

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – report from Cllr Peter Box CBE (Chair)

Flooding

1. I wrote jointly with Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the Safer and Strong Communities Board to DCLG Ministers Brandon Lewis MP and Marcus Jones MP to update them on the LGA's ongoing work to promote and support council activity in preparing and responding to civil emergencies, particularly following flooding in the north of England in December 2015. We also brought to their attention that councils will need continued support from the government given the extensive damage, particularly to roads and bridges, which will take some time to assess.

Planning

2. The LGA responded to a call for evidence on by local plans by the Local Plans Expert Group. This stressed that the focus needs to be on allowing the system to bed in effectively, avoiding large-scale reform which de-rails the good work councils are doing to get up to date plans in place. We highlighted a number of key areas where we feel there is scope to make changes to the current plan-making process in order to make it less costly, faster and provide more clarity for councils, communities and the development industry.
3. Research commissioned by the Board showing more than 475,000 new homes in England and Wales have planning permission but have yet to be built was reported widely. Cllr Ed Turner gave interviews on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC News and the story was reported across BBC Radio 2, 3, 4 and 5 Live news bulletins. The Telegraph, Financial Times, Guardian, BBC Online, Metro and Mail Online also covered the story.

Bus provision

4. The Chair of the EEHT Board met the Transport Minister, Andrew Jones MP, to discuss a couple of practical issues raised in the LGA's report on bus provision, Missing the Bus?, namely on securing a better legislative means of bus franchising and the importance of activating Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act (TMA) which councils feel will help tackle congestion hot spots and therefore improve bus punctuality. And, at the request of the Minister I followed up with a letter to provide further details and options as to how traffic enforcement powers under Part 6 of the TMA could be enacted in a way that would address ministerial concerns of potential misuse by some councils.

Zero-cost measures to support cycling and walking

5. In recognition of councils' ambition for promoting cycling and walking the Chair of the EEHT Board wrote to the Transport Minister, Andrew Jones MP, to propose a number of measures that would be of zero-cost to the Government, that would help local areas with active travel strategies. This included: civil enforcement of moving traffic offences, stable and long-term funding, and Government support for further roll out of workplace parking levy schemes.

Air Quality

6. The LGA responded to the Government's draft plans on 'Tackling nitrogen dioxide in our towns and cities' which sets out the UK's approach to meeting the NO2 limit values set out in the Ambient Air Quality Directive (EU targets) in the shortest possible time. Evidence was also submitted to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee enquiry on Defra's role for reducing emissions of key pollutants and whether the correct incentives are in place to support consumers and businesses in reducing transport emissions. In summary, it was felt that Defra's role was too focused on reporting and monitoring rather than on supporting action for improvement and that Government could do more to encourage switching to lower emission vehicles and alternative modes of travel.

Housing Commission

7. The LGA Housing Commission had its initial meeting between Lead Members and the Advisory Panel on 2 December 2015. At the meeting Lead Members and the Advisory Panel agreed areas of focus for the Housing Commission, and the outputs it will seek to deliver in the lead up to the final report being launched at LGA Annual Conference 2016. The Commission has launched a call for evidence which invites councils, partners, organisations and individuals to contribute their issues, evidence, and examples of effective housing and ideas to the Commission's Advisory Panel, made up of LGA Board members, experts and academics. We welcome all contributions before the 26 February 2016. Submissions of no more than 3,000 words should be sent to LGAhousingcommission@local.gov.uk.

21st United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP21)

8. Around a thousand mayors and local leaders came together in Paris in December to bring the voices of local and regional governments to the 21st United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP21) and showcase local and regional governments' activities and best practices in climate-oriented decentralised cooperation. In addition to the official Local and Regional Leaders Delegation to COP21, the gathering saw the Climate Summit for Local Leaders alongside sessions on how to cooperate to tackle climate change, the role of local governments in tackling climate change, and women's leadership and development, among others.
9. UK councillors attending included Cllr Richard Kemp CBE (Liverpool City Council) as the UK representative on the World Council and Executive of United Cities & Local Government (UCLG) and Cllr Sian Reid (Cambridge) who is the spokesperson on climate change for CEMR, the 'European LGA'. The Climate Summit for Local Leaders culminated with the 'Paris City Hall Declaration' where local and regional governments expressed their commitment to continue working in mitigation and adaptation and requested world leaders to reach a far reaching agreement. See more at: <http://climatesummitlocalleaders.paris/>

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