

## **Environment & Housing Programme Board – report from Cllr Gary Porter**

### **The Localism Bill**

1. I gave oral evidence to the newly-formed Localism Bill Committee on 25 January. During the session I laid out the LGA's overarching message - that many of the ideas behind the Bill are to be warmly welcomed, but they have been bound up in red tape and complexity in the drafting, something which was not the intention of Ministers. I also discussed the real financial issues in the Bill, the EU fines clauses and the HRA reforms which need to be looked at urgently by the Committee.

### **Waste Collection**

2. The Board's Vice-Chair, Cllr Clyde Loakes [responded](#) to Bob Neill's letter to Leaders about waste collection at the beginning of January. Cllr Loakes emphasised that reports on councils' performance on waste indicated issues affecting a small number of very local areas in a minority of authorities and urged Ministers strongly to ensure that future public comments on this issue are evidence based and based on constructive dialogue with the sector. Meanwhile the LGA will continue to argue the sector's position with Government through the current review of waste policy, which is being led by Caroline Spelman, and which we welcome. This should be the mechanism through which a sensible and evidence-based national framework for council decision-making on waste as a local service should be agreed. We are very grateful for the advice councils are making to evidencing and arguing our positions, and I would urge you to contact us at any time with your concerns and ideas.

### **Board Meeting with the National Housing Federation**

3. My board colleagues, Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, Cllr Andrew Gravells and Cllr Tony Newman, met with Members of the National Housing Federation on 27 January to discuss the current policy landscape and its implications for housing associations and local authorities. There were many positive discussions about what housing associations and councils can do together at a local level to respond to the opportunities and risks of the rapidly changing policy landscape, and what the NHF and LGA can do together to support their memberships in working effectively together locally, through our influencing activity nationally, and the advice and support we offer our member organisations.

### **Multi agency waste crime meeting - 26 January**

4. Cllr Clyde Loakes, vice-chair of the Environment & Housing Programme Board, jointly chaired a meeting with the Environment Agency, LG Group, Defra and other local authority representatives in Waltham Forest on 26 January. The key outcomes from the meeting were around identifying steps that need to be put in

place to ensure most effective use of our collective efforts aimed at preventing and tackling waste crime.

### **Royal Town Planning Institute's General Assembly**

5. Cllr Mike Haines, Deputy Chair, LG Group Environment & Housing Programme Board, spoke at the Royal Town Planning Institute's General Assembly on the LG Group view on planning aspects of the localism bill. Cllr Haines stressed that local plans should remain the key documents through which a clear strategic view is set out for each planning authority area, embodying the ideas local people have generated at the neighbourhood level, and reflecting what needs to happen to the physical environment to achieve local sustainable development objectives.

### **Cllr Mike Haines meeting with Defra Minister Lord Henley**

6. Cllr Haines met Lord Henley on 26 January to discuss adaptation to climate change, the waste review and littering from vehicles. Cllr Haines and the Minister agreed on the importance of close dialogue between central and local government to ensure continued priority and progress. On the Waste Review, the Minister acknowledged the contribution of the LG Group and his gratitude for the help it has provided to Defra. On littering from vehicles, where LG Group is keen to close the legal loophole that is hampering councils' ability to tackle this problem, Cllr Haines asked the Minister to clarify Defra's intentions regarding a possible amendment to the Localism Bill. The Minister was not able to confirm yet if the Government would table an amendment to allow councils to be able to prosecute the registered keeper of a vehicle where litter had been seen being thrown from the vehicle. Cllr Haines confirmed that if Government did not table such an amendment, then the LG Group would lobby to get this tabled.

### **Flood Risk Management**

7. I wrote to the Floods Minister Richard Benyon before Christmas to raise members concerns that a new statutory duty on Lead Local Flood Authorities to submit Preliminary Flood Risk Assessments by June had a very challenging timetable and to request flexibility about the deadlines.
8. I am pleased to report that the Minister has listened to our members concerns and has agreed a helpful flexibility on the submission process. The assessments will still need to be submitted by 22nd June, but to avoid rushing the process to ensure Scrutiny Committee sessions and sign off happens before submission, authorities can now, if necessary, submit first but hold Committee sessions and seek approval later. This may be particularly helpful for authorities holding elections in May. We believe this additional flexibility will be useful to authorities and help ensure they have the time to produce the comprehensive assessments they want to deliver.

**Contact officer:** Sarah Monaghan

**Position:** Member Support Officer

**Contact:** [sarah.monaghan@local.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.monaghan@local.gov.uk) / 0207 664 3214