
Environment Board

5 November 2009

Note of Decisions Taken and Actions

Present

Chairman:	Cllr Gary Porter (Conservative, South Holland DC)
Vice Chair:	Cllr Linda Thomas (Bolton MBC)
Deputy Chairs:	Cllr Mike Haines (Independent, Teignbridge DC), Mayor Dorothy Thornhill (Liberal Democrat, Watford BC)
Conservative:	Cllr Andrew Gravells (Gloucestershire CC and Gloucester City); Cllr David Potts (South Tyneside MBC); Cllr Clare Whelan (Lambeth LBC); Cllr Jason Stacey (Ealing LBC)
Labour:	Cllr Derek Bateman (Cheshire West and Chester Council); Cllr Tony Newman (Croydon LBC); Cllr Ed Turner (Oxford City Council)
Lib Democrat:	Cllr Paula Baker (Basingstoke and Deane BC); Cllr Berni Turner (Liverpool City Council)
Also present:	Sub: Richard Williams (Southampton) Guest Presenter: Sir Bob Kerslake, (Chief Executive) and Jim Bennett, Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)
Apologies:	Cllr Peter Britcliffe (Hyndburn BC)
LGA Officers:	Martin Wheatley; Abigail Burrridge; Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley, Clive Harris; Fatima de Abreu

1. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Porter (Chairman) welcomed members to the meeting, and introduced Sir Bob Kerslake (Chief Executive, Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) who had agreed to attend the Board meeting to discuss the work of the HCA.

The Chairman had, prior to the meeting, written to every local authority leader seeking their experiences of working with the HCA and analysis of the responses were circulated to members in order to inform discussion and raise any issues.

2. Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

Sir Bob Kerslake said that he was pleased to attend the meeting and hoped that it would provide a useful opportunity for all members to participate in an open debate. He began by providing Members with some background concerning the HCA; that it was set up as an investment agency, to bring together, and take responsibility for delivery of a series of government targets for provision of affordable housing and to act as a bridge for local authorities to

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achieve their ambitions in line with these.

He informed the Board that the HCA is the primary provider of direct funding with a budget of £7.5billion. Its aims are to deliver according to local and central government policies and priorities for:

- Supply and demand of housing;
- Provision of support in areas where renewal is necessary;
- Provide affordable funding for development;
- Design and advise on sustainability in accordance to statutory requirements.

Sir Bob identified 4 key challenges in the next 12-18 months:

- Although evidence showed that the housing market was improving, it was still fragile.
- Regeneration schemes, particularly mixed-use schemes that had been reliant on receipts, are facing even more acute challenges.
- The need to do more with less funding calls for the use of new approaches.
- All of these challenges are playing out during a period of heightened political debate.

The HCA would endeavour to provide a lead to all involved in developments to ensure that they have the skills, knowledge and capacity they require, and assured members that the HCA would be working closely with the LGA and government to monitor and revise agreements as necessary.

Members noted that there was much positive feedback about early experiences of the HCA. Points raised for consideration were:

- Concerns regarding the aesthetics of social housing and the right to live in decent housing – Cllr Potts pointed out that this was a particular issue in South Tyneside;
- Issues around the future viability of Section 106 and reliance on sales receipts;
- Worries that grouping of LAs would not capture specific issues faced by individual authorities;
- The importance of infrastructure and the need for the HCA's support to make sure that Government investment in infrastructure is maintained;
- Regeneration of empty housing needs to be higher on the agenda for progress;
- The vital importance of carbon reduction and other aspects of environmental sustainability being central to the delivery of housing development and regeneration
- Ensuring that there is a level playing field for local authorities to access HCA funding for new build;
- Importance of joined-up working between the HCA and the TSA to ensure that investment decisions are linked to performance of RSLs;

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- The role for elected members in the Single Conversation;
- Concerns that future lack of resources will lead to a freeze in investment in like-for-like renewal;
- Members requested assurance that future funding of new build would not be achieved by cuts to other funding such as ALMOs.

With respect to Section 106, Sir Bob acknowledged that its viability had clearly been challenged by the downturn in the housing market and that practical guidance was available on the HCA website at:

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/economic-appraisal-tool>

Realistic debate would be needed in order to identify priorities for housing investment. Members were told that these would be continually revisited and working together in order to reach central government would be vital to progression. Infrastructure would have to be considered when identifying housing growth and a balance was important in providing benefits to a whole area.

He assured members that the HCA were keen to establish priorities with local collaboration and that all criteria would be transparent. Sir Bob told the Board that elected members should be involved throughout the Single Conversation process, both to ensure involvement from other partners and to raise local authority needs with the HCA at an early stage. Sir Bob indicated that he felt there should be a formal sign-off of whatever is produced through engagement with members.

The Chairman thanked Sir Bob for attending and for allowing the opportunity for a useful and interesting debate. A report summarising HCA's response to the issues raised by councils would be agreed with HCA and circulated to the councils which had provided feedback. Sir Bob told members that they should write to the HCA via Jim.Bennett@hca.gsx.gov.uk (Head of Policy and Strategy at the HCA) with any issues that had not been addressed at the meeting, and that he would provide a more detailed note on sustainability. He offered to attend again at the Board's discretion and it was **agreed** that he would return following the next general election.

Actions:

- Members to forward examples of substandard social housing and additional concerns to the HCA (via Clive Harris) **All**
- All points already submitted but not answered to be sent to the HCA **Clive Harris**
- Follow-up delivery of report from Sir Bob Kerslake **Clive Harris**
- Prepare briefing note with answers from the meeting and follow-up by the HCA for circulation to all members who received the original request **Clive Harris**

3. Local Carbon Budgets

Abigail Burrige (Senior Policy Officer, LGA) provided an update of current discussions with Communities and Local Government (CLG) on the development of 'Local Carbon Budgets' which is proposed as a mechanism for local authorities to deliver on climate change.

She informed members of delivery proposals on climate change mitigation to include:

- Central government giving every local authority a mandatory CO2 reduction target to achieve based on the national 5-year carbon budgets
- Scaling up the Carbon Reduction Commitment to include emissions from the local area including transport, housing, businesses and the community within a local authority area;
- Building on N186 to improve the quality of data, provide additional tools and further encouraging local authorities to adopt this indicator within the LAAs.

The Board were asked to identify any concerns in order to inform the ongoing discussion between the LGA, CLG and other stakeholders.

Members stated:

- They felt that 'mandatory targets' would be unachievable and not locally appropriate;
- Broadening the scope of the carbon reduction commitment would not be achievable without additional powers and resources, and they were concerned about what would be included within the scope of a carbon budget based on this model
- They were concerned that current data on local carbon emissions is not accurate enough for local carbon budgets.

Members agreed that a robust and accurate CO2 baseline for measuring emission reduction targets was key for the credibility of the scheme and that evidence would need to include how reducing CO2 could lead to the generation of revenue. Members agreed that local authorities have a key role on cutting carbon emissions but they felt that they were not given sufficient powers to do so. It was felt that having general CO2 reduction targets were too broad and any local carbon budgets needed to be more specific with clear guidance provided.

The Board felt that skills and training were an issue and although they agreed the key elements, said that linking proposals to the post 2012 delivery mechanisms proposed by DECC should be a priority as it was vital for achieving the targets indicated.

Members said that they thought the integration by local authorities of the local carbon budget within their own strategic planning functions was obvious, but

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apparently not to government as it needed to be included in the consultation response. In addition, they asked that thought be given to how the proposals would work within 2-tier authorities.

Members agreed the concerns raised in the report and Abigail BurrIDGE informed them that an announcement from CLG and DECC is expected on 26 November, although the content of that announcement was not known, and could be to announce local authority pilots of local carbon budgets. However, Members were told that the LGA was urging CLG to allow more time for the consideration and development of local carbon budgets, alongside DECC's financial delivery mechanisms, and Martin Wheatley suggested that discussions should be taken forward by the Board's Green Portfolio Holders.

Decision:

- Members noted the report.

Actions:

- To inform members of any announcements made by CLG and DECC on 26 November and the ramifications for local authorities

Abigail BurrIDGE

- Officers to keep members informed on discussions about the scope of emissions to be included in local carbon budgets and any improvements in data collection and modelling
- Officers to continue liaising with Portfolio Holders to inform ongoing discussions with CLG.

Officers

4. Small Change, Big Difference week

Abigail BurrIDGE provided an overview of the campaign week which had taken place in the summer and the results of a survey undertaken of the participants. She asked members to consider recommendations for next year.

Responses from LAs who had taken part had been very positive, although they had requested the consideration of the following:

- The title of the campaign did not directly specify that it was around climate change and they felt that the name should be changed to make this clear;
- Specific branding should be developed;
- They would like to be part of a larger scheme with a high profile.

Suggestions for linking with the 10:10 pledge were made in order to reflect how local action was part of national campaign and it was **agreed** to take this forward.

Members were concerned that the take-up had been low and felt that reasons for this probably included a lack of sufficient notice, and insufficient targeting of

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appropriate contacts. They agreed that communication is key to achieving LGA targets for efficient communication and that technology must be addressed in order to succeed. Martin Wheatley noted that following the review of LGA Group Communications a dedicated function is being set up to drive more effective communication with the membership. The Chairman said he would register the importance of this with the Executive.

Decision:

- The Board noted the report

Action:

- Officers to develop proposals for 2010 reflecting Members' feedback and possible making a connection with the 10:10 national campaign.

Abigail BurrIDGE

- Raise communication and availability of efficient technologies with Executive

Cllr Porter

5. Networks for Flood Risk Management

Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley asked members to support this proposal for a formal Inland Flood Risk Management Group and invited them, subject to agreement, to consider membership.

The desire for a formal LGA group on managing local flood risk had initially been identified via conversations from various local authorities, particularly with respect to the forthcoming Flood and Water Management Bill which will give all unitaries and county areas responsibility for managing local flood risk. It was proposed that the Executive of the group would consist of four Environment Board members as well as representation from each of the regions, making a group of around 13 members in total. The group would set their own terms of reference, with a view to ensuring that all types of authority and experiences of flood risk were represented. A wider officer's network would link to the group. She informed them that Cllr Roger Thomas (Chairman of the Coastal Issues Special Interest Group) had given SIG support for the proposal.

Members were supportive of the proposal and thanked Vanessa for a clear, jargon-free report.

Members nominated at the meeting, were Cllr Berni Turner (Liberal Dem), Cllr Mike Haines (Independent), Derek Bateman (Labour) and Andrew Gravells (Conservative).

Decision:

- The Board **agreed** the proposal

Action:

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- Progress setting up of the formal group and identify members of the Executive
Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley

6. Update on other Board business

Members noted the reports. Cllr Turner requested an update on the progress of the proposal for creation of a Private Sector Renting Subgroup which had been requested at a prior meeting, as well as an update on Housing Finance work.

Action:

- E-mail Board members of the current position regarding the Subgroup
Caroline Green

7. Decisions and Actions from Previous meeting

The note of the last meeting was approved and the meeting was closed.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 13 January 2010