

Executive

Chief Executive Update

Item no: 4

Report by: John O'Brien **Job title:** Chief Executive

Date: 3 March 2020

Contact Officer: John O'Brien

Summary: This report briefly captures progress on a range of issues since the last meeting of the Executive.

Recommendations: The Executive is asked to note the Update report and to:

- raise any issues on questions flowing from it;
 - in particular, provide further guidance on the issue of the future balance between Executive and Leaders' Committee meetings first raised at the Executive Awayday towards the end of 2019.
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Chief Executive Update

1. Introduction

This report briefly captures progress on a range of issues since the last meeting of the Executive.

2. Ministerial Changes

Following the reshuffle in February, Group Leaders wrote to the new Chancellor of the Exchequer and the new Minister for London – to congratulate them respectively on their appointments and set out some key planks of the London Councils lobbying position. An initial meeting with the Minister for London for Group Leaders is being arranged and, it is hoped, he will accept an invitation for a breakfast or dinner with the Executive as a whole.

3. Budget 2020

London Councils detailed submission to HM Treasury on Budget 2020 was submitted at the end of January. This was circulated to all Leaders. In addition, the one page summary of key 'asks' for political use – as commissioned by Councillor Govindia at the last Executive meeting – has been shared initially with him and Group Leaders and now all Executive members.

4. Spending Review and Fair Funding Review

Discussions have continued at official level seeking to influence the Spending Review and Fair Funding Review and to focus on some specific challenges, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Housing and Homelessness and Special Educational Needs. These have involved officers from London Councils and boroughs as well as Government officials.

A summary of the key lobbying points that London Councils wants to make in respect of the Fair Funding Review will be shared with all Leaders and Chief Executives.

Following the Congress of Leaders and the Mayor meeting in February, we are continuing to align efforts where relevant with City Hall on behalf of London.

5. Devolution White Paper

We are continuing to work with City Hall and with other London partners, including the Centre for London, to try and promote the idea that London is considered as part of the Government's future devolution ambitions and as part of the promised White Paper.

6. Governance

The study being undertaken by Localis looking at London governance – 20 years on from the introduction of the Mayor and Assembly – and the evolution of governance in urban England more widely in the last five years, has commenced. London Councils is supporting this piece of work. Councillors Georgia Gould and Teresa O'Neill are part of a wider reference group that will be discussing the early stages of Localis' work on the afternoon of 24th March.

7. London 2050

London Councils is also supporting the Centre for London's work on the challenges facing London through to 2050. We will be discussing with Centre for London the nature of the outputs and a timescale for wider engagement.

8. 'Asks' of Mayoral Candidates

London Councils 'asks' of Mayoral candidates was published on 18th February and was accompanied by a joint letter from the Group Leaders. Copies have been sent to all Leaders and Chief Executives.

9. Awayday Outcomes

The Chair wrote to Executive members on 20th December setting out a range of outcomes for the Awayday discussion held earlier in the Autumn. He proposed that there should be a longer, collective discussion about the 2020/21 Business Plan at this March meeting of the Executive. This was with a view to providing an opportunity for mutual challenge about that small number of key areas where we need to focus our drive for broader collaboration and in order to realise the ambitions of the agreed Pledges. This process was agreed by the Executive in January and there is a separate report on this agenda designed to facilitate that longer collective discussion.

Further work on legal, constitutional and financial models is also progressing.

10. Balance of Executive and Leaders' Committee Meetings

At the Awayday last Autumn, members expressed an interest in re-considering the balance between the number of Leaders' Committee meetings each year and the number of Executive meetings. Some Executive members expressed the view that it was very hard to get meaningful business transacted effectively in a body of 33 members. There was a view that the Executive was better suited to driving forward London Councils' work on behalf of London local government but, in order to engage more effectively with that, it needed to meet more frequently. A smaller number of Leaders' Committee meetings each year, it was felt by some, would allow that body to be an opportunity to make those sessions more of a Forum, perhaps with specific topics being dealt with at each meeting and with selected external guests, rather than being seen as primarily a decision making meeting.

We have given some preliminary consideration to this idea. Clearly, the decision to make any such changes would need to be made at the Leaders' Committee Annual General Meeting in June. It is anticipated that were the Executive still of a mind to pursue this idea, it would be sensible for it to be canvassed at the respective party group meetings on 24th March.

We would, of course, need to provide full advice to the Leaders' Committee AGM in June in order to help the Committee come to a view. That would include legal advice about decision making powers. Certain matters are reserved for Leaders' Committee and could not easily be delegated. The bulk of business guiding lobbying and advocacy work, however, could be overseen by the Executive within an overall framework agreed by Leaders' Committee.

Potentially the more significant issue is about the possible impact on the sense of engagement and 'buy in' that Councils whose Leaders are not part of the Executive would feel about changing the nature of Leaders' Committee.

A quick initial summary of some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of such a move is captured below.

Some Potential Advantages	Some Potential Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More frequent Executive meetings would help provide stronger political engagement with various strands of London Councils' work on greater continuity of issues • Leaders' Committee could be made into a more interesting Forum style discussion on themed issues, potentially involving invited guests rather than attempting to be primarily a decision making body • Leaders' Committee could still retain key decision making responsibility for major issues, eg overall framework for activity, budget etc • Could make better overall use of members' time and focus the roles of Executive and portfolio holders more clearly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notwithstanding the differentiation between the two bodies, Leaders' Committee would still legally need to agree certain items of business and create a framework for the Sub-Committee to operate within. This could begin to erode the differentiation aspired to • Will a broader group of authorities accept the validity of conclusions reached by the Executive where they have not had a formal opportunity to influence that? That issue exists in the current structure, of course, but there are currently more frequent opportunities to secure Leaders' Committee buy-in on particularly sensitive issues. • Would such a change impact on the viability of political group meetings? • However much the 'theory' of such a change can be justified and seen to offer advantages to all Leaders and authorities, in practice could this lead to a sense of less ownership and engagement with London Councils that, over time, could weaken London local government overall?

One potential route into a more modest reform would be to consider a shift in the balance, but not as radical as that canvassed by some members last Autumn – when two Leaders' Committee meetings a year was discussed. It would, for example, be possible to have a Leaders' Committee meeting that focused on particular themes, with guest speakers, as well as undertaking one piece of core London Councils business at each one. This could look something like: June (AGM); October (reviewing party conferences and setting the agenda for the political cycle ahead); December (setting the budgets); and March (focus on the next political cycle and business plan for year ahead). This could be complemented by Executive meetings in, say, July, September, November, January, late February/early March and May.

At this point, we are simply testing the continued appetite of the Executive to pursue such a change. If such an appetite does continue, it is suggested that it is canvassed at party group meetings on March 24th and officers will work to develop a full piece of advice for Leaders' Committee in June.

11. Purdah for Mayoral and Assembly Elections

I shall be writing shortly to all staff and to Executive members about our observance of the pre-election purdah period ahead of the Mayoral and Assembly elections on 7th May.

12. Recommendations

The Executive is asked to note the Update report and to:

- raise any issues on questions flowing from it;
- in particular, provide further guidance on the issue of the future balance between Executive and Leaders' Committee meetings first raised at the Executive Awayday towards the end of 2019.

Financial Implications for London Councils

None within this paper.

Legal Implications for London Councils

None specifically flowing from this paper.

Equalities Implications for London Councils

None specifically flowing from this paper.