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Chairman's update January 2013

Local Government Association (LGA) business

1. It has been a busy run up to the Christmas break with the **Autumn Statement** on 5 December followed by the **Local Government Finance Settlement** on the 19 December. Whilst it is pleasing our campaigning has resulted in councils being protected from additional cuts next year, as you know the extra two per cent cut in 2014-15 is unsustainable. The confirmation of a further reduction in funding for local services comes on top of the unprecedented cuts councils already have to implement. This is bad news for local services and undermines the role councils can play in promoting economic recovery. We will continue to make the case that the management of these cuts, through maximizing efficiencies and redesigning services, will be impossible to repeat; and that impact on the local frontline services that residents rely on and value are very likely.
2. At the November **Leadership Board** meeting we considered Local Government Finance and Police and Crime Commissioners following the elections held in mid-November. The following day at the **Executive** meeting, discussion focused on LGA work with the British Property Federation on growth in relation to Lord Heseltine's report.
3. At the December **Leadership Board** we discussed the impact of the Autumn Statement and our membership offer. At the **Executive** meeting we discussed the forthcoming Autumn statement further and considered the Draft Local Audit Bill.
4. In mid-November I provided evidence at the **London Finance Commission**. The Mayor of London has established the Commission to help him improve the tax and public spending arrangements for London in order to promote jobs and growth. I outlined that the LGA considers that the current system of funding for local government, and indeed for public services more generally, is far too centralised and set out the LGA view that all parts of the country could and should benefit from more localised funding arrangements and more freedom to invest in infrastructure.
5. Late November I attended the **County Councils Network (CCN)** annual conference. I spoke about how valuable our close work with CCN was in working towards our shared objectives and finding the solutions to the tough issues that we in local government face.
6. Alongside Group Leaders I was pleased to visit Belfast to attend a meeting of Leaders of the UK Associations – the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We held useful discussions reviewing priorities and identifying common issues.

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Ministerial/Parliamentary business

7. Throughout November and December I met the following:
- 7.1 **Rt Hon Danny Alexander MP**, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, with Group Leaders, to discuss the Autumn statement and Local Government Finance settlement. In particular, we considered Adult Social Care funding, the Local Government Pension Scheme, Capital Financing, Infrastructure and the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) Scrutiny Rate;
 - 7.2 **Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP** to explore issues further and to discuss Business Rates retention, Early Intervention Grant, Academies' central functions funding arrangements and Community Budgets;
 - 7.3 **Rt Hon Francis Maude MP**, Minister for the Cabinet Office, to discuss community budgets further along with public sector reform and commissioning;
 - 7.4
 - 7.5 **Matthew Hancock MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Business Innovation and Skills to discuss how the local delivery of skills would provide a more effective basis for local economic growth;
 - 7.6
 - 7.7 **Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP**, Secretary of State for Transport - I raised the issue of growth further, setting out the LGA's position on growth and transport and opportunities for a more localist approach to transport delivery and for greater integration between bus, road and rail delivery at the local level;
 - 7.8
 - 7.9 **Sajid Javid MP**, Economic Secretary to the Treasury and to discuss Capital Financing, Infrastructure and the PWLB Scrutiny Rate;
 - 7.10
 - 7.11 **Mark Prisk MP**, Minister of State for Housing, to discuss the Growth and Infrastructure Bill and Universal Credit and housing and **Rt Hon David Laws MP**, Minister of State (schools), and raised with him the role of councils in school improvement and their intervention powers; and
 - 7.12
 - 7.13 **Anna Soubry MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Health, with Cllr David Rogers OBE to discuss the relationship between national organisations and local government in relation to new public health duties and responsibilities and Richard Fuller MP to discuss our funding outlook document further.

Meetings with other organisations and individuals

8. I met with **Jeremy Newman**, Chairman of the Audit Commission to discuss the latest position with regard to the abolition of the Audit Commission and the issues arising from the pre-legislative scrutiny process on the Draft Local Audit Bill.

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9. I spoke at the community budgets conference and discussed how, with government, we have made the case for doing things differently. How working together with local communities, service users, neighbourhoods, business, the voluntary sector and community groups to co-design new approaches to public service reform we can together deliver better services. I addressed the Fighting Fraud Locally conference, which promoted the significant achievements in countering fraud made by the sector since the launch of the Fighting Fraud Locally Strategy in April 2012.

Meetings with councillors and member councils

10. I was pleased to attend the **Kent Forum** and to speak on the subject of 'How Leaders can shape the future for Local Government'.
11. I held a useful meeting with Leader of **Suffolk County Council**, Cllr Mark Bee, and Chief Executive Deborah Cadman to discuss a range of issues.
12. I visited **Northampton Borough Council** to meet with the Leader, Cllr David Mackintosh to discuss future work. I also visited **Northamptonshire County Council** to meet with the Deputy Leader Cllr Joan Kirkbride and the Chief Executive Paul Blantern.
13. I visited **Oxfordshire County Council** and met with their new Leader, Cllr Ian Hudspeth and the Cabinet to discuss current LGA work.