

Meeting with Clive Betts MP, Chair of the CLG Select Committee

Summary

This document is a short note for the introductory meeting between Clive Betts MP, the Chairman of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, and Leadership Board on 12 October at 16.00. There is no formal agenda for the meeting, though Clive will wish to discuss possible areas for future Committee inquiries.

This paper covers:

- Clive's background
- Recent CLG Committee inquiries
- Topics for discussion

Recommendations

For noting in advance of introductory meeting

Clive Betts MP (Maj: 10,505)

Clive has been a Labour MP since 1992, when he was elected to serve the constituency of Sheffield Attercliffe. He began his political career in 1976 when he was elected to Sheffield City Council. After serving on the Housing and Finance Committees for several years he became leader of the council in 1987, as well as Deputy Chair of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA) and Chair of the AMA's Housing Committee. Clive stood down from the council after his election to Parliament, where he has since served on each incarnation of the local government Select Committee (Environment, Transport and the Regions, ODPM, and CLG). He was voted in as the new Chairman of the CLG Select Committee in June 2010. Clive has particular interest in housing and devolution of power, and before the General Election forced an amendment, against the Government's wishes, to the Flood and Water Management Act in Committee, designed to increase the power of local authorities. Outside of politics, Clive is a passionate football fan and captain of the Parliamentary football club.



The CLG Select Committee

The Committee undertakes a number of inquiries every year. These are usually announced in advance with a "call for evidence", following which interested parties can submit written evidence on the subject of the inquiry. This is then followed by a number of oral evidence sessions, at which members of the Committee call witnesses to be questioned on the issues under investigation. The Committee will then publish a report detailing its findings, evidence received, and recommendations for the future. Recent CLG Select Committee inquiries have included:

- Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies
- Audit and Inspection of Local Authorities
- Regeneration
- Localisation issues in welfare reform
- Finance of New Housing Supply

The Committee may also choose to undertake special inquiries into unforeseen events that require immediate scrutiny or short one-day oral evidence based inquiries on specific topics such as the Local Government Resource Review.

Recently the LGA formed part of a small advisory group that suggested the Committee's current inquiry into the financing of housing supply, and Cllr Gary Porter is giving evidence to the Committee on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on Monday 17th October.

Issues that may be discussed

Clive is coming to discuss the current work of the Committee with the new Leadership Board and potential future areas of work the Committee could look at.

- **On the NPPF** we must ensure that councils are given time to put their local plans in place before the Government's reforms come into effect. Giving councils an arbitrary deadline of April 2012 is not the best option, **we instead need Government to commit to working with councils** to get all the local plans signed off before they press forward. This will be our key message when **Gary Porter gives oral evidence to the Select Committee in October**, and we hope the Committee will push other witnesses, including Ministers, on the importance of this.
- **On housing finance the Committee is currently taking evidence on this issue.** The LGA has argued for more freedoms and flexibilities for councils to invest in local housing. In particular **councils should be able to keep 100% of Right to Buy receipts** to reinvest locally, rather than having to send 75% to the Treasury. There should also **not be an arbitrary central cap on councils' borrowing to invest in social housing** – the Prudential Code is sufficient. We hope the Government will make the necessary changes in the next spending round. Councils also must be able to access the same funding pools as housing associations and developers, and these will principle elements of our written and oral evidence.
- **On welfare reform and localisation issues**, the Committee will publish its report on 13th October. We have briefed members of the House of Lords (where the Welfare Reform Bill is undergoing scrutiny) on the **need for an effective, joined-up, local, face-to-face support system as an integral part of the Universal Credit programme**. This would link benefits with housing, health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol services, and financial capability support. Such a **locally delivered element of universal credit through local councils could be done first by piloting during the transition stage**. It is also equally the case that councils have long argued for a bigger role in commissioning employment support, so that help to get people back into employment can be effectively integrated with other public services and so the service can be held to account locally.
- **On business rates reform** fairness must be at the heart of any new system that the Government implements. **Moves toward the localisation of business rates must be done in a way which recognises the advantage that national infrastructures give some authorities over others and takes into consideration the needs of individual local authorities**. The aim must be to give councils greater freedom and incentive to encourage growth in local areas while allowing every community to benefit from national prosperity.
- **On community budgets** we believe that the root causes of the recent civil disturbances must be addressed locally rather than through central interventions, and this makes an extremely strong case for taking community budgets forward quickly. We have stressed with Government the need for quick progress taking

pilots forward, suggested a programme of sector-led programme management, and laid out the need for government departments to build support for community budgets, with preliminary trouble-shooting work to take place immediately. **The CLG Select Committee has not undertaken a detailed inquiry into community budgets** and given that Eric Pickles is the Cabinet lead on this issue **you might wish to discuss potential avenues for the Committee to pursue looking into the future of this policy.**