

CENTRE FOR LONDON

Levelling Up and Greater London

December 2021
Sponsorship Proposal

“I see Centre for London as the city's brain trust, constantly putting out high quality, thoughtful and timely work – something that will be more important than ever as we look to solve the challenges ahead.

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London



Centre for London is embarking on an ambitious project to reshape the national debate about levelling up. Support this project to contribute to a new narrative on why London's success matters to the whole country and help us shed light on the urgent need to level up within London.



Overview

Levelling up is a public policy concept that has gained considerable traction over recent years, and particularly since the pandemic. But it is:

- Currently a rather poorly defined agenda
- Conflated with anti-London resentment across the rest of the country
- Failing to consider the huge socio-economic challenges that exist within London
- Underplaying the important positive role the city has in the wider UK economy, and
- Ignoring the city's struggling recovery from the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic

Currently, the city's voice in the levelling up debate is unheard or ignored, partly because it hasn't yet found the right language to use to articulate what this could mean for London and, in turn, the country. Left unshaped by London's policymakers, it has the potential to be negative for the city, specifically for businesses located here, and for all those living in the city, but particularly those in poverty and deprived communities.

Defining levelling up

The idea of narrowing gaps between different parts of the country is not new: levelling up can be seen as the latest incarnation of this agenda. Centre for London fully supports tackling geographic inequality. We agree that it is unacceptable that such inequality in standards of living occur within the UK, and it is in everyone's interests to address these.

However, levelling up is currently poorly defined, with some interpreting it as a simple matter of switching government investment, civil service jobs and policy support from one part of the country to another (often seen as from London/South-East to the North and Midlands).

Levelling up also relies on over-simplified narratives of London and the South-East as 'rich' and the North as 'poor', and has centred on place, with very little about the needs of people. Differences in prosperity, opportunity and quality of life between regions are given higher importance than those between localities and communities within regions, which can be as large if not larger. The current debate does not reflect the unique geography of the country, in which there are poor parts of London just as there are rich parts of the north.





Anti-London sentiment

Resentment towards London isn't new – polling in 2018 by YouGov showed varying levels of favourable/unfavourable views of London across the country, and Centre for London's own polling from the same year showed an overall pride in London across the country but a range of negative views on specific aspects and characteristics of the city.

However, there is a feeling that views towards London have worsened over recent years, most notably since the Brexit referendum. Levelling up is wrapped up in this, which is a product of the complicated political and emotional situation the country finds itself in. However, resentment is often not against the whole city or those who live in it, but rather dissatisfaction with institutions and elites in the capital (e.g. politicians in Westminster, the BBC, The City).

This matters because it is shaping the political and public policy landscape, worsened by the focus on the red wall battleground parliamentary seats in the Midlands and the North. Much of the attention is on these parts of the country and, what's more, it is being hard on London is seen as popular in some red wall seats, hence a reluctance in Government to provide London with funding and policy attention.

Recognising London's socio-economic circumstances

Dangerous misconceptions have taken hold about how London's economy has been affected by the pandemic.

On many measures, London has fared worse than any other region from the economic fallout from the pandemic, with central London hit particularly hard. Outside of London this is poorly understood, and those who do recognise how hard the city has been hit assume, perhaps dangerously, it will just bounce back of its own accord.

By accident or intent, London could be levelled down.

London's decision makers, civic leaders and business groups are anxious about the direction of travel of the levelling up agenda and how, either by accident or intent, it could be very damaging to the city. It could see large reductions in government spending and investment such as affordable housing money and allocations for local authorities, and a focusing of public policy attention elsewhere, both of which lead to a weakening of the city's economic position.





Key research questions

- How do we best explain London's own levelling up challenges?
- What new ways can we find to talk about London's own levelling up challenges?
- What new takes on existing data can we use to create a fresh way of describing the enormous challenges within London?
- Is there a new vocabulary that will help us to get across London's levelling up needs?
- How can we find new ways of talking about the importance of London's success to the rest of the country's success (and vice versa) and move away from the win-lose debates that currently dominate? Are there partners we can find around the UK to help us explain this mutuality?
- What ways of talking about the importance of London resonates best with those across the rest of the country?
- What emotional as well as economic arguments work best in the debates over the importance of London to the country's economy?

Project plan

Phase 1 Q1-2 2022

Understanding and articulating the levelling up challenges within Greater London

This work will assemble a strong evidence-led narrative on the true scale of the socio-economic challenges faced by the city and those that live in London. It would go wider than just traditional economic measures of differences, and drill into how poverty, disadvantage and inequality are distributed between people, places and communities across all of London.

Our focus will be on better and more impactful ways of presenting existing data and generate a fresh vocabulary for city leaders and decision makers to use when discussing levelling up London. We do not believe there is any new killer statistic waiting to be uncovered which would flip the argument in London's favour. We could look at ways to bring together Londoners with people outside of the city with shared experiences in order to discuss issues that apply equally in both areas, particularly if the areas in question can be closely matched in terms of key socio-economic similarities.

The work would also seek to clarify the problem levelling up is trying to solve and the aims of the agenda – interrogating our understanding of 'fairness' and 'inequality' to develop a clearer concept of what we are seeking to change (e.g. opportunities, outcomes, differentials).

This phase of the project could include a large-scale listening exercise – including not just polling, but more in-depth qualitative methods such as focus groups – to gain the input of not just Londoners, but those in Whitehall and beyond. To achieve this, we would need the input of relevant external expertise, but it should help us understand what language has the best chance of resonating and having impact. We would use this work to arm the city's political leaders and decision makers with the information they need to make the case for London and focus on the Comprehensive Spending Review as a key moment of influence. To oversee this, we would assemble a levelling up advisory group drawn from partners and key stakeholders across the city, to provide oversight and expertise.

Project plan

Phase 2 Q2-3 2022

Greater London's (and the wider South-East) role in the national levelling up agenda

This phase will analyse the contribution London can make to levelling up the rest of the country, and the interrelationships and interdependencies between the city and the rest of the UK. It would use this to then help construct a vocabulary that allows London and national politicians to talk about the interrelated nature of the city's economy with the UK economy, and how London's success matters for everyone.

This vocabulary could also help to disentangle resentment the rest of the country has with institutions within London (e.g., Parliament, BBC, The City etc.) It will investigate how to emphasise that London is an enormous asset to the Government's "Global Britain" agenda and what more can be done to emphasise the aspects of the city that support people's feelings of patriotism. It will focus on providing a new narrative that helps decision makers and political leaders explain more clearly why London's success matters to the whole of the UK.

This work could also look at London in the wider south-east mega-region, and match places outside of London with areas within it with similar problems to demonstrate similar levelling up challenges across the country. In addition, the work can look at international comparisons – how other countries with a single dominant city/prosperous region have faced similar challenges, and what lessons are there to learn.



Project outcomes

A new narrative on why London's success matters to the whole country.

Given the enormous amounts London contributes to the national coffers, any weakening of the city economy is bad news for the whole country. But London finds it hard to talk about the importance of the city to the UK's economic health without sounding arrogant. Too much of the debate seems to focus on London needing to be poorer for elsewhere to be richer, which is not a true reflection of how economies work.

A more persuasive argument on the need to level up within London.

There is also a poor level of understanding of the scale of the socio-economic challenges within London, despite the city having some of the worst levels of poverty and deprivation of any part of the country.

Partnership

As well as enabling us to do this vital work for the capital, organisations sponsoring this project will receive benefits in return, which can include:

- **Branding and profile.** Acknowledgement of your organisation on the Centre for London website, the project page and in published reports, Centre for London's newsletter, all digital communications about the project, and at events.
- **Input and networking.** Feedback on event guestlists and report mailing lists; joining project advisory groups to meet and network with partners from across the public and private sectors; joining Centre for London events and plugging into our networks.
- **Thought leadership.** Opportunity to submit case studies (subject to agreement and if appropriate); capitalise on your organisation's expertise in an area; opportunities for speaking slots, keynotes and 'talking heads'.



What follows is a non-exhaustive list of benefits that are available to the Greater London Authority as a funder. This partnership offers the opportunity to help shape the capital's voice in the levelling up debate.

Major Sponsor

Levelling Up | £20,000 plus VAT

- Acknowledgement as Major Sponsor in relevant communications for the project (e.g., press releases, on the Centre for London website project page, in the final report and at the launch event)
- Membership of the project advisory group, giving you the opportunity to feed into the scope of the project
- Invitation to all related events
- Secondary branding at the launch event
- Opportunity to include a forward for the final publication
- Acknowledgement in the final publication
- Launch event guestlist input
- Copies of the launch attendee list ahead of the launch event
- Speaking opportunity at the event launch

About us

We are London's think tank.

Our mission is to develop new solutions to London's critical challenges and advocate for a fair and prosperous global city.

We are a politically independent charity.

We help national and London policymakers think beyond the next election and plan for the future.

We have ideas with impact.

Through research, analysis and events we generate bold and creative solutions that improve the city we share.

We believe in the power of collaboration.

We bring together people from different parts of the city – with a range of experience and expertise - to develop new ideas and implement them.

As a charity we rely on the support of our funders.

Our work is funded by a mixture of organisations and individuals who share our vision for a better London.

"Centre for London is the only independent organisation taking a pan-London, cross-sector and long-term approach to solving the city's challenges."

Liz Peace CBE

Chair of Trustees, and Chairman of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, and formerly CEO of the British Property Federation



CENTRE FOR LONDON

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