

European and International Board Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper outlines the recent LGA international work and updates Members on current projects taking place.

Recommendation

Members are requested to consider the update and offer any comments.

Action

LGA Officers to take forward any work identified by Members.

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European and International Board update

EU lobbying priorities: lobbying activities by LGA with the support of CEMR (European LGA)

Funding

1. LGA staff have participated in meetings with MEPs and Commission officials organised by the CEMR focus group on cohesion policy; the group is updating the CEMR policy paper on the future of EU cohesion policy and lobbying the European Commission regarding its cohesion proposal for the 2014-2020 programming period the draft common strategic framework and code of conduct cohesion regulations.
2. LGA staff are assisting CoR rapporteur Cllr Flo Clucas to promote LGA objectives through her CoR report, which was adopted in December 2011; meetings are currently being sought with the EU representations of several key governments.

Energy and environment

3. The LGA and the CEMR focus group on **energy efficiency** are continuing to lobby the European Parliament against the 3% annual renovation rate for public buildings and for more flexible public procurement rules in the energy efficiency draft directive. The vote is to take place on 28 February 2012 in the Industry, Research and Energy parliamentary committee. UK MEP Vicky Ford has tabled several amendments in support of LGA policy objectives.
4. The CoR response to proposals to relaunch the €2billion **LIFE programme** will be drafted by Cllr Twitchen, assisted by LGA staff. The objective will be to ensure that the application procedures are simplified and responsive to local needs. LGA Vice-President Julie Girling MEP is shadow rapporteur for the European Parliament and has been contacted.

Internal market (procurement, concessions)

5. The CEMR focus group on **service concessions** is preparing a response to the European Commission's proposal for a directive on the award of concession contracts. This is an LGA priority and Brussels staff are assisting in the drafting of the CEMR position.
6. LGA staff are assisting the CEMR focus group on **public procurement** to prepare a response the European Commission's proposal for a new public procurement directive.

EU funds

7. We have agreed with BIS to create a local government secondee position within BIS. This person will form part of the UK negotiating team for the EU structural funds reforms. Whilst the person will be based in BIS and will work to civil service rules, they will seek to represent the interests of UK local government and LEPs in the negotiations and provide a link for councils within BIS. The LGA will be supporting BIS in recruiting for the post. All costs will be secured by BIS.

Council of European Municipalities & Regions (CEMR)

8. CEMR have established their lobbying themes for 2012, which include cohesion policy as well as public procurement and service concessions in single market policy. Also among its priorities are air quality in environment policy and energy efficiency in energy policy. These reflect the key aspects of LGA EU policies.
9. CEMR have published their annual statistical “**portrait of local and regional Europe**”. These information sheets comprise a series of indicators that compare the organisation and finances of subnational authorities in the 27 EU member states.

Congress of the Council of Europe

10. The LGA coordinates the nominations to the UK delegation of the Congress of the Council of Europe. The current term of office ends in October 2012 and a new delegation needs to be selected for a four year period. This is formally a Government appointment, but officers have discussed the issue with CLG officials and we are suggesting a roll-over of the very flexible rules of appointment which allows freedom for the LGA, whilst securing party balance, balance of councils and targets for the ethnic and gender make-up of the delegation. Officers will formally launch the nomination process after the May elections through group Officers, using the political balance figures resulting from the May local elections. It is hoped that an English delegation can be secured before the summer recess.
11. The March plenary session falls during the UK Presidency of the Council of Europe, which it holds for six months to May 2012; the Communities and Local Government Secretary of State is expected to attend to present the UK Programme to plenary. Although the UK priority is reform of the European Court of Human Rights and a reduction in the overall budget of the Council of Europe, an important strand is its attempts to reform the Congress. The main elements of the UK Government reform agenda is to unite into a single programme the activities of the various CoE bodies in respect of local

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democracy (to improve coherence and avoid duplication), and to create a single secretariat for this activity. Although the objectives of improved effectiveness and reduced costs are broadly welcomed by the UK Congress delegation, many countries are opposing the structural changes as a threat to the identity and independence of the Congress as an assembly of local elected members.

12. The LGA is organising an exhibition at the March plenary to mark UK's rare distinction to simultaneously hold the Presidency of the Congress and the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The event will take place during the Spring Session of the Congress 19-23 March in Strasbourg. The exhibition will be a collection of static displays by four UK nations and a central point representing UK. In addition there will be stands hosted by Visit Kent and Welcome to Yorkshire. Exhibition will showcase local democracy in the four UK nations and provide information on UK's tourist and business potentials. The exhibition has been supported by the Visit Britain (together with the British Council and the UKTI), Visit England, several counties and the Foreign Office. The event has been flagged up at the Prime Minister's Office.

Committee of the Regions

13. The CoR met in plenary session in February 2012. The only UK rapporteur was Cllr Doreen Huddart on EU initiatives on child poverty, which was identified by this Board as an important policy issue.
14. The most controversial report was on reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, which attracted 120 amendments (30 UK) and was eventually defeated. European Commission President Barroso addressed the plenary on the economic crisis, and the Danish Foreign Minister set out their priorities for the EU Presidency.

Election observation

15. Members of the Congress and the EU Committee of the Regions participated in a training session on election observation LGA organised together with the Congress of the Council of Europe on 13 February in London. Members were trained on the role of international observers, their political mandate as well as on technical and logistics aspect of the election observation. Training has been delivered by Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, Chair of the Austrian delegation to the Congress and Renate Zikmund, Head of Congress's Election observations and communications department. LGA will endeavour to provide tailored oral pre-deployment briefing for members who are selected to take part in Congress/CoR joint missions.