

## **RSA**

### **Purpose**

For decision.

### **Summary**

The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) has approached the City Regions Board to consider sponsorship of an independent commission which will examine the next stage of devolution for cities. The commission will concentrate on how devolution can secure better outcomes in social policy and economic performance.

### **Recommendation**

The report recommends that the Board becomes a sponsor of the new commission.

### **Action**

Officers to take any actions as directed by the Board.

**Contact officer:** Ian Hughes  
**Position:** Head of Policy  
**Phone no:** 0207 664 3101  
**Email:** [ian.hughes@local.gov.uk](mailto:ian.hughes@local.gov.uk)

## **RSA**

### **Background**

1. The RSA is developing a new independent commission which will examine the next chapter in English devolution from an urban perspective.
2. The new report will concentrate on new solutions to social and economic inclusion through devolution to cities. This is a gap in the devolution agenda that members of this Board have previously identified.
3. The new work will follow on from the RSA's City Growth Commission which was chaired by Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs. This report had great influence on the Government (and other parties') devolution policy. Jim O'Neill was ennobled after the election and is now a Treasury minister, with responsibility for city devolution.
4. A brief for the commission has been provided by the RSA, which is attached at **Annex A (confidential)**. Members will note that the commission is currently in a scoping phase and that members for the independent commission are currently being considered.
5. Charlotte Alldritt from the RSA will attend the Board meeting and set out the objectives and current thinking. The RSA would welcome members' views to help develop the detail.

### **Some issues of concern from recent Board debate**

6. In recent Board meetings, members have raised a number of concerns regarding English devolution policy. These concerns resonate with the general objectives of the RSA work.
7. Firstly, whilst early deals have been rightly grounded in growth policy, there was some disappointment amongst councils that the public service reform agenda had not been pursued as strongly. Members have discussed the need to drive this agenda in the next phase of devolution deals. We need to enhance our evidence base in this area and consider the wider benefits of devolution in delivering social, as well as economic, policy outcomes.
8. Secondly, there has been concern that some specific Government departments have not embraced the devolution agenda as strongly as others. Councils have reported particular concerns with DWP and DfE. As these departments focus on the delivery of national solutions to social policy concerns, further evidence on the advantages of devolution would be welcome.
9. Thirdly, the first RSA report provided evidence to show that the "postcode lottery" has its origins in nationally driven policies which are not attuned to local circumstance. Within social policy debates, there are still debates to be held regarding the advantage of adapting national services to local social and economic conditions.
10. In all these areas of concern, the RSA work offers us the ability to enhance our evidence base through new research and support from independent experts. This would be of great benefit to member councils in developing future deals.

### **Sponsorship of the commission**

11. The Commission was discussed with lead members and it is recommended that the Board sponsor the Commission at £50k. This is the same sum that the LGA provided to the first RSA report. This resource is available in the LGA's commissioning budget. Members will recall that in establishing this Board in 2014, an annual commissioning budget for new research was provided.
12. In sponsoring the commission, we need to recognise that the RSA is still scoping the Commission and we will be helping to shape the objectives and the early work. There are also discussions with other potential sponsors taking place.
13. Members are also invited to consider any recommended focus that would help pursue the Board's objectives. For example, in sponsoring the first RSA report, the LGA asked the Commission to look specifically at the needs of smaller and self-standing cities.
14. It is also recommended that there is an update on the RSA work at each Board meeting until the final report is published.