

European & International Board – report from Cllr Clarence Barrett (Chair)

1. As this is my first report since becoming Chair of the European & International Board in September, I would like to start by paying tribute to the work of Cllr Dave Wilcox, the outgoing Chair, for championing the Board's work since its beginning in November 2010.
2. I am delighted to have taken on the chairmanship of the Board and am looking forward to the challenge of leading the European and international work, drawing on the wealth of expertise of fellow Board members, and working with the wider LGA membership as we seek to further consolidate and advance local government's interests in Europe and further abroad.
3. Whilst the European Union (EU) 'in-out' debate is never far from the UK headlines, it is important to remember that this issue is beyond local government's remit and therefore not for debate within this arena. Our core focus is on directing LGA resources most effectively to ensure that we get the best deal for our member councils through: lobbying and influence draft EU laws; supporting UK councillors who play a formal role on European and international bodies; and in bringing learning from international practice to support service delivery in councils.
4. We have a full programme of work ahead of us, with the European Commission's work programme (Brussels' equivalent of the Queen's Speech) due out in October, the European elections looming in May 2014 and the next few months being a critical time for ensuring that local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are given the levers to ensure the new EU structural funds programmes for 2014-2020 deliver maximum growth for their local areas.

Delivering Our Lobbying Priorities

EU Structural Funds

5. Government has published detailed guidance for LEPs on the process for agreeing local strategies for spending their notional allocations of EU funds. Alongside this, Government also published an 'opt-in prospectus' which sets out options for the provision of match-funding from a series of national agencies. LEPs can buy into sources of match-funding using their allocations of EU funds.
6. This represents a success for the sector. Nevertheless there is a lot to do to ensure spending is genuinely locally-led in practice. For example, there is still an inherent risk national administrative processes will trump local strategies, and that national co-funders, which have not always meaningfully engaged local partners in the past, may seek to dictate activity from the centre. We will be working on these issues over the coming months, to ensure that local councils, their communities and partners are able to make best use of this investment in their areas.

Role of councils in addressing the challenges facing Roma communities

7. In May Cllr Roger Stone (Leader of Rotherham MBC) addressed the Board on the challenges facing Roma communities, which helped to inform our lobbying on the issue and to identify steps to coordinate the sector's influencing efforts in Brussels.

8. Since then, Cllr Stone, a member of the UK delegation to the Committee of the Regions, has been appointed a rapporteur to draft an opinion on the "Steps forward in implementing national Roma Integration Strategies", and on the "Proposal for a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member State". These two documents have been drafted by the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.
9. Cllr Stone has had preliminary meetings with the European Commission and Roma lobbying groups in Brussels. Main points in the document will include: requests for more decisive action in eradicating discrimination against Roma; more support for integration programmes; and for more European funds for local authorities in the countries with higher level of Roma population immigration (i.e. UK).

State aid to aviation

10. Our European Association, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), is set to challenge a new set of rules from the European Commission which severely limit the amount of financial support local authorities can give to regional airports and airlines. The LGA is playing a leading role in this work and is consulting with local authority advisors from airport regions.

EU birth, marriage, and death certificates

11. We are currently consulting local authority registrars on EU proposals to standardise birth, marriage, and death certificates into a common multi-lingual EU format. The proposals will mean that civil documents issued in one EU country can be instantly accepted in another without requiring an official translation. The LGA is pushing to ensure a minimum of new administrative burdens. The proposals could also replace national symbols with the EU flag at the top of civil documents and have proved contentious.

International Links: Learning and Sharing

UKTI Update

12. International trade and export are proven routes for business growth; however, the role of local government in facilitating this is often underplayed. Following a successful meeting between Sir Merrick Cockell and Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint (Minister of State for Trade and Investment), the LGA and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) have developed a comprehensive collaboration strategy.
13. The first output from this will be a joint document aimed at encouraging local government and partners to support inward investment into areas and assist local SMEs to become exporters.

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