

Executive

Exiting the EU - Update on Local Engagement

Item no: 5

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Summary: This paper provides an update on preparatory activity at a local and pan-London level in relation to identifying opportunities and mitigating risks for London local government as a result of the UK's planned exit from the EU.

Recommendations: The Executive is asked to note this report.

Exiting the EU -Update on Local Engagement

1. This paper provides an update on preparatory activity at a local and pan-London level in relation to the UK's planned exit from the EU. Leaders' Committee considered an earlier report on preparations for leaving the EU at its meeting in March 2019.
2. London Councils has been actively engaging with Government, the Mayor of London, and the LGA to ensure that London's needs in relation to exiting the EU are heard. We have also continued to engage with boroughs, chief executives and relevant professional networks to support local preparatory activity and promote the exchange of local insights and practice.
3. Following the agreement between the Government and the EU for an extension to Article 50 to the 31st October 2019, the tempo of the pan-London EU Exit information sharing arrangements has been amended, as detailed below. These arrangements, support two main channels of engagement with Government:
 - Contingency planning, which is being taken forward under the auspices of the statutory London Resilience Forum, at the request of Government.
 - The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's information sharing network, centered on regional Hubs, to facilitate information flow between central government and local councils.
4. The Chair of London Councils continues to represent London Councils on the MHCLG Ministerial Brexit & Local Government Delivery Board. This platform provides the opportunity to raise issues identified by London boroughs and to seek information and support that will help authorities in their local preparatory work for EU exit.

Contingency Planning

5. Local authority contingency planning at a pan-London level is being co-ordinated through the Local Authorities' Panel (LAP), which is chaired by John Barradell, Chief Executive of the City of London. This initiative is operating under the auspices of the statutory London Resilience Forum (LRF) and working through the Forum's Brexit Contingency Planning Group.
6. A formal EU Exit Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) met for the first time on 13 March 2019, and agreed its strategy as follows:
 - *The London Resilience Partnership will work together to coordinate an effective response to civil contingency matters arising from the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on behalf of London's communities and businesses.*

7. The SCG moved to a daily meeting cycle, before the London contingency arrangements were stepped down from 11 April 2019 in line with the national arrangements. The Brexit Contingency Planning Group (a sub group of the LRF) will continue to meet to consider issues relating to EU Exit. The Group will have oversight of the contingency arrangements, mindful that they may need to be escalated, given the possibility that the UK may still leave the EU without a deal.

Pan London Information Sharing

8. John O'Brien is one of nine local authority chief executives who are working with the MHCLG as part of a national information sharing network to facilitate information flow between central government and local councils. Single Points of Contact (SPOCS) have been identified in each London local authority and since the start of 2019 they have fed into a regular process co-ordinated by London Councils, to streamline the flow of information between central government and London local authorities.
9. Following the agreement between the Government and the EU for an extension to Article 50, the formal weekly reporting by SPOCs has been suspended unless, or until, it becomes necessary to reinstate this pattern of reporting. In the interim we are encouraging reports, by exception, of emerging local intelligence or issues that boroughs want us to raise with Government, via MHCLG. The nine Regional Chief Executive Leads continue to be involved in weekly calls with MHCLG and other Government Departments.
10. The process has been used to amplify concerns that have been identified by some boroughs. In addition to specific issues related to the preparations for the EU Elections, issues have been raised in relation to:
 - EU Settlement scheme: Monitoring data about the progress of the scheme is being sought by boroughs to help target local engagement with EU residents. Boroughs want to ensure the effectiveness of the scheme to support residents and to secure key public workers.
 - Community cohesion: Boroughs continue to monitor community cohesion closely. Concerns have been expressed about demonstrations and community tension – as well the impact on local authority service delivery and the diversion of front-line policing resources.
 - Local economies: Some authorities have expressed concerns about the long-term impact of EU Exit on their local economies and on business rates income; Clarity is being sought from Government about the operation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from 2020 onwards; Business readiness is also a concern, alongside concerns about the availability of skilled staff.
11. In addition, there are a number of key themes that cut across individual services, including workforce impacts; supply chains and data transfer. These have informed discussions within key London local government professional networks.

12. London Councils continues to support borough Heads of Communications in relation to communicating with the public, including work on settled status. This is being supported by further information, key lines and signposting to good practice.

Strategic Engagement

13. The Chair of London Councils continues to represent London Councils on the MHCLG Ministerial Brexit & Local Government Delivery Board. The Ministerial Delivery Board has met on a monthly basis and also includes senior political representatives from the LGA, County Councils Network, District Councils Network, and the Core and Key Cities Groups. At the time of drafting this report, the date for the next meeting of the Board had yet to be confirmed. If the Board takes place before the Executive meets, a verbal report will be provided to members.
14. In addition, the Chair and the Executive Member for Business, Europe and Good Growth has discussed a number of the key issues with representatives of other party groups.

Conclusion

15. It will be important that boroughs continue to plan and prepare for any anticipated place-based impacts and opportunities as a result of the UK exiting the EU.
16. Boroughs' continued collaboration with the information sharing mechanisms that have been put in place to support both contingency planning and help the identification of emerging pan-London issues – is very helpful in supporting an escalation of medium-term concerns to Government and the exchange of practice across boroughs. If required, the network of SPOCs, will be asked to revert to a more regular reporting tempo later in the year.
17. As noted above, the EU Exit Strategic Co-ordination Group has been stepped down for the time being, however, co-ordination and assessment activity will be scaled up as required - as further clarity emerges about the UK's future relationship with the EU.
18. The Executive is asked to note this report.

Financial implications for London Councils

No immediate implications.

Legal implications for London Councils

None

Equalities implications for London Councils

None