

19 July 2007

Report by Assistant Chief Executive, Bristol City Council

CORE CITIES: UPDATE ON ACTIVITY

The Core Cities Group

1. The Core Cities work in partnership with government and other key stakeholders to promote and strengthen Core Cities as drivers of regional and national competitiveness and prosperity with the aim of creating internationally competitive regions.
2. The Group comprises Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.
3. The objectives of the group are to:
 - strengthen and promote the distinctive role of the Core Cities as drivers of regional and national economic growth
 - enhance the European and international competitiveness of the Core Cities
 - to contribute to the development of national and European urban and economic policy as it affects Core Cities and the regions they serve.
 - ensure all citizens in Core City Regions, particularly those living in deprived communities, benefit from regional and national economic growth
 - ensure that citizens, communities and businesses in Core Cities and their regions benefit from a high quality and sustainable environment
 - ensure that the wider regional areas are involved with, and benefit from, the work progressed by Core Cities.

Current workstreams

4. The workstreams are as follows, each led by one of the cities:
 - Transport and connectivity
 - Innovation
 - Skills and employment
 - Sustainable communities
 - Culture and creative industries
 - Climate Change
 - Finance and industry
 - Governance.

Bristol leads on sustainable communities and supports transport and climate change.

5. The work of Core Cities involves a combination of working with government and government agencies, working together to review and develop policy and

share best practice, lobbying to influence national policy and resource decisions and collaborating within their regions.

Influencing the Treasury Sub-National Review

6. This review is a major component of the comprehensive spending review focussing on economic development and regeneration (including spatial, economic, housing and transport planning and investment). It has the potential to make extensive recommendations for reform in the structure and relationships between cities, city regions, regional bodies, national agencies and government departments. A number of government reviews have deferred major decisions to the Sub-National Review.
7. In a series of meetings with Treasury, DTI and Communities & Local Government officials Core Cities set out common policy goals. In practical terms Core Cities argued for:
 - greater alignment of regional strategies
 - a simplification of regional structures
 - clarification of the roles and responsibility of existing national agencies (Highways Agency, LSCs, Jobcentre plus, Communities England) and their relationship with regional and sub-regional bodies, in order to promote greater alignment and more productive working
 - increased devolution by government agencies of policy, delivery powers and resources to regions and to city and sub-regions, to enable a more flexible response to their needs and ambitions
 - in the case of such devolution, to enhance the scrutiny function at regional level, and strengthen accountability within city and sub regions built on the accountability of directly elected local authorities.
8. In arguing for a significantly strengthened role for city and sub regions, within a new national framework for determining and co-ordinating priorities for economic development, the cities asked that there be:
 - a sliding scale of powers and responsibilities applicable to different places at different times to reflect their stage of development, including provision for multi-speed as well as multi-area agreements
 - support for city regions developing new governance models with sufficient flexibility for these to fit local circumstances
 - an emphasis on simplifying rather than further complicating the existing policy frameworks and organisational arrangements.
9. In the later stages of these discussions with government officials Core Cities engaged nationally with the Regional Development Agencies and eventually made a well-received joint response to the Treasury Sub National Review.

10. It remains to be seen what action government take to de-clutter and join up the current sub national arrangements for economic development and regeneration to ensure a more integrated and devolved approach.

Working with government departments and agencies

CABE on Climate change

11. Core Cities are continuing discussions with CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) on proposals for:
 - a three day 'hothouse' event in Bristol in the Autumn to provide intensive training and build the capacity of a leadership team from within each Core City to lead on robust, design-led, city-wide solutions to climate change. It will be supported by a Manual for Sustainable Cities which will help cities to use the design and management of our built environment to tackle climate change.

The event is a masterclass focussed on the Core Cities. It will offer technical support and expertise, from some of the most experienced practitioners in sustainable urban design and climate change. It will also offer an opportunity to influence based upon the involvement of senior civil servants from across Whitehall and individual presentations by Core Cities to the Environment Secretary.

- A climate Change Festival in 2008 to be held in each Core City as part of engaging and influencing the city in action to tackle climate change.
12. Climate Change is the main theme of the Core Cities Summit in November. This will include the launch of a joint statement on climate change with DEFRA.

Learning & Skills Council

13. Recent Core Cities discussions with the Chief Executive of the Learning & Skills Council focussed on securing agreement to more local discretion for LSC Area Directors in working with strategic partners in cities and sub regions, particularly in meeting the priority skills requirements of employers and supporting adults in disadvantaged communities into employment. Priorities were agreed for time limited joint work in the Autumn taking into account the soon to be released Leitch implementation plan and the proposed Skills for Jobs Programme and the established arrangements for Train to Gain.

Department for Transport

14. Following earlier Core Cities meetings with the Permanent Secretary, Core Cities Leaders will be meeting the Secretary of State for Transport to discuss further elements of the draft Local Transport Bill particularly the provisions for the opportunity to establish strategic transport authorities, securing more authority in partnerships with commercial bus companies and obtaining improved transport investment.

Leaders' Essays

15. Each of the Core Cities Leaders have prepared an essay in conjunction with a strategic partner on the challenges of leadership. The collection of essays will be published jointly with the Smith Institute.

Responses to Public Consultations

16. Core Cities continue to respond to consultations launched by government and their agencies. In addition to the response to the Sub National Review the most recent work was a submission following the final Lyons Review report. Work is currently underway to respond to the consultation launched by Communities England.

National Party Conferences

17. Core Cities will again attend the annual party conferences in the Autumn.

Future updates

18. Further updates on Core Cities' work will be submitted to future meetings of the Partnership.