

Environment & Housing Programme Board – report from Cllr Gary Porter

The Localism Bill

1. The Environment and Housing Programme Board Members have been active in our work to influence the content of the Localism bill and have been representing the sector at ministerial meetings and events. Cllr Mike Haines attended a round table with Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation and a number of other key partners shortly after the publication of the bill; this was a useful opportunity to provide comment and challenge on the reforms within the bill and to extend an offer of support to work with the government to ensure that the bill reflects the front line experience of elected councillors. Cllr Mike Haines also spoke at the National Planning Forum on the detailed content of the bill and its implications for local planning authorities.
2. On the 22nd December I hosted a seminar with Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation attended by over 70 councils on the planning reforms in the bill. This session provided member councils with an opportunity to discuss with the Minister the detailed reforms outlined in the bill and provide feedback and challenge. A report from this event will be put on the LGA website for member councils and the feedback received will be fed into LGA influencing work on the bill.
3. Councillor Mayor Dorothy Thornhill attended a round table with Grant Shapps, Minister for Housing and Local Government and a number of other key partners shortly after the publication of the bill; this was a useful opportunity to provide comment and challenge on the reforms within the bill and to extend an offer of support to work with the government to ensure that the bill reflects the front line experience of elected councillors.

Chris Huhne meeting on the LG Offer on Climate Change

4. Cllr Clyde Loakes, Vice-Chair of the Environment & Housing Programme Board, and Cllr Richard Kemp met with Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, on 25 November to discuss the Local Government Offer on Climate Change. Key areas for discussion included the role of councils in the Green Deal, with positive statements around councils receiving resources from Green Deal providers for their contribution to making local schemes successful. Other discussions were around the planning system and how the country will meet its 2020 Renewable Energy targets, energy opportunity mapping, councils selling electricity, and the carbon reduction commitment. It was agreed that a political statement of the positive direction of travel on the Offer would be released by the end of the year.

Clyde Loakes on the panel at the Combined Heat and Power Association Conference

5. Cllr Clyde Loakes was on the panel of a discussion on the role of the public sector in the role out of combined heat and power (CHP) at the Combined Heat and Power Association's (CHPA) annual conference on the 25 November. Cllr Loakes highlighted the good work of his own authority on CHP, the opportunities for councils in CHP, particularly in raising much needed revenue and helping the fuel poor, and the barriers that continue to prevent councils from taking advantage of these opportunities.

Improvement and Efficiency South East Board

6. Cllr Clare Whelan attended a meeting of the Improvement and Efficiency South East Board with Defra minister Lord Henley on the 7th December. This meeting focused on the ongoing review of waste policy being undertaken by Defra.

Local Government Group presses Government to update enforcement powers at litter summit

7. Councillor Clyde Loakes and Councillor Paul Bettison attended a recent national litter summit and called for councils' enforcement powers to tackle litter and fly-tipping to be brought up-to-date to help tackle the problem, and for the proposed national anti-litter campaign to be made flexible and relevant to all local areas. In particular, the LG Group called for the legal loophole that is hampering councils' ability to tackle effectively littering from vehicles to be closed as soon as possible. In response, the Defra minister Lord Henley said that he had been asked by the Secretary of State to look at this and the LG Group is following up to try and put in place a solution to solve this long-standing problem.

Board Meeting – 17 November 2010

8. At our last meeting of the Environment & Housing Programme Board, members welcomed Lord Best, Chair of the LGA/ CLG Housing Commission to discuss the findings of the Commission's report into the challenges facing councils in providing housing. The Commission was established by John Healey MP and Baroness Eaton in March 2010 to consider how local authorities can ensure a sufficient supply of homes for their areas. Their report has been published and can be found here: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/15282030> The report highlighted the key role of councils in meeting the housing supply challenges in their areas and noted the entrepreneurial and innovative approach being taken by councils in bringing together partners, working with the community to secure support for much needed development and providing expertise and resources to support the successful completion of schemes. Baroness Eaton and Grant Shapps MP have produced a joint response, welcoming the final report and setting out key actions to take forward the Commission's findings.

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