

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

### **Housing**

1. Cllr Jones contributed to a consultation event for key stakeholders on community-led housing solutions hosted by Lord Best and the Building and Social Housing Foundation in Windsor from 28-30 May. Discussions surrounded the potential for scaling up community housing initiatives as part of the mainstream housing market and the role of community housing activities that increase the supply of new housing.
2. In recent evidence submitted to the Lyons Housing review and the Government's review of the role of local authorities in housing supply, the LGA has highlighted that building in excess of 200,000 homes per annum is only possible if councils are given the flexibilities to deliver to full potential. In the submission, we argue for stronger powers to incentivise sites for housing (with quick completion of planning permission); for more effective release of surplus public sector land for housing via an extension of deferred payments on public land; and for the pooling of surplus public land assets at a local level for disposal and investment.

### **Flooding**

3. Councillor Jones has continued to represent the LGA on the Severe Weather Ministerial Recovery Group chaired by Eric Pickles MP which meets on a fortnightly basis. Key issues dealt with include ensuring effective roll-out of the government support schemes; support to councils needing further help with inspection of damaged assets and assessment of the extent to which funding allocation for roads and flood/coastal defences aligns with need.
4. The LGA Chairman, Sir Merrick Cockell has also met with Oliver Letwin MP to discuss the response to the flooding and hosted a roundtable with Brandon Lewis MP and council leaders to discuss councils' experience and response.
5. Liaison with the Environment Agency (EA) continues, with Cllr Mike Jones meeting Environment Agency Deputy Chair, Cllr Robert Light in June to discuss a number of items including: response to the recent floods; a framework for recovery from future events and EA withdrawal from maintenance. This follows on from a meeting between the EA Chairman, Lord Chris Smith and Sir Merrick Cockell in May 2014.
6. We continue to raise our concerns with officials and Ministers from Defra and the Department for Communities and Local Government about timescales for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) implementation and stressed it cannot go ahead until a charging and collection regime has been resolved and agreed. Implementation will give Lead Local Flood Authorities - county and single-tier – new responsibilities for approving, adopting and maintaining surface water drainage for new development. In response, Defra wrote to councils and the LGA in May to clarify that implementation will not happen in October 2014.

### **Planning**

7. In response to concerns raised by councils over a recent appeal decision, Cllr Jones wrote to Planning Minister, Nick Boles MP on 17 March regarding the issue of needs assessment for Gypsy and Traveller sites. Our letter sought to clarify that the assessment of Traveller accommodation needs should be based on local evidence, as opposed to a nationally defined figure. In response to the letter, Brandon Lewis MP confirmed that the application of an annual growth rate of 3 percent is not Government policy - that assessment must be performed locally, based on local evidence of

household formation, as outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The letter also confirmed that the Department for Communities and Local Government will ensure that this is clarified to Planning Inspectors and will update corresponding guidance accordingly.

8. The Communities and Local Government Committee has recently announced an Inquiry on the NPPF, to review its operation over its first two years and its impact on planning for housing, town centres and energy infrastructure. The LGA has submitted written evidence to the Committee outlining our views and Cllr Tony Newman will give oral evidence to the Committee on 9 June.
9. The LGA has recently responded to DCLG's consultation on Planning Performance and Planning Contributions. The response highlights our view that the planning performance regime is an unnecessary measure focused on process targets and stresses that a sector-led approach is a more effective means of driving improvement. It also sets out concerns that introducing mandatory exemptions to Section 106 affordable housing contributions will undermine the ability of local authorities to deliver much-needed affordable housing.

#### **Waste**

10. The LGA has contested clauses in the Deregulation Bill which remove the power to prescribe collection arrangements and decriminalise the offence. Our position is that these are unnecessary changes which will only serve to hamper the wider efforts of residents to increase recycling rates. The LGA has proposed that existing arrangements be retained but that the fine be reduced from £1000 to £200.
11. The LGA has provided written evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) inquiry on 'Waste Management in England'. Our evidence highlights how councils have delivered a transformation to waste service in recent years – radically reducing landfill and increasing recycling - and will continue with efforts to increase the capture of material for reuse and recycling. We will also present oral evidence to the inquiry in July.
12. The Commons Environmental Audit Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the economic benefits of waste and recycling. The LGA has provided a written response to the inquiry, highlighting how councils have contributed to a more circular economy, have delivered a transformation, and will continue with efforts to increase the capture of material for reuse and recycling. The LGA has also been asked to present oral evidence to the Committee on 11 June.

#### **Fracking**

13. On 8 April Sir Merrick Cockell and Cllr Jones attended a meeting with the United Kingdom Onshore Operators Group (UKOOG), a body comprised of representatives from the fracking industry. During the meeting, Sir Merrick and Cllr Jones stressed the importance of effective communication from the industry with councils, including provision of accessible information on regulation to address perceived safety concerns and any potential community benefits envisaged.

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