

Levelling Up and Devolution Support to Councils

Purpose:

For information.

Summary

This paper sets out the sector support programme for devolution and Levelling Up funded by the 2022/23 DLUHC Grant.

Is this report confidential? Yes No

Recommendation/s

That the Board notes the programme of support available to councils on devolution and levelling up.

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Levelling Up and Devolution Support to Councils

Background

1. The publication of the Levelling Up White Paper has expanded and extended opportunities for devolution, opening it for the first time to any area of the country that wants a devolution deal. In response to this and as part of our sector support programme, funded by DLUHC, the LGA has put in place support for councils to understand the new devolution framework and governance implications, as well as fulfil the Levelling Up missions, lead their place-shaping ambitions and enable further devolution.
2. We have developed a flexible programme support to councils as they consider options for devolution deals, and as and when they embark on negotiations. At the same time, the LGA continue to provide support to the existing combined authorities, including combined authorities with 'trailblazer' deals. Additional support will be available to councils through various existing programmes as detailed below.
3. This offer has been shared and agreed with officials from DLUHC. Officials have confirmed that despite the recent changes in the ministerial team, the government remains committed to the levelling up agenda and this is unlikely to change in the near future. To ensure that all LGA support around Levelling Up and Devolution remains relevant and sustainable regardless of any changes in policy, the LGA has engaged with a wide range of councils to better understand their needs, their areas of pressure, and any gaps in our current provision.

Devolution support

4. Specific support has been put in place in response to council needs around devolution. This includes:
 - 4.1. **Combined Authority Officer and Peer networks**, which will expand as new combined authorities and other devolution areas are agreed and will commission additional support and resources.
 - 4.2. **Sector-wide devolution and levelling up resources**, through a regularly updated online Devolution Hub, Levelling Up Hub and devolution bulletin.
 - 4.3. **Peer support and peer to peer knowledge sharing** for councils on similar devolution pathways, including support for both members and officers.
 - 4.4. **A series of webinars and events** to support and inform councils considering and/or negotiating a devolution deal, including on:
 - practical steps to setting up a CA
 - using data locally
 - comms and engagement

- governance, accountability and scrutiny

4.5. **Support to councils to develop and communicate an evidence base for devolution deals**, including through LG Inform

4.6. **Additional bespoke support**, on demand to all councils that collectively want it (including those not directly referenced in the Levelling Up White Paper), with all areas announced in the Levelling Up White Paper being approached to discuss their improvement needs, including help to develop a business case and financial modelling to support proposals, advice on developing a communications strategy, or simply trusted and honest feedback.

Levelling Up Support

5. Following extensive engagement with councils, we have identified their biggest Levelling Up support needs, which include officer capacity, rising demands due to cost of living pressures, and involving communities effectively. For new devolution areas, the transfer of LEP functions is an opportunity to re-design their economic and business support provision. Therefore, the following new improvement support will be put in place:

Support project	Impact / outcomes	Type of support
Building local government capacity to deliver Levelling Up	Improved officer capacity to support key elements of LU through deeper understanding of opportunities, improved knowledge sharing and stronger inter-authority networks.	Facilitated networks, online roundtables and surgeries
Supporting the transition of LEPs to local government	Councils and emerging CAs are better able to manage a smooth transition of local enterprise partnerships, leading to more streamlined provision of economic support and better strategic engagement with local businesses.	Good practice guide, webinar
Supporting skills and employment pathfinders	Pathfinder areas are well placed to maximise the opportunities from LU and share learning for all areas interested in devolution.	Facilitated action learning sets, online content
Strengthening pride in place through better community engagement	Councils are better supported to engage their residents in developing LU policies and interventions that meet community need and ambition.	Peer-led facilitated learning workshops shared across regions

<p>Supporting councils to remove barriers to prosperity</p>	<p>Councils can commit meaningfully to the cross-Government debt strategy and respond to DLUHC guidance on improving council tax recovery. Councils can apply behavioural insights to identify and support people at risk of debt.</p>	<p>Maturity framework and webinar</p>
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Support across all programme areas

6. Levelling Up agenda cuts across multiple improvement programmes and support offers. This includes but is not limited to the following support:
- Political and officer leadership development
 - Peer challenges
 - Governance support
 - Economic growth advisers, e-learning, events and online hub
 - Procurement support, including on social value
 - Workforce planning support and broader HR and workforce support and advice
 - Net zero support offer
 - Apprenticeship support
 - Community engagement and comms support
 - Equality, diversity and inclusion offer
 - Place narrative offer
 - Housing Advisors Programme and associated support
 - Building safety support
 - Support around Culture and Sport (not funded by the main DLUHC grant)
 - Digital Connectivity and Cyber support (not funded by main DLUHC grant)

Implications for Wales

7. None – the devolution and Levelling Up agenda only affects areas in England.

Equalities implications

8. Positive – the programme aims to help reduce inequalities between different areas of England and address challenges in terms of access to skills and employment opportunities for all. Specific support will be put in place to help councils engage their residents in developing LU policies and interventions that meet community need and ambition.

Financial implications

9. The programme of support is funded through the 2022/23 DLUHC Grant.

Next steps

10. The LGA will continue to deliver a wide-ranging programme of support to councils on devolution and Levelling Up.