

Meeting: City Regions Board

Date: 30 September 2022

Theme 3: Urban Resilience

Purpose of report

For direction

Summary

Lead Members have agreed that the Board oversee the development of a new programme of work related to urban resilience. Given the broad range of issues this work could include, this paper seeks direction from the City Regions Board as to possible avenues and aspects likely to be most fruitful.

Is this report confidential?

No

Recommendation/s

The 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.

Contact details

Contact officer: Philip Clifford

Position: Senior Adviser

Phone no: 07909 898 327

Email: philip.clifford@local.gov.uk

Theme 3: Urban Resilience

Purpose and outcome

1. Lead Members have agreed that the Board oversee the development of a new programme of work related to urban resilience. Given the broad range of issues this work could include, this paper seeks direction from the City Regions Board as to possible avenues and aspects likely to be most fruitful. The chosen piece of work could: begin to illustrate the unique resilience challenges and opportunities for urban areas; share existing good practice; and/or make policy recommendations to support city regions in their aspirations in accordance with the Board's direction.

Background

2. In order to support this process, the following paragraphs provide an overview of the key issues and policies around this topic.
3. There are many different definitions of the term 'resilience':
 - The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)) defines it as: *the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.*
 - The [OECD](#) defines it as: *the ability of individuals, communities and states and their institutions to absorb and recover from shocks, while positively adapting and transforming their structures and means for living in the face of long-term changes and uncertainty.*
 - The [European Commission](#) defines it as: *The ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks.*
4. However, as [government guidance](#) on this subject notes, these definitions are all quite similar.
5. While the City Regions Board has not directly considered the issue of resilience before, it has previously overseen the LGA's work on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).
6. Goal 11 is defined as, [make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable](#), and is particularly relevance to local government with targets relating to housing, transport, culture and disaster preparedness. As part of the LGA's work on the SDGs in 2019 we facilitated a visit from Maimunah Mohd Sharif the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

7. The UN is currently running a [City Resilience Programme](#), citing the increased risk facing urban areas from climate change, demographic shifts and aging infrastructure and the lack of capacity at a local level to meet these challenges.
8. In 2020 the Board commissioned WPI Economics to look at the drivers of urban cost pressures. As part of this research a framework was created to explore what made urban areas distinct in terms of:
 - Space: lack of land to build on; poor air quality; prevalence of high-rise housing stock; vulnerability of transport infrastructure; increased risk of pandemic
 - People: high turnover of residents; dense populations; unique and high levels of deprivation; higher levels of cultural and religious diversity
9. At the national level there are three document documents that inform the policy context for Government.
10. The [Integrated Review](#) published in March 2021, written in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, identified four overarching trends likely to be of particular importance to the UK:
 - Geopolitical and geoeconomics shifts towards a multipolar world, including: China emerging as a systemic competitor; shifts in the global balance of economic power towards the Indo-Pacific region; future economic shocks driven by the uneven introduction of new technology; increased challenges to open trade; decreasing global poverty, but with Africa at risk of being left behind; demographic changes interacting with climate change, poverty and conflict and an increased percentage of older people in advanced political economies.
 - Systemic competition leading to a more contest international environment, including: competition between political systems; competition to shape the international order; a deteriorating security environment; economic statecraft; space; and cyberspace.
 - Rapid technological change as science and technology become a metric of power, including: a rapidly changing landscape leading to the introduction of novel technologies such as artificial intelligence; science and technology emerging as an arena of systemic competition; new challenges to security, society and individual rights; technology and data standards becoming detached from existing norms and governance structures regarding their use.
 - Transnational challenges, which will test resilience and international co-operation, including: climate change; biodiversity loss, which is already in unprecedented decline; global health, including the growth of deaths due to antimicrobial resistance; increased migratory flows towards Europe; radicalisation and terrorism; serious organised crime and illicit finance.

11. In response to these challenges the Government proposed to build a better understanding of the UK's strengths and weaknesses through the creation of a comprehensive national resilience strategy, to establish a 'whole-of-society' approach to resilience.
12. The [National Resilience Strategy](#) call for evidence was published in July 2021. It highlighted how the coronavirus pandemic had stretched governments around the world and in turn placed a premium on the value of a resilient society with well-developed plans and capabilities to support recovery.
13. It also set out the Government's vision for 2030 of a suite of systems, infrastructure and capabilities for managing risks, with fewer regional inequalities in the UK's resilience leading to a more cohesive society better able to resist future shocks.
14. The [LGA's response to the call for evidence](#), prepared by the Safer Stronger Communities Board, stressed the need to build local politicians into the emergency planning cycle, increase information sharing between central and local partners and highlighted the particular risks of climate change and cyber security.
15. At the LGA's Annual Conference in July, we published [Signals of the Future](#). This report, prepared by Ipsos Trends & Foresight considered future drivers for local government with the aim of proposing a likely set of challenges for councils by the year 2027.
16. It considered a wide range of relevant issues, such as urban ageing, the decline of retail footfall in city centres and the challenges of generating sufficient electricity in urban areas, given their high demand for energy and limited space. It also suggested the possibility of cooling centres for cities, an idea which has only gained traction over the hot summer.

Proposal

17. 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.
18. 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.
19. As set out above, the question of resilience is an established field with many active participants. Councils in urban areas, like local authorities across the country will have officers dedicated to participation in local resilience forums, councillors deeply embedded and representative of their diverse communities and an array of strategies and policies focused on creating places that are stable, successful, and adaptable.

20. The experience of the coronavirus pandemic, the homes for Ukraine scheme and, more broadly, the period of economic turmoil following the financial crash of 2008 all demonstrate the ability of councils to work with their communities, businesses, public sector and other partners to withstand the impact of a shock and move towards recovery.
21. This aspect of local leadership, while highly valued is relatively well-rehearsed and understood. To make best use of the Board's time and resources it is proposed that any work on this subject is directed towards priorities and concerns that are specific to urban areas and focused on either improving best practice or developing a lobbying ask.
22. Within this context three approaches are suggested for the Board to consider:
 1. Identifying a specific risk, such as extreme heat due to climate change, international migration, public health, or economic disruption and undertaking a gap analysis of the vulnerability of urban areas to this risk and the availability of resources to mitigate and recover.
 2. Developing a risk matrix for urban areas, by looking at the specific qualities of their people and places, the overlapping incidence of different types of risk and the treatment of both within national policy development and resource allocation.
 3. Focusing on the management and interaction of response and recovery systems within urban areas, such as blue-light integration, public information and scrutiny, skills and governance structures.
23. Any additional suggestions for areas or approaches from Board members drawing on their experience as leaders of place would also be welcomed.

Implications for Wales

24. At this stage in the project there are not believed to be any specific implications for urban areas in Wales. Depending on the direction of members regarding the approach and subject for consideration there may be specific issues relating to the configuration of local service responsibilities and the nature of devolved governance. For example, Wales had a distinct response to the coronavirus pandemic, with restrictions on household movement and other public health questions that differed to the rest of the UK.

Financial Implications

25. Work carried out under this project will be supported by the Board's available resources.

Equalities implications

26. Vulnerability to exogenous shocks and the capacity to recover from the impact of these shocks is not evenly distributed across people and places. Those groups already suffering disadvantage are more likely to be hit hardest and take the longest to recover. This can be clearly seen in coronavirus pandemic, where the elderly, particular ethnic communities, and people with underlying chronic health conditions experienced higher levels of infection, mortality and financial precarity. This project will look at the specific question of resilience in urban areas as it applies to their distinct people and places and will seek to capture and address any relevant equalities issues.

Next steps

27. In line with the direction of the Board, officers will develop a workstream for consideration at the next meeting.