

## Environment Board - report from Cllr Paul Bettison (Chairman)

### Greening Communities (Environment)

#### *Climate Change*

- Local Government Partnership Board have now signed off an Environmental Policy for the LGA Group which includes some stretching targets of CO2 reduction from energy and business travel as well as targets for recycling and paper use reduction. The policy also covers the LGA Groups outward facing work which covers the design, implementation of, and messages contained within our work programmes with councils and partners. The policy has an associated action plan which details the actions necessary for the Group, Liberata and staff, to achieve targets. Launch of the policy and associated awareness raising is scheduled for Small Change, Big Difference week 13-17 July.

#### *Environment*

- LGA attended a roundtable discussion with Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on the post-Kyoto **international climate change negotiations**. Worldwide local government networks have been successful in tabling amendments to the UN negotiating text that recognise the important role of local government in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- An LGA position on the **EU Climate Change Adaptation White Paper** was developed through lead members and will be used to lobby key decision makers on EU support for sharing best practice, public education and skills development.
- LGA will continue to lobby on the **EU energy performance of buildings directive** which is currently being revised at European level. We will work with UK government (who will be consulting on the revision in July) and the MEPs who will be debating the Directive in the coming months.

### Sustainable Communities (housing and planning)

#### *Housing*

- The full text of the **Central Local Agreement on Housing and Regeneration** is now posted on the LGA website:  
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageld=2061241> In June, the Minister for Communities and Local Government and the Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency joined me at the LGA stand at the Chartered Institute of Housing conference to launch the Agreement.
- On June 29, the Prime Minister announced a four-fold increase in investment for **council-led housing development**, a major victory for the LGA. Through our Places You Want to Live campaign the LGA has lobbied the government hard about the lack of funding available for the building, repair and maintenance of

council housing. However, to unlock the full potential of councils to deliver, they must have the same access to mainstream social housing grant funding as housing associations and the private sector.

- The Government has also listened to the LGA's calls for **reform of the housing finance system**. We have campaigned long and hard for councils to be able to keep all the proceeds from their own council house sales and council rents. We continue to call for: councils to have the financial independence to invest in their housing stock and stimulate the local economy; historic 'notional debt' (which councils are currently spending £1.3 billion a year servicing) to be cancelled; councils to have the same freedom as other social housing providers to borrow money to invest in new homes; and the government to stop setting tenants' rent and allow them to reflect local circumstances.
- The new Tenant Services Authority has released a discussion paper on the proposed **regulatory framework for social housing landlords**. The LGA will be issuing a response to the discussion paper by the end of the summer, and is playing a lead role in getting all landlord representative bodies to set out some key messages on areas of common ground.

### ***Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System***

- On Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009, the Housing Minister, the Rt. Hon John Healey MP issued a written Ministerial Statement on the review of reform of the council housing finance system. The review has been undertaking its work for over a year and the LGA and other members of the sector have been working closely with the review to ensure that our member's interests are strongly represented. John Healey made his announcement at the Local Government Association's annual conference, confirming that the Government were committing themselves to the dismantling of the current housing finance system. The Minister announced his intention to publish a consultation document before summer recess on reform of council housing finance, replacing the current system with a devolved system of responsibility and funding. This is a **substantial victory for councils working together through the LGA's housing campaign *Places You Want To Live***, following the publication of our proposals on housing finance reform *Local Housing: Local Solutions* just two weeks ago. We will be working with members over the summer and autumn to ensure that we make a strong case for council house financing in the future. The LGA has issued a full on day briefing on the announcement which can be found on the LGA website at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/2202888>.