

European and International Programme Board – report from Cllr Dave Wilcox (Chair)

1. This is my second update to LGA members since I was appointed Board Chairman. Although our first Board meeting does not take place until the end of November, there were some big milestones for the Board in October: the publication of the EU's budget, the announcement of the European Commission's work programme (Brussels' "Queen Speech"), a British appointment at the Council of Europe and continuing to raise cash for local government's international development work.
2. On 19 October, the EU published its long-awaited budget proposals, from which the UK's share of the EU structural fund budget will be determined. On the same day, the LGA brought together councils, the EU and Whitehall officials in Local Government House to ensure that councils continued to lead the debate on EU funding reform. Cllr David Sparks spoke to the 140 attendees on behalf of the LG Group. At our event, Government officials acknowledged a shift in UK policy (aligning their thinking to the LGA's view). They said that there would be continuation of structural funds in some form in the UK from 2013. This is a shift in UK policy as it had previously favoured a "nationalisation" of this part of the EU budget – a policy which only had UK support. The next few months are crucial as we need to ensure that the EU policy for the distribution of funds is tuned to socio-economic factors in the UK. This will form the basis for our lobbying of Whitehall and Brussels work for the next few months. This will now be an easier task as the UK Government is not isolated from the debate in Brussels.
3. At our event with the EU, councils and Government, Cllr Sparks launched a proposal on how future EU funds should be managed, "[EU funds and place-based budgets](#)" which advocates that EU funds should be stripped of red-tape and managed through place based budgets – ending the bureaucracy which puts so many councils off applying for money. We have already secured a hearing for this debate with the EU Regional Affairs commissioner (as reported in my last report).
4. In the wider international arena, we have continued to raise money to meet the demand for UK council support from local government in the developing world. The pan-African LGA has approached us to help develop peer reviews between LGAs in Africa. The aim is to bring some challenge to the political capacity of African local government and to help improve the management of the basic services that councils deliver across the continent. The LG Group has developed a proposal and with the Secretary General of the African LGA, we have met a range of aid organisations to seek running costs. As a result both

the UN and the government of Luxembourg are considering funding an eighteen month project.

5. At the last working day of October, the European Commission's work programme for 2011 was published. This is the legislative agenda in Brussels for 2011 – the EU "Queens Speech". As over 50% of regulation that affects councils starts in Brussels, the Board will be going through this in detail at our November meeting to look for the opportunities and burdens that are being proposed. Where legislation is likely to impact on particular themes (such as children's services), we will be providing advice to individual Boards in the next few weeks. Our on-the-day summary of the 2011 programme can be found at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=14649332> .
6. Finally, I am pleased to say that Cllr Keith Whitmore from Manchester City Council has become the first UK President of the Congress of the Council of Europe. We support a very small delegation to this body which does a huge amount of work to support the development and protection of local democracy across Europe. In other parts of the Europe, this work by local government leaders is seen as an important part of the wider foreign policy work of the nation. Sadly, in the UK, we sometimes battle for a seat at the FCO table despite the increasing demand for our support from emerging Eastern European democracies. Over the next few months, we will be making the point to foreign office ministers that international treaties in the modern world on such issues as climate change and environmental standards require local delivery so local government needs a seat at the table.

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