

European and International Programme Board – report from Cllr Dave Wilcox

1. This is my first feedback report as Chair of the new European and International Programme Board. So I thought that it would be helpful if we set out some of our big issues that we will be dealing with over the next year, as well of some of our current activities.

Money

2. With over 50% of legislation affecting councils originating in Brussels, we have developed a mantra that Brussels work is not just about funding but about the affect of EU policy on front-line services such as recycling and energy efficiency and on the cost of procurement. But in these hard times, we have had messages from councils that they didn't know about all the EU funds available to support council projects, so we have re-prioritised funding as a key LGA service. So what are we actually doing?
3. In September, we launched the EU funding tracker which allows councils to see the EU funds that they could apply for and how to get more information. It is a headline "simple-guide" service that councils have asked for - not a database of Euro-jargon. Alongside this, we have a new EU lobbying tracker highlighting key EU draft laws which could affect local councils, and what LGA is doing about it. This is what we have delivered and it is live on the LGA web (for LGA members only).
4. In early October, I met EU Commissioner Hahn, the man responsible for the reform of EU structural funds. The UK currently receives €7b in EU regional grants to support the regeneration of our towns and cities. This programme will be renegotiated over the next two years and we will be lobbying hard to ensure that the UK take is protected. We were keen that we saw the man-in-charge to give him our key messages about the needs for these resources to continue and how councils can use these funds wisely as part of place-based budgets. Of course it's not just the European Commission we need to win over. We also need to work with Whitehall to get our message across. Work is progressing, and we are working with our member authorities to lobby Government about the need for a simpler administration of EU funds in the UK.

Demand for UK Skills from Abroad

5. The demand upon the LGA to support local government in developing nations continues to grow. There is a real desire in Whitehall and in the EU to direct aid

to the front-line of delivery. One simple way forward would be for the UK and EU aid to be directed to local rather than central governments, as this is where basic services are delivered. Whilst trying to get this better local/central partnership through lobbying, we will be working with a range of aid agencies to ensure we raise development resources for our local government colleagues abroad. So what are we doing?

6. We have been meeting a range of aid agencies to seek a partnership so that we can work together and ensure that local government practitioners are able to provide support to our sister associations abroad. We have successfully bid for new funds, with partners in the private sector, to deliver an EU funded project to help strengthen local democracy in Kosovo. We will be looking to provide technical expertise and support for the Association of Kosovo Municipalities and its Commissions as well as to Kosovo's municipalities. At the moment, we are collating expert CVs from the sector to support this work.

Forming our Programme Board

7. The E&I Programme Board is going to work slightly differently from the other Boards at the LGA. It will be made up of political nominees, representatives from our LGA nominees to EU bodies and representatives from each of the domestic Programme Boards. This is to ensure that we mainstream work in both directions – that our domestic Boards get early-warning on EU funds and EU policy coming down the line and that our EU representatives are grounded in the lobbying needs of councils. As a result of this unique make-up, the Programme Board meets for the first time in November. So in my next update I hope to be able to give you more on our intended work programme.

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