

21 May 2012

Item 1

European and International contribution to LGA business plan

Purpose of report

For discussion and decision.

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The LGA business plan has now been agreed and sets out clear delivery priorities for the organisation in 2012-13. This item suggests the contribution this Board can make to meet the LGA's business plan priorities.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider the LGA's European and international offer and to recommend additional ways in which these priorities can be enhanced and delivered.

Action

LGA officers to take forward Member recommendations.

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Delivering the LGA business priorities in 2012/13

The offer from the LGA European and International Board

1. The LGA business plan sets out clear delivery priorities for the organisation in 2012-13. This paper sets out how the LGA European and International Board will focus on these priorities and, in doing so, will continue to provide a European and international service upon which councils can rely on for funding, early warning intelligence about European Union (EU) policy and legislative developments affecting them, and enabling learning from abroad to help councils continuously improve.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

2. A major priority of the LGA in 2012-13 will be to pursue a programme of public service reform. As over 50 per cent of all regulation affecting councils originates from EU proposals, we will focus on those EU proposals which provide the greatest opportunities or threats to councils' ability to delivery quality public services.
3. Our offer to councils:

LGA annual EU lobbying programme

4. Every year, usually in the autumn, the LGA considers the European Commission's work programme which contains policy and legislative proposals for the year ahead. It is the EU equivalent of our Queen's speech, so it is important that the LGA is in a position to influence EU and national decision-making processes. From this, the LGA agrees a focused lobbying programme on those proposals which we expect could have an administrative, financial or regulatory impact on our member authorities, or the services that they provide or procure. This is combined with other EU lobbying priorities from previous years which are still going through the EU decision-making process. This exercise is coordinated by LGA staff responsible for EU work with detailed support from specialists across the organisation.
5. The 2012 EU work programme was published in October 2011. It is extensive, and we have identified that around 28 EU proposals which could affect the functioning of local government to a greater or lesser degree; the full list is attached at **Annex A**. Board Members endorsed the long list of issues in January this year, and discussed the issues further at the March Board meeting.

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2012 lobbying priorities

6. At the last Board meeting, Members recommended that from the long list, we identify a set of six priorities for the LGA to work on during 2012. These are:
 - 6.1 Reform of EU public procurement rules.
 - 6.2 Directive on energy efficiency.
 - 6.3 Campaign to localise future EU funding 2014-2020 including structural funds.
 - 6.4 Review of the Working Time Directive.
 - 6.5 Review of the Air Quality Directive.
 - 6.6 EU fines (part of the Localism Act) – see below.
7. LGA staff have prepared lobbying strategies for Members' consideration (circulated separately). These highlight how we propose to work with leading Members, other national associations, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR - the European LGA), Committee of the Regions (CoR), UK Parliament, and networks of council experts to influence decisions Whitehall, Westminster and Brussels.

Lobbying and relationship management in Brussels and the UK

8. We will maintain a close relationship with a range of decision-makers and opinion-formers to maximise the impact of our lobbying in Brussels and the UK. Specifically this includes:
 - 8.1 Brussels: Commission officials, CEMR, CoR, MEPs (including LGA Vice-Presidents), UKRep, UK regional offices, other national LGAs, business and trade union representatives in Brussels.
 - 8.2 UK: EU leads in Whitehall departments, UK Parliament, European Commission and European Parliament UK representations, and relevant stakeholders.
9. The political relationship with MEPs and MPs on key parliamentary committees is an area where LGA member engagement can make a significant contribution to our lobbying strategies. This is especially the case in our relationship with LGA Vice-Presidents on the European Parliament.
10. Supplementing the relationship management highlighted, the LGA will continue to develop annual theme-based UK local government summits in Brussels and Whitehall. The intention this year is to organise a summit in Brussels to focus on our EU funding campaign.

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Systematic policy briefings and intelligence

11. We will deliver a national policy information service through a monthly bulletin, funding tracker and other media. This will provide information on policy proposals/changes, key LGA lobbying events so councils can influence them, early-warning so that councils can support lobbying locally with MPs, MEPs and Ministers, and progress on key lobbying objectives. We will also maintain watching briefs on other EU proposals outside our core lobbying priorities, to ensure other risks/opportunities are monitored, and escalated if necessary.

Working with Whitehall on the delivery of EU law and regulation

12. The devolution of EU fines under the Localism Act demonstrates the continued impact of EU regulation on councils, and more importantly, and the Government's responsibility to turn EU regulations into effective UK law. Poor communication of EU responsibilities or badly enacted UK responses may have a financial impact on councils. Thus LGA activities on the EU need a greater Whitehall focus in future.

13. In 2012, our focused offer for councils will be:

- 13.1 Ensure that any attempt to devolve EU fines to local authorities is fair and evidence-based.
- 13.2 A clear process for parliamentary and independent scrutiny is in place should a local authority wish to challenge an attempt to pass down a fine. Local government expertise is adequately represented on the independent advisory panel.
- 13.3 A programme of support for our member authorities to help avoid any imposition of EU fines.

14. We will also work across Government to ensure that the implementation of EU law is effective and appropriate. We will:

- 14.1 Lead a Whitehall Summit to ensure that all Government departments are meeting their responsibilities in the implementation of EU law under the Localism Act.
- 14.2 On our EU priority issues, identify lead EU Whitehall specialists and ensure they are supported and challenged by LGA leads on the same issue.
- 14.3 Develop a link with Whitehall departments to identify areas where there is a risk of an EU fine and seek to address these issues within Whitehall and our sector.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

15. EU structural funds provide an £8 billion investment into the UK over seven years. These funds are some of the few remaining public resources to support local regeneration. These funds are being reformed in 2012-13 and we will prioritise our lobbying in both Brussels and Whitehall on this issue.

16. Our offer to councils:

Securing future investment from the EU

17. As identified above, this forms one of our major EU lobbying priorities. There is a huge demand from the sector for a concerted national LGA effort to represent their interests both in Whitehall and Brussels. Our campaign aims to ensure that councils continue to have the opportunity to receive investment from EU regeneration funds, and that it is far more flexible locally than is currently the case. We will lead the debate to ensure local authority ideas are considered, and that we work with other stakeholders to ensure that our ideas are shared. Our strategy includes working with all five Government departments, including a Chatham House arrangement to support new ideas for local delivery, securing a local government secondment into Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to help develop the UK position, engagement with MEPs and the lead European Commissioner, and feeding into UK parliamentary debates.

Early warning on funding opportunities

18. We will provide a monthly bulletin and alerts on funding opportunities for councils to provide intelligence on funding calls: service area, amount, partners needed, deadline, etc. We will work with regional associations to ensure that councils have access to any EU (technical assistance) resources to support funding applications.

SECTOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Managing the demand upon LGA member authorities from the developing world

19. We will provide a gateway to manage the growing demand for UK local government practitioners to support developing local government abroad. There is a formal relationship with the Commonwealth LGA (CLGF), EU, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DFID). The LGA promotes the use of practitioners to deliver aid programmes, rather than expensive consultants to ensure greater value-for money from international, EU and UK aid budgets as well as ensuring on the ground expertise.

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We will continue to work with aid organisations and the private sector to secure extra funding for this work to ensure that councils have additional resources to undertake this work.

Supporting service improvement from international practice

20. We will continue to disseminate knowledge through the web and seminars about innovative and basic good practice from abroad. More importantly, we will use international practice in our lobbying work to test the boundaries of the UK local/central settlement. In 2012, we will focus this work on three LGA campaigns: local growth, adult social care and local government finance.

UNDERPINNING OUR WORK FOR COUNCILS

Providing a national secretariat for councillors on formal European bodies

21. The LGA will provide a single, national secretariat to support UK members on statutory European bodies, for example, on the EU CoR and the Council of Europe. To ensure effective and responsive support to all UK members, we work closely with officers from across the UK to ensure they feed into our policy support to members. In summary, we will provide a policy briefing on issues at each plenary and committee meeting, support for lobbying and governance issues, support to “*rappoteurs*” on key issues and on-the-spot advice at committees and plenary sessions.

A national resource in Brussels

22. The LGA Brussels Office is based in the EU Quarter and is co-located with CEMR, Eurocities, over 20 other LGAs and individual regions and cities. The LGA offers one hot-desk in our office (including internet and meeting facilities) for occasional use by member councils if there are meetings to be attended in Brussels. This is available to LGA member councils as a temporary Brussels base. The shared building also has larger meeting spaces for short-term rent, which we would be happy to make available for councils (fee charged by our landlord).

23. Officers responsible for coordinating European and international policy work are:

- 23.1 Brussels: Richard Kitt, Dominic Rowles
- 23.2 London: Jasbir Jhas, Nick Porter, Rachael Donaldson (EU work)
Ivor Wells, Drago Djekovic (international work)



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Board**
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