

Environment and Housing Board Review of the year

Purpose

For information and discussion.

Summary

This report reviews the progress and achievements in relation to the priorities, objectives and deliverables agreed by the Board in September 2012.

Recommendation

Members of the Board are invited to **note** the achievements against the objectives and deliverables agreed for 2012/13.

Action

As directed by the Board.

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Introduction

1. At its meeting in September 2013 the Environment and Housing Board agreed a set of key objectives and deliverables for the year on each of its priority areas of work.
2. The board agreed 4 key areas of focus for the year as:
 - 2.1 Growth – incorporating planning, housing and green growth;
 - 2.2 Waste;
 - 2.3 Sustainability and Carbon Reduction; and
 - 2.4 Flooding.
3. This report summarises key achievements against the agreed objectives in each of these areas. A full description of achievements against each of the deliverables agreed by the board under each objective is set out in **Annex A**. The report also provides a summary of achievements of the Climate Local programme and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS).

Growth

4. **Objective:** *to promote the positive role that councils play in driving economic growth through their roles on planning, housing and supporting green industries and to present an evidenced case for the powers and flexibilities to allow them to go further.*
5. **Key achievements:**
 - 5.1 Our research and analysis of **unimplemented planning permissions** for residential development and councils' record on approving planning applications provided evidence to support our arguments that planning is not a barrier to growth and has been widely quoted in the media and by parliamentarians.
 - 5.2 The Board presented a forceful challenge to the Government's proposals for a raft of extension of **permitted development rights** for householder extensions, broadband infrastructure, offices, temporary use of shops and other buildings and schools. This included a high profile media and parliamentary lobbying campaign that secured a significant media and parliamentary profile for councils' concerns and opposition to the proposals.
 - 5.3 The **Growth and Infrastructure Bill** was a priority area of work for the Board with a significant parliamentary and media lobbying activity against proposals that would undermine local decision making on planning and extend the powers of the planning inspectorate. The Board used the Bill as an opportunity to lobby for alternative proposals which would promote growth, including removal of the housing borrowing cap. Throughout the Bill's passage through Parliament we secured extensive high profile coverage of councils' concerns and our position on the Bill. Our work secured a number of changes to the Bill including time-limiting the ability of the Planning Inspectorate to renegotiate affordable housing agreements, and securing a new clause to making it easier for councils to use Local Development orders.

- 5.4 The Board's work to demonstrate the potential for councils to invest in housing through **the removal of HRA borrowing restrictions** gained widespread support from by a range of stakeholder organisations and parliamentarians across all parties. Our publication, 'Let's Get Building', produced jointly with key housing organisations alongside research on the implementation on self-financing, has supported a high profile lobbying campaign and we continue to discuss options at a political level with the Government.
- 5.5 The Board also supported the Finance Panel's work to **assess the cumulative impact and costs of welfare reform and the impact for councils and delivery of affordable housing**. This work is due to be launched in July and will provide an evidence base for on-going work on welfare reform and future lobbying work on funding for social and intermediate housing.

Waste

6. **Objective:** *to champion local innovation in waste management and lobby for greater local decision making on waste, as the only means of addressing future funding gaps in waste.*
7. **Key achievements:**
- 7.1 **Wealth from Waste – the LGA Local Waste Review** was a significant area of work for the Board this year and examined the future opportunities, challenges and risks for waste services with the aim of enabling the sector to proactively lead the debate on future waste policy. The Review engaged widely with key stakeholders in the waste sector and brought together a range of evidence and analysis on future cost drivers and income and saving opportunities. The Review sets out a range of recommendations around the central theme of maximising the value or wealth in waste and presents a powerful case for local decision making. The Review was widely and positively received by the media and across the waste sector and we will continue to publicise the Review through further media work.
- 7.2 **Securing a positive outcome in the Waste Judicial Review.** The LGA as an Interested Party had significant input into, and was represented at, the court hearing of the Waste Judicial Review case. The outcome was recognition that EU law recognises the role of councils in determining whether separate collection of recyclables is practicable and necessary to meet quality standards and saved councils from incurring costs that could have been in the order of tens of millions of pounds. Following the successful outcome of the case the Board has been working to influence the Materials Recovery Facility Code of Practice and the guidance on the regulations to make the case for a better system of sorting recycling which will increase quality and therefore value to councils and tax payers, as well as helping to safeguard the use of co-mingling by councils' whose circumstances require it.

Carbon reduction and sustainability

8. **Objective:** *to champion local action on fuel poverty, energy efficiency and reducing the cost of energy, giving councils the flexibility and access to the resources they need to support local initiatives.*

9. **Key achievements:**

- 9.1 **Lobbying for councils to have access to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) brokerage** without having to seek Green Deal provider accreditation. The LGA pressed the case in our submission to the Spending Review on energy-related issues, as well as through our response to the DECC consultation on making it mandatory for energy suppliers to trade on the brokerage in April 2013. DECC is currently reviewing the decision to restrict access to the brokerage to Green Deal providers.
- 9.2 **Demonstrating how locally-led solutions for addressing fuel poverty are the most effective.** The LGA submitted evidence to the Energy and Climate Change Select Committee 'Inquiry into energy prices, profits and poverty' in February. Lead Members also presented recommendations on how DECC could support local action at their meeting with the Minister with responsibility for fuel poverty, Greg Barker MP, in May. This work is being followed up with a more detailed paper to be published in July.
- 9.3 Members have consolidated **engagement with DECC** Ministers. This work has secured recognition of councils' unique role in delivering carbon reduction and the value of engaging with local government. This recognition is reflected in agreement of a new Memorandum of Understanding between the LGA and DECC and quarterly meetings with the Minister for Climate Change.

Flooding

10. The Board delegated responsibility for the work on flooding to the Inland Flood Risk Management Group which has led key elements of the work to achieve the objective identified by the Board.
11. **Objective:** *To ensure that flood defences are properly planned for and funded to make the case for adequate funding for exceptional flood damage, including insurance cover.*

12. **Key achievements:**

- 12.1 **Lobbying on floods funding.** The LGA made the case for extension of the Bellwin Scheme and additional funding for councils dealing with damage from the 2012 floods presenting evidence of costs from exceptional floods in letters to Ministers. The LGA also gathered evidence from councils' initial experience of new Partnership Funding model for flood defences to highlight areas in which the model could be improved to maximise the value-for-money and support local priorities. The LGA gave evidence to the EFRA select committee inquiry into floods funding in February and is feeding into Defra's evaluation of the Partnership Funding model which is expected to report to Ministers in September 2013. The Group has continued to raise its concerns at senior officer and political level on the importance of a new model for flood insurance. The current Statement of Principles has been extended to end of July to allow more time for negotiations between ABI and the Government and it is expected that solutions will be carried forward through the Water Bill.
- 12.2 The LGA has been working with Environment Agency, Ofwat and Water UK to **promote more investment in water and drainage infrastructure** from joining up

public and water company investment plans. This was pursued through a proposed amendment to the Growth and Infrastructure Bill to encourage greater investment in water infrastructure; by highlighting opportunities for councils to engage with water company business plans as part of the 2014 Price Review process; and by working with the Environment Agency to develop arrangements for the future of flood maintenance.

The Climate Local programme

13. The work of the Climate Local programme is overseen by a steering group of local authority officers, Members from the Environment and Housing Board and officials from Government departments.

14. **Objective:** *To showcase how councils are helping people to reduce energy costs and help people out of fuel poverty and use this evidence to lobby for locally-led initiatives rather than energy supplier-led initiatives.*

15. Key achievements:

15.1 **70 local authorities have signed up to the Climate Local Commitment**, of which 29 have submitted and shared details of their local actions. Membership of the Climate Local Network has now reached 300 members across councils.

15.2 An independent **impact report** summarising case studies from 20 councils was launched in March 2013 at the Climate Local conference. The report demonstrated activity and impact of locally-led initiatives in three priority areas: driving local growth, making savings across council services and supporting vulnerable communities. Case studies from the impact report have been used to support the LGA's work on growth and fuel poverty.

15.3 **New web resources** have been produced which include guidance and information on local actions that councils can take that benefit local communities and businesses whilst tackling the climate change. These include information sheets and slide packs for elected members covering leadership, local economy, finance, housing and planning, environment and transport and health and wellbeing.

Planning Advisory Service

16. The Board secured recognition from the Planning Minister, Nick Boles MP of the importance of a sector-led approach to driving improvement in planning. With agreement from DCLG, new governance arrangements have been established to ensure that the local government sector provides leadership and direction to support provided by PAS and hold the PAS team to account for delivery of effective support on planning.

17. In 2012-13 PAS concentrated on working with local authorities on supporting their plan-making; 101 councils received one to one support, with many more attending PAS sessions on plan-making. PAS ran another successful benchmark for planning services round, with 95 authorities taking part. This provided the 65 authorities who completed the exercise with a benchmarking report focussing on activities, costs and performance which can then be used as an improvement tool. More than 300 councils attended PAS events covering the NPPF, Community Infrastructure Levy, viability, and Neighbourhood Planning, and 40 councillor briefing sessions were delivered on site at Councils.

Approximately 100 councillors attended 6 leadership academies, and 9 authorities had planning peer challenges. From the PAS impact assessment, 90 per cent of people PAS worked with in 2012 said that it helped them get their job done better.

External engagement and wider activity

18. The profile and influence of the Board has remained high with the Chair and members of the Board meeting with Ministers from DCLG, DECC and Defra to discuss policy issues on a regular basis. Engagement at senior level with key partners including the Environment Agency, the Homes and Communities Agency; the National Housing Federation, Water UK and Energy UK has consolidated and strengthened relationships and added weight to our lobbying.
19. Members of the Board have given evidence to a number of select committees and all party parliamentary groups across the Board's remit and have represented the LGA at numerous conferences and events. The LGA programme of events has included conferences on planning for growth, housing finance, energy efficiency and the Green Deal and Climate Local.
20. The Board has also maintained a strong media presence with 35 press releases issued since last September. There has also been strong broadcast and newspaper coverage of our priority areas of work including planning reforms, a range of housing issues, the Waste Review and councils' response to flooding. Since January, the Environment and Housing Board has been mentioned or quoted 93 times by national newspapers and broadcasters.