

Chief Executive's Monthly Report – June 2011

Purpose of report

For discussion

Summary

This report highlights the LG Group's main achievements on behalf of local authorities during June and reports against the priorities of the LG Group Programme Boards and cross-cutting priorities.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note the report

Action

Group Offices and communications officers to disseminate the report and its contents amongst our membership

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Summary

1. This report highlights the LG Group's main achievements on behalf of local authorities during June and reports against the priorities of the LG Group Programme Boards and cross-cutting priorities.

Children and Young People

2. The **Education Bill** has moved into its Committee Stage in the House of Lords. The LG Group briefed Peers on the concerns of councils regarding their role in the overall provision of local education institutions. Baroness Ritchie (Chair of the Children and Young People Board) has spoken in Committee about the need to maintain strong, productive relationships between councils and local schools. Baroness Ritchie has also tabled an amendment to the Bill removing requirements for councils to report to the Department for Education on their proposals for establishing new schools and seek Departmental approval for considering alternative models to academies.
3. The Department for Education is funding a sector led approach to improvement for children's services, which is overseen by the **Children's Improvement Board (CIB)**. The CIB is a partnership, set up by the LG Group, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, SOLACE and the Department for Education (DfE), which will collectively set direction and have responsibility for the overall delivery of the programme. This includes preventing failure at all points in the improvement cycle where there are identified risks and weaknesses, through a robust system of challenge and improvement support.
4. All councils with responsibility for **children's services** were invited to come forward to be 'Early Adopters' of the system and/or to be early peer challengers. There was an excellent response with 2 regions, 1 improvement cluster and a significant number of individual councils are now signed up. A successful launch event for these councils was held on 29 June.
5. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has been commissioned to look at the various delivery models of the developing **sector-led peer challenge and support** programme in order to support its further development. The research will explore this with the early adopter local authorities, and report to the CIB to feed into further developments of sustainable arrangements for sector-led improvement and support by April 2012.
6. **Local freedom or central control II – The council strategic role in education** was launched at the LG Group Annual Conference on 30 June. It

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sets out a vision for a more strategic role for councils in education, supported by case studies demonstrating the initiatives that are already being taken by councils. It also begins to identify the types of support that councils will need to help them fulfil their new role in education.

7. The LG Group is working with DfE and BIS on a **Careers Guidance Transition Summit** on 15 July in London, designed for local authorities to share information with one another about how best adapt to their changing role in careers guidance. Although the formal statutory powers of councils will not change under the current Education Bill, councils will no longer be responsible for providing universal careers advice to all young people through Connexions. Instead, DfE has made it clear in guidance that they will have a particular role in supporting vulnerable young people to obtain the information, advice and guidance that they need. Responsibility for the universal provision of careers guidance passes to schools from September 2012.

Community Wellbeing

8. The LG Group has given evidence to the re-formed **Health and Social Care Public Bill Committee**. Cllr Gareth Barnard (Vice-Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board) and Andrew Cozens (Strategic Adviser for Health and Social Care) highlighted the major gains secured by the LG Group for local government in relation to the powers of Health and Wellbeing Boards, a greater focus on place and stronger requirements for integration. However, it was made clear to MPs that more needed to be done to make the legislation fit for purpose - particularly where the Bill concentrates too much on health outcomes and not enough on wellbeing outcomes.
9. June saw the publication of the **NHS Future Forum** recommendations to Government on how to improve the Health and Social Care Bill, and the Government revisions to the Bill in response. The Future Forum, on which the LG Group is represented by Cllr David Rogers (Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board), pressed for a greater role for local government in the new architecture for health and took up a number of the LG Group proposals including: for Health and Wellbeing Boards to 'sign off' commissioning plans; for clinical commissioning groups to be coterminous with local authorities; and for greater emphasis on integration between health and local authority services and commissioning plans. The revised clauses go a significant way to addressing our concerns, though we will continue to press for further changes to the Bill.
10. **Health and social care** issues featured prominently in the programme for the LG Group Annual Conference in Birmingham. Cllr David Rogers chaired several workshop sessions, addressed a fringe meeting on the health reforms and was a panel member in the plenary session addressed by the Secretary of State for Health on Reforming Health and Social Care to Improve Outcomes.

Culture, Tourism and Sport

11. Following a steer from Programme Board Members, officers have successfully negotiated a **new improvement offer for local culture and sport** in partnership with DCMS, Sport England, Arts Council, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and English Heritage. Drawing upon *Taking the Lead*, the offer has sector-led improvement at its heart, and will focus on modernising libraries, supporting strong member leadership on sport and public health, sharing learning on commissioning and engaging the civic society sector and supporting professional development. The LG Group is working with DCMS and the culture and sport public bodies to develop a detailed project plan over the summer with a view to launching the new offer in September.
12. With just over one year to go until the UK hosts the **2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games**, officers have agreed with the London Organising Committee a number of high profile joint activities to raise awareness about the opportunities for councils across the country to facilitate community action in the run-up to and during the Games. Officers have also launched a new advisory group to give senior council officers the opportunity to raise key concerns with the London Organising Committee and to inform the LG Group's lobbying and support offer to councils.
13. Officers have met with officials from **Race Online**, the national campaign to help millions of people get on line by 2012 chaired by Martha Lane Fox, to agree a joint work programme to support councils' digital inclusion work as the campaign moves into legacy planning. The LG Group will work with Race Online to share learning from cutting edge councils, seek to broker national agreements with commercial partners to supply affordable hardware, and help councils to unlock the inter-connections with issues such as the roll out of superfast broadband infrastructure which will provide wider opportunities to promote digital inclusion.
14. To coincide with the music festival season officers have undertaken proactive media work to highlight councils' role in **bringing economic benefits to local areas by supporting music festivals**. The summer of live music will boost local economies by around £550 million. From highways, to trading standards, planning and licensing, councils across the country have been working behind the scenes with festival organisers for months to help guarantee huge outdoor events this summer run smoothly.
15. Further to a discussion at the Programme Board, **officers have secured local government representation** on a new group being set up to oversee the transfer of support and leadership for the UK's archive sector from MLA to The National Archives in April 2012. Over 130 local authorities provide archive services, local studies and local history libraries.

Environment and Housing

16. Cllr Richard Kemp (Vice-Chairman of the LGA) gave evidence to the **Environmental Audit Select Committee** on 8 June for their inquiry into air quality. Cllr Kemp raised councils concerns that it was not necessarily EU regulations on air quality that were of concerns to councils, but the possibility that the Localism Bill would create a legal nightmare by introducing a system by which councils were fined for something that was not only their responsibility.
17. Defra published its response to the **waste review** on the 14 June. The review is in general positive for councils, particularly with it re-emphasising that frequency of collection is a decision that should be taken by elected members at the local level. Inclusion of this text followed sustained lobbying from the LG Group. Elsewhere we expect Defra to discuss in greater detail issues that were raised in the review, such as banning certain materials from landfill, with the LG Group and we will provide further information on these discussions in due course.
18. Following the publication of the **Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP)**, the LG Group submitted a response to a call for initial thoughts. The LG Group welcomed the positive ambition of the NEWP and its stated intention not to place new burdens upon local authorities. However LG Group feel the white paper needs to be clearer about how some of its proposals will link to proposed planning reforms within the Localism Bill. It is essential that the forthcoming National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes the Government's national environmental priorities absolutely clear, so this can be accurately factored into local and community-led plan-making.

Workforce

19. Lead members of the Workforce Programme Board contributed to the debate on **top pay** when they met with Mr Will Hutton on the 5 July. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the proposals made in the final report of his review of fairness in public sector pay. Members took the opportunity to stress that while transparency and fairness in top pay are of course important, any decisions regarding pay levels should be left to local employers, informed by relevant and robust comparative pay information.
20. Ahead of recent **industrial action by school teachers** the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST) produced guidance for local authorities. This guidance is available in downloadable format from LG Employers' website. The guidance is generic and applies to nearly all instances of industrial action by teachers. While it seeks to cover the more 'teacher specific' issues, it includes a link to the 'comprehensive guide to industrial action' also available on LG Employers' website.

21. In response to **the Government's consultation on changes to performance management and capability arrangements for teachers**, NEOST has welcomed the Secretary of State's proposal to simplify the performance management arrangements for teachers, and is broadly supportive of the specific proposals set out in the consultation document. In particular NEOST welcomes the introduction of a clearer relationship between performance management and capability procedures to address under-performance in a timelier manner. The full response to the consultation is available in downloadable format on LG Employers' website.
22. LG Group officials have met informally with CLG civil servants to discuss **urgent pension issues** and subsequently a letter has been sent to the Secretary of State that sets out our thoughts on alternatives to an increase in employee contributions that could be considered in order to deliver the Government's aims. The letter has been copied to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister for the Cabinet Office for information. We await a decision.

Improvement

23. The draft **Procurement and Capital Assets 'Big Wins Strategy'** identifies 15 'big wins' across a range of areas (corporate services, children's services, environment etc.). The strategy is the culmination of the phase 1 of the Local Productivity Programme and the 'big wins' will be taken forward as part of phase 2 of the programme over the coming year.
24. The LG Group response to the **CLG consultation on the future of local public audit reflects** comments from member councils and the views of the Improvement Board. We reject the idea of creating statutory independent audit committees as unnecessary and impracticable and argue that the future scope of audit should be focussed on the accuracy of the accounts and probity. We also call for greater clarity around the timetable for allowing councils to appoint their own auditors.
25. Following high level discussions between Chief Executives and Departmental Directors, we are in the process of agreeing a set of principles with Government that will guide how Departments review their data requirements. The review is intended to lead to the publication of a reduced **single data list** in the autumn with a reduced burden on councils. The key principle is that data requirements should broadly follow accountability structures, where data is required the reasons for collection must be transparent and only the minimum amount collected to enable the purposes to be fulfilled.
26. Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) has published a ten point **Call to Action** from its Conference on 2 June, developed through a series of interactive discussions

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and ranked according to votes by the delegates, which is now available on the CfPS website. More news about other new publications and a series of free events for scrutiny councillors on ageing issues can be found in CfPS's most recent e-newsletter, which can be sent direct to any councillor free by registering via the website.

27. Applications have opened for this year's **Next Generation** – the LG Group's political leadership programme for ambitious Councillors. It is developed within party tradition and delivered with the support of the LG Political Group offices. The different party streams will commence in Autumn 2011.
28. The **City Leader's programme** started this month with an event for Labour (Group) Leaders in the authorities that are proposed to introduce elected mayors. The event was co-hosted by the LG Labour Group and LGiU who provided some original research.
29. We have worked with the Citizens Advice Service to publish a **Councillors Guide to Citizens Advice** (available online). The guide informs councillors of the range of services available from CAS and how the CAS can help them in their case work.
30. A series of free **Taking the Lead roadshows** around the country will take place in July to promote the LG Group's integrated offer around Self regulation, Knowledge Hub and LG Inform, and Productivity. These events will be aimed at senior members and directors – with a further series of events aimed specifically at Leaders and Chief Executives in the Autumn.

Economy and Transport

31. Officers have been working with the British Chambers of Commerce and the 157 Group of colleges on a report that looks at current evidence of how colleges, Chambers and local authorities view the **role of LEPs in local skills provision** and what is needed for local arrangements to work well. It reviews the sources of labour market intelligence available to LEPs and highlights some examples of where LEPs are working with skills providers to meet local skills needs. BIS and Skills Funding Agency officials have welcomed the project and shown an interest in the findings, with a possibility of funding a next stage. The final report was published (by 157 Group) on Monday 4 July. An Executive Summary has been posted on the 'Adult Learning' page of the LG Group website.
32. Officers have been working with the Centre for Social Justice on a report that will make the case for local decision-making about the delivery of support for people making claims for **universal credit**. It will include a call to action to the sector to bring forward proposals for innovative trials of support during the transition period 2013-17 when the existing working age benefits system will be

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phased out and replaced with universal credit. A draft of the report will be circulated to members in July.

33. The Prime Minister has commissioned Mary Portas, a leading retail marketing consultant, to undertake a review into the **future of the High Street**. The review reports in the autumn, and will recommend actions central and local government can take to create vibrant town centres. Alongside this, Government plans to develop a single portal linking to advice, guidance and best practice for councils and their partners. The LG Group will be responding to the review, and as part of this want to help stimulate further debate on the issue within the sector and will establish a specific Communities of Practice to support this. LG Group engagement with the review will look to champion the positive activity council's undertake to create retail demand and support businesses and places develop, and make recommendations for what Government can do to aid local authority efforts.
34. The LG Group supported 5 councils: Birmingham, Bradford, Lewisham, South Tyneside and Swindon in working closely with DWP and Jobcentre Plus in testing new approaches to **tackling worklessness**. LG Group acted as a sounding board and signposting parallel developments and experience in other parts of the country. These 'co-design' pilots have adopted customer centre approaches to achieving better outcomes at less cost - in particular exploring improved pathways for harder-to-help customers, and developed more coordinated contributions with wraparound services (e.g. health, housing etc). The work of the councils involved is featured in "DWP Worklessness Co-design - Final report".
35. Officers met with senior DWP officials to discuss the launch of the **Work Programme** and the development of productive partnerships between prime contractors and local government. It was agreed that we should take stock towards the end of the year on how relationships are developing between contractors, councils and local enterprise partnerships. The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion have indicated that they would like to partner with the LG Group on a follow-up to this January's successful event bringing contractors, local government and other partners together to discuss employment support.
36. The Children and Young People's Board discussed a possible programme of work on youth unemployment at their last board meeting, building on the **Hidden Talents** work on the same issue under the last administration (in 2009) and suggested that the next step would be a joint meeting between lead members of the CYP and Economy and Transport Boards. Officers are working on a paper for that meeting which will explore the possible outcomes from such a programme of work.
37. The Department for Transport's **Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme** has published some early wins and successes that enable

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councils to save money and be more innovative through collaboration. These can be found at www.dft.gov.uk/hmep The programme governance has a significant local government presence and the LG Group is supporting the work by communicating emerging good practice through its communication channels as well as making links to the Group's Productivity programme.

38. Officers have been discussing the extension of the pilot work between the **Post Office Limited**, National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and Sheffield City Council to a number of other local areas with different local characteristics. This was announced in Paula Vennell's (Managing Director - Post Office Limited) letter to council chief executives in the run up to the LG Group Conference.

Safer and Stronger Communities

39. LG Group Officers met the Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister for Home Affairs and Justice in June to discuss **policing and justice issues**. The meeting focused on the provisions in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill and how the public could be encouraged to take a more active role in challenging criminal behaviour. The Prime Minister's Senior Adviser was also keen to meet with the Chair and the Safer and Stronger Communities Board at their November meeting.
40. The **Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill** has seen a substantial package of amendments put forward by the Government following consistent lobbying by the LG Group. Peers have sought to raise the concerns of councils throughout the passage of the Bill and the Government has now strengthened the role of Police and Crime Panels, of which the vast majority of members will be local councillors, so that their thresholds for vetoing Police and Crime Commissioner proposals has been reduced and their powers to "call in" the local chief constable increased. Other government amendments look to allow police and crime commissioners to decide on the number of co-opted members provided the panel has no more than 20 members, and hold confirmation hearings for the commissioner's choice of deputy as well as chief executive and chief finance officer. The Group will continue to lobby for additional changes so panels provide a better check and balance on commissioners by giving them a veto over the commissioner's budget and ensuring any deputy commissioners are drawn from councillors.
41. Officers have also continued to participate in the checks and balances transition project established by the Home Office to ensure a smooth **transition to police and crime commissioners**. This project looks at the checks and balances on police and crime commissioners and has been looking at which councillors will serve on police and crime panels as the Home Office has been concerned at potential conflicts of interest if council leaders or cabinet members serve on the panels. As directly elected mayors will automatically serve on the panels in their force areas officers have sought to persuade the Home Office

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that decisions about which councillors sit on the panels should be left to local government.

42. As part of this transition work meetings have also been held with the Metropolitan Police Authority around future **support at a national level for police and crime commissioners**, and with the Local Government Ombudsman about complaints following the introduction of police and crime commissioners.

European and International

43. The EU has published its **EU Budget proposals** on 29 June, which allocate a similar amount of finance to the structural funds at EU level. LG Group officers met with the European Parliament REGI Committee and House of Lords EU Committee to discuss the future of the structural funds after 2013 - the current funds deliver over £8 billion in economic and skills development projects. The session led to an agreement for all partners at the session to pursue well-resourced structural fund programmes that are responsive to the needs of local communities. The European Parliament has the power of co-decision on this matter in the EU, and therefore holds significant influence. LG Group engagement with the Committee will continue as the legislation passes through the EU institutions.
44. At the same time as we gear up to lobby for access to EU funding, we are intensifying our current campaign to ward off Government plans to pass-on **EU fines** to local councils. The Localism Bill was debated in the House of Lords and the LG Group worked with peers to table a number of amendments to either delete or dilute these clauses. Peers withdrew the amendments when they got an acknowledgement from Government that the current drafting needed change and that the issues raised by stakeholders would be addressed before the report stage.
45. The EU has just published plans for new rules on **energy efficiency**. The new rules, if implemented, would oblige local councils to renovate at least 3% of its buildings every year to achieve energy efficiencies, whilst at the same time obliging procurement policies to favour most energy-efficient products, possibly ahead of other criteria. The LG Group will join other stakeholders to scrutinise the proposals and consider possible improvements or amendments.

Local Government Finance

46. Baroness Eaton, Cllr David Shakespeare, Cllr David Sparks and Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson met with the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation, on 22 June to discuss the **Local Government Resource**

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Review, community budgets and the Localism Bill. They gave the Secretary of State a copy of the LG Group's 10-point plan for business rate reform.

47. The **Relocalisation of Business Rates** was also highlighted as a desirable outcome by Rt Hon Nick Clegg, Rt Hon Ed Milliband and Rt Hon Eric Pickles at the LG Group conference. We also produced a video that brings together the views of leading figures on funding for local government and this was showed at conference. The 10-point plan and video can be found at this link: <http://www.local.gov.uk/local-government-finance> Our main objective is to ensure that this Summer the Government conduct a genuinely localist review of local government resources that reinvigorates local democracy and, importantly, also ensures fairness.
48. On 20 June, Local Government Minister Bob Neill laid a Written Ministerial Statement before the House reaffirming the Government's commitment to the **New Burdens Doctrine**, namely that all new burdens on local authorities must be properly assessed and fully funded by the relevant department. DCLG has also issued a step-by-step guide to government departments on assessing and funding new burdens on local authorities. The guidance specifically sets out that departments are to discuss their cost estimates with the LG Group and seek independent corroboration of their figures, which we have long called for.

Decentralisation and Localism

49. The LG Group continues to liaise with Peers on the **Localism Bill** as it passes through the House of Lords. During its Committee Stage Peers have debated amendments to the legislation (supported by the LG Group) covering the Government's proposals to impose fines from the EU on councils. Further intensive lobbying led to the Government's pledge to scrap provisions for "shadow mayors" and plans to force an elected mayor to merge functions with the chief executive
50. The Local Government Group Conference saw the launch of '**Doing Something Big: building a better society together**'. This report by the Local Government Group's cross-party **Big Society Task Force** brings together examples from across the country to demonstrate that councils are already at the forefront of delivering the Government's 'Big Society' vision, and identifies nine themes designed to assist councils to develop their own responses to local issues. It highlights that local democracy is fundamental to developing stronger, more empowered and resilient communities and encourages councillors to be leaders of change in their place. The report also calls on central government to help councils build upon their work with charities and the voluntary sector by scrapping the red tape and Whitehall interference that currently holds back innovation. The report makes a series of parallel offers to government of how the LG Group will support these changes, including work with community budgets areas, the community organisers initiative and third sector

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commissioning support. It also provides another opportunity for the LG Group to lobby for changes to the community right to buy and neighbourhood planning provisions of the Localism Bill to remove excessive central prescription.

51. The Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's address to the LG Group Conference saw two key announcements on the extension of **Community Budgets**. Clegg recognised that "Localism cannot work without giving local authorities greater control over money" before announcing a wider roll out of community budgets for families with complex needs. This year around fifty more authorities will get Community Budgets, with at least a further sixty participating in 2012-13, helping up to 120,000 families facing real social challenges. Clegg went on to announce four further pilots; two areas will be selected to help co-design neighbourhood level Community Budgets, giving residents the opportunity to say what services they want, how they should work and whether they want to run them; and two areas will be selected to help co-design a Community Budget bringing all funding on local public services from the area into a single pot to test how to create the right local financial set up to deliver better services that people want. The LG Group have welcomed the building momentum behind the community budgets approach, following work by the LG Group and existing Community Budget places to influence Government policy in this area. However we will continue to press for much greater buy-in from all Government departments.
52. Following the LGA's role as the 'selector' for proposals submitted under round one of the **Sustainable Communities Act**, the LG Group has welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation on proposed regulations governing the future relationship between the Secretary of State and the selector. We used our learning and good practice from round one to comment on the proposals for future arrangements under the Act, showing support for proposals to reduce central prescription and improve transparency in the Secretary of State's decision-making powers. The LG Group also reiterated our interest in building on our successful experience as the selector and suggested in future that the statutory selector role should be discharged by a single organisation. Under this model the selector would welcome the opportunity to be supported by an advisory panel made up of a number of representatives from the voluntary and community sector, Local Works, parish and town councils, rural and urban interests, business interests and representatives from hard to reach groups and others to provide advice to the selector on proposals that should be escalated.
53. The LG Group has also offered a response to CLG's consultation on new draft **Best Value** statutory guidance, which seeks to set out "reasonable expectations of the way best value authorities should work with voluntary and community groups when facing difficult funding decisions". We used examples from the local government sector to show that councils are already successfully collaborating with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), and highlighted that many of the principles being imposed by this guidance reflect existing good

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practice developed by the two sectors. We raised concerns about attempting to over-engineer relationships between councils and the VCS through national statutory guidance rather than allowing these to be shaped at a local level. Our response also highlighted that 'continuous improvement' under the duty of best value can only be secured through councils having the flexibility to respond confidently and effectively to the current climate of significantly reduced resources, and urged the Government to reconsider the use of guidance to micro-manage the delivery of council duties in a localist era.

LG Group Business

54. The last review of **members' remuneration** was carried out in 2009 and came into effect on 1 September 2009. It included:
 - 54.1 The introduction of role descriptions for all members on the LG Group's boards and panels
 - 54.2 Revisions to the scheme of allowances
 - 54.3 The extension of the scheme to cover all LG Group governance structures

55. From 1 September 2010, new governance arrangements were introduced across the LG Group. On 17 March 2011, the LG Group Executive invited Lord Best to reconvene the **Independent Remuneration Panel** to review the Scheme of Members' Allowances and report back to the Group Executive. The Panel was chaired by Lord Best and comprised Dame Mavis McDonald (former Permanent Secretary at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), Ted Cantele CBE (Professor of the Institute of Community Cohesion and former Chief Executive of Nottingham City Council and of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities), and Craig Baker (Partner and Managing Director, the Boston Consulting Group). The Panel presented their conclusions and recommendations to the LG Group Executive on 14 July 2011.

56. The final stages of the **Local Government Challenge** took place at the LG Group Annual Conference in June. The final four contestants took part in a 'Question Time' style plenary session and presented their proposals on how they would use the prize of the Bruce Lockhart Scholarship if they won the competition. Paul Knight, a senior policy officer at South Cambridgeshire District Council, was announced as the winner by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government during the final session of the Conference. Applications are now open for host authorities and contestants for the Local Government Challenge 2012. Further details available at www.local.gov.uk/lgchallenge.

Political Group updates

Conservative Group

57. Over 300 Conservative councillors attended the LG Group Conference in Birmingham which saw a number of high-profile Conservative speakers including the Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Secretary of State for Health and the Minister for Decentralisation.
58. At the Group AGM, Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell was confirmed as the Conservative Group nomination for LGA Chairman, Cllr Gary Porter as the new group leader and Cllr Andrew Lewer as the new Deputy Group Leader.
59. Following the conference our immediate focus is now on confirming our appointments to LGA Boards and Panels for 2011-2012.

Liberal Democrat Group

60. The LGA Liberal Democrat Group held their annual Local Government Conference in Bristol on 17/18 June, attended by 170 councillors from around the country. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg attended for the duration of Saturday's programme, kicking off with a plenary speech and Q&A before holding a series of smaller meetings with Liberal Democrat councillors throughout the remainder of the day.
61. Nick Clegg also addressed the LG Group Annual Conference in Birmingham, 28 June - 30 June announcing important changes afoot for business rates. The Liberal Democrat Group held it's AGM during the LG Group annual conference too. Here Liberal Democrat Group Leaders approved changes to the group structure, in particular the creation of a new Deputy Leader post within the Group, which will focus on policy development. After these changes had been agreed the office officially opened nominations for the group elections, sending an email out to all Liberal Democrat councillors in LG Group member authorities inviting nominations. Nominations will close on 12 July and, after an all member ballot, results will be announced on 19 August.
62. At Liberal Democrat meetings during the LG Group conference councillors also discussed the Future of Local Government with CLG minister, Andrew Stunell MP and looked specifically at setting council budgets next year. A group dinner during conference was an opportunity for people to pay tribute to Richard Kemp, the Liberal Democrat out-going Leader, with Lord (Mike) Storey as guest speaker.

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63. Outside of the conferences the Liberal Democrat group has held a number of meetings with ministers and other parliamentarians on issues including school funding, various aspects of the localism bill, and local government finance.

Labour Group

64. The Labour Group had a successful week at LG Group Conference in Birmingham. Highlights included:
- 64.1 Ed Miliband's speech to the main plenary session of Conference, arguing that "Britain is still far too centralised as a country".
 - 64.2 An event on local election campaigning with Cllr Nick Forbes, new Leader of Newcastle and Cllr David Ellesmere, new Leader of Ipswich.
 - 64.3 Shadow Communities and Local Government Secretary Caroline Flint MP was at the conference all week and held an open surgery with councillors on the Labour Group stand, as well as speaking at the Group AGM.
 - 64.4 Shadow Health Secretary John Healey MP and Cllr Linda Thomas (Bolton), Labour Lead on the Community Wellbeing Board spoke at a meeting for Labour councillors on the NHS reforms, local authorities' new responsibilities for public health and the social care challenge.
 - 64.5 The LG Labour Group has launched its Annual Report and Review 2010-11, which has been sent to every Labour councillor with First magazine and can be downloaded from our website.
65. Outside of the conference, other activity included:
- 65.1 Cllr David Sparks held meetings with Cllr Simon Blackburn, the new leader of Blackpool, and with the newly installed cabinet of Hyndburn district council. He also attended the WLGA annual conference in Swansea on 23 June.
 - 65.2 Alongside other members of the LGA Labour Group including Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry), Cllr Ruth Cadbury (Hounslow), Cllr Peter Box (Wakefield), Cllr Roger Lawrence (Wolverhampton) and Cllr Simon Henig (Durham), David attended the Labour Party's National Policy Forum in Wrexham on 25 June. The Labour Group Office compiled and drafted a response to the Party's 'Refounding Labour' consultation process, which was discussed at the Forum.
 - 65.3 Cllr David Sparks also had meetings with Labour Party leader Ed Miliband MP, and took part in the short listing process for the new General Secretary of the Labour Party.
 - 65.4 Cllr Dave Wilcox (Derbyshire), Chair of the European & International, led a delegation of Labour councillors from Thurrock, Nottingham and

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Lambeth to Malmo in Sweden look into effective city leadership and how the Swedish Social Democrats have tackled the threat of the extreme right.

65.5 In conjunction with Local Leadership and the LGiU, the Labour Group organised a 24-hour event in Leeds for the eleven Labour council/group leaders affected by the Government's legislation to impose Mayors on English cities.

Independent Group

66. A lively, well subscribed group election process saw Councillor Marianne Overton, Lincolnshire CC and North Kesteven DC elected as Leader of the Group. Councillor Apu Bagchi, Bedford Council was elected Deputy Leader and Councillor Bob Dutton, Wrexham Council, elected Treasurer.
67. Independent Group events at the Local Government Group Conference in Birmingham covered the reputation of local government in the current, very difficult times, health and social care delivery and planning arrangements arising from the Localism Bill. Councillor Marianne Overton chaired the Local Government Challenge Plenary at Conference.
68. The Independent Group supported the Association of Green Councillors Conference in Norwich on 2 and 3 July outlining what support is available through the Local Government Group, and facilitating a workshop on the Localism Bill.

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