

## **Coalition Government Business Plans**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction

### **Summary**

This reports sets out the coalition Government's business plans, including key themes and timescales. The report is to be considered together with items on a Local Government resource review and welfare reform to inform future work programmes and lobbying strategy.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to comment on the departmental business plans, discuss implications for the sector and the LG Group, so as to inform a future lobbying strategy to be brought to the future meeting.

### **Action**

As determined by members

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## **Coalition Government Business Plans**

### **Background**

1. On 8 November the Prime Minister published business plans that set out in detail the work of the coalition Government for the next four years. The publication is a key aspect of the government's transparency agenda enabling public access to data in order to increase Government accountability. The plans include departmental priorities, data (such as financial information) and Structural Reform Plans needed to deliver the Coalition's Programme for Government.
2. A searchable database of business plans has also been launched, <http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/>, along with information on departmental structures and salaries, ministerial meetings and hospitality and a range of other data. Every month, Departments will publish a progress report against published milestones and the plans will be refreshed annually. All legislative aspects of the plans are subject to parliamentary time.
3. A consultation is under way on the 'transparency' sections of the plans only. These sections contain input and impact indicators that include locally provided services. For example, Defra's plan identifies 'cost of local authority waste management per household' as an input indicator. CLG's plan identifies 'households in temporary accommodation' as an impact indicator. A LG Group response to this consultation is being developed and will be signed off by the Improvement Board.
4. With regard to existing scrutiny mechanisms, Government Departments are asking Select Committee Chairmen to discuss the Business Plans in more detail.

### **The plans**

5. Extracts from the plans are attached at **Appendix 1** which identifies key actions affecting local government. These are high level milestones only and do not set out the government's policy intent in detail. Some of the plans could be described as 'operational', setting out the key steps in the Whitehall policy and legislative processes, while others are more 'aspirational', aiming to incorporate insights from behavioural science. It remains to be seen how much the public beyond the 'Whitehall Village' engages with the national level data in the departmental plans, rather than the local level data relating to services that directly affect their lives. There is no single Big Society plan but a number of departments highlight actions to support community level activity.

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6. The LGA is actively engaged in, or aware of, the planned activity and it is important that there are as many opportunities as possible to influence policy before legislation is introduced. Some of the government's policy agenda will not require legislation but could still have a significant impact on local government, so early influencing opportunities are even more crucial. Conversely, some of the detail in the business plan is well known and our work in these areas is well under way. A major plank of CLG's business plan is the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, which has been discussed at Executive previously and will continue to be discussed. Similarly the Local Government Resource Review, discussed elsewhere on this agenda is also highlighted in CLG business plan and the Local Growth White Paper. Executive is also discussing a paper on Welfare Reform, which will have significant impact for local government and is shown as a key plank in the business plan of DWP.
7. We will need to be alert to issues not covered in the plans, e.g. there is no mention in the plans of the broader later life agenda, other than actions relating to pensions, benefits and the default retirement age. We will also aim to encourage joined up thinking across government where policy agendas overlap or there are opportunities for synergy. For example, there are links between residual waste management (DEFRA) and energy production (DECC) and there is a need for the outcomes frameworks for health, public health and social care (all DH) to be aligned at the local level.
8. There are also opportunities for greater devolution and reduced bureaucracy. For example, the proposed general power of competence represents a fundamental shift for councils while neighbourhood level planning and Neighbourhood Justice Panels will devolve power beyond the Town Hall. On the key issue of inspection and performance data we are keen to promote our alternative vision of sector self regulation to reduce the regulatory burden on councils and local partnerships in a way that works for the local level and allow the sector itself to manage underperformance.
9. The government's activity timetable is front loaded over the next six months; Appendix 2 shows key actions until 2015. The LG Group will also be subject to changes in structure and resources for 2011-12 and this will need to be borne in mind when prioritising areas of activity.

**Conclusion and next steps**

10. The coming months will see legislation and policy proposals brought forward which have far reaching implications for local government and communities. A detailed lobbying strategy will be brought to a future meeting of the Group Executive and will incorporate the views of members' and Programme Boards,

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and help to meet our objectives for greater devolution and delivering better value for money services.

**Financial Implications**

11. This is core work for the policy, finance and communications public affairs teams and all work is contained within existing budgets.

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