**Other business**

**Purpose**

For information

**Summary**

This paper contains a review of the Board’s activity, and wider LGA activity at the political party conference. It also contains a review of the recent joint LGA / Rural Services Network conference.

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**Party conference activity**

**Overview**

The LGA hosted a fringe event to debate ‘The first 100 days of the next government’ and an evening reception at the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat conferences. Politicians, both local and national, and journalists speaking at these events included Eric Pickles MP, Hilary Benn MP and Nick Clegg MP, Owen Jones, Chris Hope, Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, Cllr Gary Porter and Cllr Jim McMahon.

LGA lead members also spoke at or contributed fringe events and roundtable debates on 141 occasions. We have calculated that the LGA therefore contributed to approximately 12 per cent of all fringes held across the three main party conferences by stakeholders which included The Kings Fund, NHS Confederation, the Nation Federation of Builders, Crisis, Age UK, Dementia Friends, the British Parking Association and the cTCPA.

**Highlights**

Members of the People and Places Board spoke at and contributed to a range of fringe events and roundtables.

The LGA Chair David Sparks spoke at fringe events run by, among others, Age UK, the British Chambers of Commerce, the British Property Federation and Reform.

The Chair of the People and Places Board, Cllr David Hodge, attended five events at the Conservative conference. These included a British Chambers of Commerce roundtable on how to make the UK competitive on the global stage and boosting UK exports and an RSA roundtable on fostering microbusinesses and regenerating communities.Alongside the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, he spoke on the panel at an Enterprise Forum event, entitled *Property, Growth & Communities – stimulating economic growth and creating better communities.*

The Vice-Chair, Cllr Neil Clarke, spoke on the panel at Woodland Trust fringe event entitled ‘*Towards a Charter for trees, woods and people’*. He also contributed to a roundtable hosted by Reform which discussed the future of public service spending and public service reform. In addition, Cllr Philip Atkins was on the panel at a fringe event held by Living Streets on transport and the high streets. Cllrs Andrew Bowles, Clarke and Hodge all attended the joint British Property Federation and LGA roundtable dinner to discuss *Investing in our future: how can the next government deliver growth across the UK.*

At the Liberal Democrat conference, Cllr Heather Kidd represented the Board at variety of events, including speaking on the panel at events held by the Woodland Trust and the British Parking Association. In addition, she was a panel member at a Federation of Master Builders and Campaign for Rural England fringe entitled *Housing the nation: Greenfield or brownfield* and contributed to a roundtable held jointly by the LGA and L&Q which considered sustainable communities.

**Key Speeches - Highlights**

*Labour*

The Shadow Chancellor Rt Hon Ed Balls MP made the following points in his speech to conference:

* **Scotland:** The Shadow Chancellor said that the decision to stay together and shape Scotland’s future within the United Kingdom was made by the people of Scotland. They voted to retain shared prosperity, and security, and solidarity and the opportunity to shape Scotland’s future with greater devolution. Mr Balls said it was the duty for the Labour Party to deliver on that promise, and for Wales and for the cities and regions of England too.
* **City Regions:** Mr Balls said the Labour Party’s economic plan will devolve power and resources not only to Scotland and Wales, but to city and county regions in every part of England. The new independent National Infrastructure Commission will end dither and delay on big infrastructure decisions needed for the future.
* **Housing:** The Shadow Chancellor said a Labour Government would make housing a priority within the existing capital settlement for the next Parliament and get at least 200,000 new homes a year built by 2020.

In his speech, the Leader of the Opposition Ed Miliband made the following points:

* **Jobs:** A Labour Government will require every firm securing a major government contract to offer apprenticeships and insist that large employers hiring skilled workers from outside the EU offer apprenticeships to young people in the UK. They will also give employers more control over how the government spends training funds in return for them providing more high quality apprenticeships in their sectors and supply chains.
* **Growth:** Labour will help all people to share in growth by supporting small firms with a cut in business rates and giving them access to finance through a proper British Investment Bank and a more competitive banking system. They will devolve £30 billion of funding and control over the full revenue from business rates to economic regions and introduce an industrial strategy in sectors which create high skill, high wage jobs.
* **Housing:** Mr Miliband said that Labour will meet demand for new homes by increasing the number of new homes being built to at least 200,000 a year by the end of the next Parliament, creating new Olympic-style delivery agencies called New Homes Corporations to drive through large scale housing development at pace. There will also be ‘use it or lose it’ powers for local communities to tackle developers who hoard land unnecessarily and a new generation of Garden Cities.

*Conservative Party Conference*

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government made the following points in his speech to conference:

* **Scotland:** The Secretary of State said that there cannot be Scottish MPs voting for measures in England and having ‘power without responsibility’. He said there should be English votes on English laws but that a solution involving taxpayers funding more politicians is not the answer.
* **Devolution:** The Secretary of State described how the Government had given ‘real power to real communities’ by freezing council tax and giving people a say on council tax rises, allowing local people to make decisions on, for example, neighbourhood plans and enabling councils to share services and management. He also mentioned the reduction in the size of his department by 60 per cent, which has led to £9 million in savings.
* **Housing:** After criticising Labour’s record on housing, Eric Pickles MP said the Government had been ‘getting on with the job of delivering’; delivering 200,000 affordable new homes, building more council houses than the last administration, supporting over 70,000 people with the Help to Buy and Right to Buy schemes. In addition, in the last year, a total of 230,000 homes received planning permission in England. He reiterated the Prime Minister’s announcement on Saturday that the Conservatives will support an extra 100,000 first time buyers through a new Help to Buy Starter Home Scheme and will introduce a new Rent to Buy scheme to help young people save for a deposit before they buy their home.

The Prime Minister’s speech to conference covered:

* **English devolution:** The Prime Minister said the Conservatives will keep the promise to the Scottish people that they will get more powers and vowed that they would deliver English votes for English laws. One further task for William Hague is to ensure "fairness" in the UK's constitutional settlement.
* **Home ownership:** He described how planning reforms and the Help to Buy scheme have boosted housing supply and helped first-time buyers to get on to the housing ladder, then reiterated the Conservatives' plan for 100,000 new starter homes for first-time buyers under the age of 40 at 20 per cent off the market value. Buy-to-let landlords and foreigners will not be allowed to purchase these homes.
* **Taxes:** Mr Cameron pledged that the Conservatives would raise the tax free personal allowance from £10,500 to £12,500 to help those on the minimum wage. This will take 1 million more people in lowest paid work out of tax, and also give a tax cut to 30 million. Those who work 30 hours per week on minimum wage will pay no tax. They will also raise the 40 per cent tax rate threshold to £50,000.

*Liberal Democrat Conference*

Policy Manifesto

Liberal Democrat members debated a number of important motions and voted through policies that will form the basis of their party’s manifesto. This included passing policy that would make councils ultimately responsible for the performance of all schools in their area (assisted by a board of head teachers), ensures councils have powers over planning of all school places and gives financial freedom and incentives for councils to form partnerships with other public service providers to share budgets and integrate services at a local level. The Liberal Democrats also passed their pre-manifesto policy paper which contains a number of LGA wins, including the devolution of powers over local services and the economy to all cities, counties and councils.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury the Rt Hon Danny Alexander MP’s speech covered the following themes:

* **Scotland:** Mr Alexander said that new powers for Scotland will be delivered and that it must be a radical package that puts Scotland’s relationship with the rest of the UK on a federal basis. He said this was an opportunity to decentralise power in the rest of the UK which must be used.
* **Investment:** The Liberal Democrats’ first fiscal rule will be to get the UK’s debt as a share of GDP down to sustainable levels by the mid-2020s. However, as long as the overall debt is falling, Liberal Democrats want to see investment in economic infrastructure and high quality public services, such as roads, railways, broadband and housing.
* **Property:** Mr Alexander said that the Liberal Democrats would introduce a new levy on the highest value properties, new top bands on council tax ‘to end the outrage that a £50 million pound property can currently pay the same as a half million pound home’.

In his speech to conference, the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg MP argued that only the Liberal Democrats can help deliver both a strong economy and said that:

* **Devolution: Mr** Clegg said that the Lib Dems would not allow the plan for further devolution to be hijacked, or diluted, or delayed. He asserted that his party has done a lot to release Whitehall's grip: “by the time the election is called next year every single part of the UK – every nation, every City, our towns and villages – will all have more power than the day the Coalition was formed – just as we said. But I want us to go so much further, supporting strong, prosperous, empowered communities – able to shape their own futures.”
* **Taxation:** Mr Clegg gave a commitment in the next parliament to raise the starting point for paying income tax to £12,500. He insisted the Lib Dems have been pushing for this change throughout this parliament only to be met with resistance. Mr Clegg made the distinction between Conservative tax cuts which are unfunded and unfair or Liberal democrat ones that are funded and fair.

**Rural conference report**

**Background**

Following the LGA’s governance changes and subsequent inclusion of Rural Commission activity into the new People and Places Board, it was agreed that future rural conferences would be organised jointly between the LGA and Rural Services Network (RSN) under a profit-sharing agreement.

For 2014, the development of the agenda was undertaken by the RSN, with the LGA providing events and logistical support.

**2104 annual rural conference**

This year’s conference took place on 9 September in Chester with the theme of ‘Sustainability out of austerity’. It comprised a number of plenary and panel sessions, including a keynote address from Dan Rogerson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management, Defra, and practical workshops. The Minister’s speech focussed largely on the Departments investment in rural areas, and a copy is available on request.

The conference was jointly chaired by Cllr Neil Clarke, Vice-Chair of the People and Places Board and Cllr Cecilia Motley, Chair of the RSN.

Exhibitors included Royal Mail, Rural Regeneration West Cheshire, Smiths Gore and the Land Registry.

The event attracted around 70 delegates from England and Wales.

**Feedback**

Feedback from delegates was largely positive, with over 90 per cent of delegates fairly or very satisfied. The Chairs’ and panel sessions were particularly well received, as were workshops on neighbourhood planning and public service reform.

Initial analysis indicates the event returned a small profit.

Presentations are available on the LGA’s website at: <http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/past-event-presentations/-/journal_content/56/10180/6509638/ARTICLE>