

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

Commission Work Programme 2013

1. At the most recent meeting of the Board, colleagues and I agreed a new set of lobbying priorities from the **2013 EU work programme (Brussels equivalent of the Queens Speech)**, which was published in late October. Our priorities, which are determined by the potential impact of new EU laws on our member councils and therefore fit to LGA business plan priorities, include: economic development and regeneration; public procurement; environment laws; and initiatives affecting councils as employers.
2. Translating these priorities into tangible outcomes for councils and communities will require close cooperation between local government and the European Parliament to ensure EU proposals achieve their objectives in a way that is workable and cost-effective for councils who deal with new rules on a daily basis. I look forward to working with colleagues from across all the policy Boards to raise the profile, internally and externally, of the LGA's EU lobbying programme and **mainstream these cross-cutting priorities** throughout the work of the organisation.

EU Funding 2014 - 2020

3. As the debate on the overall EU budget size develops, we remain focused on ensuring that, whatever its overall size, **structural funds supporting local growth** efforts remain a priority for 2014 - 2020. EU funding remains a priority which we are actively lobbying on, as this funding is likely to become an increasingly valuable source of investment as other pots dry up.
4. Last month the LGA **met with Michael Fallon MP**, Minister of Business, to discuss the proposed delivery model for EU funds 2014 - 2020. The programmes represent around £8 billion in the current seven-year period, funding economic development and skills activity. It is proposed the Local Enterprise Partnership based EU Growth Programme will align three EU funds into a single 'nominal allocation' to different LEP areas for the seven years, which will design local investment plans.
5. Whilst I am happy to report that this represents a success for the LGA and councils, there is however a lot of detail missing that can have a profound impact on how local the model works in practice. With the formal consultation due in Spring 2013 and the new programmes likely to start mid-2014, we are now working to ensure that: all local partners in LEP areas can have genuine levers over spending; the model is flexible in how local authorities access and use investment; and that large proportions of the funds are not top-sliced into national programmes.
6. As part of this work, Board colleagues and I recently agreed a **draft position on the process for developing new funding programmes**. We agreed with the principles set out by the Heseltine Review, that EU funds should be integrated and devolved to local partnerships, such as LEPs, as a wider package for local growth. A short brief for local authorities and partners has been prepared, setting out some of the background to the issues driving these discussions, and

making some recommendations for a way forward. If you are interested in finding out more, the briefing is available at http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/eu-policy-and-lobbying/-/journal_content/56/10171/3784463/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE.

7. We have also **commissioned further research** looking into the issues facing local authorities as they prepare for the new programmes, to inform thinking on the future models for delivery. This research project, carried out by Shared Intelligence, will report early next year. We are looking for more local authorities to be involved, so please contact Nick Porter: nick.porter@local.gov.uk if your authority might be interested.
8. Additionally, on 22 January 2013, we are holding a **national conference** on the future 2014 - 2020 programmes. The event, '**EU funds for local growth**' is free for our member authorities to attend. Speakers at the event will include: Michael Fallon MP, BIS Minister, Derek Vaughan MEP and Councillor David Sparks. Less than a year away from the new EU programmes beginning, this event will provide local authorities and partners an opportunity to discuss and develop their ambitions and approaches for using future funds.

Peer Review of the UK

9. In 2013, the Council of Europe will undertake a review of local democracy in the UK. This is a routine, periodic review – the last was in 1998 – which will examine how the UK applies the Charter of Local Self Government. At our meeting on 9 November, the Board agreed to commission an **external evaluation of UK compliance** with the Charter, with specific reference to English local government. This report will help ensure that English **local government is given due consideration** in the Congress report and hopefully can be used as a lever for change in the relationship between local and central government. I look forward to sharing the outcomes of the review with you in due course.

African Peer Review Project

10. I am pleased to confirm that four of the five pilot African peer reviews, delivered in partnership with United Cities & Local Government Africa (UCLGA) and funded by the government of Luxembourg, have now been successfully delivered. Although the fifth and final pilot peer review in the Ivory Coast was not completed before the end of 2012 due to logistical challenges, UCLGA has made a formal request to the government of Luxembourg for a six month extension in order to complete the final peer review and project evaluation. I will keep you posted as the programme draws to a close.
11. We are already looking towards **maximising the learning from the programme**, disseminating the project's achievements, as well as the **design of future activities**. As part of this work, Cllr Richard Kemp CBE, Vice Chair of the European and International Board, recently represented the LGA at the Executive Bureau and World Council meetings of United Cities & Local Governments (UCLGA) and at the 6th Summit of Africities, a triennial gathering of local government leaders across the African continent. During the Africities conference, he spoke at a dissemination seminar for the African peer review project and supported African councillors in numerous discussions with aid agencies to gain resources to support the improvement of African local government through the peer review model.

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