

Priorities and Work Programme for 2013 - 14

Purpose

For discussion and agreement.

Summary

This report sets out proposals for the Board's priorities and key areas of work for the coming year. Subject to discussion and members' views officers will develop a work programme to deliver these priorities for discussion and agreement at the first meeting of the new Board cycle in September.

Recommendation

That Members of the Board **discuss** the suggested priorities and areas of focus set out at **paragraphs 8, 10, 12 and 14**.

Action

Subject to agreement by the Board, officers to undertake the 13 projects set out in this report over the course of the next year.

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Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to facilitate an early discussion about the focus and priority areas of work for the coming year. The Board's aim is to lead the agenda for local government on the key challenges and issues within its remit and support the overall objectives of the LGA as set out in the Business Plan.
2. In light of further reduction to the LGA budget and resources, it is important that the work programme is focused on a defined set of priorities on which we can deliver significant impact and demonstrate value to councils. We currently believe that the projects below can be delivered within available resources, however the work programme that is developed for discussion in September will be constrained by the overall resource envelope of the LGA, which may have implications for the scale and timing of the work to be delivered.
3. The paper suggests key themes and outline work programme on the following priorities:
 - 3.1 Housing;
 - 3.2 Planning;
 - 3.3 Waste;
 - 3.4 Energy Efficiency; and
 - 3.5 Climate Local.

Context – key issues and LGA Business Plan Priorities

4. The Board has a powerful role to play in delivering the LGA's priorities set out in the business plan 2013-14 and particularly in relation to the priority on economic growth, jobs and prosperity which aims to ensure that councils are recognised as central to economic growth.
5. The Business plan includes specific objectives within the Board's remit as follows:
 - 5.1 Councils maintain their planning powers and freedoms and there is certainty and stability in the planning system;
 - 5.2 Councils drive the increase in housing supply that the nation needs;
 - 5.3 Councils support green growth by taking action on energy efficiency and reducing the costs of energy; and
 - 5.4 Councils lead the future direction of waste policy and set the agenda for reducing waste and increasing re-use and recycling whilst reducing cost pressures.
6. Growth is also a key theme of the LGA's work on Rewiring Public Services which will be launched at annual conference. The Board's work over the next year should seek to support and inform that work as it moves forward.

Proposed focus for Board work programme for 2013/14

Housing

7. With 1.8 million households on council waiting lists, increasing homelessness; and unaffordability of housing and stalled developments in many areas of the country, housing remains a key issue for all councils. Increasing the supply of housing is crucial to addressing these issues and has an important role to play in supporting growth by ensuring housing supply matches job opportunities and boosting the construction industry. Investment in housing is also needed to reconfigure the existing stock to manage the impacts of the governments' welfare reforms. With greater numbers of people renting in the private sector, councils also have an interest in ensuring it offers a high quality and stable option for residents to play its full part in meeting housing need.
8. To lead the debate on solutions to allow councils to meet these challenges, it is proposed that the Board's work on housing is focused on 3 strands of work:
 - 8.1 **Increasing housing supply** – Supporting councils to invest in housing led growth that meets local needs and demands to invest in new and existing stock. This would include an extension of our campaign for the removal of the centrally set HRA borrowing cap for stock holding authorities, and proposals for tackling empty homes alongside work to maximise the use of land and assets, financial guarantees and planning to encourage appropriate housing development either directly or in partnership for all (stock owning and non-stock owning) authorities.
 - 8.2 **Securing a better deal for tenants in the private rented sector** – Developing evidenced proposals to secure a better deal for tenants in the private rented sector by removing unnecessary red tape and central control and equipping councils with clear and effective tools to promote a high standard of quality and take action against those landlords that fail to provide safe and appropriate accommodation and agents who do not offer redress when things go wrong and charge excessive and inappropriate fees. We will also support councils to encourage investment in the private rented sector through sharing good practice and pressing for greater flexibilities where barriers exist.
 - 8.3 **Managing the housing implications of Welfare reform** - Working with the LGA Finance Panel to assess the emerging impact and costs of welfare reform to understand the behavioural and market changes to inform future policy responses and to develop evidenced proposals for funding for affordable housing.

Planning

9. Looking to influence the development of future policy, the Board's focus should be on continuing to make the case that councils are using their planning functions to support growth and meet demand in their areas with a view to presenting a strong case against further centralisation of the planning system and to support greater local determination on planning matters. The board should also focus on areas of potential challenge to councils in their planning role, for example in planning for housing and infrastructure across local authority boundaries.
10. It is proposed that the Board's work on planning is focused on:

- 10.1 **Promoting a locally-led planning system** - Making the case for local democratic decision making on planning as a means of proactively driving growth whilst ensuring residents and business to have a say about development that affects them. This will include monitoring the cumulative impact of the extension of permitted development rights to schools, high streets, commercial buildings and household extensions. That evidence will be used to support the case for local decision making, and oppose any further extensions to the role and scope of the Planning Inspectorate.
- 10.2 **Strategic planning for infrastructure and growth** – Focusing on the role planning can play in attracting investment and funding strategic infrastructure to ensure areas remain successful and sustainable over the longer term. The work would include providing evidence of the positive role that councils play and developing policy for:
- 10.2.1 planning across local authority boundaries and work with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Deals to share examples of the positive role planning can play in meeting wider needs and growth ambitions;
 - 10.2.2 planning and funding for floods defences and water infrastructure; and
 - 10.2.3 how planning can maximise growth through cultural, heritage and sporting assets (working with the LGA's Culture Tourism and Sport Board and arts, heritage and sports agencies).
- 10.3 **Supporting councils to drive improvement in planning** – A programme of support for councils on planning will be delivered by the Planning Advisory Service. The PAS Board will agree the objectives and programme of work to be delivered to ensure that it supports councils' improvement priorities. Key priorities for this year are support for plan making, leadership of planning; councils working together on strategic planning issues and service improvement and value for money in planning. The latter priority includes a programme of support for those designated or at risk of designation for planning performance.

Waste

11. The Board's work on Wealth from Waste has demonstrated that waste and recycling are economic issues and could be a key growth sector for the UK economy. It also demonstrated council ambition and local leadership on waste and made the case for decisions on waste to be made locally. Our work on waste for the coming year would aim to continue to lead the debate on the future of waste and to build on the findings and deliver on the recommendations of the Local Waste Review.
12. The suggested work programme would include:
- 12.1 **Communication of key messages from the review**- a series of media stories until December 2013 to highlight research and key findings and recommendations from the review.
 - 12.2 **Establishing a Reuse Commission** to bring together key stakeholders to develop proposals to mainstream reuse and drive growth in the reuse of products; and

- 12.3 **A more ambitious agreement to reduce packaging waste** - convening discussions and negotiation with business to go further than the Courtauld commitment in reducing packaging waste.

Energy Efficiency

13. With energy prices rising and levels of fuel poverty increasing, energy efficiency programmes will continue to be an important means by which councils can assist vulnerable residents and those on low incomes to save on their bills and avoid ill health. With ever increasing pressures on public spending it is more important than ever that funding from tax payers – in this case through their energy bills – is used as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is proposed that the Board's focus for the coming year is leading the policy debate on energy efficiency with a view to securing greater value for money for the tax and energy bill payer and to support vulnerable households more effectively. It will be important to work with the energy companies and the National Housing Federation in taking this forward.
14. This programme of work would include:
- 14.1 **Evaluation of existing energy efficiency delivery and funding models** to establish value for money provided;
- 14.2 **Exploration of trading standards and consumer protection issues** arising from the marketing and targeting of energy efficiency programmes; and
- 14.3 **Develop evidenced proposals for changes to policy** and delivery of energy efficiency programmes to influence manifestos in the lead up to the next election.
15. The LGA and DECC have recently agreed a revised Memorandum of Understanding under which we have agreed to work with DECC to promote ways that councils can play a lead role in delivering the Green Deal and ECO; promote ways in which councils can tackle fuel poverty and raise awareness and support councils' action to on carbon reduction and energy efficiency initiatives and renewable energy. These commitments can be delivered through the work programme set out above and by the Climate Local programme.

Climate Local

16. The Climate Local programme is resourced by a post fully funded by the Environment Agency until March 2014. The proposed work programme for 2013-14 will continue to promote and support green growth and local action on climate change. As well as continuing to increase the number of signatories, activity will centre on enabling councils to demonstrate that they are delivering actions that benefit local people and tackle local priorities such as fuel poverty and sustainable economic growth. There will be a focus on providing evidence of good practice and identifying barriers to council action, to support the Environment and Housing Board's work on growth, and energy. It is suggested that in developing the work programme, consideration is given to identifying specific contributions that the Climate local programme could make to delivering each of the Board's priorities.