

City Regions Overview and Priorities 2023-24

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper sets out a brief overview of the Board's work and asks members to comment on the Board's priorities.

LGA Plan Theme: Stronger local economies, thriving local democracy

Recommendation(s)

That members comment on the Board's priorities for the year ahead, including any gaps.

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City Regions Board Overview and Priorities 2023-24

Background

1. The City Regions Board represents the urban members of the LGA. It works in partnership with the non-metropolitan People and Places Board on a number of cross-cutting issues such as devolution, local economic growth and skills and employment support.
2. In discussing the run up to the next general election in the last Board cycle, members were keen to see progress on the Board's policy priorities and also to see a greater recognition at a national level of the needs and potential of urban areas. This paper contains a brief update on work across the Board's core policy areas and asks for lead members' views on the draft policy priorities agreed at the end of the previous Board cycle.
3. Separate papers will update members in more detail on planned activity across our work programme. We would be grateful for members' comments on the overall balance of the work, including any early thoughts on the new inclusion of strategic housing and transport.

Local Government White Paper

4. At the annual conference in July, the LGA launched its ['Make it Local'](#) report. The report sets out a range of clear offers from local government in the areas that pollsters are reporting as the biggest issues of concern for the public, and therefore are likely to be prominent in national parties' manifesto proposals. Alongside the LGA's ongoing work to influence party manifestoes, we will be working with the sector to develop more detailed proposals for a new or returning government to implement.
5. The Board's existing work programme is well placed to inform the White Paper, and work due to be completed on economic inactivity, health devolution and councils' role in growth and prosperity will be well timed to contribute. Members might wish to reflect on particular issues for urban areas they would like to see covered in the White Paper.

Policy overview

Urban policy and the future of cities

6. 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. This was followed by a reception at the LGA's annual conference. The work was supported by a collection of essays, videos, data and analysis on the LGA's [Future of Cities Hub](#).
7. 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. As we look to the next general election, there is an opportunity to sharpen our offer to Government and consider how a third Urban Summit in 2024 could give the Board, and its partner Special Interest Groups, a platform to engage influential people and organisations to amplify this offer.

Growth and prosperity

8. The role of local government in local economic growth and prosperity is increasingly seen as critical to supporting the national economy, but more can be done to support councils and devolved areas in their efforts. The People and Places and City Regions Board commissioned WPI Economics to review councils' current roles and responsibilities and put forward recommendations for improvement.
9. Earlier this month Government confirmed [its decision to withdraw funding to Local Enterprise Partnerships \(LEPs\) and move their functions to local government](#), supported by some revenue funding in 2024/25. Government also published its plan to [simplify grant funding](#) to local government. We also expect Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to be announced in the coming months.

Skills and employment support

10. The LGA, councils and devolved authorities and partner local government representative bodies are united in their view that the status quo in designing, commissioning, and delivering employment and skills activity needs to change. The sector has a time-limited opportunity to influence all political parties that the LGA's Work Local approach can address the challenges and opportunities faced by people and places, and that it can be implemented across all places over time. A returning Government or new administration will want to adopt policies that it can move forward with at pace and with limited budgets. We need to both work through the operational level detail needed to turn our agreed policy lines into reality, as well as communicate our messages in a clear and simple way.
11. We have upcoming research on economic inactivity, one of the biggest labour market challenges, due to be published in the autumn. Officers continue to work with the Departments for Education; Work and Pensions; and Health and Social Care to promote a place-based approach. Following agreement by the previous Board, officers are scoping a piece of work to evidence how the fragmentation of the transport system impacts access to education, training and employment opportunities. Government's working groups on green jobs will put forward their recommendations in the autumn; there are opportunities to undertake work on the workforce needs of delivering low carbon energy security.

Devolution and Levelling Up

12. It is positive that all national parties have signalled a commitment to further devolution to local government. The LGA-sponsored [Devolution APPG](#) will continue to promote the opportunities for devolution with Parliamentarians, building on the People and Places and City Regions Boards' Levelling Up Locally Inquiry. The City Regions, Community Wellbeing and People and Places Boards are part of the time limited health and devolution working group established in April 2023 and co-sponsored by NHS

Confederation and the LGA. It will meet for a final time in September to agree recommendations, which could feed into the LGA's White Paper work.

13. The LGA, through its improvement and support work, also works with combined authorities and existing and aspiring devolution areas to support them and share learning and best practice.

Strategic transport and housing

14. As part of a refresh of Board portfolios, the LGA Board agreed that the City Regions and People and Places Boards would take on responsibility for 'strategic housing and transport,' working alongside the new Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board (formerly Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport). Following a meeting of the City Regions, People and Places and LINZ Chairs, discussions of how to implement this change are ongoing and we hope to bring fuller details to the next meeting of the Board.

Urban resilience

15. Following the record temperatures of summer 2022, Board members were interested in understanding the particular challenges and opportunities for resilience in cities and urban areas. We heard from Bristol City Council about their work on a heat map and how it would inform their work. We also heard from the think tank Localis on their work on 'Reaching Climate Resilience,' a project to examine what statutory provisions would be necessary to empower councils to act on climate resilience through: whole systems resilience; sustained and adequate finance, and subregional governance frameworks. It is proposed that this policy area move forward as a watching brief for 2023/24.

Proposal

16. Following a discussion with Lead Members of the Board, the following priorities are proposed, which are based on the draft priorities proposed at the end of the 2023/24 Board cycle:

- 16.1. Making the case for investment in urban areas and city regions ahead of the upcoming general election within the framework of a more devolved and place-based approach to public services.

- 16.2. Removing barriers to councils' abilities to support inclusive and sustainable local growth.

- 16.3. Embedding our Work Local proposals into national policy, including specific policy proposals to support green jobs and net zero.

- 16.4. To strengthen the case for urban authorities' role in strategic transport and housing (subject to ongoing member discussions).

17. Board members are asked to:

- 17.1. Agree the above priorities, with the caveat that the final priority may need to be refined at a later meeting.

- 17.2. Agree the proposal to move forward with urban resilience as a watching brief, particularly in light of the Board's expanded remit.

Implications for Wales

18. Many areas of the Board's policy are devolved, however we undertake to work with the WLGA to share learning as necessary.

Financial implications

19. The work described can be undertaken from within the Board's budget.

Equalities implications

20. The Board has sought to reflect the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout its work programme, including the particular needs of communities in non-metropolitan areas. An equalities champion is due to be centrally appointed to the Board in the autumn.

Next steps

21. Officers will bring a paper on strategic transport and housing to the next Board meeting.
22. Officers will work with Lead Members to reflect the Board's priorities as we develop our work programme and forward plan.