

15 June 2015

Reviewing the City Regions Board

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The City Regions Board first met in April 2014. In creating this Board, a new voice and resource was created for city regions within the LGA. After two years of operation, the Board was asked to review its work and form.

The LGA Executive has also asked for a short report on the work of all of the Boards over the past year.

This report provides some issues for discussion to support members' review of the Board and sets out a summary of this year's work programme.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to consider whether the Board meets the original purpose of providing a voice and a resource for city regions within the LGA.

From this reflection, Members are asked for their views on how the City Regions Board should develop over the next year.

Action:

Officers to take forward as directed by members.

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Reviewing the City Regions Board

Background

1. In January 2014, two new Boards were created by the LGA General Assembly: one for city regions and one for non-metropolitan areas. Both Boards were asked after two years to review the way they operate and their effectiveness. For the City Regions Board, this meeting signals the end of its first eighteen months of operation and presents a timely opportunity to discuss whether the original intention of having a clear voice and resource for city regions within the LGA is being achieved.
2. The paper sets out the context for establishing the Board and it offers some reflections to assist members' discussion. The paper also looks briefly at the work that has been delivered since 2014, as the LGA Executive has asked for short reports on the work of all of the Boards over the past year.

Context

3. The City Regions Board was established in February 2014, following a review of the LGA's governance arrangements after some months of concern about the role of city regions within the LGA. There were serious doubts about the ability of the LGA's Urban Commission to provide work and support which reflected the emerging makeup of local government and pace of developments in the wider public policy agenda. As a result, the new Board was created.
4. The Board was given a mandate by the LGA Executive to create its own work programme and play a greater influencing/advocacy role on behalf of English cities and city regions. The Board was also allocated specific staff and financial resources to support the delivery of its mandate.
5. Members may wish to consider the following issues in their reflections on whether the Board is meeting its original purpose: the rapidly changing geography and governance of city regions, the continued need for a strong urban influence within the LGA and the use of allocated resources.

Changing nature of city regions

6. In designing the original membership of the Board, it was recognised that the political geography of English city regions was changing and that that needed to be reflected in the composition of the Board. Thus those organisations which represented our changing urban geography in Jan 2014 formed the original membership: Core Cities, Key Cities, SIGOMA and London Boroughs. The Board's political proportionality reflecting urban councils, differing from other LGA policy boards whose make-up reflects the political proportionality of the Association as a whole.

7. From the outset, the Board's work programme was developed in close consultation with advisers from all the constituent bodies to ensure that its work added value to that being undertaken by our respective organisations and that we would collectively be in a stronger position to assert the authority of the urban voice in the UK's major public policy debates. Feedback was that this collaboration was valued and the LGA played an important role in bringing these bodies together.
8. The political geography of city regions in England has continued to evolve. There are now five Combined Authorities covering the city regions of England, with three more proposed schemes advancing through the statutory process. Members may wish to consider how Combined Authorities and other new bodies should be reflected in the membership and the ongoing work of the Board.

A strong urban voice and lens with the LGA

9. In creating the Board, there was a clear desire for a strong and distinct cities' voice within the LGA which would cast an urban lens on priority work. There was also a desire to ensure that LGA's positions on important issues such as devolution reflected those at the cutting edge of policy rather than the collective capacity of all councils.
10. Over the last year, the Board has been asked to lead a number of important policy issues on behalf of the LGA. For example, our recent devolution report reflects a clear steer from this Board and recognises the needs for LGA advocacy to reflect councils working at very different paces. This demonstrates a change of approach within the LGA.
11. If we look to the future, bespoke local deals will drive the devolution agenda and there is a risk of the sector appearing fractured. There has been strong pressure on the LGA and this Board to continue to pull together a united voice for councils, especially given the unprecedented financial constraints that are expected. In developing the recent devolution work, the City Regions and People and Places Board have demonstrated that they are able to act collectively and unite behind a common set of propositions which reflect different geographies when local government's collective voice needs to be heard. Members may wish to consider those policy areas where there needs to be more joint working with the non-mets Board and those where specific urban advocacy is needed.
12. Much work has been undertaken on ensuring that there is a much better urban voice within the LGA on its policy making and its lobbying. Whilst there has been some advocacy to business organisations, less work has been developed to ensure that the LGA's distinct urban voice is expressed to outside bodies. Members may consider that this is the next stage of development, through this would need to be achieved in conjunction with other distinct urban voices.

Use of resources

13. At its creation, the Board was provided with a dedicated secretariat and a commissioning budget for research. Broad priorities were set for its work programme which aimed to

enhance the evidence base for the case for devolution for both individual city bids and for more general national lobbying by the LGA. The detail of the work programme is contained in the appendix. Again given the pace of change in English urban governance, members may wish to reflect on how its resources are used in future years to ensure city regions are supported. For example, members may wish to focus the research and evidence base in service and policy areas where Whitehall's views needs to be challenged (for e.g. fiscal devolution and constitutional reform). More resource may need to be dedicated to supporting the improvement and development of cities and city regions as they move from deals to delivery.

14. This paper is offered not as a comprehensive review of the Board, but as a starting point to provoke discussion. Members' views are welcome on any issues which could strengthen the LGA's work for city regions.

APPENDIX- the work programme

At its first meeting, the Board set three broad priorities for its work programme in the first year:

- Devolution and public service reform
- Skills and employment
- Trade and investment

One of the Board's first decisions was to co-sponsor with Core Cities, London Councils and the GLA, the City Growth Commission, chaired by renowned economist Jim O'Neill (now Lord O'Neill, Commercial Secretary to the Treasury). The City Growth Commission delivered a series of powerful reports that have played an influential role in securing cross-party support for devolution in the lead-up to the general election, culminating in the commitments of the current government.

From this Commission and the work of the Peace and Finance Commissions, members of this Board played a lead role in shaping the LGA's policy thinking on devolution and the development of our recent report, *English devolution: local solutions for a successful nation*, which was delivered to the new Secretary of State in his first week in office by the LGA Chair.

The Board has also commissioned the following research:

- A series of three reports from the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to analyse the skills and employment challenges to be faced by an incoming or returning Government, and set out ambitious proposals for a localised approach. As a result, we are now in a strong position to try to influence decisions about the re-commissioning of the Work Programme in 2016.
- New research from Oxford Economics on long-term projections for the UK's economy if current trends on trade and investment performance hold, which also confirmed the scope for city regions to play a greater role in policy and delivery. This research can now be drawn on by city regions in bespoke discussions with UKTI on how the specific characteristics and competitive advantages of city regions can be incorporated into their trade and investment strategy. The findings of this report were also picked up in the final recommendations of the independent Non-metropolitan commission.
- Analysis of the factors that underpin successful locally-led public service transformation and the barriers to faster progress that can be used to push for "Public Service Reform Deals" to be extended to all places as part of devolution negotiations. This work was jointly commissioned with the People and Places Board.