

Digest of Meeting

Title:	Councillors' Forum
Date and time:	24 October 2013, 12.30pm
Venue:	The Westminster Suite, Local Government House, Smith Square

Item	Action by
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Welcome and Introductions

Councillor David Sparks OBE, LGA Vice-Chairman, chaired the meeting in Sir Merrick Cockell's absence and welcomed members to the meeting.

The Chairman introduced David Laws MP, Minister of State for Schools at the Department for Education and Minister of State at the Cabinet Office.

1 Discussion with David Laws MP, Schools Minister

David Laws began by addressing the issue of schools' capital. He noted that councils are struggling with a massive increase in the pupil population, the biggest since the baby boom. While the increase varies across the country, some areas have seen a 40-50% increase in the primary school population. The government has therefore not only increased the proportion of the budget spent on primary school capital, but also increased the amount in real terms. It has also given more long-term capital funding so that councils can plan ahead. The method for calculating basic needs capital has also been refined. David Laws asked councillors to take the message back to their councils that this is a much more sensible system but it relies upon the cooperation of councils to provide information about funding particulars.

David Laws then spoke about the national funding formula. He explained that the new formula is particularly important in a time when budgets are strained and money needs to be sent in the right proportions to the right places. David Laws assured councillors that this new formula is not intended to displace local decision making since the money will still be distributed locally by councils. This new formula is scheduled to be implemented in 2015-16.

Finally, David Laws talked more generally about the role of local authorities in schools. He acknowledged that there has been a shift in the last few years from local control to national control and partly attributed this to instances of poor performance. He emphasised that local authorities must show enthusiasm and commitment to their role and will be left to fulfil it if their schools are succeeding.

David Laws then took questions from the floor. Topics of discussion included:

- Shifting assessment criteria for schools leading to academies where they are not wanted. David Laws urged this member to send him details of the specific case.
- Encouraging the Department for Education to involve the LGA in setting up the new head-teacher leadership system announced by Nick Clegg.
- The adverse impact that lack of schools funding can have on local business investment.
- The discrepancies between the position of the Department for Education and OFSTED.
- Lack of stability in schools policy.

Cllr Sparks thanked David Laws for addressing the forum.

2 Chairman's Update

Members noted and accepted the Chairman's report.

3 Programme Board Chairs' Reports

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

Date of next meeting: Thursday 21 November 2013, 12:30pm – 1:30pm
The Westminster Suite (8th Floor), Local Government House