

City Regions Board – report from Cllr Sir Richard Leese CBE (Chairman)

Devolution and public service reform

1. Following the LGA Executive's discussion on devolution in January, the City Regions Board and People and Places Board were asked to develop a new vision of future English governance and a route map to achieve these goals over the next Parliament. This vision will be drawing on the findings of the three independent Commissions that the LGA has sponsored this year: the City Growth Commission which reported in October; the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance which reported on February 18th and the Non-metropolitan commission which is due to report on March 5th. Taken together, the three Commissions mount a strong case for devolution within England backed by independent business-led voices.
2. We are now aiming to set out a compelling narrative from both the urban and non-metropolitan viewpoint that shows the benefits of devolution for local people and UK PLC as a whole. This will be delivered by May so that the LGA can be in a position to influence the new Government and/or coalition talks. The Board will be discussing this work in more detail at its last meeting before the general election on March 23rd.
3. The City Regions and People and Places Board also jointly commissioned RAND Europe to analyse the success factors that underpin successful locally-led public service transformation and the barriers to faster progress. RAND is now finalising its report which sets out the emerging practice across a number of met and non-metropolitan areas and it will make recommendations for public service reform that can flex to different areas. Two city regions, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Greater Cambridge, feature as case studies in that work. At the next Board, members will be discussing how to accelerate progress on the public service reform agenda, including how the LGA can best support city regions.
4. On the City Regions Board's recommendation, the LGA also endorsed the Modern Charter for Local Freedom, building on the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta. The Charter was launched at the Core Cities UK Devolution Summit in Glasgow on February 9th. All councils have been invited to sign up: <https://www.change.org/p/the-leaders-of-the-main-political-parties-sign-up-to-our-charter-and-support-more-freedoms-for-our-great-cities>

Skills, Employment and Welfare Reform

5. The City Regions and People & Places Boards commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to analyse the skills and employment challenges to be faced by an incoming or returning Government, and offer a proposed localised solution including options for devolving the work programme in 2017. We will shortly be publishing our second report in this area, this time focusing on the obstacles, confusion and disincentives that the current employment, skills and welfare system presents, demonstrated through various touch-points and interactions from the perspective of the unemployed and people with low skills. It will be published in coming weeks. The LGA

and Inclusion will then move into the third and final stage to prepare a model for how a local government solution will offer solutions to those challenges, which is being developed with a number of councils. The work should be completed before purdah, and a final draft format should be ready for lead members comment towards the end of March.

6. In parallel, we are also working with DWP to inform their thinking on successor arrangements to the Work Programme, ran a joint workshop with the national network of employment providers (ERSA), and working with a range of other stakeholders to ensure that our wider proposals have support wider than this sector.

Trade and investment

7. Research commissioned by the LGA into past and future trends in trade and investment and the potential role of England's city-regions was presented at the City Regions Board on 19 January. Members asked for the work to be pursued with politicians and business organisations to ensure a new debate on trade.
8. We are working closely with city regions partners to flesh out the case for how the national economy stands to benefit from a more localised approach to trade and investment policy and identify case studies based on successful local investment and export operations. The commissioned research, local evidence and member's feedback are being fed into discussions with civil servants in UK Trade and Investment (UKTI), Department for Business, Innovation & Skills to help build the case across Whitehall. We are also conducting active conversations with business and key third party stakeholder such as British Property Federation (BPF), Institute of Chartered Accountants of England & Wales (ICAEW), British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and Universities UK (UUK).

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