



## LGA annual conference Harrogate, 5-8 July

Most of the speakers for the annual conference are now confirmed, and you can view the programme and the session descriptions on the dedicated conference website [www.lgaconference.net](http://www.lgaconference.net)

An innovation at the conference this year is the three **networking zones**. The idea for these zones came out of delegate feedback from last year's event, indicating that delegates would appreciate a space to sit and to network, or to work, or simply to sit down and read conference papers etc.

**Have you a 'hot topic' that delegates from districts would want to discuss at the conference?**

Additionally, there are often issues that come up nearer to the conference that delegates would benefit from the opportunity of discussing, but by this time it is too late to include a session in the programme. So we have timetabled

## The future is local

The LGA is using the beginning of the new parliament as a unique opportunity to influence the new government. The Association's lobbying agenda covers five central themes: **fulfilling every child's potential; cutting crime and the fear of crime; improving the public's health; delivering economically thriving, sustainable communities and creating cleaner and greener neighbourhoods**. Running through these themes are the 'golden threads' of **efficiency** and **continual improvement**. We will be demonstrating the crucial role of local government as community leaders.

The first Central Local Partnership meeting between leading LGA members and the new government took place on 18 May, attended by 18 ministers including John Prescott, David Miliband, Ruth Kelly, Des Browne, Ian McCartney and John Hutton. Ministers were very positive about the role of local government and the meeting heralds new and positive work between central and local government.

The LGA welcomed David Miliband to his new Cabinet-level role as Minister of Communities and Local Government in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The creation of an additional cabinet level post is a clear indication of successful engagement between central and local government and an opportunity to devolve power back down to people at a local level. The new minister travelled to Kent to meet LGA Chairman Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart and chief executive Sir Brian Briscoe on 10 May for constructive introductory discussions and to look at some examples of local government in action.

The **Queen's Speech** on 17 May set out a legislative programme of around fifty bills and draft bills for the 2005-06 parliamentary session. While many of the bills were previously introduced before the General Election, new legislation of particular interest to local government will include measures on adoption, childcare, common land, education, election administration, incapacity benefit, housing benefit, natural environment, regulation, health protection (including restricting smoking in public places), and violent crime.

The LGA will be lobbying to promote our message that the 'future is local'. Bill briefings on relevant legislation are available on the LGA website.

in some networking sessions to take place in the networking zones on Wednesday lunchtime and Thursday morning, and are canvassing local authorities for suggestions.

You can also submit to the information centre suggested questions or points for discussion to

the panel for the Thursday debate on *accommodating the needs of traveller and settled communities* to [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)

A breakfast session for district leaders and chief executives is also planned at the conference, from 8 to 9am on Wednesday 6 July.

## EO review



Issues around pay negotiations, service conditions and pensions have risen significantly up the political agenda and are now among the major policy issues facing local government. Recognising this, we are looking at ways of bringing the Employers' Organisation and LGA closer together.

Following detailed consideration, we have recommended that the policy functions currently undertaken by the EO relating to pay, pensions and conditions of service negotiations should be renamed 'local government employers' and brought closer to the LGA, and that the other functions around workforce and related improvement work should be integrated into the IDeA.

The implications and precise details of how this split in functions will work is the subject of a review to be led by John Ransford (LGA) working with Lucy de Groot (IDeA). The review will report later in the summer. A direct consequence is that the post of Executive Director of the Employers' Organisation will no longer exist and Rob Pinkham will be leaving the EO at the end of June. John Ransford will act as EO interim director until the outcome of the review is known. We will keep you posted.



## Concessionary fares

In the last newsletter, the proposal in the Chancellor's budget for a free local bus concessionary fare scheme for OAPs in England from April 2006 was outlined. There have been a number of meetings and discussions in recent weeks, including the LGA environment board and the LGA executive, where it was agreed to lobby for the proposed statutory scheme to apply on other local public transport, particularly light rail.

A number of authorities of all sizes, from small rural districts to large PTAs, have expressed concerns about the local implications of the announcement, generally along the lines that not enough from the total will emerge locally. Discussions are

continuing with both the DfT and ODPM on the implications of the Chancellor's proposal. At present there appear to be more questions than answers, but the two government departments are now more aware of the needs of the full range of member authorities to collect as much information as soon as possible, in order to smooth the introduction of the changes.

Evidence for discussions with DfT ideally need to have a robust statistical basis. If you have, or can readily provide, any hard facts to offer on the potential effects of the implementation of this scheme in either financial, or perhaps more importantly social accessibility terms locally, please feel free to let us know by contacting LGconnect.

## Licensing situation - an update

Figures released by LACORS and the LGA on 16 May indicate that fewer than 5 per cent of the licence applications expected by local authorities have been received, even though half of the period for licences to be converted to the new scheme has now passed. This has implications for councils and businesses, as premises without a valid licence when the system goes live later this year will not be able to offer licensable activities or will risk prosecution. The DCMS has also announced that Sir Les Elton, former chief executive of Gateshead council, will chair the independent licence fees review panel. The LGA and LACORS have developed an 'action plan' to address

these issues and continue to meet with government officials, ministers and the licensed trade. A number of applications for judicial review of councils' licensing policies and procedures are threatened and LACORS is working with government to ensure that any issues of interpretation of technical legal matters are clarified immediately and the resulting advice is available on the LACORS website - [www.lacors.gov.uk](http://www.lacors.gov.uk). Also available on LACORS' website are examples of guidance notes, procedures and templates submitted by councils around the country to assist colleagues. If you would like any more information, contact LGconnect.

## Cultural spending research

The LGA has commissioned York Consulting to undertake research about spending on cultural services. The objectives of the research are to seek the views of local authorities about the implications of Spending Review 2004 in terms of their 2005/6 budget for cultural services; assess the way the SR 2004 settlement has affected the ability of local authorities to draw in additional funding for cultural services; seek the views of local

authorities about future spending pressures for cultural services following the SR 2004 allocations, and investigate local authority relationships with other local, regional and national partners on cultural services.

The research project began in April and the research will be published in July 2005. If you would like any further information, please contact LGconnect.

## Virtual waste authorities: new, innovative, locally designed governance structures for sustainable waste management

Groups of councils are working together to create 'virtual waste authorities' and have just launched new web pages with advice and good practice on the IDeA's Knowledge website.

The virtual waste authorities have innovative governance structures which

are designed locally by district and county councillors, and councillors from neighbouring unitary authorities where appropriate. Some have developed a 'one council one vote' governance arrangement, for instance in Shropshire. In Essex, as it is a very large county, the districts are split into three groupings as

they implement the joint strategy. In Suffolk, the districts have formed a recycling consortium and appointed an officer to manage the contract for the materials recycling facility on behalf of the whole consortium (the Suffolk Recycling Consortium does not directly involve the county, though they work closely together, including using 'open book' accounting).

Many groups of authorities have also developed innovative budget pooling arrangements. LGA lobbying has meant councils are now free to establish locally designed financial arrangements, since a new provision in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act gives flexibility to councils to replace the old recycling credits system with more appropriate arrangements.

Many councils believe that the historical split responsibility for waste collection and disposal, where the county is responsible for disposal and the districts for collection, is inappropriate in the modern world, particularly given the need for a stronger emphasis on recycling. Councillors and leading officers are tackling the issue head on and working out further joint-working arrangements appropriate to the local area.

Through the Innovation Forum for 'excellent councils', West Sussex County is leading a group of local authorities, supported by Defra, ODPM and the LGA, in identifying barriers to joint-working in waste management, providing solutions and developing best practice models for partnership working. These partnerships can help local authorities to hit local and national targets, and save money.

[www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk](http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk)

# district councils newsletter

## The Clean Neighbourhoods Act

With behind-the-scenes LGA lobbying of all political parties right to the very end of the process, the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill successfully completed its parliamentary processes shortly before the dissolution of parliament. The act will introduce significant new powers for local authorities (particularly districts) and represents a major lobbying success for the LGA. Thanks are due to all the practitioners and advisers who helped the association draw up our 'shopping list' of measures required some two years ago and who have helped present our case to ministers and officials ever since.

The LGA will be producing a detailed *Get in on the Act* guide to the new act and the opportunities it brings for local authorities. We will also be working with Defra and others to mount a series of regional workshops to promote and explain the new act and we will be hosting a special one-day conference on the topic on 18 July for councillors and senior officers.

The act has already inspired local authorities to take stronger action against environmental crime. Some of the new powers come into force in June and others over the coming year. They include powers to immediately remove abandoned vehicles, rather than wait until a notice has been served.

Council officers will also be able to seize and destroy vehicles caught fly-tipping and to issue on the spot fines for a range of litter, waste and vehicle offences, including to businesses without waste transfer notices. These powers aim to encourage individuals and businesses to

be more responsible in disposing of their waste. The act has also clarified that chewing gum and cigarette butts are litter and anyone caught dropping these can be issued with a fixed penalty notice.

The LGA are now lobbying for more public education to change behaviour. This would save local authorities the cost of cleaning up and enforcement and allow them to concentrate resources on improving the quality of their environment. Cllr David Sparks, chairman of the LGA environment

board said: "Fixed penalty notices are only a means of helping enforce the powers of the act after the littering offence has been committed. The expensive cost of clearing up on environmental crime must be supported by a sustained and properly resourced education and awareness campaign to change behaviour that damages our local environment. Local authorities need to be equipped with the funds and tools necessary to promote the cleaner neighbourhoods agenda in their communities".

## LD05

### campaigning on throughout the year

Things are moving on quickly with this year's Local Democracy Campaign (LD05). Having expanded Local Democracy Week, the now year-long campaign aims to raise the profile of local government and knowledge of the democratic process amongst young people up to 26, while encouraging councillors to engage with this group.

There are a host of activities planned, including games, drama, debates, conferences and publications throughout the year and across England and Wales.

Friday 21 October has been officially nominated as "Take your MP/councillor to..." day. Why not sign up and work with local teachers or youth workers, to think creatively about how to approach your district's young people in their own environment? An information leaflet will be available shortly. Another fun and interactive way to participate in LD05 is by playing "I'm a councillor,

get me out of here!" - where young people are given an opportunity to spend two weeks questioning councillors, via a special website. Discover how to take part by emailing [shane@bigvote.org.uk](mailto:shane@bigvote.org.uk)

The campaign will be hosting a fringe session, scheduled for 1:30pm-2:15pm on Thursday, 7 July, at the LGA annual conference in Harrogate. The session will be a young people-led workshop, exploring ways of involving young people in democracy and decision-making. For more information on LD05, including resources and ideas on how to get involved, please contact LGconnect or visit the website: [www.localdemocracyweek.info](http://www.localdemocracyweek.info)

