

The Sustainable Communities Act Progress

Summary

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

Recommendations

That members note the contents of the report.

Action

As directed by Members.

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The Sustainable Communities Act round one

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 Environment Board's remit. For example:
 - Government should enable councils to lead local delivery of programmes to insulate the existing housing stock. For example, South Somerset District Council propose a range of measures to support improved insulation including expanding home insulation schemes, removing VAT from home insulation schemes and promoting low or zero carbon technologies;
 - Government should give councils the power to promote locally generated and low carbon energy. For example South Hams District Council want government to promote local renewable energy through a range of actions including feed in tariffs and funding for energy service companies;
 - Government should give councils the resources to tackle flood risk and other extreme weather events. For example Norfolk County Council want to retain flood sirens in coastal communities to ensure there is a range of ways to alert the community to imminent flood risk;
 - Councils should be given greater enforcement powers to tackle local issues such as fly, posting, bins left on streets and properties that are detrimental to the local area. For example Nottingham City Council is seeking additional

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- powers for councils to fine the keeper of a vehicle when someone in the vehicle has thrown litter;
- Allotment legislation should be revised to encourage the provision and more flexible use of allotments. For example Birmingham City Council, Brighton and Hove City Councils and Rother District Council seek a range of actions on this issue;
 - Landfill tax should be retained locally for investment in local priorities. City of York Council, Essex County Council, Warwick District Council all sort changes in this area;
 - Local authorities should be given a lead role in coordinating waste collection across the board. Proposals from Southampton City Council, City of York Council, Bristol City Council and Islington London Borough Council to make local authorities responsible for its collection;
 - Local authorities should be given greater powers to preserve the character of their high streets and tackle concerns about public health and anti social behaviour. Islington London Borough Council, Oxford City Council and Bristol City Council all seek changes to the use class order to make certain types of retail services subject to planning permission to help achieve and maintain diversity and vitality in shopping centres;
 - That existing barriers to the acquisition of land under compulsory purchase of temporary lease powers are removed. Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council seek stronger powers to initiate action more quickly and place a requirement on owners to provide realistic proposals for change within a reasonable timeframe, or to allow the council to step in and serve notice on the owner to sell the property/site without undue delay and without the council incurring any costs;
 - Putting planning decisions in the hands of local people and the councillors that represent them. For example Croydon London Borough Council seeks to establish local appeals boards to determine planning appeals on minor applications;
 - All income from council housing rents and receipts from right to buy sales of council homes should be retained at the local level for investment in local priorities. The LGA shortlisted 10 proposals seeking changes in this area.
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.

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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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