

General Board Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

Updates to the Board on activity in relation to transport and economy since the last Board meeting.

Recommendations

That the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board note the updates detailed in the report.

Action

Officers to action as directed.

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General Board Updates

Background

1. Updates to the Board on activity in relation to environment, transport and economy since the last Board meeting.

Issues

Lane Rental Consultation response

2. In October the LGA submitted a response to the Government's consultation on the future of lane rental powers for street works. The LGA supports the further roll out of lane rental to any authority that wishes to make use of the powers as well as supporting the Government's further proposal on super permits. Our full submission is [here](#). The consultation is now closed and we are awaiting the Government's response.

Accessibility Action Plan Consultation response

3. In November the LGA responded to the Government's draft accessibility action plan consultation. The LGA welcomed the ambition behind the plan.
4. Our response stated that it was vitally important that as many transport options as possible are open to everyone and councils will do all they can to help meet the goals contained within the plan. With such a wide variety of schemes and investments mentioned there is a risk that the plan could become ill-focused. By listing every possible intervention that the Government is considering there is no focus on which measures could bring about the biggest improvements. There is no sense of prioritisation and about the trade-offs in other areas of policy that will be required. It is our hope that the action plan will begin a serious process of ensuring that all transport policy can be inclusive and capture the benefits of mobility for all. You can read our submission [here](#).

Air Quality

5. The LGA has continued its support for councils on tackling poor air quality.
 - 5.1. The LGA held a third seminar for officers from authorities directed by the Government to produce Air Quality plans following previous events held for authorities under different iterations of the Government's air quality plans for nitrogen dioxide. The event was an opportunity for authorities to share ideas, collaborate on best practice and a chance to feed back to the LGA on issues that councils have encountered in devising the plans. We also invited outside perspectives from the bus and freight industries to challenge and inform authorities' thinking on their plans.

- 5.2. The LGA recently submitted both written and oral evidence to two separate Parliamentary committees:
 - 5.2.1. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on air quality and Clean Air Zones, and;
 - 5.2.2. The Joint select committee inquiry: Improving air quality.
6. The LGA provided written evidence for both the APPG and the joint inquiry which were focused on the Government's approach on improving air quality and reaching compliance with EU limits on Nitrogen Dioxide. Cllr Adele Morris represented the LGA at both oral evidence sessions. Key messages to both groups were that providing clean air is the responsibility of central government, however, councils and local leadership have a role to play in helping the Government to deliver this responsibility but they need sufficient funding and to be accompanied by robust national action.
7. The LGA emphasised the need for a wider national strategy for developing cleaner air with support for targeted local intervention and national policy to develop a greener vehicle fleet and for the Government to give greater priority to demand management, and more active travel and public transport.

Support for town centres

8. As part of its 2017/18 improvement offer to councils the LGA held a seminar on 29th November for councils to support them in their efforts to help their town centres. The seminar included case studies from Warrington and Warwickshire councils and was attended by over 30 people. Partner organisations, including the British Property Federation (BPF), The Association of Town and City Managers (ATCM) and researchers from Loughborough University provided additional expert input.
9. LGA officers are planning further follow up support to councils and for elected members as a result of feedback from the seminar.

Judicial Review

10. The Board will recall from previous meetings that there is a judicial review of the VAT exemption on commercial waste services being undertaken by the Durham Company. HMRC and Treasury are defending the position that council commercial waste services should be exempt from VAT and the LGA are supporting HMRC as an interested party because of the potential financial impact on councils operating a commercial waste service.
11. The judicial review cleared the first hurdle in September, as the High Court judge ruled that the special legal regime is legal and rejected the private waste company's challenge to HMRC, the Treasury and the LGA as an interested party. The LGA supported the court case through expert legal advice and by providing a set of detailed written witness statements from councils.

12. The second part of the judicial review will test whether the VAT exemption for councils is distorting the market. HMRC and the Durham Company have exchanged reports on the operation of the commercial waste market and the extent to which the VAT exemption and council activity is influencing prices and the behaviour of businesses. The reports do not set out a conclusive view and further discussion is likely. There is no agreed date for the case to return to the High Court. The LGA is continuing to support HMRC and the Treasury, however at this point it is difficult to determine what further input will be required.

Lord Porter of Spalding CBE, LGA Chairman's meeting with Secretary of State for the Environment

13. The Chairman met with Michael Gove on 25th October 2017. This was a very useful meeting in which the Secretary of State was keen to hear the views of local government. A range of topics were discussed. On flooding he recognised that there was a need to work on delivering more houses which will be better protected from flooding in the future. He also acknowledged that councils have to invest a lot of funding in flood protection and so is interested in any good or bad practise around flooding funding. There was a brief discussion about Grenfell Tower and how Government could work with councils to make sure every council is as resilient as possible. On air quality he indicated that there would be further funding available to help some councils scope local schemes. When discussing waste he recognised local government as having an excellent record on kerbside collection. His focus will be more towards avoidable waste and working further with industry to get increased co-operation. He is very happy to have us further involved in the work around deposit return schemes and flagged up some future documents which he would be happy to share with us.

Chairman's meeting with Secretary of State for Transport

14. The Chairman of the LGA and Chairman of LGA's Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board met with the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling MP, on 25th October 2017. There was constructive discussion across a range of issues including the importance of continued central and local government investment in local transport infrastructure. The SoS was sympathetic to the EEHT Chairman's concern that local transport funding remained fragmented and too short-termist, and subject to competition, resulting in uncertainty and missed opportunities for securing the best long-term outcomes, efficiencies and innovation. The Major Roads Network was also discussed, with the EEHT Chairman welcoming Government support but emphasising that additional investment should not just be about creating new bypasses, but seen as a genuine opportunity to tackle congestion, capacity and maintenance issues on these key routes. There was also discussion on possible solutions to address the funding gap on local bus services. The SoS suggested that the nature of bus provision is likely to change over the coming years, with more Uber style, demand-led services replacing traditional services. The EEHT Chairman agreed that this made sense up to a point, and that

some councils, including his, were trialling this, but that such services need to be accessible for all people.

Implications for Wales

15. None.

Financial Implications

16. None.

Next steps

17. That the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board note the updates detailed in the report.