

Item 4i

European & International Programme Board – report from Cllr Dave Wilcox OBE (Chairman)

South Africa

1. Earlier this month I attended the dissemination seminar for the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Good Practice Scheme projects in South Africa. Alongside the LGA's work with the South African Local Government Association and the peer review we carried out last year, capacity building projects on local economic development led by Leeds, Sunderland and Glasgow were also showcased. In wrapping up our GPS-funded work with SALGA my visit was also a valuable opportunity to discuss opportunities for further work around peer support for South African municipalities and this is being pursued with SALGA's management.

CLGF Executive Committee

2. This month I also had the pleasure of welcoming to the LGA the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum during their schedule of London meetings. At a time of significant pressure on local budgets around the world we had some valuable discussions focussed on decentralisation, local economic development and the role that the local state can play in attracting inward investment in more creative ways. Myself and Cllr Marianne Overton also attended a reception in London hosted by CLGF launching the policy statement on democratic local government which was presented to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Australia last week.

Pakistan Local Democracy

3. At a time when democratically elected local government has been dissolved in Pakistan, on 18 October Cllr Richard Kemp CBE chaired a seminar at Local Government House on the prospects for a return to local democracy in Pakistan and what the UK can do to support the country in this journey. Funded by the CLGF's Good Practice Scheme it was attended by a delegation of local leaders from all four provinces in Pakistan, as well as a wide range of UK based individuals and organisations with connections to Pakistan. A follow-up meeting is being scheduled soon.

Congress of Council of Europe

4. Our LGA members were again active at the October plenary session of the Congress of the Council of Europe, which focused on social inclusion, involvement of citizens and awareness-raising for human rights at local level. In particular, there was a session on preventing the discrimination of Roma populations, led by UK member Cllr John Warmisham; the London Borough of Southwark was awarded a Congress prize for its work in this field. Also in the frame of the general topic "Living together in dignity" a discussion on the fight against sexual abuse of children, in the context of the Council of Europe "ONE in FIVE" campaign.

Council of Europe – UK Chairmanship

5. The UK will hold the rotating Chairmanship of the Council of Europe from November 2011 to May 2012, and will use this period to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the body as a whole, and the Court of Human Rights in particular. In advance of this, Congress members have met with Government Ministers and the UK Ambassador to impress upon them the opportunity and need to include the local dimension of the Council's work.

Committee of the Regions

6. The October plenary session of the Committee of the Regions took place at the same time as the annual "Open Days", which brings local councils together from all over Europe to exchange ideas and experiences, and to form partnerships for future action. The week took place shortly after publication of the draft regulations on the structural funds, which were debated with the European Commission President Barroso and European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek.
7. The only report having a UK rapporteur was the one by our colleague Lord Tope CBE on Smart Regulation, in which he calls for a lighter touch from Brussels legislators, and a better assessment of the likely impact of new laws on local councils. Lord Tope is also the new CoR rep on the High Level Group on reducing administrative burdens.
8. Cllr Flo Clucas OBE chaired a seminar in conjunction with the European Policy Centre on the €1 trillion EU budget proposals for 2014-20. The event forms part of the work by Cllr Clucas OBE as spokesperson for local and regional authorities EU-wide on the topic.

Health Policy

9. During the CoR plenary, I hosted the latest meeting of the Health Intergroup, which combined presentations from the European Commission on future public health strategy, with actual examples of innovative local and regional strategies from Spain, Italy and Sweden.

UK Parliament

10. The LGA has been developing links within UK Parliament to further develop its international work. Recent activity includes a submission to the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry into how British Government policy could assist countries affected by the Arab Spring. Some of the LGA's international activity involves countries within this region, and our submission focused on the how the local government sector can assist.

Contact officer: Richard Kitt
Position: Senior Adviser (European & International)
Phone no: 0032 2 502 3680
E-mail: richard.kitt@local.gov.uk