

## Note of last Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board meeting

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**Title:** Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board  
**Date:** Wednesday 9 December 2020  
**Venue:** Zoom

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions
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#### 1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies were received from Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Mayor Philip Glanville, Cllr Ed turner, Cllr Michael Mordey.

Cllr Claire Coghill, Cllr Andrew Mackiewicz, Cllr Peter Mason, Cllr Claire Holland attended as substitutes.

Cllr Tim Hodgson and Cllr Diana Moore attended the meeting as observers.

#### 2 Economic Recovery Update (Guest Speaker Robert Pollock, Director at Social Finance)

The Chairman introduced Robert Pollock, Director at Social Finance.

Robert explained that Social Finance had been commissioned by LGA to develop good practice advice for councils leading and planning local economic recovery plans and would be interviewing up to 30 councils including Plymouth, Kent and Solihull.

Robert explained that there was a significant level of economic uncertainty following the measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, events were evolving, and although no certainty could be given it was clear that the UK was in new economic territory and had experienced the largest fall in GDP since records began.

During the financial crisis, global growth was at around 0. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, global growth was at around -4 or -5 percent. During the financial crisis, in the UK the largest monthly fall in GDP was one per cent, however in the UK in April 2020 the economy contracted by around 20 per cent. He also mentioned that job creation was twice as strong during the financial crisis as during the 2020 crisis.

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The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) analysis that fed into the Spending Review assumption on unemployment in UK assumed that there would be an EU transition deal and that mass Test, Track & Trace would take place and that a vaccine would be widely available. Without these things in place, there would be a greater negative economic impact than forecasted, however it was not possible to break down what this would look like at a local level.

Robert explained that the UK introduced public health measures later, for longer and more stringently than other European countries which had a negative effect on consumer habits and therefore the UK economy was more negatively affected than other major global economies.

Social, retail, hospitality, transport, construction, tourism, arts, and leisure sectors were all negatively affected. Things were improving which was positive and many people had been saving during COVID-19 so demand could increase.

Councils were most concerned about the impact on people - across advanced economies, lower skilled, lower waged and younger people were most affected by Covid-19 related job loses – these groups were also expected to experience the long-term effects most negatively.

Survey data showed that those who had been furloughed were most likely to lose their employment in the immediate future. Lower waged individuals were more likely to lose their jobs, as well as younger people, insecure workers, BAME and hospitality workers.

Controversial analyses ranking local authorities (districts in particular) around economic ability and scope to recover were unreliable but certain themes had emerged - some work by EY on behalf of the LGA's ADEPT network suggested that predominantly urban and predominantly rural areas were likely to experience a bigger negative impact. Regional integration, dependency on large employers or specific sectors, as well as any existing underlying vulnerability was also an indication of where negative effects would be felt.

Much of the action that needed to be taken was outside of the control of local authorities however Timothy Geithner, Obama's Treasury Secretary argued that 'any plan beats no plan'.

The main message Robert tried to get across was that local authorities must make plans even though the future was uncertain.

### Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the presentation and accompanying report.

## 3 Update from Housing Minister Chris Pincher MP

The Chairman welcome Chris Pincher MP, Minister of State for Housing, to the

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meeting and updated the board on planning white paper proposals. The Minister explained the consultation had closed on 29 October with 44 thousand submissions and will take time to work through. He also explained the following;

- Some clear themes have emerged through interaction with key stakeholders.
- There is broad support and encouragement for digitalisation of planning process.
- There is broad support for a map-based system that is more engaging, accessible, navigable.
- They were keen to look at the incentive to encourage developers to build where they have permission.
- Balance against disincentives there may be to SMEs.
- There had been a lot of interest in the infrastructure levy and how this will work, we need to consider whether a national levy is the correct approach or a more localised levy system.
- The Minister confirmed that over several months they will work on these key themes, engage with stakeholders to road test refine propositions so that when a final package is presented it is the right one.
- He emphasised that the consultation process is the start of this process and that it will take a big bill to make these changes. Planning community, architects, planners, developers, communities will then begin to make the cultural and systemic changes needed to implement a planning system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- The timeline on new legislation was not yet certain.

In the conversation that followed, the following points were raised;

- Concerns were raised around the affordable housing limit being under 50. In particular, there were concerns some developers would avoid this by simply bringing forward two smaller schemes instead of one large one. Views were expressed that modernising the planning system was a good thing, with this in mind some aspects of the White Paper were welcomed.
- Members emphasised they were confident in local governments' ability to deliver an effective planning system and felt that democratic local planning authorities should remain in place.
- Regarding decarbonisation the importance of Councils having the powers they need to build sustainable safe homes was raised.
- The Minister confirmed that they were taking environmental considerations into account, reforms will incorporate future building regulations to ensure sure that homes built from 2025 will be at least 75 per cent more efficient than they currently are.
- The Minister confirmed they were working with BEIS supply chain and the LGA to understand the challenges local authorities may have.
- The Minister also raised that ensuring the planning system would be more streamlined will free up councillors and planners to do more strategic planning.

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- Concerns were raised about the reduction in democratic accountability to communities if everything were to be frontloaded into the local plan, ultimately it should be councils that are responsible for shaping how their neighbourhoods develop and there was concern the new proposals would take those decisions out of the hands of democratically elected local people.
- The Minister explained the digitalised map-based system will be easier to read and use. As it stood, 1 per cent of populations would get involved in the plan making process as it is cumbersome and difficult to navigate.
- Concerns were raised about neighbourhood plans which had stalled. Members explained planning consultants had reported that neighbourhood plans had lost momentum. The Minister reinforced the message that neighbourhood plans still carried considerable clout, that plans should still be made and it was advantageous to have plans that were as up to date as possible.
- Concerns were raised about right to buy receipts. Members explained the way these were structured meant that additional funding was required from other sources in order to build which was a major barrier to spending right to buy receipts and deliverability generally. The minister said that he intended to make an announcement regarding this very soon.
- Members raised that optimising tool kits to ensure that planning inspections can be undertaken quickly, to speed up assessments and adjudications, would be valuable.
- A view was expressed that a new infrastructure levy based on the final developer land value would be a good approach going forwards. As there are such different markets, economies and land values across the country it was emphasised that it seemed beneficial to localise this process.

The Chairman gave thanks to the Minister for joining the meeting of the Board. He emphasised that local government wants to engage positively with government in terms of shaping the white paper proposals.

### Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board agreed to note the verbal update.

### Action

Officers will consider what key messages the EEHT Board want to take forward.

## **4 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Update** (Guest Speaker Penny Hobman, Director of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping at MHCLG)

The Chairman introduced Penny Hobman, Director for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping at MHCLG who was supporting Dame Louise Casey's work at the Ministry during the Covid-19 pandemic response.

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In her opening remarks Penny explained that her advisors had been working closely and collaboratively with LGA officers, throughout the pandemic response and thanked councillors and councils for their assistance.

Penny outlined the following:

- The 2019 Conservative Party manifesto pledged to end rough sleeping in the following parliament.
- The 2019 snapshot published in February 2020 showed encouraging signs and single night numbers were down from the 2018 record.
- In the Spring Budget of 2020 Significant new funding was put into homelessness and rough sleeping. There was a rough sleeping accommodation program to inject 6000 units of 'move on' accommodation into the housing pathway and new funding to tackle substance misuse.
- The response to the pandemic was extraordinary. The 'everyone in' saw a huge mobilisation of effort from health partners, the voluntary and community sector and crucially local government at the heart.
- By September 29,000 vulnerable people had been supported, 10,000 were in temporary accommodation and 19,000 had been provided with settled accommodation or 'move on' support. Evidence showed that this had saved lives, UCL research showed that preventative measures avoided over 21,000 infections, 260 deaths over 1,000 hospital admissions.
- The huge collective effort included legislation to delay when landlords could evict tenants, a stay on repossession proceedings and new protections to ensure bailiffs could not enforce evictions in England over the Christmas period, as well as increases to Universal Credit, local housing allowance and the introduction of the job retention scheme. Collectively £700 million of funding was spent in 2020 by central government on homelessness and rough sleeping.
- £112 million was allocated before the start of the pandemic for the rough sleeping initiative to fund existing plans and councils were later able to repurpose where necessary during the emergency response.
- During Summer 2020 plans were developed for next steps to move people on from emergency accommodation into more sustainable options – an extra £91 million for the continuation of emergency and interim accommodation as well as £150 million for move on accommodation was provided with the aim to deliver 3300 of the 6000 'move on' homes in 2020.
- In Winter 2020, further national restrictions came in and an additional funding stream of £10 million was made available for the Cold Weather Fund for local authorities to provide self-contained, covid secure accommodation, as well as money for faith-led and community/voluntary sector groups to provide accommodation during the winter months.
- Positives to build on going into 2021; close and collaborative working between central government, local government and providers - a valued three-way partnership.
- Priorities for the following year; that funding does its job to keep people safe, to demonstrate the impact and efficient delivery of the schemes.
- The LGA led peer review of next steps and winter plans was launched, which provided support and effective challenge and identified good

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practice.

- The Spending Review secured an extra funding uplift of £150 million of revenue which meant that a total of £750 million was spent in the year 2020/21 to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness.
- Next steps were to meet the ambitious targets, make progress, build on partner working, learn from greater flow of management information gathered to know and understand what happens and enable a quicker response.
- Rough sleeping and homelessness caused by a complex range of factors that cut across health, immigration, offender management, benefits etc.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were raised:

- Members welcomed the money provided in 2020 to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping and noted that councils were working to to achieve the government's ambitious objectives by 2027.
- Members sought clarification regarding the 'no recourse to public funds condition' as there was not a clear government position on whether local authorities were held responsible or not, or whether funding would be provided for housing individuals with no recourse to public funds, many of whom were foreign nationals, working in the informal economy. It was noted that this was a Home Office policy issue and that local authorities were left to use their own judgement.
- Members asked for assurances of longer-term strategic investment in order to properly tackle homelessness.
- Private rental access schemes are part of the solution and work best when locally led.

### **Decision**

This item was for noting.

### **Action**

Continue engagement and partnership working over the coming months.

## **5 Building Safety**

Charles Loft, Senior Adviser, introduced the Building Safety paper and welcomed comments from Members of the Board. Charles notified the board that all councils that were stockholders would be required to review their fire risk assessments once the Fire Safety Bill was enacted.

Charles set out the scale of the problems:

- There were approximately 3,000 residential buildings over 18 metres affected by cladding issues, and an estimated 19,000 affected buildings between 11 and 18 metres tall. In total there were an estimated total of 21,000 affected buildings and 362,000 leaseholders. Even more buildings than this were thought to be unsafe due to ineffectual cavity barriers. It had

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taken three and a half years to complete remedial works to 200 buildings.

- Access to insurance remained the main barrier as without insurance, people were unable to obtain mortgages on properties, re-mortgage or sell their homes. With residents trapped inside unsafe homes, the issue would continue to adversely affect the housing market with stock effectively being removed from the market.
- The LGA position was that central government should pay for remediation and then pursue guilty parties in the courts as the chances of individuals in significant number being able to successfully do this was too low.
- Only a matter of time before people walked away and left with dangerous, empty buildings
- The LGA had produced a guide for councillors on the issue.
- The Grenfell enquiry uncovering clear insulation companies have lying about the fire safety of their products. There would be serious questions for the whole regulatory system which had failed people and caused death.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were raised:

- EWS1 (External Wall Fire review) forms were chaotic and caused confusion and misery.
- It was a good time to push the government to pay for remedial works on behalf of leaseholder and freeholders.
- Suggestion that homes made safe by public money should come into public ownership.
- Concerns that the attached paper did not reach far enough and that low-rise properties would be left out.
- Strong support for the notion that central government should pursue the legal routes, as cost was a prohibitive barrier, and provide a guarantee scheme to enable leaseholders and freeholders to move on financially and protect their investments.

### Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the update.

## 6 Social Housing White Paper

Jo Allchurch, Senior Advisor, introduced the paper summarising the proposals in the White Paper and highlights potential areas of concerns for councils. Members were invited to comment on the proposals.

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

- Disappointment that the White Paper was not a proper consultation document.
- Acknowledgment that working with registered social landlords can be difficult, however creating an Ombudsman role would add more complexity

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and red tape without resolving problems.

- Councils are very good landlords, the problems is that there is not enough council or social housing.

**Decision**

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the paper.

**7 LGA Business Plan Update**

No comments were made.

**Decision**

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the update to the LGA Business Plan.

**8 Other Board Update**

No comments were made.

**Decision**

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the update paper.

**9 2020 Spending Review: On the day briefing**

No comments were made.

**Decision**

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the briefing.

**10 Note of last meeting**

**Decision**

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 7 July 2020 and 27 October 2020 were agreed.

**Appendix A -Attendance**

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Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Cllr David Renard (Chairman)		Swindon Borough Council
Cllr Darren Rodwell (Vice Chair)		Barking and Dagenham London Borough Council
Cllr Adele Morris (Deputy Chair)		Southwark Council
Cllr Linda Gillham (Deputy Chair)		Runnymede Borough Council
Cllr Peter Butlin		Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Rachel Blake		Tower Hamlets Council
Cllr Christopher Hammond		Southampton City Council
Cllr Mark Crane		Selby District Council
Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE		Gloucestershire County Council
Cllr Patrick Nicholson		Plymouth City Council
Cllr Catherine Rankin		Kent County Council
Cllr Andrew Mackiewicz		Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Amanda Serjeant		Chesterfield Borough Council
Cllr Nicholas Rushton		Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Claire Holland		Lambeth Council
Cllr Christopher Hammond		Southampton City Council
Cllr Tom Hayes		Oxford City Council
Cllr Peter Mason		Ealing Council
Cllr Peter Thornton		Cumbria County Council
Cllr David Beaman		Waverley Borough Council
Cllr Diana Moore		Exeter City Council
Cllr Tim Hodgson		Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Apologies:	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Michael Mordey	Sunderland City Council
	Mayor Philip Glanville	Hackney London Borough Council
	Cllr Ed Turner	Oxford City Council