

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

### **Spending Round 2015-16 and infrastructure spending beyond 2015**

1. In response to government's infrastructure investment priorities beyond 2015 published on 27 June, our key message remains that councils are overwhelmingly saying 'yes' to new homes and are working directly and in partnership to bring forward homes and encourage investment in infrastructure.
2. The Government announced a range of measures to encourage capital investment in affordable housing including £3.3 billion to support 165,000 new affordable homes over three years from 2015 -16. As demand for affordable homes continues to increase, it is helpful that the government has listened to the LGA's call for investment in housing and it is important that councils, as well as Housing Associations, are able to access the £3.3 billion fund on an equal basis. The LGA will continue to press for local authorities and ALMOs to be provided with the financial flexibilities to invest in housing and to press government to remove the unnecessary and arbitrary restriction of the HRA borrowing cap.
3. The announcement included Government plans to pool £400 million of funding for the New Homes Bonus across LEP areas as part of the Single Local Growth Fund 'the single pot'. Whilst we remain very supportive of Lord Heseltine's recommendation to devolve funding held by central government departments to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through a single pot, the decision will redistribute money previously received directly by councils and impact on planned funding for local services. Those impacts do not appear to have been properly considered and we are urgently seeking more detail.
4. Protection and certainty for those areas at risk of flooding has been a long term aim of the Board and our Inland Flood Risk Management Group has consistently ensured that Government hears the concerns of councils who are frontline in responding to flooding. The Government's announcement of a new agreement with the insurance industry on the provision of accessible and affordable floods insurance was therefore most welcome. The measures will be introduced via the Water Bill and the Board will continue to represent local government as the legislation develops. Also welcome was the long-term funding settlement for flood defences set out by Government, rising from £344 million in 2014/15 to £370 million in 2015-16 and then protected in real terms to 2020-21.

### **Environment and Housing at the LGA Annual Conference**

5. There was a strong focus on the role of local government in driving growth at conference this year and the need for further real devolution of power. Cllr Keith House, Cllr Clyde Loakes and I led well-attended sessions with fellow Councillors, and key partners on planning, housing and waste.
6. On the Monday preceding the Conference the Environment and Housing Board met to consider the progress made against our objectives set out at the beginning of the year. Amongst other successes we have secured a number of changes to the Growth and Infrastructure Bill; led a forceful challenge to the Government's proposals for a raft of extension of permitted development rights; successfully defended councils' interests in a Judicial Review of Defra; and lobbied hard for councils to be able to access funding from energy companies for local energy efficiency projects through the ECO brokerage

scheme. We have also supported councils to address climate change through our Climate Local initiative.

### **Local Waste Review**

7. On 4 June, we launched our Wealth from Waste report with an event at Local Government House chaired by Cllr Clyde Loakes and a key speech from Lord de Mauley, The event was attended by over 80 delegates from local and central government as well as other waste related organisations. There has been significant interest in the report's findings and recommendations from the waste management industry and local and central government, at the highest level. The report has secured good coverage in the national media and Cllr Clyde Loakes and I have given a number of interviews and spoken at several events to highlight the work. The full report can be downloaded from: <http://www.local.gov.uk/waste-management>

### **Rural Mobile & Wireless Connectivity Seminar**

8. On 13 June, I attended a half-day seminar on the progress of better mobile connectivity and coverage in rural areas, hosted by DCMS and chaired by the Rt. Hon Maria Miller MP. The seminar will brought together senior representatives from the mobile network operators, broadband stakeholder groups and rural organisations such as Countryside Alliance, Country Land and Business Association and the National Farmers Union. I communicated Councils' concerns that changes in legislation and regulation give the Government a blanket power to remove the prior approval requirement for all electronic communication apparatus, including mobile, without restriction to broadband. This removes decision making from local communities.

### **Rogue Landlords/Beds in Sheds Taskforce**

9. Cllr Frances Roden attended a meeting of the Government's taskforce which heard from LB Newham, Slough BC and Fenland DC councils who are working to quantify the size of the problem in their areas using thermal images and surveys. Work is concentrated on poor quality rented sector properties, poor quality extensions and suspect landlords.
10. DCLG have made £3 million available to local housing authorities to help them tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector. Areas with acute and complex problems relating to rogue landlords are invited to submit a bid for funding by 20 September. DCLG are also looking at the impact and effectiveness of licensing schemes.

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