

European Bodies Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This Board takes responsibility for a number of external bodies where UK local government has formal representation. These bodies include:

1. The EU Committee of Regions;
2. Congress of the Council of Europe;
3. CEMR (the European LGA);
4. CLGF (the Commonwealth LGA); and
5. UCLG (the world LGA).

This paper gives an overview of recent developments in the Congress, CEMR and Committee of the Regions.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the recent developments in the Congress, CEMR and Committee of the Regions.

Action

None.

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Congress of local and regional authorities

1. Congress is the local government arm of the Council of Europe, based in Strasbourg. It acts as the guardian of local democracy and good governance, which it achieves by scrutinising how each country implements the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and it organises election observation missions to ensure fair and transparent electoral processes. It also promotes exchange of experience and good practice in key policy areas for local councils. The current Congress President is Keith Whitmore (Manchester). The LGA provides the secretariat for the full UK Delegation.
2. Members of Congress are local councillors nominated by each member nation. The current Congress mandate expires on 15 October and a new delegation for 2012-16 needs to be in place by October 2012. The LGA is responsible for nominating 13 English full members and 13 alternates, out of a total of 18.
3. The nomination process has been organised by LGA political groups and they submitted final lists in August. The resulting UK Delegation meets targets for both gender and ethnicity and is politically balanced (based on current LGA proportions). The delegation covers and has representation from each English region, covers all type and size of authority and has a mix of urban and rural. The full list is attached at **Appendix A**.
4. The UK Delegation will meet for the first time on 15 October when it will elect its political office-holders and agree allocations to committees.
5. One of the first high-profile tasks of the new delegation will be to consider the report of a peer review of UK local/central relations. The Congress visit to scrutinise local democracy in the UK will now take place in February 2013 and will include a visit to the LGA.

CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

6. The CEMR is the European association of LGAs from across Europe, and can be described as the "European LGA". It's main role is to lobby on new EU legislation on issue that concern local councils; it is increasingly successful in this, due in large part by being able to speak on behalf of over 100,000 local councils.
7. The CEMR was first established in Paris over 60 years ago, although in recent decades the weight of the organisation has shifted more towards Brussels, where it is co-located with the LGA and associations from nearly 20 other countries.
8. The LGA has campaigned for many years to locate the CEMR exclusively in Brussels in order to be more efficient, more visible, and to save money. The French LGA has consistently blocked such a move, but the recent decision of the City of Paris to give notice to CEMR from its subsidised premises has created the catalyst for change. The French LGA has therefore lifted its objection to relocation from Paris and this was confirmed at a meeting of the Executive Bureau on 4 September, in which Cllr Keymer played an active role as UK representative and Vice-Chair of the CEMR Finance

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Committee. Although the move will need to be staged over a few years to minimise costs of redundancies, we expect this to be completed within 3-5 years.

Committee of the Regions (CoR)

9. The CoR is a formal consultative body of the European Union. Its remit is to comment on forthcoming EU laws from a local and regional perspective. The LGA provides the secretariat for the full UK Delegation, which comprises 24 full and 24 alternate members.
10. In the May 2012 local elections three members of the LGA-nominated UK Delegation chose not to stand. These members were Amanda Byrne (Conservative, Yorkshire), Flo Clucas (Liberal Democrat, North-West), Peter Moore (Liberal Democrat, Yorkshire). The relevant LGA political groups have nominated to these vacancies and the following nominations will be put forward to the various Government Departments for approval: Paula Baker (Liberal Democrat, South East) from an alternate member to a full member; Dee Sharpe (Conservative, Yorkshire) as a full member; and Stewart Golton (Liberal Democrat, Yorkshire) and Margaret Lishman (Liberal Democrat, North West) as alternate members.
11. Still going through the Whitehall machinery are nominations to replace three Scottish MSPs from the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2011. Even more outstanding is the LGA nomination made in November 2010 of a replacement of a Labour member, despite repeated pressure on civil servants.
12. In its political work, the CoR has now adopted a report by LGA member Cllr Kay Twitchen on funding for environmental projects, and a report by former Board member Cllr Nilgun Canver on environmental law has now reached the committee stage; both reports were drafted by an LGA staff member.