

Environment and Housing Board – report from Cllr Mike Jones (Chair)

Flooding

1. There have been almost 7,000 properties flooded since December last year with a similar number indirectly affected. We have seen most areas transition from response to recovery in the last week of February, although groundwater flooding remains an issue, with a number of places likely to continue to be affected for the next couple of months.
2. I am representing the LGA on the Severe Weather Ministerial Recovery Group chaired by Eric Pickles which meets on a weekly basis. We are continuing to work closely with central Government on the details of the various schemes of support that have been announced, have been participating in the national recovery groups convened by Government and will be engaging with the review of the Bellwin scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose in the future. Further information on all the funding schemes and other announcements can be found on the dedicated [microsite](#) on the LGA's website.
3. As councils move into recovery, we are focusing now on evidencing the costs of response, recovery and repair to lobby further on your behalf. We also continue to make representations on the effectiveness of the funding model for flood defences. To support that work we are keen to ensure we have a comprehensive picture of the issues and impacts on councils and would welcome feedback from you on this. If you have any information you would like to share please contact jo.allchurch@local.gov.uk or your political group office.

Fracking

4. I have been invited to represent the LGA on the All Party Parliamentary Group on Unconventional Oil and Gas. The Group, which is chaired by Dan Byles MP, provides a forum for discussion between key industry stakeholders around the issue.

Housing

5. I met with Andrew Stanford, Head of the Private Rented Sector Taskforce at the Department for Communities and Local Government on 24 February. Mr Stanford emphasised DCLG's keenness to engage more closely with local authorities on the role that they can play to encourage institutional investment in the private sector. I highlighted the LGA's recent [case study document on supporting housing investment](#), which includes examples of a range of different approaches in councils to providing new housing.
6. We have also met with the National Federation of ALMOS on 24 February to discuss how councils and ALMOs can bring forward more housing. I highlighted the LGA's work to call for the lifting of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap and the NFA agreed to continue working in partnership to press for financial flexibilities for local authorities and ALMOs.

7. Following a consultation from DCLG on the future funding of the Housing Ombudsman and proposals to extend fee charges to councils, the LGA has [responded](#) that the proposals represent an additional financial burden for councils and the costs should be met by central government. The response emphasises that a fair funding structure is needed for all tenants and social landlords.

Planning

8. A number of concerns that we have been raising about Local Plans have been reflected in changes to the new set of national Planning Policy Guidance which was published on 6 March. The LGA has had a long term campaign for the simplification of the thousands of pages of contradictory, duplicative national planning policy. In his statement launching the guidance, Planning Minister Nick Boles made a clear commitment to Local plans as a means of allowing local communities to shape where development should and should not go.
9. We have been promoting our new [Planning and Growth: the facts](#) document to Ministers, senior civil servants and wider stakeholder organisations. This sets out our view on the debates we need to have about planning and housing supply. This work argues that the changes to the planning system that this government has introduced are working to encourage development and highlights the debate we think we need to be having in relation to planning.
10. We have also developed a set of proposals for how statutory consultee processes could be improved. Statutory consultees have an important role to play in the planning system and our proposals are designed to ensure that they engage early and in a way that is more joined up, streamlined, and proportionate to the levels of risk involved. This will help to avoid delays in development coming forward.

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