

Item 3

Independent Local Government Campaign

Purpose of Report

For decision.

Summary

This paper reports on activity to date on the Independent Local Government Campaign and sets out suggested next steps to ensure we maintain momentum and manage risks over the next few weeks.

Recommendations

The Leadership Board is invited to agree:

1. the process for reaching a view on the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee's proposed draft Code on independent local government set out at paragraph 4;
2. the suggested next steps for taking a view forward, after Conference when we have one, which are set out at paragraph 7;
3. the outline sketch at paragraphs 8-13 of how the campaign might assert the value of local democratic accountability in a way that complements the Code debate but has a wider reach and appeal.

Action

Officers to follow the Board's steer.

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Background

1. At its January meeting, the Leadership Board agreed that the LGA should work with the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee to invigorate a debate at a national and local level about the Select Committee's proposal for a new formal Code setting out relations between central and local government, whilst not endorsing the draft code at this stage, pending the views of member councils. In February, the Board asked for this work to become an LGA campaign, and to be linked to campaigning on the role of elected councillors in holding local services to account. This paper provides an update on that campaigning work so far and proposes how we should take it forward over the next few months.
2. For now, our work has focussed on the debate about the proposal for a Code. We have held a series of events around the country in partnership with the Select Committee, have engaged with members of Parliament, academics and think-tanks, and have secured positive media coverage in both national and trade outlets. We have also published, again in partnership with the Select Committee, a pamphlet setting out the proposed draft Code together with comments on it from the LGA's group leaders. **Annex A** lists the events held so far and events planned for the next few weeks. The Leadership Board's agreement with Graham Allen MP, the chairman of the Select Committee, was that this phase of activity would conclude with a debate at the LGA's Annual Conference and that is in the conference programme.
3. While this work delivers the debate on the Code proposal which the Leadership Board asked for, we now need to set out:
 - 3.1 how we will bring the debate to a head, including how we will reach decisions about a formal LGA position on the proposed Code;
 - 3.2 how we might take those conclusions forward into further campaigning work; and
 - 3.3 how this might combine with the campaigning theme the Leadership Board wanted to see promoting the role of elected councillors in providing accountability.

Reaching a view on the Code

4. We propose the following steps to lead us to the Annual Conference debate on the Code:

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- 4.1 we should summarise what we have learned through the debate about councils' views on the proposed draft Code in a document that could be published at Annual Conference;
 - 4.2 we should then discuss a proposed LGA position, based on that document, in the pre-Conference Leadership Board and Executive on 13 and 14 June;
 - 4.3 we should share our views with Graham Allen MP and the Select Committee following that discussion and in advance of Annual Conference; and
 - 4.4 we should put that position to the Conference debate.
5. In doing that, there are two things it may be important to take into account:
- 5.1 the need for the Conference debate to be a positive discussion that provides momentum; and
 - 5.2 the distinction between the issue of codification of the central-local relationship, on the one hand, and the substance of what the Code might say on the other.
6. Judging by what has been said in the debate so far, it feels unlikely that the LGA's position would be to endorse the Code the Select Committee has proposed in full in its current form. We should, though, be able to develop a position which is positive and campaignable about either the principle of codification, or some of the individual issues of substance reflected in the Select Committee's draft, or both.

Once we have a position

7. Once we have an LGA position, we suggest our next steps are:
- 7.1 to make a formal response to the Select Committee;
 - 7.2 to take discussions forward with the government about the ways in which the key elements of our position might be adopted as policy, in particular with an eye to the suggested refresh of the Coalition Agreement;
 - 7.3 to use our position as the substance for LGA events at the Autumn Party Conferences; and
 - 7.4 to continue working in partnership, as far as possible, with the Select Committee.

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Making this an accountability campaign: my councillor

8. In line with the Leadership Board's earlier view, we have considered how to give this campaign an expression that sets out the stall for democratic localism in a less policy-heavy way that appeals to a wider audience.
9. We recommend that, following Conference, we should complement our further campaigning by developing nationally, but also providing to councils for local use, material that celebrates the role of democratically-elected councillors in holding services to account locally.
10. Officers have discussed a relatively simple offer, building on what has been successful in the past, aimed at raising awareness of, and reinforcing positive perceptions of, the work that individual councillors do for their residents.
11. On our current thinking, the offer would focus on:
 - 11.1 poster/online graphics showing typical ways councillors help residents with simple text reinforcing the message: for instance, "Today I...listened to people worried about potholes. *My councillor: there to speak for me.*"
"Today I...helped an old person get the care they need. *My councillor: there to speak for me ;*
 - 11.2 raising the visibility of councillors using social media by further promoting the Tweety Hall offer; and
 - 11.3 developing a simple app allowing smartphone users to send a message to the councillor for wherever they happen to be at the time.
12. The aim would be both to further improve the standing and perceptions of the frontline councillor role, but also to provide visible collateral for the narrative about democratic accountability which underpins the more rarefied discussion about local government's constitutional role. If the Code, or elements of it, are the "what" we are campaigning about, this aspect of the campaign provides the "why" which is currently only implicit in our campaign.
13. We are very conscious that members will wish to be closely involved in taking ideas of this kind forward and we will be guided by Councillor Light and other members in doing so.

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ANNEX A

INDEPENDENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY

Campaign launch with Parliamentary reception	9 February
Smith Square debate	29 February
Publication: 'Independence from the centre'	1 March
Smith Square debate on Public Service Reform	28 March
Leeds event	13 April
Parliamentary roundtable	16 April
Oral evidence to CLG Select Committee	16 April
Nottingham event	20 April
Roundtable for MPs	23 April
Wakefield/LGYH event	22 May
Article in First	26 May
Birmingham event	30 May
INLOGOV event	14 June
Sunderland/ANEC event	16 June
Sheffield event	22 June