

Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board – Report from Cllr David Renard (Chairman)

Environment & Climate Change

Environment Bill

1. The Queen's Speech confirmed that the Environment Bill will continue into the new session of Parliament. We welcomed the return of the Bill and will continue to propose our amendments as the Bill enters the next stage of scrutiny in the House of Lords.

Waste consultations

2. Consultations on Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme opened on 24 March with a closing date for responses of 4 June. A consultation on Consistency in Household and Business Recycling in England opened on 7 May and closes on 4 July. On the afternoon of 11 May the LGA ran a webinar for councillors and officers to discuss the interdependencies between the three consultations, with Government officials presenting and taking questions. Draft responses to the first two consultations have been prepared following substantial engagement with local councils via the waste officer networks of ADEPT, NAWDO, LARAC, the LGA Waste Advisory Group and the District Councils Network. Drafts were discussed with EEHT Board members at an extraordinary meeting on 20 May and final drafts will be circulated week commencing 24 May.

Climate Change Task Group

3. Following discussions at the Executive Advisory Board in March, it was decided that an open-ended Climate Change Task Group was to be established to steer the strategic engagement with Government on climate change matters in this COP 26 year and beyond. The first meeting was held in April where we invited Yunus Arikan, Director of Global Advocacy at Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). He provided an update about the progress of their political negotiations and opportunities to work with ICLEI and other local government bodies. The second meeting took place on 17 May.

Local path to net zero

4. We have added some videos of case studies by leading councils on climate activity and with industry experts to our [Local path to net zero](#) series. Two articles have also been published in the LGA's ['first magazine'](#) about this work.

Green finance

5. In December 2020, Local Partnerships produced the guide, [Financing Green Ambitions](#) on behalf of the LGA which was supported with a webinar. Since its launch, Government policy in relation to green finance has evolved, particularly in regard to the remit and role of the Infrastructure Bank and a number of sources of grant funding. The LGA is seeking to update the report and deliver another webinar.

Economic Recovery

6. Since the last board meeting, two good practice guides were published by the LGA to support councils in their work on local economic recovery. These include a guide on Local Economic Recovery Planning ([A playbook for action](#)) and on Microbusinesses ([How well do you know your Microbusinesses](#)).
7. The LGA has commissioned WPI Economics to produce a robust and credible business case that sets out the economic, social and environmental benefits for investing in councils to deliver local low carbon infrastructure. This will strengthen our lobbying on climate change and a green economic recovery. The work is expected to be completed in the summer.

Transport

National Bus Strategy

8. The LGA [welcomed](#) the Government's National Bus Strategy, [Bus Back Better](#), which was published on 15th March. The strategy marks a significant shift in national policy and the role of local government and includes a number of LGA 'wins' such as greater oversight powers (via enhanced partnerships or franchising) and access to ongoing recovery support and funding for transforming services as well as capacity support. There is also a commitment to review BSOG and the restrictions on councils being able to form their own bus companies. [Slides](#) are available from a virtual briefing session with DfT officials and Buses Minister which took place on 21st May.

Stakeholder engagement in an emergency: Learning from Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

9. To help draw out some of the key lessons from last year's DfT funded Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) programme, the LGA commissioned experts from the University of Westminster and Fern Consulting to undertake [independent research](#). The research explores the longer-term relationship between councils and their communities and what councils do (or don't do) 'in the moment', offering practical recommendations concerning the management of changes to the allocation of roadspace between different transport modes. The rate and intensity of such 'disruptive change' on our roads is only likely to increase over the next few years. To manage this change, councils will need every tool available to balance the needs of road users, local communities and the needs of the environment. We hope this research provides some insights into achieving this.

Housing, Planning and Homelessness

Housing

10. **Right to Buy:** Following many years of lobbying and recent intensive discussions with MHCLG and Treasury, the government announced in March a series of right to buy reforms to give councils increased flexibilities to build more homes. This included: extending the time councils have to spend Right to Buy receipts from three to five years; an increased cap in the percentage cost of new homes councils can fund from Right to Buy receipts, raised from 30% to 40%; and allowing receipts to be used for shared ownership, First Homes, as well as affordable and social housing. Alongside this, the government also introduced a cap on the use of Right to Buy receipts for acquisitions. We will be working closely with councils to monitor the impact of the reforms, including the acquisitions cap, on the delivery of new homes.
11. **First Homes:** The LGA and DCN organised a joint session with MHCLG and Homes England on 13 April at which they discussed the [First Homes scheme](#). At the session MHCLG and Homes England outlined to over 150 local authority attendees how First Homes will be delivered through the planning system, how the 1,500 unit pathfinder programme will work and how the First Homes scheme will operate. [The LGA responded to the First Homes consultation last year](#).
12. **Right to regenerate - reform of the Right to Contest:** [We responded](#) to the [government's 'Right to regenerate' consultation](#). In our response we made clear that any reforms need to ensure that councils can continue to take a strategic approach to re-use and release of assets that they own. We opposed proposals that would allow the government to order sales of land where temporary uses cannot be identified for unused land which has an intended future use. We await the government's response to the consultation responses.
13. **Affordable housing small sites threshold:** The government has confirmed [that it will not, at this stage, be introducing a proposed measure to temporarily lift the small sites threshold](#) below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing, to up to 40 or 50 units. We strongly lobbied against this measure, including [this analysis of the potential impact](#), which we press released in October. We raised that councils must have sustainable funding streams, resources and flexibilities under local leadership to decarbonise buildings.
14. **Future Building Standards consultation:** [We responded](#) to the government's consultation on the Future Buildings Standard. It builds on [the Future Homes Standard, which we also responded to](#), by setting out energy and ventilation standards for non-domestic buildings, existing homes and includes proposals to mitigate against overheating in residential buildings. We welcomed the government's second stage of proposals for non-domestic and domestic standards that will support achieving the UK's commitment to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. We also said that councils must have sustainable funding streams, resources and flexibilities under local leadership to decarbonise buildings.
15. **Government inquiry on Local Government and the path to net zero:** We responded to the [HCLG Committee's inquiry on Local Government and the path to net zero](#). The inquiry will scrutinise the Government's plans to make all new homes "zero carbon ready" by 2025 through the introduction of the Future Homes Standards, and to explore how local government can help achieve net zero by 2050. We responded that local government plays

a leading role in accelerating the shift towards achieving net zero carbon and that council staff and local areas will need to have the capacity and skills to be able to deliver on this work.

16. **House Building:** The Board met with Peter Freeman, Chair of Homes England, to discuss its support to council building through strategic partnerships and the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme

Homelessness

17. The LGA has published a [written guide for elected members](#) which will support them to effectively perform their role in shaping and scrutinising the local response to homelessness. The guide was launched at a training event on the 11 May 2021.
18. We also ran a joint workshop with the National Housing Federation on 26th April 2021 on partnership working around homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on identifying lessons learned and actions for the future. The outputs from the workshop will be fed into the [Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping](#), of which our Chairman is a member.

Planning

19. **National Planning Policy Framework/National Model Design Code consultation:** The Government sought views on draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and draft National Model Design Code (NMDC) as part of the planning reforms. The NMDC is meant to provide a clear framework for local authorities to follow to produce their own local codes and guides. The NPPF clarifies that all areas should produce their own codes or guides, based on the principles set out in the NMDC. We responded that whilst we support an increased focus on design, we continue to have concerns that fast-tracking development deemed 'beautiful' may not lead to quality homes and places communities. We said that introducing the NMDC and updating the NPPF is premature because the Government has not yet responded to the Planning White Paper consultation responses.
20. **Planning Gateway One:** The first stage of the new building safety regime is to be introduced in August. Developers of residential buildings over 18m will need to provide a Fire Statement at planning stage and the HSE's Building Safety Regulator will become a statutory consultee on planning. The Government has published [more details](#).
21. **Research on interactions between local plan making and neighbourhood plans:** The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) on behalf of the LGA commissioned DAC Planning to [research the interactions between local plan making and neighbourhood plan making](#). The research identifies practices that are occurring across the country as local plans and neighbourhood plans are progressed. The research also identifies where there may be a need for further support, research or identification of best practice to enable local planning authorities (LPAs) to effectively support neighbourhood planning in the future.
22. **HCLG inquiry into Permitted Development Rights:** The HCLG Committee held an [inquiry to examine the Government's recent and proposed changes to Permitted Development Rights \(PDR\)](#) which closed on 30 April. On 17 May EEHT Board Member Councillor Rachel Blake gave oral evidence to the Committee. Cllr Blake reiterated our ongoing concerns raised in our written submission that PDR removes the ability of councils and local communities to shape their local area. We also reiterated that Government's own

research revealed that removing the locally-led process leads to poorer quality homes and places.

Parliamentary Activity

23. We have briefed MPs for parliamentary debates on the following: the [Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community report Coming Home and the case for setting out a long-term housing strategy](#)
24. We [submitted evidence](#) to Government on Local factors in managing flood and coastal erosion risk and property flood resilience in March. We also briefed the Chairman for a Net Zero APPG.

Press Releases & Statements

25. We have issued proactive press releases on the following: [Offices left empty by COVID-19 could result in surge in substandard home conversions; over 1.1 million homes with planning permission waiting to be built](#). We have also made public statements on the following: [response to new planning rules coming into force](#); response to [launch of new independent rough sleeping commission](#); [response to Public Accounts Committee report on rough sleeping](#); [response to vaccine prioritisation](#); [response to further extension of bailiff enforced eviction ban](#); [response to rough sleeping figures](#).
26. We issued proactive press releases on the work councils are doing to tackle climate change and protect the environment to mark [Earth Day](#), [non-recyclable materials and packaging manufacturers](#), the re-introduction of the [Environment Bill](#) in the Queen's Speech and [fly-tipping](#).

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