

Theme 1: Future of Cities

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This report provides an update on the recent urban summit and an overview of follow-up work.

LGA Plan Theme: Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy

Recommendation(s)

That the Board note the success of the urban summit and provide a steer on any additional activities or areas of focus they would like to see in the coming months.

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Background

Outcome and Purpose

1. The purpose of this project is to reach an agreed set of asks and offers around the future of cities, which can inform the LGA's lobbying to Government and political manifestos ahead of the next general election, as well as being used by cities and urban areas themselves. This will be achieved by bringing together the voices of city leaders, experts, and now urban residents, to draw on their understanding of how cities need to change to meet the needs of the future and the strong offer cities can make to some of the important challenges facing the nation.
2. Key stakeholders to engage for this work include the RSA, Core Cities, Key Cities, London Councils, SIGOMA and 3Ci. Officers will continue to work with these organisations, particularly where similar projects can be brought together.
3. The desired outcome of this work is that the leaders of our city regions will be empowered to play a key role to play in the shaping of cities in the future, ensuring that they are inclusive, flourishing regions able to manage global challenges and access a diverse range of funding.

Context

4. On 22 March 2023, the LGA held its second urban summit, hosting more than 100 delegates and facilitating contributions from a wide range of speakers, including: Andy Haldane, Bruce Katz, Alice Charles, Joy Warmington and Alex Norris MP.
5. The day's events were captured in an article for [First Magazine](#) and a [selection of presentations](#) from the various sessions are available on the LGA's website. It also saw the launch of a series of commissioned videos '[City Citizens](#)' and the publication of an [open letter](#) from the leaders of Core Cities, Key Cities and London Councils to government, setting out the case for further investment in cities. Andy Haldane's comments were also picked up in the [Local Government Chronicle](#).
6. A write-up providing an overview of two sessions from the event is attached at Appendix A. The RSA also undertook an evidence gathering exercise to ensure that the views of participants were captured for consideration and inclusion in their [UK Urban Futures Commission](#). The commission is due to be launched in September and will provide a practical blueprint to effect and fund change in the UK's Cities.

7. Since the event the LGA has been approached by ITN Business to act as an editorial partner on their [Cities of the Future](#) programme, which is due to launch in October, in time for Party Conference season.
8. We are also planning to hold an 'urban fringe' at the [LGA's Annual Conference](#) in Bournemouth on Wednesday 5 July. This reception-style event will provide an opportunity to hear an update from the RSA on their Urban Futures Commission and receive a short presentation from 3Ci on progress with their climate investment model. Closer to the event we will be sending out targeted invitations to key stakeholders with an interest in cities and urban areas. In order to support this event we will also be updating our Future of Cities microsite with new analysis and data.
9. Furthermore, now that the pre-election period has ended, we are working with our public affairs team to arrange a follow-up meeting with Alex Norris MP, Shadow Minister for Levelling Up and Dehenna Davidson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up to discuss the proposals contained in the open letter and the wider offer from city leaders.

Proposal

10. Members are asked to review the context set out above and provide a steer on any additional activities they would like to see put in train over the summer, to better position the City Regions Board in advance of party conferences in the autumn.

Implications for Wales

11. This work is being carried out within the context of the Levelling Up White Paper, which presents a vision for the UK. While many of the investment and policy levers are likely different within the Welsh context there will be value in drawing on the experience of Welsh cities and the aspirations of Welsh city leaders as part of this work.

Financial Implications

12. The costs of facilitating the urban fringe as well as any additional policy or lobbying activities arising from this paper will be met from Board's policy and research resources.

Equalities implications

13. Officers ensured that the urban summit and city citizens involved a diverse range of perspectives reflecting the diversity of cities in the UK. We will continue to do so as part of any follow-up work and use data and evidence to make the case for investment in cities, recognising the differential impact of national policies on the characteristics of urban areas.

Next steps

14. Subject to the comments of Members, LGA Officers will take forward the work identified above: working with ITN Business to develop a television programme in time for the autumn, hosting an 'urban fringe' at LGA Conference, organising meetings with key political stakeholders, carrying out further analysis in order to better understand the challenges facing UK cities and working to support and promote the activities of organisations such as 3Ci and the RSA.

Appendix A – Notes from the Urban Summit

Response to RSA's UK Urban Futures Commission findings: panel discussion

Cllr Susan Hinchliffe, Leader of Bradford, introduced the panel and chaired the discussion.

Dr Miatta Fahnbulleh (Chief Executive, New Economics Foundation), welcomed the initial findings and said the RSA work takes the debate about cities further.

She commented that we need to ask people what they want from their cities. She believes they want things that fundamentally linked to environment and social infrastructure.

She advocated pushing power and resources down to citizens in our cities but noted that some of the devolution debate tends to be technocratic and out of citizens' control.

She asked: where is the public to put the pressure on and how do we involve them more?

Adam Hawksbee (Deputy Director, Onward), opened by asking how do you make agglomeration work? He cautioned that our cities not dense enough, not connected enough and not safe enough.

He claimed that personal safety and criminality is a barrier to levelling up and we must recognise this.

He noted that every area is frustrated with Whitehall, but argued that leadership in places is often fractured. He claimed that devolution forces people to get involved and that matures the political conversation.

He concluded by arguing that the foundation for change has to be public services and the engine of growth is still agglomeration in cities.

Lord Nat Wei (Conservative Peer), began by asking: how does the Shoreditch effect happen in other places, how do we attract tech jobs to our regional cities and create clusters of change and how do we manage gentrification that comes with that, in particular feelings of local people around house prices?

He noted that half the growth in the local economy was digital advertising. He saw part of the solution was to grow the top performing businesses and use business rates from their success to provide entrepreneurs with access to office or retail space.

He claimed that we don't focus enough on the liquid city, the post war city. He raised the example of empty car parks and asked what space have you got that we can do stuff with for a season?

He concluded by arguing that to get an agile Britain, we need to be help urban areas to be nimble and see cities as places of resilience.

Joy Warmington (Chief Executive, Brap), commented that despite successive waves of regeneration in Birmingham, some areas of the city remain untouched. She noted that the issues around the potential of citizens and the changing demographics of urban areas is often missing from the conversation.

She asked, are cities keeping pace with the needs of citizens and noted that sometimes it appears citizens needs are almost bolted on as an afterthought.

She argued that in Birmingham as well as in other cities we now have a complete diverse melting pot. She followed-up by asking how do we get into the heads of our different populations, particularly young people and utilise their thoughts to create cities that everyone wants to occupy?

She concluded by noting that there is a legacy of discrimination; people are reluctant to participate and do well, because they suffer sustained discrimination. She cautioned that as policy makers we don't realise how this is woven into the fabric of our society and our cities.

Will Garton (Director General, DLUHC), opened by arguing that the six pillars of the Levelling Up White Paper are a pretty good organising framework in terms of creating change in urban areas.

He believe that institutions and relationships matter hugely and noted that densification is happening right now in Manchester and elsewhere, with some of our biggest city centres are growing substantially.

He welcomed the trailblazers in Greater Manchester and West Midlands and concluded by saying that driving investment through the investment zone programme is a big part of what we're doing.

How do we get there: aspirations for cities and what we need to deliver change

Sue Jarvis, Co-director of the Heseltine Institute, introduced the panel, outlining the work that the Heseltine Institute does on developing sustainable and inclusive cities, and thinking about regional inequalities and how these can be overcome.

Sue, as chair of the panel, asked what the barriers are to greater success for cities in the UK, and can these barriers be overcome locally or if not, what do we need from Government for our cities to succeed?

Cllr Abi Brown, Leader of Stoke-On-Trent City Council responded first, saying that two significant challenges were the need for inward investment into cities, and the question of how to create better jobs. She said that Stoke-on-Trent created a recovery plan as the city left the pandemic, which had four priorities: transport, economic development, education and skills, and health and productivity. She said that they have used this recovery plan as a framework to make decisions about what to bid for, and when they do bid for money from central Government they always try to fit the bid into one or more of these priorities. They also use their priorities as a

framework for lobbying Government and try and influence them to create things they can bid for within these priority areas.

Cllr Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council spoke next. He said that the starting point for what we need from Government is a reset of the relationship between local and national government. Local government needs to be seen as equals and working together in partnerships. This happened during the pandemic, where local government was trusted to deliver bespoke services locally.

Beyond the need for a reset in the relationship with government, Cllr Ward said that we need to bring the benefit of growth to the city as a whole. The current competitive bidding system is a barrier to this, as cities are competing against each other, and wasting money, sometimes bidding with little chance of success. There needs to be a shift away from a centralised state, and also we need more double devolution. Devolution should not stop at the regional level, but have a further level down to the city level. If we don't address these issues, he said, we won't be able to move cities forward, and if we want the UK to be successful, cities need to be successful.

Cllr Gareth Roberts, Leader of Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council responded next. He outlined the issues of the overuse and overreliance of cars, saying that this is a barrier to both the success of cities now and the ability to carry out further development. He argued that the more we can free people from the reliance on personal car use, the easier it will be to create cities that are good for people to live in. He argued that the move away from a reliance on cars is necessary both in terms of creating a greener, more sustainable city, but also a healthier city.

Sue next asked the panel: do our city leaders have enough power? And does the Government's plans to extend devolution help cities to level up?

Cllr Roberts answered this first, saying that the question is not necessarily whether or not leaders have enough powers, but whether they have the right powers. He gave the example of the Mayor of London, who has powers over certain parts of the transport network in London, such as the tube and bus network, but he has little to no real authority over the rail network. His area of Richmond is reliant on rail connections to central London, but the Mayor has no power to improve these or align these. There is also a cost implication for residents, as a single train fare is more than twice as expensive as a single tube fare for an equivalent journey.

Cllr Roberts also stressed the need for the right level of accountability, saying that the GLA has few powers to hold the Mayor to account. He argued that 'with great power comes great accountability'.

Cllr Ward spoke next, on the need for decisions to be made at the closest level to where people live. Cities are the scale at which leaders can take on the big challenges like the transition to net zero. He said that in Birmingham, 40 per cent of children and young people grow up in relative poverty, but that it is hard to tackle these issues due to the fragmented and uncertain approach to public investment from the current government. He argued that there is a need to join up funding streams and empower leaders at a local level. He also said there is a need to change the view that exists in Government around combined authority powers – local authorities are the conveners and place shapers for cities and need corresponding powers. He said he could not see that the answers to the challenges cities face will come from Whitehall, and instead Government should see cities as a system and give powers to local authorities as well as metro mayors to accelerate whole place regeneration.

Cllr Brown said that she did think that local leaders needed more powers. She reminded everyone that Stoke had been mentioned 20 times in the Levelling Up White Paper but the benefits of devolution had yet to be felt, and this was in part because the three levels of the devolution framework didn't match where Stoke is now and the kinds of powers that would be helpful for them to have.

She went on to say that the proposals for devolution are interesting but not necessarily right for all places. She said she knows Stoke-on-Trent better than the Government, and that transport is the top power that needs to be devolved to the area.

Finally, Sue asked: are there urban success stories from your local experience that could be replicated in other UK cities?

Cllr Ward answered, giving the example of the Commonwealth Games, which delivered under budget, and levered considerable investment into the city and the surrounding area. He said that this was a good example of how procurement can be used to deliver social value, as they had put conditions on procurement for the commonwealth games which had reaped significant benefits for Birmingham.

Cllr Roberts said that as a member of London Councils, he has seen the benefits of working on a cross-party basis, and that when councils come together, they can deliver better outcomes. He said that this was seen particularly during the pandemic, where councils worked together on the response to covid-19, and this work now

continues in London on the work they are doing to tackle health inequalities.