

## **City Regions Board Work Programme 2015/16**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction

### **Summary**

This report sets out a proposed work programme for the City Regions Board for 2015/16. The work programme seeks to:

- Reflect the broad remit for the Board and provide continuity.
- Reflect the LGA's Leadership Board commissions, specifically for the City Regions Board (in partnership with the People and Places Board) to focus on devolution and the future shape of local government in city regions.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to comment upon and agree the draft work programme for 2015/16.

### **Action**

Officers to take forward actions in line with Members' steer.

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## **City Regions Board Work Programme 2015/16**

### **Background**

1. Established in February 2014, the City Regions Board represents the interests of cities and city regions at the LGA. Its membership is drawn from Core Cities, Key Cities, London Councils and SIGOMA.
2. To date, the work of the Board has covered devolution for economic growth and public service reform; skills, employment and welfare reform; and trade and investment. As part of its work programme on devolution, the Board sponsored the City Growth Commission, (chaired by Lord O'Neill, now Commercial Secretary to the Treasury), which released a number of high profile reports and publications. Through our engagement with the Commission, the LGA and co-sponsors Core Cities and London Councils have been able to shape the Government's current devolution programme. The Board has also worked closely with other relevant LGA Boards on shared organisational priorities (in particular the People and Places Board with which it developed the LGA's recent work on devolution) providing a united voice from the sector.
3. Next month, the Government will use the Spending Review to announce an initial set of second phase devolution deals and is also predicted to deliver another tough financial settlement for local government. After setting the radical devolution of powers to local areas in England as a key priority, the Government received 34 bids from areas across the country. It is clear from this that there is a huge appetite for devolution across England in key policy areas including housing, skills and transport, but also in new areas of interest such as complex dependencies, arts and culture and children's services.
4. It is in this context that the City Regions Board are asked to agree a draft programme for the year. **Members are asked to consider:**
  - 4.1. **The work that the LGA Leadership Board has asked the Board to undertake.**
  - 4.2. **Specific policy priorities based on the Board's remit.**
  - 4.3. **The balance and prioritisation of activity within the proposed work programme.**

### **Leadership Board policy commissions**

5. As part of the recent member-led review of governance, the LGA Executive and Leadership Board have been asked to commission work from the LGA's policy Boards where a clear corporate priority has been identified or where an important policy issue straddles more than one Board.
6. The Leadership Board met in July 2015 and agreed the following remit for the commissioning of policy work from Boards on behalf of the LGA leadership:
  - 6.1. The Leadership Board's commissioning is related to the most important (current and future) issues for LGA membership.
  - 6.2. The issues commissioned cover the terms of reference of more than one Board.
  - 6.3. There will be a limited number of corporate commissions, no more than five.
  - 6.4. Boards will continue to set policy priorities based on their specific terms of reference.
  - 6.5. These will be reported back to the LGA Executive.

7. The following cross-cutting areas of work were agreed and are being commissioned from relevant Boards in 2015-16. Specific Boards have been asked to lead this work, as indicated below, and report back to the LGA Executive. Lead Boards will be having detailed discussions about the projects at their first meetings of this Board cycle. All policy Boards are invited to consider their contributions to the four projects.
  - 7.1. **Devolution and future shape of local government** (jointly led by People and Places Board and City Regions Board). It is likely that this work will focus on supporting councils to develop and implement bespoke devolution deals, including governance, the evidence base for devolution, and working with Whitehall once the Cities and Local Government Bill has been enacted. Members might like to note the Leadership Board felt that the LGA's strong focus on devolving skills and employment support should continue throughout the next phase of work.
  - 7.2. **Housing** (led by the Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board), will include a focus on addressing housing need, building on the LGA's leadership of this debate.
  - 7.3. **Finance** (led by the Resources Board) will be driven largely by the outcome of the Spending Review and will look to build on our successful Future Funding Outlook work.
  - 7.4. **Promoting health and wellbeing** (led by the Community Wellbeing Board). Continued moves towards an integrated health and care system remains at the top of councils' and the Government's agenda, and getting these new arrangements right for councils and citizens remains a significant opportunity for the LGA. This work should: draw on the wider role of other local services such as schools, children's services, the fire service, public health, housing, transport and leisure; and play in promoting wellbeing across the life course and keeping people physically and mentally healthy, in work, and in their own homes. It should raise the profile of social care as an equal to the NHS, and build a business case for council-led investment as part of a much wider integrated approach to improve health outcomes and address health inequalities, as well as keep pressure off the NHS and other expensive services. This work should also consider the role of citizens and communities in supporting themselves and each other and promoting resilience and independence.
8. Other Boards will also have an interest in exploring the opportunities devolution presents for their policy areas. It is suggested that officers work closely with colleagues across the Finance and Policy directorate to ensure that we maintain a good understanding of the connections between Boards' workstreams. Equally, Board Chairs and Lead Members might wish to meet their counterparts to discuss areas of shared concern, for example to share non-metropolitan perspectives where appropriate.

### **Suggested priorities and work programme for 2015/16**

9. Since its inception the Board has bolstered the urban voice within the LGA and played an important role developing the LGA's recent devolution work and lobbying positions. The Board will have a particularly important role to play following the Spending Review, when a number of devolution deals with city regions are expected to be announced and the scale of cuts to local government spending will be known. It is suggested that the Board use its January meeting to take stock of the position of city regions, what progress has been made towards ambitious devolution and the gaps that remain to inform the delivery of its work programme for the rest of the year.

10. There are also a number of other strategic issues for members to consider when establishing the work programme for the coming year, including:
  - 10.1. Follow up to the Cities and Local Government Bill: much of the detail will be set out in subsequent Orders and secondary legislation so the LGA will likely need to keep up the pressure in Parliament to ensure that progress continues to be made.
  - 10.2. Securing the gains for English local government: The LGA's support to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Reform, Decentralisation and Devolution and its inquiry on Better Devolution in the UK is a key opportunity for the LGA to engage with the constitutional issues. This is addressed in item 5.
  - 10.3. Developing the fiscal case: The proposal for full retention of business rates has the potential to be a game-changer for local areas, but there are a range of implications for local government that need to be addressed. There will be an opportunity for members to provide a steer on the LGA's approach to business rates and fiscal issues more broadly at the end of the meeting.
  - 10.4. Implementing devolution: As more places secure devolution deals, there is likely to be demand on the LGA to support implementation and help develop risk management strategies. It will also be critical to harness the learning from individual devolution deals to feed into broader policy development.
11. The Board also expressed a strong interest in continuing its work on employment and skills and agenda item 8 gives members the opportunity to consider proposals in this area more fully.

### **Next steps**

12. Members are invited to comment on and agree the Board's priorities and work programme.

### **Financial implications**

13. The draft work programme can be delivered within existing resources.