

## **Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – Report from Cllr David Renard (Chairman)**

### **Housing, planning and homelessness**

#### *Housing*

1. The Government has responded to last year's [Future Homes Standard](#) consultation responses. They will be taking forward [our recommendations](#) that local authorities should retain powers to set local energy efficiency standards, to take a fabric first/whole house approach, and that homes should be built with low carbon heating. They are now consulting on the remaining proposals for homes and all non-residential buildings to be net zero carbon in the [Future Buildings Standard](#), ending 13 April.
2. The Social Housing White Paper proposes some significant changes for the social housing sector. We are hosting a [webinar](#) on 19 March that will cover the implications for councils and their residents and will explore how councils and the Regulator for Social Housing can work together effectively to achieve improved outcomes for local communities.
3. [The 2020/21 Housing Advisers Programme \(HAP\)](#) closed for applications on 7th January 2021. There were 41 applications for funding and 17 councils were awarded grants of up to £20,000 for projects ranging from delivery carbon neutral homes to redesigning homelessness prevention services to address the impacts of COVID-19

#### *Homelessness*

4. We have been working jointly with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop and facilitate a Rough Sleeping Peer Support offer to assist councils in their rough sleeping response. This offer involves the delivery of a programme of virtual Delivery and Impact Panels which provide a safe space and framework for council lead officers to come together, reflect on their work to date, share and challenge learning and highlight good practice across the sector. We will produce a national report detailing key themes and emerging learning from the Delivery and Impact Panels which will be shared with the Ministry and participating councils in March 2021.
5. We have commissioned a written guide and associated training resources for elected members which will support them to effectively perform their role in shaping and scrutinising the local response to homelessness. The online training will be delivered in two half-day sessions on 11 and 12 May 2021.

#### *Planning*

6. In January we responded to the Government's consultation [Supporting Housing Delivery and Public Service Infrastructure](#). The proposals would allow premises in the new Commercial, Business and Service use class (E use class) to be converted into residential use without planning permission under a new permitted development right and for a faster planning

application process for the extension of public service developments such as hospitals, schools, colleges and prisons. In [our response](#) we said the proposals undermine councils' ability to make decisions that reflect local need and could undermine councils' plans for local recovery.

7. In September and October 2020 we conducted a survey of Heads of Planning of English local planning authorities. The purpose of this survey was to estimate the number of dwellings allocated in local plans which had not yet either received permission or were yet under consideration. A total of 192 councils (59 per cent response rate). The survey results showed that across England there are over a million homes allocated in local plans which are waiting to be taken up by the development industry. We have used this evidence in our ongoing lobbying work.

#### *Parliamentary activity*

8. We have briefed MPs for parliamentary debates on the [Planning for the Future White Paper, support for homelessness during the winter months](#) and [homelessness and temporary accommodation](#).

#### **Economic Growth**

9. In response to the growing problems of empty shops the LGA commissioned We Made That to produce [good practice guidance](#) on how councils have dealt with the issue, using both hard and soft powers. The guidance includes several case studies. The accompanying webinar on 10<sup>th</sup> February attracted over 350 participants – you can access the slides from We Made That, Leicester City Council and Telford and Wrekin Council [here](#).

#### **Environment and climate change**

10. We held an informal climate change meeting with the EEHT Board outside of the Board's forward plan in January 2021, to provide an opportunity to discuss adaptation, as recent Board discussions have focused more on reducing carbon emissions (for example, debates on decarbonising transport). Tom Walker, Director for Environmental Strategy at DEFRA and Jo Wall, Strategic Director for Climate Response at Local Partnerships presented at the meeting which was followed by a panel question and answer. We are considering some of the issues raised in our work and taking forward next steps.

#### *Parliamentary Activity*

11. Due to delays in the Parliamentary process the Environment Bill will be carried over to the next Parliamentary session.
12. Councillor Kevin Bentley gave evidence to the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee Inquiry into Green Jobs on 3 March 2021.

#### *APPG for energy studies*

13. In January we submitted evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Energy Study Group inquiry into "the energy policies that will drive an independent UK to net zero while fuelling the economy".

### *Waste and recycling*

14. Consultations on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) and Consistency in materials collected for recycling will now be published in the second half of March. We have continued to work with local authorities, government and the environment agency to ensure there is support and guidance on the safe collection, transfer and disposal of waste from Lateral Flow Device mass testing sites. We have been working with ADEPT and Defra to restart the local authority survey collecting vital data on waste services during lockdown.

### *HoC Environment Audit Committee*

15. In March we submitted evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into deposit return schemes.

### *COP26*

16. COP26 is being hosted in Glasgow from 1 – 12 November 2021. The Cabinet Office has launched an Expression of Interest inviting proposals from a range of organisations, including councils to participate in the opportunities of the UK-managed space. LGA officers are engaging in the process to submit our own expressions of interest, and working with our national counterparts across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on a joint submission.
17. We presented our COP26 strategy to Informal Group Leaders and will be presenting to the Executive Advisory Board in March.
18. We are working to showcase and promote local climate action in the lead up to COP26, and have invited stakeholders, partners, think tanks and industry experts to share their perspectives on the importance of the [local path to net zero](#). The first of these [contributions are now on our website](#). They will be themed on the five campaign areas identified by Government for COP26: energy transition, clean transport, nature, finance and adaptation and resilience.

### *Flooding*

19. In January we submitted evidence to the Commons Public Accounts Committee session on Managing Flood Risks

## **Transport**

### *Highways maintenance funding*

20. We have written to the Secretary of State for Transport highlighting our concern with the funding that is available for highways maintenance for 2021/22. The LGA estimate that this is a reduction of nearly £400 million from the year before which jeopardises councils' planned improvement works. We have asked that the difference is addressed for the coming year and in the next spending review for the remainder of this Parliament.

### *The Future of local buses*

21. The board has concluded and [published its research project](#) examining the future of local buses and councils' ambitions for their role in getting the industry going again post pandemic. The findings have been shared with Ministers with a view to informing the upcoming National Bus Strategy. Presentations from Systra Ltd, Bath and North East

Somerset Council and Lincolnshire County Council from the accompanying webinar held on 19<sup>th</sup> January can be found [here](#).

### *Rural transport*

22. The LGA responded to the Government's Future of Transport: Rural Strategy call for evidence. [Our response](#) highlighted the differences and similarities facing rural areas to more urban ones, including the challenges in innovation required to meet future needs, the role of different tiers of government, as well as the private sector.

### **Publications and correspondence**

23. Since the last forum I have commented on the following LGA press releases and external communications on behalf of the Board: [response to rough sleeping figures](#); [response to new housing development rules](#); [successful applicants for LGA Housing Advisers Programme](#);

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