

## Note of last Resources Board meeting

<b>Title:</b>	Resources Board
<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday 17 November 2020
<b>Venue:</b>	Via Zoom

### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#) to this note

Item	Decisions and actions
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### 1 Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Interest

Cllr Richard Watts (Chair) welcomed members to the meeting and gave a brief reminder of etiquette in online meetings.

There were no declarations of interest.

Cllr Tim Oliver (Vice-Chairman) proposed an additional meeting of the Board in January 2021 to discuss the outcome of the Spending Review and work around the EU Exit. Nicola Morton (Head of Programme, Local Government Finance) explained that the current meeting schedule is planned to meet workflows but noted that a January meeting should be achievable. The Chair suggested that while there was an agreement in principle for an additional meeting, Lead Members and officers should discuss the practicality of such.

#### Action

Officers to coordinate a meeting of the Board in January 2021.

### 2 Business Plan 2019/22 - 2020 Review & Update

The Chair explained that the LGA has re-focused its Business Plan in light of new priorities thrown up by the ongoing COVID pandemic and noted that many of these had been reflected in the Work Programme presented at the previous meeting in September 2020.

The following comments were raised by members of the Board:

- It was suggested that the Plan should be amended to include specific work around the local leadership on the Shared Prosperity Fund as well as Child Poverty & Hunger. Sarah Pickup (Deputy Chief Executive, LGA) said that this work could be picked up when the plan is next updated.
- There was also a call to ensure the Plan reflected the full spectrum of Government Departments the LGA lobbies on funding for Local Government. Sarah explained that while the paper was not explicit on this matter the LGA works across Government.

- Members welcomed the inclusion of Sustainability as a key priority in the Plan. Further lobbying was recommended to enable local authorities' greater discretion to work towards decarbonisation.

**Decision**

The members of the Resources Board noted the Business Plan.

**Action**

Officers to proceed with delivery of Business Plan in line with members comments.

### 3 Local Government Finance Update

The Chair invited Nicola Morton (Head of Programme, Local Government Finance) to discuss the update paper and recent activity. Nicola raised the following points in her update;

- In advance of the second national lockdown the Government announced the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to provide £8 per head funding to local authorities.
- Further business support initiatives have been announced in the Business Closure and Business Support Grants.
- The Government has published the Tranche 4 funding allocation and methodology.
- The Comprehensive Spending Review was due to be published on 25/11/20. Although the LGA's submission was made on a Three-Year basis, the points presented remain relevant to the One-Year settlement to be announced. Lobbying efforts are continuing through Parliament, the media and contacts in Government departments.
- On the Redmond Review, Nicola explained that a letter outlining the feedback of the Board has been sent to MHCLG.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were raised by members;

- Members noted concerns with the Government's decision to set a further One-Year Spending Review for Local Government. It was noted that continued delays to a multi-year settlement have exacerbated challenges around setting balanced budgets for local authorities.
- Members stressed that the LGA must continue to push for a multi-year settlement in future reviews.
- It was suggested that the fragmentation of funding further inhibited the budget setting process.
- Concerns were highlighted with the resourcing for local testing programmes and the introduction of Lateral Flow testing and community immunisation. It was argued that limited resources would prevent effective service delivery. Sarah explained that costs of mass testing and immunisation are being discussed at length by the Group Leaders.

- Arrangements around the distribution of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund were questioned. It was urged that a clear formula is needed to guarantee fair distribution.

**Decision**

The members of the Resources Board noted the report.

**Action**

Officers to proceed in line with comments from members.

**4 Welfare Reform Update**

The Chair invited Rose Doran (Senior Adviser, Children & Young People) to provide a verbal update on recent work. Rose raised the following points in her update:

- Moving forward the item name will be changed to “Support for Low Income Households”.
- The Self-Isolation Payment was announced on 20<sup>th</sup> September, with a three week period for district and unitary authorities to implement. In addition to the core funding for those meeting all the eligibility criteria, a Discretionary Fund of £10 million was announced. Significant variation in levels of demand across the country, which DHSC are analysing to ensure funds are used most effectively. We continue to lobby for additional funding for the discretionary support where needed.
- The Winter Support Grant was announced on 8<sup>th</sup> November, linked to the ongoing Free School Meals campaigns and £63 million made available during the summer. WSG consists of additional monies for helping people with food and other essentials. It was announced alongside additional funding for the holiday activities fund and for Healthy Start Vouchers from April 2021. Total of £170 million committed to WSG, however concerns were noted around the capacity for local authorities to make the most effective use of the funds before the end of March 2021.
- Rose requested a specific steer from members on how to proceed with lobbying with a view to help develop improved systems, enhanced resilience and tackle long-term underlying drivers of hunger and poverty.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were raised by members:

- While the introduction of the WSG was welcomed, it was noted that the funding would not extend to the 2021 School Summer Holiday. As such it was suggested that further lobbying to secure dedicated funding would be needed shortly.
- A member noted that there had been significant local increases in both rent arrears (in private & social properties) and fuel poverty. Argued that the steps taken so far by the Government were not providing support to vulnerable groups being disproportionately

affected. Rose added that the Government focus on food provision has somewhat disregarded underlying factors such as housing affordability.

- Concerns were raised that under Government guidance the Self Isolation Payment Discretionary Fund has not been extended to non-UK nationals due to changes in the rules around recourse to public funds. Rose explained that work is taking place across the LGA on people without Recourse to Public Funds and that a nuanced approach is necessary.
- The short-term £20 increase to the basic rate of Universal Credit was noted as a vital piece of support. Recommended that the LGA should lobby for a permanent increase. Rose explained that work is already ongoing around Universal Credit as well as other welfare payments.
- The publication of the interim report on the National Food Strategy was highlighted as a guide for developing work on food poverty and Free School Meals. Rose explained that the LGA's work on the NFS is being coordinated by the Children & Young People Board and that officers are in regular contact with a range of stakeholders including the Food Foundation.

#### **Decision**

The members of the Resources Board noted the report.

## **5 Reshaping Financial Support Programme**

The Chair invited Rose Doran (Senior Adviser) to introduce the Reshaping Financial Support programme. Rose noted that the aim is to support councils in the provision of help and services to households at risk of financial hardship and requested a specific steer from members on developing the Memorandum of Understanding with MHCLG.

Rose introduced Gareth Evans and Matt Earnshaw from the Financial Inclusion Centre to present on the Programme. In the presentation the following points were raised;

- Work conducted so far has been heavily influenced by the input of local authorities.
- Matt gave an overview of the Financial Hardship Demand Dashboard which arose out of discussions with authorities on tracking the impact of the COVID pandemic on deprivation and assist in system design.
- The Dashboard collates data sets from local authorities on deprivation, poverty, employment, housing need and financial vulnerability. Enables wider and faster access to data that is often assessed in isolation.
- The Dashboard has been made available through the LG Inform portal, allowing authorities to access consistent data sets on a national, regional and local level.

- Gareth discussed the consultancy work taking place with participating authorities. This included;
  - o Ethical debt collection with Leeds City Council
  - o Collaboration on service delivery for Brighton & Hove Council
  - o Engagement with cross departmental budgeting and income maximisation tools with the Royal Borough of Greenwich
- A more in-depth case study was presented on a Community Banking programme with Borough of Barking & Dagenham.
- Research identified a gap in provision for access to affordable credit, with the Borough ranking extremely low on the Good Credit Index. Such has led to circa 6000 households per year accessing subprime credit arrangements.
- Funds put forward by the Council and the LGA to provide affordable credit to low-income households has had a significant impact in the Borough; £2.4m financial gains for households and a £1.7 M boost for the local economy over three years.
- The next steps were outlined as an in-depth evaluation of the case studies to understand the long-term and system wide benefits of early intervention on financial hardship.
- Rose gave an overview of funding model used using funds from the MHCLG MoU grant alongside funding leveraged from partner organisations.
- Specific comments were requested on how to advance discussions with MHCLG and develop a focus on helping low credit areas from the COVID pandemic through the provision of affordable credit.

The Chair thanked Gareth and Matt for their time. The following comments were raised by members in the subsequent discussion:

- A question was raised on whether additional best practice examples could be shared from Board members. Gareth welcomed any additional examples.
- Energy Clubs were recommended as an area for further development as a means to tackle fuel poverty.
- It was noted that money spent by local authorities to support local services such as legal centres and credit unions, has a sizeable impact in local economies.

The Chair summarised, noting that the number of financially vulnerable residents is expected to rise and with proactive steps needed to provide support. The potential returns on investment illustrated by the RFS programme, show the importance of efficiently managed local authority support funds.

#### **Decision**

The members of the Resources Board noted the update.

#### **Action**

Officers to proceed in line with members comments.

## 6 Workforce Update

The Chair invited Naomi Cooke (Head of Workforce) and Jeff Houston (Head of Pensions) to provide an overview of recent activity. In their update Naomi and Jeff raised the following points:

- Naomi noted the Environmental Health Together programme launched on 30<sup>th</sup> October with 144 applicants seen to date. Since opening to Councils on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 21 local authorities have joined.
- Return to Work programme has been expanded into ICT and planning sectors. Both aspects of the programme have far exceeded initial targets for engagement with applicants and authorities.
- Schools are facing a major capacity challenge with staff resource stretched due to social distancing regulations and successive year groups isolating.
- Staff resilience is being flagged by local authorities as a significant issue, following an extended period of working at high-intensity.
- Jeff outlined ongoing work on public sector exit payments. Four judicial reviews are being brought against the legislation, with the LGA potentially named as an interested party in three of these.
- Due to implementation of the exit cap before changes to the Pension Regulations there is a deal of legal uncertainty for local authorities, through which the LGA is attempting to find the lowest risk way forward.
- A meeting is being held with the Pension Ombudsman to discuss key issues.

The Chairman invited Cllr Sharon Taylor (Equalities Champion, Resources Board) to update on equality, diversity and inclusion activity:

- Participated in a Difference & Inclusion webinar on 21st September.
- Has met with officers to discuss and plan work for the year ahead in line the LGA's priorities as laid out in the Business Plan.

### Decision

The members of the Resources Board noted the report.

## 7 EU Funding Update

The Chair invited Paul Green (Adviser) to discuss recent developments and work around EU Funding. In his update, Paul noted the following points:

- Lobbying has continued on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to create a council and combined authority led fund based on local needs and outcomes, and aligned to other funding streams.

- The UKSPF continues to be a standing item on the Local Government Delivery Board agenda with MHCLG. LGA has pushed for additional information to be published on this topic ahead of the Spending Review.
- Concerns around the allocation and spending of several existing funds. The European Social Fund Social Fund has seen significant delays due to the administrative approach followed by the Department for Work & Pension. Assurances from DWP that backlog would be cleared have not been fully delivered but progress is being made. In response, the LGA and stakeholders on EU Committees have called an extraordinary Performance & Dispute Resolution National Sub-Committee for DWP to set out a plan of action. A working group to review the remaining ESF allocation will commence in the new year
- Potential for additional ERDF monies to be made available for use supporting businesses. Requested for a steer from members on how this should be allocated.

**Decision**

The members of the Resources Board noted the update.

## 8 Note of the previous meeting held on 15th September 2020

The Chair asked the members of the Board to approve the note of the previous meeting as an accurate record.

**Decision**

The members of the Resources Board approved the note of the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020 as an accurate record.

## Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Richard Watts	Islington Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Tim Oliver	Surrey County Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Keith House Cllr Jason Zadrozny	Eastleigh Borough Council Ashfield District Council
Members	Cllr Philip Atkins OBE Cllr David Finch Cllr Daniel Humphreys Cllr Peter Jackson Cllr Roger Phillips Cllr Richard Wenham Cllr Sharon Taylor OBE Cllr Terry Paul Cllr Amanda Serjeant Cllr Peter Marland Cllr Bev Craig Cllr Adam Paynter Cllr Phelim MacCafferty	Staffordshire County Council Essex County Council Worthing Borough Council Northumberland Council Herefordshire Council Central Bedfordshire Council Stevenage Borough Council Newham London Borough Council Chesterfield Borough Council Milton Keynes Council Manchester City Council Cornwall Council Brighton & Hove City Council

Apologies

Cllr Erica Lewis

Lancaster City Council