

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title:	Environment & Housing Programme Board
Date and time:	Wednesday 17 November 2010, 11.00am
Venue:	The Millbank Room, Local Government House

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chairman	Baroness Eaton DME	Bradford MBC
Vice chair	Name (including title etc)	Council (name and type)
Deputy chair	Name (including title etc)	Council
Deputy chair	Name (including title etc)	Council
Deputy chair	Name (including title etc)	Council
Members	Name (including title etc)	Council
	Name (including title etc)	Council
	Name (including title etc)	Council
	Name (including title etc)	Council
Substitutes	Name (including title etc)	Council
	Name (including title etc)	Council
In attendance	Name (including title etc)	Council
Apologies	Name (including title etc)	Council
	Name (including title etc)	Council

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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1 LGA/ CLG Housing Commission

The Chair welcomed Lord Richard Best, Chair of the LGA/ CLG Housing Commission to the meeting. Lord Best outlined the purpose of the Commission, which was established by John Healy MP and Baroness Eaton DBE in March 2010 to consider

how local authorities can ensure a sufficient supply of homes for their areas.

Lord Best informed Members that the Commission's final report would shortly be published, but gave Members a preview of its key findings and recommendations. Lord Best emphasised that the key policies which will impact housing provision are bound up in the Government's broader localism agenda. Therefore, it is essential that Government are held to account on this agenda to enable local councils to take more control of their housing provision.

Lord Best set his recommendations in the context of the wider changes to the benefits system and spending cuts announced by the Government, but stressed that although these would have a significant impact on housing policy, there were still ways in which both central and local government could ensure a sufficient supply of affordable homes. Lord Best outlined key ways in which housing provision could increase given the challenges of operating within cuts in funding. In discussion with Lord Best, the following points and recommendations were made:

- HRA Reform – councils must be able to retain the rents and sales from the receipts they collect to enable them to recycle the proceeds in housing provision. However, Members stressed that councils were already able to retain their assets in some housing systems already **[don't know what this is called.]**
- New Homes Bonus – this will offer significant benefits to councils for house-building, and is an appropriate incentive scheme in the current financial situation.
- Business often grows after housing has been built, so often Local Authorities need to provide funding for this first. However, it is essential for local authorities to lead the way on housing provision and encourage further development because if the private sector retreats from development, this will lead to further problems.
- Infrastructure – it is essential that infrastructure funding is increased, particularly the tax increment funding to enable councils to provide necessary housing.
- Community Infrastructure Levy – is essential for councils to hold private developers and house builders to account, and provide sufficient infrastructure for their properties.
- Section 106 – must be upheld by councils to ensure that landowners to meet their planning obligations.

- Partnerships – between councils and LEPs are an opportunity to co-operate on housing, share expertise and build quality relationships in a time of financial strait.
- Private partnerships – high charges for private sector partnerships are becoming less feasible for councils. There should be standardisation of contractual terms for partnerships with private companies to continue to bring in the expertise and ? they offer.
- Rural Housing – exception sites are an extremely useful but under exploited resource for rural communities.
- Community Right to Build – although in principle this is a good idea, there are concerns about how a referendum requiring 75% approval of plans would work in practice.
- There were concerns that the ‘Affordable Rent Scheme’ could have extreme effects in London, where the proposed 80% of market rents would in practice mean *the* market rent itself.

The Chair thanked Lord Best for attending.

Decision

*Members **agreed** that, in response to the Government’s announcement that housing associations will be able to charge 80% of market rents, the LGA will construct a lobbying approach which argues that Local Authorities should be on a level playing field with housing associations in terms of their ability to supply adequate housing locally. Therefore the same freedoms and flexibilities should be available to councils, should they decide to use them.*

Action

- Officers to circulate a set of words which reflects the Programme Board’s discussion and decision regarding the LGA’s response to the Government’s proposals for an ‘Affordable Rent Scheme’.
- Officers to circulate a note of discussions with senior officials from the Homes and Communities Agency with any details of the Government’s plans.

Martin Wheatley

Martin Wheatley

2 Spending Review 2010

Piali Das Gupta, Senior Policy Consultant, LGA, introduced this report and updated Members about the lobbying approach

agreed by the LG Group Executive on 11 November.

Piali explained that there was a limited window of opportunity to influence Government before the Local Government Financial Settlement in December. In discussion, the following points were made:

- Clarification is needed about what process by Defra to inform their decision to cut funding for several PFI projects but not others.
- The consultation on the New Homes Bonus closes before the next meeting of the Environment & Housing Programme Board. However, officers should consult with Members' regarding the LGA response to this offline.
- Concerns were raised about the 'Affordable Rent Scheme' in practice. If different councils/ housing associations implement different policies and rent prices, there is a possibility that this could increase social and economic disparities within areas as poorer people will not be able to live in the area charging higher rents.

Decision

Members noted the discussion.

Action

Officers to take forward the comments made by Members in lobbying activities.

Officers

3 Housing and Planning influencing programme

Clarissa Corbisiero, Senior Policy Consultant, LGA, introduced this report, which provides an overview of influencing activities to take forward the Programme Board's key policy objectives on housing and planning issues.

Members discussed the proposed activity, and in particular the LGA's proposed lobbying position on the 'Affordable Rent Scheme'. There were strong opinions both for and against this scheme, and whether the LGA should actively seek the freedom for councils to charge rents at 80% of the market price, but all agreed that it was of great importance that there was a level playing field between councils and housing associations.

It was proposed that this report should be a live document, and

would change radically once the Localism & Decentralisation Bill was published.

Decision

Members agreed the planned influencing activities, subject to the amendments recommended made in discussion.

Action

- Officers to update and circulate the influencing programme document on a monthly basis to housing and planning portfolio holders. Clarissa Corbisiero/
Russell Reefer
- Officers to incorporate Members views and recommendations into programme. Clarissa Corbisiero
- Officers to arrange lead members' meeting to discuss some issues of concern, and develop a strategy for dealing with them. Sarah Monaghan

4 Defra Waste Review submission

Martin Wheatley introduced this report which outlines the LG Group's response to Defra's Waste Review and the lobbying work which is continuing to be communicated to Government.

Martin stressed that some key wins for local government were that Ministers have recognised that municipal waste needs to be considered alongside commercial and industrial waste. The LGA is also on the inside track with Government officers who will carry out the review. However, alongside the cuts to several PFI projects, some key risks were also identified, such as the possibility of setting alternate week collections for councils. The LG Group has communicated to government that this goes against the principle behind the localism agenda and should be reconsidered.

In discussion, Members raised a number of issues, but in general endorsed the submission and suggested that lobbying work should continue to raise these issues with Government. In particular, Members suggested that there should be more joined up thinking between Defra and DECC around waste infrastructure energy opportunities.

Decision

Members noted the contents of the report.

Action

- Officers to continue to lobby Government on the key issues for councils in the waste review.

Martin
Wheatley/ Clive
Harris

5 Local Government Group support for councils on tackling litter

Nick Clack, Team Leader, Local Government Regulation, introduced this report which provides an update on the progress made in the national campaign to reduce litter, and highlights significant outstanding issues.

Members discussed the difficulties of prioritising tackling litter given the extremely difficult financial situation for local government. However, as this remains a key concern for most local residents, this issue should not be sidelined and Members endorsed the general approach outlined in the report. It was suggested that local government should concentrate resources into making legislation in this area simpler and easier to enforce.

Members also suggested that the LG Group should lobby to change legislation so that the owner of the vehicle is liable for any litter dropping.

Decision

Members:

- ***endorsed*** the lobbying approach generally, subject to the recommendations made in discussion
- ***agreed*** to be represented on the 'Litter Convention' by Cllr Clyde Loakes.

Action

Officers to take forward work in this area based on steer provided by Members.

6 Update on other Board Business

Members noted the away day in Somerset County Council on energy generation and climate change on 12 January. This

should be attended by one Member from each political group and chaired by a lead member.

Cllr Paula Baker updated Members on ongoing European and International work, and suggested that regular updates should be fed back to the Board since her appointment to the European and International Programme Board.

Decision

Members noted the updates.

Action

- Officers to circulate further details of the away day on 12 January Clive Harris

7 Note of the last meeting

Decision

Members agreed the note of the last meeting.

Date of next **away day**: 12 January 2010

Date of the next **full Programme Board meeting**: 16 March 2010