

LGA Special Interest Group Annual Report to LGA Board

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Membership

The Key Cities Group is a cross-party partnership of councils for mid-sized cities and places, acting as a united voice for working with Government. Our membership currently consists of 23 local authorities. These are: Blackpool, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, Bradford, Carlisle, Coventry, Doncaster, Gloucester, Hull, Kirklees, Lancaster, Medway, Newport, Norwich, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Preston, Salford, Southampton, Southend, Sunderland, Swansea, Wakefield and Wolverhampton.

Eligibility to Key Cities is primarily extended to mid-sized cities and places included in the Centre for Cities 'Cities Index' as well as other areas which do not fit into this population band but are significant to the wider area in their local economy and to the UK as a whole and have similar challenges and ambitions to the group.

Aim

The Key Cities Group aims to provide focus, collaboration of learning and a unified voice to ensure that those cities and places within the group are more visible and are consistently represented in policy-making at a national level. We are working to lobby Government and engage with critical Government Ministers based on a clear and consistent set of key asks and messages which are unique to our group – in order to exert sufficient influence over the national agenda.

What is the groups purpose?

- To provide a united voice for mid-sized cities
- To make the case for greater investment in our cities
- To share expertise and promote collaboration between cities, sectors and industries to seize post-Brexit opportunities
- Develop policy to strengthen resilience, and improve economic performance and social cohesion in our places

What makes Key Cities unique?

- Available land with room to expand

- Diversifying economies
- Reduced dependence on single industries
- Targeted and sophisticated strategies to support economic development
- Major strengths in manufacturing and exports

What do Key Cities offer?

- Strong returns on public investment to boost productivity
- 'Test beds' for innovative government policies
- Agility to respond quickly to new opportunities
- A strong partnership with central Government

Key Activities / Outcomes of work undertaken

Group meetings

The Key Cities Executive group meet on average 6 times a year, with themed Full Group meetings taking place quarterly.

Conferences and events

- Joint fringe event around tourism levies in the UK, held at the LGA annual conference in partnership with Core Cities on 3 July 2019
- Fringe event at the annual LGA conference to discuss how cities and towns can use culture and sport to achieve their economic and social ambitions held on 3 July 2019.
- Housing conference held in Salford on 25 November 2019

Key projects/workstreams during the year

- In August 2019, Key Cities kicked off an ambitious piece of work to identify key asks and offers with government and set a collaborative agenda with the new administration. It encompassed the following work:
 - New Local Government Network was commissioned to undertake analysis of electoral results and trends in Key Cities parliamentary constituencies.
 - New Local Government Network and the Key Cities group produced a research and analysis piece of work, identifying key asks of and offers to government.
 - Weber Shandwick worked on behalf of Key Cities to produce a Key Cities economic analysis framework document.
- Cities in Action reports:
 - In July 2019 the first in a series of "Cities in Action" reports was produced in partnership with New Local Government Network around workplace automation.
 - New Local Government Network also produced a report on how to eradicate rough sleeping, which was launched at the housing conference on 25 November 2019.
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council undertook a Smart Places survey on behalf of Key Cities to gather intelligence on this agenda, with the aim of hosting a conference in 2020 and identifying key workstreams that the group could collaborate and/or lobby on.

- Dialogue continued with DCMS around Cultural Compacts and the role of Key Cities.
- Following the election of a new Chair, work began to build a manifesto for Key Cities, which is due to be published in summer 2020 as the basis to engage government on how mid-sized can support the country's economic recovery.
- Blackpool Council has led on policy leads' discussion around recovery in the post Covid environment and organised scenario planning workshops due to be held in June.

APPG

We are supported by an All-Party Parliamentary Group in Westminster which met only once during the last 12 months, due to losing both co-chairs – one to a ministerial position and one at the General Election. Work has therefore focused on identifying replacements with the drive and ambition to support the work of the group and enhance its collective voice with government. The APPG will be re-launched soon with new chairs following agreement from Julie Elliott, MP to be Labour Chair and John Stevenson MP to be the Conservative Chair.

Collaborative partnerships

- Key Cities met with Conor Burns MP on 22 October 2019 to discuss a Key Cities growth strategy and the cultivation of a relationship between the group and the Department for International Trade. This dialogue continued with DiT into 2020, Cllr Merry has held discussions with officials at DiT exploring further collaboration with Key City members, bringing in Export Champions where appropriate. This could be jointly piloted with 2-3 Key Cities, post COVID-19.
- Developing relationships and linkages with think tanks and universities to develop policy positions on a range of issues relevant to local government.
- We are currently in discussions with Core Cities on how we can do some joint lobbying where we have shared interests.

Media activity

- Key Cities has maintained an active media profile during the last 12 months across a range of relevant topics such as the future of town and city centres, the outlook for mid-sized cities in 2020 and the new Key Cities leadership group – coverage has appeared regularly in publications such as Open Access Government, the MJ and key regional titles.

Change in Leadership

- The Chair of Key Cities changed in November 2019 following the previous Chair stepping down from a local government role. Cllr John Merry from Salford was elected the Chair in November 2019 and will remain Chair until a minimum of July 2021.