

## Note of last LGA Executive meeting

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<b>Title:</b>	LGA Executive
<b>Date:</b>	Thursday 20 February 2014
<b>Venue:</b>	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
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### Congratulations

The Chairman opened the meeting by thanking Cllr Mehboob Khan, who was standing down from his roles at the LGA and as Leader of Kirklees Council at the end of February to become Head of the Labour Group Office at London Councils, for all his work on the Safer, Stronger Communities Board and on the Executive over the past seven years. There followed a round of applause for Cllr Khan in recognition for his contribution to the LGA and the sector.

### 1 Rewiring Public Services: Parliamentary Activity

Laurence Meehan (Public Affairs and Campaign Manager) introduced the report which updated Members on the programme of parliamentary activity since the launch of the *Rewiring Public Services* campaign in July 2013. In doing so, he highlighted the headline issues and thanked all those Members involved in the lobbying campaign.

In the discussion that followed, Members welcomed the activity to date and made a number of comments, including:

- Examples of how the *Rewiring* principles had been taken forward by different regional associations and summarised progress in influencing the content of political party manifestos in the lead up to the 2015 General Election.
- The opportunity presented by Combined Authorities to speak with a more independent voice on public service reform.
- Concern at the lack of locally elected members invited to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee.

- The opportunity for Members to discuss the *Rewiring* principles with Members of Parliament and Peers at the LGA's Annual Parliamentary Reception on 26 February.

### **Decisions**

The Executive:

- i. **endorsed** the direction of travel of the activity to date; and
- ii. **asked** that their views inform the further development of the work programme.

### **Action**

Take forward in line with Members' comments.

Laurence  
Meehan.

## **2 Response to Extreme Weather - Verbal Update**

Cllr Mike Jones (Chairman, Environment and Housing Board), outlined the current position in relation to severe weather and flooding. In particular, he highlighted the work of councils and their public sector partners in supporting their communities. He drew attention to LGA's activity to keep member councils briefed on developments, as well as liaising with the national media to highlight the work of councils in affected areas. Whilst work to ascertain the full scale of recovery costs was ongoing, Cllr Jones emphasised the importance of councils having full discretion over how the additional funding allocated by government should be spent.

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

#### Funding

- Whilst the Prime Minister's commitment that 'money would be no object' in supporting the recovery was welcomed, Members emphasised the need to ensure that councils did not experience a shortfall in funding as a result of their recovery activities.
- That previous emergency incidents such as the flooding in Hull and the gas explosion in Oldham had not attracted such a commitment.
- The need for clarity about the different funding streams available and the role of councils in the design of the funding criteria.
- The importance of councils having autonomy over how to spend funding to best meet local need.
- Whether funding was available for Welsh local authorities affected by flooding.
- The importance of support from the insurance industry to ensure that victims receive compensation, and whether those affected by the 2011 riots had actually received compensation.

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Response and Communications

- There was general consensus that the working relationship between the Environment Agency (EA) and councils had been constructive. On behalf of the EA, Cllr Light (Deputy Chair of the EA) thanked local councils and partners for their vital contribution to the response and recovery effort.
- Whilst Members commended the success of partnership working across the public and voluntary community sector (VCS) in helping those at risk, concerns were expressed about the continued capacity of local volunteers to support communities.
- There were diverging views as to the extent that the role of councils should be actively promoted in the media in the wider political context.
- With reference to the long term nature of the recovery, the importance of maintaining the profile nationally after the initial media interest had waned was emphasised.

Next Steps

- With reference to limited financial investment in coastal defences over a prolonged period of time, as well as reductions in funding to councils and the EA, Members highlighted the need for local government to lead an honest and realistic national debate about flood management, funding and the role and responsibilities of councils and the EA.
- Member welcomed the Government's review to ensure that lessons were learnt from recent events, but emphasised the importance of local government feeding into the review.
- It was also suggested, that work be undertaken to look at other vulnerable public service areas to future proof against potential risks.
- Members suggested that the ability of the sector to swiftly and effectively respond to the demands of the crisis be used as lever for greater autonomy, as well to make the case for the sector being represented on the Government's national emergencies committee, COBR.

**Decision**

The Executive **noted** the update.

**Action**

Clarify funding for Welsh councils.

Helen Murray

### **3 Business Rates Appeals Consultation**

Cllr Sharon Taylor OBE (Chair, Finance Panel) introduced the item which outlined the LGA's draft response to the current Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on Business Rates Appeals. Whilst the LGA's response was generally favourable to the proposed changes, she highlighted the need for clear targets on clearing the backlog of appeals and reiterated the importance appeals from before April 2013 being offset against the old business rates pool.

Members endorse the key messages in the LGA's response, but asked that a number of comments be incorporated, including:

- robustly making the case that the risk should not sit with local authorities, particularly with reference to the potential level of risk for smaller collection authorities;
- addressing the issue of empty property exemptions; and
- lobbying more broadly for local determination of business rates.

Concern was also expressed about the backlog of appeals and the detrimental impact of the Government's late publication of guidance on pooling arrangement meaning that some local authorities were unable to form such arrangements.

#### **Decisions**

The Executive:

- approved** the draft response subject to the inclusion of their comments; and
- agreed** that the Finance Panel Office Holders sign off the final version.

#### **Actions**

Include Members' comments in the LGA's response to the consultation.

Mike Heiser.

### **4 Annual Perceptions Survey**

David Holdstock (Director of Communications) introduced results of the 2013 perceptions survey and invited the Executive to agree the key principles of the action plan. He drew attention to the headline issues and the significant increase in satisfaction in a number of key areas.

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

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- Members welcomed the encouraging results and highlighted the importance of linking them to a communications and improvement plan. Particular reference was made to paragraph 13 of the report, where a number of indicators had scored over 90 per cent.
- The involvement of Welsh authorities in the survey was questioned. Cllr David Phillips (WLGA) agreed to send the results of an external perceptions review recently undertaken by the WLGA and asked that this feed into the LGA's perceptions work.
- With reference to the number of local elected politicians being invited to provide evidence to Government Select Committees, Members discussed the importance of promoting this high profile work more widely within the sector – for example as part of the regular Parliamentary bulletin or in *First* magazine.

### **Decisions**

The Executive:

- i. **noted** the results of the 2013 perceptions survey; and
- ii. **agreed** the headline principles of the revised action plan for 2014.

### **5 Note of the last Leadership Board meeting - Tabled**

The notes of the Leadership Board held on 19 February were noted.

### **6 Note of last LGA Executive meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 23 January were agreed.

### **7 Icelandic Banks - Verbal Update (Confidential)**

Daniel Goodwin (Executive Director of Finance and Policy) updated Members on the LGA's efforts to secure the return of councils' money that was lost during the Icelandic banking crash in 2008. He advised that most of councils' remaining claims had been settled by a competitive auction. Those that had not been were continuing to receive support from the LGA. An LGA press release providing further details had been tabled.

The Executive commended the work of those members and officers that had worked towards this positive resolution and asked that it be promoted as a good news story. Particular reference was made to Stephen Jones, the former Director of Finance and Resources at the LGA, for his contribution as a member of staff as well as his continued efforts since leaving the organisation. Daniel also responded to two technical questions about the competitive auction.

**Appendix A -Attendance**

<b>Position/ Role</b>	<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Authority</b>
Chairman	Sir Merrick Cockell	RB Kensington & Chelsea
Vice-chairman	David Sparks OBE	Dudley MBC
Vice-chairman	Gerald Vernon-Jackson	Portsmouth City
Vice-chairman	Marianne Overton	Lincolnshire CC
Deputy-chairman	Robert Light	Kirklees Council
Deputy-chairman	Andrew Lewer	Derbyshire CC
Deputy-chairman	Mayor Dorothy Thornhill MBE	Watford BC
Deputy-chairman	Mayor Sir Steve Bullock	Lewisham LB
Deputy-chairman	Sharon Taylor OBE	Stevenage BC
Deputy-chairman	Mehboob Khan	Kirklees Council
Members	Gordon Keymer CBE	Tandridge DC
	Katie Hall	Bath and NE Somerset DC
	Izzy Seccombe	Warwickshire CC
	Robert Dutton	Wrexham
	Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks DC
	Tony Jackson	East Herts DC
	David Hodge	Surrey CC
	Neil Clarke	Rushcliffe BC
	Roger Lawrence	Wolverhampton City
	Paul Watson	Sunderland City
	Judith Blake	Leeds City
	Flick Rea	Camden LB
	Martin Hill OBE	Lincolnshire CC
	Sue Murphy	Manchester City
	David Simmonds	Hillingdon LB
	Mike Jones	Cheshire West & Chester
	Bryony Rudkin	Suffolk CC
	Harvey Siggs	Mendip DC
	Jim McMahon	Oldham
	Peter Box CBE	Wakefield
	David Philips	Swansea City
<b>Apologies</b>	Gary Porter	South Holland DC
	Clarence Barrett	Havering LB
	Peter Reeve	Cambridge
	John Hart	Devon CC
	Sir Richard Leese CBE	Manchester City
	Stephen Parnaby OBE	East Riding
	Mayor Jules Pipe CBE	Hackney LB



**LGA Executive**

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Stephen Houghton CBE  
Alderman Wootton

Barnsley MBC  
City of London