

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

Councils' record planning permissions create a building backlog of 400,000 new homes

1. Further to our work in early September responding to the Government's Housing and Planning announcements, the LGA has released research which illustrates that there are 400,000 unimplemented planning permissions for new homes and that councils overwhelmingly respond positively to new development. We will continue to call for Government to focus efforts to boost housing growth on freeing up finance for developers and increasing the availability of mortgages for would-be home owners struggling to get on the housing ladder.

LGA submission to CLG Select Committee Inquiry – Housing and Planning

2. The CLG Select Committee Inquiry will take evidence on the recent government announcements on housing and planning from the new Housing and Planning Ministers on 15 October. Evidence submitted by the Environment and Housing board highlighted that a focus on wider market issues and access to development and mortgage finance is necessary to unlock development. The Board highlighted its concerns with recent planning measures such as proposals to extend permitted development rights and proposals to significantly expand the role of the Planning Inspectorate to make decisions on planning applications and to renegotiate the affordable housing element of section 106 agreements.

Green Deal Launched

3. The Government officially launched the new 'Green Deal' on 1 October. The Green Deal is designed to help householders and businesses improve the energy efficiency of their properties at no upfront cost with the improvements to be paid for out of any bill savings made. There are still a number of details to be confirmed, so householders won't be able to benefit until next year. A number of councils are looking to use the Green Deal to help generate local jobs and lever in investment. Birmingham City Council estimates that their local Green Deal – 'Birmingham Energy Savers' - could create 3000 jobs and generate £1.55 bn.
4. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO), an obligation on the energy suppliers to support the Green Deal by offering additional financial support to householders that are struggling with their heating bills or have homes that are very expensive to improve, will be launched early in the new year. Councils are pivotal to delivering the obligation because they can identify local opportunities for energy efficiency improvements that the energy suppliers can fund, and they can refer their vulnerable and fuel poor households to the energy suppliers for additional support. The LGA is lobbying to make sure that councils can take part in this brokerage without unnecessary bureaucratic constraints. Our Green Deal Conference, which I will be chairing on 12 November, was fully booked months in advance.

Climate Local

5. Our Climate Local initiative is going from strength to strength. My own council, Cheshire West and Chester, is signing up along with more than 50 councils around the country. Through Climate Local, councils commit to local action to reduce carbon emissions and

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increasing resilience to climate risks like flooding. The programme is showing how councils can have a real impact – reducing energy bills, protecting vulnerable communities from severe weather events and boosting the local economy through new green jobs and services. For information on LGA and council-led action to reduce emissions and build resilience go to: www.local.gov.uk/climate-change

LGA Members at the Party Conferences

6. Members of the Environment and Housing Board and other LGA Boards have been active at their party conferences this Autumn, contributing to a number of events as follows:
 - 6.1 *Liberal Democrat Party Conference* – Councillor Keith House, Deputy Chairman of the Environment and Housing board was hosted by the Association of Liberal Democrat councillors. In a discussion on the future of housing Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson also spoke regarding new approaches to home improvements
 - 6.2 *Labour Party Conference* – Councillor Clyde Loakes, Vice Chairman of the Board spoke at an event hosted by the Royal Town and Planning Institute (RTPI), which considered how planning can deliver the growth local economies need. Councillor Loakes also contributed to a fringe event which considered how local government can get the best outcome from the Green Deal for local businesses and consumers.
 - 6.3 *Conservative Party Conference* – Both Sir Merrick Cockell and Councillor Gary Porter attended events on housing future generations, hosted by the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Home Builder Coalition. I also attended a number of events, including one focused on the links between Housing and Social Care hosted by the Riverside (Social Housing providers) and Tunstall (providers of telehealthcare equipment); and a discussion of housing's relationship with growth, hosted by the RTPI.

LGA submission to Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee – Draft Water Bill

7. The LGA has also provided written evidence to the EFRA Select Committee's inquiry into the draft Water Bill. We reflected councils' concerns that the draft Bill is a missed opportunity for ensuring a stronger relationship and alignment of plans between water companies, councils and the Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT) in support of locally determined growth and development, and argued that any new legislation reduces red tape. With regards to the proposal of extending competition of supply and sewerage services to non-residential customers, it will be important that there are clear lines of accountability to customers, such as who is responsible when assets fail.

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