

Note of the last Executive meeting

Title:	LGA Executive
Date and time:	Thursday 16 May 2013
Venue:	The Westminster Suite, Local Government House

Attendance

An Attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note.

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
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1. LGA Submission to Spending Round 2013

Councillor Sharon Taylor OBE (Chair of the Finance Panel) introduced the report which included a copy of the LGA's detailed submission to Government to influence the forthcoming spending round. The submission, which consisted of 12 individual papers, was submitted to the Treasury and relevant Government Departments on 29 April and had received considerable media and ministerial attention. Cllr Taylor summarised the key overarching messages from the submission and thanked members and LGA officers for their contributions.

In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments including:

- Members commended the quality of the submission, endorsed the key policy lines within it and advocated that the documents be promoted widely within the sector. They welcomed the fact that the submission presented a number of solutions in addition to challenges and hoped that this approach, combined with a robust lobbying campaign, would discourage Government from considering sector-wide restructuring.
- A number of specific issues were touched upon in more detail, including: a financial mechanism for redistribution; flexibility for councils to set planning fees; an equitable pay mechanism for local government pensions; and the need for four year financial settlements for local authorities to provide financial stability as well as support community budget style working.

Decision

That Executive **noted** the submission and **asked** that their comments inform the LGA's lobbying work.

Action

LGA Officers to proceed as directed.

Philip
Mind

2. Queen's Speech

Laurence Meehan (Head of Public Affairs) introduced the report, which summarised those Bills announced in the Queen's speech on 8 May which had significant impact on local authorities. Given that the report had been drafted in advance of the Queen's Speech, Laurence drew attention to a number of changes to the Bills that had been announced and asked Executive to agree the suggested priority Bills for the LGA.

In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments including:

- Members endorsed the suggested prioritisation of the Bills and highlighted a number of issues of significance to councils in forthcoming legislation. These Bills included: Immigration; Pensions, Freedom of Information and data protection and Gambling (Licensing and Advertising). Members asked that the LGA monitor these areas and keep Members apprised as and when further detail was available.
- The lack of legislation on cigarette packaging and minimum pricing for alcohol in the Queen's Speech was discussed. A number of contrasting views were expressed on the relevance of these issues to the sector and the lobbying position that the LGA should take given councils' statutory responsibilities for public health.
- Serious concerns over the proposal to extend council tax referendum provisions to include the charges of levying bodies as part of the Local Audit and Accountability Bill. Members reiterated their opposition to a centrally imposed limit on council tax levels in principle, and expressed concern that this would lead to further reductions in funding for essential local services and impede key infrastructure projects, such as those agreed through CityDeals.

Decision

That the Executive **approved** the suggested priority Bills for the LGA.

Action

LGA Officers to proceed as directed.

Laurence
Meehan

3. Councillors' Pensions - Consultation

The Chairman introduced the item which asked for Executive's views on the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) consultation on *Taxpayer-funded pensions for councillors and other elected local office-holders*. In doing so he asked that all Members encourage their colleagues to submit a response and supporting evidence to the consultation.

In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments, including:

- Members were united in their view that access to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) plays a vital role in retaining existing and attracting new councillors, encouraging diversity and ensuring that elected representatives reflect the communities they represent.
- Unanimous support for option three, which advocated no change to the current arrangements, was expressed. However, Members asked that the reference to 'taxpayer-funded' be removed from the recommendation so as to better reflect the fact that individual councillors, as well as the state, contribute to the scheme. In addition to this, it was suggested that alternative options not included in the consultation also be explored, so as to provide the sector with a robust evidence base with which to make its case.
- Whilst Welsh councils were exempt from the proposed changes, the WLGA and the Welsh national Independent Remuneration Panel would be submitting a response to the consultation advocating maintaining councillor access to the LGPS as well as submitting evidence to support this position.
- Members cautioned against conflating the issue of councillors' pensions with the wider debate around fair and proportionate remuneration for locally elected representatives.

Decisions

That the Executive:

- i. **endorsed** the Leadership Board's recommendation to support option 3 of the consultation, subject to the removal of the reference to 'tax-payer funded'; and
- ii. **supported** the proposal to bring contributions in line with the rest of the scheme (in the event that councillors continue to be part of the Local Government Pension Scheme from 1 April 2014).

Action

LGA Officers to prepare a draft consultation response to reflect members' discussions and decision.

Claire
Holloway

4. The expansion of Ofsted's remit

Cllr David Simmonds (Chair of the Children and Young People's Board) introduced the report which updated Members on recent moves to expand Ofsted's inspection remit to cover council school improvement support and to give it an increasing role in providing improvement support in relation to children's services and early years provision. In doing so, Cllr Simmonds drew attention to the potential implications for local councils and asked Members' for their views.

In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments, including:

- Members expressed opposition to the expansion of Ofsted's remit into areas and roles which were previously undertaken by local authorities and the importance of providing a robust response to this proposed encroachment. Whilst Members recognised that Ofsted has a performance role to play, they emphasised the importance that councils be given the powers and freedom to carry out their statutory duties effectively.
- Concerns were expressed over: the potential conflict of interest in Ofsted in undertaking both improvement and inspectorate roles and the need for greater clarity and consistency in exercising its existing (and any future) powers; and the need for Ofsted and councils to work together to establish clear expectations in relation to standards and delivery on both sides.

Decision

That the Executive **asked** that its comments inform the LGA's lobbying position and future engagement with Ofsted.

Action

LGA Officers to proceed as directed.

Ian
Keating

5. LGA Proportionality 2013/2014

The report, which set out the LGA's revised proportionality following the recent local elections, was moved by the Chairman without further comment.

Decision

That the Executive **noted** the report.

6. Publicity Code Consultation – LGA Response

Chairman introduced the report which set out the LGA's full response to the Department for Communities and Local Government's (CLG) consultation on the code of recommended practice on Local Authority Publicity and summarised the findings of an LGA survey on the impact of council publications on local newspapers. He noted that in a recent meeting with Brandon Lewis and Baroness Hanham, he had refuted the presupposition that council publications are competing unfairly with local newspapers and raised the issue of removing the legal requirement placed on councils to publish public notices in local newspapers.

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In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments, including:

- Members expressed strong opposition to the proposal to enshrine the existing Publicity Code in primary legislation on the grounds that it would be contrary to the spirit of localism, threaten the fundamental principles of local democracy and at odds with existing evidence.
- In particular, Members emphasised that the centrally imposed restrictions were disproportionate and would inhibit local authorities' from exercising their democratic right to engage with their local electorate and for the electorate to engage with the council. They noted that not only is there no evidence that council publications compete unfairly with local newspapers, local newspapers neither reach as large a proportion of the local population, nor support the voluntary community sector in the way councils do.
- In discussing paragraph 7.2 of the consultation response, Members' highlighted the need to make clear that the local councils are key purchasers, rather than subsidisers, of the local newspaper industry.

Decision

That Executive **noted** the findings of the LGA's survey of council publications and LGA's response to the consultation.

Action

LGA Officers to proceed as directed.

David
Holdstock

7. LGA EU Lobbying

The Chairman introduced the report, which drew Members' attention to two issues which had arisen from a number of lobbying meetings the Chairman had partaken in recently in Brussels. He asked for Members' views on the distribution of EU funding across the UK and on strengthening English local government influence over current and future EU regulation.

In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments, including:

- Members endorsed the need to strengthen English local government's influence over current and future EU regulation but acknowledged that the small number of English local government representatives based in Brussels, compared to those who worked for the devolved administrations in Brussels, meant that any efforts to coordinate English influence had to be realistic.
- Members highlighted the importance of those European bodies representing local authorities' interests, such as the Committee of Regions (COR), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP) and Committee of

European and Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

- In discussing the distribution of EU funding across the UK, it was noted that the figures were currently indicative as the EU budget had not yet been confirmed due to a dispute between the EU Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

Decision

That Executive **asked** the European and International Board to investigate possible closer working between English local government offices in Brussels and report back to the Executive with their findings.

Action

European and International Board to investigate possible closer working between English local government offices in Brussels and report back to the Executive.

Ian
Hughes

8. General Assembly Annual Meeting: Motions

The Chairman introduced the report which set out the Notices of Motion received for the 2013 Assembly. Leadership Board had recommended that Motion 2 on 'Welfare Reform' and Motion 3 on 'Independent Local Government' be taken forward for considered by the General Assembly.

Decision

That Executive **agreed** that the 'Welfare Reform' and 'Independent Local Government' Motions be debated at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the General Assembly.

9. Note of the 15 May Leadership Board meeting

Members **noted** the minutes of the previous meeting of the Leadership Board from Wednesday 15 May 2013.

10. Note of last LGA Executive

Members **noted** the minutes of the last LGA Executive meeting from Thursday 14 March 2013.

Appendix A – Attendance

Position/ Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Sir Merrick Cockell	RB Kensington & Chelsea
Vice-chairman	Gary Porter	South Holland DC
Vice-chairman	Gerald Vernon-Jackson	Portsmouth City
Deputy-chairman	Robert Light	Kirklees Council
Deputy-chairman	Robert Gordon CBE DL	Hertfordshire CC
Deputy-chairman	Andrew Lewer	Derbyshire CC
Deputy-chairman	Sharon Taylor OBE	Stevenage BC
Deputy-chairman	Mehboob Khan	Kirklees Council
Deputy-chairman	Mayor Dorothy Thornhill MBE	Watford BC

Position/ Role	Councillor	Authority
Members	Flick Rea	Camden LB
	Mike Jones	Cheshire West & Chester
	Alderman Sir David Wootton	Corporation of London
	Dave Wilcox OBE	Derbyshire CC
	Tony Jackson	East Herts DC
	Stephen Houghton CBE	Barnsley MBC
	David Simmonds	Hillingdon LB
	Mayor Sir Steve Bullock	Lewisham LB
	Martin Hill OBE	Lincolnshire CC
	Gordon Keymer CBE	Tandridge DC
	Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks DC
	Chris White	Hertfordshire
	Robert Dutton OBE	Wrexham County Borough
	Keith Wakefield	Leeds City Council
	David Phillips	Swansea City and CC
	Neil Clarke	Rushcliffe BC
	Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
	Sir Richard Leese CBE	Manchester City
	Paul Watson	Sunderland City Council
	Zoe Patrick	Oxfordshire CC

Position/ Role	Councillor	Authority
Substitutes	John Merry CBE	Salford City
	Apu Bagchi	Bedford BC
	Roger Lawrence	Wolverhampton City

Apologies	Councillor	Authority
	David Sparks OBE	Dudley MBC

13 June 2013

Item 7

Marianne Overton
Peter Box CBE
Philip Atkins
Mayor Jules Pipe
Cllr David Bellotti

Lincolnshire CC
Wakefield Council
Staffordshire CC
Hackney LB
Bath and NE Somerset