

Environment and Housing Board – report from Cllr David Parsons CBE (Chairman)

The LGA responds to the Government's NPPF announcement

1. Cllr Sir Merrick Cockell, Chairman of the LGA, responded to the announcement of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 27 March. Following pressure from the LGA, the amended definition of sustainable development now strikes a better balance between economic, social and environmental benefits. Another key win for local authorities is that a timeframe of one year has been put in place to allow the development of local plans, and that plans will gain greater weight as they near completion. The future of localised planning and community development following the NPPF was also the focus on a panel debate I took part in, at the Westminster Energy, Environment & Transport Forum, on 26 April.

Rural Commission

2. The NPPF was also a main topic of discussion at the meeting of the LGA Rural Commission, where Cllr Terry Stacy gave a speech outlining the LGA's position on the NPPF and how it applied to rural councils. A breakout session also considered how best to meet local housing needs.

Meeting with Lord Best, Cllr Parsons, Placeshapers

3. Cllr Gary Porter, Cllr Tony Newman, Cllr Apu Bagchi, Cllr Terry Stacy and I met the President of the LGA, Lord Best, and the Placeshapers group of community-based housing associations in late March to discuss their key values and introduce them to the LGA's positions on social housing.

A discussion on Climate Change with Lord Krebs

4. Cllr Gravells and I met with the Chair of the Adaptation Sub-Committee on the 24 April, to discuss the third report on national preparedness for climate change due in July. This will focus on flood-risk – and a significant part of the sub-committee's analysis is about the role of local decision making. We will continue to work productively with the sub-committee.

Housing Masterclasses

5. The LGA delivered six free Housing Masterclasses, to over 90 elected members over the Spring in Leeds, Liverpool, London, Taunton and Birmingham, with Cllr Andrew Cooper, Cllr Richard Kemp, Cllr Tony Newman, Cllr Brian Hood, Cllr Terry Stacy and Cllr Roger Hollingworth all involved in chairing the events along with LGA member peers. The events received a satisfaction rating of over 90%.

Cross Government Group on Criminal Landlords and Migrant Rough Sleepers

6. A cross-Whitehall Ministerial Working Group has been convened to deal with the issue of criminal landlords and the problem of so-called 'sheds with beds'. Cllr Frances Roden attended the first meeting on 30 April on behalf on the board. Sir Robin Wales, Leader of the London Borough of Newham, and senior officials representing the Treasury, DWP and DCLG also attended.

Planning Peer Challenges

7. In April we concluded the last of this year's programme of six planning peer challenges, fully subsidised by the Planning Advisory Service. We were on site in Wiltshire, Sandwell, Warrington, Derby, Cornwall and Maidstone. The average overall satisfaction rating with the challenge process and outcome was 86%.

Housing

8. Cllr Terry Stacy attended a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Housing and Planning Group (**APPHPG**), where he argued that there is no one size fits all solution to the housing crisis and, consequently, the solutions have to be finely tuned at the local level.
9. Cllr Ed Turner continues to contribute on the LGA's behalf to the Local Housing Delivery Steering Group. The LHDSG is a cross-sector working-group which seeks to produce advice for developers and local authorities on viability and local standards in plan-making. The group's advice on viability will be launched later in May.
10. Cllr Clyde Loakes headed the LGA's response to the successful transition to self financing system for local authority housing. The new self financing system reflects a long standing lobbying campaign by the board and is based on an acknowledgement that councils are best placed to make decisions about how they spend money raised locally.

Flood insurance

11. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) and Richard Benyon, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment and Fisheries, have each sent letters to the LGA in response to the joint letters by Cllr Clare Whelan and Cllr Andrew Cooper highlighting councils' concerns with the current state of the flood insurance market. The LGA are following up separate invitations for further meetings with the Minister and the ABI to progress the issue.

High street clustering Campaign

12. In support of the High street clustering Campaign, Cllr Tony Newman spoke to the Today programme and Clyde Loakes, Vice Chair of the board highlighted the results of our high street survey, which showed clearly that clusters of certain types of premises are hitting the economic growth of local high streets, according to councillors and council staff.

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