

Work Programme 2021/22

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report sets out a work programme for the City Regions Board for the 2021/22 political cycle for consideration and sign-off.

Is this report confidential? Yes No

Recommendation/s

Members are asked to consider and agree to the proposed work programme for the City Regions Board for the 2021/22 cycle.

Action/s

Officers will take forward the work programme over the next year, in line with comments from the City Regions Board and with sufficient flexibility to adapt to changes in national circumstance.

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Work Programme 2021/22

Background

1. As set out in the [terms of reference](#), the City Regions Board represents the interests of urban areas within the LGA. It has a shared interest and regularly works with the People and Places Board on a number of issues, including: devolution, skills and employment, local economic growth and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The City Regions Board also oversees the LGA's work relating to the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. This paper sets out a work programme for 2021/22. With a new Board Chair and a new Secretary of State recently announced members are actively encouraged to consider the proposed shape, direction and priorities set out below and discuss whether these meet their ambitions for the Board over the next year.
3. Following this discussion and subject to any additions or alterations, the Board is asked to formally agree the programme, noting that uncertainty arising from the pandemic is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Proposed Work Programme

Devolution

4. Devolution has been one of the Board's core issues since its inception. Most board members sit within devolution deal areas covered by a combined authority and represent the vanguard of English devolution to date. While much of the LGA's work with the People and Places Board has been focused on extending devolution to councils in non-metropolitan areas, the work of the City Regions Board has been more specifically aimed at strengthening existing deals, such as through the introduction of [fiscal devolution](#), and sharing best practice commissioning research published on the [LGA's Devolution Hub](#).
5. Recently, the Board has worked to support the Devo APPG's inquiry into [Levelling-up Devo: the role of national government in making a success of devolution in England](#) and part-sponsored a report by IPPR North [The devolution parliament: Devolving power to England's regions, towns and cities](#).
6. On 27 July 2021 the then Local Government Minister indicated that the LGA's calls had been heard in Whitehall and that a new round of devolution including new county devolution deals, new combined authorities in urban areas and more powers for existing devolution deal areas would be brought forward. While we await further detail on how this process might work in practice, it appears that devolution is back on the Government's agenda.
7. Looking ahead to the autumn and the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper (see below) it is anticipated that the City Regions Board will want to continue to play a leading role in shaping the Government's emerging policy on devolution and supporting local areas to secure the best possible deal for their residents. It will also want to ensure that

Government does not lose sight of its promise of further devolution for urban areas, particularly around the opportunities to align health devolution with the activities and leadership of local government.

8. As part of its MHCLG-funded sector led improvement offer, the LGA will also be able to offer support to all areas interested in devolution. For those urban areas considering a combined authority for the first time, we have a wealth of material on the basics of CAs and lessons learnt from those who have been through the process.

Levelling Up

9. The concept of 'Levelling Up' first appeared in Boris Johnson's first speech as Prime Minister and later featured in the 2019 Conservative Party Manifesto. It has since been refined to cover a wide-ranging policy agenda, picking up aspects of public service reform, addressing regional economic disparity, and the role of culture in building civic pride and resilience.
10. In May 2021, the Government announced its plans to publish a Levelling Up White Paper later this year. Reports have suggested publication will be alongside the Spending Review in the autumn. MHCLG has since confirmed that this will supersede the anticipated Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper and will include further details regarding the next phase of devolution deals.
11. As detailed in a separate paper to lead members it has been agreed that over the next political cycle the People and Places and City Regions Boards will jointly oversee a programme of research and round tables to explore different aspects of levelling up locally, including:
 - a. The opportunities to de-fragment policy and funding programmes at the local level to improve the quality of public service outcomes and address concentrations of deprivation
 - b. The role that devolution to democratically elected local leaders can play in binding communities and anchor institutions together to strengthen resilience, align national and local priorities and articulate policy interventions necessary to support balanced economic growth
 - c. The optimal relationship between local and national government, the private and public sector and physical and social infrastructure investment in addressing inter and intra-regional inequalities
 - d. The potential of local cultural capital and other assets to strengthen inward investment, encourage entrepreneurialism and support demographic dynamism
12. At the time of dispatch, Michael Gove has just been appointed the new Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with cross-departmental responsibility for levelling up. It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the timing and shape of the Government's agenda, but the Board will be seeking to engage with his office as soon as possible.

Economic Growth and Recovery

13. Following the commissioning and publication of A Vision For Urban Growth And Recovery which received [widespread media coverage](#) it is proposed that the Board will want to ensure that the Levelling Up White Paper responds to the needs and priorities of urban areas. (A Vision For Urban Growth And Recovery publication link: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/vision-urban-growth-and-recovery>)
14. In line with the Board's previous interest and expertise it is proposed that work in relation to the review of Local Enterprise Partnerships, trade and investment and the wider development of local economic strategies is advanced in line with the priorities of national and local stakeholders.
15. Given the importance of climate change to cities and urban areas it is proposed that Board take stock after COP26 in October and consider the implications for future work on this topic.
16. The LGA has also secured a position on the [Business in the Community's Place Taskforce, chaired by Lord Steve Bassam](#). Recognising the diverse interests across councils we have put forward two representatives, a vice chair from each of the City Regions and People and Places Boards, who would attend on an alternating basis.
17. The LGA will provide briefing support for these representatives who will report back to their respective boards on progress and seek a steer on priorities. We will also submit evidence to the inquiry and will co-host one of the taskforce's roundtables.

Employment and Skills

18. A separate employment and skills paper is tabled at this meeting and covers our suggested work plan for this area. It includes a mix of policy and improvement activity and builds on discussions at the last Board meeting in June 2021. The main change to our suggested priorities is that we include a refresh of our well-established Work Local proposals. The aim of this is to support the sector on employability devolution now that the Government has confirmed that English devolution is back on the agenda, and different spatial footings would be considered

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

19. The Government has launched the pilot Community Renewal Fund scheme. Lead authorities (combined authorities, county and unitary authorities) have undertaken competitive bidding processes for the CRF and we are urging the Government to announce successful bids as soon as possible. Members agreed a programme of work at the June 2021 Board meeting which included developing good practice case studies, peer networks and roundtables to provide learning and evidence to support the sector and help government shape policy. We are engaging with the sector to capture learning from the process so far. This will be expanded once CRF programmes are in place.

Implications for Wales

20. Wales is on its own devolution journey. We continue to work with the WLGA on issues of shared importance, including the role of local government post-Brexit and the details of the UKSPF.

Financial Implications

21. The Board's activities are supported by budgets for policy development and improvement. Resources will be allocated as directed by members in support of individual objectives.

Equalities Implications

22. Issues of equality, diversity and inclusion will be a core component of each of work streams identified above.

23. In designing the levelling up inquiry, we will ensure a diverse range of participants, explicitly consider issues of economic and social deprivation and adopt an evidence led approach to demographic change and representation.

24. Our employment and skills and UKSPF work will take a closer look at how range of our work will also focus on EDI challenges and opportunities and how these can be better identified and addressed at a local level.

25. In advocating for and on behalf urban areas the board will reflect the specific and diverse concerns of these communities and, by successfully pressing the case for devolution, we will put more power and resources in the hands of local leaders, who we believe are best able to take decisions for their areas.

Next steps

26. Members are asked to consider and agree to the proposed work programme for the City Regions Board for the 2021/22 cycle.