

Resources Portfolio – report from Cllr Claire Kober (Chair)

Joint Working with Community Wellbeing Portfolio

1. On 12 February, Resources colleagues and I met with Community Wellbeing Portfolio Lead Members to share experiences and learning from the pilot model thus far.

Local Government Finance Settlement

2. On 8 February, the Department for Communities and Local Government published the final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17. As a direct result of LGA and sector lobbying, the Government has made a number of changes in the final settlement, compared to the provisional settlement, which includes £415.6 million of new money for local government:
 - 2.1. Transitional grant of £150 million in both 16/17 and 17/18 for the councils most adversely affected by the change distribution of revenue support grant.
 - 2.2. £2.3 million in 17/18 and £22.8million in 18/19 to remove the additional tariff / top-up adjustment caused by negative RSG.
 - 2.3. An extra £90.5 million has been added to the Rural Services Delivery Grant.
3. In addition, as requested by the LGA, all Shire Districts will be given the flexibility to raise council tax by the maximum of £5 or 2%. This is an additional £39.2 million in council tax in 19/20 if all Shire Districts use this flexibility every year of the four year period. The additional funding together with the assumed use of the £5 council tax flexibility each year leads to a spending power increase of £525 million in total across the four year period. Further details can be found in the [LGA Briefing](#) on the final Local Government Finance Settlement 2016/17.

Independent Council Tax Support Inquiry

4. The LGA has submitted [written evidence](#) to the 'Independent Council Tax Support Inquiry', which is focussing on efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and the impact of Universal Credit. Cllr Claire Hudson (Welfare Lead) and I will meet Eric Ollerenshaw (who is leading the inquiry) on 25 February.

2016 Budget

5. In advance of the Budget 2016 being announced on 16 March, the LGA has made a submission to Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT). The submission which is available [here](#) was cleared through Resources Lead Members, the LGA Executive and LGA Leadership Board.

Business Rates retention

6. We continue to work with the Government on implementation of full retention of business rates, due to come in by 2020. This is a complex reform which requires careful consideration so that it does not have an adverse impact on councils that are currently reliant on top-ups as part of the system, while maintaining a strong incentive. An important aspect of this is management of the financial risk of business rates appeals, avoidance and evasion – we are working with the Government on options to manage this risk (and expect to hear more in Budget 2016 on 16 March), as well as the wider issues needing consideration.

Independent Review of the Community Infrastructure Levy

7. The LGA has submitted evidence into an independent review of the Community Infrastructure Levy commissioned by DCLG. The Review panel includes Cllr John Fuller (Resources Portfolio Vice-Chair). The LGA's submission can be viewed [here](#).

LGA Welfare Conference

8. The LGA's Annual Local Government Welfare Conference took place on 18 February and was chaired by Cllr Claire Hudon – Deputy Chair of the Portfolio. This conference explored how councils

are designing and integrating services to improve life chances and outcomes for low income households, in the context of ongoing welfare reform and the implementation of Universal Credit.

Supported Accommodation

9. The Government have confirmed that they will be conducting a review of supported accommodation, with findings expected in the Spring. In response to amendments tabled at the [Report Stage debate](#) for the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, Lord Freud said Government would use the review to find a workable and sustainable long-term solution for both the supported housing sector and Government. Lord Freud confirmed the providers of supported accommodation would be fully involved.

Universal Support delivered locally

10. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be broadening Universal Support (US) back out to encompass employment and other safety net support provided by councils. The opening out is welcome and suggests our lobbying on the local safety net has had impact. However, there is still no promise of sustainable funding or clarity about responsibility for the safety net in the longer term.

Skills and Apprenticeships

11. Cllr Linda Van den Hende - Portfolio Skills Champions - has contacted members across the regions seeking intelligence on the help they would like from the LGA in meeting their skills challenges.

Pensions

12. Cllr Roger Phillips has been appointed the first chair of the LGPS Scheme Advisory Board in England and Wales. Set up under the Public Service Pensions Act 2013, the board has a statutory function to provide advice and guidance to local authority pension funds on efficient and effective management of the LGPS and to advise DCLG on the desirability of making changes to the scheme.
13. Cllr Phillips also attended a meeting on 12 January with the chairs of LGPS pension funds to discuss the creation of an Infrastructure 'Clearing House'. Such a body would be an access point for projects to present to the LGPS and for LGPS to bid for projects directly.

JNC Youth and Community Workers

14. The National Employers are supporting the assimilation of Youth & Community employees to LGS terms and conditions and therefore withdrawing from national collective bargaining through the JNC for Youth & Community Workers. Support will be provided to councils in advance of this transition.

Public Sector Employment Policy

15. The Government is continuing to conduct consultation exercises on a variety of topics, including:
- 15.1. Sickness absence – the LGA has held preliminary discussions with the Treasury as part of its review, stressing that absence management is very much a local issue.
 - 15.2. Internal-only recruitment - the LGA is preparing a response which explains that councils use internal-only recruitment in the special circumstances of reorganisation and redundancy.
 - 15.3. English-speaking requirements –the LGA is working with Government on preparing standards to ensure requirements to introduce minimum English speaking across public service are not onerous.
 - 15.4. Name-blind recruitment – The Government has pledged to reduce the potential of discrimination by removing names from recruitment sifts in the civil service and has asked LGA to highlight good practice to councils.
16. It can be seen that, along with changes to exit payments and activity on senior pay levels, the Government is pursuing a policy of considerable influence and reform in public sector employment practice. The LGA is working with the various departments involved to ensure that the policies are introduced in ways that made sense for local government.

Public Health workforce

17. Cllr Linda Van den Hende took part in a workshop at the recent LGA-ADPH Public Health Conference where it was argued strongly that the wider local government workforce needs to develop a variety of public health skills to help promote wellbeing.

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