

Chief Executive's Monthly Report – September 2011

Purpose of report

For discussion

Summary

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

Children and Young People

2. The Department for Education (DfE) has committed £10.5 million this year for a sector-led programme for **children's services improvement**. A Children's Improvement Board (CIB) has been established to oversee the delivery of the improvement programme, with representatives from the LG Group, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, SOLACE and DfE. As part of this work nine local authorities have been selected as pathfinders for a payment by results trial for children's centres. The pathfinders will focus on the core purposes of children's centres, which are: to improve child development and school readiness among young children and to reduce inequalities. The scheme will explore the potential to join up with other payment by results schemes being developed across Government. Pilots are due to be launched in up to 21 more local authorities in the autumn, with a view to rolling out the system nationally by 2013.
3. In July, Ofsted launched a consultation on **new arrangements for the inspection of children's services**, which will come into effect from May 2012. It will be vital that the new inspection framework supports and integrates with the sector-led improvement programme, so the Children and Young People Programme Board will receive a presentation from Miriam Rosen, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills at its September meeting. CIB will also meet Ofsted in September to discuss how inspection can add value to the sector led approach to improvement.

Community Wellbeing

4. The independent Commission on **Funding of Care and Support** published its report on the future funding for care and support in England on 4 July. Building on its long-held position that reform of an over-stretched and under-funded adult social care system is urgently needed, the Local Government Group has developed a declaration on care and support reform which all top-tier councils were encouraged to sign up to. This was then submitted to Party Leaders, stating cross-party consensus to deliver meaningful reform to deal with demographic change is needed, with a clear programme of action. An Early Day Motion has also been tabled in Parliament.

5. The Group will analyse the Commission's proposals more thoroughly over the coming weeks, engaging with colleagues in local government and other key stakeholder partners, to help shape our position and ensure it reflects the views of the sector. We then will develop an influencing strategy for the forthcoming Adult Social Care White Paper and then a programme of activity to support our work on the Adult Social Care Bill.
6. The Group produced an On The Day Briefing to the Commission's report and have worked with colleagues from the Commission to develop a Frequently Asked Questions document that explores the report's proposals in greater depth. This is now available on our website. We are also in discussions with Age UK about collaborating on a series of briefings for MPs on the Commission's report and the LG Group's reaction. The aim is to run these sessions in October.
7. Following a story put out by the Trades Union Congress on councils **reducing funding to charities**, Sir Merrick Cockell was quoted in the Guardian and in several trade publications defending councils' track record at supporting charities, even where tough financial decisions had to be made. Cllr David Rogers, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme and 5 Live to discuss the ways in which councils were working with the voluntary sector. In a separate interview, Cllr Rogers also spoke on the Today Programme defending council cuts to addiction services.

Culture, Tourism and Sport

8. The LG Group has launched a new publication to share the lessons from phase one of the **Future Libraries Programme**, a sector-led improvement programme to support councils to modernise libraries. In phase one ten projects involving 36 councils were supported to develop locally appropriate solutions to deliver modern and efficient library services. The learning shared in the publication includes using new technology, sharing services across council boundaries, co-locating library services with other local services and retail outlets, and giving local people the opportunity to play a bigger role in running libraries.
9. The Arts Council has committed to work in partnership with LG Group to deliver a second phase of the Future Libraries Programme and we are currently consulting with councils about the support they need.
10. The media team secured positive coverage of innovative work being done by member councils as part of the Programme. Stories were placed about the programme's findings with the Guardian, Daily Express and BBC Online. Cllr Chris White, Chairman of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, was interviewed on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme and 5 Live Weekend Breakfast about council efforts to modernise libraries through initiatives like providing other services alongside them, back office mergers and the recruitment of volunteers.

11. Key elements of the LG Group's proposal for **Local Museum Partnerships** have been adopted by the Arts Council, who recently announced details about new national funding programmes for museums. The Arts Council's proposals reflect our core principles of devolving as much funding as possible to the frontline, supporting locally appropriate solutions, creating local partnerships where they don't already exist and that the major grants programme should be aimed more widely than the eight to 12 museums originally envisaged. Officers will continue to work with the Arts Council as more detail is developed and announced in the Autumn.
12. The LG Group has worked with Sport England to develop **a new leadership offer for sport portfolio holders**, which will be launched in the Autumn. The aim is to strengthen local political leadership and support Members to position sport locally within the context of local government's new responsibilities for public health. The offer will comprise a Leadership Academy for portfolio holders, a small number of briefings around the country and a good practice publication.
13. The LG Group has submitted evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry into the **2005 Gambling Act**. In our response, we highlighted that although gambling makes a significant contribution to some councils' evening economy offer and economic vitality, councils need sufficient planning and licensing powers to deal with problems caused by the clustering of betting shops.

Environment and Housing

14. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published a draft **National Planning Policy Framework** at the end of July. As well as responding to the formal consultation, LG Group officers have been consulting with membership, and will be developing written evidence to the Communities and Local Government and Environmental Audit select committees and putting forward our own proposals to CLG on how the framework can be implemented.
15. Following up Lord Jenkin's (LGA Vice President) meeting with Greg Clark at the beginning of August, LG Group officers met with officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government to discuss ways in which the Localism Bill could be amended to reduce bureaucracy for councils and discuss the amendments that we would like to see tabled and debated at Report Stage. We continued to push for a more proportionate approach to **neighbourhood planning referendums** and argued that referendums should only be used where they add value.
16. We have published our response to the CLG planning for **Traveller sites consultation**. While we are broadly supportive of Government's intention to streamline this policy area, we have made some suggestions on a more flexible approach to transit and temporary accommodation solutions for Gypsy and Traveller communities.

17. With the eviction of travellers at Dale Farm in Essex prominent in the headlines, LGA Environment Board Chairman Cllr David Parsons was quoted on the BBC website calling for councils to be given greater flexibility over where they can accommodate travellers on a temporary basis.
18. The consultation on the new '**Nottingham Declaration**' and the future of the LG Group supported 'Nottingham Declaration Partnership' was sent out to all councils in August. The results of the consultation will inform the central-local relationship on energy and climate change and will determine the extent of central intervention in local action.
19. The Local Government Group is developing an offer to councils to support them in delivering a **strong leadership role in housing**. On 30 August, officers convened a roundtable with housing experts throughout local government to discuss what a housing offer should look like. We will be presenting our findings to the Environment and Housing Programme Board this month.

Workforce

20. LG Group officers have advised on the new Employer Standards for all employers of **social workers**. These are now complete and will be promoted from September onwards, with the possibility of the LG Group hosting the standards on behalf of all the working parties involved (including the Department for Education) and promoting good practice.
21. The outgoing Chairman, Baroness Eaton, wrote to Ministers to reiterate Group suggestions about the best ways to deal with **equal pay**, which are based on favouring local negotiation and agreement. The reply from Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Equalities and Criminal Information, Ms Lynne Featherstone MP, while conscious of the requirements of European Law, gave an undertaking to monitor activity in County Courts and also to ask the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to give fresh impetus to its guidance that covers issues of pay protection. Sir Merrick Cockell replied as incoming chair of the LG Group asking for assurances that the Government regards negotiation and agreement as the best way forward. Lynne Featherstone has replied confirming that the Government agrees with this point of view and mentioning that they are seeking to control the activities of no-win-no-fee lawyers.
22. The LG Group and the unions held their first joint meeting on 27 July 2011 on **pensions**. There were further meetings throughout August and employers' representatives met on 31 August to consider their preferred options for securing a package of measures to secure short term savings equivalent to a 3.2 % increase in employee contributions by 2014/15. A further meeting with the unions took place on 2 September. The Secretary of State has requested that we inform him of the outcome of these discussions by 9 September. Should it not prove possible to reach an agreement the Secretary of State will need to consider what proposals should be put out for a statutory 12 weeks consultation period. The risk remains that this will be for a 3.2% increase in

employee contributions with subsequent potential losses of membership to the scheme.

Improvement

23. Officers have had some very positive feedback from early users of the new **peer challenge offer**. The new offer is much more flexible than in the past enabling the challenge to be focussed on key issues councils are facing and allowing the challenge to be undertaken at a time that best suits the council concerned.
24. DCLG has been considering the best route for transferring the **Audit Commission's in-house practice** to the private sector and decided that this should be by way of outsourcing the work, as opposed to creating an independent company which could be sold.
25. Subsequently it has been considering how long the outsourced contracts should be with options ranging from three to five years from 2012/13. Whilst longer contracts might achieve greater value for money they would also delay the point at which councils would be free to appoint their own auditors (if the contracts were for five years then the first year for which councils will have been able to appoint their own auditors will not be until 2017/18). DCLG recognise councils' interest in this trade off which they will discuss with the sector once they have secured three and five year bids from audit firms.
26. The eighth cohort of the **Leeds Castle** programme will take place between September 2011 and January 2012. To date over 60 leaders and chief executives have been invited, with a good spread from all 9 regions and authority types. At this stage we have a high number of very positive confirmed expressions of interest or application letters and, in comparison to recruitment for previous cohorts, these numbers are reassuring. The optimum size for the cohort is a group between 16-20 participants. Of those that have declined this year, many have asked to be considered for future programmes.
27. The **Leadership Academy Graduate Summer School 2011** was attended by 30 members and was extremely positive and received 3.4 out of 4 for the overall mark regarding satisfaction. This year, topics like shared services; healthier communities; planning; working with the third sector; political leadership in the future and public speaking skills were covered. Through this year's Summer School - we had an increased sign up for the other programme offers like Planning; Ageing Well, Young and BAME Councillors event.
28. Bookings for our various **Leadership Academy programmes** have now reached 266 registrations for our various programmes from over 121 authorities, including three from authorities that have not sent councillors on our programmes in the past. We have also written to the 26 district councils that are entitled to a free place on the main programme, due to a change of political control, and 19 of these have so far confirmed that they will be taking up the offer.

29. **Creative Councils** is a new programme from the Group and NESTA designed to stimulate and support innovation in service delivery. Almost 130 councils applied to be part of the programme. NESTA and the Group are supporting a small number of applicant councils to develop and implement radical innovations to improve service delivery. We will be working closely with NESTA to share the learning from this programme. We will also work with some of those councils that were not selected, but that are developing practical solutions to productivity issues, to encourage and share their learning.

Economy and Transport

30. The Children and Young People and Economy and Transport Programme Boards asked for a joint Lead Members' meeting to discuss proposals for taking forward the next stage of the **Hidden Talents** work. Officers have developed a report introducing a programme of activity that the LG Group might undertake, focusing on addressing the fragmentation of services from early years to employment, which will be discussed by members during September.
31. LG Group has submitted a response to the **High Street Review**, which David Cameron commissioned Mary Portas to undertake. The review is expected to report in the autumn 2011, and may include recommendations for both local and central government. The LG Group response aims to showcase local authority activity, to defend councils interests (on car parking charges for instance), and to advance existing lobbying objectives within the context of the outcomes they can deliver for town centres.
32. In response to requests from member councils, we have commissioned work to set out some options for **local enterprise partnerships** and local councils to raise finance for economic regeneration. We are holding an online discussion focused on *Unlocking Development* on the LEP Community of Practice in September.
33. We are consulting members on the National Audit Office call for evidence on the arrangements for delivering the **Work Programme** - through the relevant communities of practice.
34. We are working with the Centre for Social Justice on a pamphlet making the case for **local delivery of universal credit** and calling for local pilots during the transition phase to universal credit (2013-17).
35. Following lobbying by the LG Group to enable authorities to introduce measures to reduce the disruption and congestion caused by **utility companies' road works**, the Department for Transport has proposed the introduction of lane rental schemes. This will enable local authorities to charge utility companies for work that runs over into peak traffic times. This is a move in the right direction, but the LG Group will continue to press the DfT to ensure that the scheme is introduced nationally and that local authorities can introduce such schemes without reference to the Secretary of State. Cllr Shona Johnstone, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Economy and Transport Board, and Labour Group Leader Cllr David Sparks both appeared on BBC local radio discussing

Government plans on this issue. They also called for powers to better deal with poorly performing contractors, including allowing councils to take a 'bond' or deposit from utility companies so if they don't do the job properly they can more easily recoup the costs of repair.

Safer and Stronger Communities

36. The Home Office has sought LG Group advice on the structure of the four 'deep dives' they are proposing to hold in September as part of their preparations for the introduction of **police and crime commissioners**. These fact finding projects are due to take place in Leicestershire, South Wales, the West Midlands, and West Yorkshire and will look to explore in detail some of the issues arising from the introduction of commissioners. The Home Office have invited the police, council leaders and chief executives and representatives from other local partners to look at areas like the commissioning of community safety activity and the establishment of police and crime panels. The feedback from these sessions will then be used to inform Home Office work as they implement the introduction of police and crime commissioners.
37. LG Group officers have also been meeting member authorities along with partner bodies to discuss what preparations need to be made for the introduction of police and crime commissioners. Over July and August visits were made to councils in Cambridgeshire, Devon and Cornwall, Hampshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Surrey and Sussex with discussions focusing on the different landscape community safety partnerships will be operating in and the technicalities around setting up police and crime commissioners. Authorities have said they found the process useful and visits to further councils have already been arranged for September.
38. Officers have been working with the Drugs, Alcohol & Community Safety Directorate at the Home Office, building on our previous success in attracting funding from them for peer challenge projects. They are due to put a paper to Ministers in the next couple of weeks to formally approve £60k of funding for up to 8 **Safer Communities peer challenges**.
39. In March the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) advised councils that they were unable to request **enhanced CRB checks** from people applying for licences as taxi and private hire vehicles drivers. The only exception to this is where the drivers would be transporting children or vulnerable adults to a regulated activity under the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act. As a result of this advice councils have resisted from requesting enhanced CRB checks. However this has meant that licensing authorities have been unable to take into account any additional information held by the police on an individual such as incidents of a serious nature which for a variety of reasons have not been taken to court. The LG Group, along with Transport for London, the Metropolitan Police, the taxi trade and other interested bodies have been pressing the Home Office to change the law so councils can request enhanced CRB checks. At a meeting with the Home Office in August attended by the Vice-Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board, Cllr Les Lawrence, Home Office civil

servants said they could see the benefits of licensing authorities to request enhanced CRB checks. Our calls for the Home Office to rethink plans were covered in the Independent.

40. During the **civil disturbances** in early August councils played a vital role in providing community leadership at the time and immediately afterwards and assisting businesses and residents affected by the disturbances. This work has been rightly commended by Ministers. The LG Group itself was involved in the responses at a national level through its membership of the Civil Contingencies Committee (also known as COBR – Cabinet Office Briefing Room) and was in contact with authorities to offer support. The Group also helped to highlight the work being carried out by councils and continues to be involved in the government's on-going response to the disturbances. This includes the LGA Chairman's place on the Ministerial Recovery Board set up to develop a recovery plan and involvement in the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government's Leaders' Summit in early September.
41. Sir Merrick Cockell was quoted in the Financial Times discussing the good work councils were doing with their communities in clearing up after the disturbances. The Guardian also ran a comment piece from him which detailed how councils are working communities to tackle deep-rooted problems associated with civil unrest. The piece highlighted the success of community budgets in reducing truancy, offending and police call-outs, and identified how Whitehall bureaucracy often hampers councils in helping troubled families.
42. The LG Group has joined the government's working group to review the **Fire National Framework**. The membership is an officer group with additional representation from CLG officials, Chief Fire Officers Association, LG Group, Fire Brigade Union, and the Fire Sector Partnership. The first meeting of the Group took place on 7th July. The new framework will be published by March 2012. An additional sub-group has been established to consider National Resilience in the context of the National Framework.

European and International

43. The **EU fines** section of the Localism Bill would give the Government the right to pass on to local councils fines imposed on the UK by Brussels for non-compliance with EU rules. This will be debated at report stage in the House of Lords at the beginning of September. Earl Atlee, the Government Whip, undertook to review the amendments and come back with a compromise at Report stage. Over the summer, the LG Group has been working with Whitehall departments and Peers to ensure any compromise offers sufficient safeguards for local authorities in the event that a Minister ever seeks to pass on part, or all, of an EU fine. We are seeking to influence legislation and the statement of policy which underpins the policy.
44. The LG Group has produced a short pamphlet introducing the top ten issues for Councils arising from the **EU Budget**. '**Rethinking EU Billions**' (<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=19229825>) aims to introduce councillors, officers and Local Enterprise Partnerships to the funds, encourage

localities to consider how they might want to engage with them in the future, and to promote lobbying lines with key stakeholders in Whitehall and Brussels. The LG Group also publishes a weekly digest of current EU funding opportunities.

Local Government Finance

45. The Government published proposals for the **localisation of business rates** for consultation on 18 July, and subsequently released technical papers on a number of issues on 18 August. We produced overnight briefings on both the broader consultation document (<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=19377877>) and on the technical papers (<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=19786657>). On the whole, the Government has listened to the LGA's call for an open and transparent consultation that provides authorities with the level of information they need to comment substantively on the proposals. To assist member authorities to assess their potential starting positions under a new system, we have also provided them with some modelling. We have set up an intensive series of discussions with member authorities throughout September and October to help them work through the proposals and engage them in the development of our formal response to the consultation, which closes on 24 October.
46. As reported previously £148m in 2011-12 and £265m in 2012-13 is being removed from formula grant to pay for central education functions for **academies**. 23 authorities commenced legal action on the 2011-12 top-slice, with a further 6 authorities being given leave to join them. The authorities agreed to stay the legal action following the Secretary of State's agreement to reconsider the amount of the transfer for 2011-12 and 2012-13. This consultation was published on 19 July, with a four week deadline responses. Despite a letter from Baroness Ritchie the Government refused to extend this timetable.
47. The LGA's response to the consultation shows our serious concerns about the methodology the government propose to adopt; which is not in accordance with the Government's own New Burdens Doctrine. This is because they still propose to calculate the top slice to be removed from local government on the basis of the additional to be paid to academies as opposed to the actual savings in local government, which are substantially lower. The LGA's response provides detailed evidence of this. In elaborating its response, the LGA worked with over 30 member authorities, with different numbers of academies, in estimating the real savings as well as the additional costs to authorities of setting up academies. We are following up the consultation with meetings with the Department for Education, CLG and Treasury.
48. The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently published its consultation **Localising Support for Council Tax** in England. The consultation will run for a 12 week period, with a deadline for responses of the 14 October. The Local Government Group has consistently argued that, if done properly, the localisation of Council Tax Benefit (CTB) could enable

councils to design schemes to meet local circumstances as opposed to the current CTB scheme which is very "top-down" and carries heavy administration costs. In order to make a localised scheme work, councils will ultimately need greater flexibility in how their localised scheme functions in order to accommodate the 10% funding cut that is taking place in conjunction with localisation. We provided member authorities with an on the day briefing: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/tio/19533377> and are engaging with member authorities in developing our consultation response.

49. We have been working with the legal team representing local authorities with deposits in the failed **Icelandic banks** to prepare for the upcoming Supreme Court hearings on 14 and 15 September in the case of Landsbanki and 26 September in the case of Glitnir. As reported previously, the Icelandic District Court found in our favour on 1 April, but appeals were subsequently filed by other parties. Our written submissions for the appeal hearing were filed in May and we have since been working on the oral submissions. Stephen Jones, Director of Finance for the LGG, will be attending both sets of hearings in Reykjavik to support our legal team.
50. All local authorities in England are potentially facing legal proceedings issued by property search companies seeking refunds of charges for all **property search data** dating back to 2005. The LGA is facilitating joint action on behalf of member councils, which allows them to access strong legal representation at a fraction of the cost that non-member authorities are incurring. On their behalf, the LGG's legal team secured a stay in the proceedings this past July, helping to keep legal costs down and providing authorities with the time they need to review the claims and their positions. Since local authorities' exposure to these proceedings has resulted from legislation implemented by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we will be lobbying for Government to recognise their responsibility to contribute to any possible settlement as a new burden.
51. The Department for Communities and Local Government announced that it had issued non-equal pay **capitalisation** directions in the amount of £229 million to 54 local authorities. We pressed hard for the Government to allow councils the level of capitalisation they thought they needed, and most were granted the full value of their bids, compared to recent years when capitalisation was more tightly rationed and tended to result in authorities receiving about 40% of what they asked for. The LGA's intensive lobbying also resulted in the Government raising the cap on capitalisation to £300 million and a limited second application process for exceptional circumstances is being run this year, with applications due by 28 October 2011.
52. In response to CLG publishing an on-line map which displayed **council assets**, LGA Improvement Board Chairman Cllr Peter Fleming was quoted in several national newspapers and appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, 5 Live Breakfast and local radio. He explained why councils hold the assets they do and described the work being done by local authorities to save money through smarter asset use.

53. Following the increase in the **Public Works Loans Board** rate of interest, the LGA twice appeared in the Financial Times discussing the idea of councils being able to issue bonds so they could raise funds at lower rates of interest.

Decentralisation and Localism

54. The LG Group have been working with CLG officials and leading peers to put forward a number of changes to the Localism Bill. Lord Patrick Jenkin, one of our Vice Presidents and our President Lord Best have tabled a number of our amendments which we will pursue in the Lords during September and October.

Political Group updates

Conservative Group

55. Much of the summer period has been spent finalising appointments to the various Boards and Panels. As part of this process the group office has worked with the Executive Office and Member Services on preparations for the Members' Induction day on the 2 September.
56. Final preparations are being made for the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester which takes place from Sunday 2nd to Wednesday 5th October. Leading members and group office staff will be attending the conference.

Liberal Democrat Group

57. The focus of the office throughout August has been the administration of the Group elections. This year's process saw 81 councillors competing for the 26 positions held by the Liberal Democrats on the LG Group boards and panels. Around 1050 councillors from member authorities took part in the postal ballot, a little over a third of all Liberal Democrat councillors in England and Wales.
58. The results were announced on 19 August with Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Leader of Portsmouth City Council, being confirmed as our new Group Leader and several new board leads also being voted in.
59. Outgoing Group Leader, Richard Kemp, maintained his busy schedule to the very end of his term. His final month saw meetings with Ed Davey to discuss community involvement in post offices, Paul Burstow to discuss health reforms, Andrew Stunell to on the localism bill and also an event with council leaders to launch his Localism into Practice campaign.
60. With conference season approaching, the Group have also been making preparations for their conference programme which is set to include a fringe on the Open Public Services white paper, a reception and a series of meetings between council leaders and ministers on business rates, planning, tourism and finance.

Labour Group

61. The Labour Group has completed all appointments to the LG Group Boards, Panels and other relevant bodies for the 2011/12 year. Other Labour Group activity for the July-August period includes:
 - 61.1 The Labour Group programme of fringe activity at Labour Party Conference in September has been finalised, which includes two fringe meetings, one held jointly with Progress, a reception held by the LG Group and the ALC, and a meeting for women councillors and future candidates hosted by the LG Labour Group Women's Network.
 - 61.2 Cllr Steve Reed attended the launch of the Co-op Councils Network in Rochdale, attended by Ed Miliband. The network is being run by the Co-operative Party in partnership with the LG Labour Group and currently has a membership of 14 Labour councils.
 - 61.3 The Labour Group has worked closely with the Labour Party on the Refounding Labour consultation, playing a key role in proposals to reform the party's relationship with local government and the structures that support this.
 - 61.4 Cllr Ann Lucas and Cllr David Sparks, in their capacity as members of the Labour Party NEC, took part in the process of appointing the new General Secretary of the Labour Party.
 - 61.5 The Labour Group have continued to work with new councils via Change of Control support, and Cllr David Sparks has visited Gedling Borough Council to meet the new leadership team.
 - 61.6 Cllr Linda Thomas, Vice Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board, met with the Labour House of Lords Frontbench Health team to discuss the upcoming Health and Social Care Bill.
 - 61.7 The office held an event for Labour Graduates of the 2010/11 Next Generation Programme, and has interviewed all candidates for the 2011/12 cohort, to be finalised shortly.
 - 61.8 The Labour Group has begun the process of working with the peer support team to identify suitable individuals as requests for peers come in.
 - 61.9 All Labour member Groups have been offered a Campaign Health Check for 2012 and the processing of applications to be part of the programme has begun.

Independent Group

62. Recent activity has focussed on **appointments and induction** to LG Group Boards/Panels/Commissions and outside bodies, as well as on planning for the forthcoming year.
63. This year's **Independent Group annual conference** is being held on Monday 21st November 2011 at Local Government House. Full details will be available in due course.

64. A series of **regional meetings** are also being planned for the Autumn, providing opportunities for Independent Group members to meet each other and discuss key issues and actions.

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