

8 March 2010

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## **Influencing a new Government – key lobbying positions for the Fire Services Management Committee**

### **Summary**

As we approach the most keenly contested General Election for over a decade it is important that the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee identifies the key issues that will need to be addressed by any incoming government to ensure member FRAs are well placed to perform well in a period of serious spending constraints.

This paper outlines the current political context and also summarises the LGA's work ahead of the General Election undertaken so far.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to agree 5 key 'asks' that the Committee can present to a new Government in May 2010 and identify where these would fit within the LGA Group Business Plan 2010-11.

### **Action**

LGA officers to action as necessary.

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## **Influencing a new Government – key lobbying positions for the Fire Services Management Committee**

### **Background**

1. It is now almost certain that the General Election will be called in early May and there is the greatest chance of a change in Government for over a decade, with polls (ICM/The Guardian February 2010) showing popular support as follows:

Conservatives: 37%  
Labour: 30%  
Liberal Democrats: 20%  
Other 13%

2. This has been projected to give the Conservatives a small majority and this would have major implications for the LGA Group. A hung parliament would have its own implications and this outcome cannot be discounted.

### **Economic context**

3. At the end of the 2009-10 financial year the budget deficit will stand at £175 billion. This exceeds combined annual spending of the Department for Communities & Local Government, the Department for Children, Schools & Families, the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Transport, Home Office, and many more. It is predicted that the 2010-11 financial year will see asset sales, tax rises and spending cuts. Nick Clegg MP has told people to expect "savage cuts", whilst the Shadow Chancellor, George Osborne MP has suggested that "painful changes" would be necessary. The Chancellor, Alistair Darling has stated that "it's essential we cut the public deficit".

### **The LGA's work**

4. A second series of Smith Square debates on emerging public policy issues, with leading speakers - e.g. Martin Bell on Independents' Day is taking place, alongside events with think tanks, 'commentariat' as well as bilateral meetings with Ministers and shadow spokespeople. The LGA has also been giving implementation advice on key policy proposals; the abolition of regional tiers for example.
5. The LGA's work so far has focused on positioning local government as:
  - the most efficient part of the public sector
  - beating Whitehall on efficiency improvements
  - efficient due to accountability (in contrast with quangos)
  - innovative in pursuit of efficiency (e.g. Total Place)
  - leading by example as UK approaches an age of austerity/constraint
  - over-regulated, with costs to 'the public purse'

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6. The LGA *Delivering More for Less* report, published in November 2009, highlighted that £4.5bn-plus potential savings could be made through tackling:
  - the quango state
  - reviews of reviews
  - policy overkill
  - excessive reporting requirements.
7. Total place is an innovative LGA Group-backed project to find fresh ways of making public services better for people at lower cost. Initial results from pilot projects, in areas from Birmingham to Dorset, on subjects from housing to older people have been positive. These results are being promoted on a cross-party basis and publicised nationally (e.g. 'Today') and in trade media, through the LGA, Leadership Centre and IDeA 'getting closer' work.

## **Election messaging and the LGA Group Business Plan 2010-11**

8. The LGA Group Business Plan has been developed in conjunction with member authorities to identify the most important issues and where the Group can add the most value:
  - Local Democracy: putting local decision-making at the centre of debate, particularly in election year
  - Reputation: enhancing councils' reputation as outstanding service providers, community leaders and employers of choice
  - Innovation and Value for money: helping councils achieve greater efficiency, and lobbying for the funding they need
  - Economy: helping councils lead their communities, and the country, out of recession
  - Customer service: a 'fit for purpose' LGA Group delivering excellent, value for money services to members, through 'Getting Closer': e.g. Communications Review
9. Where does the Committee see the 5 'asks' fitting into the categories above?

## **Financial Implications**

10. There are no financial implications for the LGA Group.

## **Implications for Wales**

11. There are no implications for Wales.

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