

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

### Housing, Planning and Homelessness

#### *Housing Advisers Programme (HAP)*

1. The HAP will benefit 91 councils across 30 projects for [2021/22](#). This includes local authorities that have been identified by the LGA to receive targeted support via the programme. The maximum grant, which has been awarded to 29 of the 30 projects, is £25,000 (the project undertaken by London Councils has been awarded £20,000). The impact of the HAP is far-reaching, with councils benefitting from a range of project areas including homelessness; green homes; housing supply; planning; private rented sector; skills; and strategy. An online survey of participants of the programme since its inception in 2017/18 found that one hundred per cent of respondents said that the project had a positive impact overall.

#### *Social Housing Management Peer Challenge (SHMPC)*

2. The SHMPC was piloted for the first time at South Holland District Council (SHDC). The SHMPC is based on the principles of the [Charter for Social Housing Residents](#). Two subsequent evaluation meetings will take place respectively with the Peer Team, and then the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Housing at SHDC, to revise and enhance the guidance and framework for delivering the SHMPC. A second pilot will be delivered at the London Borough of Hounslow Council later this year, and subsequently we will roll out the SHMPC as a concerted offer to all Local Housing Authorities.

#### *House of Commons, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee Inquiry into Social Housing*

3. In partnership with Public Affairs colleagues, we briefed Cllr Renard (as the Chair of the EEHT Board) to present oral evidence to the Committee. The Inquiry focussed on the reasons for the poor quality of some social housing; the effectiveness of the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing; the Government's Social Housing White Paper proposals; and the impact on the Housing Revenue Account.

#### *Building Safety Bill Amendment*

4. The Government has announced a number of changes to the [Building Safety Bill](#). Under the new legislation, leaseholders will be protected from all cladding remediation costs in buildings over 11 metres and it will be the freeholder that will be responsible for these costs. Developers and freeholders will be the first port of call to pay for other, non-cladding, historical safety defects. Local Authorities at present fall under the definition of 'developer' in the Building Safety Bill. The LGA has published [four core asks around the Building Safety Bill](#), which is currently at the Committee Stage in the House of Lords. We are working with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), as well as the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) and the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), to engage Local Authorities to understand the impact of the amendment

on stock they own over 11 metres and Housing Revenue Accounts. DLUHC will be contacting Local Authorities for data on their stock.

#### *Out of Area Placement Protocol*

5. Following a discussion at EEHT board and based on the results of the consultation, LGA will be publishing the proposed out of area placement protocol as guidance as soon as possible and asking as many councils as possible to make a pledge to adhere to the best practice within it. The guidance will apply to all homelessness and children's services placements made out of area and should greatly improve services for families experiencing homelessness as well as support for host authorities.

#### *Exempt Accommodation*

6. We submitted evidence to the House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Inquiry into exempt accommodation. We called for councils to have more of an oversight role as well as more control over referrals to ensure those with the most need are provided the right accommodation with the right support. We also called for housing benefit regulations to be amended to reduce exploitation of the rules. An LGA officer will also be attending the Homeless Link Accommodation Conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> March to talk through key issues and to share examples of quality standards for exempt accommodation.

#### *Non-UK National Working Group*

7. In partnership with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Home Office, we are leading on a working group to improve the processes and relationships between local authorities and the Home Office with regards to rough sleepers who are non-UK nationals. Various council officer representatives who work closely with rough sleepers have been invited to join and the first meeting will be on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March.

## **Environment and Climate Change**

#### *Bad weather*

8. The EEHT Board has worked with councils to understand the impacts of the recent bad weather – including Storm Eunice - and to support any discussions with partners and the Government on support. It also issued a statement reminding the public that council staff continue to work around-the-clock to ensure the safety of residents, homes and businesses, shore up flood defences, and protect road networks and power supplies as much as possible. We encouraged people living in affected areas to keep an eye on their councils' social media channels and their websites and follow their advice as they provide rolling updates on the situation, provide safety advice and detail any service disruption. As the LGA's environment spokesperson, I was interviewed by BBC News and BBC Radio 4's PM programme to discuss councils' efforts to tackle Storm Eunice and help local communities.

#### *Waste and recycling*

9. The EEHT Board continues to engage with councils and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the next steps for the proposed waste reforms set out in the Resources and Waste Strategy - we expect the Government to respond with their planned next steps within a couple of months. We are engaging with the development of a range of proposals around consistency, garden and food waste, the

new Extended Producer Responsibility, and the deposit return schemes. We are increasingly raising concerns regarding the implementation of reforms set against the current timetable.

#### *Office for Environmental Protection*

10. Dame Glenys Stacy and Natalie Prosser, Chair and Chief Executive of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), attended the February board following the publication of the OEPs [draft strategy and draft enforcement policy](#). Following a presentation, the discussion focussed on how the OEP intends to work with all the public authorities it has jurisdiction over in a cooperative and colligate manner. The Board agreed that the LGA will submit a response to the consultation documents by 22 March 2022, based on the content of the discussion. The EEHT Board is increasingly concerned about the governance of partnership action on environmental matters and will develop a project on how to improve partnership working between agencies.

#### *Water and development, nutrients neutrality*

11. The Board discussed the impact of water related restrictions on new development at their February meeting. The Board agreed that further work should be done on this issue and that the LGA should be included in relevant cross-government bodies, such as the Ministerial Taskforce on nutrient neutrality. Councillor David Hitchiner, the Leader of Herefordshire Council, shared a powerful presentation on the impact of high levels of phosphates in the River Lugg. The council cannot approve new development in the affected area unless it is “nutrient neutral”. There is action underway to find solutions such as creating wetlands as a buffer zone for fragile habitats and establishing a nutrients management board, but there are serious long- term challenges in restoring the river to a good quality. We heard from other members of the Board on their experience of nutrient neutrality, and from councils in West Sussex where new development has been paused due to the impact of water extraction on fragile environments.

#### *Biodiversity net gain*

12. The Environment Act has laid the bones of the legislation needed for the new system of biodiversity net gain. Developers will be required to set out how their project will create an improvement to biodiversity either on site or through another location. Defra has shared further details of how this will work in a consultation on the [Biodiversity Net Gain regulations and implementation](#). This consultation is relevant to councils as planning authorities and also in the potential for supporting local nature recovery. The Board will be responding to the consultation and is engaging with councils on this complex issue through a range of events.

#### *Local path to net zero*

13. EEHT Board is working with City Regions and People and Places Board on a policy paper asking Government to consider a place-based approach for the delivery of retrofit employment and skills. The local path to net zero will require significant levels of buildings’ retrofit to ensure England’s housing stock is both affordably warm and zero carbon. Retrofit offers an opportunity to gain qualifications that can support people into well paid stable employment. A key barrier to this is the reduction in funding for adult skills to Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE), which has been reduced by 50 per cent over the last decade. To enable skills and employment opportunities in green and new sectors to be maximised, the adult education budget (AEB) should [be restored to its 2010 levels](#) as minimum and devolved.

14. EEHT is co-funding a piece of research with the National Housing Federation to identify hard-to-decarbonise homes and possible policy solutions. The NHF were primarily focussing on the housing association sector, but LGA funding is enabling the project to include local authority housing also. The successful bidders are Parity Projects and the research finding will be available at the end of this financial year.
15. The EEHT Board is refreshing its Green Finance Guide for councils. The guide will provide advice on the approaches and opportunities for funding climate change work. It will include details on the UK Infrastructure Bank which has now launched, and has engaged with the EEHT Board.

#### Adaptation

16. On 23 February 2022 the LGA ran a webinar with Defra and Local Partnerships on climate change adaptation policy. The focus was on governments approach to the preparation of NAP3 and the tools that Local Partnerships have developed to support councils adapting to the impacts of Climate Change. Approximately 100 delegates attended the 90 minute event and [slides](#) are available on the LGA website.

#### Economy

17. The LGA published research on [Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'new normal'](#) in response to changing shopping habits from the pandemic and how councils can help to deliver more resilient town centres in future. Included is an interactive tool which helps councils explore the challenges they are facing and the strategies which can be adopted to tackle them as well as a checklist of 35 pre-pandemic trends.

#### Transport

##### *Road pricing*

18. The EEHT Board is undertaking research into councils' views on the future of what should replace motoring taxes given the transition to electric vehicles and the resultant impact on revenues from reduced fuel duty income. The research will be framed around the recent [Transport Committee report on road pricing](#).

##### *Bus Recovery Funding*

19. The Government have announced an additional £150 million funding for bus and light rail operators until October 2022 to ensure services can continue to run. This win for local government follows action by the LGA, in coalition with partner organisations, including the Campaign for Better Transport, Urban Transport Group and ADEPT, [to call](#) on the Government to extend its emergency support for local bus services to avoid a cliff-edge loss in services. The Bus Recovery Grant was due to finish at the end of March 2022 but given that passenger numbers have not yet recovered to original forecasts because of the Omicron variant and Plan B measures, there is a serious risk that substantial services and routes will be lost without further support. I wrote to the Minister for Transport and received a response indicating the government's continued support for bus services.

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