

2020/21 Resources Board Priorities & Work Programme

Purpose of report

For information and discussion.

Summary

This report provides an overview of priorities for the 2020/21 Resources Board meeting cycle.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the proposed the priority areas for 2020/21.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate, in line with members comments and steers.

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Local Government Finance Priorities For 2020/21

Spending Review 2020

1. Working with other Boards to develop and deliver a high-profile campaign and reports in advance of the 2020 Spending Review that make the case for adequate resources for local government and the additional freedoms and flexibilities needed. This will include lobbying for the Government to fully cover the costs and irrecoverable income losses, as well as deal with the cash flow issues, arising from the COVID-19 pandemic that stretch beyond the current financial year.
2. This is a high priority for the LGA and is being led by Leadership Board and Executive with contributions from all relevant boards.

Local Government Set Pieces

3. To understand and debate the financial challenges facing councils and support the Executive Advisory Board in developing policy and funding asks in response to the annual local government finance settlement and Chancellor's Budgets.

Business Rates, Council Tax and Other Local Taxes

4. Work includes responding to the Call for Evidence as part of the HM Treasury Review of Business Rates, considering LGA policy on council tax and developing views on alternative sources of income for local government.
5. This work is a high priority for the LGA and is being led by the Business Rates and Local Government Reform Task and Finish Group, and the Executive Advisory Board.

Business Rates Retention and the Fair Funding Review

6. The Government has delayed further business rates retention and the Fair Funding Review and the LGA will seek to establish when and if these reforms will be introduced. This work was a high priority for the LGA and was previously led by the Business Rates Retention and Fair Funding Review Task and Finish Group, and the Executive Advisory Board.

Capital Financing

7. Contributions to national reviews so that they enable rather than restrict prudential financial management.

Other Finance Policy

8. To influence thinking, formulate policy and respond on behalf of the local government sector so that councils are supported by an appropriate financial framework that is appropriate, not over restrictive and balanced with local freedom and accountability. This will include responding to ad hoc financial consultations and reports that impact on local government, including but not limited to, accounting practices, audit policy, treasury management, and other related issues.

Contribute to wider LGA objectives

9. Provide local government finance support to other Boards on service-specific issues.

Workforce priorities for the coming year

10. Priorities for Workforce come under the MHCLG memorandum of understanding (MoU), which helps inform the work and priorities of the Resources Board.
11. The MoU for 2020/21 was adjusted to take account of COVID-19 and includes workforce support and guidance in response to the pandemic.
12. The MoU now assumes that programmes to deliver this overall outcome will focus on the recovery and rebuilding phase with a revised agreement from September 2020. The work programme will be organised around the five priorities set out in our Workforce Focus document updated for the recovery phase:
 - 12.1 organisational development and changed ways of working including more routine home-based work and socially-distanced teams;
 - 12.2 skills development and the new skills priorities for post-COVID service delivery;
 - 12.3 leadership in post-COVID organisations;
 - 12.4 recruitment in urgent shortage occupations
 - 12.5 pay and reward.
13. Specific deliverables will include:
 - 13.1 Help councils to address inequalities, especially around gender, ethnicity and disability

- 13.2 Support councils to transform their workforces and modernise the way they are managed through a range of HR/OD initiatives and in line with sector priorities.
 - 13.3 Identify the services with the most urgent recruitment problems post-COVID and explore the resources needed so that advice and support can be targeted most effectively
 - 13.4 An apprenticeship programme (of encouragement and practical support) designed to help councils increase the number of apprentices and maximise their levy investment.
14. The LGA has an on-going remit to provide the secretariat functions for national pay negotiations. Deliverables will include: maintaining the national negotiating machinery on pay and workforce issues, facilitating the negotiation of a pay agreement that addresses the challenge of incorporating the potential growth in the National Living Wage whilst maintaining proper pay differentials, delivering affordable pay deals in the post-COVID financial environment whilst acknowledging the new value placed on public service. To deliver pay agreements for other occupational groups in the context described above.
15. The Workforce team will continue to develop and provide advice on employment law issues and to respond on behalf of the sector to legislative and regulatory consultations.
16. The team has a special responsibility for resolution of complex senior employee relations cases which continues to grow.
17. The team also has an income-generating responsibility which will continue to focus on:
- 17.1 Providing bespoke consultancy for example relating to recruiting, organising and rewarding senior management teams.
 - 17.2 Job evaluation.
 - 17.3 Enhancing and growing the information and support subscription service provided to associated employers such as academy trusts through the “Employer Link” programme.

Welfare and Universal Credit Priorities for 2020-21

18. Reshaping financial support will remain a key priority as councils support households through the social, financial and economic impacts of the pandemic. We will continue to work with councils, Government and partners to promote and share good practice, and to make the case for a properly recognised and adequately resourced local safety net.
19. Identify and share good practice on debt prevention, debt recovery and liabilities – balancing income maximisation with support for vulnerable households; making the case

for reviewing council tax regulations; working with debt advice providers and the Money and Pensions Service (MaPs).

20. Continue to highlight the vital role of councils in the wider welfare system, and ensure they are properly funded for local delivery; continue to monitor the impact of the benefits system on council services (e.g. housing and homelessness); make the case for effective integration and data-sharing to provide efficient, effective support to low-income households

EU Funding Priorities for 2020/21

21. The Board's priority for 2020/21 will be to ensure that current EU funding is fully spent until the end of the 2014-20 programme, utilising the new flexibilities to support local economic recovery. There should also be a smooth transition from ESIF to the domestic replacement, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The LGA is lobbying for this to be a localised, place-based fund, which affords maximum flexibility to target local needs and tailor support where it has best impact.

Financial Implications

22. All work programmes are met from existing LGA budgets and resources.

Next Steps

23. The Resources Board will discuss and agree the 2020/21 work programme during its first meeting of the new cycle – 15 September 2020.