International development in the Commonwealth: UK Local Government’s Role

Purpose of report

For information and comment.

**Summary**

This report provides: 1) an update on the LGA’s international development work, and 2) background to a presentation to the Board by Lucy Slack, Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).

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| **Recommendation**Members are invited to discuss how the LGA and its member councils can best contribute to the work of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. **Action**Officers to take actions as directed. |

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International development in the Commonwealth: UK Local Government’s Role

**Background**

1. Councils across the world face many of the same economic, social and environmental challenges that we do, such as shrinking budgets, ageing populations and infrastructure, a changing climate and youth unemployment etc.
2. There is growing international demand upon the skills and expertise within British local government and much of this comes from developing Commonwealth countries with similar administrative and governance arrangements.
3. Over many years the LGA has delivered a wide range of externally funded, peer-to-peer local government improvement programmes in a number of countries. Our programme work is based on the following principles;
	1. It is externally funded on a cost-recovery basis.
	2. It is peer-led and not outsourced to expensive consultants.
	3. It is demand-led and shaped by our development partners.

**New approaches to development cooperation**

1. While UK local government has much to offer, there are also opportunities to bring home learning and widen trade and investment cooperation too. More recently new themes of cooperation have evolved in international development. Councils in emerging economies are keen to secure both capacity-building support and forge economic trade links with English and Welsh towns and cities and the LGA is promoting local government’s leadership role in this area while also responding were it can to requests for support.

**Sector-led improvement in Africa**

1. In partnership with the pan-African LGA, United Cities & Local Governments Africa (UCLGA) the LGA has now successfully completed a pioneering project supporting local government peer reviews across five African countries. Peer reviews led by African local government experts from thirteen African countries, shadowed by British local government peers were delivered in Namibia, Ghana, Cameroon and Uganda, with a fifth entirely African-led peer review completed in the Ivory Coast.
2. The evaluation of the project emphasised the high calibre of the LGA’s training, the professional advice and support of the UK peers and new demand across African local government for further cooperation with UK on sector-led improvement. This programme has further projected UK local government onto the global stage and our sector continues to be held in high regard amongst development partners.

**Whitehall support for Commonwealth local government**

1. As part of the UK government’s development commitments DFID is providing £4.5 million in funding over three years (2013-2016) for CLGF to support local government in the Commonwealth, with a particular focus on south Asia and southern and western Africa. The programme operates on a number of levels, with a strong emphasis throughout on boosting economic growth.
2. At the local level, CLGF will be harnessing expertise to trial a range of local economic development interventions and create new practitioner networks between councils and LGAs. At the national and regional levels the programme aims to build the capacity of national associations, as well as engaging national Ministries and other stakeholders to further influence decentralisation policies.

**Support from UK councils and the LGA**

1. CLGF has been in conversation with the LGA about how UK local government, within the current fiscal climate can best contribute to its DFID-funded work in a way that ensures appropriate cost recovery for participating UK partners, value for money and mutual benefit where possible.
2. Previous to this 2013-2016 programme, for almost a decade CLGF ran a Good Practise Scheme which provided resources for two councils (one British, one from a developing country) to work on small, practical projects.
3. For example Cardiff City shared its experience of redeveloping Cardiff Bay with Vadodara Municipality in India as part of a project which focused on both riverside redevelopment, as well as poverty mapping. In Aurangabad, Birmingham City also provided managerial and technical support to in the creation of an integrated solid waste service.
4. In South Africa the London Borough of Lewisham worked with Ekurhuleni Metro to create a bespoke job brokerage scheme based on lessons learned from across south east London. And in Sierra Leone, Hull City helped the city of Freetown develop a new waste management strategy in response to new central government policies.
5. At the national association level, under the Good Practise scheme the LGA carried out a corporate peer review of the South African LGA which in large part created demand for our subsequent work at a pan-African level on peer challenge. In Pakistan the LGA has also supported the Local Councils Association of Punjab in developing local government structures.
6. This new programme is not however a continuation of the previous Good Practise Scheme, which was reliant on bilateral, council-to-council partnerships. CLGF has proposed a broad outline of what a new, more flexible form of UK support from the LGA and councils could look like under the following key areas;
	1. LGA peer-to-peer support to national associations in south Asia (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan) and West Africa (Sierra Leone) on building a membership base, strengthening organisational capacity and improving lobbying and advocacy.
	2. Consortia of councils or individuals sourced from LGA member councils providing technical skills and expertise to a small number of local economic development programmes being piloted in councils in western and southern Africa.
7. Costs incurred by the LGA or any councils participating in this programme will be covered by DFID. Lucy Slack’s (CLGF Deputy Secretary General) presentation will provide a more detailed overview of skills, themes and places where UK support could be provided.

Discussion

1. After the presentation by Lucy, Members are invited to discuss the opportunities presented, with reference to the following key issues:
	1. How the LGA and its membership, at a time of considerable financial pressure for councils, can continue supporting the work of CLGF in a way that minimises resource commitments for councils while maximising results on the ground.
	2. How British local government skills and expertise can be mobilised in more creative ways in order to ensure contributions are targeted, bespoke and adding real value in-country.
	3. How the LGA, or any councils participating in this programme, can create opportunities for mutual learning and, where appropriate, open new avenues for trade and investment.