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**Housing and Planning influencing programme**

**Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction

**Summary**

This paper provides an overview of influencing activities to take forward the Programme Board's key policy objectives on housing and planning issues.

**Recommendation**

Members consider and agree planned influencing activities

**Action**

As directed by the Programme Board.

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**Housing and Planning influencing programme**

1. The Spending Review and the forthcoming Decentralisation and Localism Bill together signal significant and wide ranging reforms for councils' housing and planning functions. This paper provides an overview of the reforms, key events and milestones and a programme of LG Group influencing activity until the end of the financial year. This will be an evolving document and will be updated and shared with Board members as we receive more detail on the content and process associated with the Decentralisation and Localism Bill. **Members are asked to discuss and note the planned activities detailed in paragraphs 3 to 10.**
2. Key issues for the Board in our lobbying going forward will fall broadly within the themes outlined in paragraphs 3 to 10 below which provide a summary of specific lobbying activity. In addition to this specific work the LG Group will be seeking to publicise our messages and influence key players through political level discussions, dedicated briefings for peers and MPs, media work, conferences, events and Smith Square debates. Annex A sets out a timeline of activity mapped against known external activities, announcements and milestones on the timeline in Annex A; again this will be updated and shared with members as the details and process behind the bill become evident.

**Planning Reform**

3. Key issues we will be lobbying on:
  - 3.1 **Local Plans:** LG Group is lobbying for a simplified process and limiting the ability of the Planning Inspectorate to overturn local plans.
  - 3.2 **Community/Neighbourhood Planning:** The LG Group has fully supported the principle of bottom up planning, and many councils do this well already. The balance between neighbourhood and local planning is unclear as present and we have sought to emphasise the crucial role that democratically elected councillors play in balancing the needs and views of different communities and areas in making planning decisions. The LG Group has also proposed a model to support the delivery of the Community Right to Build.
  - 3.3 **National Policy Framework:** The LG Group has welcomed commitments to scale back nationally set guidance and prescription and we are lobbying for a small set of nationally focused outcomes with the flexibility for councils to implement these in a way that works locally.
  - 3.4 **Decisions on major infrastructure projects:** The LG Group has argued that in the successor arrangements to the Infrastructure Planning

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Commission that decisions should be informed by evidence and understanding of the impact on communities and that this should be resourced appropriately.

- 3.5 **Strategic planning for infrastructure and economic development:** The LG Group is lobbying to ensure that LEPs receive the necessary powers to take key strategic decisions about business, employment and skills which meet the needs of local businesses and local people.
- 3.6 **Local Development Tariffs:** The LG Group is calling for successor arrangements to be implemented as a matter of priority to fund infrastructure.
- 3.7 **Fees:** The LG Group is calling for increased flexibility to set planning fees locally. Our work with the developers group has indicated that the development sector supports councils to cover the cost of providing the planning service.
- 3.8 **Village Greens:** LG Group is lobbying for village green legislation is amended to remove minority group's ability to frustrate development and for green space to be protected through the local planning process.

4. Key activities will include:

- 4.1 Establishment of major developers group to act as a sounding board and to build relationships in advance and through the course of the bill. (completed)
- 4.2 Publication of Delivering Localism Report. This is a follow up report to the LG Group's offer on planning reform, published in September 2010. This report has been developed with a group of notable developers and key figures in the planning sector. (due for publication in November 2010)
- 4.3 Meeting between Baroness Eaton and Greg Clark MP to discuss the LG Group's planning offer (November 2010).
- 4.4 LGA National Planning Conference (November 2010).
- 4.5 Leadership Academies to lead councillors to support strategic planning for infrastructure and economic development (October – March 2010)
- 4.6 Key amendments to the bill; for example pressing for an amendment on village greens, and flexibility to set planning fees locally (November 2010).
- 4.7 LGA response to CLG consultation on planning for schools (December 2010).
- 4.8 Joint regional workshops (LGA/PAS/RICS) to take forward dialogue with private sector (October onwards)
- 4.9 PAS workshops on sub regional planning and neighbourhood planning (Jan-March 2011)

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**Housing supply**

5. Key issues we will be lobbying on:

- 5.1 The government have signalled that they will introduce a **new homes bonus**; an incentive scheme that matches the council tax receipts from new build homes for six years. The LG Group supports the principle of incentives for housing supply and we want to see this put in place as quickly as possible. We await further details on the incentive but key issues will include obtaining clarity and certainty about how much councils will receive and the distributional impact the incentive may have if derived from top slicing formula grant. We are also interested in ensuring that the incentive rewards the right kind of investment for the area, in some areas this may mean investing in existing stock rather than new builds.
- 5.2 Continue to make the case for the **important role councils play in housing supply**, through strategic housing and planning roles, partnerships with Housing Associations and Developers and building directly.

6. Key activities will include:

- 6.1 LGA briefing on Growth White paper cited our concerns regarding potential distributional impact (completed).
- 6.2 LGA response to forthcoming consultation on New Homes Bonus (tbc).
- 6.3 LGA/CLG Housing Commission on the role councils play in meeting housing shortages (November 2010).
- 6.4 LGA briefing for Lords debate on housing (November 2010)
- 6.5 LGA Housing supply survey (publication date tbc).
- 6.6 Housing localism and economy conference (December 2010)
- 6.7 Case studies to celebrate successful completion of HCA's Local Authority New Build scheme (tbc).

**Housing Finance**

7. Key issues we will be lobbying on:

- 7.1 Following the welcome announcement from Grant Shapps MP in October that the **Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System** would be reformed the LG Group will be lobbying to ensure that the level of debt transferred is sustainable. The level of debt proposed in the CLG prospectus consultation under the previous government was too high and risks making many councils unable to pay for necessary investment in existing and new stock. The Group will also argue that the maintenance backlog should be funded. The Chancellor announced that the Government would provide £2bn funding for Decent Homes in the spending review, however

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CLG's own research noted that this backlog is in the region of £6bn. Not funding it will deplete the asset base, lead to inefficiency and waste and will make many councils self financing business plans unviable.

- 7.2 The Spending Review notes that the Government will 'Right to Buy' receipts for the 4 years of the spending review. Which is contrary to the commitment given to councils in the CLG Prospectus consultation and will reduce council's ability to use their own resources to pay off debt allocated under the new system. Our line on RTB receipts has been that we believe that councils should have full control over these receipts to spend locally on their housing needs.
- 7.3 The **Housing Benefit measures** announced in the June 2010 budget and the Spending Review, including capping local housing allowance rates, paid to tenants in the private sector, and setting them based on the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of local rents, are likely to increase homelessness costs, since they will diminish the willingness of private rented sector landlords to let to housing benefit customers. The LG Group will be discussing the potential costs of disruption and homelessness costs these measures are likely to create with a view to making a case for new burdens funding. There is a risk that there will be even more pressure on social housing, with councils forced to make even more difficult choices than they do already about who gets access to what stock there is.

8. Key activities will include:

- 8.1 LGA response to detailed announcement on HRA reform (tbc).
- 8.2 HRA advisors and member meetings (November)
- 8.3 Discussions with Ministers and Civil Servants on detail (November)
- 8.4 Housing Finance Conference (January 2011)

**Regulation and Tenancy issues**

9. Key issues we will be lobbying on:

- 9.1 The Minister has announced the outcome of the review of tenants' regulation and has announced that as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 the Tenant Services Authority will cease and their regulatory functions will move to the Homes and Communities Agency. Our line on regulation is that responsibility for performance should lie with landlord organisations and local panels involving tenants, councillors and housing experts should ensure transparency and challenge poor performance whilst pushing for service improvement and better value for money.

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10. Key activities will include:

- 10.1 Position paper on regulation proposals setting out key lobbying priorities to take forward through the bill (November).
- 10.2 Joint sector meeting to identify gaps and develop a framework to help people ensure a smooth transition to a more localised approach to regulation (2<sup>nd</sup> December).

**Homelessness and Tenancy Mobility**

11. Key issues we will be lobbying on:

- 11.1 Both the Prime Minister and the Housing Minister have floated the idea in the media that they are considering the issue of life time tenancy and succession. CLG officials are also considering potential changes to the homelessness rules to enable councils to discharge duty to people that have been placed in the private rented sector. However, the detail of this is not yet finalised. Some councils already discharge duty to the private rented sector and would welcome regulations that allowed them greater flexibility to do this. The LGA has until now supported the issue of life time tenancies and there are some serious implications of changing tenancy conditions, for example, there will be the cost of administering the regular review of tenancies and there are disincentives for tenants to improve their circumstances if they fear the lose of their home. However, there maybe some councils how wish for local housing need reasons to offer a variation on the standard Secure tenancy.
- 11.2 As noted in the Board report on the Lord Best Commission the Spending Review noted that housing associations are will be able to offer tenancies at 80% of market rent.

12. Key activities will include:

- 12.1 LGA representation on the Ministerial Advisory Group on Homelessness (ongoing)
- 12.2 LGA response to detailed announcement on tenure and mobility (tbc)

**Next steps**

- 13. It is proposed that the influencing programme attached at Annex A is updated and circulated to housing and planning portfolio holders on a monthly basis alongside an update on key developments on the decentralisation and localism bill.

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**Financial implications**

14. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

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