

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

Flooding

1. The government has responded to our calls for additional funding to help with repairs to flood and coastal defences and extensive damage to roads. They have committed an additional £270 million flood defence grant-in-aid over 3 years and £183.5 million for roads which will be paid out to councils by the end of March. In the budget the government also announced a further £200 million for potholes which is a competitive bidding fund.
2. I continue to represent the LGA at the weekly Severe Weather Ministerial Recovery Group chaired by Eric Pickles. We are also continuing to work closely with central Government on the funding schemes that have been announced – this includes the Repair and Renewal Scheme which launched on the 1 April. Councils are playing a crucial role in scheme roll-outs and Whitehall is taking an interest in council arrangements to help residents and businesses access the available funds.
3. In addition, the LGA has provided written evidence on flood maintenance measures to an EFRA Select Committee inquiry. The evidence highlights that value for money can only be delivered if investment in capital funding and maintenance of flood and coastal risk assets are planned together. We also advocated a single place-based pot in each area for capital and revenue budgets to provide increased flexibility to target funding according to local priorities.

Housing

4. On 13 March, I met with Alan Ward, the Chairman of the Residential Landlords Association (RLA) and Policy Director Richard Jones to discuss opportunities to attract investment into the sector and most importantly, raise standards. This included consideration of how a co-regulatory arrangement alongside Councils' enforcement role might work. There was a great deal of common ground and while recognising that the vast majority of private landlords provide good accommodation and work constructively with the local authority, I emphasised that when all other options have failed, councils must be able to take swift and meaningful action through the courts as a last resort against criminal landlords. The LGA will be publishing proposals to reform the regulatory framework to ensure that it is fit for purpose in May 2015.
5. The LGA has recently submitted written evidence on housing to the Lyons Review, highlighting the role of councils in bringing forward housing of all tenures - either directly, or in partnership with registered providers or commercial developers. A key message within this evidence is that the successful delivery of over 200,000 housing units per year cannot be delivered by the private sector alone. Councils must be provided with the flexibilities to build to full capacity. <http://www.local.gov.uk/housing>.
6. Recently, the LGA surveyed councils on their self-financing plans, including plans to invest in existing stock and plans to build new homes. Research findings were positive: 98% of councils responding planned to release land for housing over the next five years and 88% planned to build over the same time period.

http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/research-housing/-/journal_content/56/10180/6009823/ARTICLE

Planning

7. The Government has recently [launched a consultation](#) on criteria for identifying under-performing planning authorities and proposals for minimum thresholds within Section 106 agreements for affordable housing. The LGA has raised concern that, in many areas, proposals will undermine councils' ability to deliver affordable housing. The LGA will be responding to the consultation shortly.

Waste

8. I met with Laura Sandys MP on 19 March to discuss the LGA's proposals to obtain increased value from household waste. We discussed the need to change perceptions to view waste as a resource that could help contribute to economic growth.
9. The LGA launched its 'Routes to Reuse' document on the 27 March 2014. The report identified that over £400 million of additional value could be obtained by reusing and repairing products that are currently thrown away. The report received positive coverage on the BBC.

Energy and the Environment

10. Cllr Tim Moore chaired the Climate Local conference on 31 March 2014. The conference heard from speakers including Cllr Robert Light, Deputy Chairman of the Environment Agency, Energy UK, the National Housing Federation and a number of local authorities sharing innovative initiatives at the local level. The Environment Agency have also agreed to second a member of staff to support the LGA's Climate Local support tool for a further year, until March 2015.
11. Cllr Tim Moore gave evidence to the ECC Select Committee on the 1 April 2014 on the Green Deal and ECO. Cllr Moore stressed that councils should have a much bigger role in ensuring that there is better take up of the Green Deal. He said that the Green Deal needed council's assistance to become more successful as they were in tune with what energy efficiency measures are required for their areas. Giving councils a bigger role in this initiative would prevent the fragmented approach and poor uptake that we have seen to date.

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