

## City Regions

### Background

1. The City Regions Board provides a clear voice and resource for non-metropolitan authorities within the LGA. This year the Board has had a particular focus on building a coalition to identify and address the future needs and opportunities of cities, exploring three key questions: what are cities; what do we need them to be; how do we get there? Alongside this, the Board has also continued to develop work in relation to employment and skills, growth funding, levelling up and devolution.
2. Members are asked to consider the achievements of the board over the last year and the proposed priorities for next year.

### Priorities and Achievements

#### Future of Cities

3. The LGA's second urban summit was held in March 2023, with over a hundred people attending in person. Attendees heard from Andy Haldane, Chief Executive of the RSA who set out the initial findings of the RSA's UK Urban Futures Commission, including how UK cities lag behind their global competitors on productivity and growth, and highlighted the links between income and health disparities.
4. The summit was supported by an open letter to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities signed by the leaders of Core Cities, Key Cities and London Councils. This set out our ambitious offer to government: that, with the right policies, finances, and space to deliver, cities can produce better outcomes, not just for urban areas, but also for the whole country.
5. The City Regions Board will be hosting a reception at the LGA's Annual Conference to hear more from the RSA on their work and to begin the process of shaping these emerging findings ahead of Party Conferences in the Autumn.
6. As part of the LGA's wider work in this area the Board also commissioned six videos from city residents, describing their experience of living in urban communities and setting out their hopes for the future. The videos were launched at the summit and form part of a wider collection of essays, data and analysis on the LGA's [Future of Cities Hub](#).

## Levelling Up

7. The LGA's [Levelling Up Locally Inquiry report](#) was published in March 2023, broadening the conversation around levelling up through five roundtable discussions, commissioned research and analysis of demographic trends. The inquiry explored how the Government's levelling up agenda might better strengthen local areas by looking beyond the Levelling Up White Paper to explore the role local leadership can play in shaping a recovery that reduced inequality for all. The report was launched at a hybrid event with over 100 attendees and speakers included Sarah Longlands from CLES, Professor Francesca Gains from Policy at Manchester and Professor Michael Kenny from the Bennett Institute.
8. The Board approved the creation and co-sponsorship of a health devolution working group with the NHS Confederation. This working group has met once and provides an opportunity to ensure that learning can be shared between local government, the NHS and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). The three boards with an interest in health devolution (the City Regions Board, the People and Places Board, and the Community Wellbeing Board) all have a nominated representative on the working group, with Cllr Gillian Ford representing the City Regions Board on the group. Sarah Pickup, Deputy Chief Executive of the LGA is also a member of the working group.

### *Employment and skills*

9. Since last summer's publication of our employment and skills devolution proposals '[Work Local: Unlocking talent to level up](#)', we have engaged a wide range of parliamentarians and stakeholders on how it could improve services. To build on the growing support for the Board's proposals, over the coming months, we plan to develop further methods to communicate our proposals to decision makers and stakeholders as well as to look at ways it can be implemented.
10. We continue to promote the role of local government in employment and skills and our Work Local objectives through select committees. For instance, in January, Cllr Toby Savage gave oral evidence on behalf of the LGA at the Work and Pensions Select Committee's inquiry on the DWP's Plan for Jobs and employment support. Our [written submission](#) was cited widely by committee members. Alongside this we [responded](#) to the [APPG for Youth Employment Committee](#) inquiry into how young peoples' mental health is affecting labour market outcomes. More recently in May 2023, the Boards responded to the APPG for Youth Employment Committee inquiry into [Place-based approaches to youth employment](#) with Cllr Gillian Ford representing the LGA at an evidence session.

11. Work in ongoing to influence the outcomes of the [Commission on the Future of Employment Support](#) which is looking at ways in which employment support and services could be more effective. This include an LGA evidence session from Cllr Toby Savage.
12. Building more strategic relationships with Government departments including the Departments for Work and Pensions and Education (DWP and DfE) are important for both the LGA and councils to improve policy making at national level and create stronger ties locally. Devolution areas already have a relationship with these departments, so the LGA has proactively sought to develop links with councils not currently in a devolution area. In the last year, working with our local government partners, we have set up an LGA/DWP advisory group for councils to discuss issues related to labour market policy. The group last met in February and discussed youth hubs, contracted employment programmes and economic inactivity. It will next meet in June. We have also had positive discussion with DfE to establish a similar grouping.
13. With LEP transition under a year away and an increasing focus on the role of councils in growth, the councils' economic development (ED) functions will change. Working with councils, we have developed a guide to economic development teams – their role and skills needs. The report shows how ED services are delivered across England, shares learning across the sector with examples and top tips of what works and sets out the future skills and capacity challenges they face and where they can go for support. It will be published as an online guide on our website.
14. A joint piece of work developed by People and Places, City Regions and Community Wellbeing Boards has explored the role of local government in addressing economic inactivity and what factors could be driving this locally. We aim to publish the work in the summer.
15. The People and Places and City Regions Board jointly agreed to examine how the role of councils in supporting equality, diversity, and economic inclusion could be advanced to help unlock talent and level up local areas. The work will conclude in June with a compendium of case studies and the LGA 'Economic Inclusion Principles' paper to share learning across councils to guide the advancement of economic inclusion in their communities.

### **Urban Resilience**

16. City regions face an increasing variety of physical, political, economic and social risks. The Board took the decision to begin work to explore the nature of these risks, what it means to be resilient and understand how our city regions can become resilient. The initial focus of this work centred on the consequences of climate change for urban areas,

particularly the risks associated with higher temperatures. Members heard from Bristol regarding the creation of a heat vulnerability index and from Space Syntax as part of the urban summit. Consequently, the Board is exploring the potential of a 'local resilience act' with the think-tank Localis, to strengthen the ability of urban leaders to manage change.

### **Green Jobs**

17. The People & Places and City Regions Boards have been supporting the local government representative on the Ministerial Green Jobs Delivery Group, securing a time limited Local Capacity and Capability sub group (LCCG). The LCCG comprises of representatives from skill providers, business, industry, national and local government, with the sector being represented by the LGA, Solace, ADEPT, MCA Network and UK100. It has explored a range of issues including a national definition of green jobs, the strategic mapping of key net zero infrastructure projects, the opportunities and barriers to developing the workforce needed to deliver net zero and local delivery mechanisms. This has been an opportunity to promote the Work Local model. The LCCG will be developing recommendations by July.
18. In tandem with the work of the LCCG, the City Regions and People & Places Board will be developing policy positions on the place-based approach needed to develop the workforce and jobs needed to deliver net zero, utilising the new partnerships the LGA has created through the LCCG. This work will be done to complement the net zero and climate change work of the EEHT Board.

### **Growth Funding**

19. The City Regions and People and Places Boards commissioned Shared Intelligence to provide support for councils and combined authorities undertaking LEP integration and to share good practice and learning. The project saw a series of interviews and workshops carried out and the final report draws on learning from research between November 2022 and March 2023 and DLUHC officials attended the sessions. It will be used to inform the Board's response to the Government's consultation process following the Chancellor's announcement in the 2023 budget that he was 'minded to' end funding to LEPs from April 2024.
20. The Board, working with the People and Places Board, commissioned Shared Intelligence to capture learning for policymakers in central and local government from eight place-based programmes that have been delivered over the last 20 years. The final report identifies eight key lessons for policymakers to consider. The report has recently been published on the LGA's website.

21. Following the announcement of the allocation of the second round of the Levelling Up Fund, the City Regions Board and People and Places Boards sent a letter to the Secretary of State outlining experiences and asking for an open review of the process ahead of any future rounds of funding. Dehenna Davison MP has agreed to meet with both Board Chairs ahead of the third round of the Levelling Up Fund to discuss how the fund could be implemented in a way which would both be cost effective and empower local areas to level up their communities.
22. The People and Places and City Regions Board jointly commissioned WPI Economics to explore councils' future role in driving growth and prosperity. This is due for completion in June 2023 and will help inform the LGA's manifesto asks ahead of a forthcoming general election.
23. The City Regions and People & Places Boards has been active in ensuring that DHLUC continue to work with local authorities as they introduce the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). In November, the Chair [called](#) on the government to approve local authority investment plans and calling for greater flexibilities on how the fund can be used across the three years. Following the approval of the plans in December, the Chair [called](#) for there to be flexibility between year spend. In January, DHLUC confirmed that lead authorities could spend allocations between years, subject to a credible plan, with a further announcement made in March on the introduction of the flexibility to spend UKSPF on the People & Skills Priority in 2023/24.
24. The People & Places and City Regions Board commissioned Shared Intelligence to undertake action learning sets to support local authorities with the introduction of UKSPF and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) in early 2023. This has provided a space for local authorities to network and share learning. As there has been significant interest in participating, the LGA has created a wider informal officer network to share learning. The LGA will publish the learning from the action learning sets by the beginning of June and will continue to support continual officer engagement with DHLUC and DEFRA for both UKSPF and REPF.
25. Working with councils, we have developed a guide to economic development teams – their role and skills needs. The report shows how ED services are delivered across England, shares learning across the sector with examples and top tips of what works and sets out the future skills and capacity challenges they face and where they can go for support. It will be published as an online guide on our website.

## **Programme of work and priorities**

26. The Board will look to build on its successes as it plans for the 2023/24 board cycle. Areas of focus are likely to include:
- 26.1. Making the case for investment in urban areas and city regions ahead of the upcoming general election.
  - 26.2. Influencing national policy on levelling up and devolution, including widening the scope of powers available and deepening of existing deals.
  - 26.3. Exploring the policy levers needed to improve resilience in urban areas and city regions.
  - 26.4. Embedding our Work Local proposals into national policy, including specific policy proposals to support green jobs and net zero.
  - 26.5. Streamlining local growth funding and implementing the learning from existing funding programmes.
  - 26.6. Supporting councils with the transitions of LEPs to local government and removing barriers to councils' abilities to support local inclusive growth.

## Next steps

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