

Executive

Forward Look

Item no: 4

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Date:	10 September 2019		
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Summary	This paper looks forward over a nine month time horizon and invites the Executive to help guide a range of linked activities and workstreams.
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Recommendation	That the Executive offer comment and guidance on the content of this Forward Look.
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Forward Look

Introduction

1. Core Context

Earlier in 2019 Leaders' Committee agreed both a set of Pledges to Londoners through to 2022 and the London Councils Business Plan for 2019/20. These remain the basis of the organisation's work. As we reach the halfway point in the year, however, it is an opportune time to look forward in broad terms over the next six to nine months to highlight a range of prospective activities and workstreams and the inter-relationship between them. This will provide the Executive with an informal opportunity to help guide these streams of work.

Clearly, the national political situation will potentially impact significantly on this period. In particular, were a General Election to take place in this period, some adjustments to these workstreams would be required in order to take account of the election period. Much of the core of the activity, however, is likely to sustain in any case, even if there needs to be agility and flexibility around timing and wider context. The observations of the Executive on the possible impact of a potential General Election on London Councils' work is invited.

2. EU Exit

Previously reported engagement on EU Exit is continuing. The Chief Executive is one of the nine Regional Lead Chief Executives working with the LGA, MHCLG and Government more widely as an information hub in respect of the EU Exit issues. He is also working closely with John Barradell, as Chair of the London Resilience Local Authority Panel, and other chief executives, as well as wider public service partners as part of the Resilience preparations for EU Exit being led by the London Resilience Forum. There is a particular focus on work with Borough Heads of Communication as part of our contribution to the wider Resilience work. These streams will imply some additional calls on London Councils resource – Chief Executive, Communications and PAPA staff – beyond that identified in the Business Plan. In addition, the Chair and Councillor Coghill continue to serve on the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government's Brexit Ministerial Delivery Board. From September onward the rhythm of reporting via the Regional Hub function is likely to intensify again, as is LRF led preparation ahead of 31st October.

3. Spending Round

In August the Government confirmed that it intended to hold a one year Spending Round, covering 2020/21. This is due to be announced on 4th September. A more fundamental Spending Review is now likely to go back a year and take place later in 2020, covering future years. Confirmation that plans for implementing a Fair Funding Review and 75% Business Rate Retention will also be delayed is widely anticipated, but had not been announced at the time of writing this report.

Earlier in 2019 members agreed core London Councils' lines in respect of a one year Spending Round. They were used in media and public material over the summer and were reflected in a submission to HM Treasury that was approved by Group Leaders. This augmented a broad suite of lobbying activity, including engagement with London MPs and other partners.

Work will continue in advance of a more fundamental Spending Review anticipated for later in 2020 and to influence final conclusions on Fair Funding Review and the issue of 75% Business Rate Retention.

4. Devolution and Public Service Reform

Over the past two years, most of the focus under this theme has been on implementation of a range of reforms that London Councils pressed for in the preceding years, including in relation to:

- employment support;
- skills;
- health;
- criminal justice;
- business rates.

This, however, has not stopped work continuing on new reform initiatives in relation to health, housing and criminal justice that have been the subject of recent reports to members. There is, of course, some speculation about whether, potentially in a post Brexit environment, Government will wish to renew a focus on the devolution and reform agenda in a more pro-active way. This could be an opportunity for London local government to make a distinctive argument for enabling boroughs and groups of boroughs to be more at the heart of commissioning integrated place

based local public services as part of a wider London approach to devolution and reform. In that vein, London Councils has continued to work with other partners in identifying potential opportunities for London to pursue should that renewed focus materialise. Executive members are asked to comment on their appetite for pursuing further devolution and reform opportunities on behalf of London, boroughs and groups of boroughs.

5. Mayoral Election

Clearly, this winter will see an intensification of the Mayoral election campaign ahead of the poll next May. In previous cycles, London Councils has agreed a core set of ambitions, that it has publicised, setting out what it would want the candidates to commit to in terms of working with the boroughs to tackle London's major challenges should they be elected. This has been useful both as a vehicle for publicising London Councils positions and helping to set an agenda for discussions with a post election mayoral administration. The views of the Executive are sought on whether to follow this course again. Clearly, the Pledges to Londoners provides a good foundation for such a product.

Were members to wish to go ahead with this, the London Councils Summit on 23rd November might well be a suitable opportunity to launch such a product in relation to the ask of mayoral candidates.

6. London Governance

Members have, for some time, expressed an interest in exploring ways in which the collective voice of the boroughs can most effectively contribute to the overall governance of London public services. Earlier in the year Executive members discussed the potential for commissioning a piece of work that would compare the evolution of London's governance structure – 20 years on from the introduction of the Mayor and Assembly – to the development of urban governance in the rest of England, particularly in the last three or four years. Members suggested that rather than commission such a piece of work directly, there might be merit in considering whether appropriate Think Tanks might be considering work in this sphere. If that were the case, London Councils could be amongst those supporting their work. The Chair and officers met recently with Localis, who are a well known and respected think tank in the public service and local government arena. Localis is considering such a piece of work and would be keen have London Councils support for this. The view of the Executive in pursuing this opportunity is sought.

7. Internal

Members have previously discussed the degree to which the adoption of the Pledges for Londoners and other priorities that have flowed from the London Councils Challenge exercise should lead to a reflection on the basis of London Councils' work, its capacity and its activity range. This type of reflection would be helpful in shaping a medium term strategy and trajectory for the organisation and what it requires to serve London local government most effectively.

The Chair is proposing that the Executive and Corporate Management Board hold a half day session this autumn – preferably during October - to consider these issues. The Chair has written to the Executive to begin the process of arranging such a discussion this autumn.

8. Recommendation

That the Executive offer comment and guidance on the content of this Forward Look.

Financial Implications for London Councils

None within this paper. Some of the initiatives already have budget provision. Others would require more detailed development depending upon the views of the Executive.

Legal Implications for London Councils

None specifically flowing from this paper. The half day session proposed for October may consider approaches to London Councils' work that could necessitate further legal advice.

Equalities Implications for London Councils

None specifically flowing from this paper.