

## **European & International Board – report from Cllr Dave Wilcox OBE**

### **EU Funds**

1. You may recall that in my last update I mentioned that 2012 is the key year in finalising the arrangements for future EU funding. I am happy to report that both Members and officers have been focusing their efforts in this area to good effect.
2. On 19 April, Board members (Cllrs Bore, Keymer and Nicholson) were part of a delegation of Councillors who met with Commissioner Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy. The delegation represented both urban areas such as Birmingham and Manchester as well as rural areas, counties and smaller district authorities. It was a positive discussion, with Members reaffirming to the Commissioner the willingness and capacity of Local Government to play a leading role in the formulation and delivery of future EU structural funds. The Commissioner has sought to make the funds more local, and although Government has a good deal of discretion in how the funds are designed and managed, it must be agreed by the European Commission.
3. We have submitted evidence to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee inquiry into European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and will offer oral evidence on 30 April. In doing so, we have emphasised the positive role that councils have played in accessing and using the Fund to benefit local businesses and communities, and will offer to show the Committee Members around some projects. We have emphasised the need for Government to focus on making the future ERDF programmes work for local economies and implementing them in a way that fits with the wider devolution of local growth levers.
4. We will be submitting a response to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' (BIS) informal consultation on Local Government's role in the future EU funds, as will be negotiated in the Partnership Agreement. Within it we will emphasise the need for Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships to have the freedom – as individuals or in clusters – to decide what role they would like to play in future programmes, so that spending can be shaped around the needs and aspirations of places.
5. I am also happy to report that two experienced local authority EU Structural Funds practitioners will be seconded to BIS for up to 2 years to be part of the UK negotiation team on the future of EU funds. This is to help Government develop a UK-wide 'Partnership Agreement' - which is required by the EU to set out a national business plan for spending EU Funds. The secondment is actively supported by the LGA, and we will be working with them closely to ensure the views of local authorities are taken into account.

6. We have launched an online platform for council officers and Members to access, share and talk about the issues associated with the establishment of the new EU funding programmes for 2014-20. The Knowledge Hub forms part of the new integrated online offer from the LGA. Please do join in. To register, please click on the link below:  
<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/web/councilroleinfutureeufunds201420>

### **International links: learning and sharing**

7. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR - the 'European LGA') has appointed me as its lead member for twinning. This is a real opportunity to refresh what we mean by twinning. It should not be based on the 1950s idea of Mayors exchanging flags, but it should be a means of councils learning about public service reform across the globe. I am convinced that English councils have some great ideas to showcase across Europe, but equally there is much that we can learn from our European partners.

### **The local role in global trade**

8. It is a time to refresh this debate and to test how we can help turning old-fashioned twinning into new trade links. As part of our Local Growth Campaign, I spoke at an EU-sponsored debate on the role of councils in attracting inward investment into communities. As well as a presentation by Councillor Box, Chair of Economy and Transport Board, the event also featured feature robust and lively debates with contributions from overseas peers and speakers from UK business, Germany and New Zealand.
9. Councillor Kemp, the Vice Chair of the Board, and I have recently been involved in discussions with the Foreign Office about how to take forward the role that councils can play in opening up new markets for local firms. Many local authorities are being approached by councils abroad about partnerships with the private sector. There was a recent request from Mexican local government on this issue. We will be exploring how these approaches to councils can open up new markets for UK firms and help the national drive for growth.

### **Commonwealth Symposium on Local Government in Colombo**

10. Much of our international work is done in partnership with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). In April, CLGF asked for our input into a high level local government training programme for councils across Asia. The event, supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat, focused on sharing of good practices policies on local government. This is another good example of how the demand for expertise of UK councils continues to grow.

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