

Environment and Housing Board – report from Cllr Mike Jones (Chairman)

Government Initiatives on Housing and Planning

1. Over recent weeks the Environment and Housing Board members, LGA officers, and the political groups have worked hard to influence the debate in advance of government's decisions on housing and planning and have achieved significant media profile for local government's perspective on the announcement.
2. We have responded in the media to the government's proposals which would allow developers to ask councils to renegotiate previously agreed Section 106 obligations, and reiterated the point that much-needed development is being held up because buyers can't buy, and developers can't sell, as a result of the lack of liquidity in the finance market and the limited availability of mortgages. These are the real obstacles standing in the way of a recovery in new house building.
3. I and other members of the Environment and Housing board will continue to argue that planning is not the key barrier to growth and councils have a strong track record in using the planning system to bring forward much needed homes and development. We also will re-iterate that removing affordable housing requirements will not address the underlying wider economic issues that are stalling development featured strongly in media coverage.

Energy efficiency and fuel costs

4. I am delighted to be able to announce that successful lobbying by the LGA has secured funding for councils and social housing providers to improve energy efficiency and lower fuel bills of homes in the most deprived areas of the country, with a specific focus on rural areas. £190 million will be available over 2 years from January 2013 from the UK's largest energy suppliers under the 'Carbon Saving Communities' Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

Launch of the LGA Climate Local initiative

5. Over the summer the LGA successfully launched the 'Climate Local' initiative to support and help councils drive local action and reduce risks from the changing climate. I am pleased to be able to say that over 50 councils have now signed up and over 160 people are taking part in a new online network to support councils to share ideas and progress.

Flooding damage to infrastructure

6. Lobbying for exceptional funding for councils to repair substantial structural damage to local roads caused by intense summer rainfall and to help local economies to recover. This included high profile press coverage and representations to government. Though the Department for Transport have responded that they do not have funds available for

capital expenditure for exceptional flood damage, we are continuing to pursue the issue with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Car Litter Loophole

7. Earlier in the summer, Councillor Clyde Loakes, Vice-Chairman of the board responded on the LGA's behalf to the publication of Lord Marlesford's Bill in the House of Lords to close the loophole that allows people who litter from vehicles to dodge fines. The LGA emphasised the high cost of hundreds of millions of pounds' of taxpayers' money spent cleaning up after people who don't dispose of their litter responsibly, and highlighted the need for local authorities across the country to be given enforcement powers to tackle the problem.

Rural Commission and Conference

8. The LGA's Rural Commission held its Annual Commission on 11 September and its Conference the following day. This year the event was hosted by South Lakeland District Council at Low Wood Bay, Windermere. The conference featured a ministerial address from Owen Paterson MP, new Secretary of State for the Environment at the department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). We are delighted that the event was chosen as the launch for the Government's Rural Statement, which sets out how the Government intends to improve local economies and make better places to live and work.

Looking forward

9. As the new Chair of the Environment and Housing Board I look forward to getting to grips with the many challenges and opportunities that local government faces across the board's remit. We have already begun discussions on our priorities for the forthcoming year, and this will be the main focus of our first board meeting.
10. I would also like to welcome the new faces from around the country on the board, and pass on my thanks for the work of those Councillors who are no longer on the board, and who contributed hugely to the work undertaken last year.

Contact officer:

Paul Raynes

Position:

Head of Programme

Phone no:

020 7664 3037

E-mail:

paul.raynes@local.gov.uk