

E.U Referendum

This year's conference began with a session trying to come to terms with the impacts resulting from the EU referendum result, for Britain to leave the European Union. The thoughts split into two very distinct camps, one side is feeling that the resultant challenges that arise from the result are going to be yet another challenge on top of all the others that Local Government face.

The other opinion is that the Local Government Community should look upon this as an opportunity to be seized and made to work for our residents. Either way all sides agree that the campaign was littered with scare stories and inflated facts, this has brought about a huge challenge to make sure those that have possibly voted for the first time in years are not let down when the final agreement with Europe becomes clearer. It does feel quite alarming that the government has really not thought through a plan to cover a leave eventuality.

The big fear from Local Government is that the funding that regions already get from the EU will not find its way to the regions that currently rely on these funds to develop their economy.

Electoral Reform

One issue that has resurfaced is electoral reform, although a referendum in 2011 decided that the alternative vote system should not be followed, there still remains a yawning gap when it comes to Political representation becoming a positive vote for a political outcome. The LGA are assessing the various options before making a recommendation to Government.

Housing Companies

we had a lively session looking into the issue of the future for housing delivery and the trend for Councils to set up housing companies to make better use of the funds that can arise from new housing growth. We had a great presentation from Bournemouth Council on how they have used new housing growth to not only deliver vital housing needs as well as a return on the original investment, as well as a tool for regenerating some run down areas. Bournemouth has also been centre stage in having an in house team that can build these properties thus supporting a wholesale increase in Apprenticeships to fulfil the skills needed to physically achieve these housing targets.

Devolution

I was able to directly lobby Greg Clark, the local government minister for Local Government, regarding the devolution settlement proposed for Suffolk & Norfolk. Regarding the issue of government insisting, that counties will have an elected mayor as part of any combined authority deal. The Minister stated that the details of the Devolution deals are as requested from the Councils to government. This is not the case, government are first telling councils what deals they feel are appropriate.

The Conference ended with a session led by Singer and campaigner Billy Bragg, this session focussed on his views regarding English and British identity.