

Note of last Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board meeting

Title:	Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board
Date:	Thursday 18 February 2021
Venue:	Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
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1 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman welcomed and introduced members to the Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Butlin and Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Rankin and Cllr Stewart Golton were in attendance as substitutes.

No declarations of interest were made.

2 House Building Report

The Chairman invited Ellen Vernon, Programme Director of One Public Estate (OPE) to discuss how the OPE programme was supporting councils to unlock surplus public land and property to support housing delivery.

Ellen introduced her presentation and explained that OPE focused on efficient use of surplus public land to rationalise and re-purpose the public estate and provided technical and practical support and advice to councils, to deliver property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners. The OPE programme had been going since 2013 with funding from Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Cabinet Office - Office of Government Property (OGP) with all activities and programme work delivered by the Local Government Association (LGA) in partnership with OGP.

Currently, OPE have and were funding over 600 projects with 96% of councils in England involved in an OPE partnership, transforming their local communities and public services. To date the OPE programme had £384m in capital receipts back to central/local government partners, £77m in reduced running costs and surplus land released enabling 15,500 homes.

Ellen explained that OPE offer provided the following:

- Funding at early stage to help partners with feasibility studies, business cases and master plans.
- Professional support
- Access to central/local government
- Neutral brokering
- Sharing best practice

Ellen also commented that the following partner benefits included:

- Release of surplus public land for homes, jobs and regeneration schemes
- Efficiency savings (capital receipts and revenue savings)
- Better integrated public services

In 2018 OPE delivered the Land Release Fund (LRF), a cross-government initiative between MHCLG which awarded £45m in capital funding to over 70 councils-led projects, releasing land for 6,000 affordable homes. Specifically aimed at supporting local authorities to move brown field sites through to housing delivery, often these sites may come with significant abnormal costs, constraints and infrastructure requirements. The LRF was able bridge the viability gap and provide funding for demolition, remediation, highways access and flood works.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members raised that land was critical in delivering public infrastructure but the over inflated land value and hesitancy from government departments to collaborate over long-term caused perverse short-term decisions that impacted delivery of local public infrastructure and council and social housing. Ellen responded that OPE is aware of the pressures that vary across the country and focused on helping localities address challenges and opportunities through scrutinising viability assessments. Additionally, OPE was working on exploring how institutional investment may help complex projects.
- Members commented that the district valuer had a role in determining the valuation of land based on current use, which may be a higher value than that for a housing scheme. The programme could consider this in the future with government as it would make it easier to deliver in local authority areas. Ellen responded that there was a shift away from a full reliance on land values in terms of calculating benefit cost ratios that sit behind some of the assessments, looking at moving to include social value benefits in assessment and non-monetised benefits.
- Members mentioned that for skills and capacity (paragraph 10.4) it was important to look at the bigger picture about working with partnerships, as some areas did not have the skills available. It would be beneficial to work closely with further education to make provisions

around the skills in demand. Ellen responded that there were a few bodies that were currently trying to link up skills shortages in local authorities to ensure a pipeline of skills.

Members made the following comments on the wider report:

- Members commented on the disparity between the government and survey figures. Highlighting that it was important to address wider challenges around skills shortage and parts of the UK without a Housing Revenue Account. Numbers needed to capture council construction from all models not just one particular model.
- Members raised that for funding for retrofitting
- Members also raised that shorthold tenancies should be reconsidered.
- Members highlighted that more analysis was needed on local authorities with HRA capacity underused as there was a risk of Ministers raising concerns over why housing demand was not being met.
- Members pointed out the delay in Right to Buy receipts was significant as it was a major rate-limiting factor and would be useful to hear from others on how this was affecting them.

Actions:

- Officers to consider comments made by Board Members on the key areas for lobbying outlined in paragraphs 10.1 to 10.6.
- Officers to consider comments made by Board Members on the set of proposed actions (paragraph 23).

Decision:

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the House Building Report and agreed on the proposed recommendations in the report.

3 Building Safety Update and Samuel Garside Fire Report

The Chairman introduced Cllr Rodwell to present to the Board. Cllr Rodwell informed the Board that in June 2019 a major fire in a privately owned four-storey block of flats in Barking and Dagenham destroyed eight flats and ripped through the balconies within six minutes. Over 50 families were safely evacuated and within two hours support and accommodation was set up. Due to complications over the property being on private land, support for residents who raised concerns previously could not be provided by the local authority. Considering the concerns raised the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham commission an independent review.

Cllr Rodwell invited Sir Steve Bullock and Diarmaid Ward to present the Samuel Garside Independent Review highlighting their findings and aftermath of the fire.

Steve explained that the review highlighted four key emerging findings which needed to be addressed:

- The context in which any housing emergency situation is dealt with has changed and in future residents must be better informed and more engaged with what happens in the building where their homes are located.
- Complex ownership arrangements have become more common and this puts a premium on giving all residents clarity about roles and responsibilities, including what happens in an emergency.
- Local authorities are well placed to provide leadership in an emergency situation but need the resources and powers to meet the expectations of their residents.
- Making distinctions based on arbitrary height limits about the rules and regulations relevant to particular buildings may be a short-term necessity but, for the peace of mind of those who live in buildings with multiple self-contained housing units, a common approach is needed as soon as possible.

Diarmaid informed the Board that thankfully no lives were lost in the fire but, it was a very traumatic experience for the residents who lost their possessions and pets. To gather an understanding of the resident's feelings an online survey and a series of video and audio calls were rolled out.

Diarmaid highlighted some of the main issues that arose from the conversations with residents were:

- Complex ownership and management structure of the building causing communication issues, which residents felt that owners and managers were not taking responsibility.
- Arranging temporary accommodation was a difficult process.
- Process of returning to their homes as some residents felt unhappy about being asked to return earlier than they felt comfortable to do so.

Steve commented that recommendations set out in the review ensured that in the future there was a clearer understanding of all parties involved as to what needs to happen in the event of a fire. Including, the responsibilities of everyone, including the resident needs to be properly understood so events like these can be avoided.

Cllr Rodwell thanked Sir Steve Bullock and Diarmaid Ward for presenting their findings in the review to the Board.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members commented that the non-cladding related fire safety issues had not been addressed and were not satisfactory, which were numerous across new build properties.
- Members raised the complex ownership and management structures were an industry wide problem.
- Members expressed that the recommendations were incredibly important and highlighted key areas of concern that needed to be addressed.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Rodwell, Sir Steve Bullock and Diarmaid Ward for their contributions and comprehensive independent review.

The Chairman introduced Charles Loft, Senior Policy Adviser, who updated the Board that Lord Porter had seen the independent review and concluded that the LGA should support and promote the recommendations.

Actions:

- Officers to invite Lord Porter to a future Board meeting.
- Officers to continue to update Board Members on the progress of the recommendations in the Samuel Garside Fire Independent Review

Decision:

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the Building Safety Update, Building Safety Announcement Update paper, Samuel Garside Fire Report and agreed the recommendations.

4 Flooding

The Chairman introduced the report which reviews the current policy lines on flooding and the consultation on changes to the Flood Re Insurance scheme, ensuring that affordable flood insurance was available to all households in high risk flood areas.

Hilary Tanner, Senior Adviser informed the Board that the report provides an update of several reviews on flooding over the past few months and was subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Hilary highlighted that key areas of focus in the report which required feedback which were; issues over planning permissions being granted for housing in flood risk areas, capital funding to be devolved to local areas, the Bellwin Scheme's shortfall in funding for flood emergencies and current arrangements for managing the risk from surface water flooding.

Andrew Richmond, Adviser informed the Board that following the devastating flooding event in Doncaster in 2019,

Government commissioned Amanda Blanc, CEO of Aviva, to undertake an Independent Review of Flood Insurance as many of those affected did not have insurance cover. The Government has proposed to take forward all 12 recommendations set out in the review.

Andrew also commented that DEFRA have recommended the following key points they wish to implement in collaboration with local authorities:

- **Landlord Notification:** Landlords of properties in high flood risk areas should provide their tenants with details of the building's insurance cover in place, including the support that would be provided by the insurer to the tenant in the event of a flood.
- **Landlord Buildings Insurance:** Government should consider the broader case for legislating to require landlords to have buildings insurance that protects tenants in the event that the property is uninhabitable for an extended period.
- **Local Authority Tenant Awareness:** Local Authorities should ensure that tenants in high flood risk areas are given guidance on i) the range of risks they face in the event of a flood and ii) ways in which they can protect themselves with adequate insurance cover.
- **Flood Re Low Income Affordability:** Government should consider more direct ways to increase the take-up of contents cover for tenants in high flood risk areas. As well as promoting awareness, this should include reviewing the impact of the Flood Re premium for contents-only cover on the affordability of contents insurance for low-income households.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members commented that local authorities were better at delivering flood schemes and arguing for government to devolve more power to local authorities was one strongly supported by the Board.
- Members mentioned that inviting Environment Agency to a future Board meeting would be beneficial to understand what they do on a national level.
- Members raised that the Bellwin Scheme was out of date and the government should be pressed for alternative ideas.
- Members commented that flooding on a local level cannot be prevented due to climate changes, but the focus should be around land abandonment and how to support those who may need to move.
- Members stated that they would like to see the LGA lobby government to ensure that revenue support to local authorities follows capital investment.
- Members expressed that insurance needed to capture affordability and permitted/minor development under 250sqm as it continues to be allowed in the flood plain.

Action:

- Officers to consider comments made by Board Members on recommendations to the report.

Decision:

The Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board noted and approved the update.

5 Climate Change Update

The Chairman introduced the report which provided a reflection of the issues that were raised during the last Board meeting and next steps.

Following the brief discussion, the following comments were made:

- Members commented that tracking of climate emergency response and LGA declaration was not clear and required a high-level response.
- Members raised the that a coherent offer from all local authorities to put forward to the COP26 summit required careful stakeholder engagement.

Decision:

The Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board noted and agreed the update.

6 Equalities and Diversity EEHT board work

The Chairman introduced the report which sets out key commitments in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles, a selection of key information sources, and EDI-related work in the EEHT area.

Tamsin Hewett, Adviser informed the Board that the report summarised where there may be Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion issues and a starting point for any issues identified within areas of particular concern or groups that may be affected by issues in those policy areas.

Following the brief discussion, the following comments were made:

- Members commented that it was important to embed best practice and voice how climate change and access to high quality public transport impacted different communities.
- Members expressed it was important that Members had the appropriate tools for training and resources needed.
- Members acknowledged the recommendations in the report and the analysis on each of the topic areas but, highlighted the scale of the issues raised should not be underestimated.

Action:

- Officers to reach out to Councillors who have expressed support they are willing to provide on behalf of the Board.

Decision:

The Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board noted the update.

7 Other Board Update

The Chairman introduced the report which provides updates on a range of issues within the remit of the Board.

Following the brief discussion, the following comments were made:

- Members raised that the Decent Homes Standard update work was welcomed as it coincided with council house building and climate change work.
- Members commented that from an LGA perspective it was important to make clear how many opportunities there may be already to deliver on the objectives for Right to Regenerate: reform of the Right to Contest.

Action:

- Officers to consider comments made by Board Members

Decision:

The Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board noted the update.

8 Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 were agreed by the Board.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr David Renard	Swindon Borough Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Darren Rodwell	Barking and Dagenham London Borough Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Adele Morris	Southwark Council
	Cllr Linda Gillham	Runnymede Borough Council
Members	Cllr Mark Crane	Selby District Council
	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Patrick Nicholson	Plymouth City Council

Cllr Nicholas Rushton	Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Linda Taylor	Cornwall Council
Cllr Asher Craig	Bristol City Council
Mayor Philip Glanville	Hackney London Borough Council
Cllr Ed Turner	Oxford City Council
Cllr Rachel Blake	Tower Hamlets Council
Cllr Michael Mordey	Sunderland City Council
Cllr Christopher Hammond	Southampton City Council
Cllr David Beaman	Waverley Borough Council

Apologies

Cllr Peter Butlin	Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	Cumbria County Council

In Attendance

Ellen Vernon	One Public Estate	One Public Estate
Sir Steve Bullock		
Diarmaid Ward		

Matilda Gross	MHCLG	MHCLG
Nick Atkinson	MHCLG	MHCLG
Simon Jeffery	MHCLG	MHCLG
Alex Ariyadasa-Saez	MHCLG	MHCLG

Jessica Hill	Press
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LGA Officers

Eamon Lally
Jo Allchurch
Hillary Tanner
Charles Loft
Amelia Sutton
Bethany Vella
Amy Fleming
Christina Kaiser
Andrew Richmond
Tamsin Hewett
David Mills
Joe Difford
Nick Sutton
Tahmina Akther