

European and International Programme Board – Report from Cllr Dave Wilcox (Chairman)

1. One of the benefits of being the Chair of the European and international Programme Board is that our lobbying work takes place on a UK wide basis. In late January, I chaired our annual EU/UK local government summit in Brussels where the political leads from the four UK LGAs meet with leading MEPs, UK diplomats and European Commission officials to highlight the most important EU legislative proposals for councils. The benefit of the joint approach is that we can demonstrate both cross-party and cross-UK concern on issues such as the future of Britain's £7b share of EU structural funds. We aim to ensure that our MEPs, our diplomats and the Commission representatives have our key concerns on their inner radar.
2. With cross party support from the LGA, we raised two big issues with the Brussels decision-makers.
3. Firstly, we wanted them to understand that in crafting new regulations and laws in Brussels, councils' ability to fund delivery of new regulation (such as energy efficiency) has to be the core consideration. For example, many councils have been telling us that one of the biggest barriers to delivering savings is the cumbersome EU procurement rules. The Commission has heard this plea from this LGA and our sister organisations across Europe. A review has now been initiated and we will be seeking a slashing of red tape. Secondly, we set out some principles about the future of EU funds and the need for councils to drive deliver in the post-regional age. This was understood in Brussels and we will be working with the Commission over the coming months to look at the detail.
4. Whilst in Brussels, I was asked to comment on the review of EU international development policy, where the European Commission envisage a significant role for local government to support the delivery of aid projects across the world. They understand that the delivery of local projects needs the support of practitioners rather than consultants. I will be writing to the Commission to encourage them in this work and to set out the excellent record of councils in supporting developing local government across the world. It is important to note that in much of Europe the delivery of aid projects by councils is part of the "normal" local/central settlement.
5. Our day-to-day work to support sister associations continues. This month, we ran a workshop with leaders from across Pakistani local government to support democratically elected local government. This work is being funded by DFID through the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) Good Practice Scheme and builds on past work with newly created local government associations Pakistan.

6. Our Board met in Nottingham in January. As a result, we were able to invite councils from across the East Midlands to the meeting to comment and challenge our work programme. About forty councillors from across the region attended our meeting. We set out our top five lobbying priorities and asked for a real challenge on whether our priorities and our lobbying goals resonated with their own front-line priorities. I was pleased that whilst we had a real challenge on tactics and detail, our priorities have survived intact. As mentioned above, the “burden” of the EU procurement regime stimulated most debate and we will be renewing our work in this area.
7. One issue where we will be developing new work as a result of the meeting will be to get some real evidence on the difficulties faced by councils in delivering local “match money” to support EU funds. We need to have real evidence to present to Brussels and Whitehall and I would be pleased to hear any concerns that you have.

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