

City Regions Board Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper provides members with a brief update on issues and policy areas not covered by other items on the agenda.

Recommendation

Members are to note the contents of the report.

Action

Officers to take forward any comments from members.

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City Regions Board Update Paper

Project Updates

1. In anticipation of the Local Economic Recovery and Devolution White Paper, and to ensure members are well positioned to represent the interests of metropolitan councils in the coming months, the Board is overseeing a range of projects related to growth, devolution and recovery. Below are the projects which haven't been covered by other reports on the agenda

From Devolution Deal to Delivery

2. Shared Intelligence have been commissioned to deliver a piece of work looking at the lessons that can be learnt from areas that have successfully negotiated devolution deals, and in some cases established new combined authorities. The project will develop a toolkit, with a suite of learning tools, top tips, and short case studies to help those considering or going through the process of negotiating a devolution deal. The toolkit will also cover the process following a successful negotiation of a devolution deal, looking at the operation of a new combined authority and the relationships between the combined authority and its constituent councils.
3. Shared Intelligence have carried out around 30 interviews, and are now moving into the next stage of their work, where they will be carrying out 'deep dives' into the experiences of specific Combined Authorities, and establishing a sounding board to ensure that their recommendations resonate with key stakeholders. This work is due to be completed at the end of March.

Supporting the advanced digital skills pipeline

4. We have commissioned research to outline the interventions councils might take to support the future success of the tech sector, supported by a quantification of the opportunities for growth in this area and with a particular emphasis on addressing the perceived shortage in advanced digital skills.
5. The project will forecast the type of tech jobs, and skills need that will be emerging in the coming decade and how these might disperse across the country by local authority. The project will also provide a series of detailed local case studies which evidence the role councils have played to attract and retain tech firms with examples of how they have worked to understand and meet specialised digital skills demand in tandem with local partners.

Councils' guide to supporting exports

6. Trade in UK goods and services will continue to play an important part in the Government's ambitions to increase national growth and prosperity as part of its 'levelling up' agenda. Building on previously published guides for councils looking to attract foreign capital investment and drawing on lessons learned from established and emerging sub-national bodies, we have commissioned Value Adage to produce a guide to outline best practice, advice and assistance to councils looking to support local businesses to increase their exports.
7. The guide will include:
 - (i) An overview of the strategic and economic case for increasing levels of exports, particularly amongst small and medium sized enterprises
 - (ii) A high-level summary of the support available from national government, business representatives and other key stakeholders
 - (iii) Insight and guidance from businesses and business representatives as to the type of support they require from councils
 - (iv) A selection of case studies drawing on best practice from across the UK and, where appropriate, international examples.

Analysis of Match Funding Sources for the European Structural and Investment Fund

8. To support our policy work relating to the UKSPF and wider growth funding streams, we have commissioned work to explore private and public funding which have matched EU funding from the ESIF programme. This will provide us with a great understand how much additional funding the ESIF programme has brought to local areas. This will help us understand the total quantum of the ESIF programme, as well as provide us with commentary on the outcomes, commissioning and decision-making process which will further support our policy development.

Employment and skills activity

9. *Local government's role in jobs and skills recovery:* The sector has, and continues to do, an incredible amount of work to lead or contribute to local jobs and skills recovery efforts, but capacity and resource constraints offer little opportunity for the sector to share learning and ideas with each other.
10. To save the sector time and resource and facilitate knowledge transfer, we initiated two projects to be delivered by the end of March:

- (i) An online 'how to / top tips' resource. This will focus on five themes critical to jobs and skills recovery, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of a representative group of twelve member authorities. The Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has been commissioned to deliver this for us. We worked with a group of local authorities to test which themes to focus on and the agreed themes are: dealing with economic shocks and opportunities, improving basic skills and capabilities, retraining the local population, addressing long-term unemployment and youth unemployment.
 - (ii) Enhancing our existing online case study resource with new material for fifteen local authorities that demonstrates local government's role to support jobs and skills within their local area during the Covid-19 crisis and as they plan for recovery. Rocket Science will deliver this project by the end of March.
11. *Long term unemployment:* We have part funded the Learning and Work Institute to carry out analysis on projections for long term unemployment (LTU) in local areas. We intend to use the report to highlight how different local areas will be impacted by unemployment, the need for a tailored response and a renewed push for a co-design approach for recovery. The report will be launched before the Spring Budget.
12. *Mapping national employment and skills provision:* Most employment and skills provision is commissioned and procured nationally by Government departments or their agencies on different geographic boundaries. This can make it challenging for local government employment and skills teams (or similar) to know across their local authority area, what support is available and when. We would like to address that by mapping out national government procurement for existing provision to help improve conversations between local and national government on how to collaborate on existing provision by geography and any future opportunity, thereby making the best use of public funding. Research Matters will produce the data by the end of March.

Update on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

13. Following the release of our UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Councils last July, we have continued to engage with councils, Government and other stakeholders to share good practice, influence the SDG agenda and anticipate the appetite for engaging with the SDGs across local government. As part of this, we hosted a webinar on 12 February targeted at aiding council's pandemic recovery through engagement with the SDGs.
14. From our discussions and the feedback from the webinar, councils appear keen to further engage with the SDGs as a means for a green and inclusive recovery but are often reluctant due to issues of capacity and resources, as well as practical tools like access to local authority level data to monitor their work towards the SDGs.

15. Our next steps include working towards providing relevant disaggregated data on the SDGs through collaboration with the Office for National Statistics and the LGA's LG Inform team. This will provide councils with relevant data and metrics to monitor their progress against SDG targets, which will provide a boost for SDG engagement across the sector.

Devolution APPG

16. On 9 March the LGA supported the launch of the Devolution APPG's [inquiry into the role of national government in making a success of devolution in England](#). This inquiry drew on five oral evidence sessions with academics, politicians and experts and written submissions from 24 organisations. It was chaired by Andrew Lewer MP and steered by a panel including Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe, Vice Chair of the City Regions Board.
17. The report makes several recommendations in the following areas:
- (i) **Covid-19:** The strength and importance of local government has been amply demonstrated in the response to COVID-19. It will not be possible to deliver economic recovery, levelling-up, improved health outcomes and increased resilience without much greater devolution of powers and funding.
 - (ii) **The White Paper:** The government's deal-based approach linked to the creation of metro mayors played a clear role in kick-starting the process of English devolution, but it has now run its useful course. Given the scale of the economic and social challenges ahead, the need to make swift progress and to recognise that metro mayors are unlikely to be appropriate for every community, the Government needs to widen its approach and consider new models. The forthcoming White Paper should bring forward a new approach.
 - (iii) **Barriers in Central Government:** There are cultural barriers towards further devolution in Whitehall that must be addressed. Local Government needs to be given the parity of esteem that its huge achievements in responding to COVID-19 deserve.
18. At the time of writing this report the publication has received good media coverage and has been well received by senior figures in national and local government. In the coming weeks the Devolution APPG will meet to discuss how best to take forward the proposals contained in this report, Board members are welcome to attend and share their priorities.

Secretary of State's Annual Report on Devolution 2019-20

19. The [Annual Report on Devolution](#) has now been published and presented to both Houses of Parliament. This report reiterated the commitment of the Government to giving communities more control over how investment is spent, recognising that local areas are best placed to make decisions that affect them. The Government further committed to bringing forward the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper, although no details on when this could be expected were provided.
20. The report stated that only one area submitted a formal proposal for a devolution deal between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. This area was West Yorkshire, which agreed a devolution deal on 11 March 2020. This deal included investment funding of £8million per year for 30 years, close to £3billion of public and private sector investment and is expected to create 20,600 jobs and add £2.1 billion a year to the economy of the area by 2031.
21. Although West Yorkshire was the only area to formally submit a devolution deal proposal during the period covered by the report, the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority took the decision to progress their stalled devolution deal. This consultation process concluded in March 2020. The Government are committed to engaging with local areas looking to agree new devolution deals going forward.
22. The report also set out the three statutory instruments (SIs) made to implement devolution agreements between April 2019 and March 2020. These SIs allowed for new functions and changes to governance arrangements in Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation in Stockport, and the devolution of adult education functions in North of Tyne Combined Authority.