

Minutes

Special Meeting of the General Assembly

23 January 2014 at 12.45pm

Local Government House

Present

132 authorities in full membership and 4 authorities in corporate membership were represented at the meeting.

1. LGA Governance Arrangements

Sir Merrick Cockell, Chairman of the LGA, welcomed representatives to the Special Meeting of the General Assembly, which had been called to consider proposed revisions to the LGA's governance arrangements, commended by the LGA Executive.

The Chairman stressed the importance of the LGA's governance arrangements in leading and shaping its work, on behalf of its membership, on a day to day basis. He emphasised that, as councils took tough decisions about funding and vital public services, the LGA's governance must reflect current realities within the sector. They must be able to equip the Association to support and represent its membership effectively and they must be affordable.

The Chairman outlined the five key principles on which the proposed changes were based:

Representing our membership

- Councillors across the country are engaged in the work of the LGA.
- The needs of individual councils are balanced with the needs of groupings of councils.

Structures

- City regions and counties have a central role in the LGA's decision making.
- Current governance arrangements are streamlined to focus on LGA priorities.

Ways of working

- Less reliance on formal 'committee meetings based around officer papers.
- Greater emphasis on engagement with the sector.

The role of Members

- Increased emphasis on the role of members as decision-makers, as representatives of local government and as advocates of the LGA.

Cost of Governance

- Overall reduction in direct, support and managerial costs.

The Chairman summarised the proposed changes and invited representatives to give their views.

Cllr Robert Light (Kirklees Council), referring to the practical implementation of the new arrangements, asked how the transition from the current to the new structures would be effected. In response, Michael Coughlin, Executive Director of Workforce, Leadership and Productivity, explained that the new Boards would overlap with the existing Boards for a period of time to allow effective transition of responsibilities. Induction arrangements would also be put in place for all members on the new Boards.

Cllr Neil Clark MBE (Rushcliffe District Council), commended the proposed formation of the City Regions and People & Places Boards. Cllr Clark expressed his satisfaction that there was potential for an increase in the influence of rural authorities as the People & Places Board would have decision making powers under the new arrangements. Cllr Clark said that he was also pleased that the annual Rural Conference would continue under the new proposals.

Cllr Evelyn Carpenter (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham) asked about the level of savings that would be achieved in the LGA's overall budget as a result of the streamlining of structures. The Chairman responded that the proposals would lead to a reduction of about 11% in the cost of running the LGA's governance arrangements.

In response to questions from **Cllr Clarence Barratt (London Borough of Havering) (Chair of the European & International Board)** and **Cllr Claire Hudson (Mendip District Council) (Vice-Chair of the Workforce Board)** Sir Merrick Cockell gave the LGA's assurances that mechanisms were being put in place to ensure that all priority streams of work, together with networks and external relationships, within their two policy areas, would be picked up in the new governance arrangements. In addition, the LGA Executive would take overarching responsibility for co-ordinating cross-Board policy.

Following the discussion, the Chairman commended the LGA Executive's proposals to the General Assembly. The General Assembly agreed the recommendation in the report by a clear show of hands (one vote against and one abstention)

Decision

*The General Assembly **agreed** the recommendations in the report and **approved** the revised Constitution.*

Actions

The City Regions and People & Places Boards to be established from February 2014.
The remaining changes to come into effect from September 2014.
A full review of the new arrangements to be carried out after 12 months.

2. The Chairman's Address

In addressing the General Assembly, Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell, Chairman, set out what he thought were the really big challenges facing local government over the next 16 months, leading up a new Government in May 2015.

Sir Merrick began by paying tribute to the magnificent response from local government to some of the most extreme and persistent bad weather in recent times. On behalf of the sector, Sir Merrick thanked council staff, contractors, volunteers and councillors, for a job well done, despite the risks and challenges thrown at them by the elements.

The Chairman moved on to set out what the LGA had been doing on behalf of member authorities through some very difficult times. He highlighted the results of LGA's perceptions survey, which indicated that we were continuing to improve our offer to authorities – 73% of whom speak positively of the LGA.

Sir Merrick outlined five key challenges for councils in the months to come. The first was the continuing shift in the funding of local government. 2015 would be a 'crunch' year for public services, with incredibly difficult decisions to be taken as a General Election draws near.

The second challenge was the significant housing shortage that the country faces. The LGA was rallying behind this issue and was continuing to lobby hard to lift the borrowing cap which would enable local government to build an additional 12,000 homes a year.

The third challenge was meeting the rising demands for health and social care from an ageing population. Sir Merrick expressed his pride at the work led by the LGA which had released billions of funding to be shared between health and social care as part of the Better Care Fund.

The fourth challenge was for the need to generate a meaningful national debate about the future of public services – what should public services in post-austerity Britain look like? Can we afford to deliver services and how should they be delivered? Local areas would need to debate and conclude what their priorities were and where the money would come from to pay for them.

The final challenge was the 2015 General Election. In the coming months the LGA would be working hard to articulate what the sector would want from the next government in order to transform local public services.

Concluding, Sir Merrick said that the changes to the LGA's governance agreed by the General Assembly today would enable the LGA to better meet the challenges ahead and show that as an organisation we can listen, learn and react to the changing nature of local government and public services.

The Chairman emphasised that the next few years would be demanding but the LGA, with its strong cross-party approach, would continue to speak loudly for the whole of the local government sector. In the run up to the Annual Conference in July, members would hear more about how we are and will be meeting these challenges. The LGA would continue to do its utmost for its members and those they represent.

The Chairman closed the Special Meeting of the General Assembly.

The 2014 Annual Meeting of the General Assembly will be held on 8 July 2014 in Bournemouth.