

LGA support offer - devolution

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper provides an update on recent activity to inform members' discussion of the next stages of the LGA's support offer on devolution.

Recommendation

That the Board provides a steer on how best to focus the devolution support offer provided to councils as set out in **paragraphs 3, 5, and 7.4**.

Action

Officers to take any actions as directed by the Board.

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Recent activity

1. Over recent months the LGA's devolution support offer, drawn up with direction from the City Regions Board, has seen very good take up, with officers receiving positive feedback from councils on the range of services that have been used. Andrew Campbell (LGA Associate Director, currently on secondment to the LGA from his position as a Director General in DCLG) has met with groups in every part of the country, and his connections have been particularly valuable in helping local areas gain insight into the thinking of Whitehall departments as they refine their pitches. Over the past weeks, he has been helping places at every stage of their devolution activity: preparing for their challenge sessions with Ministers, advising on the formulation of proposals, supporting negotiations and speaking at numerous events.
2. There was a strong demand from the sector for up to date and accessible knowledge sharing. The LGA has started to deliver this. Our [DevoNext hub](#) brings together the latest information from the sector and Government. Councils asked us to create a database of all bids and maintain a fast-moving analysis of the latest "baselines" for devolution – these are available on the hub and are kept to up to date as details emerge. The hub also allows us to help councils communicate about devolution with materials such as a short video to explain what combined authorities are (gaining over 900 views to date), and infographics on themes such as skills and employment and benefits to businesses. Lastly, it contains information to help councils prepare their own bid by making available the LGA's evidence base for devolution and sharing key documents produced by areas.
3. Future developments could include:
 - 3.1. More short videos explaining key elements of devolution, for example provisions of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill.
 - 3.2. Tools for councils to use to communicate locally about devolution, customisable to their area.
 - 3.3. Increasing the interactivity by using resources such as the Knowledge Hub.
 - 3.4. 'Vox pops' of leading members, officers, business leaders and others talking about why devolution is important to their area and sharing their journey so far.
4. ***Members' views are sought as to how these resources could be developed further.***
5. The LGA has also positioned itself as a leading organiser of sector-facing events on devolution, providing a forum for sharing knowledge and key messages as well as fostering peer learning. Recent successful events include:
 - 5.1. A national conference on communicating about devolution in Birmingham on 21 October. Discussions are now taking place with several areas interested in hosting smaller, locally-driven workshops on the same theme with our support.
 - 5.2. A joint national conference with SOLACE on governance in a new world on 27 November.

- 5.3. Two events for elected members to explore place-based leadership in the context of devolution as part of the LGA's Leading Edge and Leaders' Programme.
 - 5.4. The first meeting of the LGA's Officers' Devolution Network took place in December. The event was well received, with attending officers considering the key challenges they anticipated facing in coming months. They were signposted to work the LGA has completed or is developing that will assist with these. The LGA will facilitate two more meetings in 2016, as well as developing a programme of seminars on specific topics within the broader devolution agenda.
 - 5.5. A planned member-focused event for June.
6. Again, ***members' views are sought on future activity***, including the focus for the June event.

Future considerations and next steps

7. Those areas furthest ahead are now moving towards implementation and delivery of devolved services. There is need for the LGA to look forward, adapt its programme of support, and focus resources where it can add maximum value. This could include a bespoke offer for combined authorities. Whilst it is anticipated that a flexible approach may still be required, thought should now also be given to what elements of support can be standardised and 'packaged', in order to best meet the emerging needs of the sector and at the same time remain focused. There are a number of considerations in this area:
 - 7.1. **Established support mechanisms:** in considering the development of our devolution offer, it is helpful to consider the existing LGA improvement offer led by the Improvement and Innovation Board, including:
 - 7.1.1. Peer challenges - a small team of local government peers spending time at the council to provide challenge and share learning.
 - 7.1.2. The Leader's Programme and Leadership Academy help to support and develop councillors, ensuring local politicians are confident and capable.
 - 7.1.3. The Economic Growth Adviser programme is designed to build up the capacity of a local area to improve its economic future, offering direct, bespoke advice via a panel of advisers with a proven track record in their field.
 - 7.2. Each of these programmes, developed for single councils, has elements which could be built upon to provide more bespoke devolution offer for combined authorities. In addition, existing relationships with organisations such as the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Local Partnerships will be helpful in shaping an updated offer.
 - 7.3. **Sector led improvement:** supporting local authorities to help each other improve is central to LGA philosophy. In this context, the LGA will work with New Economy to develop new tools and guidance based on the experiences in Greater Manchester and areas across the country who are at different stages in the devolution process. This will capture learning that will better enable other areas to make robust, evidence-based cases for devolution in relation to tax and spend, as well making recommendations for how the deal-making process could work better in future.

- 7.4. **The move to implementation:** following successful negotiations in many areas, councils are increasingly concerned with the practicalities involved in delivering deals. ***Members may wish to consider how best the LGA could assist councils and combined authorities to implement devolved powers and responsibilities,*** taking into account the possible templates for support in paragraph 7.1. This could for example consist of offers such as:
- 7.4.1. Supporting place-based leadership, both for members and officers, including for example peer challenges for combined authorities.
 - 7.4.2. Expert support in designing effective governance systems.
 - 7.4.3. Expert support and advice in designing systems to deliver devolved services.
 - 7.4.4. Working with partners to improve community engagement.
 - 7.4.5. Bespoke support in local economic development.
 - 7.4.6. Support to drive forward urban regeneration.
 - 7.4.7. Evaluation and knowledge sharing.
8. The support offered will have clear resource implications for the LGA, both in officer time and in funding. This will be considered more fully once the support offer has been developed in more detail.