

Chief Executive's Monthly Report – June 2014

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The LGA business plan 2014/15 centres on three priorities:

- Funding for local government;
- Economic growth, jobs and housing; 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 the Leadership Board notes the Chief Executive's report for June 2014.

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Part 1- Achievements against our three priorities

Priority 1 – Funding for local government

- We briefed MPs ahead of a House of Commons debate on the **localisation of council tax support**. The LGA's calls for an independent review of the policy and our concerns that the tax is regressive were quoted by MPs.
- The Work and Pensions Committee has published a report on **Fraud and Error in the benefits system**. The report echoed many of the concerns raised by the LGA in our official evidence, including our concerns about centralising the Single Fraud Investigation Service in advance of setting up Universal Credit.
- Our warnings that closure of public services such as leisure centres, libraries and youth clubs will intensify over the next two years were reported in the Guardian. Our '**Under Pressure**' report on council financial strategies found that three in five councils will have exhausted other ways of making savings by 2015/16.
- Since the Executive endorsed the revised business case for the **Municipal Bonds Agency**, discussions have been held with over 70 councils testing the appetite for investing in/borrowing from the Agency. Continued promotion in the press and in briefing, included an LGC article headlined "the Municipal Bonds Agency could save local government over £1 billion".
- We persuaded DWP to investigate the potential to access European Social Fund funding to support services for **Universal Credit**. Five of the English Face to Face pilots successfully secured a total of £1.6m worth of additional ESF funding as part of a trial initiative.

Priority 2 – Economic growth, jobs and housing

- The LGA's **Betting Commission** met on 4 June to discuss a local framework for councils and betting shops, and to consider the implications of the recent Government announcement on gambling, which proposes a new planning use class to prevent empty shops being turned into betting shops without planning permission.
- Our concerns over new clauses on taxi and private hire vehicles, introduced by the Government into the **Deregulation Bill**, were quoted in a related House of Commons debate.
- Sky News Online covered our report on **online fraud** carrying a warning from Trading Standards that loan seekers and bargain holiday hunters are among thousands being targeted and duped into giving out personal details online.
- We responded to the RAC Foundation report, which claimed that motorists are losing millions in pay-and-display **parking** machines that do not give change. We pointed out that councils are obliged to spend any surplus on local transport projects such as filling potholes, concessionary travel and road improvements projects.
- Our response to a **Potholes.co.uk** report on the rise in compensation claims in flood-hit areas, ran on Express Online and Sunday Times Online.

- We called for new powers for councils to deal with **rogue private landlords**, who rent out sub-standard properties and for current regulations to be overhauled to protect the growing number of those living in private rented accommodation.
- We continued campaigning for a stronger role for councils in **housing delivery** through parliamentary briefing on the Deregulation Bill and the submission of evidence to the government's review of the role of local authorities in housing supply.
- PAS continued to support the role of **planning in delivering growth**, with a planning peer challenge in Lancaster City, and support to councils on plan-making and getting a community infrastructure levy in place.
- The Treasury has agreed to work with the LGA and councils to develop a **digital communications infrastructure strategy**, setting out how to meet the country's digital infrastructure needs beyond the current publicly funded superfast broadband programme.
- At a follow-up roundtable on the Farrell Review of **architecture and the built environment** we emphasised the LGA's support for what the review calls "proactive planning". The Review Team is working with councils to test recommendations, including "urban rooms" which offer local people a physical or virtual space to engage with plans for the local built environment.
- LGA officers met officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to discuss communications on the **First World War commemorations** and secured agreement that Government will reinforce how councils can support local commemorations.
- We published *Totalling Hidden Talents*, demonstrating that a third of young people will be unemployed or underemployed by 2018 unless **youth employment and skills** services are reformed. The research highlighted significant geographical variations and will be used to make the case for more devolved youth engagement, employment and training provision.
- We are working with Government and partners on the implications for councils of the Deputy Prime Minister's 16 to 24 Review of **services to young people**. Recommendations include a UCAS-style website run by councils for young people not going to university, a new Jobcentre Plus pilot to support 16 and 17 year olds and two new programmes – Youth Engagement Fund and Fair Chances Fund – to support young people not in work or learning.

Priority 3 – Public services reform

- We worked with Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe to draft a private members bill to introduce a **public health objective** to the Licensing Act 2003. Its first reading is on 12 June.
- The first seminar for councils on establishing a **community trigger** was held in York. This is a new provision in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, designed to enable victims of persistent anti-social behaviour to request action from local partners.
- We published *Get in on the Act: The Children and Families Act 2014*, summarising the key features of the Act for local government and highlighting how the LGA influenced the legislation.
- We briefed Peers ahead of a House of Lords debate on the Government's decision to exclude councillors from the **Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)**. Peers, including a series of LGA Vice Presidents, highlighted local government's opposition to the proposal and supported the LGA's call for the decision to be reversed.
- Sir John Peace launched the **Non-Metropolitan Commission's**, launched the Commission's call for evidence on economic growth and the future of public service reform in non-metropolitan

areas.

- Responding to the announcement of four separate enquiries into schools in Birmingham, Chief Executive Carolyn Downs' article, calling for powers for councils to ensure that every child has **fair access to a place in a good local school**, ran on the Guardian website.
- Children's Minister, Edward Timpson MP, announced that the DfE would shortly commission work to "explore developing **capacity for delivering children's services**, including outside of local authorities. Following an exchange of letters with Sir Merrick Cockell, the Minister has agreed that the LGA should be involved throughout the review.

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

- 32 councils submitted applications to the **One Public Estate programme** - a pan-public sector asset management and rationalisation programme designed to facilitate work between local authorities, central government and local public sector partners on land and property.
- The latest **shared services** map from the LGA shows that the total saved by councils sharing their services has increased by £83 million since last year. There are now 337 councils engaged in 383 shared service arrangements, resulting in £357 million of efficiency savings.
- We produced an outline proposal on how the **PSN compliance process**, associated communications and governance arrangements might be improved, and the issues highlighted by councils addressed, to reduce the burden on councils and Cabinet Office in the future.
- We have secured over 40 opportunities for LGA members to speak at the three main **2014 autumn party conferences**. These include various stakeholder events including the King's Fund, Crisis, the National Federation of Builders, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Royal College of Physicians, National Youth Agency, Centre for Mental Health and the Royal Institute of British Architects.
- We published the evaluation of **sector-led improvement**, a two year research programme, showing that sector-led improvement is a success story - residents remain satisfied with and continue to trust their local council, councils' performance continues to improve and the approach and support from the LGA is welcomed and valued by councils.
- Following the Improvement and Innovation Board review of the LGA's leadership development programme in late 2013, we launched '**Highlighting Leadership**' - the new umbrella brand designed around our three main areas of leadership development support - Political Leadership, Managerial Leadership and Top Team Leadership.
- With the assessment stage of the **National Graduate Development Programme** complete, we are working to place over 120 graduates in more than 50 councils. Graduates will undertake a range of placements and complete a programme of learning and development.
- We held four **INSPIRE learning events** (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe) across the country, attended by over 230 council officers, to inform, share knowledge and best practice about the INSPIRE regulations and how to implement them in local authorities.
- The LGA received a further £ 1.7 million in grant funding from BIS and Cabinet office for councils to release and make better use of **open data**. We have organised three events in June to share the learning and to inform councils about future funding opportunities.

Part 3 – Our own efficiency and effectiveness

Membership

- The following visits to councils by the Chairman, Chief Executive and Strategic Directors are confirmed in the coming months.

2014 Schedule of Visits		
13 June	Havant - IOW and Hampshire Leaders	Sir Merrick Cockell
19 June	Liverpool – ChEx and Mayor meeting and UCLG World Forum	Sir Merrick Cockell
19 June	South West Chief Executive's Meeting	Carolyn Downs
24 June	NW Chief Executive meeting	Carolyn Downs
24 June	Jim Taylor, CEX outgoing Rochdale CE and incoming Salford city director	Carolyn Downs
26 June/27 June	Barrow and Cumbria	Michael Coughlin
30 June	North East Lincolnshire (London visit)	Carolyn Downs
1 July	Sedgemoor	Michael Coughlin
2 July	Croydon Council	Carolyn Downs
3 July	Paris – Global Cities conference re Bonds Agency speech	Sir Merrick Cockell
15 July	Tower Hamlets	Carolyn Downs
5 September	Bristol City	Carolyn Downs
16 September	Isles of Scilly and Cornwall	Carolyn Downs
18 September	Norfolk Chief Execs Meeting	Carolyn Downs