

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

Delivering our Lobbying Priorities

2012 – 13 European and International Board and Priorities

1. The new members of the European and International Board (E&I) will meet for the first time on 17 September. I look forward to working with a number of new Members as well as existing colleagues over the next 12 months in demonstrating the importance of international activity and European engagement across the LGA and local government sector.
2. On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my gratitude to Councillor Linda Gillham, the former Independent Group Deputy Chair of the Board, for her commitment and contribution over the past three years.
3. As we head into a very busy Autumn session in the European Parliament, the LGA is particularly active on the rules surrounding future European Union (EU) funds, public procurement and environmental legislation. We continue to push for EU decision makers to consider the financial implications new EU rules have on councils in addition to the benefits they may bring. Increasingly, the rules agreed in Brussels affect the day-to-day work of councils.

EU funding post-2014

4. With the current round of 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. Councillor David Sparks OBE, Vice Chairman of the LGA, recently met with Mark Prisk MP – the responsible Minister on the future of the EU structural funds. Discussion focused on the options for future EU funds in the context of driving growth, and localism. The Minister was particularly interested in the LGA work on future EU funding models and local resolutions to the concern over match-funding. The LGA offered regular meetings to ensure a coordinated UK response on EU Funds.
5. A cross-party delegation of E&I Board Members, including the three lead members and myself, will be meeting Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the European Parliament on 18 September 2012 to make the case for more locally-responsive EU funding model. We will also take the opportunity to set out our stall on other issues being considered by the Parliament affecting councils' day-to-day work including procurement, energy efficiency and working time. Part of this will include a roundtable discussion bringing together the UK Government, Commission, the European Parliament and UK regional offices. I look forward to feeding back to you in my next report on these key lobbying activities.

International links: Learning and Sharing

Congress of local and regional authorities

6. The LGA is responsible for nominating 13 full members and 13 alternates to Congress, the local government arm of the Council of Europe. With the current mandate expiring on 15 October 2012, the LGA has coordinated the nomination of a UK Delegation that is gender-balanced, respects political balance in each of the constituent countries, has representation from each English region, covers all type and size of authority and has a mix of urban and rural. The UK Delegation will meet for the first time on 15 October when it will elect its political office-holders and agree allocations to committees.
7. I am delighted to announce that Congress' visit to scrutinise the UK's local democracy week will include a visit to the LGA. This will now take place in February 2013.

MEPs' link to local government in England

8. We have recently re-launched 'Local Link' the LGA's e-bulletin on EU issues targeted specifically towards English MEPs. The bulletin keeps our MEPs up-to-date on how the EU rules they agree affect the day-to-day work of councils. The aim is to have at least three editions per year.

Africa Peer Reviews

9. I am pleased to confirm that the second of the five pilot African peer reviews, delivered in partnership with United Cities & Local Government Africa (UCLGA) and funded by the government of Luxembourg has now been successfully delivered and received positive feedback from all participants. The review, held in Accra was of the National Association of Local Authorities Ghana and the participating UK peers were Cllr Marianne Overton, Vice Chairman of the LGA and Jim Dillon, Chief Executive of Scarborough Borough Council.
10. Board colleagues and I are taking a keen interest in the delivery phase of the African Peer Review Project and are committed to maximising the learning gained from the programme, including a thorough evaluation following the completion of the five reviews. I look forward to sharing the outcomes of this ground breaking programme with you in due course.

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