

Environment and Housing update paper

Purpose

For information and comment.

Summary

This paper provides an update on LGA activity and recent developments relating to the Board's work programme and priorities in the following areas:

- Spending Review submissions
- Housing and Planning
- Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Governance Board
- Community Infrastructure Levy
- Waste Update
- Flooding, water resources and climate change
- ECO Brokerage
- Events

Recommendations

That Members of the Board **note** the updates provided.

Action

As directed by the board.

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Environment and Housing update paper

Introduction

1. This paper provides an update on activities undertaken to progress the Board's agreed work programme not covered by other items on the agenda for the meeting on 14 May and covers key policy developments relating to issues within the Board's remit that have taken place since the last Board meeting on 20 March 2013.

Spending Review Submissions

2. The LGA made a submission to Government in advance of the Spending Round for 2014/15 which is expected to be announced at the end of June. The LGA submission included an overview paper and a series of papers on key issues for Local Government, which have also been sent to relevant government departments. Within the Environment and Housing Board's remit, these included submissions on Housing, Waste and Energy. The submissions will be available to view on the LGA website on Thursday 8 May and will be available in hard copy at the Board meeting.

Housing and Planning

3. This month the LGA submitted our response to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Housing Commission, and Cllr Mike Jones gave oral evidence to an evidence session on investment. We stressed that councils are supporting growth and are using the planning system to provide certainty to encourage investment and reiterated opposition to the housing borrowing cap.
4. We have also provided input into the Labour Party's Commission on Infrastructure chaired by Sir John Armitt. Cllr Ed Turner joined attendees from a range of sectors including utility companies and regulators to discuss how Britain can achieve the improvements to infrastructure it needs to remain competitive. Cllr Turner highlighted that infrastructure is crucial to insuring new housing development is sustainable over the long term and governance arrangements for national infrastructure should reflect decision-making at a local level.
5. The LGA also submitted written evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry on the Private Rented Sector. The evidence stressed that local authorities work constructively with private landlords to encourage investment and drive up standards. We put forward a range of proposals which would enable current tools and powers to be simplified and streamlined which would enable councils to make better use of limited resources for regulation and enforcement action where this is appropriate.
6. Cllr Mike Jones met with the Chair, Lord Matthew Taylor, and Chief Executive, David Orr of the National Housing Federation (NHF). Their discussion included the potential impact of welfare reforms on local authorities and housing associations. It was agreed that the LGA and NHF should have a board-to-board meeting to consider findings from research and evidence on the cumulative impact of the reforms. The discussion also covered the LGA and NHF's positions ahead of the Spending Review, as well as issues relating to the Green Deal and apprenticeships.
7. Cllr Mike Jones also wrote to Planning Minister, Nick Boles MP to provide an assessment of the impact and implementation of the National Planning Policy

Framework. The letter emphasised the positive progress councils are making to update and put local plans in place and argued that an extension to the transition arrangements would aid this work. Cllr Jones also pressed for certainty in national planning policy going forward to enable the new system to take full effect. The letter is attached at **Annex 4a**.

8. In response to government's announcement that they will establish a local residency test, Cllr Mike Jones wrote to Housing Minister, Mark Prisk MP to stress that a nationally set 'one size fits all' approach to allocations is not appropriate and that it is crucial existing flexibilities established through the Localism Act which enable councils to put in place allocation policies that reflect local priorities and manage pressure on their housing waiting lists are maintained. The letter and the response from Mark Prisk are attached at **Annex 4b** and **Annex 4c**. Subsequently, the Queen's Speech announced a new immigration bill which government intend will bring the residency test into effect.

Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Governance Board

9. Cllr Tony Newman and Cllr Mike Jones attended the first meeting of the new PAS Governance Board on 11 April. The Board has been set up to provide sector leadership to the support offered by PAS ensure it is responsive to councils' needs and supports exchange of good practice. The aim is to support on-going improvement in plan making and decision taking including helping councils to avoid designation on performance on major applications. The Board consists of the LGA, DCLG Directors and representatives of SOLACE, ADEPT and the Planning Officers Society.

Community Infrastructure Levy

10. Amendments to the regulations to the Community Infrastructure Levy came into force on 25 April 2013 to require charging authorities to pass a proportion of CIL receipts to communities where development has taken place (25% in areas with a neighbourhood plan, 15% in areas without a neighbourhood plan).
11. Government have also published a consultation on further reforms to the regulations for CIL which will have implications for those councils in the process of developing their CIL. The LGA will be submitting a response to the consultation which closes on 28th May.

Waste Update

12. Following our work defending councils' interests during the Judicial Review of Defra on recycling regulations, we have urged Ministers to take account of the principle of local determination explicitly supported by the judgment when drawing up the new MRF Code of Practice and in guidance accompanying the regulations. Our consultation response called for proportionate and appropriate measures which will generate both market confidence in the quality of recycle and the certainty which councils need. Cllr Clare Whelan reiterated these points when she attended a roundtable with Lord de Mauley and waste management industry, as did Cllr Mike Jones in his recent meeting with Lord de Mauley.

Flooding, water resources and climate change

13. **Partnership Funding** - Defra have announced a review to evaluate the early impact and delivery of the Partnership Funding policy. The review will investigate local behavioural

responses, capacity issues within those organisations now tasked with delivering these new arrangements, and the impact on local businesses and community relationships on funding for flood and coastal resilience schemes. The evaluation is due to report in September 2013. The LGA is working with councils to develop propositions for how partnership funding could be improved, drawing on experience of the scheme to date.

14. Sir Merrick Cockell met with Lord Chris Smith, Chair of the **Environment Agency** on 23 April, as part of their quarterly series of meetings. Key issues discussed included the implications for the Environment Agency (EA)'s statutory planning role resulting from the Government's red tape challenge initiative and budget reductions, sharing ideas on investment in water infrastructure, the Partnership Funding model for flooding, and the Triennial review of the EA and Natural England. '**Fracking**' was also briefly discussed, with an agreement to stay in close dialogue as policies on fracking develop to ensure that the EA and councils' role in planning and regulating complement each other. A further meeting between Cllr Mike Jones and Cllr Robert Light (Deputy Chair of the EA) is arranged for 16 May.
15. **Climate change and Climate Local** - At his recent meeting with Lord de Mauley, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Resource Management, the Local Environment and Environmental Science, Defra, Cllr Mike Jones discussed progress with Climate Local in supporting action on adaptation to climate change. Following the meeting, the LGA provided input to the local government chapter of National Adaptation Programme.

ECO Brokerage

16. The LGA has been working to develop proposals for DECC which will enable local authorities that are not registered as Green Deal Providers to place their energy efficiency projects on the ECO brokerage service. We have this month responded to DECC's consultation on the ECO brokerage by calling for local authorities to have access, setting out how this would contribute to the success of the platform and deliver government objectives by fostering competition, targeting resources to those who need it most and maximising the resource available for projects.
17. In support of this work Cllr Mike Jones met with Angela Knight, Chief Executive of the Energy UK to discuss how we can support councils and energy suppliers to work effectively together. At the meeting we agreed to promote good practice (showcasing a range of examples of effective local partnerships between councils, energy suppliers, and other agencies), explore options to promote action on energy efficiency by Registered Providers, and to organise a joint conference on the theme of local action on energy efficiency in the autumn, in collaboration with the NHF.

Events - Planning for Growth and Private rented and empty homes conferences

18. Cllr Clyde Loakes and Cllr Ed Turner chaired two conferences in April that addressed councils' role in facilitating much-needed housing and growth. Speakers included Shona Dunn, Director of Planning, DCLG and Andrew Stanford, Head of the Private Rented Sector Taskforce, DCLG, as well as experts from local councils around the country. A range of well-attended workshops and panel discussions examined topics such as engaging with landlords, bringing empty homes back in to use, negotiating sustainable growth locally; and how long-term planning can be used to promote growth.