

Joint working with the House of Commons Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee launched an inquiry into the state of the relationship between central and local government and commissioned a draft code that would entrench a reformed relationship in the constitution. The Chair of the Committee, Graham Allen MP, is minded to work jointly with the LGA to bring the question of the relationship and the proposed code to wider prominence with central and local political leaders.

Recommendation

The Executive is asked to comment on the proposed plan of joint action between the LGA and Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee.

Action

LGA officers to work as part of a joint campaign team that would plan and deliver the proposed events, publications and media coverage.

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Background

1. In 2010 the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee launched an inquiry into the state of the relationship between central and local government and the prospects for codifying it. The Select Committee held a number of oral evidence sessions, the last in January 2011, at which Baroness Eaton, Sir Merrick Cockell and other senior local government leaders gave evidence.
2. The Select Committee subsequently commissioned a draft Code (**Appendix A**) delineating the relationship between central and local government. The LGA Chairman responded to this draft code supporting the Select Committee's willingness to grapple with this thorny issue, but expressing scepticism on behalf of the sector that codification would be the best way to bring about fundamental change in the way in which central and local government do business with each other.
3. The Chair of the Select Committee, Graham Allen MP, would like to see this draft code form the basis of a wider debate across central and local government led jointly with the LGA.

The issues

4. As a result of discussion with the Select Committee's Chair, it has been proposed that the LGA and the Select Committee should work together to take the debate to its next stage. Our participation would not imply a view on the substance of the Select Committee's proposed code at this stage. This is however an opportunity for the LGA to play its proper leadership role in shaping the future of the sector and the next stage of the localism debate.
5. There has been interest in this debate from Ministers of both coalition parties in participating in the discussions, and we expect that opposition Ministers might be equally interested.
6. Working jointly with a Select Committee, unprecedented in recent times, puts the LGA in a very strong position to lead the reform of the local-central relationship and reinforce the importance of democratically elected local councillors in delivering the localism agenda.

Proposed plan of joint action

7. The proposed plan of joint action would see LGA elected members with Graham Allen MP leading a series of roundtable discussions, Parliamentary and other events and publications to explore councils' and others' appetite for a new relationship and the form it might take, culminating in a session at our annual Conference in June 2012.

Conclusion and next steps

8. We suggest that the Executive mandate officers to develop and deliver the proposed plan of action on the principle that the LGA work jointly with the Select Committee to invigorate the debate at a national and local level while not endorsing the draft code at this stage, pending the views member councils express.