

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – report from Cllr Martin Tett (Chairman)

Meetings and external events

1. I chaired the LGA Future Transport Conference and will attend the LGA regional housing seminar in Cambridge at the end of the month.

Environment and waste

2. Government published a waste and resources strategy in December. The LGA provided a summary of the strategy for councils which can be read [here](#).
3. The strategy will be followed by three consultation on taking forward plans for greater consistency of services, extended producer responsibility and the introduction of a deposit return scheme.
4. Recycling and reducing plastic waste continues to attract national interest. In October our media work highlighted the impact of China's waste ban councils including the financial costs that some councils reported to [the LGA's research project](#).

Town Centres

5. Following the announcement in the Budget the Government have launched its [prospectus](#) for the £675 million Future High Streets Fund. This will provide co-funding towards capital projects that bring transformative change to their town centres. Local authorities are invited to submit Expressions of Interest by 22 March 2019 setting out their challenges and strategic approach to regenerating town centres. The Government will assess these and make an announcement on places moving forward to Phase Two in summer 2019. The LGA had previously highlighted that council funding pressures were preventing them from doing more and that this new funding announcement should help, provided the bidding process was proportionate and gave councils full flexibility.
6. The LGA's own work on the future of high streets and town centres continues. A town centre masterclass, focused on practical approaches to creating better towns, took place over two days in December 2018 and January 2019. A further national LGA [conference](#) on town centres will take place on 14th February, focused on 'Taking control of your town centres'.

Housing, Planning and Homelessness

7. An LGA briefing has been produced which summarises the main recommendations of relevance to local government and sets out the LGA's initial response to the review. Oliver Letwin has confirmed his attendance at the May Board meeting and we will also be inviting an MHCLG representative. The LGA is meeting with MHCLG officials considering the Letwin recommendations in early January.

8. There is currently a live MHCLG [consultation](#) on draft regulations amending the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010. This includes streamlined consultation processes for local authorities introducing CIL; removal of the section 106 pooling restrictions; introducing Infrastructure Funding Statements and clarifying that local planning authorities can seek a sum as part of a section 106 planning obligation for monitoring of obligations.
9. We are working with MHCLG officials to develop a survey for local authorities on the impact of the planning fee increase and resourcing issues more generally. It is anticipated that this will generate a robust evidence base to support our ask for properly resourced planning departments.
10. The LGA has recently surveyed councils on the impact of PDR and used results as part of the draft response to the current MHCLG [consultation](#) on extending permitted development rights further. We are also working with Shelter on an open signatory letter outlining our opposition to further permitted development rights including upwards extensions, and the demolition of commercial buildings and rebuild as new homes.
11. The LGA responded to the [consultation](#) on changes to planning practice guidance on the standard method for assessing local housing need. We raised a number of concerns with the locally assessed need figures' responsiveness to the complexity in local housing markets, and the implications of using them as a target within the Housing Delivery Test, and made a number of proposals for ending or limiting the impact. The Government is due to publish its proposals on the future Housing Delivery Test soon.
12. The LGA continues to call for reforms that ensure developers deliver the affordable homes and infrastructure that communities need with new development. We have been working with MHCLG to shape the data format for publishing Section 106 agreements, viability assessments, and other developer contributions. The intention is for these tools to support councils in the development of an Infrastructure Funding Statement (draft regulations currently out for consultation) to monitor and report on CIL and s106.
13. The LGA, Chartered Institute of Housing, Royal Institute of British Architects and Royal Town Planning Institute launched [Future Place](#) in December 2018 – a programme to recognise, reward and encourage high quality place-making in England.
14. We held a successful sell-out workshop in December 2018 in collaboration with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management for local government planners who need to understand and implement the biodiversity agenda.
15. The Government is planning to introduce regulations setting out a future for starter homes, crucially councils will have the flexibility to plan for them in line with local need, which was an LGA campaigning ask. LGA has participated in Government working groups and hosted a roundtable with MHCLG and councils to explore and shape future starter homes policy.

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Social housing

16. Now the cap is off the LGA is undertaking a short survey of stock-owning councils to understand to what extent this changes their delivery ambitions, and to help inform the development of an LGA sector support offer that can add most value from next financial year. In the short term the LGA has established a small grant programme helping councils access the staff/skills to take forward their aspirations.
17. We are still awaiting the Government's response to the RtB consultation which closed last year. The consultation proposed a number of helpful reforms which the LGA have been advocating for some time, for instance for councils to be able to recycle greater proportions of RtB receipts into replacements, and to have more time to build replacements. While we're hopeful some of these proposals will be taken forward the LGA expressed a concern that they did not go far enough and has continued to make the case for 100% receipt retention and ability for councils to set discounts locally.
18. The Government has not set a date for when it expects to publish its response to the submissions to its proposals, which include recommendations for reforming the regulatory and performance framework, tenant engagement and other issues. The LGA is currently finalising a project with the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service looking at good practice in enabling and empowering tenants through engagement.
19. We have responded to Government consultations on the future of social rents, following the four year one per cent rent reduction. While there are some welcome proposals for increasing rents by CPI+1 per cent for 2020-25, the LGA raised concerns about the removal of flexibilities for councils to set rents, in particular for those councils that had flexibility to move rents upwards, and the limited certainty provided by a 5 year proposal. We expect a Government response in March. We have also written to HRA councils to help clarify the impact of the rent reduction on the recovery of rents on 53 Mondays in the year.

Homes England

20. Homes England have published a strategy setting out their future housing delivery ambitions. Within the next few years, they will have invested over £27 billion across their programmes. The strategy also confirms geographical targeting across 5 of their funds, where 80 per cent of their funding will be targeted at half of all councils and only 20 per cent for the other half. The LGA has raised concerns with Homes England and the Government regarding national targeting, arguing all councils should be able to bid into all programmes. We have also made the case for greater proportions of this funding to be joined up and devolved to places in order to best meet local need.
21. As part of its wider role, HE is thinking about how it might support councils to build their capacity to enable the delivery of new housing. It is currently unclear what are HE's

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priorities and what model might be pursued. The LGA are working with them to ensure the development of an offer that adds most value to local authorities.

Private Rented Sector

22. A research project with councils will begin shortly to investigate good practice approaches to improving the quality of private rented housing, and how councils can secure sustainable sources of funding.
23. The LGA supported the Tenants Fees Bill and the intention to ban excessive fees to tenants. Importantly, LGA lobbying activity secured an amendment to the Bill in the House of Lords to exempt local authority incentive payments to landlords from the ban, which councils used to prevent and relief 17,000 cases of homelessness last year. The Bill will undergo further scrutiny in the House of Lords and House of Commons before receiving Royal Assent. Local authorities will be responsible for enforcing the ban.
24. The Private Members Bill proposed by Karen Buck MP has been passed into legislation. The LGA supported the new Bill, which will allow tenants to take their landlord to court in order to secure repairs and compensation for unfit accommodation. Tenants could use the new powers against council landlords and this extends to the common parts of a building. We will be working with government and other stakeholders to provide further information.
25. The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 became law in November 2018. This includes a new provision to help councils tackle long term empty homes. The percentage by which a council may increase the council tax payable in respect of a long-term empty dwelling, rises to up to 300 per cent for some properties. The LGA welcomed the new provisions as recognition of the challenge facing councils in tackling empty homes and a potentially useful new tool.

Homelessness

26. The LGA has been working with MHCLG and councils to ensure that councils' concerns around the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act are reflected in its review, in particular the concerns that councils have not been sufficiently funded to deliver the new duties. As part of this, we have undertaken a survey of councils on their experiences of the Act, with results due to be published shortly, and we have been successful in influencing the shape of the Government's own review of the progress on the delivery of the Act.
27. We fed into the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy, which was published in August 2018, including over £100 million of new funding some of which responded to direct asks from the LGA. The Government subsequently published a delivery plan in December, which states that MHCLG plans to work with the LGA to develop a package of sector-led support for homelessness and rough sleeping. We have also supported MHCLG to

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engage with councils by hosting one of three regional homelessness workshops in October. New data published by the Government found that 440 rough sleepers died last year.

28. Following Board discussion in December, the research project to present the case for effectively resourcing a long-term council-led approach to preventing homelessness is now underway. Scoping conversations with colleagues in the voluntary sector, academia, and councils have taken place in the first part of January. We are also working with LGA colleagues to commission a cross-policy analysis of the fragmentation in central government funding, in order to demonstrate the weaknesses in Government's current approach to funding councils.
29. The second meeting of our Homelessness Officers' Policy Network has been scheduled to take place in March: this Network brings together 20-30 council officers to directly engage with MHCLG on homelessness issues, and to help inform and evidence our lobbying activity on homelessness. The next meeting will focus on the challenges which councils are facing in preventing homelessness, and learning will feed directly into the prevention project.
30. Working with the LGA Resource Board, we have been working with colleagues in the voluntary sector, private landlord sector and in London Councils to coordinate messaging on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), in the lead-up to the Spending Review. We will be taking forward the call for a review of LHA rates, which have been limited (and subsequently frozen) since 2013, limiting the support claimants receive with their housing costs. The evidence which we collectively provide is intended to shape DWP's review on the future of the LHA following the lifting of the LHA freeze in 2020.

Housing Improvement [joint with the LGA improvement board]

31. The LGA Housing Advisor Programme is a direct response to the challenge of the Housing crisis and the need to build new homes and increase housing supply. In 2018/19, the LGA received over 120 bids for independent advice & expert support from Councils who are striving to deliver homes, reduce homelessness or generate savings or revenues in 2018/19. We are currently funding over 45 bids, directly supporting over 60 Councils meet their local Housing need, through a mix of direct Grant funding and LGA procured expertise. The projects are diverse and wide ranging; covering our key themes of Homelessness, Housing Supply, Overall Housing Strategy and Planning. Projects are in delivery phase and we will start publishing comprehensive case studies and best practice / learning from April 2019 onwards.
32. Following the removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the LGA wants to promote, facilitate and enhance the role and capacity of councils to build more homes. Many Councils want to move quickly, so we have launched a Building Council Homes Programme to provide some immediate support to those ambitious Councils who want to

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immediately access skills to increase the delivery of homes via their HRA. The Programme will issue grants to support a minimum of six projects to the value of £50,000 and potentially more depending on the demand. This might include projects to: fully understand development potential; innovate in the delivery of new homes; explore and build partnerships to deliver new homes; access particular skills necessary to deliver new homes, and: achieve wider public service gains through delivering new homes.

33. We have written to all HRA holding councils, and have asked them to complete a short survey in order to help us create a longer-term offer that helps councils have access to the skills and expertise needed to realise their growth and building ambitions. Every council is different and will have a range of opportunities and pressures that will affect their ability to respond to the removal of the HRA cap. The results of the survey will be analysed and will help the LGA develop the next phase of sector support to enable councils to meet their local housing needs.

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