

07 July 2020

## **Housing, planning and homelessness update - July 2020**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

An update of the housing, planning and homelessness work that has recently been carried for the Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board.

### **Recommendation**

That Lead Members reflect and provide any comments on the issues and proposals raised in this update.

### **Action**

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

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## **Housing and planning update - June 2020**

### **Planning**

1. Item 4 provides more detail on the Government's recent and proposed reforms to the planning system and LGA activity in this area.
2. We will be shortly be launching a public campaign, to promote the importance of a local plan-led system, democratic accountability and public participation in planning.

### **Housing**

3. We have published a report detailing our proposals for a housing stimulus package that would enable councils to build more affordable, high-quality and sustainable homes at scale, and at pace. Our proposals include Right to Buy reform, a consistent approach to rents policy, provision of additional capacity and improvement support for housing delivery teams, increased funding of the Affordable Homes Programme and access to other finance, borrowing and land to deliver council housebuilding programmes. We have sent a copy of the report to the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick and other government Ministers and will continue to promote our asks over the coming months.
4. We have continued to raise concerns with government that some councils are at risk of having to risk of having to return unspent Right to Buy receipts to the government. In response, the government has granted councils an extra six months to spend Right to Buy receipts that were due to be spent by the end of June and an additional three months to spend those due to be spent by the end of September. We continue to push for a longer extension, so that councils have at least five years to spend receipts. We are still awaiting the government's response to the Right to Buy consultation which closed in 2018.
5. Stock-holding local authorities have been feeding in information about the cost and income pressures on their Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) as part of MHCLG's monthly monitoring of COVID-19 impact on the financial health of local councils. We are working with MHCLG and councils to understand the range of scenarios that may result and the different options available.
6. We have convened (OPE) a housing delivery discussion group, consisting of senior Housing and Regeneration Leads from a number of local authorities across England, to understand and collectively think about the challenges and opportunities for councils to deliver housing in both the short and medium – long term. The first session was jointly hosted by the LGA and OPE in partnership with Homes England and provided invaluable insight for shaping our support offers to members and informing our engagement with government - including our recommendations for the housing stimulus package.

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7. We have run a webinar focusing on the role councils have to play in building again following COVID-19 as part of our housing improvement support offer.

#### Homelessness

8. Homelessness services continue to experience significant pressure, both in terms of continuing to accommodate and support people in hotels under the "everyone in" initiative, and identifying safe and suitable move-on options.
9. We have sought clarity from MHCLG on whether the "everyone in" policy still applies to councils, and they have confirmed that it does. In June, Cllr Renard wrote to Luke Hall MP to ask that any decision to end "everyone in" was made nationally, and with clear public health evidence, and that councils are fully reimbursed for any accommodation and support provided up to the programme's end. We are working with Public Health England to understand when "everyone in" could safely end.
10. On 28 May, Luke Hall wrote to council chief executives to ask for the return of high-level move on plans for people currently in emergency accommodation. To support councils in completing these returns, we worked with Local Partnerships to publish a [briefing note](#) on options available for accommodation for rough sleepers. This is a live document and we will continue to update it, including with further technical briefings, subject to demand.
11. We have also been lobbying government for key policy and funding changes needed to ensure that councils avoid being put in the position of returning people to the streets. In particular, we have lobbied through [press work](#) and direct communication with ministers for the temporary and universal lifting of the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition, and an expedited end to Section 21 evictions, as proposed by the government in their June 2019 consultation.
12. On the 24 June, the government announced an additional £105 million to help local authorities implement a range of support interventions for people placed into emergency accommodation, as well as a further £16 million to provide specialist treatment for substance dependence. This is in addition to funding announced on 24 May to provide 3,300 homes for vulnerable rough sleepers this year. The Government has also temporarily, nationally suspended an EU derogation to enable councils to accommodate and support a specific group of EEA nationals who are sleeping rough for up to 12 weeks. This does not extend to access to statutory services or welfare benefits.
13. In June, MHCLG hosted both the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel and a local authority discussion group, which is feeding into the recovery workstream being led by Dame Louise Casey (referred to as a "taskforce"). We attended both to raise councils' concerns and will continue to do so. Dame Louise also agreed to participate in a successful webinar that we held on homelessness.

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14. We are also engaged in a working group on possession proceedings being chaired by Mr Justice Knowles. This has been set up as a result of the Civil Justice Council's review of the impact of COVID-19 on the operation of the civil justice system. It is looking at how the courts can best manage the backlog of housing possession proceedings that are expected once the courts recommence at the end of August. This includes: consideration on how cases should be prioritised, potential strengthening of the pre-action protocol, potential relaxation of mandatory grounds for possession to reflect the circumstances created the pandemic and ensuring that defendants and their representatives can effectively participate in hearings.