

Chief Executive's Monthly Report – November 2013

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The LGA business plan 2013/14 centres on three priorities:

- Funding for local government;
- Economic growth, jobs and prosperity; and
- Public service reform.

The monthly Chief Executive's report sets out the LGA's main achievements against those priorities. It also summarises how we are supporting councils through our core improvement services, and how we are managing our own efficiency and effectiveness.

Recommendation

That Leadership Board receives the Chief Executive's report for November 2013.

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Part 1- Achievements against our three priorities

Priority 1 – Funding for local government

- Issued a parliamentary briefing ahead of a backbench business debate in the House of Commons on **local authority funding**, at which LGA figures were quoted extensively. We briefed Andy Sawford MP, LGA Vice-President and new Labour frontbench spokesperson, on local government finance, the financial pressures facing councils and Rewiring Public Services ahead of a House of Commons debate on the **funding of local authorities**.
- Briefed Labour MP Gisela Stuart about the financial position of councils which she then referenced, quoting LGA figures, ahead of her ten minute rule motion on a **Funding for Local Authorities Bill**.
- Responded to a report published by DCLG which revealed that **parish councils** have increased their council tax by five per cent this year. The LGA was quoted on Telegraph Online saying: "Town and parish councils are self-supporting and it is for them to decide with residents if an increase in the precept is appropriate."
- Invited further bids for the **local government open data breakthrough grant**. Twelve projects have already been awarded funding from the £1 million pot which will help councils overcome technical barriers to opening up data for wider use.
- LGA research showing that local authorities face a **£15 billion funding gap** by 2019/20 featured in a Mirror piece about cuts, which also referenced the LGA-organised letter from 150 council leaders warning the Chancellor that further cuts cannot be absorbed without "devastating social and economic implications." The Guardian featured comments by the Chairman that some councils' finances are close to breaking point and are in danger of going bust as a result of the planned 15% cut in 2015/16.

Priority 2 – Economic growth, jobs and prosperity

- Briefed MPs ahead of a House of Commons debate on **planning and housing supply**. Nick Herbert MP (Conservative, Arundel and South Downs) referenced our concerns about the Planning Inspectorate's "apparent disregard for sites identified in emerging local plans."
- Cllr Ed Turner gave the LGA's oral evidence to the **Environmental Audit Committee** as part of the Committee's inquiry into the code for sustainable homes and the housing standards review.
- Cllr Mike Jones was quoted in **The Guardian** explaining that "councils could build up to 60,000 additional new homes over the next five years if the Treasury removed the housing borrowing cap and allowed councils to invest against normal guidelines."

Item 3

- Society Guardian used updated LGA figures in their feature about **collective switching** which showed that more than 150 councils are involved with the scheme and 285,000 households have already signed up.
- Worked with similar associations across Europe to respond to EU proposals which will ban public operating support to **local/regional airports** within 10 years.
- Cllr Tony Ball was quoted in The Sun, Mail, Telegraph and on BBC Online responding to the Government announcement on a **potential ban on fixed cameras and "spy cars"** which are used to detect illegal parking. His comments were also reported on BBC News 24, and news bulletins across BBC Radio 2, 3 and 4. Cllr Mehboob Khan appeared on BBC Radio 2 and Cllr Peter Fleming was interviewed on the subject by Sky News and on 5 Live Breakfast.
- Cllr Tony Ball responded in the Telegraph to comments made by Eric Pickles in the Commons where he said that councils who do not offer **free parking** for up to 30 minutes near local high streets are "failing in their duty" to small businesses and residents.
- Gave both written and oral evidence to the Transport Select Committee on its inquiry into **local authority parking enforcement**. Our response to its report on parking charges was included on BBC Online, Mail Online and reported across BBC Radio 4 Today Programme news bulletins. Cllr Peter Box appeared on BBC News to discuss the issue.
- Responded to a **Which?** Investigation, featured in the Sunday Times, claiming councils are "raking it in" by towing away thousands of cars for minor parking offences. We pointed out that only 1% of all removals are appealed against successfully.
- Responded to the Transport Select Committee enquiry on the **Strategic Roads Network** emphasising that these must not be treated in isolation from the local roads network or transport provision as a whole, and infrastructure investment must be coordinated with local growth plans.
- **Potholes** were big news this month with The Sun Online citing LGA warnings of a £10.5 billion backlog of pothole repairs in its report on transport minister Robert Goodwill's £28 billion road building programme and his pledge of an extra £10 billion for potholes. Cllrs Peter Box and Mehboob Khan responded to claims by breakdown company Britannia Rescue on potholes and compensation claims to local authorities in The Mirror, ITV.com and ITV Daybreak.
- Briefed MPs ahead of Opposition day debate on **high streets and use-classes**.

Priority 3 – Public services reform

- Held a successful workshop on the development of local **social work career frameworks** in partnership with Skills for Care and other partners. The outcomes will inform the development of advice and guidance aimed at improving recruitment and retention of experienced staff.
- Continued negotiations with Government and the Fire Brigades Union in relation to resolve the ongoing dispute over the pension scheme reform.

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- Supported 14 portfolio holders to lead **transformational change of cultural services** through the first LGA /Arts Council England Culture and Growth Leadership Academy.
- UNISON, GMB and Unite tabled their **2014 pay claim** for, “A minimum increase of £1 an hour on scale point 5 to achieve the Living Wage and the same flat rate increase on all other pay scale points”. We calculated this would increase the national paybill by 8.5% and will consult with councils before responding formally to the unions.
- Worked with Members of the European Parliament ahead of a key vote on 21 October to ensure strict new EU **data protection** rules do not place undue burdens on councils.
- The Communities and Local Government Select Committee reported on its inquiry into **Community Budgets**, to which the LGA previously offered oral and written evidence. The report strongly supported the LGA’s position on the benefits of community budget approaches.
- Issued a briefing to MPs ahead of **Local Audit and Accountability Bill** Second Reading in the House of Commons and also briefed office of John McDonald MP on the LGA’s concerns with the Bill.
- Issued briefings on the **Lobbying Bill** and the **Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill** ahead of their respective Second Readings in the House of Lords, on the **Children and Families Bill** ahead of its remaining days of the Grand Committee Stage, and on the amendments for the **Care Bill** which were discussed at Report stage in the House of Lords.
- Sent a briefing to MPs ahead of Report and Third Reading in the House of Commons of the **Pensions Bill**.
- Submitted written evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee for the inquiry into support for housing costs in the **reformed welfare system**. Briefed Cllr Sharon Taylor ahead of her oral evidence on "the role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system", in which she discussed Rewiring Public Services.
- Held a **Local Authorities Roundtable** in the House of Commons with Andy Burnham MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Liz Kendall MP, Shadow Social Care Minister, on Whole Person Care.
- Submitted a paper to the Education Select Committee on the **Inquiry into Foundation Years - Sure Start Children’s Centres**.

Part 2 - Sector-led support, improvement and innovation – our core services

- Responded to Ofsted’s consultation on the ‘**Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers**’, highlighting that the inspection regime must complement and leave space for sector led improvement and recognising that peer to peer challenge and support is the most effective tool in driving sustainable improvement.

- Issued job evaluation and grading guidance for **public health roles** developed jointly with the trade unions, and joint guidance with Public Health England on appointing senior public health consultants working.
- With the District Councils Network, ran the 4th in a series of 24 hour workshops for Chief Executives and District Council Leaders on **leading improvements in service delivery**. 43 District Councils have taken part in the events so with the final event planned for 28/29 November.
- With the Audit Commission produced a report highlighting the benefits and principle of **good contract management** and showcasing examples of good practice. The report will be launched at the Society of Procurement Officers (Sopo) annual conference on 11 November.
- A Guardian Online piece plugged the LGA's '**Tweetathon**' to mark 'Our Day' on October 17 in an article calling on local government to embrace innovation
- Worked with local government associations across Europe to respond to EU proposals which will require councils to accept **e-invoices** rather than paper-based ones from their suppliers.
- Launched the '**Councillors Guide to Procurement**', setting out a strategic approach to procurement, framing a set of useful questions and busting a number of procurement myths.

Part 3 – Our own efficiency and effectiveness

Finance

1. The LGA has made its proposals for the Autumn Statement to the Treasury. The submission has been sent to the Chief Secretary and the Shadow Chancellor under cover of a letter from the Chairman.
2. A key message is that by the end of 2013-14 councils will collectively have made only half of the cuts they need to make by March 2016. The same level of cuts that has been achieved over the last three years must be achieved again in the next two.

Alongside the submission we have provided an updated analysis of the financial position of "Anycouncil" and an assessment of the impact of our proposals would have in helping Anycouncil protect local services and growth.

Efficiency

3. As part of our work to secure the future financial sustainability of the LGA, members invited officers to instigate a review of its commercial potential. Consultants Ernst and Young held a successful consultation session with CLT on 14 October, and are due to report back with a shortlist of workable ideas towards the end of November.

KHUB disposal

4. We have now formally agreed the details of a new partnership which means that the Knowledge Hub has transferred to Liberata with effect from 12 November. This has included transferring four LGA employees to Liberata.
5. This means that the Knowledge Hub will continue to be provided to local authorities and others in the public sector, at the same time as achieving substantial savings for the LGA, as previously reported to members.
6. As part of the new arrangements the LGA has agreed to pay Liberata a subscription fee which will enable us to continue to operate up to 60 private groups to support our own priorities

Membership

7. The LGA membership position remains unchanged with 21 councils on notice to leave on 31 March 2014. A further two (Preston and Lancashire) in have given notice for 2015.
8. Work has begun on developing proposals for 2014/15 subscriptions. A separate report is included on the agenda. A table of visits to member councils is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Appendix 1 - Planned visits to member councils

2013		
4 November	Peterborough CC	Michael Coughlin
7 November	Solace South West Seminar	Carolyn Downs
7/8 November	Chief Executive & Perm Sec event	SMT
11-14 November	West Sussex	Sir Merrick Cockell
12 November	Rewiring in the Regions - South West	Carolyn Downs & David Sparks
13 November	Rewiring in the Regions - Southeast	Sir Merrick Cockell and Michael Coughlin
15 November	Rewiring Event in East of England	Daniel Goodwin Sir Merrick Cockell
16 November	Opposition to Power	Carolyn Downs
27 November	Hastings Borough Council	Daniel Goodwin
28 November	Doncaster (Mayor) North Lincolnshire (Leader)	Sir Merrick Cockell
28 November (PM)	North Lincolnshire	Sir Merrick Cockell
29 November	Hull and East Riding	Sir Merrick Cockell
6 December	Rewiring in the Regions - West Midlands	Sir Merrick Cockell & Carolyn Downs
10 December	Dorset Chief Executives	Michael Coughlin
10 December	Kent County Council	Carolyn Downs & Sir Merrick Cockell
10 December	Cambridge City Council & Cambridgeshire County Council	Daniel Goodwin
17 December	Lancashire County Council	Michael Coughlin