

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

1. Our new European and International Programme Board met for the first time in late November. We had a good first meeting where we analysed the European Commission work programme for 2011.
2. Whilst the regulatory state is being rolled back in the UK, we must not forget that the EU continues to have an enormous impact on local government's front-line. This year we are expecting numerous European legislative proposals which will affect local services and budgets. At the Board meeting, we decided upon our EU lobbying priorities for 2011 by testing the EU's long legislative agenda using some simple questions: does it matter to councils; how great is the regulatory burden; how much will it cost or what will it offer to a council. Thus our most important lobby will be the reform of the EU structural funds, where the UK's €7b share of the EU regeneration budget is at stake. Other key issues will be the working time directive, new regulations on energy efficiency and water management in public buildings (both of which are good environmental legislation, but likely to add to local financial liabilities) and continued regulation on waste and recycling. You can keep up to date with our lobbying work and make suggestions for our meetings with EU decision makers through our lobbying trackers on the LGA website.
3. Whilst we have prioritised lobbying for future EU funds, numerous councils have raised concerns about the current administration of EU funds, where RDAs have had a prominent role to date. Our view is that in the post-RDA world, we should promote a local approach where councils play a central role in the delivery of both the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). A number of councils have helped us with draft models of what might work in the future, including proposals from East Midlands, South Yorkshire and the West Midlands. We have been working with and lobbying DCLG and BIS on this issue from the outset. In December 2010, DCLG set out some initial proposals for managing the remaining ERDF funds (around £1.3 billion up to 2013) following the abolition of the RDAs. Generally speaking LGA messages are well reflected in proposals, which outline how councils can play a greater role in determining spending in their areas, but there is plenty to do to ensure this is the case before new arrangements are implemented in July 2011, and to establish more locally responsive arrangements for the future of EU funds.
4. I have noted in previous reports that demand for UK local government support from the developing world is increasing every month. We have to raise external resources to meet this demand and I am happy to report a major success. In

collaboration with the pan-African LGA, we have just been rewarded with significant resources to develop peer reviews between LGAs in Africa to help improve good local governance and leadership. Our sister LGAs in Africa always inform me that they need support from fellow practitioners rather than expensive consultants. We are currently developing how we deliver this work and I will be writing to members about how councillors can get involved in this exciting programme.

5. If we ever needed a reminder of how EU laws impact on councils, you only need to look at the Localism Bill which was published just before Christmas. It proposes an EU fines clause, which would enable a Secretary of State to pass any EU fines for the non-implementation of EU laws to local government, where it can prove an authority has defaulted. The LGA is working with UK parliamentarians to counter this proposal.
6. As councils face the new financial year, we may well seek lessons from outside the UK to get greater value from our smaller budgets. In order to support this learning, can I recommend the website and conference of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (www.clgc2011.org). Commonwealth local government leaders and ministers will be meeting in Cardiff in March to share learning and experience from many local perspective. Given our common history and the Government's emphasis on the Commonwealth, I wish the conference success and hope that it can provide some learning to UK public service reform.

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