

The Sustainable Communities Act round one - update

Summary

This paper provides members with an update on progress with regard to the Sustainable Communities Act and outlines linkages to the LGA Regeneration and Transport Board.

Recommendations

That members note the contents of the report.

Action

As directed by Members.

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Background

1. The Sustainable Communities Act (SCA) was passed in 2007 and outlined a formal mechanism for communities, through the local authorities that represent them to identify and propose actions to be taken by government to promote sustainability in their community.
2. The LGA has been allocated a statutory role under the act as the 'Selector', to receive and shortlist proposals and to seek to reach agreement with the Secretary of State on which proposals to implement.
3. The LGA received 301 proposals from 90 lead authorities (25.5% of English Councils) under the first round of the SCA. Of the 301 proposals received, 18 were joint proposals, bringing the total number of authorities submitting proposals under the act to 100 (28% of English councils).
4. As Selector the LGA has shortlisted 199 proposals made under the Act. Short-listing was undertaken by a cross party panel of elected members, chaired by Councillor Keith Mitchell CBE.
5. Many of the shortlisted proposals echo calls for change by the LGA and will be useful in our ongoing lobbying with government. There are a number of themes emerging from proposals that link specifically to issues covered by the Regeneration and Transport Board's remit. For example:
 - That local authorities and groups of local authorities working together should be given greater powers and strategic control over funding for worklessness and skills. The LGA received proposals from Sheffield City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Kent County Council relating to this.
 - That local authorities should be given the flexibility to vary benefit rules to suit the local economy. For example a proposal received from Essex County Council seeks powers to set the eligibility criteria and amounts payable for all working age benefits for all claimants.
 - That local authorities should be given powers to use empty premises for community use. This was echoed in a proposal from Islington London Borough Council among others.
 - That local authorities are given greater flexibility to set appropriate speed limits and signage to enable better traffic management.
 - More effective coordination between national, regional and local transport networks. For example South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council are

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seeking greater influence for the region to ensure that national and regional road programmes better suit local needs.

- That local authorities are given greater powers to regulate and enforce parking. For example Leeds City Council proposes extending the powers to civil enforcement officers to issue penalty charge notices for obstructive parking.
6. The LGA will now enter into discussions with the Secretary of State to seek to reach agreement on those proposals to be implemented. The LGA is lobbying for the process to be open, transparent and to provide opportunities for real dialogue and discussion at both official and member/ministerial level. The LGA would like the process is concluded in a timely manner and has proposed to Government that the discussions are concluded by Easter recess.
7. Members are asked to support the implementation of the shortlisted proposals by:
- Using the proposals as case studies in LGA lobbying.
 - Writing to relevant MPs, ministers and stakeholder endorsing specific proposals and pressing for their implementation.

Financial Implications

8. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

Implications for Wales

9. The Sustainable Communities Act applies to authorities in England only.

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