

Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – report from Cllr David Renard (Chairman)

Housing, planning and homelessness

Housing Improvement

1. After some delays due to the impact of COVID-19 we are now moving forward with the Housing Advisers Programme (HAP) for 2020/21 which is designed to support councils seeking to innovate in meeting the housing needs of their communities. The 2020/21 HAP opened for applications on 12 November 2020 with a closing date of 7th January 2021. Successful bids are expected to be announced by 22nd January 2020. For more information visit www.local.gov.uk/housingadvisersprogramme
2. Together with the National Federation of ALMOs and the Association of Retained Council Housing we commissioned published [a report](#) by Pragmatix Advisory demonstrating that a post-pandemic building boom of 100,000 new social homes for rent each year would meet demand for affordable homes and deliver a £14.5 billion boost to the economy. The report was [cover story in The Observer](#) and covered in other media channels.
3. In November we held a webinar on the obligations and opportunities for custom or self-build housing. The webinar included presenters from the Right To Build Task Force and Mid Devon District Council.

Planning reforms

4. In October we responded to [Government's Planning for the Future White Paper](#) consultation. In [our response](#) we raised our concerns with a number of the wide-ranging proposals such as a shortened 30-month Local Plan timeframe; land in future Local Plans being allocated into one of three areas - Growth, Renewal, Protect; a new Infrastructure Levy; and the reduction of councillor and community input. We have begun working with Government on proposals we support such as the shift to a more digital approach and a skills strategy.
5. We simultaneously responded to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's parallel [inquiry into the future of the planning system in England](#) which examined how well the proposed reforms would support Government's wider building strategy, including their target of 300,000 new homes a year. In our evidence we stated that only a locally-led planning system in which councils and the communities they represent have a say over the way places develop will ensure the delivery of high-quality affordable homes with the necessary infrastructure to create sustainable, resilient places.

Decarbonisation of housing

6. In November we responded to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee's [inquiry into decarbonising heat homes](#). In our evidence we noted the vital role local government plays in accelerating the shift towards achieving net carbon zero. We also noted that it is important that councils have the tools, powers and flexibilities they need to improve quality standards and decarbonise heat in existing and new build homes and deliver the types of new homes and infrastructure their communities need.

Homelessness

7. In December, the LGA published [a policy paper on Rethinking Homelessness Prevention](#). Based on research commissioned by the LGA and delivered by the Institute for Social Policy, Housing, and Equalities and Neil Morland and Co., the paper calls for an explicit, national-level focus on upstream homelessness prevention, with the associated resources for councils.
8. In December, Councillor Rachel Blake gave evidence to the Housing, Communities, and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into the impact of coronavirus on private renting and homelessness, on behalf of the EEHT board. She raised issues relating to local government funding, the No Recourse to Public Funds condition, and welfare benefits, including Discretionary Housing Payments. The committee has also [published the LGA's written evidence into the inquiry](#).
9. Working with Local Partnerships, [the LGA published a briefing on the lessons learned from the COVID response](#) for local authorities' homelessness services in November. In December, I chaired a webinar to discuss the report's findings with councils. Steve Philpott, the Strategic Lead for Rough Sleeping at Birmingham City Council, attended to share Birmingham's experiences and approach.

Building safety

10. The LGA has [published a briefing](#) aimed at any ward councillors supporting residents experiencing cladding issues in their local areas. It explains the background to cladding issues, highlights issues facing residents, and sets out ways in which councillors might support them.

Environment and climate change

11. A number of key policy documents on climate change were published at the end of 2020. These include:

11.1 [Ten Point Plan](#): announced by Government which sets out ambitions for a Green Industrial Revolution and the approach that government will take on the UK's path to net zero. It outlines investment and support for developing the low carbon economy, in areas such as clean transport, green jobs, renewable energy, homes and public buildings, carbon capture and storage, nature and innovation. Key commitments include bringing forward the ban on selling new petrol and diesel cars to 2030, creating 250,000 jobs and mobilising £12 billion of government investment. The LGA provided a [response](#) which is published on our website.

11.2 [Energy White Paper: Powering our net zero future](#): published by The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) which sets out plans for a clean energy system. The White Paper builds on the government's Ten Point Plan and at the centre is a green economic recovery by supporting up to 220,000 jobs across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and, keeping energy bills affordable.

11.3 [Sixth Carbon Budget](#) (the limit on UK emissions for 2033 – 37): which consists of recommendations by the Committee on Climate Change to Government on meeting the UK's carbon reduction targets. It includes a number of reports including on a pathway to net zero by 2050 and a specific report on [the role of local authorities to achieve net zero](#). This report highlights that councils share Government's climate change ambitions, and key recommendations include a delivery framework incorporating local and national action and, flexible long-term financing for local authorities.

12. Biodiversity and Ecosystems – Cllr Philip Glanville gave evidence to the Parliamentary Environment Audit Committee Inquiry into Biodiversity and Ecosystems on 12 November, highlighting our concerns about the impact of the new measures in the Environment Bill on councils, particularly the introduction of biodiversity net gain through the planning system. The Environment Bill is expected to move to the House of Lords shortly, and we are waiting for a revised timetable.
13. We responded to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) inquiry on managing flood risks. We also contributed to the LGA's submission to the Environment Audit Committee's (EAC) inquiry on green jobs.
14. The [results](#) of the LGA's climate change survey, which was issued by officers in February 2020 and closed in October 2020 due to Covid-19, has been published on our website. A press release on the findings on climate-related incidents affecting councils was also [released](#).
15. The LGA has worked with Local Partnerships to publish a [green finance practical guide](#) to help councils understand the options available for financing their green ambitions and how these might apply to different types of projects. We delivered a webinar to support the launch of the guide and it forms part of our activities in the lead up to COP26. We are working on a number of activities based on the five areas of focus announced by Government in the lead up to the Summit, namely finance, clean energy, clean transport, nature-based solutions, and adaptation and resilience.

These activities seek to demonstrate and showcase the role of councils in delivering a local path to net zero.

Transport

National Infrastructure Strategy

16. The Government has launched its long delayed National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) which is a response to the National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) carried out by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and published in 2018. The strategy sets out the Government strategic infrastructure priorities for the coming parliament. We were disappointed that the Government did not fully implement the NICs recommendation that cities should have five-year guaranteed funding settlements for transport infrastructure.
17. Instead the Government is only seeking to guarantee these budgets for Mayoral Combined Authorities. We will continue to push the government to make long term settlements available to all areas to allow them to create long term infrastructure plans based on guaranteed and predictable funding.

Decarbonisation of transport

18. We completed our series of webinars on the decarbonisation of transport. The webinars were well attended and covered a wide variety of topics. The final webinar on active travel was recorded and can be viewed [here](#). The web resource for our decarbonisation project is available [here](#) and includes practical information for councils decarbonising their transport networks.

Public transport

19. The board has concluded our research project examining the future of public transport and councils' ambitions for their role in getting the industry going again post pandemic. We held a webinar on 19 January to reflect on the findings and discuss councils' role in the future of public transport. The webinar details are available [here](#).

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