

## **The National Planning Policy Framework in practice**

### **Purpose of Report**

For discussion and direction

### **Summary**

This paper provides a summary of the LGA's position on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and seeks Members' views on the approach to sector led planning guidance. The paper also provides a summary of support provided by the Planning Advisory Service to councils.

Members will receive a presentation from Broadland District Council, and the Planning Advisory Service will also be in attendance to discuss the impact of the planning reforms on the ground and the support on offer from the LGA.

### **Recommendations**

1. That the Programme Board **notes** the LGA response to the NPPF and support offer to councils.
2. That the Programme Board provides a **steer** as to the LGA's approach to guidance and agree that the Chairman and Planning Portfolio Holders should develop a series of core principles to underpin our approach going forward, paragraph 5.

### **Action**

As advised by the Programme Board.

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## **The National Planning Policy Framework in practice**

### **Part 1**

#### **The LGA's response to the National Planning Policy Framework**

1. The LGA has worked with councils to respond to the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The LGA has long lobbied for a streamlined and accessible planning system and has been supportive of the Government's efforts to simplify the planning system through the NPPF. A copy of the LGA consultation response is attached at **Appendix A**, and a summary of key issues are provided below.

#### Sustainable Development

2. We agree with the principle of sustainable development as defined in the NPPF. The LGA has argued through its response that sustainable development only makes sense at a local level and as such has called for a better balance between economic, environmental and social issues across the NPPF as a whole. This is important in allowing locally elected councillors the flexibility to make the necessary trade off's locally.

#### Transition arrangements

3. The LGA has put forward proposals to government that would ensure that local people and businesses remain in the driving seat in shaping their local area by providing a reasonable chance for local authorities to get their plans in place and update them in line with the new framework. The government has indicated that it will put in place 'appropriate' transition arrangements; representing a significant achievement for the programme board. Councillor Parsons, Chairman of the Programme Board has written to Greg Clark MP setting out our detailed proposals for a smooth and managed transition and offering the Association's support going forward. The LGA's proposals can be summarised as follows:
  - 3.1 For councils who have not yet adopted a local plan; we suggest that a reasonable timetable based on Local Development Schemes published by councils and the information the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) currently hold should be set. The LGA has offered our support to work with the government and PINs to determine an appropriate timescale for this. In the interim we suggest councils could publish a list of which pre-existing policies or evidence they will be using as a basis for decision making in advance of getting a local plan in place. This list could be updated as evidence is updated and new policies emerge.

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- 3.2 For those councils who have a local plan adopted or are at a late stage of preparation; we suggest that councils should have the opportunity to inform PINS that their plan is in conformity – the plan is therefore considered as a sound basis for decision making unless the inspectorate identify specific areas not in conformity and remedial actions to be carried out within a set period. In the interim councils should be able to adopt specific parts of national or regional evidence and adopt them as supplementary planning guidance – we would envisage this occurring on an exceptions basis.

Planning Guidance

4. The LGA has long lobbied for the simplification of the planning system and has argued that technical guidance to support councils should be led by appropriate sector groups and only in cases where there is a clear need. There is scope to use PAS survey mechanisms to measure a number of these issues. **Member's views would be welcomed on the following key issues:**
- 4.1 The basis on which the need for guidance should be determined. For example, this might include:
- 4.1.1 Where there is a clear (cross) sectoral call for guidance
  - 4.1.2 Where lack of guidance would lead to delay, confusion, challenge or increased costs
  - 4.1.3 Where the lack of guidance would bring the planning system into disrepute
- 4.2 The role of government (and specifically the planning inspectorate) in endorsing any guidance or advice produced by the sector or on a cross sector basis.
- 4.3 The balance between national sector led guidance and support for locally commissioned guidance (at authority or sub regional level for example).
- 4.4 The resource and risk implications for the LGA if it plays an active part in the creation or promotion of guidance.
5. It is proposed that based on Member's views officers should work with the Programme Board Chairman and Planning Portfolio Holders to develop a series of principles which will underpin the Programme Board's approach to planning guidance.

**Item 2**

**Part 2**

**Planning support offer to Councils**

6. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is a grant funded programme. The team works with local authorities (officers and councillors) to help them to respond to the planning reform agenda and improve the delivery of planning.
7. The four priority areas for support identified with and signed off by the Environment and Housing Board for the 2011-12 business plan are:
  - 7.1 Understanding and responding to planning reform
  - 7.2 Strong and strategic planning by local authorities for neighbourhoods and local areas
  - 7.3 Effective development management and good decision making
  - 7.4 Accountable and value for money planning services.

**PAS 6 month review**

8. The Planning Advisory Service's 6 month activity review is attached as **Appendix B** to this report. PAS has made good progress in delivering on its business plan. In summary, since April, 40 separate events have been held across four main themes of understanding planning reforms, benchmarking and improvement, community infrastructure levy and neighbourhood planning. Around 1,250 people came to at least one of these events. Overall, feedback from the evaluation form demonstrates over 90% delegates found the events to be good or very good.
9. Along with 'getting a local plan in place' these areas have been the focus of activity over the first 6 months of this year's programme. In addition, 14 councillor briefing sessions have been held covering 40 local authorities and over 60 councils who do not yet have a plan in place are receiving bespoke support. The benchmarking programme had over 216 authorities take part, and is the biggest collection of raw data on planning costs ever undertaken (to our knowledge).
10. Over the remainder of the year will continue work on these themes, as well as delivering and contributing to 13 leadership academies, running 6 planning peer reviews, delivering support on strategic planning and the duty to co-operate and looking at responding to planning reform.

**Financial Implications**

11. The planning support offer will be delivered within existing budgets. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.