

European & International Board – report from Cllr Clarence Barrett (Chair)

1. There has been plenty of activity over the past month, with European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) developments moving at a pace, the Council of Europe recommending more powers for English local authorities following its 'peer review' of the UK democracy, and that is not even to mention the debate and anticipation building around the European elections which are looming large on the horizon.

EU Funding 2014-2020

2. As mentioned in my last report, the LGA is represented on the Programme Growth Board (PGB) for European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) for 2014-2020 and has been lobbying to influence the delivery and management arrangements for the £5.3 billion investment to support local growth. This is to ensure Ministers' commitment to devolve spending decisions locally become a reality as the funds go live later this year.
3. Following LGA interventions at the third PGB meeting, the LGA pressed Ministers and their officials for the business process contained within the binding UK-EU Partnership Agreement to explicitly define Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and their local partners roles and responsibilities vis a vis Government (acting as Managing Authorities) and its agencies.
4. The LGA has strengthened this in favour of local areas through successive iterations, the latest of which was submitted on 21 March. These are the minimum roles and responsibilities we expect. Notwithstanding this progress, we continue to press for further clarifications. For instance, where the Government has suggested the main barrier to achieving our minimum expectations, we have pushed for full involvement in the relevant European Commission (EC) - UK negotiations. We will also provide further comments once we have an understanding of the expected Ministerial decision on delegated functions for those areas which will have more control of ESIF coming into their areas. I will keep you updated on developments. In the meantime, for further information on any of these issues, please contact e&i@local.gov.uk.

Transport

5. The LGA has successfully lobbied the European Parliament's transport committee to reject EU proposals to allow extra-long lorries, so called 'mega trucks' from abroad, on UK roads by 2016. Northern European countries, including Sweden and Finland, permit 30 metre long mega trucks but councils in the UK and other countries had a range of concerns surrounding safety, added congestion, and environmental consequences.

International Links: Learning and Sharing

Committee of the Regions: Transport and Accessibility

6. Fellow Board colleague Cllr Gordon Keymer, and Leader of the UK Delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR), has been appointed spokesperson for the CoR on

'Mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions'. His work will make a series of official recommendations to the EU for improving transport and accessibility in such regions. For more information or to submit views by 5 May, please contact: dominic.rowles@local.gov.uk.

Council of Europe "peer review" of UK local democracy

7. In March, the Congress of the Council of Europe adopted a report on the situation of local and regional democracy in the United Kingdom. Their report was drafted by elected politicians from outside the UK and was based on two fact-finding visits to London, Leeds, Scotland and Wales, involving meetings with LGA members, local councils, Ministers and peers, and civil servants.
8. The Congress considered that, on the whole, local democracy in the UK meets the commitments entered into when it signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997. However, it regretted that local self-government is not constitutionally or legislatively enshrined in the UK and noted that local councils do not have adequate financial resources. It noted that English councils are still further disadvantaged as compared to counterparts elsewhere in the UK. The Congress recommends that the UK Government develops more structured arrangements for consulting local government and takes steps to reduce the financial constraints on local authorities resulting from cuts. Furthermore, it encourages the UK Government to extend the scope of the Charter to include the Greater London Authority.
9. The Congress recommendations – which can be viewed in full here www.coe.int/t/Congress/ - helpfully provide independent and objective support to the *LGA Rewiring* campaign. Whilst the recommendations are not binding on the UK Government, their compliance with them will be assessed in a future report.

LGA Skills Conference: Cllr Sue Murphy

10. On 17 March, Cllr Sue Murphy, Vice-Chair of the Board, spoke at the LGA's Skills Conference: *Local people into more and better jobs: can we deliver skills for the future?* She chaired the afternoon session, as well as addressing the conference on the skills challenges within her locality, Greater Manchester.

Contact officer:	Ian Hughes
Position:	Head of Programmes
Phone no:	020 664 3010
E-mail:	ian.hughes@local.gov.uk