

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

### **Delivering our lobbying priorities**

#### **Future EU Funding**

1. With the current round of European Union (EU) funding ending next year, one of the Board's top priorities is to convince EU funding decision makers in Whitehall and Brussels that councils should play a lead role in the design and implementation of EU funds, adding value and bringing efficiencies. As EU regeneration funding amounts to almost £8 billion in the UK, both Board Members and officers have been using all the LGA's channels of influence to ensure that decisions are taken in localities rather than centrally.

#### **Brussels**

2. We have successfully coordinated a common set of **legislative amendments** with other LGAs from across the EU as well as having a number of amendments tabled by Catherine Bearder MEP to ensure funds are more flexible and encourage local delivery. Furthermore, Derek Vaughan MEP recently held a hearing allowing the LGA to directly address the European Parliament and Commission officials. To further build on this support amongst UK Members European of Parliament (MEPs), myself and a **delegation of European and International Board** Members will visit Brussels in September to make the case for change directly to MEPs.
3. With the Cypriot Government assuming the **Presidency of the EU** for the six month period when crucial decisions on the EU funding reform will be taken, we recently met with a number of Cypriot senior civil servants to set out some of our concerns and issues. Through the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Cypriot LGA, we were able to provide LGA briefings to all the relevant ministers in Cyprus to ensure that the UK local government view will help form part of their Presidency's agenda from July to December 2012.

#### **Whitehall**

4. Although good progress has been made in making the case for local authorities, there is still a long way to go. The message is that **parts of Whitehall remain to be convinced**, suggesting a preference for more centralised EU programmes in the future.
5. To address this we have been able to secure the secondment of two local government officers to the Department for Business, Skills and Innovation (BIS), who have suggested that there is still plenty to play for and assured us that decisions have not yet been made and that there are different views in different Whitehall departments. We are seeking to capture practical examples of effective local engagement to **develop a more persuasive case** to support our work with lead Whitehall departments.

## **Procurement**

6. In conjunction with Councillor Fleming, the Improvement Board Chairman, I sent a letter to all UK MEPs to secure their support ahead of a crucial vote on **future procurement rules** which will take place in the Autumn. The Brussels Office has worked with associations across Europe to develop a number of legislative amendments for our MEPs to table. The work aims to ensure simpler and more flexible procurement rules for councils under the new regime being introduced in June 2014.

## **International links: Learning and Sharing**

### **First African Peer Review – Namibia**

7. I am happy to report that the first of the five pioneering African peer reviews has now been completed in the municipality of Otjiwarongo in Namibia. Our thanks goes out to the two UK Peers, Councillor Martin Curtis from Cambridgeshire County Council and Allen Graham, Chief Executive of Rushcliffe Borough Council who supported and shadowed the Vice Chairman of the Burundian LGA and the Chief Executive of Dakar City in Senegal. Feedback from officers and Members in Otjiwarongo, as well as the Secretary General of United Cities & Local Government Africa (UCLGA) has been **extremely positive** and I am pleased to say that this is a very solid start to the delivery phase of the programme. The next Africa peer review will be hosted by the Ghanaian LGA during the week commencing 16 July and I look forward to keeping you up to date as the review programme progresses.

### **2012 Emperor Maximilian Prize**

8. It gives me great pleasure to pass on the news that Keith Whitmore, a former Manchester City Councillor, has won the 2012 Emperor Maximilian Prize for **outstanding contribution to local politics in Europe**. This has been thanks to his work as a leading figure in the LGA and as President of the Congress of the Council of Europe. In May this year he stood down as a councillor, and his presence will be missed. Keith is the first UK local politician to have been given this prestigious award and his acceptance speech reflected on over 30 years of service in local government.

### **European Local Democracy Week**

9. I would like to take this opportunity to remind members that 2012 European Local Democracy Week will take place on **15-21 October**. The annual event, which builds on an earlier initiative of the LGA, is organised by the Congress of the Council of Europe and encourages involvement in political life and promotes awareness of public services and citizen's rights. With the theme this year being "human rights make for more inclusive communities", I would encourage you all to support your council's participation in this valuable engagement initiative.

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