

24 May 2011

Item 6

Oral Feedback from Members

Summary

The latest monthly report to the LG Group's Councillors' Forum from the Chairman, Cllr Peter Box, is attached for information (**Annex A**). This include summaries of all other Members' attendance at other meetings.

Members are invited to comment and to raise any other business.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to provide any steer for future meetings that may be required.

Action

Subject to comment from the Board, officers to take forward any suggested actions.

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£100m additional funding for pothole repairs

1. The LGG has been lobbying for additional funding for local authorities to repair damage to local roads caused by this winter's severe weather. I was very pleased that our work was reflected in the Budget announcement which confirmed an additional £100m for councils to deal with the damage to roads. This is on top of the £100m announced in February, meaning councils will have an extra £200m for potholes. The additional funding is of course a very welcome contribution, but the LGG will continue to highlight the importance of tackling the much bigger £9bn road maintenance backlog and arguing for road maintenance to be sufficiently funded in future.

Streetworks

2. I wrote to Norman Baker to raise councils' concerns about damage caused to roads by streetworks undertaken by utility companies. I emphasised the importance of ensuring that councils have sufficient powers to recoup the costs of this damage and to manage streetworks in order to minimise disruption to road users. The letter urged the Minister to make progress in making it easier for councils to implement streetwork permit schemes and enact unused legislation that would make it easier to recoup costs from utility companies.
3. On April 20th, I appeared on BBC One's Breakfast show and was interviewed on Radio 4's Today Programme, Radio 5Live and several regional radio stations calling for councils to be given greater powers to tackle utility companies which botch road repairs.

Buses

4. Cllr Jim Harker met Transport Minister, Norman Baker MP, on 30 March to discuss the future of bus subsidies. Cllr Harker set out the LGG's proposals for reform of the bus subsidy system. The Minister indicated his intention to consult on options for reform later this year and LGG officers will now work with DfT officials to work up options for reform. Cllr Harker also gave a presentation on concessionary fares to the Urban Commission on 30 March.
5. I gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee enquiry on Buses after the Spending Review on 22 March. The committee was interested in how spending cuts were impacting on councils' support for socially necessary bus services and how councils have consulted with their communities on making the cuts. In response, I emphasised that councillors are democratically accountable for decisions about future support for buses and alternative transport provision, and that these decisions will vary across the country given the local nature of bus services and in view of other local priorities. I also explained to the committee

how the LGG's proposals for reform of the bus subsidy system would mitigate the impact of the cuts.

Integrated Transport Authority

6. I chaired a meeting of the Integrated Transport Authority special interest group on 22 March. The meeting provided the opportunity to discuss key issues affecting ITAs and the LGG's current work on transport, the economy and lobbying on the localism bill and to identify areas where we can work together to influence policy.

Air Quality

7. Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, Deputy Chair of the Environment and Housing Programme Board, and I met Ministers Lord Henley (Defra) and Norman Baker (DfT) to discuss air quality on 16 March. The Ministers agreed that a more coordinated, strategic approach across local and central government is needed to tackle the problem. Officials will now be working together more formally to coordinate evidence in order to create a better shared understanding of the problem and potential actions at local and national level. This work will inform a further political meeting later in the year.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

8. Lead members of the Economy and Transport Board spoke at joint LGA/Association of Colleges events for local government, colleges and other local partners in Durham, London and Warrington on the development of effective relationships between local training and skills providers and local enterprise partnerships.

LG Group Economy and Transport Programme Board

9. At the last meeting of the Board on 24 March, Members agreed key messages that will inform the LGG's response to DfT's consultation on the InterCity West Coast rail franchise. This will make the case for councils to have a stronger role in franchising so that decisions on rail investment are integrated with plans for local economic growth and local transport networks. Members also commissioned the development of a work programme, in conjunction with the Children and Young People's Programme Board, about how the LGG can help councils to respond to rising youth unemployment. The full agenda and reports to the Board are available on the LGG website at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageld=46040>