

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

1. As you would expect, a lot has happened since my last report in November, so here is a whistle stop tour of the key developments.

Delivering Our Lobbying Priorities

European Commission's 2014 Work Programme

2. The European Commission's work programme (Brussels' equivalent of the Queen's Speech) has been published and as expected, there was a lot which we believe could affect the delivery or commissioning of council services. As a result, the LGA Executive agreed a series of EU lobbying priorities which will be pursued in order to secure the best deal possible for our member authorities. For more details on this, see below and my recent article in *First* magazine.

EU Funding 2014 – 2020

3. Preparations at European, national and local levels have been gathering pace to ensure plans and systems are in place to deliver growth with England's £5.3 billion 2014-2020 EU structural and investment funds (ESIF) allocation.
4. The European Union agreed its overall 2014-2020 budget and the rules governing the way ESFI for the new programme will work over the same period. The final regulations are welcome given that many of the points the LGA pushed for on behalf of local authorities have been included. The LGA will be encouraging Whitehall to make the most of the EU regulations e.g. new instruments for local delivery, stronger central-local partnership working and simplified common processes. Indeed, in January we submitted a response to the 'Cohesion Policy' *Balance of EU competences review*, focusing specifically on joined up activity and simplification of business processes, opt-in models and certainty of funding.
5. Councils and local partners will be submitting their ESIF LEP strategies by the end of the month. Meanwhile, the European Commission has finally adopted the Code of Conduct on the Partnership Principles. This is a set of standards to ensure strong cooperation between central government and local authorities in the design and on-going delivery of the 2014-20 ESIF. The Code of Conduct is something LGA has long been lobbying for to ensure that councils are at the heart of the process, rather than just another stakeholder to be consulted. Whilst far from perfect, the Code is a significant and welcome step for local government, which takes the form of a legally binding Regulation. The Code can be found here:
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/com_adl\(2013\)09651/com_adl\(2013\)09651_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/com_adl(2013)09651/com_adl(2013)09651_en.pdf).

EU Procurement rules

6. I am sure many of you will be aware that the EU procurement rules will change, with Government planning for the new Directive to come into force in the UK by the end of the year. LGA lobbying last year achieved a more streamlined and flexible set of rules, for example, we ensured that councils sharing 'in house' services will be exempt from the rules for the first time. We are also working with the Cabinet Office to ensure specific elements of the rules are implemented in the most helpful way possible, e.g. social services provisions, SME provisions, e-procurement, negotiation with suppliers, etc.

New priorities: Environment, Transport, Birth Certificates and International Aid

7. There are also some new areas of focus that I would like to draw your attention to and shall keep you updated as to progress over the coming months. EU **environmental legislation** is likely to be a key focus this year, with the EU due to publish a 'framework for climate and energy policies' and an initiative on 'resource efficiency and waste'. We aim to ensure that any new subsequent regulation in the fields of energy, waste and air quality is manageable for councils. We will underline that EU waste and energy targets must be realistic in the current financial climate.
8. The EU is also increasingly active in transport policy. A package on sustainable urban mobility, published at the end of last year, encourages a new **local transport** planning process based on EU guidance. The LGA has helped to ensure that councils still have local flexibility in this area.
9. Issues around licencing fees and proposals for **EU format birth, marriage and death certificates** are also on our radar. In addition, new EU rules on protecting personal data have been inadequately drafted and will require us to work with our EU partners to ensure proper recognition and protection for councils.
10. We will also be looking beyond Europe. Following LGA lobbying, the EU has now recognised local government as a key partner in delivering its future **international aid** commitments. We are working closely with CEMR (the European LGA), the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and other partners to ensure that local government is adequately resourced in Europe's future aid programmes.

International Links: Learning and Sharing

Local Government representation in Europe

11. On 21 January, the LGA organised and hosted a joint meeting between the UK delegations to the EU's Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress). These are important forums which make the case for local government in the EU and Council of Europe, therefore the joint meeting provided an excellent opportunity to ensure commonality in purpose so that they can continue to work together to influence Europe. The meeting was addressed by Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell (LGA Chairman) and Baroness Stowell (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government).

Congress: Peer Review of UK

12. As reported previously, Congress has been conducting a "peer review" of how the UK is respecting its commitments under the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The two fact-finding visits have now been completed, and Congress Members have been given advance sight of the draft report which will be submitted to the Monitoring Committee on 19 February for final adoption in March 2014. I look forward to sharing the outcomes of the review with you in due course.

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