

Decisions and Actions from Previous Meeting

Present

Chairman:	Cllr Paul Bettison (Conservative, Bracknell Forest UA)
Vice Chair:	Cllr Ian Mearns (Labour, Gateshead MBC)
Deputy Chairs:	Cllr Mike Haines (Independent, Teignbridge DC), Mayor Dorothy Thornhill (Liberal Democrat, Watford BC)
Conservative:	Cllr Peter Britcliffe (Hyndburn BC); Cllr Andrew Gravells (Gloucestershire CC and Gloucester City); Cllr Gary Porter (South Holland DC); Cllr David Potts (South Tyneside MBC); Cllr Clare Whelan (Lambeth LBC)
Labour:	Cllr Derek Bateman (Cheshire West and Chester Council); Cllr Tony Newman (Croydon LBC)
Also present:	Cllr Andrew Cooper (Kirklees MBC)
Apologies:	Cllr Paula Baker (Basingstoke and Deane BC); Cllr Adam Paynter (Liberal Democrat) (Cornwall Council), Cllr Ed Turner (Oxford City Council)
LGA Officers:	Martin Wheatley, Clive Harris, Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley, Fatima de Abreu

1. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Bettison welcomed Members, and said that he was pleased to have the opportunity to meet prior to the start of the LGA Annual Conference. Apologies had been received from Cllrs Turner, Baker and Paynter.

2. Discussion on Flooding

Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley introduced the paper and circulated additional information on flood risk management from key partners and the LGA.

Vanessa reminded Members that the recommendations made in Sir Michael Pitt's report had been accepted by Government and a response was now timely. A National Partners Group on Flooding, chaired by Sir Michael, has been set up by the LGA, and recently met to discuss the draft Bill.

It had been agreed that, although the recommendations that local government should take the lead role for managing local flood risks were welcomed, assurance needed to be secured that this will be able to be undertaken effectively and with provision of appropriate support. The LGA has major concerns about the risks if authorities are not provided with sufficient financial

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support from Defra, whose current assumption seems to be that undertaking new roles would in fact mean savings for local authorities.

The National Partners Group has agreed that task groups to look at particular issues such as skills, capacity and funding. These will help inform the proposed legislation and identify in more detail the resources required by LAs to undertake any new responsibilities proposed in a final Bill.

Vanessa informed the Board that a broad response to the draft Bill had been proposed and referred members to the appendix paper that summarised the LGA's policy positions on flood risk management issues. This included the lack of certainty of costs involved - particularly with regard to setting up partnerships and increasing capacity, training etc. Evidence from member councils suggests that there are a great deal more expenses connected to both the lead role and implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) than currently acknowledged in the draft Bill. Other major issues raised in questioning the draft Bill should include:

- Clear legislation on sharing data;
- Clarification on two-tier roles and the need for local agreement;
- Concerns around current and future skills gaps and training needs;
- Possible creation of a surface water draining charge for SUDs properties, which would then be passed onto LAs via Water and Sewerage Companies (WASCs);
- Funding for development of Surface Water Management Plans (SWMPs).

Vanessa assured members that both the Coastal Issues SIG and the LG Flood Forum were involved in consideration of the response, and that the recent meeting of stakeholders had been very well attended. Sir Michael Pitt had expressed the added value of the Group meeting and the contributions from stakeholders.

The Board was pleased with progress, but agreed that there were still certain issues such as the LGA position with regards to ring-fenced funds for flood risk, distribution of grants and clarification of the lead in two-tier authorities. Assurance would need to be sought that Government would not impose a one size fits all structure for managing local flood risk and the point accepted that expertise will not always lie in one authority tier.

The Chairman endorsed the value of the LGA's work on this, and members agreed that evidence would need to be collected on revenue and cost to ensure additional funding. Cllr Mearns questioned the fairness of the proposal for funding Surface Water Management Plans for a flat-rate charge to residents and recommended that business rate contributions were also sought. It was agreed that this would be looked at in greater detail. Cllr Cooper recommended that the response should include reference to National Indicators 188 and 189, and the links between flood management and

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Climate change. Vanessa confirmed that this will be done and that emphasis within the context of climate change would be a priority. Cllr Gravells stressed the need for all authorities to make flood risk a priority and a possible need for authorities such as Gloucestershire to reinforce to other authorities the urgency of taking action to reduce flood risk.

Decisions:

- The Board agreed with the LGA's assessment and proposed strategy for taking forward work on flood risk management, subject to consideration of their suggestions and concerns.

Actions:

- Draft LGA response to the draft Bill to be sent to Members of the Board by mid July, with the final response agreed before 24 July.

Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley

3. LGA Work on council-led Development

Martin Wheatley said that the circulated report had been overtaken by a conversation between Sir Jeremy Beecham and the new Housing Minister John Healey, and by significant Government announcements on the day of the meeting and expected the following day:

- The amount available for LAs to provide new housing will be quadrupled to £200m in grants and £200m in borrowing, providing around 15-20 thousand new homes;
- Councils will now have more freedom to set their own letting policies;
- There will be a crackdown on tenancy fraud / illegal subletting and,
- The Government is to consult on the dismantling of the HRA..

The Board agreed that this was very positive news and Martin Wheatley confirmed that arrangements were currently being put in place for a media briefing. He informed members that the LGA would be seeking early discussions with CLG on allocations and tenancy fraud.

Members expressed their gratitude for the work of LGA officers in attaining these significant achievements, and requested that a letter formally thanking Jeremy Beecham for his input be sent from the Chairman. Martin Wheatley went on to thank Cllrs Haines, Porter and Newman for the work they had done representing the Board as its Housing Portfolio Holders.

Decision:

- Members noted the announcements

Actions:

- Draft letter of thanks to Jeremy Beecham for the Chairman's signature

Clive Harris

- Officers to investigate whether local authorities can bid for mainstream

funding when the £200m has been allocated.

Caroline Green

4. The LGA's manifesto for delivering low carbon communities

Martin Wheatley presented this item as Philip Mind was unable to attend. The manifesto was circulated to Board members at the meeting with an apology for its lateness.

Members were asked to consider the first draft of the manifesto, together with plans to promote it. The manifesto included:

- Provision of a single national fund for supporting home carbon reduction;
- Affects on stamp duty;
- Community training;
- Assistance for smaller councils;
- Working with Government on achieving a better approach to cutting carbon in the private rented sector;
- Introduction of SMART meters.

Martin asked members for their comments on this draft, and informed them that it was hoped that it would be ready for publication during Small Change, Big Difference week (13-18 July 2009). The IDeA would follow up the document by providing information to councils on how to prepare themselves to deliver low carbon communities.

Cllr Cooper questioned the realism of the Government's 2015 target for the insulation of existing homes. After Kirklees, Sheffield Council was going to be only the second council in the country to provide free home insulation but that it was anticipated to take six years to achieve. He also said that the Government's recent announcement on feed-in tariffs for renewable heat would only be effective if the issue of the availability of capital funding was resolved.

Following a discussion about the winter fuel payment, it was agreed that the paper would be rewritten to include the winter fuel payment in an analysis of how effectively current sources of funding were targeted on those most in need and on carbon reduction.

Decision:

- The Board noted the report

Action:

- Further comments on the draft prospectus to be fed back to Philip Mind and Abigail Burrige (LGA), they to revise it for publication.

Phillip Mind/Abigail Burrige

5. Climate Change – International and European dimension

Cllr Haines said that he and Phillip Mind had recently attended the Local Government Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen to chair and speak at a

workshop on local government powers to develop low carbon communities.

Cllr Haines informed members that the workshop had been very enlightening particularly with a view to the evidence that less developed nations are suffering the effects of global warming caused by developed countries. Research has also shown that the effects will be greater than those anticipated and financial support is therefore being sought by these countries to help respond to climate change. Cllr Haines went on to state that it was anticipated that the annual cost of this assistance to the developed world would probably be up to £100billion.

Both Cllr Haines and Phillip had made a number of contacts at the event, and are in the process of producing a questionnaire which will be circulated to European local government associations. Further to this, they will provide a report on local government action on climate change highlighting the responsibility, powers and funding local government in other countries have in order to act on climate change.

Decision:

- The Board noted the report

6. Consultation on UK Strategy for Managing low level Radioactive Wastes from the Nuclear Industry

Clive Harris summarized the details of the report which had been received from Fred Barker (NuLeAF's Executive Director). NuLeAF were preparing a response to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) consultation on managing low level radioactive wastes (LLW) and were keen for member input.

He suggested that the work would need greater focus and that Waste Portfolio Holders would be best placed to take this forward via a meeting with Mr Barker. Clive took the opportunity to brief the Board on the work that he and Phillip Mind were currently involved in, helping local authorities communicate with central government regarding the siting and development of new nuclear power stations.

Members agreed that there were lots of issues involved and that views would have to be properly considered. Cllr Bateman said that he had been reassured that NuLeAF has been speaking for LGA appropriately, and expressed a request to be consulted at every stage. Mayor Thornhill said that it would be important to find someone knowledgeable and committed in this particular field to act as a sub.

The Chairman requested that officers develop a small number of key people to remain fully briefed and up to date with Government policy changes as they would be very helpful to the Environment Board. He told members that this could become a big part of future agendas after the General Election. It was agreed that suggestions would be put forward at a future meeting.

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Decision:

- The Board noted the report

Action:

- Feed back response to Fred Barker, and arrange meeting with Waste Portfolio Holders **Clive Harris**
- The Board will consider setting up a 'new nuclear' portfolio holder group in September **Clive Harris**

7. Update on other Board business

Members noted the reports.

8. Decisions and Actions from Previous meeting

The note was approved subject to amendment of council details for Cllr Derek Bateman.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions over the last year and said that they should feel proud that the Environment Board in particular had had a significant impact on government policies. The amendments made to the three Acts on Housing, Planning and Climate Change had been substantial and, although it would be the last meeting for some members, he wished everyone well in the new session.

Members requested that a record of appreciation for the Chair's management of Board meetings be noted and the meeting was then closed.

Date of next meeting:

Monday 14 September, 11am in Rooms D and E, Layden House

Address: Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

Please note that the Office Holder Meeting – 9am, and Political Group Meetings – 10am, will also be held at the above address.

(Map and further details to follow with the agenda in due course)