

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

Housing

1. Councillors Mike Jones and Clyde Loakes met with senior members of the National Housing Federation to discuss shared opportunities and challenges on issues including housing supply and the impacts of welfare reforms in June. The LGA and NHF agreed to work closely together on these two matters to include aligning our work to share good practice and encourage effective partnership working.

Planning

2. The LGA will be surveying local authorities to understand the impacts of the 2013 changes to permitted development for householder extensions and office to residential conversions. Findings from the survey will be available in early August 2014 and will support the LGA to press for changes to permitted development rights through the Infrastructure Bill.
3. The LGA has contested clauses in the Infrastructure Bill which put in place deemed consent arrangements for planning conditions and to transfer the responsibility for local land charge searches to the Land Registry, from local authorities. The LGA will continue to press for these clauses to be removed from the face of the bill through briefings and meetings with parliamentarians.
4. Cllr Tony Newman gave evidence to the Commons Select Committee enquiry into the Operation of the National Planning Policy Framework on 9 June. In his response, Cllr Newman argued that infrastructure needed to be seen as integral to developments, highlighting work which the LGA was currently developing to address issues that councils face in planning for, and securing funding for, infrastructure required to support economic and housing growth. He called for greater resources to be given to support the planning process and advocated a period of stability to allow recent planning reforms to bed in.

Waste

5. Councillors Jones and Loakes met with Maria Eagle and Barry Gardiner MP in June. We argued that the debate on waste needed to be seen as an economic issue and that there was huge potential to secure increased value if we invest in the infrastructure to support this. This is the key waste issue; and not collection frequency. The LGA also updated on the work of local authorities to respond to the severe wedding and flooding which affected many areas this winter and set out proposals to simplify systems for accessing funding and support.

6. Cllr Loakes gave evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee as part of their "Growing a circular economy" inquiry. The inquiry's remit is to explore whether economic growth can be de-coupled from natural resource use and the role of the household recycling and waste management sector in the circular economy.

Flooding and SuDS

7. Councillor Jones met Dan Rogerson MP on 30 June 2014. The LGA used the meeting to press our concerns that the government has still not clarified an appropriate funding mechanism for SuDs It was stressed that there should be no additional financial cost to councils. Cllr Jones also discussed flood maintenance and received an update from the Minister on the government's work to simplify the framework for emergency funds and invite views on options for future flood defences.
8. Councillor Jones met with Councillor Robert Light in June 2014. Councillor Jones outlined the concerns that councils have raised about the Environment Agency's withdrawal from maintenance activity and to transfer costs to councils. The Environment Agency and LGA agreed to share information of the costs of this activity on local areas. The LGA and Environment Agency also provided information on the activity taking place across local areas to support the recovery following the severe weather and flooding earlier this year.
9. Councillor Jones has continued to represent the LGA on the Severe Weather Ministerial Recovery Group chaired by the Rt Hon 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. Councillor Jones has also used these meetings to stress the need for a simplified framework for recovery for future events. This proposal has been well received by Ministers from across government departments.

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