

Meeting: -

Date: -

City Regions Board Work Programme

Purpose of report

For direction

Summary

This report sets out a draft work programme for the City Regions Board for members' comment

Is this report confidential?

Yes

Recommendation/s

Members are asked to comment on and agree the overall shape and direction of the draft work programme.

Contact details

Contact officer: Rebecca Cox

Position: Principal Policy Adviser

Phone no: 0207 187 7384

Email: rebecca.cox@local.gov.uk

City Regions Board Work Programme

Purpose and outcome

1. The Board's work programme reflects the remit set out in the terms of reference, with particular projects develop in response to national policy changes and the challenges and opportunities facing councils and combined authorities. Taken as a whole, it should enable city regions to deliver better outcomes for their communities and create the conditions for sustainable and inclusive economies. Note that at the time of writing, details of the new Prime Minister's policy programme were still emerging. Members might wish to reflect on recent announcements (such as the suggested investment zones) as they discuss the programme.

Background

2. The City Regions Board has a wide remit, as set out in its terms of reference. This paper sets out a proposed framework for the Board's work in the forthcoming year. Within the broader framework will be opportunities for the Board to respond to new issues as they arise, and the Board is free to amend the framework during the year should the local or national policy context change.
3. The framework also contains a number of projects that were agreed in the previous Board cycle and will complete in the coming months. This gives the Board more flexibility when considering how it might like to use its resources in the second half of the cycle. See Annex A for a proposed overview of the Board's work.
4. Following the LGA's annual conference and the publication of [Signals of the Future](#), which was commissioned from Ipsos MORI, the LGA will be taking a fresh look at the long term issues facing the country and what local government's role is in addressing them. This will also support our work to influence manifestos in the lead up to the next general election. The City Regions Board is already well positioned in this space, thanks to its foresight in commissioning the Future of Cities, Levelling Up Locally Inquiry, Work Local refresh and other projects. In their consideration of the work programme, members might wish to consider how the Board's findings and recommendations might feed into the LGA's wider work.
5. Members will want to ensure that the Board's work programme speaks to the cost of living crisis which is set to severely impact communities, businesses, and public services. Aspects of this are woven through our work programme, albeit with a stronger emphasis on long-term preventative work. The City Regions Board will also feed into the LGA's wider cost of living work through participating in the steering group. Any further views from members about how the Board should engage on this issue are welcome.

Proposal

6. Five themes for the Board's work programme are set out below. Where these are supported by briefing papers, these are mentioned in the text.

7. **Theme 1: Future of Cities**

The [Future of Cities collection](#) was launched at LGA Annual Conference in June 2022. This collection brought together city leaders, academics, think tanks, urban artists and writers to provide a response to the question "What do we want our cities to be, and how do we get there?". This question aimed to develop further the discussions held at the Board's first Urban Summit in March, which posed three questions: "What are cities?", "What do we need our cities to be?" and "What is the difference and how do we get them there?".

The following Board paper sets out more detail of the activity in this workstream, including bringing in the voices of people living in cities and proposing a second urban summit linking with the RSA and Core Cities work in this space. The Future of Cities project will provide a platform to make a strong and positive offer to government of the role cities can play and what is needed to deliver on this.

8. **Theme 2: Levelling Up**

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the future of the levelling up agenda in its current form, we are hopeful that the incoming government will continue to see reducing regional inequalities as a priority. In the last Board cycle, members commissioned a number of areas of work jointly with the People and Places Board to position councils at the heart of levelling up, which are set out in more detail in the following Board paper:

- a. The Levelling Up Locally Inquiry, looking at funding and alignment, leadership, productivity and prosperity, and place and identity. Its initial roundtables have been completed and the inquiry will bring contributors together in October for two sense-making sessions. The final set of findings and recommendations will be brought to the November Board meeting.
- b. We will continue to lobby on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, particularly with regard to the Missions.
- c. Our Work Local proposals for a more localised employment and skills system were launched in the summer. Officers are focussing on engaging stakeholders, especially businesses and employers, and laying the groundwork for engaging Parliamentarians from all parties and new Ministers in the autumn. In addition, we are continuing work agreed in the previous Board cycle to understand the role of councils and combined authorities in addressing inequalities in skills and employment (see accompanying Board paper).

- d. In the last Board cycle, members worked with the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board to consider potential issues for health devolution in the move to Integrated Care Systems. The Board will maintain a watching brief on this issue.

9. **Theme 2: Urban resilience**

The City Regions Board is asked to provide direction on the scope and scale of new work to identify the challenges and opportunities facing leaders in urban areas looking to build resilient communities.

This work would sit alongside the LGA's existing programme on climate change resilience, led by the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board, and activity related to the development of a new national resilience strategy, which is being led by the Safer Stronger Communities Board.

10. **Theme 3: Green jobs**

At the last Board meeting, members identified the need for there to be a step change in retrofitting homes to support councils to deliver net zero commitments, tackle the cost-of-living crisis and fuel poverty and keep homes warm. Members directed officers to focus on ensuring there is the qualified workforce available to deliver the scale of retrofit needed, and that this needs to be developed at the local level. Local government has real ambition to deliver on its net zero commitments, and therefore needs a localised, place-based approach to deliver retrofit, which should include an integrated employment and skills offer that is tailored to local need.

The accompanying paper sets out activity to strengthen our relationships with stakeholders, including SMEs where there is less understanding of the role of local government, and to influence Government through the Green Jobs Delivery Group and other channels.

11. **Theme 5: Growth funding**

At the final board meeting of the last political cycle, members of the City Regions Board agreed to the preparation of a report for the LGA Executive proposing to consider the future of growth funding. There is already an immediate focus on ensuring vital local services can keep pace with rising inflation and increased demand from residents, and in the longer term, a need to ensure councils have greater ability to boost productivity and strengthen sustainable and inclusive growth across the country. The accompanying paper sets out a proposal to commission some technical analysis to allow us to better make the case for the relative efficiency of local investment.

The Board also shares with the People and Places Board the responsibility for the LGA's work on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and any issues arising from this over the course of the year will be brought to the Board under this heading.

Implications for Wales

12. Many policy areas are devolved, however where the topic allows we will work with the WLGA and other bodies, such as Core Cities, to ensure issues relating to Welsh councils are properly represented.

Financial Implications

13. Work commitments can be met from the Board's policy budget.

Equalities implications

14. We strive to reflect equality, diversity and inclusion issues throughout the work programme, whether through the focus of the project; the scope, design and research, or our engagement with stakeholders. More detail is included in the background papers.

Next steps

15. Members are asked to comment on:
 - The overall balance of the work programme
 - Any gaps or other issues that should be considered, particularly with regard to the rising cost of living
 - Any considerations arising from the new Prime Minister's policy priorities.