

# Minutes

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## General Assembly

15 December 2004

QE11 Conference Centre, Westminster, London SW1 at 2.15pm

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## Present

209 authorities in full membership and 24 authorities in corporate membership were represented at the meeting.

### 1. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the General Assembly held on 6 July 2004

The Chairman welcomed Members to the General Assembly and outlined the business of the agenda for the December meeting. The minutes of the meeting were **agreed** as a correct record.

### 2. LGA Winter Review 2004 and Business Plan 2005

The President expressed his appreciation to Members for all their hard work during 2004 and acknowledged that with a general election likely in 2005, next year would be a busy time for local government. The Chairman then outlined the LGA business plan for 2005.

The focus of the Association's work for 2005 centred around delivery of the key pledges made in the LGA manifesto, launched in September. The manifesto sets out a bold new vision for local government. It called for a radical shake-up of the scope and role of local government across the country, and asked central government to commit once and for all to regional devolution.

The manifesto argued for a reduction in the number of quangos and for central and local government to be clear about the role of local councils. It called for a halving in the number of inspections. The Chairman acknowledged the achievements made by the Audit Commission, while conceding that this had not yet been reflected by some of the Government Spending Departments.

The Chairman congratulated the LGA on its work with the Local Government Finance Spending Review which was now under consideration by the Lyons Committee. The Chairman emphasised the critical role played by local councils in raising education standards and in improving health services. Since the last AGM in July, constructive meetings had taken place with the DfES and Charles Clarke over the Government's Five Year Education Plan, and with civil servants to discuss improvements to health reform.

The Chairman commented on the successful result of the Local Government Settlement and congratulated the work of the LGA, the 100 councils who supplied hard evidence and the Deputy Prime Minister for taking the case to the Treasury and Spending Departments. The Chairman

said the LGA needed to build a strong evidence case for the next three-year budgets.

On the matter of council tax, the Chairman stated that council tax increases over the last five years had been unsustainable. Local Government had for many years been delivering on annual efficiency savings and this would continue. He called for discussions with Government and Opposition parties to address this issue.

To conclude, the Chairman spoke of the need for all members to work together in raising the standing and perception of local government. One of the key strands of the business plan for 2005 would be the image project, and this would be vital in order to raise the satisfaction of residents, for morale and recruitment within councils and to add the weight of public support in arguing cases with Government.

The Chairman sought the endorsement of the Assembly for the LGA Winter Review and Business Plan for 2005. The LGA key objectives for 2005 were to secure delivery of its manifesto and in particular:

- secure adequate resources for all member authorities to exercise all their functions;
- win a firm government commitment to a fair reform of local taxation that enables councils to collect at least two-thirds of their revenue through locally-controlled taxes and charges;
- seize every opportunity to reinforce the community leadership role of councils, particularly in relation to education, community safety and the management of offenders, public health, young people and the local environment, and by making the most of local public service and local area agreements;
- reverse the loss of powers from councils to regional and national quangos and improve arrangements for holding regional bodies to account;
- ensure councils lead the creation of sustainable communities and develop workable proposals to enable local communities to benefit from development gains;
- help councils make significant progress in devolving power beyond the town hall;
- help put 'poor' and 'weak' councils on track to rise out of these categories by 2008;
- win a government commitment to halve spending on inspection by 2008;
- help councils to achieve and retain the benefits from greater efficiency;
- undertake a sustained campaign to improve public perceptions of local government and raise the profile of councils' roles.

The Chairman then commended the Winter Review and the Business Plan 2005 to the Assembly.

The General Assembly then **agreed** that:

- i. The LGA Winter Review 2004 and Business Plan 2005 be endorsed;
- ii. Boards be asked to develop a work programme to deliver the strategic objectives;
- iii. The LGA Executive should monitor progress and report back to the General Assembly in July and December 2005.

### **3. Budget and Subscriptions to the LGA 2005/06**

The Chairman moved the report on the budget and subscriptions for 2005/06. An amendment was moved by Cllr Ken Thornber CBE (Chairman of Resources Panel/Leader of Hampshire County Council), and duly seconded, that :

Paragraph 2 of the report be deleted and replaced with the following:

*The General Assembly approves the outline budget as originally recommended to and agreed by the Resources Panel on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2004 which contained a 0% subscription increase.*

A debate ensued, after which a ballot was taken. The amendment was subsequently declared lost, with 292 members voting for the amendment and 411 against.

The General Assembly then **approved**:

- i. the budget for 2005/06; and
- ii. the subscription increase of 1.4% for 2005/06.

#### **4. Future Relationships with Welsh Local Government**

The General Assembly agreed the Report and **approved**:

- i. the constitutional changes set out in Paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Report; and
- ii. that consideration of voting rights, subscription rights, subscription levels and political balance calculations be delegated to the LGA Executive, following further consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association and local authorities in Wales.

#### **5. Dates of Future Meetings**

The dates of future meetings were **noted** as Tuesday 5 July 2005 (at the Harrogate International Centre) and Monday 12 December 2005 (at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London).

#### **Speech by the Deputy Prime Minister**

The Chairman invited the Deputy Prime Minister to address the Assembly. The Rt Hon John Prescott gave a speech on sustainable communities and how areas of local government responsibility such as housing and planning were integral to the delivery of the vision for sustainable communities. He welcomed the Association taking on such an active role and pointed to examples of successes, such as being on track for reaching the decent homes standard by 2010. The Deputy Prime Minister also said that much work still needed to be done – that a culture change in the attitude towards planning was crucial – and referred to the Sustainable Communities Summit to be held early in 2005 to raise awareness of all these issues.

There followed a question and answer session with the Deputy Prime Minister.