

## **Environment and Housing Board: Annual Review of the Year**

### **Background**

1. Councils' role in promoting and supporting growth has been an important overarching theme for the Board's work on planning, housing, waste and environmental issues this year.

### **Planning**

2. A priority area of work for the Board this year was the **Growth and Infrastructure Bill** (now Act) which we argued was a missed opportunity for growth. We lobbied fiercely against proposals to extend the powers of the Planning Inspectorate at the expense of local decision making. In their place, we put forward alternative proposals for new clauses that would do more to unlock growth, including removal of the housing borrowing cap, and making Local Development Orders easier to use. Our work secured a number of changes to the Bill including time-limiting Planning Inspectorate powers to renegotiate affordable housing agreements, and securing a new clause to making it easier for councils to use Local Development Orders.
3. Alongside work on the Bill, the Board led 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.
4. 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 the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and hold the PAS team to account for delivery of effective support on planning.

### **Housing**

5. Our campaign for **removal of the housing borrowing cap** gained widespread support from by a range of stakeholder organisations and parliamentarians across all parties. We have presented a case for investment in housing as a means of supporting growth and in dealing with the impacts of welfare reform. Alongside removal of the cap we argued for flexibility on Right to Buy and a new fund for investment in housing which has been reflected in government's spending round announcement on further funding for affordable homes. We have also been working with 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.

## **Waste**

6. We were successful in defending councils' interests in a **Judicial Review** against the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra). This ensured that councils can determine how they collect waste, based on local circumstances in accordance with EU law and saved councils from incurring costs that could have been in the order of tens of millions of pounds.
7. We also carried out a **Local Waste Review** to lead the debate about the future for waste services. The review's report "Wealth from Waste" sets out evidence of how with the right support and investment, the waste and recycling sector will be a key growth sector for the economy and release significant untapped value to the taxpayer. It also makes a powerful case for local decision making on waste. Our recommendations include freezing the landfill levy and recycling income to reinvest in waste infrastructure and that the way waste is collected and disposed should be a matter for a local deal between councils and residents without interference from Whitehall. The review has been widely and positively received by Ministers and Shadow Ministers, the waste sector and in the media.

## **Flooding**

8. Following the severe floods of 2012, we have been working to ensure councils can access funding for flood defences and flood recovery, as well as supporting councils in their role as lead flood authorities. We have been working with the water industry to put forward proposals for an increase investment in water infrastructure to improve resilience to flooding and support growth. We have also been encouraging Government and the insurance industry to come to a new solution on floods insurance. Our lobbying on these issues have been reflected in Government commitments to increase funding for flood defences and a new arrangement for floods insurance announced as part of the spending review.

## **Sustainability and Carbon Reduction**

9. We have pressed the case for councils to be able access funding from energy companies for local energy efficiency projects through the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) brokerage scheme. We have also been supporting councils to take action and share good practice on carbon reduction and resilience to climate change through our Climate Local initiative. 70 councils have now signed up to the initiative which demonstrates how councils are actively working to reduce people's energy bills, protect residents and businesses and drive green growth.

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