

Decisions and actions from previous Meeting, 26 May 2010

Present

Chair:	Cllr Gary Porter (South Holland DC)
Vice-Chair:	Cllr Linda Thomas (Bolton MBC)
Deputy Chairs:	Mayor Dorothy Thornhill (Liberal Democrat, Watford BC); Cllr Mike Haines (Independent, Teignbridge DC)
Conservative:	Cllr Andrew Gravells (Gloucestershire CC and Gloucester City); Cllr David Potts (South Tyneside MBC); Cllr Clare Whelan (Lambeth LBC); Cllr Jason Stacey (Ealing LBC)
Labour:	Cllr Derek Bateman (Cheshire West and Chester Council); Cllr Tony Newman (Croydon LBC); Cllr Ed Turner (Oxford City Council)
Lib Democrat:	Cllr Paula Baker (Basingstoke and Deane BC)
Substitute:	Cllr Richard Williams (Labour, Southampton)
Apologies:	Cllr Peter Britcliffe (Hyndburn BC); Cllr Berni Turner (Liverpool City Council)
LGA Group Officers:	Martin Wheatley; Jennifer Watson; Caroline Green; Greg Taylor; Corin Thomson; Clive Harris; Fatima de Abreu (LGA)
Observer:	Cllr Lorna Campbell (Lambeth LBC)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Members supported Cllr Porter's congratulations for Ian Mearns, previous Member of the Board, on his election as Member of Parliament for Gateshead.

Action:

- Officers to draft letter of congratulations to Ian Mearns MP for the Chairman's signature. **Greg Taylor**

2. General Election 2010 – Key Issues for the first 6 months of a new Government

Introducing the discussion, Martin Wheatley drew particular attention, among the Ministerial appointments of greatest interest to the Board, to the reconfiguration of Ministerial roles in CLG in which Grant Shapps is leading on housing, and Greg Clark on planning, alongside his wider brief on decentralisation.

A number of key announcements had happened since the election or are in train, including the formal coalition agreement, the £6.2billion savings package announced on 24 May, and an emergency Budget on 22 June. LGA had made an offer to the incoming Government emphasising the scope for achieving necessary reductions in public spending by increasing local discretion about how public money is spent locally.

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The Board agreed that, among the issues of most interest to the Board, the top priorities were housing finance, planning and waste. In discussion, the following points were made:

Housing

- An immediate and urgent need to push for self-financing and ensure councils' capacity and capability to do this;
- The need to keep an eye on the scale and impact of likely reductions in HCA's capital programme;
- The importance of understanding regional impacts of HRA reform and other shifts in funding;
- Important to maintain focus on the private rented sector.

Planning

- While the council sector was likely to be broadly welcoming of the Government's devolutionary approach, the same was not true of business and other stakeholders, and it would be important to promote the case for devolution and councils' ability to manage well in a devolved system;
- Some Members were concerned that the Government's approach could risk losing the benefits they saw in current regional plans and processes ;
- If the abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission resulted in delay or discontinuation of major projects, there could be significant local adverse impacts. However, the Chair of the IPC had written round widely explaining that the likely position was for a single national, streamlined, process for big projects to continue, supported by a Major Development Unit, on the basis of whose work Ministers would take decisions;
- It remained important to press the Government to introduce a proper framework for developer funding for councils' role in major developments;
- Concern was expressed at the possibility of removing the need for planning permission for change of use classes. It was suggested that the LGA's position should be that councils should be able to decide whether or not to waive this requirement;
- The proposed weakening of the ability of inspectors both to alter local plans and overturn individual development control decisions was significant.

Waste

- The coalition agreement puts a strong emphasis on anaerobic digestion but it is extremely costly, and if this aspiration is to be achieved the cost issues will need to be overcome;
- Need to maintain a strong focus on waste reduction.

Members requested a note on what is happening to Regional Development Agencies.

The Board noted the considerable performance and improvement challenges which the financial situation and changing policy would create.

Decision

- The Board **noted** the report.

Actions

- Officers to reflect members' comments in taking forward lobbying priorities for the Board and to provide updates as they are available. **LGA Officers**
- Officers to circulate geographical map of regional impacts of changes in housing finance. **Clive Harris**

3. EU Commission work programme 2010/11

Jennifer Watson (LGA) updated members on the European Commission's work programme for 2010 and potential impacts on local government.

Members were pleased that the European Commission would not be pushing for separate legislation on biowaste. In addition, they welcomed calls for a more holistic approach to the management of municipal and non-municipal wastes.

Regarding the EU work programme, members said there was an opportunity to present suggestions in relation to forthcoming proposals to ensure that any future legislative steps are appropriate to councils' needs. They felt that some issues remained around communicating EU initiatives in terms of identifying the relevance and outlining subsequent opportunities for councils.

Ms Watson agreed to provide members with updates and more detailed reports at future meetings.

Decision:

- Members noted the report and **agreed** the actions proposed.

4. Environment Programme Board 2010-11

Corin Thomson (LGA) briefed Members on changes occurring to the LGA Group as part of the *Getting Closer* programme. Key changes for the Environment Board in particular would be a change of name to the Environment and Housing Programme Board and membership from September 2010 would include a representative from LACORs.

She detailed other changes within the group and asked Members to comment on the proposed Environment Programme Plan and to advice on how the LGA Group can better engage with its members. The Board were informed that the new political governance structure will take effect in September, subject to agreement by the General Assembly at their meeting in July

The Board considered the proposals and made the following points:

- They were concerned at the length of time it has taken the Association to get to grips with what they see as a simple matter of building or purchasing, and then maintaining, accurate lists of Members in relevant leadership positions, an essential basic tool for more effective

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communication;

- They agreed that work was needed on how to ensure outward focus be attained and agreed to put forward suggestions for ways of doing this;
- A more strategic approach is needed to membership of outside bodies and external speaking events.

The Board agreed to the proposed format for reducing official Board meetings from six to four a year, and felt that this would provide an opportunity for better engagement in relevant locations at other times, for which LGA Group Officer support would be available.

Decision:

- Members noted the report.

Actions:

- Officers to identify key events / conferences for LGA Group representation and suggest a strategy for consideration at September's meeting
LGA Officers
- Officers to collate suggestions on better working from members and provide a report for the July meeting
Clive Harris

5. Update on other Board Business

Members noted the Chairman's reports to the LGA Executive for March to May.

Cllr Porter reminded members of the LGA Group Member Induction Day on Friday 3 September. He encouraged them to attend if possible since the governance changes make it as important for longstanding and new Members.

Decision:

- The Board **noted** the report.

6. Decisions and actions from previous meeting

Cllr Tony Newman had given apologies for the previous meeting and asked that these be recorded.

Decision:

- The Board **agreed** the note of the last meeting.

Date of next meeting: Monday 5 July 2010 at 2pm, Bournemouth Marriot Highcliff Hotel, Bournemouth (to coincide with the LGA Group Conference)