

From the Chairman of the Association
Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell

The Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP
Minister for Business and Enterprise
Department for Business Innovation and Skills
1 Victoria Street
Westminster SW1H 0ET

25 September 2013

Don Michael,

Issues arising from the shadow National Growth Board

I was pleased to attend the first meeting of the shadow National Growth Board (NGB) last week on behalf of the Local Government Association. The LGA strongly supported your decision to localise the delivery of EU funds and we have welcomed the opportunity to develop a shadow Board to ensure that the most effective delivery arrangements are in place in England.

I am writing to highlight the key issues raised by myself and other partner representatives at the Board and the decisions that we made.

I am sure you are aware that Cllr Sir Richard Leese, Cllr Sir Albert Bore, Cllr Ian Stewart and I have been chosen to represent both councils and LEPs on the Board. Having the leaders of the Local Government Association (LGA), our major cities, and counties on this Board reflects the importance that both LEPs and councils are placing on this work. With £5.3 billion to invest in local regeneration over the next seven years and an equal amount of match funding, it is important that we have such senior players leading this work. There was a consensus at the meeting that given the importance being placed on the work by senior partners, a Minister (rather than a civil servant) should chair future meetings

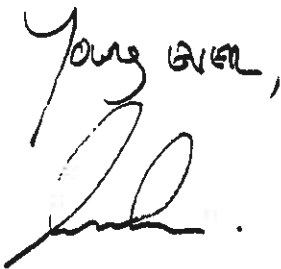
At the meeting, the EU Commission set out its expectations about the partnership commitments that were required to secure approval of the UK Partnership Agreement. Councils and local partners are keen to offer genuine collaboration on the Board to secure these funds for the UK. I raised a concern that the Board must not act as an advisory body to Ministers (as suggested in the Board papers). There was no dissent from around the table. It was readily agreed that the Board needed to be decision making body and such decisions should be reached by consensus.

I understand that revised terms of reference are being drawn up by officials to reflect the comments within the room, and we are all looking forward to receiving them.

I raised a further concern at the meeting regarding the UK Programme Board having no representation for England. Your officials have since clarified that the UKPB is an officer level gathering, which neither takes decisions nor sits above the NGB. Nevertheless, the principle of English representation still stands. You will recall that the LGA and partners voiced strong opposition to the decision to reallocate part of England's EU funding allocation to other parts of the UK. Your officials agreed to look into this and come back with a proposal for discussion which addressed the English issues.

The first Board meeting was very positive in that it showed the commitment of business, councils and other important partners to work together with Government to secure much needed investment in local areas.

I look forward to future meetings. I would be pleased to develop a paper for you which sets out the most important issues for inclusion in Partnership Agreement from a local government perspective and how we could use the learning from the local government self-improvement model to secure the most effective local delivery of EU funds. I have written in similar terms to Baroness Hanham CBE.

Yours sincerely,


Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell