

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

1. Our Board met in Exeter on 2 June and I am very grateful to both SW Councils and Devon County Council for supporting us there. As well as holding our Board meeting, we ran a seminar on our EU lobbying work to check that it was relevant to the front-line work of councils. About 15 councils attended the seminar. There was an excellent discussion and a clear agreement that the work to change EU procurement rules was a top priority.

Procurement

2. EU procurement rules govern how councils purchase supplies and services. The current legislation is too detailed and complex and councils spend a huge amount of resources following these EU rules, adding costs which do not meet our communities' needs. We are campaigning for simpler procedures. We want to raise the thresholds above which the rules apply; a greater ability to negotiate with suppliers; exclusions for contracts between public bodies; reduce challenges from failed bidders; a flexible approach towards green and socially responsible procurement; and greater sharing of expertise across the EU.

Local Government Finance

3. In 2012 the EU may propose a single EU-wide system for the VAT treatment of public bodies. This may require changes in how the system works in the UK, which may be problematic for services where the council delivers in the same market as the private sector (car parks, crèches, leisure centres, letting business units etc). Our lobbying aims to ensure that councils in the UK can continue be fully reimbursed for all types of VAT they spend. Any changes must meet our objectives to reduce administrative burdens on local authorities; promote efficient use of public resources; and provide financial flexibilities at the local level.

Pan-African peer review

4. I have written in past reports about our pan-African peer review project with United Cities & Local Government Africa (the pan-African LGA) which is being funded by the Foreign Ministry of Luxembourg. Despite some delays we are now close to delivery. The project will be progressed in two stages: firstly, initial training and capacity-building delivered to the UCLGA Secretariat on facilitating and supporting peer learning; and secondly, delivery of five peer reviews in each of UCLGA's regions with each review team being an equal mix of African and UK peers. The selection process for UK member peers will be the same as for current UK peer reviews. As EIPB Chair I will also play an active role in the selection process.

Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)

5. I recently met with the Secretary-General of the CLGF to emphasise that the LG Group's international work is continuing with strong political support. At a time when some councils are having to wind things up as funding ends, we need to avoid the impression that the UK is 'pulling up the drawbridge in difficult times'. As our CLGF-funded projects come to an end later this year I am ensuring that we explore ways in which further funding can be leveraged through a renewal of DFID resources or new partnerships with donors.

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