

## **City Regions Board – report from Sir Richard Leese (Chair)**

### **Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016**

1. Since the last Councillors' Forum, the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill has received Royal Assent. Throughout the Bill's progress through Parliament, the City Regions Board and the People and Places Board have worked in partnership to steer the LGA's lobbying activity. As a result, the LGA successfully secured, to the benefit of the sector, the requirement of the Secretary of State to make an annual report on devolution in England. The LGA also got on record assurances from the Government that the powers to determine the composition of local governance arrangements and remove functions from local authorities without local consent would only be used in exceptional circumstances and with safeguards to protect the viability of all affected authorities. The Boards also steered officers to consistently make the case for there to be greater flexibility in how councils could come together, and these changes are reflected in the Act.
2. On 11 February I spoke at the Lloyds Baking Group Ambassador's conference on the changing local government landscape and the emerging devolution deals. I highlighted the importance of engaging with combined authorities and their importance for promoting growth.

### **Devolution – the LGA Support offer**

3. Take up of the LGA's devolution support offer, drawn up with direction from City Regions Board the People and Places and, remains excellent, and officers have received positive feedback from councils on the range of services that have been used. The Board have steered officers to continue to position the LGA as the key provider of devolution support to councils. Thanks to the Board's input, the offer has evolved and will offer the following additional support:
  - 3.1. A guide for councils will be commissioned which will combine details on the legislative provisions for combined authorities with practical suggestions and advice on setting up a CA.
  - 3.2. The LGA has partnered with New Economy, one of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA's) research, policy and strategy arms to:
    - 3.2.1. produce the first comprehensive tax and spend data set for all council areas, including explainers and guides as to how to best use this to help make the case to Government for, and support the design and delivery of devolved services;
    - 3.2.2. capture local and national experiences of devolution thus far and share the lessons learned.
4. The Board has also commissioned officers to:
  - 4.1. work with Professor Robin Hambleton at the University of the West of England to explore models of executive governance, including international arrangements;
  - 4.2. work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support areas to develop their governance arrangements and capture the related learning;

- 4.3. host specialist local devolution communications workshops.
5. The LGA hosted a roundtable on health and social care devolution with Greater Manchester combined authority and health partners, and the Public Service Transformation Network to share learning from Greater Manchester's experiences.

#### **Commission on economic inclusion**

6. The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) approached the City Regions Board to consider sponsorship of an independent commission which will examine the next stage of devolution for cities. This work will concentrate on how devolution can secure better outcomes in social policy and economic performance, and follows on from the RSA's City Growth Commission which was chaired by Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs. This report was influential in the development of 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.
7. The Board has agreed to sponsor the commission, which is still in a scoping phase. Members are currently helping to shaping the commission's terms of reference.

#### **Devolving employment and skills**

8. The LGA continues to build on our Realising Talent campaign to influence the Government's planned 2017 Work and Health Programme. This will include widening the suggested geographic scope, ensuring adequate funding is set aside, and that local government has a formal role in the programme.
9. Lead Members will be asked to consider a scoping power to expand our lobbying from April 2017, including:
  - 9.1. completing a stock take of employment and skills devolution as part of a wider analysis of devolution;
  - 9.2. influencing the debate on the future of public employment services leading up to the expiry of Job Centre Plus estate contracts in 2018, including international comparisons; and
  - 9.3. mapping councils' influence (existing and potential) over the skills spectrum including Area Based Reviews.

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