

11 February 2020

Housing Update Paper February 2020

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

An update of the policy and improvement work that has been carried out for the Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board covering housing, planning, homelessness and building safety since the last Board.

Recommendation

That Members of the Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board note the contents of the report.

Action

Officers to take forward any member comments for future policy work.

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Planning

1. Permitted development rights (PDR) – We are engaging with a number of national stakeholders who continue to raise concerns about the impact of permitted development rights to plan post-election activity and how we can work together to maximise our influence. We understand that the government has now commissioned a review of permitted development rights for conversion of buildings to residential use in respect of the quality standard of homes delivered.
2. Probity in planning – we have now received a final draft of this update to the 2013 Probity in Planning guide for councillors and officers. The final version will be published in December.
3. Planning White Paper - MHCLG have committed to publishing a Planning White Paper to reform and speed up the planning system. We convened a round table with senior planning officers in February to help inform our response.
4. Future Homes Standard consultation – we are engaging with councils and other stakeholders to inform our response to this consultation which looks at how the government's commitment to reducing emissions can be achieved through new homes building guidance.
5. Future Place programme – we are continuing to work with the RTPI, CIH, RIBA, Homes England and Local Partnerships to provide capacity support to the 5 Future Places that were announced in March 2019. Future Place is a joint programme to unlock local potential for place-shaping. A mid-term review has recently been held with programme participants presenting on activity to date.
6. Housing, Planning and Infrastructure Conference – this will be held on 17 March 2020 and work is underway to secure speakers.
7. Compulsory purchase – we ran a technical masterclass for local authorities on understanding compulsory purchase orders and compensation.

Housing

8. Working with the National Housing Federation – following on from the case studies we have recently published on councils working in partnership with housing associations, officers are currently planning future joint activity.
9. Parliamentary briefings - we have briefed MPs ahead of the following debates: [Building out extant planning permissions](#)

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10. Right to Buy (RtB) reform – We continue to make the case for 100 per cent retention of sales receipts and the ability for councils to set discounts locally through the media and our engagement with government and other stakeholders. The government response to the RtB consultation which closed last year is still awaited.
11. Social Housing Green Paper – an update is still awaited from the Government on the next steps from the Green Paper.

Private Rented Sector

12. Private rented sector improvement project – The LGA has commissioned a piece of research that is looking at the range of activity being undertaken to improve the quality of the private rented sector and to understand the key challenges. The final report and a practical toolkit for councils will be published in March 2020.
13. The researchers have begun to engage with key stakeholders within the sector and a number of councils across England. This will capture a broad range of housing markets, levels of demand and geographical nuances across urban, rural and coastal areas to help build up a picture of council activity in the private rented sector and associated resource, capacity and powers that councils are leveraging.
14. Early conversations and an initial review of policy have highlighted some key areas and that will be explored further. These include the following:
 - 14.1. The impact of demographic changes in the private rented sector e.g. a growth in pensioner households; short-term lets and the powers to control this; and the impact of climate change and importance of retrofitting properties.
 - 14.2. Understanding the extent of use of current legislation and powers used by councils.
 - 14.3. Understanding the strategic approaches that councils are taking in enforcement activities and how councils can better align their activities with policy.
 - 14.4. The role that consumer regulation can play in improving the quality in the private rented sector.
 - 14.5. Selective licensing is the most prominent aspect of local authority involvement in improving the quality of the private rented sector, and informal activity also appears to be popular.
15. The next stage in the research involves undertaking a deep dive with a selection of councils to develop more in-depth case studies and explore some of the emerging key areas further. The findings will inform the toolkit that we will launch and disseminate to the sector in a way that is most practical and effective for councils to use.

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Homelessness

16. Homelessness prevention project – The LGA has conducted research with councils on policy changes needed to support the effective delivery of homelessness prevention services. A summary of the findings will be published in March.
17. Out of area placements – The LGA is currently seeking legal advice on its protocol, following which it will consult councils on its provisions. This protocol outlines the actions to be taken by councils when moving households from one council area to another. This work was carried out by a steering group, comprised of local housing authorities and children's services, to develop an approach whereby the LGA could add value in supporting positive working between councils in a way that best supports families and services.
18. Working well with the voluntary sector – the LGA continues to work with Homeless Link to publish a short joint guidance note on how voluntary sector organisations can seek to work strategically with councils to tackle local homelessness issues. We will be holding a consultation event with members from both organisations in December 2019, and will publish the guidance shortly afterwards.
19. Local Homelessness Strategies – our guidance for local authorities on formulating, delivering and governing local homelessness strategies was published in December. This is intended to support local authorities, as well as inform Government work to reform the structures that support partnership working and accountabilities in homelessness.
20. Events with the National Housing Federation – we are hosting two events in collaboration with the National Housing Federation on joint work between councils and housing associations to tackle homelessness. These events are taking place in London and Manchester in March 2020.

Building safety

21. Hackitt Review – The Government has announced that a new building safety regulator will be established within the Health and Safety Executive. We continue to work with the National Fire Chiefs Council, Local Authority Building Control, and the Health and Safety Executive to advise Government on detailed proposals, as part of our role in the Joint Regulators Group.
22. The Government has also announced that it intends to lower the height threshold for sprinkler requirements in new buildings from 30 metres to 11 metres. The LGA had called for the height threshold to be lowered, and funded retrofitting on a risk-basis, and welcomed the government's announcement.

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23. Remediation work – work of the Joint Inspection Team commenced in August and is ongoing, with five councils having been supported so far. This is the LGA-hosted, MHCLG-funded multi-disciplinary taskforce which is supporting councils to enforce the removal of ACM cladding. In the queen’s speech, the Government committed to strengthening the enforcement powers of fire and rescue services through legislation, which the LGA welcomed. Until this takes place, councils continue to be best-placed to enforce cladding issues under the Housing Act 2004.
24. The deadline for private sector building owners to apply for ACM remediation funding has now passed, although the Government has indicated that newly-discovered buildings with ACM cladding may be eligible for funding. We continue to support the Government to work with councils to drive enforcement where necessary.

Housing Improvement

25. Housing Springboard programme update – We have now successfully delivered the first two of three masterclass events in December and January. The programme is developed and delivered by the Housing & Finance Institute to investigate the different options available to councils in order to enable housebuilding. It brings councils together with industry experts to provide business, technical and leadership support relevant to their needs. The final masterclass will take place on 5 March 2020.

Press releases and statements

26. We have issued proactive press releases on the following: [councils overspending on homelessness services](#).
27. We have also made public statements on the following: [response to latest homelessness statistics](#); [response to Crisis report on sofa surfing](#); [LGA responds to end of Local Housing Allowance freeze](#)