

City Regions Board Annual Report

Background

1. The City Regions Board was created to provide a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA.

Priorities and Achievements

Levelling up and devolution

2. The Government's long-awaited Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2 February 2022. The LGA published a [briefing note](#) and [full press release](#) in response to the Government's ambition to pursue 12 national missions and proposals relating to a new devolution framework, a plan to streamline growth funding, a new independent data body and the establishment of a new levelling up advisory council.
3. Following the announcement of a Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in the Queen's Speech, the LGA on 10 May, the LGA issued a [response](#) emphasising that levelling up will only be achieved if councils have the powers and funding, they need to address interregional and intraregional inequalities, tackle deprivation, and make communities attractive places to live, work and visit. We will be working with parliamentarians and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to shape and amend this legislation to ensure it helps councils level up and delivers greater devolution.
4. The Board, along with the People and Places Board, launched an inquiry into how the Government's levelling up agenda might better strengthen local communities. The [Levelling Up Locally Inquiry](#) is part of the Board's work around levelling up and looks beyond the Levelling Up White Paper to investigate the role of local leadership in shaping a recovery that works for all.
5. The Board agreed to an independent steering group helping to shape the inquiry's development including its evidence gathering; making contributions drawing on their own experience and expertise; and formulating a set of recommendations based around each of the themes. The steering group is co-chaired by Mayor Rees and Cllr Bentley of the People and Places Board and comprises of members from business, academia, think tanks, community groups and government organisations.
6. As part of the inquiry, four roundtables are being held focussing on: funding and alignment, leadership, productivity and prosperity, and place and identity. To date, two of the four roundtables have taken place. A final set of recommendations will be published in the Autumn.
7. The Board has continued to work with the Community Wellbeing Board (CWB) on issues related to health devolution, and in particular the implications of the implementation of

Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). The Board heard from Cllr David Fothergill, Chair of the CWB at a meeting in January and Cllr Fothergill and Mayor Rees met again in March to discuss progress. The Board raised concerns in January about the exclusion of councillors from Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and were pleased that Government revised guidance to permit councillors to sit on ICBs.

8. The Board agreed to work with the CWB to develop a set of LGA policy messages. The aim of this will be to ensure that ICSs build on, enhance and support existing health devolution areas, in recognition that these only cover a minority of local authorities; do not create a barrier for any new devolution deals to include health devolution; enhance and support the role of Health and Wellbeing Boards, recognising that this will be different depending on the complexity of the ICS footprint; are locally accountable; and that their decision-making is transparent to local people and their elected representatives.

Local growth

9. The Board, alongside People and Places, have supported Business in the Community (BITC) Place Taskforce to launch a [new report](#) looking into the role of business and cross-sector partnerships in place-based regeneration. Cllr Abi Brown represented the City Regions Board on the taskforce. The report provides practical recommendations to business, local government and national government on the role business can play in delivering the 'how' of the Levelling Up White Paper, as well as the foundations that are needed to transform communities.

Urban Summit

10. The Board held its first Urban Summit on 9 March. The event, hosted by Mayor Rees, brought together a broad cross-section of academics, international experts, politicians and business representatives to explore the challenges facing cities today, and look ahead to the role for cities in delivering the Government's levelling up agenda and tackling the challenges of the future.
11. The event heard contributions from speakers including Professor Greg Clark, Chair of the Connected Places Catapult, Lord Kerlake, Chair of the UK2070 Commission, Dr Coleen Thouez, a Senior Fellow from the New School's Zolberg Institute, Dorthe Nielsen, Executive Director and Acting Secretary General of Eurocities, as well as leading councillors from Salford, Nottingham, Southwark, Lancaster, Richmond and Bradford.
12. Following the summit, officers have developed plans to build on the discussions at the Urban Summit, including an urban fringe event at LGA Conference which will launch a collection of videos and essays on the topic of "what do we want our cities to be, and how do we get there?".

Employment and skills

13. In May, we published [Work Local: Unlocking talent to level up](#), our employment and skills devolution proposals which build on the Levelling up White Paper and recommends ways Whitehall can improve its approach to employment and skills policy for all places right now and deliver a coherent devolution approach. Analysis reveals devolution could each year result in a 15 per cent increase in the number of people improving their skills or finding work in a local area.
14. Following the Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper, it launched two consultation and legislated to establish new Local Skills Improvement Plans. The LGA responded to the consultations on the [National Skills Fund](#) and the [FE Funding and Accountability System](#), and engaged parliamentarians to support the LGA position on the [Skills and Post 16 Education Bill](#) which has now been enacted.
15. We proactively brought together DfE and councils outside of devolution areas to ensure that the £270 million Multiply adult numeracy programme (funded through UKSPF) was routed via councils in non-devolution areas rather than contacted nationally through the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
16. We published a [report](#) to showcase the work of councils to support and develop education, employment and training pathways, including the wider wrap-around support for young people experiencing disadvantage.

Community Renewal Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund

17. The LGA has worked with the sector to capture learning from the UK Community Renewal Fund. Following the delay in the announcement of the successful bids, we [lobbied successfully for an extension of the fund](#), with the Chairs of the People & Places and City Regions Boards writing to the Secretary of State, outlining the sector's concerns. We have commissioned Shared Intelligence to capture the learning from the fund to help inform our wider work on growth funding
18. In April 2022, the Government published the [UKSPF prospectus and allocations](#), which [allocated £2.6 billion over three years](#), as well as [the allocations for the Multiply adult numeracy Programme](#). We launched a [UKSPF Hub](#) to support local authorities to develop their investment plans.
19. The announcement confirmed that the fund would be driven by local authorities, funding to support capacity building and the removal of competitive bidding processes. These are some of the key asks that we have been consistently lobbying on since the EU referendum.
20. We have continually engaged with councils and combined authorities to understand the implications of the prospectus, and identified some of the key concerns, including the

funding gap between the end of European Social Fund programmes and the commitment of the People & Skills priority in 2024/25, as well as the need for a longer-term funding solution. We have raised these issues through [the press](#) which was featured in the Financial Times. The Chairs of the People & Places and City Regions Boards wrote to the Secretary of State setting out the sector's concerns regarding the funding gap.

Programme of work and priorities

21. The Board will advocate for Work Local model to be a way of mechanism for enabling the sector deliver a local employment and skills offer to support the levelling up agenda.
22. The Board will also continue to work to ensure that the Government puts councils at the heart of its Levelling Up agenda, and that reforms to health systems are aligned with the principles of devolution and local leadership.
23. The Board will build on its emerging discussions around the future of cities.
24. 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

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