

Briefing Note for themed session: EU funds post 2013 - Update

Background

1. 2012 is the key year in finalising the arrangements for the future funds at EU level. The EU published legislative proposals in October 2011 governing how the funds for regional development, training, rural development and fisheries could work together in a more integrated way in the next programming period: 2014-20. An LGA summary position is attached as **Annex 1**.

LGA Activity

2. LGA has increased its activity towards the EU accordingly and has undertaken significant work with other associations across Europe to develop:
 - 2.1 a common position on the future funds
 - 2.2 a common set of legislative amendments to promote to MEPs
 - 2.3 a common statement on the importance of strong local involvement in the funds post 2013.
3. The approach across Europe on behalf of local authorities is therefore significantly more coordinated than previously and is beginning to show results. In particular:
 - 3.1 there are welcome new possibilities for local authorities (especially cities) to be more closely involved in the design and delivery of the funds
 - 3.2 there are much stronger rules on working in partnership with local authorities
 - 3.3 there is greater opportunity for local strategies to help steer the delivery of the funds
 - 3.4 there are new opportunities for the involvement of local community groups.
4. We also note improved dialogue with decision makers in the EU. The CEMR (the European LGA) has played an important role in facilitating this, as MEPs and Commission officials find it beneficial to meet with a single delegation rather than many separate associations of local and regional government from across Europe.

5. In particular, LGA has been successful in:
 - 5.1 getting the EU to commit to come forward with guidance on involving local authorities more closely in the delivery of funds
 - 5.2 providing input into the key report in the European Parliament
 - 5.3 getting the European Parliament to secure Derek Vaughan MEP (LGA Vice-President) as spokesperson on local involvement in the future of the funds.
6. Councillors are also playing an important role in the Committee of the Regions on these questions:
 - 6.1 Cllr Flo Clucas is following up her CoR report on the EU's financing post 2013 with meetings with EU representations of several key governments, especially those who seek to reduce the EU's budget.
 - 6.2 Cllr Albert Bore recently tabled amendments to ensure a strong local dimension in the CoR's report on the future of the funds.
7. There is also significant activity taking place in London to engage councils and to engage with Whitehall. Whilst the EU framework looks more promising than in previous rounds in terms of local involvement, government still retains much discretion about how the arrangements will work in practice.
8. We continue to engage partners in Whitehall on the potential role of local authorities in the future EU funding programmes. There is a risk that Government will look to further centralise the priorities and administration of EU funds to the detriment of what local partners want to achieve for their places.
9. This engagement is based on the previously agreed principles of: ensuring local authorities have an effective role in order to target EU funds at priority issues for their areas; better join-up between EU funds and with other national and local schemes with similar objectives, and; simplifying the arrangements to ease the burden of council engagement with the EU funds.
10. This activity includes:
 - 10.1 roundtable engagement events with local authorities and government officials, on 27 February LGA hosted an event with 30 local authorities at which government tested some initial EU funding concepts for 2014-2020. There will be an oral update at the meeting on outcomes.
 - 10.2 ongoing work with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to establish a local authority secondment to government with the purpose of engaging local authorities in the process of drafting and negotiating the future Partnership Contract with the EU on future funds.

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10.3 the development of a paper setting out the LGA's vision for moving forward on the EU funding programmes - based on the premise of effective engagement in a way that allows all local areas to explore their proposed contribution to the programmes in their area.

11. Looking ahead it is proposed to continue dialogue with councils and government officials, and step up political engagement with Ministers. The informal task group of E&I and E&T members will continue to lead this work, which might include the presentation of ideas to Ministers, and engagement with Commissioner Hahn.

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