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Chief Executive's Monthly Report – November 2011

Purpose of report

For discussion

Summary

This report highlights the LGA's main achievements on behalf of local authorities during October.

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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Chief Executive's Monthly Report – November 2011

Background

1. The LGA Programme Boards help shape the LGA business plan and, along with the LGA Executive, lead programmes of work to deliver the LGA's strategic priorities. This report sets out their main achievements on behalf of local authorities during October.

Children and Young People Programme Board

2. Education Secretary Rt Hon Michael Gove MP answered questions and responded to points from members of Children and Young People Programme Board and more than 50 lead members for Children's Services at the National Children and Adults Service Conference. In response to a question on **Academies topslice**, he said that the DfE is ready to talk again to the LGA again about the deduction from Revenue Support Grant to fund the central costs of academies. He indicated that he now accepted the case for making the deduction on the basis of the number of pupils in a council area being educated in academies, rather than top slicing all councils on the basis of a national formula. He said he hoped that agreement could be reached on the appropriate 'per pupil' amount that should form the basis of the calculation. LGA officers are now working on producing an estimate of what the per pupil amount should be, building on the work carried out over the summer to respond to the Government consultation on the issue.
3. On 24 October, Peers debated provisions within the **Education Bill** which removed the duty on schools to co-operate with Children's Trusts. The Government argued that whilst they "were in favour of schools working together they did not need a duty to do so." Members of the House of Lords, led by Lord Laming CBE DL, disagreed and highlighted the contradiction in removing the duty to co-operate at a time when the Government was announcing further partnership working on special educational needs. Schools Minister Lord Hill CBE conceded the case and agreed to delete the provisions removing these duties from the Bill. The duty for schools to co-operate in Children's Trusts will therefore remain in law.
4. The sector led improvement programme for children's services is making good progress. More than forty councils are now actively working on developing a system of self improvement based on self assessment and peer challenge. A number of councils experiencing particular difficulties or who have identified

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risks to performance, have received direct support. An element of funding will be shortly devolved to regions and staff from the **Children's Improvement Board** (CIB) will be working with colleagues in regions to engage councils and develop work programmes which respond to regional and local needs.

5. This year's **National Children's and Adults Services Conference** was covered in national and trade press including the Telegraph, Guardian, LGC and MJ.

Community Wellbeing Programme Board

6. The **National Children and Adults Services Conference** was held at the ExCel Centre in London Borough of Tower Hamlets from 19 – 21 October and attracted over one thousand delegates, including chief officers and lead members for adults and children's services, senior stakeholders from national organisations and Government departments. The annual event provides a vital forum for discussion and debate on key policy areas and this year's conference did not disappoint. The Secretaries of State and several Ministers from the Department of Health and the Department for Education attended the conference and had useful discussions with local Government representatives on the impact of the Government's reform agenda for children, adult social care and health.
7. **New partnerships, new opportunities: setting up and running health and wellbeing boards** has been published by the LGA Healthy Communities Programme to assist local areas in establishing health and wellbeing boards as the leaders of system change and coordination to achieve lasting health improvement. The document draws early lessons from nine case studies from areas at the forefront of setting up health and wellbeing boards. This is the first of a series of resources, events and other support to assist councils in ensuring that they are ready to take on extended responsibilities in relation to health improvement and public health outlined in the Health and Social Care Bill.
8. Our lobbying and briefing on the **Health and Social Care Bill** continues as the Bill reaches the Lords Committee Stage. On 25 October we held a briefing for all peers on the aspects of the Bill that we want to see further change. We will be focussing our efforts on the following issues:
 - 8.1 **Children's public health** – we are seeking an amendment to the Bill that would make local authorities responsible for commissioning children's public health services from pregnancy throughout childhood.
 - 8.2 **Integration** – we are pleased to see a renewed focus on integration in the Bill but most of the amendments simply reinforce the benefits of integration to the NHS. We are, therefore, proposing an

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amendment to ensure greater delegation of commissioning from Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to local authorities in order to deliver integrated services that are person-centred.

- 8.3 **Health and wellbeing boards** – the LGA has welcomed strengthening the role of HWBs in the development of CCG commissioning plans but we maintain that the changes do not go far enough. We would like to see an amendment to ensure that CCG commissioning plans address the priorities of the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy of the relevant local authorities. We are also seeking a further amendment to place a duty on CCGs to cooperate with HWBs on the basis of the boundaries of the relevant local authorities.
 - 8.4 **Death registration** – the Bill introduces a new duty on first-tier local authorities to appoint medical examiners to oversee the death certification process. This duty arises due to the proposed abolition of PCTs and, as such we maintain that it represents an unanticipated burden to local authorities. We are to have the clause removed from the Bill.
9. To coincide with the second reading of the Health and Social Care Bill, the media team issued a release calling for the **scrapping of a proposed 'death tax'** which could see families being charged between £130 - £170 to check the cause of death when a relative passes away and leave councils unjustly painted as the bogeymen by bereaved families. The story received positive coverage in the Telegraph, Express, Sun, Mail and regional BBC. Cllr David Rogers OBE was also interviewed by LBC radio.
 10. LGA officers asked David Ward MP (Liberal Democrat) to table a question asking the Government what mechanism will be used to determine the overall **budget for the new public health system in England**, and what proportion of that budget will be allocated to local authorities to fulfil their new public health responsibilities. The Government responded that they were collecting current spending data and that further analysis will take account of pressures from recently introduced polices and the overall resources available to the Department of Health – however it is not possible to say, until this analysis has been completed, what proportion of the total public health budget will be allocated to local authorities. Shadow allocations to local authorities for 2012-13 will be published later this year.
 11. A press release highlighting the number of **public health funerals** carried out by councils and calling for reform of the Government's Funeral Payment scheme received positive coverage in the Times, Independent and BBC Online as well as featuring in regional newspapers. Cllr David Rogers OBE, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Programme Board, was

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interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC local radio, and Vice Chairman Keith Mitchell CBE also spoke on BBC local radio.

Economy and Transport Programme Board

12. **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) Capacity Fund Round 2 planning:** The LGA has been invited to present the views of local authorities in ensuring clear objectives and methodology for Round 2 of the LEP capacity fund bids. We are currently consulting councils on how BIS can make this an effective process and add value to the work of LEPs.
13. We have continued to work on preparations for **winter weather** through discussion with DfT and support to the new winter weather community of practice. The LGA surveyed of member councils asking about preparations that had been made for treating the roads in the event of snow. A press release, which revealed councils had ordered more salt than was used throughout all of last winter, secured two separate positive front page stories in the Daily Express and positive national coverage in the Sunday Times, Mail, Mirror, Sun, Star, BBC Online, on Sky News and in more than 150 regional newspapers, including the London Evening Standard. Cllr Shona Johnstone, Vice Chairman of the LGA's Economy and Transport Programme Board, was also interviewed by Sky News Radio, which was then broadcast by commercial radio stations across the country.
14. The European Commission has launched proposals on **the future of structural funds for 2014-2020**. The proposals represent a success for the LGA and its activity in Whitehall in Brussels, by confirming that all areas will receive some funding, with a new initiative targeting additional levels for less-prosperous sub-regions. The UK take from current structural funds is well over £8 billion. The LGA will now work to influence proposals as they are negotiated by the European Parliament and Member States in Brussels. In Whitehall, we will continue to work with Government in thinking through how areas can make the most from the opportunity EU funds offer, as it has the final say on the exact level, scope and role of local authorities in future EU funding programmes.
15. Following criticism about some councils increasing **on-street parking charges** and residential permits, Cllr Peter Box CBE was quoted in the Daily Mail pointing out that money raised from parking is retained locally for funding things like street lighting, road maintenance and parking enforcement. Cllr Shona Johnstone was interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Radio London and Sky News Radio on the same issue and reiterated these key messages.
16. Cllr Shona Johnstone appeared on BBC One's The One Show to discuss councils using car-mounted CCTV cameras to tackle **illegal parking**.

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17. Cllr Peter Box CBE appeared on BBC Radio 4's You & Yours to discuss councils **reducing funding for bus services**. He stressed the impact of Government cuts to general funding and bus-related grants, the innovative ways councils are providing alternative community transport and the need to reform the funding system.

Environment and Housing Programme Board

18. In the lead up to the implementation of reform of council housing finance system from April 2012, LGA officers and housing advisors have been continuing to work to ensure that councils have the flexibility and resources to manage and improve their housing stock under the new self financing system. In response to Government's recent announcement of proposals to increase discounts for **Right to Buy**, we are working to present the case to Government that all income from the sale of council homes should be retained and reinvested locally to ensure that councils can make long term investment plans to meet need for affordable homes.
19. The LGA submitted its response to the **National Planning Policy Framework** this month. We applauded the Government for the reduction in central prescription in guidance and highlighted two areas for further work. Firstly, that there must be appropriate transition arrangements to the new system for councils and secondly that the three pillars of sustainability need to be balanced throughout the document to ensure local flexibility and decision making. We are pleased that the Government has listened to us and agreed that communities and councils need 'appropriate' time to put into place their local plans. We are working with Government to determine a reasonable and realistic timescale and process.
20. The LGA in partnership with Defra and WRAP have launched the '**Business Waste and Recycling Commitment**'. The Commitment sets out the principles of how local authorities can help local businesses, particularly Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, meet their waste management responsibilities and recycle more. It recognises the important role local authorities can play in collecting recycling and waste from businesses. More information about how to sign up to the Commitment, and practical guidance, can be found on the WRAP website at: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/labusinesscommitment>
21. Cllr Eddy Poll (LGA Environment and Housing Programme Board) addressed the **All-Party Parliamentary Flood Prevention Group**. Addressing funding issues, he highlighted the LGA's disappointment that overall capital funding for flood prevention has decreased - but our hope that the new model (whereby councils will be able to bid for part funding of schemes) could mean that more places will be able to deliver flood defences as funding from other sources can be levered in. He added that the success of this model will depend on the extent

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to which other funding streams can be realised, and that there is a real concern in councils that areas which receive more investment from large businesses may find it easier to attract funding compared to perhaps sparsely populated rural/coastal areas.

22. LGA Chairman Sir Merrick Cockell appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, Sky News and ITV News to discuss the Government's extra £250 million to encourage **weekly bin collections**. He stressed the good record councils already have on rubbish collection and that the decision is entirely one to be taken locally. Cllr Clyde Loakes, Vice Chairman of the LGA's Environment and Housing Programme Board, was interviewed on the issue for ITV's Daybreak.
23. Following an investigation into the number of councils **dimming or turning off street lights** to save money, Cllr Peter Box CBE, Chairman of the LGA's Economy and Transport Programme Board, was quoted in the Sunday Telegraph, Mirror and Express explaining that provided it is done in consultation with the police and local communities, reducing street lighting can save taxpayers' money without reducing public safety.

Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board

24. The report from the Government on **tackling gang and serious youth violence** was published at the end of October. This set out how over the lifetime of a potential young offender or gang member local agencies could intervene to break the life-cycle that leads to violence or work to reduce reoffending when individuals have already been involved in violence. The LGA's involvement in the officials group producing the report ensured that community budgets are seen as having an important role in funding the multi-agency work to address gang and serious youth violence. Initial plans to require multi-agency serious case reviews after very gang related murder of someone under 18, have also been amended due to LGA lobbying on the basis that this would be a new burden. Instead councils and others will only be encouraged to conduct such reviews.
25. The Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board and the Association of Police Authorities hosted a successful conference in the middle of October on **preparing for the introduction of police and crime commissioners** in November 2012. The sold-out event explored the wide range of issues that councils will have to consider in the coming year before commissioners are in post, including conducting the elections, setting up police and crime panels (including their role in handling complaints against the commissioner), and the relationship between commissioners and local partnerships. The conference also heard from the Policing Minister, Nick Herbert MP, and gave delegates the

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opportunity to raise issues such as the level of support from the Home Office for setting up police and crime panels.

26. A Chairman's summit was held at the end of October to look at the **civil disturbances** in August and the implications and lessons for councils of them. The summit heard from a range of councils about the disturbances, including areas which did not have any problems and why they thought that was the case. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government also addressed the summit and set out what the Government will be doing to assist communities in the longer term tackle the social issues behind the disturbances. The event was covered by the Press Association, Guardian Online, Independent, BBC London, BBC Bristol, the MJ, LGC. This was followed by a Smith Square debate which discussed the role of local government leaders in aiding recovery as well as the Government's approach to tackling underlying social problems. This event was chaired by the BBC's Chris Eakin and the Panel included the former Cabinet member Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Lib Dem London Mayoral candidate Brian Paddick and Lord Adebowale CBE.
27. John Ransford attended a **conference of the Combined Fire Authorities** to discuss membership issues and the LGA's new fire offer. He fielded questions from both councillors and chief fire officers and his speech about the value of belonging to the LGA was warmly received and endorsed.
28. Officers made strong representations with CLG about their decision to drop an **amendment to the Automatic Fire Alarm clause** in the Localism Bill. After months of work, and agreement, CLG's unexpected decision to drop the amendment has caused deep concern and disappointment in the sector. We will be addressing this at the highest level.
29. We continue to monitor the **trade dispute between the Fire Brigades Union and the Government on the matter of pension schemes reform**. The FBU Executive Council has decided not to ballot its members with a view to taking industrial action on 30 November but it will do so in the future if it believe that the current sector specific talks have stalled or will not result in a mutually acceptable solution.

Culture, Tourism and Sport Programme Board

30. The challenging financial climate councils face is prompting some areas to transform radically their **library service**. Through strong political leadership, modern library services are emerging that are fit for the 21st century, more efficient and supporting wider council and community priorities. The LGA is working with Arts Council England (ACE) to provide bespoke peer support to a small number of councils between now and early 2012. We are pressing

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ACE to ensure that sector-led improvement continues to be at the heart of libraries improvement.

31. DCMS is consulting on a proposal to remove licensing requirements in England and Wales for most activities currently defined as '**regulated entertainment**' in Schedule One to the Licensing Act 2003. This includes live music, performance of plays, indoor sporting events and exhibiting films. The Culture, Tourism and Sport Programme Board supports making the process as easy, transparent and free from red tape as possible. Consultation with councils is also highlighting the importance of ensuring councillors have sufficient powers to protect people who attend public events as well as those who work and live nearby. The Culture, Tourism and Sport Programme Board will consider a draft response on 23 November.
32. As the **2012 Games** get closer, councils are increasingly concerned about the impact on transport. In response to feedback, and with the Economy and Transport Programme Board, we are urging the Organising Committee and transport operators to consult and work closely with councils on issues including changes to rail timetables and station opening hours, park and ride, the need for flexibility in public transport and the interaction between local transport networks and the national road and rail network.

European and International Programme Board

33. The UK take from current **EU regional funding** is well over £8 billion which councils up and down the country can access. As proposals emerge for the next funding period (2014-20) the LGA's campaign to ensure councils and the places they serve continue to benefit from EU funds has gathered apace, particularly since our recommendations are included in the draft regulations (see our on-the-day briefing). But it is Government that has final say on the exact level, scope and role of local authorities in future EU funds; the LGA and our member authorities need to continue making the case for a real change to the current central control. A press release highlighting the LGA's successful efforts received positive coverage and saw Sir Merrick Cockell quoted in Public Finance, PoliticsHome, LGC, The MJ and EPolitix.
34. The LGA welcomes recognition in the draft EU law that councils are key to increasing **energy efficiency**, and that is the most cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions. The EU proposes a twin-track approach: to oblige regular renovation of buildings and ensure our contractors are themselves energy efficient. However the potential EU obligation on councils to renovate 3% of their buildings annually by 2014 is too inflexible, especially when not matched with funding. Promoting energy efficiency through public procurement is perhaps logical but the law must recognise the need to balance energy

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efficiency ambitions with value for money contracts; it is not in councils' gift to dictate market prices.

35. The LGA welcomes the legislative amendments to the clauses in the Localism Bill concerning the potential transfer of **EU fines to local councils**. This, combined with LGA's proposal for a statutory statement of Government policy, offers far greater safeguards for councils should a Minister ever seek to pass a fine on. However, in turning our proposal into a statutory statement, the Government will consult stakeholders, and it will be vital that Government fully accepts and implements the principles and processes set out in the our proposal.

Workforce Programme Board

36. Following earlier discussions at the Workforce Programme Board, the LGA is publishing advice and general guidance recommending that councils should review their local approaches to **pay and rewards**. This advice is being offered because in the context of serious pressure on budgets the time is now right to take a look at the reward structures that are needed in changing organisations. Further support will be offered by the LGA but the immediate aim is to spark a healthy debate in the sector.
37. The national Concordat covering the overall requirements for fair treatment of staff in the upcoming **transfer of public health functions to local government** has now been finalised. The LGA is a co-signatory to the document. Work has begun on preparing more specific advice for local government HR departments on options for dealing with the transfer. This advice will be developed with the Trade Unions and will emphasize the need for local flexibility and discretion The LGA is involved also in separate strands of work on appointing Directors of Public Health and dealing with pensions issues.
38. The final report of the NJC working party on **Social Work** careers and progression has now been delivered. The report includes a suite of benchmark role profiles for use in developing local approaches. These profiles will be published shortly.

Improvement Programme Board

39. More than 40 people, including councillors and member development officers from across the country, attended a seminar to launch a **Political Mentoring Toolkit** at Local Government House on 7 October. The LGA worked closely with Professor Silvester of City University, London in the research and development of the document which provides guidance for both the mentor and the mentee and for those wanting to set up mentoring arrangements for

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councillors. The guide will be available as a free download from the LGA website.

40. The LGA has responded to the Cabinet Office consultations on open data: Making Open Data Real and the Data Policy for a Public Data Corporation. We support the general presumption in favour of open data but have expressed concerns about the overly prescriptive nature of the proposed policy and the potential that open data could add an additional burden. We have reiterated local government's right to self regulate in how far local authorities make **use of open data to support transparency**, accountability, self-service and improve productivity and efficiencies within local areas. We also call for a harmonisation of legislation and further simplification to licensing and charging. Further information is available on <http://www.local.gov.uk/open-data-consultation>.
41. We have responded to the recent **Audit Commission consultation on its work programme and fees** for 2012/13. Our response welcomes the proposal to reduce audit fees for audited bodies by 10 per cent from the published 2011/12 scale fees and the expectation that the current procurement exercise will realise further reductions in the cost of audit, which can be passed on to audited bodies in the form of even lower fees. However we believe it is also important that the costs of key elements of the auditors' work should be itemised – to provide greater transparency – and that there should be a presumption that any additional work agreed between the council and auditor is not chargeable at a higher rate. We are also clear that further reductions could have been made if the balance on earnings from local government activity of £26.8m as at 31 March 2010 had not been exhausted by the high level of redundancies.

Finance Programme – (LGA Executive)

42. Our response to the **Local Government Resource Review** consultation, which was agreed by the LGA Leadership Board following a lively discussion of the Executive on 13 October, strongly supports the localisation of business rates, but points to four key areas that need more work in order to make the reform a success. We have called for a new system to allow councils to retain all of their real growth in business rates from the outset; maintain stability and a continuing powerful commitment to resource equalisation under independent oversight; have in place a robust risk management strategy; and provide a clear and simple incentive. The Chairman and Group leaders made strong representations on these points to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when they met with him on 18 October. The consultation closed on 24 October and we are already engaging with Government to press for the final design of the scheme to take our recommendations into account.

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43. After three years of supporting councils as they sought to get their deposits back from the failed banks Landsbanki and Glitnir, we are very pleased to report that the **Icelandic Supreme Court** awarded the UK local authority test cases priority creditor status on 28 October. Securing priority creditor status means that authorities will get back 100 per cent of their deposits in Glitnir and 98 per cent of deposits in Landsbanki. We will now be pressing for the winding up boards of both banks to apply the rulings on the test cases to the claims of all UK local authorities as soon as possible. The Supreme Court is the highest court in Iceland which means there is no further right of appeal. There are still a number of complex issues related to foreign exchange movements to sort out, and the LGA will continue to represent the interests of member authorities on these matters. The LGA's coordination of the legal action has helped to keep costs to less than 1 per cent of the extra £470 million that local authorities are now set to recover as a result of the Supreme Court ruling.
44. The consultation on **localising support for council tax** in England closed on 14 October. The LGA's reply, which was signed off by leading members having been discussed at the Executive, says that if the Government wants to make the £500m saving which the Spending Review figures imply, then it should give councils more flexibility within the existing system of discounts and exemptions. It says that following 2013 resources should rise in line with the number of claimants, particularly as the Government propose that current and future pensioners should be fully protected. It expresses concern about the very short timescale for implementation. Following the consultation, LGA officers are discussing these issues with CLG officials.
45. LGA officers have been engaging with the Department for Work and Pensions on the implementation of the new **Universal Credit**. It raises issues for councils arising from the fact that it is intended to be a single monthly payment direct to households, which will replace housing benefit and a number of other work-related benefits. This poses risks to councils in their role as landlords, with the increased risk of arrears, as well as to councils as organisations with responsibility for delivering the current housing benefit. Local government representatives in their discussions with DWP have been making the case for local government involvement in the delivery arrangements for Universal Credit, particularly in face to face support. The LGA Executive has approved a paper endorsing this approach.

Localism Programme – (LGA Executive)

46. In response to the Government's proposals for the reform of public services, as set out in the **Open Public Services White Paper**, the LGA emphasised local government's strong record in reforming and improving public services and the importance of local democratic accountability at the heart of reform. The LGA is working with officials to promote proposals for further decentralisation of

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services, clarify the role of local and central government and ensure that reforms build on local government's progress and avoid over prescription or regulation of local approaches to commissioning. We are working with councils to demonstrate examples of how they are already working with their communities to implement innovative reform of local services. A further statement on how Government will take forward plans for reform is expected in November.

47. The LGA has secured further concessions to the **Localism Bill** in the House of Lords, with the Government committing to completely remove provisions requiring councils to hold costly, non-binding local referendums. The Bill will receive its third reading in the Lords on 31 October, when the LGA is urging peers to support amendments on neighbourhood planning. LGA-sponsored amendments would ensure that planning referendums are only employed in cases of disagreement and conflict, and not when there is widespread local support for a plan or development. Following this third reading the Bill will return to the House of Commons for the penultimate stage before Royal Assent.
48. The possibility of what Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP has called "one cheque from Whitehall" to break down silos and improve services - has come a step closer with the launch of the Government's prospectus for "whole place" **Community Budgets** initiatives. At the same time, the Prime Minister has this month given a new push to the existing Community Budget work with troubled families. The LGA brought council leaders and chief executives together with Ministers on 17 October to keep up the momentum, and to launch new online resources developed by councils.
49. The LGA press office issued positive lines to coincide with the Government's announcement that a new unit is being set up in Government to help **troubled families**, stressing that councils have been leading on this agenda and community budgets have resulted in huge cost savings and improvements in peoples lives. Sir Merrick Cockell was quoted across local government trade press including LGC, MJ and PoliticsHome.

Conservative Group

50. Lead members and Group Office staff attended the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester. There were a number of fringe meetings with speakers representing the LGA which were well attended as was the LGA drinks reception at which the guest speaker was The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.
51. Cllr Gary Porter continues to meet weekly with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government as does Cllr Clare Whelan with Ministers from DeFRA.

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52. Cllr Porter has visited Torridge and Teignbridge District Councils in order to cement their relationships with the LGA, especially with Torridge now returning to membership.
53. The Conservative Group held a briefing seminar at Lancashire County Council. This was attended by a large number of Conservative councillors who engaged well with the speakers.
54. The popular meetings of Conservative Group leaders with The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP are due to start again and the Group Office is currently waiting for DCLG to confirm dates for these.

Liberal Democrat Group

55. The Group maintained their profile at party conference with spokespeople sharing platforms with ministers and MPs in the many fringe events. A busy LGA Reception saw Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg MP, welcome our new leader Gerald Vernon-Jackson. The Group's series of roundtables offered council leaders the chance to question the Secretary of State for Climate Change; the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Liberal Democrat DCLG minister as well as providing forums for discussion of issues relating to CYP and CTS. Key areas for discussion were housing finance, the resource review, the Green Deal, school funding and tourism.
56. The Liberal Democrat conference programme also included a housing policy workshop, the ideas from which will now be developed with MPs and Peers through a policy working group to be co-chaired by Cllr Richard Kemp CBE. We have been working with Lib Dem parliamentarians on both the Health & Social Care and Education bills. Lib Dem councillors have also met with Andrew Stunell OBE MP and Greg Clark MP in developing our response to the NPPF.
57. Earlier this month the Group helped to organise a conference looking at the opportunities offered by the Localism Bill. Around 90 Lib Dem Group leaders attended, putting their questions to Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg and Andrew Stunell OBE MP in the plenaries and using workshops to share ideas on how their councils can take advantage of the provisions in the bill. This conference was followed by a resource review Q&A with Andrew Stunell OBE MP and representatives of the Treasury where Group leaders took the opportunity to press the panel on issues such as the set-aside, local growth and rate-setting.

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Independent Group

58. A lively, well attended East of England regional meeting enabled Group members to hear from lead Group members on organisational changes at the LGA, changes to planning legislation arising from the Localism Bill, and the offer of a free peer review for every council in membership of the LGA.
59. Cllr Marianne Overton, Leader of the Independent Group attended the Commonwealth Local Government Forum on 19 October.
60. Independent Group member peers were well represented at the Member Peer Conference which took place in Lambeth Town Hall on Tuesday 25 October. Among other things, those attending discussed the role of member peers in self regulation, how to further the work of member peers across local government more generally and how the Independent Group can help raise the profile of the support available.
61. The Group Executive Committee has been finalising the programme for an Independent Group Conference taking place on Monday 21 November at Local Government House.