

## **Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – report from Cllr Peter Box CBE (Chair)**

### **Infrastructure and growth**

1. I met with the Vice Chair of Resources Portfolio Cllr John Fuller (Con, South Norfolk) on the 24<sup>th</sup> March to discuss what possibilities exist in making links between the areas of commonality in the Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board's work and that of the Resources Portfolio's work around financing infrastructure and growth (specifically CIL, S106 and the New Homes Bonus).

### **LGA Transport priorities**

2. At the request of the Leadership Board I presented an overview of the EEHT's Board's priority areas of work on transport at their meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> April. In doing so, I touched upon the devolution agenda, the condition of the highways network, funding challenges and the role and responsibilities of councils' with regard to air quality. Members welcomed the report, endorsing the EEHT Board's work on transport and highlighting a number of issues for further consideration, including need for a more joined up approach between national infrastructure projects and local transport networks, to keep pressure on Ministers regarding the challenges of working with Network Rail and Highways England and the importance of the Bus Services Bill being beneficial to all areas.

### **The Buses Bill**

3. The Queen's Speech introduced the Bus Services Bill which will allow local authorities the power to improve bus services for the people who use them. Mayoral combined authorities will be given automatic London-style powers to franchise local services. Other areas will need to apply to the Secretary of State to pursue franchising powers and all areas can benefit from enhanced partnership arrangements. Data about routes, fares and times would be made available across the country to developers of apps to give passengers better information about how to make the most of local bus services. The LGA has long called for greater control and influence of local bus provision and so the Bill marks a significant step for councils and their ambition for greater devolution of powers.

### **Housing and Planning bill**

4. The Housing and Planning Bill recently received Royal Assent, the Board has spent a lot of time with Members of Parliament to improve the Bill. Following our work with Peers, we were able to secure a number of amendments, including giving councils the ability to grant secure tenancies to families with children, restrictions around the resale of starter homes so that owners cannot 'cash in' on the discount only a few years after, changes to the taper rate for pay to stay and time limited pilots on competition in processing planning applications. The Act will still, however, have a significant impact on councils and their communities, the Board will now be working to represent and support councils as government develops regulations to force the sale of council homes, increase rents for some council tenants and build starter homes.

### **Housing commission**

5. The LGA Executive and Leadership Board asked the EEHT board to undertake a commission into the future role of local government in developing housing, and in a way that helps resolve wider public service challenges. The EEHT board has shaped and led the Commission, supported by a group of seven expert advisers.
6. The Commission has built on the findings of previous extensive reviews that have looked at the role of councils in housing, and focused on how local and central government can practically deliver in a way that: drives housebuilding; shapes prosperous communities and places; boosts employment; supports an aging population.
7. The Commission has received around 90 written submissions, has held 4 evidence gathering seminars and visited six councils. It is now developing the emerging recommendations to launch at annual conference, ahead of a full report being launched later in the year.

### **Flooding**

8. The LGA gave oral evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into future flood prevention. Cllr Box met with the Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP to discuss our submission to the National Resilience Review. This covered a number of areas including increasing flexibility in the current approach to flood defence funding, further incentivising private sector investment in flood defences, allowing areas to use precepts as a mechanism for increasing funding for flood defences and the potential for flood defences to be developed as part of wider infrastructure and economic investment in local areas in the medium to long-term.

### **Waste & recycling**

9. The LGA is working with HMRC and the Treasury to defend the VAT exemption for council commercial waste services in a legal challenge brought by a private waste company. Evidence was submitted to the High Court at the end of April, using expert legal advice and witness statements from the LGA and a number of councils. The High Court hearing will take place in July.

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