

Update on current issues

Purpose of report

For information/ noting.

Summary

This report updates Members on current issues of interest to the Board which are not covered elsewhere in the agenda. Updates are included on:

- Spending Review
- Superfast Broadband
- The Arts
- Sport
- Media
- Heritage

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the update.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Update on current issues

Spending Review

1. The LGA has submitted proposals to the Treasury setting out our recommendations for the Spending Review. It is informed by work that we have been doing with our member councils and sets out specific proposals for change which would help councils play their part in delivering great public services. The submission highlights that councils are already dealing with a 33 per cent cut in funding from central government. This has led to reductions in local services and we are currently facing a funding gap of around £15bn in 2019/20. Unless there is the flexibility to change, across both central and local government, any new cuts next year and beyond will have a significant negative impact, particularly as the rising demand for and cost of services such as adult social care and changes to National Insurance will soak up an increasing share of local government funds.
2. The culture, sport and digital economy element of the LGA's submission makes the case for giving councils the necessary levers and flexibilities to maximise the contribution of cultural services to local growth priorities. The LGA is arguing for a new approach to lottery funding, a funding solution for Universal Credit that recognises public libraries will be a key access point for face-to-face support, a partnership approach to keeping the broadband roll-out on track and investment in physical activity to tackle obesity and improve public health.

Superfast Broadband

3. Robert Sullivan, Chief Executive of Broadband Delivery UK – the unit in DCMS responsible for government broadband funding – updated the LGA's Executive in March 2013 on the progress of the superfast broadband roll-out. He acknowledged councils' commitment to making a success of superfast broadband roll-out.
4. The programme is now moving at pace. Fifteen contracts with suppliers have been signed and there are more to follow. Members discussed the importance of broadband as an enabler of economic growth and reinforced that councils want to work in partnership with government and telecommunications providers to keep the roll-out on track and achieve value for money.

The Arts

The Arts and economic growth

5. The Culture Secretary of State's recent keynote speech to arts executives, calls for the arts to make the case for public funding by focusing on its economic value. These sentiments support those within the LGA's publication "Driving growth through local government investment in the arts", which highlighted that many councils are already doing this.

VisitEngland and Arts Council England Partnership agreement

22 May 2013

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6. VisitEngland is supporting the importance of the arts to attracting visitors and encouraging them to stay longer through a new partnership arrangement with Arts Council England (ACE), which will result in around £3 million funding to local arts organisations and events to help places develop a strong cultural offer and attract more visitors. The LGA is encouraging VisitEngland to involve fully councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships in the allocation of the funding.

Arts Council England independent governance review

7. Arts Council England (ACE) has published its new non-executive governance arrangements, following an independent review which the LGA contributed to. ACE is replacing its nine regional councils with five area councils. One-third of seats will be reserved for local government, in recognition of councils' vital role supporting and funding the arts locally. ACE has agreed with the LGA that local government should nominate its own representatives to the area councils. Councillor Rea has written to Sir Peter Bazalgette, Chair of ACE, to offer the LGA's full support with the transition to the new arrangements.

Summer of free concerts

8. Communities Minister Don Foster has announced that 250 free concerts will go ahead this summer, featuring the best of local musical talent. The concerts will be both free for people to attend and for musicians to enter and will bring people from different backgrounds together to listen to a wide variety of music. Over 200,000 people are expected to attend the concerts in July.
9. This runs alongside The Licensing Act 2003 (Descriptions of Entertainment) (Amendment) Order 2013 which was put before Parliament on 25 April. This order deregulates plays and dance for up to 500 strong audiences and indoor sport for up to 1,000 strong audiences, between 08:00am-23:00pm.
10. The LGA has campaigned to make it easier for councils to support local events, whilst retaining powers to ensure safety and protect residents from excessive noise and nuisance, and this proportionate deregulation is an important step forward.

Sport

Public health transfer

11. On 1 April 2013, the responsibility for public health transferred to councils and offers a transformational opportunity for councils to work with communities to improve health and wellbeing through high quality physical activity provision and cultural activities.
12. The LGA is working with the Department of Health to bring together the key national organisations whose members and delivery organisations will be operating in the new locally-led health environment, including Public Health England, the NHS Confederation, the NHS Commissioning Board, the Association of Directors of Public Health and Healthwatch England. Together we are developing an offer of help, support and challenge for the members and organisations involved in local health and wellbeing boards, public health in local government, and local Healthwatch to address local health issues and improve the wellbeing of their local people.

New chair of Sport England

13. Sport England announced on 29 April 2013, that Nick Bitel, previously Chief Executive of the London Marathon, is their new Chair. Mr Bitel is tasked with helping Sport England deliver its community sports legacy plans and strengthen grassroots sport across the country.
14. The LGA works in partnership with Sport England to deliver a very successful joint leadership programme for portfolio holders and we are running our sixth leadership academy in June 2013.
15. The Chair of the CTS Board has written to Nick Bitel to congratulate him on his appointment and also emphasising the opportunities councils' new responsibilities for public health present for sport and physical activity and its potential to address the growing obesity levels amongst communities.

Media

Publicity code proposals

16. On 8 April 2013, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued a consultation on proposals "to protect the independent press from unfair competition by introducing legislation providing the Secretary of State with powers to make directions requiring one or more local authorities to comply with some or all of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity's ("the Publicity Code's") recommendations."
17. Although it is right and proper to have publicity codes for local government and that councils should have due regard for such guidance, the LGA, on behalf of councils, strongly opposes the proposal to enshrine the existing Publicity Code in primary legislation. This is unnecessary and completely disproportionate, running contrary to the Government's professed commitment to local decision-making and to reducing regulation and red tape
18. There is no evidence that council publications are competing unfairly with local newspapers and therefore no reason for the existing code to be put into primary legislation. Before the Government changes the status of the current code it should set out the evidence for this decision. An independent review should be undertaken to establish what, if any, impact council publications have on local newspapers.
19. Contrary to the premise of the consultation, councils actually support the commercial newspaper industry by paying them £26 million a year to publish statutory notices. When you take into account total spend, including general advertising, councils are subsidising the commercial newspaper industry by nearly £44 million per year. Furthermore, 15 per cent of councils have print or distribution contracts with their local newspaper.
20. The majority of councils produce newsletters because they are the most cost effective way of reaching a high proportion of residents. 79 per cent of council publications reach 90 per cent or more of the local population. Just one per cent of local newspapers reach 90 per cent or more.

21. The LGA's full response is available on the website:
http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8c825f31-2033-42fd-854b-713e86f444a5&groupId=10171

Heritage

22. The LGA is working with English Heritage to produce a heritage publication which identifies and shares innovative approaches to delivering local historic environment services. Local heritage is at the heart of the identity of places and councils are at the forefront of protecting and opening it up for residents and visitors to enjoy and learn from. Heritage also delivers important economic benefits – UK heritage tourism accounts for £4.3 billion of GDP and creates employment for 113,000 people.
23. The Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) new scheme, Heritage Enterprise, will empower not-for-profit organisations, such as community groups and social enterprises, to work in partnership with the private sector to rescue and return neglected historic buildings to productive use.
24. The LGA is liaising with the HLF to ensure that early discussions take place with councils, in order to ensure planning permission and other local issues are dealt with appropriately for a smooth transition in the usage of the buildings.

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