

Digest of Meeting

Title: Councillors' Forum

Date and time: Thursday 14 March 2013, 12.30pm

Venue: The Westminster Suite, Local Government House

Item

Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell, Chairman of the LGA, welcomed members to the Forum meeting and introduced Daniel Goodwin, LGA Executive Director for Local Government Finance and Policy, to update members on the LGA's work on a new model for local government.

1 New model for local government

Daniel introduced the meeting as an opportunity for members to be updated on the progress of the New Model Roadshows which the LGA is taking around the country in to gauge a steer from members on work in this area. Moreover, the Forum members were invited to feed in their immediate thoughts. Daniel explained that the LGA is keen to gather any examples of radical ideas, suggestions and approaches.

Daniel spoke on how the vision is that the new model should help inform the longer term spending review; not only the government's arrangement for the country but also the economics around the five key themes we have identified.

He highlighted the themes emerging so far during the roadshows.

The first of these was **trust** and members have expressed their concerns that there should be national recognition of how local government enjoys high levels of public trust (79 per cent). However, it is also important that trust extends to the relationship between local and central government.

The second theme is in relation to the need to develop a more mature **relationship** with central government which would give us greater flexibility and this is needed because local authorities should be trusted to take risks in the interests of their localities and communities.

On **partnership** working, local authorities have an important role to play in steering discussions to ensure that what is important to their communities, which will differ throughout the country, is at the core of all developments.

With regard to **risk-taking**, views so far have suggested that local authorities want to be empowered to take risks and action decisions in the specific interests of local government and local communities. Daniel encouraged members to think beyond economic risk and Sir Merrick mentioned that there could be a range of areas where risk taking should be a matter for councils and councillors for their area where they will

be held to account by the ballot box.

Finally, focussing on **growth** Daniel updated members on how much of the conversation has centred around how a coherent voice is needed about the crucial role councils play in boosting local growth.

Daniel explained that the LGA hopes to use its position as the national voice of local government effectively to speak out clearly on all these issues and represent the sector strongly in these challenging times.

The Chairman then opened up the floor for discussion and the following issues were raised and addressed in turn:

- Centralisation and the relationship between local and central government;
- Closer pro-active LGA working with MPs;
- District councils' involvement in health and wellbeing;
- Better alignment of good health and social care;
- Recognition that risk levels need to vary;
- Necessity of government support for councils taking risks;
- Benefits of advocating devolution in principle;
- The input of fire authorities and engagement with fire and rescue services;
- Alignment of welfare reform with employment issues;
- Links between sustainability and equalisation within local government;
- Fragmentation of services and managing residents' expectations; and
- Democratic deficit and the need for constitutional devolution in England.

The Chairman encouraged members to further participate in the debate wherever possible, either at future roadshows or in the Knowledge Hub group where more detailed notes on the discussion can be found at <http://bit.ly/11fjkn>.

2 Chairman's Update

Members noted and accepted the Chairman's report.

3 LGA Board and Panel Chairs' Reports

Members noted the written and oral updates from each of the LGA's Board Chairs.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 16 May 2013, 12:30pm, The Westminster Suite, Local Government House