The future of city leadership in the United Kingdom

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Foreword

The Future of Cities project is informed by working papers which are commissioned by the Lead Expert Group and written by authors from academia and industry.

These papers highlight the key challenges and opportunities facing cities in the UK out to 2065. The Expert Group has drawn upon this evidence base to develop project outputs.

These outputs will aim to inform near-term policy making in both local and central government, which achieves desirable long-term outcomes for UK cities.

Professor Sir Alan Wilson

Executive summary

This working paper presents the findings of the UCL City Leadership Initiative's (CLI) research into the future of city leadership in the UK. The paper reviews the key factors shaping city leadership, presents the results of a desktop review of leadership in 37 UK cities as well as findings from workshops involving leaders from 20 different cities. The working paper is made up of four sections. Section 1 sets out key background information, including CLI's definition of city leadership. Section 2 sets out some of the key factors that have shaped city leadership in the UK over the last 50 years. Section 3 presents the research findings on leadership in the 37 cities investigated for this research project. Sections 4 and 5 build on the findings from the research workshops held with city leaders from around the UK. Section 4 summarises the key challenges for city leadership and characteristics of effective leadership. Section 5 focuses on future capacity building and policy directions. Each section is summarised in more detail below.

Section 1 of the paper sets out the broad view of city leadership adopted by the research team. **We conceptualise city leadership as a catalytic process** bringing together multiple elements of urban governance to identify issues and priorities and implement action. These elements fall into three categories. These are the **people and groups** who act as catalysts, driving these processes (i.e. the 'leaders'). Secondly, there are the **structures and institutions** that establish and underpin the legitimacy of the people, processes and tools of leadership. And finally, there are the **tools and instruments** used to set out and implement strategic priorities.

Section 2 of the paper sets out some of the key factors that have shaped city leadership in the UK over the last 50 years. These include considerations about what precisely defines the "city" to be led. The UK appears to be following a global trend of **moving towards a greater use of metropolitan governance structures**. Another key contextual factor is the urban policy landscape. **City leadership is shaped by policy emerging from a range of levels beyond the city**, including the European Union, Parliament and, in recent years, the devolved governments of the individual nations of the UK. Across the UK, among national and local policymakers, there is **wide support for greater devolution of responsibilities to a local level**. Among the core arguments for devolution is the view that it will help cities drive economic growth. Conversations around devolution are often paired with proposals for the introduction of directly elected mayors for UK cities.

City leadership in the UK is also shaped by a growth in **partnership working** and the increasing role played by **city networks**. In cities around the UK, relationships are coordinated, needs identified and strategies developed and implemented by a range of multi-agency and sector partnerships. A number of formal and informal city networks connect cities and their leaders in the UK. These allow cities to come together to discuss areas of common interest and concern and develop agendas to lobby their central governments, and in some instances international institutions.

Section 3 of the report sets out the research findings on leadership in the 37 cities investigated for this research project. Despite ongoing conversations among policy makers about the value of introducing metropolitan governance structures, these did not exist in the vast majority (80 per cent) of sample cities. The UK is an outlier internationally in its use of a leader-cabinet model rather than directly elected mayors. Political leadership of cities in the UK is still a relatively short-term affair. Of the 37 cities surveyed, the average length of tenure among current leaders is 4.7 years, and over 60 per cent of the city leaders in the sample had been in office less than 3 years.

The section goes on to use two case studies to further explore the three elements of city leadership introduced in Section 1. Firstly, we consider **the role of partnership working in city leadership** through a case study of the English Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The case of LEPs highlights the tension between the need for greater partnership working in city leadership with concerns about the representativeness and democratic accountability of the mechanisms put in place to enable this. The second case study focuses on **the role of long-term strategic planning as a tool of city leadership**. While most local authorities have some form of plan, a good proportion of these may not be capable of catalysing action.

Section 4 begins by setting out the **seven challenges for city leadership** that were most commonly discussed in the workshops. These challenges are: social inequality and polarisation, demographic change, sufficient and sustainable infrastructure, keeping local economies vibrant, competitive, and sustainable, doing more with less, competition for talent, and lack of continuity and empowerment. City leadership cannot solve these challenges on its own. It can, however, be a source of innovation at a local level, harnessing a broad range of ideas and actors to develop effective strategies and catalyse change.

Building on workshop discussions where we asked participants to think about opportunities for improving and enhancing city leadership, we put forward four key characteristics of effective city leadership. City leadership should be **empowered** by the UK's national governments to allow cities to take on a stronger role. City leaders, as direct providers of many critical services, need to be **accountable** and responsive to their citizens. City leadership should also be **diverse and distributed**. City leadership is about more than just individual leaders. Elected leaders need to be supported by strong and effective institutions, and leadership should be distributed throughout communities. Finally, good city leadership should be **networked**. Through networks, cities can compare and benchmark their experiences with their peers, knowledge they can then leverage when advocating for change in their own cities.

Section 5 sets out a series of recommendations for capacity building and future policy directions. The first part of this section sets out four broad areas that national and local policymakers and leaders might focus on if they wish to build city leadership capacity and increase its effectiveness. Firstly we suggest that capacity building efforts should focus on **creating opportunities for widespread involvement** in city leadership, enabling a broad variety of actors to get involved. The second area to focus on is **promoting innovation and variety**, in particular local approaches to tackling key issues. The third area is to support cities to **harness knowledge** for effective decision-making, the fourth to support the development and **build the reputation and profile of city leaders**.

The second part of the section proposes a series of five recommendations specifically for national policy makers who wish to support improved city leadership. We recommend that policy promotes improved city leadership by **encouraging a variety of locally generated models and approaches** and building on successes and failures from a broad range of UK cities. Policy should also **account for the multiple dimensions of city leadership**, both formal and informal. National policymakers should develop mechanisms to **build a stronger voice for cities in policy-making processes**, and support existing efforts by cities themselves to improve leadership, particularly through city networks. We also suggest that national governments can support the **improvement of the tools and mechanisms** used to set strategic priorities in cities. And finally, national governments should support cities to e**xtend the international profile and reach** of UK city leadership.

1. Introduction

This working paper presents the findings of the UCL City Leadership Initiative (CLI) research into the future of city leadership in the UK. The purpose of this research project is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of, and future challenges and opportunities for, city leadership in the United Kingdom (UK). To do so, the CLI research team carried out an eight-month research project investigating who leads cities, how they are led, the instruments leaders have at their disposal, and the trends shaping leadership.

The research seeks to identify key drivers of change, challenges and opportunities for city leaders, and the role of city leaders in the UK system of cities. The findings in this report are based on research conducted between April and December 2014.[1] Presenting initial conclusions from this inquiry, this working paper aims to answer two primary research questions:

1.   What is the current state of city leadership in the UK?

2.   What factors will shape city leadership in the UK in the next decades?

Of the 64 primary urban areas used to classify cities in the Foresight project, CLI selected a sub-set of 37 cities to investigate. These cities represent a cross-section of cities around the country by size and location. These included the UK's four capital cities: London, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast, along with Swansea and Edinburgh, the 8 largest cities in England outside London (which, together with Glasgow and Cardiff, constitute the remainder of the Core Cities group) and a selection of mid-sized and smaller cities (drawn from the Key Cities group). The research was conducted with the collaboration of Core Cities and Key Cities groups, as well as with the Greater London Authority, and Glasgow City Council. Figure 1 presents the geographical spread of this study.

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[1] This study also relies on research undertaken by CLI for the *Urban Connections* project, a joint initiative of the World Bank Group, UN-Habitat and University College London aimed at better informing city leadership internationally.
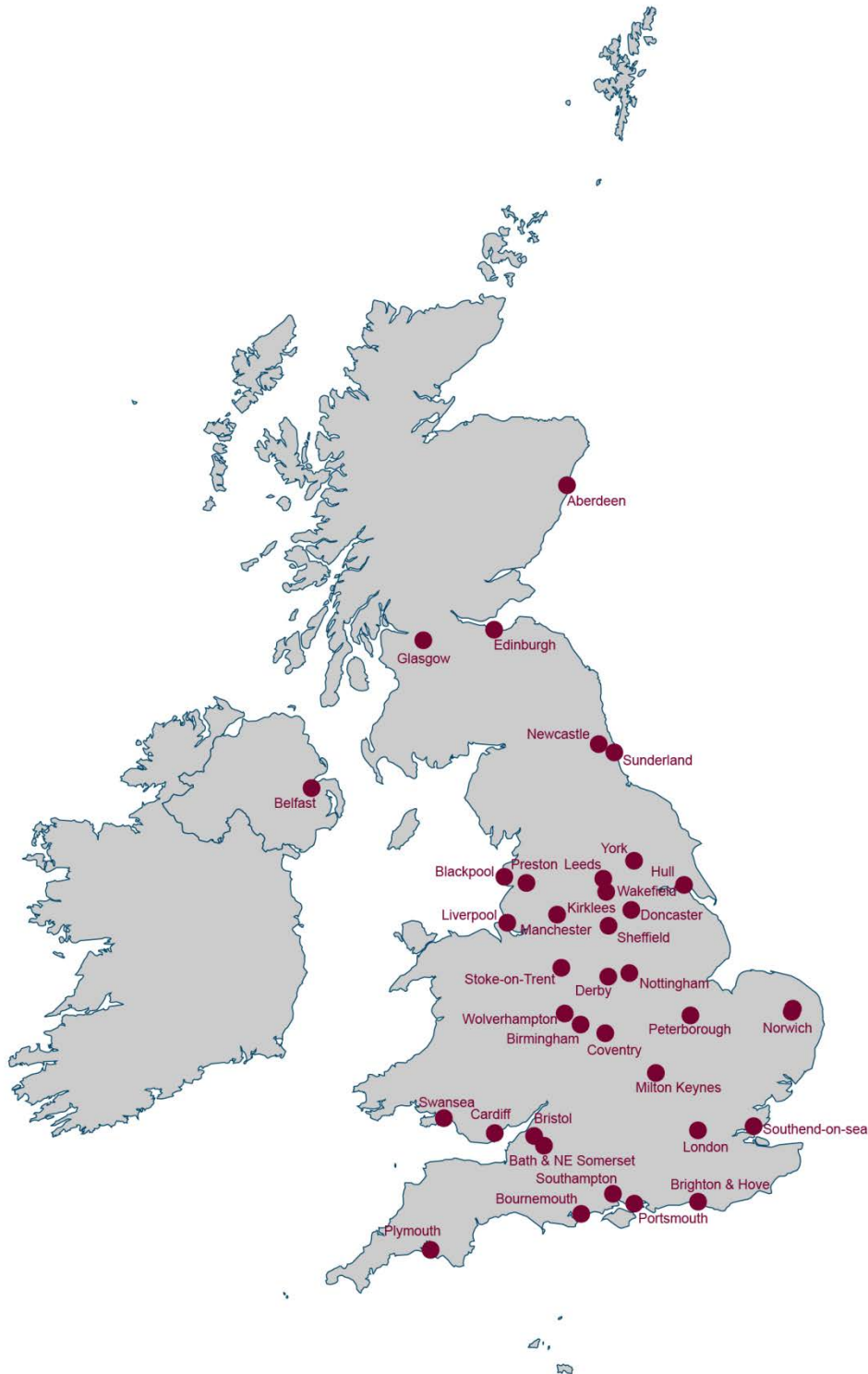
Figure 1: UK cities included in the research project

The CLI research team used three main methods to investigate the primary research questions set in partnership with the Government Office for Science and its Lead Expert Group (LEG) on the future of cities. These were a desktop review followed by workshops and interviews with city leaders and officials. In the desktop review the research team looked at leadership and governance structures and actors, strategic planning processes and priorities and the instruments and levers used by leaders. CLI then ran a series of five workshops with council officers, Chief Executives and elected leaders from a number of cities in its sample group, as

well as other relevant experts. Workshops took place in Liverpool, Glasgow and London. These workshops were used to complement and expand quantitative, profiling and archival evidence with qualitative views of the trends and challenges shaping city leadership in the UK. The workshops gathered the inputs of those involved in actually leading the UK's cities. The CLI team further complemented this data with direct semi-structured interviews. Some of these were follow-up interviews with city officials; others were with people who have expertise in a particular dimension of city leadership. Over 50 elected officials and council officers from around the UK were consulted throughout the duration of this study.

The working paper is made up of four sections. Section 1 sets out key background information, including CLI's definition of city leadership. Section 2 sets out some of the key factors that have shaped city leadership in the UK over the last 50 years. Section 3 presents the research findings on leadership in the 37 cities investigated for this research project. Sections 4 and 5 build on the findings from the research workshops held with city leaders from around the UK. Section 4 summarises the key challenges for city leadership and characteristics of effective leadership. Section 5 focuses on future capacity building and policy directions.

1.1 City leadership and urban governance

Leadership is often a fuzzy concept applied across a vast amount of sectors, from politics to business, education and even art. Much of the literature within management studies still focuses on a highly individualistic view of leadership (Bolden et al., 2003). For instance, Northouse (2012, page 5) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". One alternative theory that takes the now common focus on leadership as a dispersed system is the concept of distributed leadership, which conceptualises leadership as a shared activity carried out by a group or network (Spillane, 2006). In this approach, the individual leader is separated from the concept of leadership, which is "a process of sense-making and direction giving within a group" (Bolden et al., 2003, page 17).

In the policy arena, calls for 'leadership' to tackle major challenges can be found across a vast variety of policy domains, from the national debates and international spheres to an increasing focus on the role of *city* leadership (Acuto, 2013; Rosenzweig et al., 2011). Amongst urban scholars, discussions of leadership have historically been integrated into broader arguments about urban governance, decision-making and agenda setting (Molotch, 1976; Stone, 1989, 1995). These discussions focus on unravelling the complex politics of urban governance, including how decisions are made and by who, as well as the impacts of these decisions on urban dwellers. These observations highlight that city leadership is inextricably linked to the broader task of urban governance. In this working paper, we restrict our discussion of governance, focusing on it specifically in relation to city leadership. A more detailed review of urban governance in the UK is provided by the Foresight working paper *Comparative Urban Governance* (Slack and Côté, 2014).

When discussing city leadership it is first useful to distinguish between city govern*ment* and govern*ance*. The task of running a city has, in modern times, largely been the responsibility of a municipal government, made up of an elected or appointed leader or leaders and a professional bureaucracy. Increasingly, and in particular since the 1980s, alongside the formal hierarchy of the state, a range of other actors are involved in setting priorities, delivering services, and the many other tasks involved in governing an urban area. The term governance is frequently used to describe and explain this move away from a traditional, state-centred approach to governing (Palumbo, 2010). Governance is defined in a number of different ways, but broadly it implies a

focus on informal horizontal networks over formal, vertical institutions (Savitch and Vogel, 2009). The rise of informal networks and the broadening of participation in the activities of governance have led to a shifting role for the state. Rather than provider of services, government has become a strategic enabler of service delivery, managing through setting objectives rather than creating rules (Healey, 1997).

For the purpose of this study, the CLI research team has taken government as consisting of formal structures of elected or appointed leaders, who are mandated to manage a city. Governance, on the other hand, is understood as the wider spectrum of public and private actors involved in delivering public services, managing core services of the city and setting strategic priorities for its development. Governance is, of course, by nature a more 'grey' and less readily identifiable political environment than government. Nonetheless it can be studied systematically via stakeholder analysis, unpacking service and strategy delivery mechanisms and highlighting public-private intersections in city leadership. These methods were deployed in both the desk research and structured discussions with UK cities at the heart of this report.

Observing and studying governing from a governance perspective requires attention to two core factors. Firstly, a focus on *society*, in particular the relationship between society and the state and the role of society in governing (Kooiman, 2003; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Secondly, a governance perspective emphasizes the role of *networks* (Kjær, 2004; Rhodes, 1997). Networks, in the realm of urban policy and governance, can be defined as "stable patterns of social relations between interdependent actors which take shape around policy problems and/or policy programmes" (Kickert et al., 1997, page 6). For a study of city leadership, this emphasis on the role of society and networks in governing draws attention to the fact that city leadership is about far more than the individual leader that is often at the centre of political, economic and media attention. Conscious of this wider dimension of city governance, the CLI research team has developed a multi-dimensional definition of city leadership for the purposes of this report. This is outlined below.

1.2 A framework for city leadership

1.2.1 Dimensions of city leadership

This report adopts a broad view of city leadership as a catalytic process bringing together multiple elements of urban governance to identify issues and priorities and implement action. These elements fall into three categories. These are:

- the **people and groups** who act as catalysts, driving these processes (i.e. the 'leaders');
- the **structures and institutions** that establish and underpin the legitimacy of the people, processes and tools of leadership; and
- the **tools and instruments** used to set out and implement strategic priorities.

1.2.2 People and groups

A wide variety of people may be involved in city leadership both individually and as a part of groups. In the urban context, the highest profile leaders are usually elected leaders, such as mayors and council leaders. However other elected and appointed officials often take strong roles in catalysing action and driving change in cities, as can private and third sector actors and organisations. In the UK, the people who are involved in these processes may include elected leaders, council Chief Executives, business and community leaders, and members of LEP

boards. Citizens without a formal position in the structures of city leadership can also take on leadership roles through their involvement in community organisations or individual activism.

City leaders can take on a number of different styles: a mayor may take on the role of negotiator, ambassador, or visionary (Clark and Moir, 2014). Some leaders may take on highly visible roles, and become closely affiliated with how people nationally and internationally perceive a city. Indeed, early work in leadership theory has focused on the "great man" (sic) theorization of the leader as capable of stirring the masses in particular directions, an individualistic notion that eventually spurred the widespread "trait" and "behaviourist" theories of leadership centred on the leaders' characteristics, performance and situational contingency (for a fuller review see Bolden *et al.* (2003)). Other leaders take a quieter, more behind the scenes role or even more Machiavellian machination strategies. Yet what 'leaders' tend to have in common is the capacity to 'mobilise change' (Heifetz, 1994) in the society and/or institutional settings they are embedded within. Recognising that this capacity is, as more recent theorisations prove, intertwined with the structures, processes and tools of leader*ship* is a fundamental step in presenting a fuller, more accurate and actionable view of city leadership beyond formal or popular notions of what constitutes a city leader. As the report illustrates below, this broader view of leadership capacity is critical in the wider governance context of a changing UK, but also points at the need to understand the long-term trends, path-dependencies, and levers available to these 'leaders' to catalyse action in their cities (and beyond).

1.2.3 Structures and institutions

In the UK, structures that set out or affect how a city will be governed exist at a number of different levels, including national, regional and local and include specific pieces of legislation. Formal leadership structures play an important role in ensuring the transparency, lines of accountability and stability of city leadership. For example, in Belfast, the governance structure is carefully designed to enable the city's leaders to manage the challenges of governing a divided city. Formalised structures are often associated with a particular geography, for instance the boundaries of an urban area delineate the area where legislation passed by a city council can be applied. Changes to formal structures are often connected in part to changing thinking about the appropriate geographical scale of urban governance. The abolition of the regions and introduction of LEPs, for example, was an element of the 2010-2015 Government's introduction of their 'localism' agenda (for more on this, see Sections 2 and 3.3).

Alongside formalised leadership structures are their more informal counterparts that, while they may lack the statutory basis of their formalized counterparts, can also play a strong role in city leadership. Many studies of urban governance have highlighted the strong role played by business and community leaders as they develop informal, but longstanding relationships with each other, city officials and politicians (Digaetano and Klemanski, 1999; Stone, 1989). Some scholars of urban governance have argued that informal arrangements have led to the prevalence of a 'partnership' mode of governance, though this has been critiqued as privileging partnerships with business over other stakeholders (Bassett, 1996; Thornley et al., 2005). These informal relationships may be formalised, as has occurred in England with the formation of LEPs (Deas et al., 2013).

1.2.4 Tools and instruments

One of the key responsibilities for city leaders is to establish strategic priorities for a city. There is a plethora of competing issues and priorities that city leaders might address and city leaders can deploy a number of tools and instruments to set priorities, catalyse action or weave

coalitions across the governance landscape municipal governments are embedded in (Albrechts, 2004). These often take the form of documents, such as legislation and policies, visions, strategies and plans. These may be developed by the city itself, mandated by other levels of government, or, as is the case with the recently agreed City Deals and Growth Deals, negotiated between groups of actors. Other types of tools include activities and events such as citizens' forums and consultation groups.

Plans are one tool that city leaders often use to both set out their strategic priorities and detail how they will be achieved. Over the last 30 years, strategic planning has emerged as a popular approach to the planning process (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2007). Amongst planners, particularly in Europe, the strategic spatial plan, or the strategic urban plan, has become a popular tool in the last 20 years. The strategic spatial plan is "a public-sector-led socio-spatial process through which a vision, actions, and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and may become" (Albrechts, 2004, page 747). According to Newman and Thornley (2011), Strategic Urban Plans (SUPs) include three dimensions: they are city-wide, include a spatial dimension pertaining to geographically-bounded areas within the city, and establish priorities, rather than giving specific details of individual policies. As indicated in the definitions above, strategic planning at the urban scale has an inherently spatial focus, in that it sets out the objectives for a geographically defined area. However, strategic urban plans are not solely the purview of planners, but are developed by a broad range of actors (Albrechts, 2006).

Importantly, leadership tools like strategic plans play an important role in connecting leaders (people and groups) to the structures and institutions that allow them to catalyse action. Hence, in carrying out this research project, the CLI research team focussed on strategic urban plans as one of the main identifiable expressions of the catalytic process of city leadership. While SUPs are not the only important tool used in city leadership, they are clearly one form of documentation aimed at laying out the priorities of a city's leaders. They are also usually fairly transparent in that, in the UK at least, it is possible to identify who developed them and how they are used. Most of the cities studied had SUPs. In addition, with the introduction of LEPs in England, one or more Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) now covers all English cities. Considering these two publically accessible documents, particularly in comparison, provides insight into leadership processes and priorities.

1.2.5 Leadership as a catalytic process

Leadership facilitates processes of interaction between these various elements. It can do so in a number of ways. It may act as a catalyst, setting off a reaction between elements resulting in the creation of something new. It can also act to stabilise relationships between elements, leading to longer term, sustained initiatives. Leadership can also involve processes of altering or dissolving relationships when they are no longer working effectively. Examples of leadership, then, might include an appointed leader getting a partnership board involved in the development of a strategy, or a community group using its influence to encourage citizens to vote in an election. It could also be the decision to disband a partnership board.

Common to all of these processes is that they are not passive, but the result of a conscious decision, by agents, to facilitate them. This reinforces the emphasis found on the traits, styles and activities of *leaders* (or people and groups in the language used above), in much of the leadership literature Aviolo et al 2009, Bolden & Kirk 2006, Papa et al 2007)..However, as a number of scholars have pointed out, leadership is more than just the actions of leaders (Gronn

2002, Spillane 2005, Uhl-Bien 2006). In cities, we argue, leaders operate in the context of structures influencing their operating environment and the tools at their disposal.

Critical to our understanding of leadership is that it brings together diverse elements that then act together. This is a key distinction with distributed leadership, which sees leadership as residing in multiple places. We recognise the distributed nature of leadership, but also wish to emphasise that leadership is more than the sum of its parts. It is something greater that is created through the processes of interaction described above.

Effective leadership requires all three of these elements (people and groups, structures and institutions, and tools and instruments – see Table 1) to be in place, and to be broadly accepted as legitimate and fit for purpose. For example, if the results of an election are questioned, the mandate of the elected leaders may not be accepted. If an influential group or demographic is not represented on a leadership group or board, its work may not be considered legitimate in the eyes of some.

In the spirit of this multi-dimensional but fluid view of (city) leadership as a catalytic process, the three elements of leadership outlined above will be further explored throughout this document. It is important to emphasise at this point that discussing each one in turn is not meant to indicate that they sit separately alongside each other. Rather, the three elements are highly interdependent. For example, changes to city leadership structures may alter the actors and groups involved. A change to the process by which priorities are established could lead to the introduction of new structures. By setting out the various dimensions of city leadership, we wish to emphasise that leadership is not fixed, nor necessarily permanently embedded in a particular institution, person or process. Rather, leadership is multi-dimensional and continually evolving.

Table 1: Summary of the elements of city leadership

Element	Examples
People and groups	- Elected leader (executive) - Elected representatives (legislative) - Appointed leaders (Chief Executive, City Manager) - Partnership boards - Business and community leadership groups
Structures and institutions	- Recognised process for putting leaders in place – Election, appointment - Legislation granting powers and authority – city charter, regional or national law - Judiciary - Civil service / bureaucracy
Tools and instruments	- Documents such as strategies and plans - Policies - Citizen's forums and public consultations - Websites, public information campaigns

2. Putting UK city leadership in context

This section briefly outlines some of the factors shaping the context of city leadership in the United Kingdom. These include international trends, legislation and regulation at the European Union, national and sub-national levels, as well as historical and cultural factors.

2.1 Geographies of leadership: cities, regions and city-regions

The first question to ask about city leadership is what precisely is the "city" to be led. Cities as defined by their administrative boundaries are not independent, autonomous units. Rather, they almost always form part of a metropolitan region made up of a number of cities and towns. The distinction between a city's administrative boundaries and its functional economic area (which is often much larger) creates a number of important challenges to effective city leadership. Metropolitan regions are characterised by significant economic and social interdependencies that require working across administrative boundaries. Critical infrastructure such as public transit almost always operates at a regional scale.

Amongst scholars of metropolitan and regional governance, there are two traditional theories of how to organise local governments: metropolitan government and polycentrism (Savitch and Vogel, 2009). A metropolitan government approach holds that city boundaries, and governments, should encompass the entire metropolitan region. This can be achieved by consolidating smaller authorities, or creating a metropolitan government on top of existing, smaller, local governments. In contrast, the polycentric perspective holds that the market organises the most efficient provision and coordination of public services.

These different governance structures each have their advantages. It is broadly argued that smaller governments bring greater efficiency, access and accountability, while larger ones bring greater economies of scale, equity and regional coordination (Slack and Côté, 2014). Debates about the appropriate scale for urban governance are also increasingly influenced by the widely held-view that contemporary city-regions compete on the international stage, independently from their national government (Jonas and Ward, 2007; Scott, 2001). To this end, contemporary arguments about the merits of particular forms of governance, in particular city-region or metropolitan governance, focus on their role in fostering economic growth and competitiveness (Deas, 2014; Savitch and Vogel, 2009).

In recent years, many cities have put in place some form of metropolitan governance structures. Research by the OECD on 263 metropolitan areas found that nearly two-thirds have some form of metropolitan governance body in place, with a substantial increase in their creation beginning in the 1990s (Ahrend et al., 2014). The OECD has been prominent in investigating and promoting the link between metropolitan governance bodies and economic growth and investment. In a series of recent reports, it has argued that metropolitan governance bodies are associated with economic growth, unlock inward investment and promote well-being (Ahrend et al., 2014; OECD, 2015). One report found that city-regions with a metropolitan tier of governance in place tend to have higher per capita GDP, as well as performing better in areas such as public transport provision, and controlling urban sprawl (Ahrend et al., 2014).

The degree of importance given to *city-region* (as opposed to *city*) government and governance arrangements has varied in the recent history of the UK. Prior to 1985, London and six of the UK's largest other cities were governed, at a strategic level, by metropolitan authorities. The

1985 Local Government Act, which abolished these in favour of unitary authorities, marked a distinct move away from city-regional governance. In recent decades, successive governments have supported a gradual move back towards city-region governance. Evidence of this is the re-establishment of a strategic authority for London in the early 2000s, and the city-region pilot status given to Manchester and Leeds in 2009. The effectiveness of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has recently led to negotiations resulting in further devolution, by Whitehall, of funding and responsibilities to the Authority. The history of and debates around cities and city-regions in the UK are covered in detail in the Future of Cities working paper *Cities and Public Policy* (Harding et al., 2015). In this, the authors argue that after a 40-year trend of moving towards unitary local government, the case for city-regions is being bolstered by claims that they are effective in creating economic growth and development (Harding et al., 2015).

2.2 The urban policy landscape

City leadership is shaped by policy emerging from a range of levels, including the European Union, Parliament and, in recent years, the devolved governments of the individual nations of the UK. In the UK, the national government has traditionally played a substantial role in city leadership. Devolution to Scotland (in 1999), Wales (in phases since 1999) and Northern Ireland (in phases since 1998) has meant that much of the central UK government's role in city leadership in these countries has been passed to the national governments (see box over page for a brief overview of national approaches to local governance and leadership). Despite this, recent research has demonstrated that the four UK nations take a similar approach to local government issues (Morphet and Clifford, 2014). The European Union has been an important force in encouraging greater devolution in the UK.

National approaches to local governance and leadership

England

In recent years city leadership in England has been shaped by a trend towards greater devolution. Successive governments have had differing approaches to local government. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Government attempted to establish a regional layer of government between central and local, creating nine Regional Development Agencies (Gay, 2004; Pugalis and Townsend, 2012). The 2010-2015 Government abolished the English regions and created 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The formal structure of leadership has also changed in recent years. Until changes introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, all English councils consisted of directly elected councillors. Councillors then elected a council leader from amongst the majority party and councils set up committees that deliberated over particular issues. Since the 2000 Act councils can now opt to directly elect a mayor. In addition, council leaders now appoint a cabinet, giving them a core leadership team to work with.

Scotland

As has happened in England, the devolved Scottish government has made moves aimed at increasing further devolution to local governments. The 2003 Scotland Local Government Act included a duty to cooperate that emphasised the role of communities and the need to work across borders. In 2010, the Scottish government created the Commission on the Future of Public Services. The commission's report, known as the Christie Commission recommended a greater focus on working with communities to deliver services (Black, 2011; Gardham, 2013). Though the 2014 public referendum for full Scottish devolution from the UK was unsuccessful, the campaign echoed the broader demand for greater devolution across the UK. Glasgow has

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been particularly active in promoting the urban agenda, negotiating a Growth Deal with Westminster and joining the Core Cities group.

Wales

Many of the changes to Wales' local governance administration over the past 50 years have occurred in conjunction with those in England. Devolution to the Welsh national assembly occurred later than in Scotland, but following a series of pieces of legislation and a referendum in 2011, Wales now has greater control over local government and planning matters. In 2013, the Welsh Assembly created a Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery to undertake a review of government structures in Wales. The Commission published a report in January 2014 that argued for reducing the number of Principal Areas (as local administrative bodies are called in Wales), and reducing the amount of councillors within them. A full review and reorganisation will take place in 2020.

Northern Ireland

Leadership is a sensitive topic in Northern Ireland, due to the on-going conflicts between the two dominant religious-ideological leanings. Determining who leads urban areas and how they are led is a delicate practice. While Northern Ireland has been a devolved nation since 2006, the further devolution of powers to local councils has been slow to occur. At the national level, equal representation in government between the dominant groups is ensured through a power-sharing democratic model (known as 'consociationalism') that requires the different religious-political groups to share the task of governing. The history of inter-group conflicts has led to a tendency to keep activities normally addressed at a local level in the hands of national government. A recent local government reform process, led by the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment (DOE), took effect on 1 April 2015. As part of this reform, a number of powers will be devolved from the national government down to local councils.

Despite these moves towards greater devolution, an important dimension of city leadership in the UK is the substantial role in urban affairs played by central government, and, more recently, the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This has occurred through a series of government-initiated reorganisations of the administrative structures of local government. In addition, government ministries, through their leading role in identifying sectorial priorities and allocating financing, have significant influence over urban areas. This is what Harding et al. (2015) refer to as 'implicit' urban policy; policy not made with the urban scale in mind that nevertheless can significantly impact urban areas. Currently, England is one of the most centralised OECD countries, with approximately three-quarters of local authority income coming from central government (House of Commons (HOC), 2009, page 105).

Section one identified three dimensions of city leadership: people and groups, structures and institutions and tools and instruments. Currently, central government and the devolved national governments in the UK hold a great deal of control over all three of these dimensions. Recent history has been characterised by regular, and often substantial, changes to the laws, structures and institutions that shape the context in which city leadership occurs. Since 1965, the governance of England's largest cities has been restructured three times, moving from city-regions, to a dispersed model, then to regions and now, seemingly, back to a city-regional approach.

2.2.1 Devolution and growth

Devolution from a national to local level has occurred unevenly both between and within countries. The larger cities in England currently have the most power devolved to them. Since the creation of the Greater London Authority in 2000, the London mayor has had an increasing level of authority in areas such as planning, economic development and transport. Manchester, along with Leeds, was granted pilot statutory city-region status in 2009. In 2014, the Government established combined authorities, along the Manchester model, in four other city regions: West Yorkshire, Sheffield, Liverpool and the North-East.

Changes in government policy alongside the lobbying efforts of city networks such as Core Cities have sparked a broad debate across the UK about urban governance structures and leadership models, in particular the value and role of metropolitan tiers of governance and elected mayors. These debates are largely focused on increasing the efficiency of local governance and ensuring cities are best placed to fulfil their potential, particularly by delivering economic growth.

In late 2011, the Government published an 'explicit' statement of its urban policy with *Unlocking Growth in Cities* (HM Government, 2011). This outlined its City Deals process, in which the Government negotiated deals with local authorities. The first 'wave' of City Deals was restricted to the (then) eight Core Cities (the largest cities by population after London), with discussions starting in late 2011. In 'Wave 2', 20 other cities and their surrounding areas were invited to compete for the opportunity to negotiate deals. Initial proposals were submitted in January 2013 with an announcement the following month that all 20 submissions had been successful and were moving forward in the negotiations.

The City Deals were followed up with Growth Deals. Announced in July 2014, the first wave of these comprise of £6 billion to LEPs to support the training of young people, the creation of jobs, house building and infrastructure projects such as transport improvements and superfast broadband. This includes the complete £2 billion allocation from the Local Growth Fund for 2015 to 2016 that was established in response to Lord Heseltine's report No Stone Unturned (Heseltine, 2012). The Scottish Government has also emphasised the role of cities as engines for growth. The 2011 *Government Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2011b) emphasised their significance for resilience and sustainability, and helped to establish a new *Agenda for Cities* (Scottish Government, 2011a).

2.2.2 Political leadership

Conversations around devolution are often paired with proposals for the introduction of directly elected mayors for UK cities. The ten councils making up the Manchester city-region have long collaborated on the governance of Greater Manchester (Deas, 2014). Nevertheless, in a 2014 deal to transfer additional powers to the GMCA, the government required the introduction of an elected mayor for Greater Manchester. Both the Governments of the 1990s and early 2000s and the 2010-2015 Government strongly advocated for the introduction of elected mayors as a means for increasing accountability and improving local government (Copus, 2008; HM Government, 2011).

The government's encouragement of the mayoral model also stresses the many soft power benefits of publically accountable leadership. The practice of local elections for a singular mayoral candidate creates an opportunity for the public to galvanise for their locality, promoting conversations around the direction of their city under new leadership. It would aid in signalling changes in local governance by promoting more compelling leadership rhetoric for growth and

change (Grint, 2012, page 7). In this rationale, individuals running for mayor thereby help to personify the city, providing it an identity or brand as it emerges from an election cycle. The public crucially gains a clearer sense of "who is in charge and who they can turn to" (Gash and Sims, 2012, page 29).

Another important aspect of this debate is the accountability of urban governance and leadership. For example, while Manchester is often held up as a good example of effective city-region governance, its city-region leadership model has been critiqued as largely not democratically accountable (Deas, 2014). To some extent, this explains the parallel promotion of city-region level government and elected mayors by the current UK Government. The existing council model renders local leadership indirectly accountable to the public, as the majority party in the council selects leaders. Elected mayors, evidence suggests, are more focused on and accountable to the public that elects them (Greasley and Stoker, 2008). As opposed to councillors who are primarily held responsible to their individual districts, a singular figure elected by the entire council area creates a streamlined and pronounced hierarchy of leadership. Though accountability may be enhanced through other governance mechanisms, such as oversight by community groups, elections are recognised to be blunt instruments for political accountability (Bardhan, 2002).

A critique of this mayoral model states that, though elections make leaders more visibly accountable to the public, this does not necessarily translate directly to greater political autonomy. It is therefore important to delineate the elements of democracy and autonomy in legislation (Pratchett, 2004). A new mayor simply presiding over the existing council structure, though potentially reaping many soft power benefits may not be as effective in leadership as if they had additional autonomous powers such as a mandate to elect their own cabinet, or spearhead initiatives. As will be discussed later, city leaders themselves have mixed views on the extent to which the introduction of an elected mayor influences city leadership in the UK.

2.3 Leading through partnership

Among the advantages of the elected mayor model of urban governance is that mayors have been demonstrated to take a more facilitative leadership style (Greasley and Stoker, 2008). This approach, it is argued, suits the current climate of networked urban governance in which building cooperation between different stakeholders is a central part of a political leader's role (Stoker, 2006). As discussed above, city leadership is a multi-faceted concept. In the UK, elected and appointed local officials, leadership groups and locally-generated strategies play an important role in city leadership, as do the central UK government, the devolved national governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a range of non-governmental actors.

Over the last 20 years, partnerships between public, private and third sector organisations have been an important element of policies and programmes to deliver economic growth and regeneration in the UK's cities (Bailey, 2003; Ball and Maginn, 2005; Bassett, 1996; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998). In recent years, in line with the broader move towards a governance model, elected leaders have increasingly worked in partnership with other stakeholders on key city leadership tasks such as agenda setting and strategy development. In cities around the UK, relationships are coordinated, needs identified and strategies developed and implemented by a range of multi-agency and sector partnerships focusing on specific areas, including education, skills and training, police and fire services and health and social care. As the range of actors and institutions involved in city leadership has grown so too has the types of processes and tools used, though these remain largely consistent across different cities, once again reflecting the centralised nature of urban policy-making in the UK.

There are differing perspectives on the capacity of local government within the partnership model. Stoker (2011) questions the capacity of local government to exercise power in the network coordinator roles they tend to take on in partnership working. In contrast, others (Agranoff, 2006; Agranoff and McGuire, 2001; Fenwick et al., 2012) point to the endurance of public bureaucracies and the underpinning mechanisms of accountability. They argue that the increasing pervasiveness of networks and partnerships alter the boundaries of the state in only marginal ways and the extent to which they are replacing public bureaucracies is significantly overplayed.

Most recently, the partnership approach can be seen in the 2010-2015 Government's focus on 'unlocking growth' at the urban scale via 'deals' structures. Demonstrating the current Government's endorsement of the partnership model of governance, most deals are negotiated not with city governments, but with LEPs. The partnership approach to local service delivery is apparent not just in England. In Scotland, local planning is coordinated through each council's Community Planning Partnership, a group that brings together council leaders with other key sectorial stakeholders e.g. from law enforcement, health, education and charities. Like the English LEPs, these partnerships also include private sector representatives, though they do not appear to be represented to the same extent as in LEPs. In Wales, each council has a Public Service Board (PSB), with representatives from local government, third sector, national government and, in some local authorities, businesses. PSBs are responsible for developing and monitoring strategic plans for each local authority. Before the enactment of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, these existed as voluntary structures called Local Service Boards. The dynamics of partnerships are explored further though a case study of the English LEPs in Section 3.3.

2.4 City networking

A final dimension of contemporary city leadership, cutting across both 'structure' and 'tool' dimensions of leadership, is the catalytic capacity shown by cities through networking and connections to each other. 'City networks' are today a well-established reality of governance across a multitude of levels, from local collaborations in regional settings, to continental and international processes (as within the European Union), all the way to the sprawl of trans-national networks now linking cities across different parts of the globe. A number of formal and informal networks exist that connect cities and their leaders in the UK. These allow cities to come together to discuss areas of common interest and concern, chart common policies and monitoring systems, and develop agendas to lobby their central governments, and in some instances international institutions like the EU or the United Nations.

Traditionally the UK has, like many other countries, seen the presence of either national networks or regional partnerships. For example, in reference to the former, the Scottish Cities Alliance is a group of Scotland's 7 cities that came together following the launch of the Scottish government's "Agenda for Cities" at the end of 2011. It now allows Council leaders and officers to meet regularly. The UK has also seen the development and continued action of various local government associations in the form of regional groups. These are voluntary organisations, typically created in the vacuum left by regional authorities. There is a national group for English local authorities, the Local Government Association (LGA), which in itself offers a number of regional sub-groups. Since regional groups and city networks tend not to be mandatory bodies, not all cities in the UK are members of these organisations; indeed, only half of the cities in our sample pool are part of regional groups. Outside of England, there are the Welsh Local Government Association, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. These groups are not represented under the LGA

umbrella. Chief Executives from councils across the UK collaborate under the umbrella of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

The influence of these organisations on city leadership is still to be documented systematically, but the discussions in several of the workshops forming this study began to confirm the wider scholarly consensus on city networks: while still embryonic in their capacity to effectively shape the direction of municipal government, and city governance in general, *some* networked activities are today important drivers in the change and catalytic capacity of cities.

Amidst these, two groups have emerged as carrying particular potential to shape the networked dimension of the UK's system of cities: Core Cities and Key Cities. The Core Cities group, established in the 1990s, consists of the eight largest English cities outside London, as well as more recently Glasgow and Cardiff, which joined in 2014. The elected leaders of the ten cities meet regularly, as do the Chief Executives, as well as policy advisers and several thematic working groups. The Key Cities group, formed more recently in 2013, consists of 22 mid-size English cities, and also allows leaders and the Chief Executives to meet regularly. Both groups regularly lobby central government in support of their agreed agendas. City networks also influence urban policy, scanning the international landscape for ideas and models to bring to the UK context. Examples include Tax Increment Financing, a model of municipal finance originally developed in the United States, whose introduction in the UK has been supported by the Core Cities among others (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Core Cities Group, 2008).

Besides these internal connections, it is critical for an analysis of the evolution of the UK system of cities to also consider the networked geography that links UK cities with international and trans-national initiatives. City networks like Core Cities are making efforts at connecting more directly with the variety of inter- and trans-national networks charting the geography of city-to-city collaboration on a global scale. For instance, one of the workshops for this project (in Liverpool) involved simultaneously the meeting of Core Cities executives and leaders, and the executives of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) network, with a membership of over 1,000 cities across 112 countries. While the jury on the impact of these network-to-network connections is still out (and in need of systematic research), it is clear from the experience of several UK cities that these connections do fertilise and enhance the effectiveness, individual and collective, of UK city leadership.

3. City leadership in the UK today

This section discusses the research findings on leadership in the 37 cities investigated for this research project. We also compare these findings with international trends by drawing on a major international research project that surveyed city leadership internationally, looking at 202 cities in 101 countries.[2] In discussing city leadership, we focus on the three of the elements of leadership introduced in Section 1: actors, institutions and tools. The section begins by reporting on the research findings about the most visible elements of city leadership, that is, governance structures and political leaders. It then explores some of the other elements of city leadership in more detail through two case studies. The first delves further into the role of partnership working in city leadership today through a review of the case of the English LEPs. The second case study looks at the role of a particular type of tool used in city leadership, the strategic planning document.

3.1 Governance and leadership

Urban governance and political leadership arrangements in the sample set of 37 cities reviewed for this research project vary. However in terms of their most basic structures there are some strong trends. Urban government structures can be characterised as falling into three different categories: one-tier, two-tier and pluralised (Goldsmith, 2001). In the sample set, 80 per cent of cities are governed by a single-tier Unitary Authority or Metropolitan District. This is higher than the international average. Globally approximately 66 per cent of cities have a one-tier government structure.
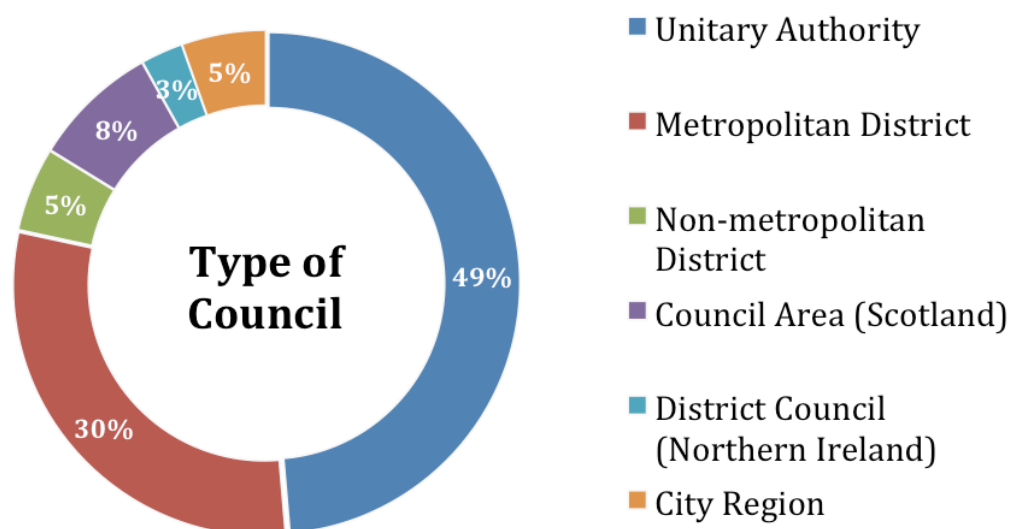

Figure 2: Breakdown of the government structures of 37 UK cities

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[2] Research will be published in the forthcoming report by the UCL City Leadership Initiative *Urban Connections: a global review of city leadership.*

In terms of political leadership, the majority of cities in the UK are still governed by a leader-executive model, though 15 cities in England have opted for elected mayors since this became an option in 2000. The fact that the directly-elected mayor model has not 'captured the imagination' (Fenwick and Elcock, 2005, page 64) of the British public puts the UK as an outlier in its approach to local political leadership. Internationally, the highest elected official in 74 per cent of cities is a mayor.

Within this institutional framework, and within the broader shifts in governance in the UK, a key dimension of city leadership is that of *stability*. When it comes to elected leaders, stable leadership is generally considered to be beneficial, although overly lengthy periods of uninterrupted leadership are discouraged on democratic bases.[3] Of the 37 cities surveyed, the average length of tenure among current leaders is 4.7 years (including years spent in previous appointments to the same role). A notable outlier to this trend is Sir Richard Leese, who has been Council Leader of Manchester for 18 consecutive years. A further breakdown of term length is given below.

Importantly, over 60 per cent of the city leaders in the sample had been in office less than 3 years, and 68 per cent less than 5 years with a substantial number (20 per cent) of leaders in place for under 1 year. This suggests that political city leadership in the UK is still a relatively short-term affair. A counterbalance to this trend may be council Chief Executives, who are appointed to serve non-political leaders of the council, and often have much longer tenures.
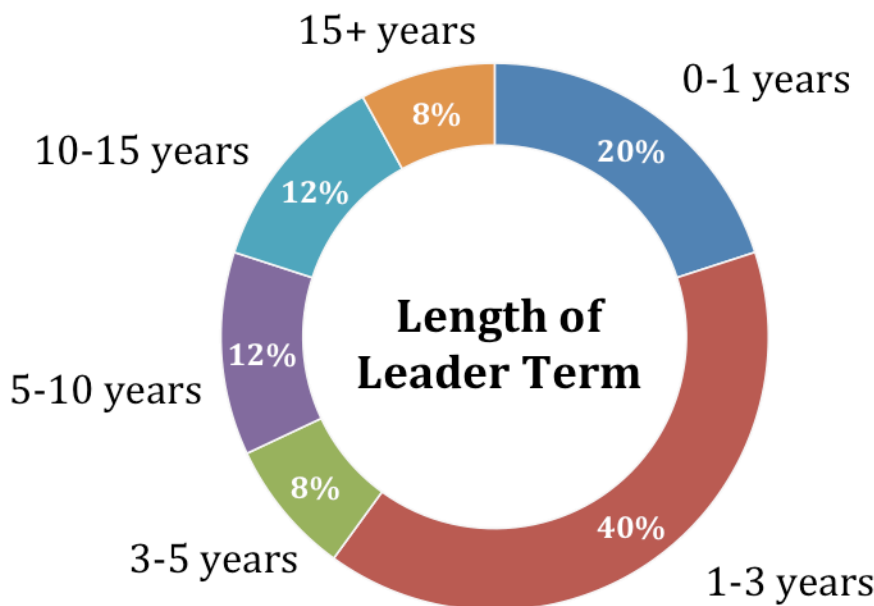
Figure 3: Length of elected leaders' time in office

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[3] This has historically been the position of the OECD, where stable democratic governance has been promoted as critical to economic growth and social integration, but with the caveat that *some* degree of turnover is necessarily beneficial to the health of a democratic system.

Representativeness of leaders, and their capacity to embody the constituencies they stand for, is a central feature in the catalytic influence of leadership. Yet the gender balance of city leadership in the UK is skewed. Of the 37 cities surveyed, only 16 per cent (six cities) have female mayors or council leaders. In this area the UK is lagging behind many other regions of the world, in particular Latin America where over 50 per cent of city leaders are women. The proportion of females serving as Chief Executives of the case study cities is significantly higher, at 41 per cent (14 cities). The positive story behind these figures is that the past 30 years have seen a dramatic improvement in the representation of women in local authority leadership roles. In terms of political leadership, looking beyond just council leaders shows a more positive picture. In 1990 only 1% of 404 local authority Chief Executives in England were women (Morphet, 1990) but research by Bochel and Bochel (2008) found that between 1997 and 2006, the number of female councillors in local authorities in the UK gradually increased, and the number of women in cabinet posts has grown proportionally along with this increase.

As city leadership broadens out to include a range of actors beyond just elected leaders, there may be greater opportunities for women to take up leadership roles. This could occur through the involvement of women in some of the leadership structures highlighted in this report, such as LEPs in England, or Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland. Unfortunately, recent research in 2013 on the gender balance of LEP boards found that only 14.5% of these are made up of women[4]. This may reflect the emphasis on business representation of LEPs, as women are broadly underrepresented in business leadership roles more generally. In the business sector, among the Fortune 500 companies, only 5.4 per cent have female chief executives (Catalyst, 2014). The composition of LEP boards is discussed further in the next section.

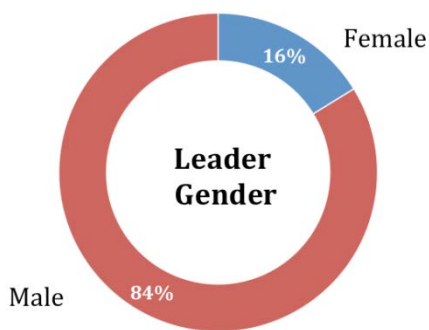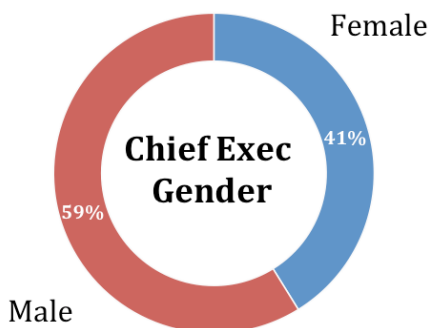

Figure 4: Gender of elected leaders for 37 sample cities

Figure 5: Gender of local authority Chief Executives for 37 sample cities

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[4] Unpublished research undertaken by Professor Janice Morphet, UCL Bartlett School of Planning.

3.2 Leaders and leadership structures: Local Enterprise Partnerships

LEPs highlight the tension between the need for greater partnership working in city leadership with concerns about the representativeness and democratic accountability of the mechanisms put in place to enable this. This section focuses on the English LEPs, as they provide a way to look at the people involved in city leadership (the LEP board) and the structures that imbue them with authority (the government policies establishing LEPs). The next section then examines one of the tools they use, the Strategic Economic Plans that LEPs are required to produce. In addition, through reviewing LEPs we can also explore the contemporary dynamics, and tensions of partnership working for city leadership. Currently, there are 39 LEPs in the UK. This study examined the composition of the 21 LEPs into which the 37 cities included in this study fall.

LEPs are voluntary arrangements between business, civic, educational and community leaders. They are designed to be "joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities themselves to promote local economic development" (Cabinet Office, 2010, page 10). Proposals for LEP creation were assessed on, amongst other things, their support from business and 'natural economic geographies' (Ward, 2014). In this sense they aim to address the demand, mentioned in Section 1, for a governance mechanism that covers a functional economic region rather than an administrative area. In this sense, LEPs provided a new mechanism for the task of city leadership. As leadership bodies, LEPs have a challenging task – uniting multi-level, cross-sector interests in a way that enables regeneration and economic growth. LEPs have adopted varied roles and priorities; some focus on strategy, others on delivering programmes, some have formed companies and others remain informal partnerships (Cominetti et al., 2013; Pugalis, 2012).

The chairperson of the LEP board is usually a local business executive and the Government's expectation was that generally half of board members would be business leaders, and the rest would be community leaders (Department for Business, Innovation and Skill (BIS), 2010). Our analysis shows that these expectations have been met with businesses commanding the lion's share of representation on LEP boards, albeit with substantial variation (from 30% to almost 70% and 47% average participation). Educational bodies present the least variation (between 5% and 20%) and charities the lowest average participation (5%).
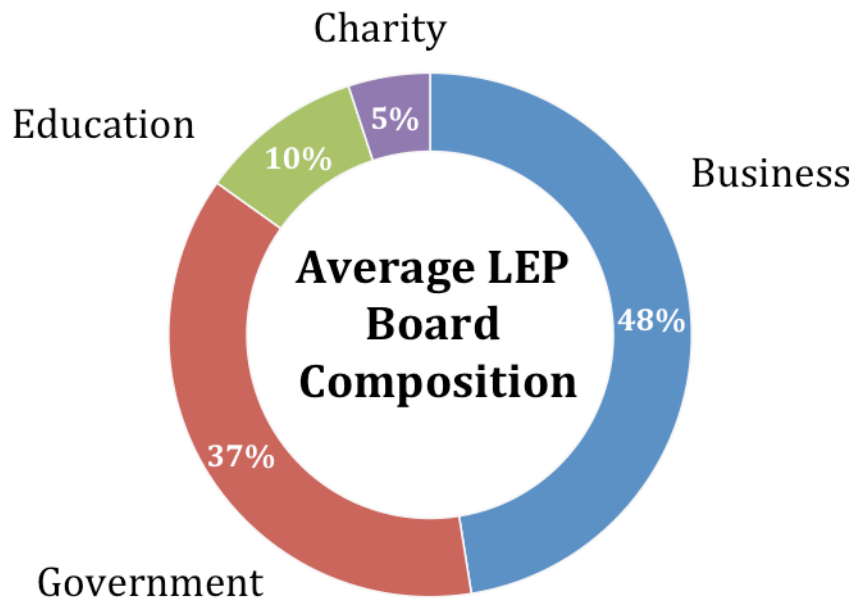
Figure 6: Breakdown of average LEP board composition for 37 cities studied

LEP Board Composition by Sector

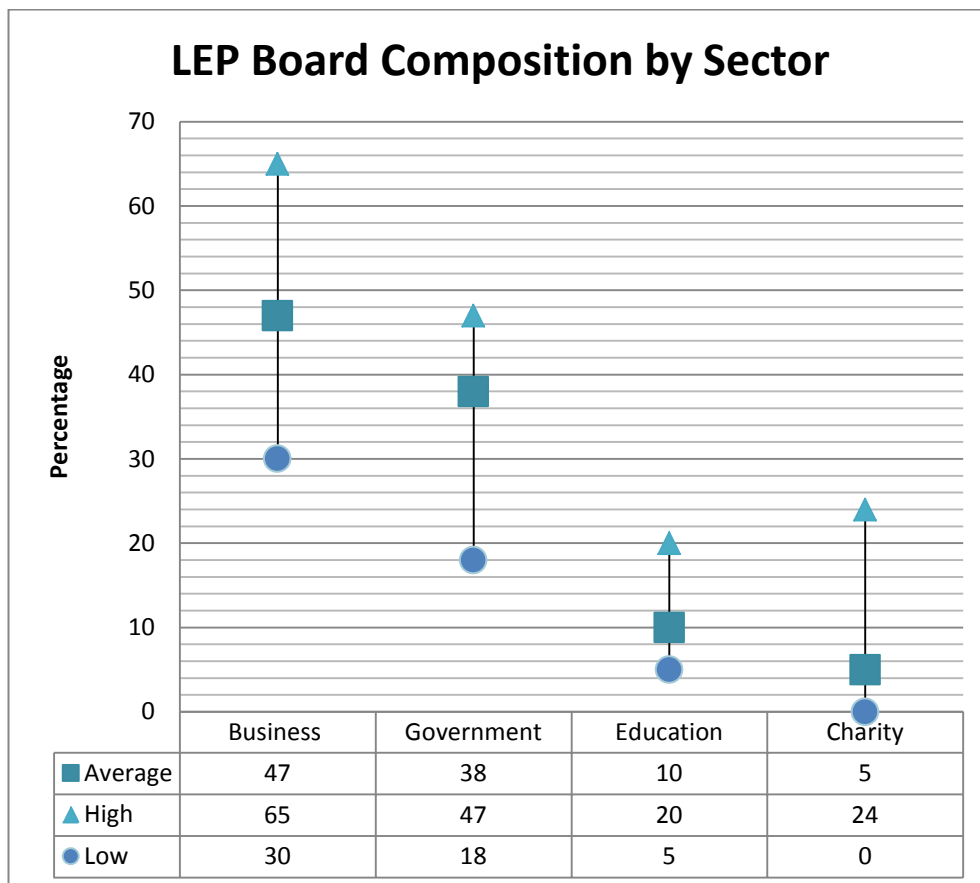|	Business	Government	Education	Charity
■ Average	47	38	10	5
▲ High	65	47	20	24
● Low	30	18	5	0

Figure 7: Spread of composition of 21 LEP boards

In thinking about the future of city leadership in the UK, close consideration could in future be given to the role and working of LEPs. Palumbo (2010) argues that elected leaders have input-oriented legitimacy, afforded them by their status as elected leaders, while leaders in a governance context must gain output-oriented legitimacy i.e. they are judged on the results they

produce. Since LEP partnerships involve stakeholders at the local level, their effectiveness (in terms of output) and accountability could be improved by sharing the democratic responsibility for LEPs (that currently lies with national government) with the local level. Moving forward, any power, finance and autonomy devolved to LEPs from national government would benefit from being accompanied by increased accountability and democratic legitimacy to help cities best develop.

3.3 Leadership tools: strategic plans

Investigating trends and challenges for cities in the UK necessarily implies examining what tools and instruments city leaders use in the process of city leadership. One tool that has become increasingly common internationally in recent years is the Strategic Urban Plan (SUP). SUPs can be a very useful tool for holistic strategic urban leadership, setting out objectives that can be consulted on, and, once agreed, something to measure progress against.

Local governments in the UK use a range of different types of SUPs to coordinate priorities. These range from mandatory documents that all councils must prepare (such as Core Strategies in English local authorities) to non-statutory longer-term and more visionary documents such as Glasgow's *Glasgow 2062* strategic plan. Documents vary in their approach, with some setting out clear objectives and monitoring protocols, while others are more high level vision-documents without clear objectives. This diversity of approaches presents a challenge for communicating and coordinating priorities across administrative boundaries. In addition, local strategies may at times not be citywide, or influence the allocation of resources from central government.

Factors such as these limit the effectiveness of SUPs as instruments of city leadership. To further understand the role of strategic planning in city leadership, the CLI research team conducted a qualitative review of SUP-type documents across the 37 sample cities in the study. This involved reviewing the strategic priorities and scope of issues addressed and the time frames proposed. **Error! Reference source not found.** summarises the findings of this review. While most local authorities have some form of SUP, a good proportion of these may not be capable of catalysing action. Some SUPs lack a long-term planning scope, lasting only two years or lacking specific end dates. Some only address a certain spatial area of the city (i.e. the urban core), while others only address a certain issue (e.g. the environment).

A new tool introduced in England is the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), which LEPs are required to produce. The Government provided cities with guidance on preparing SEPs in its report *Growth Deals: Initial Guidance for Local Enterprise Partnerships* (BIS 2013). Though there are no set formats for SEPs, "in line with the principles of localism," the document still provides a checklist of standards for LEPs to follow with the objective of making plans robust and able to deliver growth (ibid: 10). Among the criteria outlined are demonstrating rationale, value for money, delivery and risk.

Table 2: Summary of key features of SUPs and SEPs

	Strategic Urban Plan	Strategic Economic Plan
Authority	Created by (most) Local Authorities	Created by LEPs (in England only)
Scale	City-wide strategy	Sub-regional strategy
Remit	Contains spatial element	"Growth vision"- used for (economic) Growth Deals
Time frame	Average Length: 10 years • Median: 13 years • Longest: 20 years • Shortest: 2 years	Average Length: 9 years • Median: 7 years • Longest: 21 years • Shortest: 6 years
Comments	Some SUPs lack time frames, specific objectives, monitoring instruments and systematic foresight considerations	Several SEPs are directly linked to the Growth Deals (which currently last until 2021- i.e. 7 years), therefore shorter horizon.

The qualitative study conducted by the research team found far more consistencies and commonalities between SEPs than between SUPs. It is clear that many SEPs have been used as the basis to frame and negotiate Growth Deals (or vice versa) with central government. Because the Government has asked that LEPs prove their accountability in writing, the strategic objectives outlined by local areas in these documents are significantly more defined and explicit when compared to SUPs. Though SEPs cover a set of strategic dimensions more narrowly constrained to economic development activities than those often contained in SUPs, this finding offers some support that the Government's 'deals' mechanism, though officially informal, has set implicit expectations from governments and, in the form of SEPs, these have been translated by LEPs and their negotiations with Government into reasonably clearly defined goals and strategic priorities. The level to which these goals, through the mechanism and criteria laid out by Government, have been homogenised around narrowly defined economic criteria at the expense of a more joined-up and holistic consideration of other outcomes is, however, still open to critique. This is especially true when we take into account the issues of representation and accountability of LEPs raised above.

Another challenge that SEPs may pose for city leadership is that several cities are subject to the mandates of multiple SEPs, as they are geographically set within overlapping LEP boundaries (examples include York, Croydon, and Winchester). In addition, in research workshops some of the representatives from smaller cities mentioned that when they fall into the same LEP as a larger city, it can be difficult for them to have their city's priorities recognised and incorporated into a SEP.

Finally, one factor that could be of important impact on the remit of the Foresight Future of Cities project is that of timeframes. For the 37 cities researched by CLI in this study, there are currently no SUPs or SEPs looking beyond 2035. Indeed, only one SUP reaches 2030, and only three SEPs stretch to 2030 or 2035. Moreover, since several SEPs are directly linked to current

'deals', they present questionable adaptability to unexpected political-economic shifts as well as in terms of long-term governance flexibility. These tools do not appear to be used for systematic, longer-term planning and are only marginally sustained by serious foresight capacity.

3.4 Summary of baseline findings

Key findings from the survey of the history and current status of city leadership in the UK are as follows:

- the UK is moving towards city-region governance structures for larger cities. This will create multiple layers of leadership (council leaders, metro mayors), leadership structures (local councils and combined authorities) and instruments (local plans, SEPs, city-region SUPs);

- there is a diversity of institutions and instruments of leadership across the UK. The form of these institutions and instruments change frequently, often with changes in national political leadership. City leadership in the UK is substantially influenced by national politics;

- a diverse range of public, private and third-sector actors are involved in city leadership in the UK. This occurs through a range of networked governance arrangements such LEPs in England;

- city leadership is not fully representative of the UK population. Research shows that women are under-represented, particularly in political leadership roles. In the English LEPs, small business interests are under-represented, as are charities and educational institutions in some areas; and

- the strategic planning horizons of most cities do not extend beyond 10-20 years, demonstrating a lack of systematic long-term planning and foresight capacity; and

- political leadership in the UK diverges from international trends in its higher use of a leader-cabinet model, over directly elected mayors.

4. City leadership: challenges and opportunities

This section of the paper focuses on the findings from a series of workshops held with city leaders from around the UK. In the second half of 2014, the CLI team held five research workshops in London, Liverpool and Glasgow with representatives from over 20 UK cities.[5] These workshops consisted of a series of participatory exercises aimed at stimulating a frank and open conversation. We complemented these workshops with individual interviews with several individual city leaders. Our aim was to gather in-depth of information to complement our review of existing literature and the baseline information presented in Section 3 and give a view on the future of city leadership in the UK based on a direct engagement with cities. This approach is aligned with the spirit of co-production of knowledge that is central to the approach of both the Foresight Future of Cities project and CLI.

This section is split into two parts. Firstly, it briefly summarises the key trends and challenges identified in the workshop discussions. Secondly, it builds on the research findings to set out four key characteristics of effective city leadership in the UK context. This sets the stage for Section 5 of this paper, in which we present a series of recommendations for how to use capacity building to unlock potential and enhance UK city leadership.

4.1 Seven key challenges for city leadership

We began all of our research workshops by asking participants to set out the top three challenges that they anticipate will shape city leadership in the next ten years. There was no shortage of thoughts on this issue; clearly cities in the UK are confronting turbulent times. As one participant put it, "the range of challenges at hand puts unprecedented stresses on city leadership". This section unpacks the precise nature of these challenges and their impact on the ability of our workshop participants to lead. We highlight below the seven most commonly cited issues.

4.1.1 Challenge One: social inequality and polarisation

Workshop participants argued that urban inequalities are common across a variety of dimensions. These include unequal access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities, as well as spatial segregation. Skills gaps and insufficient employment training were two important challenges repeatedly cited in the workshops. Participants' conerns about this issue is reflected in the research community. For instance, recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that income inequality in UK cities is greater in larger cities, with London being the most unequal city (Lee et al., 2013). City leaders see inequality not only as one of the key challenges facing UK cities, but also the one that they themselves felt particularly accountable for confronting as a result of their statutory responsibilities. Leaders are concerned about their ability to address these critical issues in the face of shrinking budgets, particularly in the area of adult social care.

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[5] To encourage workshop participants to speak freely, comments below are not directly attributed to them, and participant lists not disclosed. Only in a few specific instances particular cities and best practices are explicitly attributed (to cities not their representatives attending the workshops).

4.1.2 Challenge Two: demographic change

Demographic changes were also reported as major contributing factors to inequality. The UK's ageing population is continuing to challenge city leaders as they struggle to provide adequate health, care, and mobility services for the elderly. Additionally, a steady flow of migrants into the UK has increased cultural, religious, and political diversity, which has been challenging norms and conceptions of local citizenship. The diverse and complex issues associated with demographic change place particular pressure on city leaders, as they are often held accountable for promoting social cohesion.

4.1.3 Challenge Three: sufficient and sustainable infrastructure

City leaders and municipal officers reported that providing stable and sustainable infrastructure for their constituents was a significant difficulty in public management. Inadequate infrastructure puts a strain in particular on larger cities, which reported that they struggle for example to develop adequate transport infrastructure. Social infrastructure is another challenge. Providing housing for growing populations, including specialised provision for affordable or cultural housing is a major challenge. Where investment in infrastructure and the built environment does occur, city leaders face the pressure to make sure this occurs in a way that is both sustainable and improves quality of life for all citizens.

4.1.4 Challenge Four: keeping local economies vibrant, competitive, and sustainable

Economic pressures impact on nearly every dimension of the work of city leaders. City leaders are tasked with keeping local economies vibrant, competitive, and sustainable, attracting investments from both within the UK and abroad. Linking in with the discussion in Section 2, leaders highlighted that policy from other levels of government should focus on empowering and enabling them to achieve these objectives. Representatives from London in particular cited the need to maintain the city's global financial and cultural comparative advantage as a strategic imperative. Leaders of cities with high growth rates must facilitate this growth sensitively while those in decline are charged with implementing innovative programs for economic revival in a context of austerity. As their traditional sources of funding have decreased (see Challenge Six below) city leaders have been required to think of new methods of securing investment and growth. Networks linking cities with their counterparts both in the UK and abroad were cited as a productive avenue for the development of more competitive and sustainable local economies.

4.1.5 Challenge Five: doing more with less

City leaders are tasked with responding to a growing demand for public services, but have also seen a dramatic reduction in the resources they have to deliver these. Since the global economic downturn in 2008, local government spending has been significantly reduced through central budget cuts.[6] Workshop participants were, by and large, proud of the way they have managed in the face of these cuts. They felt that they had found creative and efficient ways to do more with less. However many cautioned that austerity had effectively created unfunded mandates, in particular in relation to their responsibilities to deliver adult social care. One group of participants predicted that insufficient funding in this area would eventually lead to a serious crisis in this sector.

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[6] In England, local government spending (excluding police, schools, housing benefit) is set to fall by nearly 30 per cent in real terms between 2008 and 2015 (Hastings et al., 2013).

4.1.6 Challenge Six: competition for talent

The challenge around resources is not limited to financial assets – the importance of attracting qualified people to work in city government also came up in workshops. Medium-sized cities highlighted the difficulty of attracting and retaining talented councillors and officers. There was broad agreement that these cities struggled to compete in what they termed a "war for talent." This is an important challenge that is distinctive to mid-sized and smaller cities in the UK, quite in contrast, for instance, with the GLA workshop participants that emphasised how the capital easily attracts skilled people to city leadership. Contributing to the skills challenge is a lack of flexibility in the internal labour market of city councils. Meeting the demand for new skills often requires bringing in new people or training, but some participants spoke frankly about how their councils' hiring and firing policies did not allow for sufficient agility. Where this challenge exists, it was linked to the negative image and mistrust of politics more generally, and the need for political leadership to counteract this.

4.1.7 Challenge Seven: lack of continuity and empowerment

Lastly, workshop participants argued that a lack of continuity in governance arrangements, which can make it difficult to clearly delineate where responsibilities lie, is a barrier to effective leadership. For many cities, their relationship with their respective national government is not characterised by the degree of mutual trust that they would like. To provide longer-term clarity and stability, a number of participants were keen to see city governance arrangements entrenched in a constitution. It is also worth noting that in many cities, particularly smaller ones, a lack of continuity can be the result of challenges more local in origin, such as reactive political cultures.

Despite moves toward greater devolution, workshop participants consistently emphasised how the UK is internationally atypical in terms of its high degree of centralisation. Even representatives from London, which enjoys a relatively high degree of autonomy, emphasised that they still enjoyed "very little devolution" compared to many international urban competitors. Furthermore, cities in Wales and Scotland stressed that devolution of powers to the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament has done little to empower cities. Rather, they often perceive themselves as just as distant from their national governments (in governance terms) as they might be from the central UK government.

In the absence of greater devolution, cities find themselves vulnerable to what they described as a "crisis of politics." For many people in their cities, some participants argued, national politics is perceived as less and less relevant to "people on the street." Feeding into this, they argued, is the fact that local elections are often focused on national issues.

4.2 Effective city leadership: four key characteristics

The challenges highlighted above are extremely broad, long lasting and often quite entrenched. Most of them are the focus of a substantial body of scholarship, and some of them have been the subjects of their own working papers published by the Foresight Future of Cities project. As we conceptualise it, city leadership plays a particular role in addressing these challenges. Good city leadership cannot, on its own, solve all of these issues. It can, however, be a source of innovation at a local level, harnessing a broad range of ideas and actors to develop effective strategies and catalyse change. The remainder of this section will focus specifically on how to enhance city leadership in such a way that it can address challenges like those outlined above not just today, but well into the future.

In our research workshops, in addition to discussing challenges, we also asked participants to think about opportunities for improving and enhancing city leadership. Building on these discussions, below we put forward four key characteristics of effective city leadership: empowered, diverse and distributed, accountable, and networked. These are the characteristics that UK city leadership can and should embody. In Section 5 we put forward a set of policy and capacity building recommendations designed to achieve this agenda.

The four characteristics discussed below are critical to effective city leadership, however we wish to emphasise that good city leadership may take a variety of forms. Thus we have chosen to focus on broad characteristics rather than specific approaches to leadership (e.g. the elected mayor model). This decision reflects something our research participants were particularly keen to emphasise - there is not a standard 'formula' for good city leadership in the UK. This is particularly the case for leadership structures. Despite the dominance of 'devolution talk', participants argued that debates on this issue tend to focus too much on the role and reform of governance structures, perhaps seeking an elusive "ideal" structure that would work for all cities.

In contrast, the city leaders we spoke to argued that what works for one city might not work for another. For example, Manchester's success in establishing effective joint working arrangements and a combined authority needs to be understood in the context of the specific characteristics of that city-region. One aspect of this, according to workshop participants, may be its geography. The concentric geography and historical links between local authorities in the Manchester region make its designation a 'city region' fairly straightforward. Representatives from Liverpool, on the other hand, argued that the geography of their city meant that many neighbouring local authorities had stronger ties to other places than to the city of Liverpool. Meanwhile, representatives from mid-sized cities noted that models such as "metro regions" and "metro mayors" are better suited to the needs of large, mono-centric cities and city regions. In addition, the suitability of leadership arrangements can vary within a city. Arrangements that work for one sector (such as transport) are often seen as unlikely to work for another. We will return to the theme of promoting a diverse range of approaches to city leadership throughout the remainder of this paper.

4.2.1 Empowered

There was broad consensus in workshops that city leaders wish to be more empowered by their national governments to take on a stronger role. This is of course the focus of the debates and discussions around devolution that have been on going for a number of years. Many of the UK's cities' asks have been set out in publications by the Core Cities and Key Cities groups, and will not be repeated here in detail. Broadly, cities agree that devolved powers are desirable not just for their own sake, but in order to achieve greater economic growth through more localised decision-making about policies and budgets. The fiscal devolution of budgets for investment would be particularly welcomed. Currently, fiscal devolution takes place via specific 'pots' of funding that put cities only partially in control. This is perceived to hinder holistic place making and promote piecemeal investment in opportunistic areas that are highly dependent on what is made available centrally. Put differently, to quote one participant, cities seek "a capacity for choice".

Workshop participants argued strongly that there needs to be an appetite, in both national and local government, for new models and thinking on devolution and decentralisation. To this end, cities welcomed the opportunity to share experience with their counterparts around the UK. For example, there are cities outside England that may benefit from the types of city-region

governance arrangements currently being re-introduced in cities like London and Manchester. The Greater Glasgow and Clyde city region, for example, is a large conurbation with a population of 1.2 million, approximately one-fifth of Scotland's population (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2014).

4.2.2 Accountable

As direct providers of many critical services, city leaders understand that with devolution comes a need to be accountable and responsive to their citizens. Robust public engagement is critical to the long-term sustainability of democratic urban governance. Achieving this requires addressing the "crisis of politics" mentioned in the section on challenges. National political contests need to make adequate space for the discussion of local issues. This will go some way to addressing, in many places, concerns over trust and honesty that are affecting voter turnout and civic participation.

In workshops, discussions of accountability often overlapped with debate about the role of elected mayors where successful, elected mayors are seen as clarifying and increasing accountability and supporting investment. This was attributed to having one individual with whom stakeholders can communicate, and hold accountable to the vision they create. This was not a universal view among workshop participants; once again participants rejected a one-size-fits-all approach. Representatives of cities without elected mayors were keen to stress that it is still possible to offer a clear and stable vision for a city with the leader-executive model and effective local strategic partnerships.

4.2.3 Diverse and distributed

As emphasised in Section 1, city leadership is about more than just individual leaders. Elected leaders need to be supported by strong and effective institutions, and need to consult broadly on the plans, policies and programmes they use to implement their agendas. Section 3 highlighted that some of the formal aspects of UK city leadership (elected leaders and LEPs) are not representative of the diversity of the UK's population. Efforts to improve this should focus not just on high profile, formal leadership roles; leadership should be distributed throughout communities (a point made by several workshop participants).

4.2.4 Networked

Cities are vocal participants in debates about their future – most powerfully from within formalised networks and organisations such as the Core Cities and Key Cities Groups and the Local Government Association. The networking of these groups is having important effects. Cities can compare and benchmark their experiences with their peers. They can also leverage their knowledge of practice gained elsewhere through these networks when negotiating and advocating for change in their own cities.

Those cities that are currently not part of UK city networks also recognise the value of network membership. Welsh cities would like to form a similar network to those found in England and Scotland. In 2014, both Glasgow and Cardiff joined the Core Cities group. Similarly, representatives from Belfast talked of their proactive, though less formalised, efforts to network with and learn from other cities - in particular seeking to learn from the Scottish and Welsh models of community planning. Belfast municipal officers have also benchmarked their own activities against Manchester and Liverpool, and encourage their elected members to enter into dialogue with other cities.

Many UK cities already demonstrate excellence in the four characteristics outlined above. The challenge moving forward is for both cities and their national governments to develop strategies to build on these successes. This is the focus of the final section of this working paper.

5. Capacity building for effective leadership

This paper has presented research findings about the current state of city leadership in the UK, the key challenges leaders face, and suggested four key characteristics that city leadership in the UK should aspire to in order to be most effective. This final chapter of the paper sets out a series of recommendations for capacity building and future policy directions.

As discussed in Section 4, precisely what 'effective city leadership' looks like will vary across cities. Cities are coming from different starting points, and as a result will have a range of different capacity building requirements. For example, the CLI research team asked workshop participants to imagine a context where they were granted the new powers and freedoms that many of them are lobbying for. If this occurred, we then asked, how confident were they about their capacity to deliver on their objectives? The levels of confidence participants expressed broadly correlated with the sizes of their cities. Representatives from the GLA were keen to stress their competency levels and previous track record. Within the Core Cities group, views were mixed. Some expressed a confidence about specific skills-sets, such as negotiation and dealing with multi-national corporations. However, others cited this specific area — getting the best deal for their city in their dealings with business — as one where they needed support.

Despite this variety in the circumstances and needs of individual cities, our research identified a number of clear themes in how both cities and national governments can work, individually and in partnership to improve city leadership. The first part of this section sets out four broad areas that, based on our research, we suggest national and local policymakers and leaders might focus on if they wish to build city leadership capacity and increase its effectiveness in the areas outlined in Section 4. These are preliminary suggestions, and further research should investigate their effectiveness in strengthening city leadership in a diverse range of cities across the UK. The second part of the section proposes a series of recommendations specifically for national policy makers who wish to support improved city leadership.

5.1 Building capacity within cities

We suggest that there are four areas where future capacity building in city leadership in the UK might focus, detailed in turn below. For each area, we have included one or more specific recommendation.

5.1.1 Create opportunities for widespread involvement in city leadership

- **Experiment with a variety of approaches to engaging citizens and communities**
- **Develop and empower long-term partnerships that bring a broad range of people into city leadership activities**

Distributing leadership responsibilities among a range of people and groups can empower and enable a broad variety of actors to get involved in city leadership and decision-making. Many workshop participants recounted how they have been most effective when they have engaged with their communities to find the relevant people to come together around an issue. This more networked, collaborative approach is seen as a more sophisticated mode of leadership than hierarchical models. This has been one objective of the localism agenda. The question that this raises, however, is whether localism, which has largely been focused on increasing business involvement in economic development, is bringing in the full range of actors with something to contribute to city leadership.

"Joe Public," one participant argued, is more likely to engage with city leadership processes when they start to see meaningful opportunities for involvement. Bringing more people into the processes of city leadership is likely to require creating meaningful and long-term partnerships that involve a wide range of actors and groups in processes such as problem identification and strategy development.

5.1.2 Promote innovation and variety

- **Encourage local innovation and variety in approaches to tacking key issues**

When tackling the leadership dimensions of the key challenges outlined in section 4.1, it is common to see a similar set of solutions repeatedly promoted. For example, the challenges of making leadership transparent and accountable have featured heavily in the findings of this research. One approach to increasing accountability that is regularly discussed in UK local government debates is introducing elected mayors. Yet there are other approaches to increasing accountability that do not require structural changes.

Workshop participants argued that social media has increased their accountability. Social media allows them to be much more open about how they spend their time and how their activities relate to the issues relevant to their city. New social media platforms offer opportunities for increased accountability by opening up decision-making processes and data to better engage citizens. In order to keep public services reactive and efficient, many cities are also creating mobile applications and online forums for citizens to connect and communicate more openly with the government. Cities should be supported in these efforts to experiment with different structures and tools to enhance city leadership.

5.1.3 Support cities to harness knowledge for effective decision-making

- **Foster a wide knowledge base for city leadership**
- **Integrate local universities into city leadership**

City leadership needs to be informed by a broad knowledge of research evidence as well as national and international practices. Yet the ability of cities to do research and harness existing knowledge in policy making varies. For example, while the GLA has a large in-house research team and isnh confident about undertaking their own research, other cities lack the resources to sustain analytical, foresight and research capacity. Cardiff City Council's research team was recently reduced from a team of ten to a team of just two.

City networks can enhance learning as cities work together, as can partnerships with universities and think tanks. Some workshop participants cited a growing involvement and contribution from universities in their work, while others felt that cities were often "missing a trick" where universities were concerned. This "trick" might be a critical way for city leaders to leverage local resources to increase their knowledge and hence their capacity. Universities can serve as independent and neutral partners, providing academic rigour to the evidence used to inform policy and programme development. Long-term collaborations (as opposed to individual projects) that involve joint working and co-production of knowledge in particular can bring substantial benefits to cities.

5.1.4 Build the reputation and profile of city leaders

- **Support the development of local leaders**

- **Promote to the public the positive role played by city leadership**

Promoting effective city leadership across the UK's cities requires programmes that will support the development of local leaders, particularly for those groups under-represented in existing leadership roles and institutions. As highlighted in the section on challenges, attracting talented people into municipal leadership can be difficult, particularly for many smaller cities. This is exacerbated in the case of elected leaders by a lack of a clear career trajectory, as many councillors survive only one term. Some participants argued that further devolution of powers to cities might help them attract good leadership at a local level. Political leaders also need to actively work to build public trust and demonstrate their accountability.

5.2 Future policy directions

While the previous section focused on capacity building needs for cities, this section proposes a series of recommendations for national policy makers who wish to support improved city leadership. These recommendations fall under five categories of objectives that policy makers may wish to achieve. Each category has one or more specific recommendations attached.

5.2.1 Promoting improved city leadership

- **National policy should account for (if not encourage) a variety of city leadership models**

- **Share and build on experiences from a broad range of UK cities**

- **Encourage experimentation, and learn from failures as well as successes**

Effective city leadership arrangements need to be based on a range of contextual factors. These include an understanding of the functional geography of a city and its region, and the ability of leadership institutions to gain the trust they need to command authority and respect, attract investment and build critical relationships. While the need for city leadership to be contextually specific is recognised by many, there is also an understandable desire, at both the national and local levels, to identify examples of best practices and ideas that can be transferred from one city to another. One issue raised often in our workshops was the perception that central policymakers, when gathering their evidence base, tend to look to a group of 'usual suspects' that might not be a representative sample of UK cities. For example, in urban policy circles around the UK, the Manchester case has achieved a certain profile as a successful example. Manchester is now promoted as the 'northern powerhouse' and its city-region governance model is soon to be rolled out in the Sheffield region as well.

Our research workshops revealed that while some cities do wish to emulate the Manchester model, others were very aware that Manchester's experience builds on a specific history and culture of governance in that particular region. In addition, while Manchester receives a great deal of attention, smaller cities, especially those in polycentric economic regions, can struggle to attain recognition for their relative contributions and performance, regardless of which regional arrangement has prevailed. One city described how they struggled to be recognised for outperforming their larger neighbouring city in the investment decision-making of their LEP. The experiences of smaller cities should not be neglected.

Equally, both central and city governments need to understand, and manage, the risks associated with possible changes to city leadership and governance, and accept that there will be mistakes. Mistakes and failures are challenging to manage, but can also present learning opportunities in the same way that successful examples do. A closer attention to limits and failures, supported by a climate of city-Whitehall collaboration, could help us learn from what goes wrong as much as what succeeds. For example, very few cities opted to have elected mayors when given the option. But why was this? Some workshop participants indicated that this was because the introduction of elected mayors felt like a top down process. This assertion only scratched the surface of a more complex dynamic of localised structures, national institutions, leaders' individual capacities and varying processes of leadership. Here, the local knowledge bases (universities and think tanks) can be particularly effective in offering a scholarly sounding board for the experiences of UK cities, in a safe environment where 'failure' is not seen as a negative component of leadership.

5.2.2 Accounting for the multiple dimensions of city leadership

- **Policy should take into account the various dimensions of city leadership, which include both formal and informal elements**

Throughout this working paper, we have argued for a broad conception of city leadership that goes beyond individual leaders and formal leadership and governance structures. A focus on only one of these elements, such as formal structures or individual leaders results in a range of options for enhancing leadership being neglected. For example, a push to introduce elected mayors may focus unduly on an individual leader rather than the many other elements of leadership that need to be in place to support him or her. Work on leadership should consider each of the three dimensions of city leadership outlined in Section 1, not just individually but as an interconnected, and interdependent, network. Thinking in this way, we are constantly reminded that city leadership is not simply a leader, or a plan, or a governance structure, but something more than the sum of these individual elements.

Policy also needs to account for more informal processes of leadership such as relationship building. The representatives of the UK cities consulted for this research project emphasised that effective leadership requires open and trusting relationships, both between central and local government and between city leaders and local stakeholders. Some of the cities consulted for this research explained that the key relationships shaping city leadership transcend the formal structures introduced by higher levels of government. In cities with broad, distributed leadership networks, introducing a new structure (such as LEPs) does not change leadership so much as reconfigure it.

5.2.3 Listening to the cities

- **Build a stronger voice for cities in policy-making processes**

- **Support city networks and groups to improve city leadership**

Cities are working to self-organise, and are increasingly communicating with a collective voice. Clearly cities have strong, although not always unanimous, opinions about how they should be lead. Groups such as Core Cities and Key Cities have set out their ideas in their manifestos and are attempting to work with central government to make their voices heard nationally. The Scottish Cities Alliance is not yet so specific in their 'ask' but is developing its standpoint and agenda. Other organisations, such as the Local Government Association (LGA), also attempt to put forward the views of local government. Organisations such as these may constitute a good starting point for efforts to build a stronger voice for cities in policymaking and democratic

processes. These organisations should sit at the table when decisions impacting upon city leadership are being made.

These networks may also be a good starting point for efforts to further build capacity for the softer, more 'informal' mechanisms of leadership, knowledge-sharing and exchange which, based on the evidence we have heard, seem to be important. National and international city networks provide important venues for policy exchange and capacity building. Yet these networks, several participants to our workshops noted, remain to date underfunded, under-acknowledged and in some cases somewhat ad hoc. Any national programmes to improve city leadership should work alongside and fully support existing organisations.

5.2.4 Setting strategic urban priorities

- **Support the improvement and further development of the tools and mechanisms used to set strategic priorities in cities**

Effective and accountable city leadership requires a clear and consistent set of priorities. There is a need to consider more carefully the tools and mechanisms used to set strategic priorities in UK cities. Currently, cities use a variety of tools including SUPs and, in England, SEPs, City Deals and Growth Deals. A range of actors is currently involved in the processes of developing these tools, including local and national government, institutions such as LEPs and community planning partnerships. This diversity can make it difficult to understand where to look and who to speak to in order to learn about a city's key leadership priorities. Given this, there may be a case for rationalising the structures, actors and processes by which these are set.

That said, this study found that while local strategic spatial planning documents were quite varied, the new SEPs are remarkably consistent. This raises two issues. Do policies and programmes generated in central government, such as Growth Deals, and, more generally, efforts to centrally 'rationalise' city leadership and governance, encourage homogeneity in objectives and approaches? And secondly, if so, is this a problem? On one hand, national governments should offer all UK cities a similar set of opportunities and resources. On the other, as highlighted throughout this report, it also needs to allow the UK's diverse cities the freedom and flexibility they so urgently call for.

5.2.5 Fostering and capitalising on international linkages

- **National governments should support cities to extend the international profile and reach of UK city leadership**

Workshop participants highlighted the value of looking internationally for examples of how to enhance city leadership and governance in the UK. London and some other UK cities are members of international networks such as the C40 Climate Leadership Group and the European network EuroCities. Membership of these groups facilitates international learning and benchmarking, something that can be especially useful for smaller cities, perhaps even more so than for larger cities. Networks, as noted above, tend to facilitate not just policy exchange and the travel of ideas, but also encourage greater comparative and international thinking among cities. Despite these promising features, only a few participants highlighted efforts on the part of *national* government (e.g. Foreign Office, Department for International Development or BIS, besides initiatives such as "Business is Great") to enhance these international linkages. In several cases, especially in bigger metropolises, the relationship with national government has even emerged as possibly contrary and adversarial to the expansion of international action and

advocacy by cities. There is a need for national government to offer more strategic support in this direction.

5.3 Towards 2065

In the spirit of the Foresight project, we close this report with a set of hypotheses about the future state of city leadership, developed over the course of researching and writing this working paper. Barring a significant shift in national policy, we anticipate that, as we move towards 2065, city leadership will be characterised by the following factors:

- city leadership will be increasingly locally controlled as moves toward devolution to national and sub-national levels continue;

- city leadership in the UK will be increasingly heterogeneous, involving a broad range of actors and institutions;

- networks, relationships and partnerships, both formal and informal, will be more important than individuals in city leadership;

- to maintain its legitimacy, city leadership will have to be ever more accountable to citizens; and

- democratic legitimacy and accountability are essential elements to good city leadership, but the quality of leadership will also be judged on its performance and results.

Appendix: methodology

Questions guiding semi-structured workshops and interviews with city leaders:

Part I: Opportunities and challenges

- What are the three most pressing challenges that your city will face in the next 10 years?

- What are three key opportunities for your city in the next 10 years?

Part II: Governance, devolution, and capacity building

- How do current governance structures enable these challenges/opportunities to be addressed?

- What are the key local policy freedoms or controls that you would like to see made available to your city by government and why? Are there other barriers that exist at a local and/or national level to achieving opportunities?

- Capacity building needs from government and from universities

- Possible extra: international dimension, comparative dimension

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