

City Regions Board Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper provides members with a brief update on issues and policy areas not covered by other items on the agenda.

Recommendation

Members are to note the contents of the report.

Action

Officers to take forward any comments from members.

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City Regions Board Update Paper

EU Exit and Transition

1. Since the referendum in 2016, the LGA has taken a neutral stance on the issue of EU exit. We have been consistently working with Government on the opportunities and risks of EU exit to local areas on behalf of councils and the communities they serve.
2. The LGA has been clear that councils face multiple challenges in the coming months. Councils are ensuring that their communities are as safe as possible from the COVID virus. Council capacity will be stretched, and we have highlighted this issue in our conversations with Government.
3. As we head to the end of the transition period, the below provides a summary of the current key issues for councils, highlighted below, that the LGA is raising through its lobbying including to the Delivery Board: both those issues directly related to the end of EU transition on 31 December 2020 and those issues that became domestic policy when the UK left the EU in January 2020.
4. Consequences of the end of transition:
 - 4.1. Autumn/winter pressures and capacity to prepare
 - 4.2. Preparedness of regulatory services, including demand on regulatory services
 - 4.3. officers and the new IT, infrastructure and training needed to support them
 - 4.4. Increase infrastructure demands for port towns, including transport links and the designated transit inland port sites
 - 4.5. Costs of any new tariff regime introduced
 - 4.6. Opportunities to reform state aid and procurement
 - 4.7. Data protection issues.
5. Post EU Exit policies:
 - 5.1. EU funding and the UKSPF
 - 5.2. EU Settlement Scheme and the focus on vulnerable people to apply to the scheme
 - 5.3. UK immigration policy and the consequence for social care workforce
 - 5.4. UK legacy of the Committee of the Regions
 - 5.5. Freeports.

Freeports

6. The Government has now published its response to its freeports consultation which the LGA responded to on behalf of the Board. In it they made clear:
 - 6.1. Government will consider approving more than ten Freeports in the event of a large number of high-quality proposals;
 - 6.2. Seed capital will be provided to address infrastructure constraints relevant to Freeports and their surrounding area;
 - 6.3. Existing zonal planning tools like Local Development Orders (LDOs) have a role to play in delivering residential and commercial development in local areas around Freeports;
 - 6.4. To combat economic displacement, bids will be invited to provide evidence and proposed mitigation activities as part of their bids;
 - 6.5. The government is evaluating options for local authorities to retain business rates as part of the Freeports programme;
 - 6.6. Bidders will be expected to have fully engaged the relevant local authority and have its full buy-in to proposals to be a Freeport.
7. Government is aiming to launch the bidding prospectus in time for the process to have finished before local election purdah kicks in ahead of local elections next year.

Housing and Planning Update

8. The LGA, through the work of the EEHT Board, has been lobbying Government for some time on changes to the planning system that would improve the ability of councils to shape their areas for the benefit of communities, as well as supporting the Government's aim of building 300,000 homes per year. The Board re-confirmed its positions on housing planning [at its meeting on 19 May](#). This includes:
 9. Lobbying for increased flexibilities for local planning authorities to ensure continued delivery of effective planning services during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak
 10. Pursuing options for: strengthening the local plan process; giving councils greater powers to act where housebuilding has stalled; an 'infrastructure first' approach; removal of national permitted development rights; removal of sanctions where councils do not meet 5 year housing land supply or Housing Delivery Test requirements; locally-set planning fees.

11. Continuing to influence the Planning White Paper
12. Working with Homes England and other stakeholders on skills and capacity issues that are slowing housing growth
13. Making the case for councils to have the powers and funding to deliver more homes that are affordable, sustainable and meet the needs of communities
14. Making the case for right to buy reform and flexibilities including 100% retention of receipts and the ability for councils to set discounts locally
15. Working with councils to understand the impact of income and cost pressures resulting from COVID-10 on council housebuilding programmes
16. We also launched our [‘Keep Planning Local’ campaign](#) in July, which was supported by a large number of signatories and received national media coverage. Our press releases on the [impact of removing the requirements for developers to build affordable homes on small sites](#) and the [impact of proposed new housing targets](#) were also widely reported in both local and national media.
17. We have also [published a report](#) outlining the tools, powers and flexibilities that councils need to plan for and deliver the quality homes and infrastructure that communities need. A second report details 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.
18. On 6 August, the Government published the [Planning for the Future White Paper](#) consultation paper with proposals for long-term fundamental structural changes to England’s planning system. The consultation period closed on **29 October**. A copy of the LGA’s response can be sent to Board members.
19. Alongside this, they also published the consultation paper [Changes to the current planning system](#) which includes proposals for more immediate amendments to existing processes. The consultation period closed on **1 October** and we await the Government’s response. [The LGA has responded to the consultation](#).
20. Councillor David Renard, the Chairman of the EEHT Board had the opportunity in September, alongside LGA Chairman, Councillor James Jamieson, to brief over 20 MPs and peers at a parliamentary briefing session on housing and planning. We have also briefed MPs for parliamentary debates on [planning reform and housebuilding targets](#) and [motions related to planning](#) and have recently submitted evidence to the Housing, Communities Local Government Committee for their [new inquiry into the future of the](#)

[planning system](#).

21. LGA officers have been working with councils to develop the detailed responses to both planning consultations. This includes: working with our planning officers' steering group to better understand the implications of the reforms and holding webinars for members and officers (in conjunction with the District Councils' and County Councils' Network) to gather views. EEHT Board members have provided input into both responses. We have also gathered feedback from other LGA Boards, including both the People and Places and the City Regions Boards.
22. We will be continuing our engagement with both parliamentarians and officials to ensure that the concerns of councils and our key asks are heard in Government. We have also indicated that we want to work pragmatically with officials to try and design any reforms to the planning system, so we can seek to ensure they are introduced in the best interest of councils and communities.

Heads of Place Pilot

23. The Cabinet Office has launched a new pilot initiative - Heads of Place. Its aims are to better coordinate UK Government presence and action in each of the regions and nations of the UK, providing stronger, visible leadership for the civil service, and a more consistent and streamlined engagement for partners. Twelve interim Heads of Place have been appointed from within the civil service at Director level. Each Head of Place has been appointed to cover a specific region.
24. The Cabinet Office see Heads of Place as "better joining up the work of central government so we can be a better partner to you and colleagues in your places." The longer-term purpose of Heads of Place in a more ambitious model will be threefold; to work with the Places for Growth reforms to support fulfilling careers across the UK; to work with local partners to tackle the challenges and grasp the opportunities present in each place; and to use their learning and perspective to influence national decision making, driving wider transformation across how Whitehall currently works.
25. The LGA will be engaging with this initiative to ensure that the voice of local government is clearly heard by the Heads of Place. An initial workshop has taken place to hear feedback from councils, combined authorities and LEPs. All groups have welcomed the opportunity to have greater direct links into Government. We will also work to further understand how this new initiative can support more localised recovery across the country.