

European & International Board – report from Councillor Dave Wilcox OBE

DELIVERING OUR LOBBYING PRIORITIES

Future EU Funding - Brussels Delegation

1. A cross-party delegation of Board Members, including LGA Vice Chair, Councillor Dave Sparks and myself, met 20 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the European Parliament on 18 September 2012 to make the case for the local delivery of EU funds after the EU budget is reformed in late 2013. The visit was scheduled ahead of key votes in the European Parliament when the package of new EU structural funds will be drafted. We wanted to ensure that MEPs understood the changing sub-regional geography of England and that it could deliver better value from EU funds.
2. A full brief was left with MEPs including evidence of where locally delivered funds worked well in their region, or where funds had a poor fit with local priorities. The evidence showed that where councils had more influence over the funds there was an alignment with local economies. Equally there were examples of limited local engagement in nationalised programmes when local programmes did not fit well with local business need.
3. We also took the opportunity to brief MEPs on other issues being considered by the Parliament affecting councils' day-to-day work: procurement, energy efficiency and working time. Part of the visit included a roundtable discussion with the UK Government, Commission, the European Parliament and UK regional offices on how best to use the future funds to ensure local growth.
4. A number of key outcomes resulted from the visit including commitments from several MEPs to consider amendments that need tabling ahead of key votes and to pick up the issues raised by the delegation in Party conferences, in their work with the media, in regional events back in the UK, and in their links with UK Government and the UK Parliament.

Future EU funding - Government Roadshows

5. The reform of EU funding is unlikely to be completed in Brussels until 2013, so there is still work to be done and time to influence the debate. During November and December, Whitehall departments are holding a number of roadshows across England to engage with local authorities and partners on the future of EU funding post 2013. This is a chance for the sector to input its views to ensure that local perspectives are built into the future delivery arrangements in England so I would encourage all councils to get involved. For more information about these roadshows, contact one of the local government secondees to the Department for Business, Innovation's negotiating team on kevin.richardson@bis.gsi.gov.uk or simon.nokes@bis.gsi.gov.uk.

Future EU funding - Welsh Local Government Association

6. On 21 September I spoke at a Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) event on the negotiations with government on the future of EU structural funds in England. The event

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offered the perfect opportunity for the LGA and WLGA to continue their joint lobbying effort in Brussels, as well as to exchange information and advice on the establishment of future programmes in England and Wales. I talked about a range of issues linked to the debate, including the Community Led Local Development tool for managing local programmes.

EU Fines

7. At our September Board meeting, we agreed to step up our engagement with Whitehall and Parliament on developing a partnership between central and local government on EU issues. One area in which we are looking to do this is on EU fines. We have already been working to make the process fairer and have secured a number of safeguards for councils not originally envisaged. To build on this work, we are planning an EU summit with key Government departments focusing discussions on those issues within the upcoming 2013 EU work programme which will most affect council services. I look forward to keeping you abreast of progress.

EU energy efficiency proposals

8. I am delighted to inform you that following significant LGA lobbying efforts, European Parliament recently agreed to remove local councils from the obligation to renovate 3 per cent of their buildings annually. We successfully argued that to impose such a financial obligation on councils that are facing a tough budgetary climate would be inappropriate, and potentially expose councils to huge fines for non-compliance. The duty is now limited to central government buildings only.

INTERNATIONAL LINKS: LEARNING AND SHARING

LGA, UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) collaboration

9. On 13 September 2012, Councillor Richard Kemp CBE, Vice Chair of the Board, hosted a joint LGA, UKTI and FCO evening reception exploring Trade Opportunities in Mexico. The Mexican local government is trying to develop a more commercial approach to public services and approached the LGA to help them contact UK firms. As a result, the LGA and FCO are looking at the role of local authorities as enablers of local economic growth, via support of international trade and investment opportunities. With speakers including José Luis Rodríguez, the Head of Office at UKTI Guadalajara and Alejandro Estivill, the Deputy Head of Mission at Embassy of Mexico, the evening successfully brought together Mexican Government and UK firms to look at the opportunities for investment and growth.
10. Over the coming months, we will be working with colleagues in the Economy and Transport Board to progress this work on the role of local authorities in promoting international trade and investment opportunities as part of the local growth campaign.

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