

Resources Portfolio - End of Year Report

Background

1. In the past year, the Resources Portfolio has shaped the national political agenda and made decisive interventions on priority issues for councils in the areas of: local government finance; strategic growth and infrastructure; workforce; and welfare.
2. The Portfolio has contributed towards the achievement of LGA corporate priorities and campaigns, and has worked very closely with the LGA Leadership Board, Executive and other Boards on shared policy interests.

Achievements

Local Government Finance

3. Secured the Government's commitment on local government retention of revenue from business rates by 2020 and a commitment to work closely with the LGA and the local government family on how this reform will be implemented.
4. Secured a better-than-expected outcome in the 2015 Spending Review and Autumn Statement and the 2016/17 local government finance settlement, including:
 - 4.1. Flexibilities for social care authorities and low-tax district councils to raise council tax by more than the 2 per cent referendum threshold in each of the four years until 2019/20;
 - 4.2. Additional funding for social care through the Better Care Fund, worth £1.5 billion in 2019/20;
 - 4.3. Additional funding in the four-year settlement to protect councils with the biggest reductions in revenue support grant worth £300 million, and £25.1 million to remove the negative RSG adjustment in 2017/18 and 2018/19.
5. Held a highly successful local government finance conference which was attended by more than 100 delegates. It was one of the highest earning one-day paid events on the LGA's calendar for the third year in a row.

Strategic Growth and Infrastructure

6. Commented on LGA submissions to the reviews of the Community Infrastructure Levy review and the New Homes Bonus.
7. Organised a local authority capital finance conference in conjunction with the Municipal Bonds Agency.
8. Focused lobbying efforts to promote local decision making for 6 billion 2014-20 European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) programme.

Workforce

9. Launched the Skills Champion role and surveyed the regions on their skill shortages.
10. Lobbied the Government on apprenticeships policy on the levy & public sector targets.

11. Instrumental in assisting authorities to develop pension fund pooling proposals that meet Government objectives in particular the provision of an effective communications and feedback channel between authorities and Government at both political and offer level.
12. Taking a lead role in the practical and technical implementation of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions (GMP) policy across all public service schemes following the ending of contracting out.
13. Working to influence policy with regard to exit payments and ensure authorities are fully informed of the implications.
14. Two year pay agreement reached for Local Government Services which also starts to meet the challenge of addressing the likely level of the National Living Wage in 2020.
15. Collaboration with NHS Employers and Kings Fund in preparing a major report on priorities in developing roles and skills for integrated services, to be launched after a roundtable event at the end of June.
16. Publication of a survey report on development of multi-disciplinary public health teams as a prelude to collaboration on a new public health workforce strategy for all UK nations.

Welfare

17. Secured sustained administration funding and a recognised role for councils throughout the transition to Universal Credit.
18. Worked with the sector and the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to successfully make the case for co-located and integrated support for claimants and jobseekers. We secured a firm commitment from Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, and a number of places continue to move forward with co-located services.
19. Effectively moderated key proposals within the Welfare and Work Bill and the Housing and Planning Bill to ensure that councils are better able to meet the needs of low income tenants, particularly through the provision of affordable housing.
20. Continued to make the case for integration of a wide range of services around low income households to ensure that they are able to both contribute to and benefit from local growth. We have sought in particular to engage with and influence development of the Life Chances strategy and the design of the Work and Health programme.
21. Maintain a resource on LGInform to enable councils to understand and respond to the impact of reforms in their local area.
22. Delivered the LGA's third annual Welfare Reform Conference.

Future Priorities

23. Looking ahead to next year's meeting cycle, the Board may wish to consider the following priorities in developing its work programme for 2016/17 meeting cycle:

Local Government Finance

24. Work on the Government's proposal for further local government retention of business rates will be a key priority for the Resources Board for the forthcoming year and in the run up to implementation. The Board and Task & Finish Group, with Leadership Board and the Executive, will develop a unified position to put forward the strongest possible case for the sector, for example:
 - 24.1. Building a case for specific transfers of responsibilities and phasing out of grants, while pressing for existing pressures to be reflected in additional business rates income.
 - 24.2. Making business rates income more predictable by managing the impact of appeals and revaluations.
 - 24.3. Building in sufficient safeguards to guard against risk, such as an appropriate and fully funded safety net.
 - 24.4. Ensuring the Government's review of relative needs and redistribution takes into account views of all parts of the sector and builds an evidence-based case for ministerial decisions.

Strategic Growth and Infrastructure

25. Conclude the review of existing funding and financing sources for infrastructure and formulate policy improvements to suggest to Government.

Workforce

26. Promote practice on tackling skills shortages and responding to the Apprenticeship policy implementation by March 2017.
27. Working with Department of Health and other partners to develop shared advice and support on integrated workforce planning, skills development and terms and conditions for the changing health and care workforce.
28. Piloting the LGA's "come back to social work offer" designed to encourage experienced professionals back into the workforce and ensure they are job-ready.
29. Influencing future pension reform following the 2016 valuations.
30. Influencing policy and determining the implications of guidance on non-financial factors and government intervention powers with regard to the investment of pension funds.
31. Working with the Higher Education and Further Education sectors to manage their change of status in the pension scheme and developing options for as academisation increases.
32. Further work on addressing the challenge of the National Living Wage both through guidance to councils and the development of a new national pay spine.

Welfare

33. We have commissioned updated research on the impact of the present Government's continued reforms to the welfare system. This will focus in particular on the combined impact of legislation, policy and spending on housing stability and affordability, in particular for low income households. In particular local policy implications in relation to: employment support, the 'safety net', homelessness and supported accommodation.

34. Further development of a properly recognised and adequately funded local safety net that brings together services to improve life chances for low income families.

Financial Implications

35. All work programmes are met from existing budgets and resources.