

## **Economy and Transport Programme Board – report from Cllr Peter Box CBE (Chair)**

1. It has been party conference season over the past few weeks and the predominant debate has been about economics and growth. I believe that councils have been playing a huge role in driving the growth agenda. You will know from my previous reports that the Economy and Transport Board is launching a Local Growth Campaign in the next month. We have developed a programme of “town-hall” meetings with think-tanks and partners to develop new ideas on the local economic growth debate and to highlight the important role that councils and their local partners are playing. The programme will be kicked off at the Smith Square debate in November at which the Chairman and I will be speaking.
2. One issue that I have raised with colleagues is the need for Boards to take the initiative and work together where issues cross Board remits. Most of the work to stimulate economic growth could be placed in this area. Thus, the leadership of the Economy and Transport Programme Board and the Children and Young People Programme Board have set up a joint work plan to look at how we can develop a new phase to the LG Group’s work on youth unemployment. We intend to identify what is working locally, look at how local government has best used new devolved opportunities and to establish what this local learning means for national policy in the future. I will be working closely with colleagues on both Boards on this programme.
3. As part of our work on young people and employment, the Board has sent a submission to the taskforce on youth unemployment chaired by David Miliband MP making the case for a whole systems approach to helping young people to engage successfully in learning and work.
4. In September the Board also submitted a contribution to the High Street Review, which the Prime Minister has asked Mary Portas to undertake. Our response sets out how councils are developing town centres, not just as retail centres, but as community and cultural hubs. It also highlights barriers to this effort, and makes recommendations for what Government can do to help. Lead members are seeking a meeting with Mary Portas to discuss issues ahead of the publication of the review.
5. Transport policy and local delivery was also been a big theme of our work in September. At the Labour Party Conference, I met with Tom Smith, Chairman, and Michael Roberts, Chief Executive, of the Association of Train Operating Companies. The meeting was to discuss suggested proposals in the upcoming rail white paper to devolve some degree of decision making on rail services and

investment from the Department for Transport (DfT) to a local authority or regional level. Though the proposals are yet to be finalised, they thought it would be useful to discuss what thoughts I and the Programme Board have had so far. This is part of a number of initiatives by the DfT to devolve transport programmes to the local level. For example, the Secretary of State recently announced the devolution of the major transport schemes budget. Whilst the Board has broadly welcomed this direction of travel, I have written to the Secretary of State so that we can discuss how these separate projects can be joined up into local programmes which could support economic growth and to discuss the financial risks associated with such devolution.

6. The Board has also been supporting councils in their day-job on transport. Vice-Chair, Cllr Shona Johnstone, spoke at the annual Cold Comfort conference on the LG Group's role in representing, advocating and coordinating sector activity in response to winter weather over the last three years. Cold Comfort – organised by Surveyor magazine – attracts some 450 delegates, chiefly local authority winter service managers and representatives of related industries, the keynote speech was delivered by DfT junior minister, Norman Baker MP. Cllr Johnstone's speech coincided with the launch of the LG Group's Winter Weather community of practice to share best practice on our preparation for snow and ice.
7. I was also pleased to see at first-hand the work of Blackpool Council on Highways and Asset Management. The briefing focused on the Council's *Project 30* initiative, which works to repair or replace its road network of over 40 miles of carriageway. The project will see £30m invested over the next four years. The key aim of the project is to bring the roads and footways network up to an acceptable standard as well as to significantly reduce tripping claims. DfT is keen to trial the Blackpool approach in five pilot areas, with Blackpool council acting in a peer consultancy role.

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