

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title: Environment & Housing Programme Board

Date and time: 13 September 2010, 11am

Venue: Local Government House, Smith Square

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chairman	Gary Porter	South Holland DC
Vice chair	Clyde Loakes	Waltham Forest LB
Deputy chair	Mike Haines	Teignbridge DC
Members	Peter Britcliffe	Hyndburn BC
	Andrew Gravells	Gloucestershire CC / Gloucester City
	Clare Whelan	Lambeth LB
	Jason Stacey	Ealing LB
	David Smith	Lichfield DC
	Tony Newman	Croydon LB
	Ed Turner	Oxford City
	Paula Baker	Basingstoke & Deane BC
Substitute	Roger Symonds	Bath & NE Somerset Council
In attendance	Sir Bob Kerslake	Homes and Communities Agency
	Jim Bennett	Homes and Communities Agency
	Martin Wheatley	LG Group
	Caroline Green	LG Group
	Abigail Burrige	LG Group
	Clive Harris	LG Group
	Fatima de Abreu	LG Group
Apologies	Derek Bateman	Cheshire West & Chester Council
Deputy chair	Mayor Dorothy Thornhill	Watford BC
	Berni Turner	Liverpool City

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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1 Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Porter (Chairman) welcomed Members to the meeting, and introduced Sir Bob Kerslake, Chief Executive, and Jim Bennett from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). He congratulated Sir Bob on his recent appointment as Permanent Secretary, Communities and Local Government.

2 Homes and Communities Agency

Sir Bob said that, in line with the Government’s strategy on localism, the HCA would continue to operate as a much reduced, but more strategic and streamlined agency, to deliver local and central government policies and priorities in terms of housing and planning. Collaboration and flexibility between the HCA, the LGA and government on new sub-regional governance would continue to be vital for monitoring priorities for support and enabling leadership, particularly given the challenges of operating within cuts in funding after the Government’s Spending Review in October.

The following issues were raised in discussion:

- The council new-build scheme had been extremely successful. This had confounded widespread scepticism about the interest and willingness of landlord councils to start building again;
- There were concerns that a vital supply of new affordable housing in London in particular might not be deliverable;
- Changes to Housing Benefit payments could mean the access of people on low incomes to the private rented sector became much more restricted;
- Investment in infrastructure planning needed to be maintained. There was a potential role for HCA to support the implementation of Local Development Tariffs;
- The way government currently scores contributions to the funding of social newbuild schemes, counting council investment funded by prudential borrowing against CLG’s spending total, tends to make council schemes appear more expensive than housing association schemes, even if the actual cost in central government is lower.

Sir Bob said that the HCA would provide practical advice on best practice in implementing tariffs at a local level. He said that

the issue of sharing risk would be more difficult due to rules around accountability and liability.

He acknowledged that there were issues around changes to Housing Benefit rules and said that the HCA would contribute at a national level by informing CLG of impacts of these so that the strongest case possible could be put forward. The Board said that it was important to engage with all elected members to ensure that they had an opportunity to contribute to evidence. Sir Bob referred to the development of Local Investment Plans and reminded Members that the process involved all local authorities.

The Board noted discussions with CLG on top-slice funding in relation to skills and knowledge. Sir Bob agreed that leadership should be held by the LG Group with support of a knowledge hub from the HCA and a link to LG Group information.

The Chairman thanked Sir Bob, congratulating him on his new position and for enabling the Board to raise their concerns. Sir Bob invited members to email 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.

Decision

Members noted the discussion.

Action

Officers to take forward agreed work programme on housing issues and changes to legislation and provide members with a grid setting out our lobbying plan on housing and planning.

Caroline Green
Greg Taylor

Officers to lobby on government's approach to new build schemes and scoring system with regard to cost per home / person housed.

Ruth Lucas

Officers to circulate note to Members of recent Member meeting on planning.

Caroline Green /
Russell Reefer

3 Local Government's Offer on Climate Change

Abigail Burridge explained the LG Group's Climate Change Offer (slides at **Annex A**).

Members said:

On the Offer:

- They would like more emphasis on Fuel Poverty and reducing bills;
- They wanted more emphasis on helping people make lifestyle changes;
- They wanted methods in place to enable councils to work together;
- They wanted to ensure schools, other public sector partners, and wider partnerships were included;
- They would like rural issues to be raised more prominently;
- They wanted to maintain the emphasis on area-based schemes that had been raised previously;
- They want to ensure that the specific issues two-tier authorities have are incorporated and recognised;
- They agreed that financial incentives would have the most impact on behavioural change, but thought incentives through Council Tax would be difficult and complex.

On the Green Deal:

- They wanted officers to continue pushing for councils to be Green Deal providers and have their role as trusted organisations on energy efficiency and climate change recognised;
- They want officers to emphasize to Government that there should be a level playing field for both councils and the private sector to be Green Deal providers;
- They want officers to emphasize to Government that new green economic growth strategies, such as the Green Deal, should be about growing local small businesses, not just about opportunities for big businesses;
- They want officers to make clear to Government that councils don't just want to deal with the most difficult properties, as they won't gain from also dealing with the easier properties.

The Board discussed whether there should be a statutory duty for councils on climate change and had strong opinions both for and against this, agreeing that opinion should be gained more widely. They agreed that the most important issue was to make acting on climate change and energy easy and sensible for councils so it is in their best interest to act.

Decision

Members noted the discussion.

Action

Officers to take forward Members' comments in responding to DECC's request and to submit the full Offer document in advance of the Government's Spending Review. Abigail Burridge

Officers to publicise issues to sector, for example through First Magazine. Abigail Burridge

4 Environment & Housing Programme Board: Programme for 2010-11

Martin Wheatley summarised the Work Programme and asked for Members' views on proposals for the forthcoming year.

Members noted the summary draft submission to the CLG on the RSG top-slice bid and requested copies of the final submission further to consideration by the LG Group Executive on 16 September.

Members discussed relations with the Environment Advisory Panel Strategic Core Group and agreed that attendance by nominated Members would be useful.

The Board discussed the agreement to reduce the number of formal meetings to 5 per year, leaving January and May as an opportunity to engage with the sector on a wider basis. They agreed to assist in identification of host authorities and topics for discussion. Members were informed that an offer to host had been received from Somerset and this should be considered as an option.

The Chairman, Cllr Gary Porter, agreed to take forward Members' feedback to the LG Group Executive on 16 September.

Decision

Members agreed the proposals.

Action

Members to make suggestions for topics and council hosts for discussions in January and May Members

Lead Members to nominate Members for panel to review Lead Members

improvement work

Officers to incorporate Member's views into the Work Programme.

LG Group
Officers

5 Membership and Terms of Reference 2010-11

Members agreed the Membership and Terms of Reference for the Board.

6 Appointments to Outside Bodies and Portfolio Holders

Members considered nominations to outside bodies and agreed that Lead Members would confirm these with LG Group Officers.

Action

LG Officers to confirm appointments with nominated Members and submit a report for noting at the next meeting.

LG Group
Officers

7 Conference Mapping

Members noted the map of conferences and agreed that this was a useful tool in setting calendar commitments.

Action

Continue to provide an update to Members on conference commitments at each meeting.

Fatima de
Abreu

8 Update on other Board Business

There was no other business to discuss.

9 Decisions and Actions from previous meeting 5 July 2010

The note of the previous meeting was agreed.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 17 November 2010