

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – report from Cllr Martin Tett (Chairman)

Ministerial Meeting

1. On Tuesday 21 February I met with the Rt Hon Therese Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities following our previous meeting in November. The meeting was focussed on discussion of urban recycling rates and how they can be improved. Many thanks to all the Board members who provided me with feedback in preparation for the meeting.

The Road ahead for Buses

2. This week the LGA hosted and I chaired 'the road ahead for buses'. A conference examining the future for the bus industry and local government's role in supporting bus services. We heard from the DfT on the latest developments with the Bus Services Bill which will give councils new powers as well as forcing bus operators to open up more data. There was also discussion of how buses will fit in with new developments in transport technology like connected and autonomous vehicles. Authorities from around the country shared what they have been doing to drive growth in bus passenger numbers. Details of the presentations can be found on the LGA events pages.

National Infrastructure Commission

3. The LGA has been engaging with the National Infrastructure commission and their work on producing the National Infrastructure Assessment. The National Infrastructure assessment will be produced for parliament and will outline the long term infrastructure needs of the country.
4. We have recently responded to a call for evidence providing Local Government's perspective on a wide variety of infrastructure sectors. We have urged the Commission to consider how greater devolution of funding and greater power for councils can reduce the need for large capital intensive schemes and ensure that the country's infrastructure is well maintained and used as efficiently as possible.

Highways England

5. The LGA has contributed to Highways England's discussion paper The Road to Growth. It is part of their commitment to publish a strategic economic growth plan for maximising the economic contribution of the Strategic Road Network. It highlighted the key roles the network plays in economic growth.
6. We welcomed the document and made clear that for this approach to be a success it needs to be embedded throughout Highways England. They also need to recognise their role in ensuring the entire transport network is functioning efficiently. Only by all areas of the transport network functioning efficiently together can we ensure that the SRN unlocks the maximum benefit.

Unlocking Growth in Partnership

7. Melanie Leech, Chief Executive of the British Property Federation, and I jointly launched [a good practice guide](#) on unlocking commercial growth through long-term public/private collaboration. The report highlights best practice of councils and developers and identifies key asks of central government to help attract investment into local areas and achieve better growth.

Housing White Paper

8. The Government published its Housing White Paper which included a number of lobbying wins for the EEHT Board, including: more resourcing for planning departments; the dropping of the starter homes requirement; powers for councils to set up local development corporations and more. However, councils are more ambitious than the White Paper which lacked substantive measures to support councils to build affordable homes rapidly. The EEHT Board will work with the Government on influencing the detail of proposals, and campaign for new flexibilities and powers so that councils can meet local need. An LGA briefing is available [here](#).

Homelessness Reduction Bill

9. The Homelessness Reduction Bill has finished its progress in the House of Commons and enters the Lords on 24 February. The Bill places further duties on local government. We have worked hard to remove some elements of the original Bill that would have been unworkable for many councils to deliver, and helped secure over £60 million to meet new duties and a commitment from the Government to review this within a couple of years. However, the EEHT Board will continue to push for adequate resources to deliver new duties, and for wider housing and welfare reforms that will be crucial to delivering ambitions to reduce homelessness.

Neighbourhood Planning bill

10. The EEHT Board has briefed MPs in advance of debates on the Neighbourhood Planning Bill as it has worked its way through the House of Commons and now through the House of Lords. We have stressed that the Bill could do more to help the Government achieve its ambitions on speeding up the delivery of new homes and to enable local authorities to deliver responsive planning services through adequate resourcing. The LGA has been quoted widely by MPs in their discussions, including our concerns about the proposed reforms to the use of planning conditions, local development plans and our research on office to residential permitted development rights.

Housing Conference

11. The EEHT Board has been preparing a free national housing conference to explore and set out councils' future role in meeting local housing need. To view the programme and register visit the LGA events page linked [here](#).

Press Releases and Statements

12. I have recently made public statements on a report by a new [Local Government Ombudsman on parking fines](#), as well as [new government statistics which show an increase in the number of people sleeping rough](#) and the publication of the governments [Housing White Paper](#).

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