

## City Regions Board Annual Report

### Purpose of report

For information.

### Summary

This report summarises the Board's activity over the past year. It sets out key achievements in relation to the priorities for the **City Regions Board** in 2020/21 and looks forward to next year's priorities.

Is this report confidential? Yes  No

Reports should be made available to the public where possible. Consider why the report should be confidential (e.g. does it include commercially sensitive or personal information?). Please note that reports may be disclosable under Freedom of Information legislation. For further information see the FOI procedure [here](#).

### Recommendation/s

Members are invited to:

1. Note the achievements against the board's priorities for 2020/21; and
2. Note the board's proposed priority areas for 2021/22

### Action/s

Officers to take forward actions as appropriate.

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## **City Regions Board Annual Report**

### **Background**

1. The City Regions Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for urban authorities within the LGA.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements of the board over the last year against the use of allocated resources and to reflect on whether the board is continuing to meet its original purpose in response to the emerging priorities of urban areas.

### **Priorities and Achievements**

#### **Devolution**

3. In the run-up to the Queen's Speech, we [published research](#) showing 58 per cent of MPs and 80 per cent of peers agree that councils should be given greater powers and funding to drive employment and training schemes in their areas.
4. The LGA [responded](#) to the House of Lords Public Services Committee report on Levelling Up, saying bringing greater resources and powers over key responsibilities, such as skills, transport and housing, closer to communities, is the best way to ensure we have a recovery that works for everyone.
5. We responded to the Treasury Select Committee's inquiry into jobs, growth and productivity after coronavirus, setting out the important convening role played by local government in the many aspects of the local economy.
6. Following confirmation that the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper has been superseded by the Levelling Up White Paper, we are considering how to ensure that the sector's devolution priorities and the opportunities for urban areas can best be included within this new agenda.
7. Following the successful [launch of its report in March](#), the Devolution APPG held its Annual General Meeting in May and agreed a new work programme.

#### **Urban Issues**

8. Work to explore the additional cost pressures facing urban areas was completed and the final report drawing on the experiences of councils tackling the issue of housing and homelessness sent to the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government for consideration.

9. In the autumn, the Board agreed to commission new work to set out a vision for urban growth and recovery. This work is now concluding, and the final report highlights the differential impact that Covid-19 has had, with urban areas being acutely affected, including with higher rates of infections and a higher proportion of deaths. It discusses the way the pandemic has amplified existing challenges and exacerbated existing inequalities and identifies five priorities for urban areas in the next five years: restructuring, functioning places, tackling inequalities, addressing environmental sustainability and climate change, and securing sufficient resources. The report recommends the creation of a Sustainable Urban Futures Fund to provide long-term, large scale funding for integrated urban programmes, and stand in contrast to the current, fragmented, funding approach. This report is due to be published this summer.

### **Local growth**

10. This Board, along with the People and Places Board, commissioned research into the lessons learned from the Local Industrial Strategy trailblazer areas and the implications for other areas developing local economic strategies. This is available on the LGA's [Local Industrial Strategies Hub](#).

### **Employment and skills**

11. On 25 March, we brought together Whitehall leads with councils to engage on, and shape, Plan for Jobs related activity, and ran a workshop with the sector and the National Audit Office on its inquiry into the workings of DWP during Covid-19.
12. We responded to the [DfE's flexi-apprenticeship consultation](#), noting councils' important convening work during the pandemic, setting out the case for recovery interventions to be locally tailored, and pointing out councils' key role in ensuring interventions are coordinated nationally and locally.
13. We [briefed](#) for the 15 April Westminster Hall debate on the Education Committee's report on adult skills and lifelong learning; making the case for the role of local government.
14. We launched a new [Local employment and skills recovery learning hub](#) at a [webinar](#) on 20 May with 208 delegates. The hub contains *Top tips on five themes to boost local jobs and skills* and thirteen case studies highlighting practical local government action to coordinate jobs and skills during the pandemic and a report capturing lessons for the future.
15. We also launched a [report](#) capturing action learning to support local authorities to identify barriers and challenges in fulfilling their statutory duties for young people and to identify solutions.

16. We continue to work with the sector to set out the implications of the Government's Adult Education Budget funding rule change on councils' adult and community learning provision.
17. We responded to the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee's inquiry into measures taken to protect and create jobs for young people, reiterating our asks for young people in the recovery.

### **EU Funding/UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

18. Through the Growth Programme Board and the Performance and Dispute Resolution National Sub Committee, the LGA has continued its work in shaping the Reserve Fund (the remaining ERDF and ESF programme) to support recovery. Having previously raised concerns about DWP not fully utilising the ESF programme before we leave the ESIF programme, there is evidence of significant improvements in the ESF appraisal process which means it is more likely that the total of the fund will be spent when we leave the programme in 2023.
19. The Government has launched the prospectus for the [UK Community Renewal Fund](#), the pilot programme to inform the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Following the launch of the UK Community Renewal Fund prospectus, officers are speaking to a number of lead authorities to seek feedback on the CRF process and any learning that might be made available for the design of the forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

### **Freeports**

20. East Midlands Airport, Felixstowe & Harwich, Humber, Liverpool City Region, Plymouth and South Devon, Solent, Teesside and Thames have been successful in the Freeports bidding process for England. It is vital that Freeports create new jobs and opportunities for local people and we have called on Government to remain alive to the risk of economic displacement of UK domestic businesses as it progresses with winning areas.
21. There were over thirty bids for Freeport status from across the country evidencing a high-level interest from local areas. We have asked Government to continue to consider how it can best work with the unsuccessful areas as part of its wider ambition to 'level up' the country and ensure no area is left behind.

### **Programme of work and priorities**

22. The Board will seek to ensure the Government's plans for economic recovery account for the interests and challenges of urban places and lobby for them to have the powers and resources to lead a successful and sustainable recovery and drive improved outcomes in their communities.

23. The Board will also continue to work to ensure that the Government puts councils at the heart of its Levelling Up Agenda.
24. The Board will continue to take forward the LGA's lobbying work on skills, making the case for the Work Local model and continuing to engage with key stakeholders. The Board may want officers to focus on the role employment and skills will play in the Government's recovery plans.
25. The Board will continue to seek feedback on the UK Community Renewal Fund process to help the development of the design of the forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and ensure that councils play a key role in managing growth funding through the Levelling Up Fund and UKSPF.

**Next steps**

26. Officers to take forward actions as appropriate to draft a work programme for the board.