

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

Local Growth Campaign

1. Our Local Growth Campaign has now reached the half-way point of the series of town hall debates taking place across the country. Last month, the campaign published its interim findings and reported the main themes that have emerged from the debates held so far in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Wakefield and Cambridge.
2. One consistent message that I am hearing from civic leaders is that councils are 'just doing it' in driving economic development and have been for over a century. We continue to claim our space in this area. One key objective for the local growth campaign will be to highlight councils proud tradition, and ongoing work in economic development. At the Birmingham and Cambridge debates the link between skills, education and innovation were discussed in depth. In Leeds the discussion focused on how transport can be used as an instrument of growth. Evidence was heard from colleagues in Scotland and the Netherlands about how transport programmes were being driven by economic and employment objectives, enabling transport systems to be a lever for growth.
3. On 9 March the LGA partnered the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) to explore the economic growth and recovery situation in the North East, and on 13 March a London debate focused on what the council role is in attracting inward investment and export. Future debates are also planned in Devon and Lincolnshire. The local growth campaign will culminate in the publication of a Green Paper in the summer. The paper will include the evidence we have gathered as part of our campaign and will form the basis of our discussion with government.
4. To find out more about the Local Growth Campaign and to get involved please see: <http://www.local.gov.uk/localgrowth> .

Transport Select Committee

5. On 28 February, Cllr Shona Johnstone (Cambridgeshire CC), Vice Chair of the LGA Economy and Transport Board gave evidence on behalf of the LGA to the Transport Select Committee as part of its inquiry into competition in local bus markets. Cllr Johnstone stated that the Commission had asked focussed too narrowly on how on-road competition could be encouraged, and that competition by operators for franchises could do more to deliver on the issues that matter to passengers, adding that the various forms of subsidy for bus

services should be unified and devolved to councils. The Committee heard that the risks and complexity involved have deterred councils from using Quality Contracts, although some councils are examining this option, and that support was required from the DfT for those authorities who wanted to implement a franchising/Quality Contracts approach.

Youth Summit

6. When I started the Local Growth Campaign, I was very clear that any proposals we developed had to be tested by young people themselves. On 14 February Cllr David Simmonds (Chair, Children and Young People Board) Cllr Shona Johnstone (Deputy Chair, Children and Young People Board), and I met 40 young people assembled from all over the country by the British Youth Council at a Youth Summit. Youth unemployment is an issue of critical concern to councils. After listening to the concerns and ideas of young people themselves - which included earlier provision of careers advice and greater involvement of employers in schools - we presented some of the LGA's emerging ideas for tackling youth participation in a 'Dragon's den' format. Of the various ideas pitched, the one for giving young people a greater say over all funding and services in their area got the most support. Feedback from young people will be built into the heart of the LGA's work moving forward. An interim report on the findings is expected in the upcoming weeks. This is a joint initiative between the Economy and Transport Board and the Children and Young People Board.

Winter Weather

7. My Board has taken a keen interest in councils' response to the winter weather. Now that winter seems to have passed without the levels of snow and ice seen in previous years, there have been some attempts in the press to run stories suggesting councils have over-invested in preparing for harsh conditions. These can be rebutted by emphasising that properly-stored salt keeps for several years. For the most part however we have been credited for our preparedness and high salt stocks. The LGA is in discussions with DfT over future arrangements for the national strategic salt stockpile, acquired by the government during the winter of 2010-11 and made available to councils to purchase in times of short supply.

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