

Item 3(d)

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

1. The Board has some very clear lobbying objectives to support councils in their ambition to deliver local economic growth. These include more City Deals (especially for counties and non-urban areas), greater devolution in transport and skills and better working partnerships with higher education and on overseas investment. In the run up to the Autumn Statement, we have been ensuring that these issues are high on the priority lists of government departments as they put forward their ideas for growth to the Chancellor.

Winter Weather

2. I announced the findings of the LGA's winter weather survey on the BBC's Today programme on 27 October, confirming that local authorities are well prepared and have 1.3 million tonnes of salt in stock, which is twice the amount used in the most severe winters.

Hidden Talents

3. The Lead Members of the Children and Young People Board and Economy and Transport Board have agreed the next stages of the Hidden Talents campaign. Over the last year the programme has been successful in influencing debate and gaining support from partners, but government has asked for more detail and evidence on the benefits of devolved approaches to reengaging young people. Looking ahead, members will make more specific and well evidenced recommendations for policy change, driving the campaign forward based on what councils are already doing locally that work.

Distressed Town Centre Property Taskforce

4. I represent local authority interests at the Distressed Town Centre Property Taskforce, a group convened by the retail property industry to look at new ways of leveraging investment into the growing amount of poor quality retail space. Councils will play an increasingly critical role - the localisation of business rates will lead businesses to look to councils in influencing how rates are invested. The taskforce offers a number of opportunities to build new relationships nationally, as well as to protect council interests – it has commissioned research into the issue, planned for early next year.

Lord Heseltine Review

5. Lord Heseltine was commissioned by the Prime Minister to review UK competitiveness. The LGA worked extensively with his review team to plant ideas about greater devolution, especially more City Deals and greater devolution in skills and transport policy. On 31 October, Lord Heseltine published his report 'No stone unturned in pursuit of Growth' setting out a series of radical proposals for economic growth which calls on Government to pool £50 billion of Whitehall money to support local growth. Whilst the LGA has dismissed his call for local government re-organisation and competition for funds, there is much to welcome especially in his call for greater devolution of transport and skills budgets. Government will respond to the report in 2013. Thus we need to ensure that the case that Lord Heseltine has made for economic devolution is not lost in Whitehall. I have invited the senior civil servant who has been given responsibility for the follow-up of the report to the next Board to discuss next steps with our leading members.

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City Deals

6. The LGA has been pressing Government to extend City Deals to councils that have transformational ideas for growth. We have worked extensively with the Cities Unit putting this case in advance of the Autumn Statement. On 29 October the Deputy Prime Minister announced a further 20 cities which had been invited to bid for a Wave 2 City Deal. Cities and their wider areas have been invited to submit innovative and ambitious proposals around the key issue facing their area. This responds to the LGA's call for the expansion of the City Deal process. We have offered support to the 20 cities to assist them where required. We have developed a menu of options for bidders. For more information, please contact kamal.panchal@local.gov.uk. We were disappointed that deals were not extended to all councils with big ideas, especially counties and other rural areas. We continue to press ministers for a further extension of these deals and for a mainstreaming programme of measures from Wave 1 that just 'make sense' for all councils.
7. Just after the Wave 2 announcement, I, and the Board Vice-Chair, Cllr Tony Ball, chaired a successful LGA conference on City Deals and Local Growth, providing the opportunity to hear from cities with deals and from Government about their hopes for the next wave.

Local Growth Campaign - Basildon Town Hall Summit

8. On the 13 November Basildon council hosted the second Town Hall Summit as part of the LGA's ongoing work with councils on economic growth and recovery. This Summit explored how councils work well with overseas investors and national promotional agencies (e.g. UKTI) to maximise the potential of inward investment and export opportunities. We know from the evidence collected as part of last year's campaign that councils are working directly with overseas businesses and that there is evidenced demand from investors from developing economies to engage directly with civic leaders and councils. The Basildon Summit explored how councils are building long term relationships with businesses and councils overseas, and how councils in this country are placing inward and outward investment at the heart of their economic strategy.

Universities UK - Economy and Transport Board

9. To develop our work on better engagement of higher education in local growth, Universities UK have been invited to our next Board to discuss the role of Higher Education institutions in local economic growth and how they, businesses and local authorities can work better together on supporting local growth priorities, commercialising innovation and preparing graduates for work. Recent reports, such as the Wilson review of university-business collaboration, and IPPR North's 'Beyond bricks and mortar boards' have shown that more can be done through greater joint working.

National Sustainable Transport Conference

10. On 31 October, I spoke at the National Sustainable Transport Conference, detailing the LGA's lobbying work on transport devolution, in particular the importance of transport for promoting growth, looking at transport as a whole and linking to other policy areas such as Health. Local authorities are best placed to help the Government deliver transport solutions. Norman Baker MP delivered the keynote speech on the DfT's White Paper 'Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon: Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen', focussing on linking transport across policy areas, investment in cycling and the need to take decisions at a local level with a devolved programme of work.