

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

1. In this, my last report as Chair of the European and International Board's work, I am pleased to report on our lobbying to secure the local delivery of EU funds, a major international conference hosted by Liverpool and excellent work undertaken by our delegates to Congress and the Committee of Regions.

### **EU FUNDS TO SUPPORT LOCAL GROWTH**

2. Led by the LGA Chairman, the fourth meeting of the European Growth Programme Board (GPB) took place on 25 June and brought together key central and local representative bodies to make decisions on arrangements for England's 2014-2020 £5.3 billion EU Structural Investment Funds (EUSIF). Key issues discussed included the development of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Structural Fund (ESF) and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) operational programmes (OP), together with early indication of European Commission (EC) thinking on the draft English chapter of the UK EUSIF Partnership Agreement (PA).
3. The LGA Chairman (in his final Board attendance before stepping down) together with key representatives from local councils and LEPS, strongly reiterated the importance of local leadership on key areas including national and local governance arrangements and EUSIF project selection criteria, both in terms of achieving wider EC funding objectives and securing local partners continued endorsement of the programme. Following the discussions GPB members have been asked to provide written comments back to government by 4 July which will help finalise the key documentation required by the EC. In addition, useful discussions were held and actions taken forward on future PGB governance arrangements.

### **THE WORLD VISITS LIVERPOOL**

4. From the 17-19 June, the city of Liverpool hosted the first ever meeting of the global LGA, United Cities & Local Governments (UCLG) held in the UK. The meeting of the UCLG Executive Bureau, on which the UK is represented by Board Vice-Chair, Cllr Richard Kemp, coincided with the International Festival of Business currently being held in Liverpool. This was a unique and valuable opportunity for local government and business to meet and culminated on Wednesday 18 June in a summit of global city leaders sponsored by BT. The LGA Chairman, Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell welcomed delegates to the UK and presented the LGA's work on Rewiring Public Services.
5. The summit was also an opportunity for the LGA to hold bilateral discussions with counterpart LGAs in North America, Europe and across the Commonwealth. This included opportunities for the LGA Chairman and Cllr Sir Richard Leese Chair of our City Regions Board, to meet with counterparts in Canada and discuss opportunities for further collaboration on our growing cities

agenda, as well as promoting the role of local government as a key conduit in national trade and investment strategies.

#### **EU COMMITTEE OF REGIONS**

6. LGA political groups are launching the selection process for the next CoR 5-year term starting January 2015. The LGA nominates a total of 15 full members and 15 substitutes, which have to be balanced politically, geographically, by type of authority, gender and diversity. LGA members on CoR are expected to defend the interests of English local government in the EU, notably by scrutinising draft EU laws for local impact and to propose changes that minimise their financial and administrative burdens, whilst maximising their potential benefits for our local communities. The final selection will be made over the summer.
7. At its most recent meeting, the CoR adopted reports from LGA members on promoting efficient and sustainable urban transport, and planning for resilience against natural disasters. There were also reports on new forms of governance for integrated urban policies, EU policies to promote employment, homelessness, and biodiversity.

#### **CONGRESS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

8. The LGA Executive recently discussed the Council of Europe peer review of UK local democracy. In 1998 the UK voluntarily agreed to be bound by the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which sets principles and benchmarks to safeguard local democracy and electoral probity, ensure financial and administrative autonomy from central government control, and guarantee adequate consultative arrangements. The peer review found that whilst the UK as an established parliamentary democracy is compliant with many of the provisions, it has shortcomings on some of the details and is generally failing to uphold the spirit of the Charter. It found that English local councils are relatively worse-off than their counterparts in the rest of the UK, notably in terms of financial resources.
9. Whereas UK Ministers have rejected the full report (the first country to have reacted with a blanket rejection), the LGA Executive has endorsed the findings of the peer review and resolved that all LGA political groups would refer the report to their national parties, and the LGA will seek to promote a debate in the UK Parliament.
10. Cambridge City Council recently passed a resolution endorsing the Congress recommendations and other councils are invited to do likewise. The report is available here:

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2171585&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C>

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