

Leaders' Committee

London Councils Challenge

Item no: 9

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Summary

This report seeks to capture a number of the key names discussed by members in respect of taking forward the London Councils Challenge Report. It sets out the broad conclusions of those discussions to date and seeks Leaders' Committee's comments to help inform progress going forward.

Recommendations Leaders' Committee is asked to

- (i) Note the report of key themes discussed by members in respect of the London Councils Challenge Report;
- (ii) Comment on the steps being progressed to reflect the conclusions of the Challenge Report and members' subsequent discussion of the issues.

London Councils Challenge

Introduction

1. In 2016 London Councils commissioned a Challenge process aimed at ensuring that the organisation continues to meet the evolving needs of its member authorities over the next five years. A Challenge team, led by Sir Derek Myers, conducted the work. Sir Derek shared the emerging conclusions from the work with members of the London Councils Executive in June 2016 and with members of the London Councils Leaders' Committee in July 2016.
2. Following publication of the Challenge Report, Leaders have had a number of informal discussions about its findings. These built upon communications from the Chair to all Leaders in September 2016, inviting comments and contributions reflecting on the Challenge Report.
3. The London Councils Executive had an Awayday session at the end of November 2016 to reflect on the feedback it had received and the Chair briefed members on that discussion in an informal session immediately before the Leaders' Committee meeting in December 2016.
4. This report seeks to consolidate the emerging collective views of members from those discussions.

Core Purpose

5. The discussions amongst members have helped in capturing a core purpose as set out below.
 - London Councils is the collective **voice** for London local government. It seeks to be an influential advocate for the interests of boroughs, promoting both councils' leadership of their places and of a broad range of public services on behalf of their localities. London Councils fights for the resources, powers and freedoms that boroughs need to play that role.
 - London Councils is a **hub** for co-ordination and co-operation between boroughs collectively as well as a focus for mutual challenge and support designed to drive efficiency and future improvement on behalf of Londoners.
 - London Councils is a focal point for **brokering** the collective relationship between London local government and partners and stakeholders nationally and within London, including Government, the Mayor and wider London public services.

- London Councils facilitates the development of shared London local government initiatives, campaigns and services. This includes the direct **delivery** of a defined range of services, as well as acting as an incubator for other shared activities.

Ambition and Positioning

6. In their discussions, members have emphasised the importance of London Councils being positive and on the front foot in its dealings. There is a recognition that operating as a coalition of the willing on certain, specific issues is an important aspect of future working. Not every activity will be endorsed by every individual member authority. Members, both at the Executive Awayday and more broadly, have also emphasised, however, that such voluntary coalitions should not be built at the expense of the legitimacy that comes from a broad base of political cross party endorsement and, indeed, broad alignment across geographies in London as well.
7. Members have been keen that London Councils should pursue bolder and more distinctive leadership positions on a range of key policy areas where it is able to do so. This would build on a number of examples in more recent years. In doing so, however, it is recognised that there is an ongoing importance to London local government of the organisation playing its role as a hub and a platform for wide borough deliberation and consideration and, on occasions, a convenor for shared action. This will not always result in a clear, collective position or action, but the facility for the collective consideration of such issues is an important one.
8. Members have also concluded that it is right that London Councils should work positively to advance London's interests with the Mayor of London where it is sensible and productive to do so. The Mayor and Borough Leaders play a critical role in the executive governance of London. This approach would build upon a broad range of work across policy areas and, more recently, in respect of both fiscal and service devolution and public service reform. Equally, however, there is a clear understanding that not all of the work that London Councils undertakes is defined by that means of operation. London local government will continue to provide distinctive public service leadership in its own sphere of activity and responsibility – and this requires less focus on alignment with City Hall.

Sub-Regions/Borough Groupings and Governance

9. There has been a significant amount of discussion amongst members about the evolution of governance arrangements, in part seeking to take account of the development of sub-regional groupings of councils in a number of policy areas. As has often been discussed,

such groupings are not identical for all topics and not all boroughs play an active part in such groupings.

10. The Executive, reflecting on the discussions that have taken place amongst Leaders, concluded that it would be important to ensure that the Executive had amongst its membership, at all times, representatives from each of the main groupings of councils. This should also be true for the Transport and Environment Committee Executive and the Grants Committee Executive as well.
11. It was felt by members that this would be best achieved through the current party group process of discussion and negotiation around membership of such bodies. It was not considered sensible to add to the numbers of people serving on the Executive in order to designate specific, *additional* roles for members representing sub-regions or groupings. There would, however, be a clear expectation on all members of Executives to act as a conduit for two way communication at political level with the groupings of councils that they were part of and that this should be written into the job role for Executive members.
12. Equally, in respect of influencing the nominations that London Councils makes to outside bodies, it was felt that sub-regional and borough groupings coverage should be an influencing factor on the party groups in considering this but would not determine the outcome. Party proportionality and association with relevant portfolio holder responsibilities would still be paramount considerations in making these nominations.
13. It was felt, however, that assuming that the Congress arrangements are refreshed with the current Mayoral Administration, the Congress Executive meetings with the Mayor should include not just members of the London Councils Executive, but also the chairs of the main sub-regional groupings of councils if they are not already members of the Executive.
14. There are, of course, wider governance issues which are bound up with discussions with the Mayor and Government on further devolution and reform in London. Some of these have been the subject of a detailed discussion by Leaders – both in the summer of 2015 and in consideration of propositions in 2016 for the full retention of business rates. The Executive felt that it should seek to build on those positions in its ongoing discussions and negotiations with the Mayor on this matter. Joint governance was to be the core subject in a future meeting of the Member Devolution Group with the Mayor.

15. In addition, steps are being taken to ensure that there is opportunity for a wider and richer dialogue between members in various settings. Opportunity should be sought for more informal, themed discussions among members to complement more formal decision making meetings. The Executive will look, twice yearly, to meet with senior officers in an Awayday format as distinct from a formal meeting of the body. Steps are also being taken to ensure that greater use of Skype/Videoconference type facilities can be utilised for meetings.

Utilising the contribution of London local government more broadly

16. There was a significant section in the London Councils Challenge Report on this theme and the relationship between Leaders' Committee, the senior staff of London Councils, led by the Chief Executive, as well as Chief Executives and senior professionals from across London local government.
17. Members were keen that there should be a clearer and more explicit commissioning relationship in respect of activity by senior staff across London local government in support of collective action on behalf of London Councils. This is distinct from any collective work that such groups may undertake themselves as professional groups.
18. The Group Leaders, supported by the Chief Executive, are in discussion with senior members of the Chief Executives London Committee in order to clarify a range of principles that should underpin how this commissioning role could operate, how London Councils should act as a 'pivot' for harnessing this contribution and the nature of the accountability back to Leaders' Committee collectively. The product of that discussion will be reported back to Leaders' Committee.

Focusing action

19. The Challenge Report and subsequent discussions have talked of the importance of trying to refresh the core themes that represent the essence of what the organisation is seeking to achieve at particular times. Some of this is also captured in the core purpose statement earlier in the report.
20. Members of the Executive will be considering this topic as part of developing the Business Plan for 2017/18 onwards. At the Executive Awayday various themes were discussed including:

- **Resourcing London** – including Business Rates/Needs Review/NFF/NRPF
- **Shaping London and its localities** – including Physical Development/Growth/London Plan, as well as Shaping a World City that is fair and usable for all
- **Reforming London's Public Services** – including Health and Care integration/Policing and Justice/Children's Social Care/Transport and Mobility/TA and Homelessness/Migration
- **Supporting London to Deliver** – including Transport and Mobility Services/London Ventures/Self-Improvement/Digital/Analytics/Resilience/Employer Function
- **Influencing and Strengthening London local government's wider contribution** – including Mayor/London Governance/Strategic Partner relationships/Core Cities/CELC and Sub-Regions.

Organisational implications

21. Clearly, as this programme of work unfolds, there will be a bearing upon the way in which the organisation is set up to deliver. Leaders will be aware of proposals that were agreed for the 2017/18 Budget in respect of an implementation fund to support additional, senior capacity to take forward some of the key priorities that members agree on a time limited, project basis.

Conclusion

22. Leaders are asked to note the content of the report and comment on the steers being taken to reflect the conclusions of the Challenge Report.

Financial implications for London Councils

There are not immediate financial implications for London Councils as a result of this report.

Legal implications for London Councils

None

Equalities implications for London Councils

There are no direct equalities implications for London Councils as a result of this paper.

Attachments

None