

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title:	LG Group European & International Programme Board
Date and time:	Tuesday 19 July 2011, 2.00pm
Venue:	The Millbank Room, Local Government House

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chair	Dave Wilcox OBE	Derbyshire CC
Deputy Chair	Sandra Barnes MBE	South Northants DC
Members	Gordon Keymer CBE	Tandridge DC
	Liz Eyre	Worcestershire CC
	Sir Albert Bore	Birmingham City
	Paula Baker	Basingstoke & Deane BC
	Roger Phillips	Herefordshire CC
	David Lloyd	Hertfordshire CC
	Peter Box CBE	Wakefield City
	Nilgun Canver	Haringey LB
Substitutes	Dave Allan	Sunderland City
	Keith Whitmore	Manchester City
Apologies	Linda Gillham	Runnymede BC
	Lord Graham Tope CBE	Sutton LB
	Dr Andrew Povey	Surrey CC
	Richard Kemp CBE	Liverpool City

Officers: Ian Hughes, Jasbir Jhas, Dominic Rowles, Drago Djekovic, Ivor Wells, Richard Kitt, Virginia Ponton (LG Group)

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting and detailed apologies received. Ahead of potential reconstitution of the Board's membership, the Chairman asked for it to be recorded that the Board sent their thanks to Lord Tope CBE for his good counsel and contributions to the Board. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Keith Whitmore to the meeting to contribute on an additional item within item 4 on the Congress of the Council

of Europe as it was not possible to adequately cover this at the meeting on 2 June 2011. The Congress of the Council of Europe item was taken as item 4.

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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1	The renewed LG Group European and International Offer	
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Ian Hughes introduced this item which Members had asked for after the completion of the restructure. He outlined the offer, highlighting in particular:

- the importance of bringing government departments and EU leads together for coordination work.
- the new European and International team members and the team's capacity
- rationalisation of UK offices in Brussels and a possible debate for Members to revive around the offering up of shared office space in the future
- a possible debate for Members on the interest from LEPs to carry out work in Brussels.

Members considered the LG Group offer and made the following comments:

- It would be useful to know how many member councils are engaged with European or international work.
- Members discussed how to promote European and international engagement to LEPs.
- There is no mention of the European and International team on signage at LGH. Members agreed that this area of work should be added to the list of teams.
- Members discussed sending a letter to all councils to find out what work local authorities or LEPs are doing on European or international issues and attach the LG Group lobbying principles on this work in order to reinforce the value if the Board.

Cllr Dave Allan said that there was no mention of the Partnership of Public Employers (PPE) of which Cllr Allan is President and proposed that his team meet with the European and International Programme Board. The Chairman agreed to this in principle.

Decision

Members noted the report and considered issues to be taken on board by officers.

Action

Officers to provide ideas on funding opportunities under paragraph 8 to the next meeting of the Board.

Ian Hughes

2 European economic and skills development funds

Ian Hughes presented the paper and asked Members to share their comments.

Members asked officers to provide a map of current GDP of UK regions and were concerned about a lack of local input into how local EU funding is directed and welcomed bringing government departments together with local authorities on this issue. Paragraph 11 does not refer to EIB funding which Members thought should sit alongside EU structural funding.

Members and officers detailed meetings with various government departments and Ian Hughes suggested quarterly meetings to catch up on these linkages.

It was highlighted that councils lack confidence in finding match funding and putting together bids.

Decision

Members noted the report and considered issues which are to be taken on board by officers.

Action

Officers will provide a UK region GDP map.

Dominic Rowles

3 EU fines

Jasbir Jhas provided an update on EU fines, the LG Group's position and the next steps. She thanked Lord Tope CBE for raising the debate on EU fines with Lord Attlee and informed Members that Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell had met with the Secretary of State for Local Government and Lord Attlee to highlight the LG Group's position. The Chairman thanked Jasbir Jhas for the invaluable update. He also expressed his thanks to Lord Tope CBE for his tremendous amount of work on this issue

and wished officers the best in progressing the LG Group work on influencing the EU fines clauses in the Localism Bill.

Decision

Members noted the update.

4 Congress of the Council of Europe

Members agreed to take this as an additional item, as follow-up to the paper taken at the previous meeting (copy tabled). Cllr Keith Whitmore outlined the forthcoming UK Chairmanship of the Council of Europe and a forthcoming peer review in 2012 on UK compliance with the Charter of Local Self-Government.

He highlighted the possibility of focussing on coastal issues during the UK Chairmanship and the need to promote European Local Democracy Week, urging Members to consider how to revive this week of activities.

Members said that it was disappointing to see a lack of excitement and importance placed on the Chairmanship and concern therefore that the UK term may not make much of an impact. Members stressed the importance of promoting Council of Europe achievements and positive news stories and the importance of the UK Parliament recognising and launching the presidency.

Decision

Members noted the report and agreed to bring the peer review debate back to the Executive Board or the Councillor's Forum to further discuss what a peer review might look like.

Action

It was agreed to liaise with ministers on plans for the UK Chairmanship..

Richard Kitt

5 Possible EU proposals on VAT and public authorities – next steps

Dominic Rowles updated Members on the possible EU proposals on VAT and the work being carried out by LG Group on this issue and responded to Members' technical questions.

Members also discussed:

- whether the Association of Parish Councils had been contacted on this matter as they would need guidance
- the possibility of authorities interpreting rules differently
- the difficulty in categorising services to decide on which VAT rules to follow
- the support on offer to procurement officers.

Members felt the proposals could be seen as complicated and disadvantageous to local authorities.

Dominic Rowles welcomed further feedback from Members and the Chairman highlighted that there would be time to collect information and further debate this issue.

Decision

Members noted the report and considered issues to be taken on board by officers.

6 Future LG Group International work

Ivor Wells introduced the item and together with Drago Djekovic gave a presentation based on the programme of work on paragraph 12. Officers sought comments and approval that Members were still happy for this programme of work to be progressed. Officers briefed members on preparatory meetings for the UCLGA Pan-African Peer Review Programme, the first of which is taking place in Rabat, Morocco on 25-26 July, and will be attended by Ivor Wells, Andy Bates and Paul Clarke.

The Chairman thanked officers for an impressive presentation and discussed how capacity would be managed.

Members wished officers success in this programme of work and discussed the following points:

- how to communicate this work to the sector
- how to join up with other stakeholders in the field
- how officers manage political sensitivities with other countries.

The Chairman concluded that Members had indicated fairly strong approval of the programme of work and agreed in principle the idea of Members as champions of projects. He thanked all in attendance for their contributions to the meeting.

Decision

Members agreed to support the programme of work presented by officers.

6 Update on Board work

Members noted the report

7 Notes of the last meeting

Members approved the notes of the last meeting as an accurate record.