

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

1. I was delighted to Chair the first Board meeting of the new cycle, which took place on 15 October. It was great to meet my fellow Board colleagues to hear their views on the Board's priorities, as well as agree the work programme for the coming months, which is already well underway.
2. The publication of the European Commission's work programme (Brussels' equivalent of the Queen's Speech) at the end of October will give the Board an opportunity to look in greater detail at our European lobbying priorities at our next Board meeting. I will report back to you on this in future updates.

Delivering Our Lobbying Priorities

EU Funding 2014 - 2020

3. LGA lobbying in Whitehall and Brussels secured the localisation of £5.3 billion EU structural and Investment funds through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). However, several aspects of programme management and delivery are yet to be developed so one of the most immediate priorities for the Board is continuing to lobby to ensure that councils are able to lead and implement their local growth ambitions.
4. At the Board we heard from senior civil servants from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) on the latest developments in this process, and put our own views across to them to ensure that local government has a strong voice in the process. The LGA is also working to achieve this via the EU Funds Programme Growth Board (PGB).

Programme Growth Board

5. The local government delegation on the PGB comprises of the LGA Chairman, Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell, Cllrs Sir Albert Bore, Sir Richard Leese and Cllr Ian Stewart. The second meeting took place on 6 November and was attended by DCLG Minister Baroness Stowell. It was an important opportunity to convey key issues from a local government / LEPs perspective, with our Members making three key points to the Minister: (1) that EU and national strategies must be flexible to enable local joined up activity to flow; (2) that national opt-in programmes offering LEP match funding must add value and impact local need; and (3) that business processes must achieve simplification and respond quickly to need.

Public services reform

6. The LGA worked with Members of the European Parliament ahead of a key vote on 21 October to ensure strict new EU data protection rules do not place undue burdens on councils. The rules, as proposed by the European Commission are designed for big businesses, but do not currently contain the proper derogations to allow councils to easily deal with personal data for public interest purposes.

Sector-led support, improvement and innovation

7. In October, the LGA worked with similar associations across Europe to respond to EU proposals that will require councils to accept e-invoices rather than paper-based ones from their suppliers. The EU's proposals will require councils to adapt their payment systems and associated software to conform with a new EU standard invoice which is currently under development.

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International Links: Learning and Sharing

International partnership activity by English local authorities in key growth markets

8. We have had an encouraging response to our call for evidence on local government links with key high-growth markets as identified by UK Trade and Investment. The research aims to identify good practice and any potential blockages to sector progress to developing trade links, and will inform our on-going lobbying work. The survey is open until 17 November so please encourage your economic development officers to respond. For further information, contact helen.wilkinson@local.gov.uk or to download the survey visit: www.local.gov.uk/economy-and-transport-research.

Commonwealth Local Government Forum

9. Many councils work with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to support local government in the Commonwealth. In fact, CLGF has been responsible for providing resources for many councils' international work over the last few years.
10. I was pleased to represent the LGA at a meeting of CLGF's European Members on 24 October. The theme of the meeting was 'local government innovation at a time of austerity', and with local government representatives from Cyprus, Malta and the UK, it was a great opportunity to share experiences and international learning. Members were particularly interested in hearing about the LGA's *Rewiring* campaign, with many of the themes within it resonating with the challenges local government is facing across CLGF's European membership.
11. On Thursday 7 November I met with the Executive Committee of the CLGF. This was a valuable opportunity to discuss issues affecting local government across the wider Commonwealth, the post-2015 development agenda and the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. I was joined by the Vice Chair of the Board, Cllr Richard Kemp, and CLGF Board Member, Cllr Dave Wilcox.

Council of Europe: European Local Democracy Week

12. The annual European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) took place this year between 14 – 20 October. Local authorities from all 47 member states of the Council of Europe organised public events to promote local democratic participation. The event always coincides with the anniversary of the signing of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Charter seeks to defend local government from central government controls and promote good governance and local democracy, and establishes various rights for local councils and benchmarks for democratic processes. These benchmarks are monitored by peer reviews, with the UK currently undergoing a review (see below).

Congress: Peer Review of UK

13. The second fact-finding visit of a delegation from Congress took place between 5 – 7 November as part of their peer review of UK local democracy. The five person delegation met with UK Ministers, parliamentarians, the Welsh LGA and Northern Ireland LGA. These parliamentarians included the LGA President, Lord Best, two former LGA Chair persons, Lord Beecham and Baroness Eaton, and the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Clive Best MP. The delegation's draft recommendations will follow shortly, with a final report submitted to Congress for adoption in March 2014.

European Parliament: Support and information available to councils

14. You may not be aware, but the European Parliament (EP) Information Office in the UK has a suite of materials available to councils to help raise awareness of the role of the EP in the democratic process and in particular the work of its democratically regionally elected MEPs. With the EP elections taking place on 22 May 2014, the EP Information

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Office in the UK is looking to support councillors and council officials in their activities to raise awareness in their locality of these elections. If you are interested, a range of free downloadable materials can be found at <http://ddc.europartv.twofourdigital.net/en>.

15. In addition the EP Information Office in the UK regularly works with local partners and provides free educational resources. It takes part in local government weeks, Parliament weeks etc. to help enhance the awareness of the role of the Members of the EP to councillors, staff and the general public. To make sure your council makes the most of this support, contact: elisabeth.sweeney@europarl.europa.eu.

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