

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

### **Housing, Planning and Homelessness**

#### *Homelessness survey*

1. The LGA undertook a survey of councils to obtain a snapshot of the number of new Ukrainian households presenting to homelessness services. We have used the data as an evidence base to help make the case for further funding for councils and an effective rematching scheme. The findings have been cited widely in the media and in parliament.

#### *Planning reforms*

2. The government has now set out the direction of travel for planning reforms – some of which will be delivered through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the rest through secondary legislation or policy change. The proposed reforms are a significant improvement from those proposed in the planning white paper. In particular there is a greater focus on democratic input and community engagement; measures that intend to strengthen the weight of Local Plans and reduce speculative development as well as proposals to increase planning application fees. Crucially, the proposal for development 'zones', linked to an automatic permission, have been scrapped. These are all areas that the LGA has lobbied on. There is much to welcome in the new proposals but there are many changes and effective engagement with the sector on the detailed policy development will be key.

#### *Permitted development rights*

3. In a proactive press release on 9th May, Councillor David Renard raised concerns that more than 18,000 affordable houses have been lost as a result of office-to-residential conversions under permitted development. The release called for permitted development rights to be removed to ensure all conversions and new developments contribute to the delivery of desperately needed affordable homes.

#### *Building Safety Act 2022*

4. The Act aligns with the LGA's fundamental asks: that the construction industry, developers, and manufacturers should pay for the cladding crisis. We continue to press the government to distinguish between local authorities and developers, and fund councils to deliver the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). We are supporting a coordinated audit of risk within medium-rise residential buildings. The Fire Safety Act commenced, with secondary legislation implementing most recommendations of the Grenfell Inquiry. Following lobbying, the Home Office published the Fire Safety Assessment Prioritisation Tool alongside the Fire Safety Act and agreed to implement the LGA's working group on PEEPs neighbour assistance. We will engage in the new consultation on PEEPs and the Emergency Evacuation Information Sharing (EEIS) proposal. The LGA has published case studies and a document on principles of

effective regulation, and has run several webinars and Leadership Essentials events with more being planned currently. The Joint Inspection Team has secured funding for the next two years which will see it triple in capacity by the end of this financial year.

5. We will engage with HSE's programme to establish the new building safety regulator and raise awareness amongst councils of their responsibilities as regulators and duty holders under the new building safety regime. As part of this, we will continue to lobby for the funding of new burdens and a proportionate approach to transition to the new regime and new FSO responsibilities. We will continue to support councils in taking enforcement action under the Housing Act 2004 through hosting the Joint Inspection Team and to monitor the impact of the continuing competitive environment in building control regulation for buildings under 18m.

#### *HRA commission – assessing the new challenges*

6. The LGA is working with ARCH and the NFA to jointly commission a research project to assess the new challenges to the HRA, following the most recent reform to the system in 2012 when the HRA became a self-financing model. Three separate, but interrelated contracts will be commissioned in relation to: expenditure; income; and the Right to Buy. The overarching project objective is to understand and assess how effectively the HRA self-financing model is operating in relation to meeting expenditure needs. The supplier(s) will develop a report which will comprehensively capture the long-term challenges to the HRA; and produce a set of evidence-based policy recommendations to assist in the LGA's lobbying. The indicative timescales for the project are June – November 2022.

#### *Infrastructure Levy*

7. Following a ministerial roundtable in April attended by the LGA and the Queen's Speech in May, we are meeting with stakeholders that have an interest in the Levy to support our lobbying as the Levy progresses through Parliament under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. This has included the GLA, CCN, NHF and others. The purpose of these meetings is to better understand the issues and concerns with the new system; identify areas of agreement and opportunities to jointly lobby on the Levy; and frame our asks of Government to ensure that the new Levy will be a success for councils.

#### *Homes for Ukraine webinar*

8. In April, the LGA hosted a webinar for council practitioners to share the case studies and the lessons learnt from administering the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Delegates had the opportunity to hear from, and pose questions to DLUHC. The aim of the webinar was for councils to improve their local offer and ensure that new arrivals from Ukraine can access suitable accommodation that meets their needs. The webinar was attended by 270 delegates and 75% of the respondents to the subsequent satisfaction survey were either very or fairly satisfied with the webinar overall.

#### *APPG for Ending Rough Sleeping*

9. Cllr Pippa Heylings attended an APPG for ending rough sleeping on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May in Parliament. The LGA called for government to address the system drivers and levers of homelessness and reassure councils they will be supported with rising pressures relating to the cost of living crisis. We also shared difficulties around recruitment and retention of staff, data sharing and increasingly complex customers. We called for better partnerships at a central government level and asked for the new rough sleeper strategy

to look at broader homelessness prevention as opposed to being focused on the crisis end of homelessness.

#### *Vagrancy Act Submission*

10. At the beginning of May we responded to government's vagrancy act submission. We commented that not everyone who is living a street-based lifestyle is homeless and this crossover can be difficult for councils and partners to manage. A one size fits all approach will not work and different tools are needed to respond to different types of begging. We noted that it would be helpful to have a clear view from councils and the police about what gaps could be created through the repeal of the Vagrancy Act, and which existing or new powers could be better utilised to address these complex issues. We also asked that any new reforms proposed would need to be clear and enforceable, with enforcing bodies fully resourced to apply them.

#### *Rough Sleeping Strategy Roundtables*

11. The LGA have participated in and facilitated workshops which will influence the new rough sleeper strategy. Over 30 councils attended the local authority roundtable hosted by LGA on 19<sup>th</sup> May, as well as representatives from across the various central government departments. The roundtable was split up into three workshops focused on what central government, local government and the third sector can do to end rough sleeping and we were assisted by valued partners from Crisis and Homeless Link. The outcome paper will be submitted to lead members for approval this week. LGA officers also attended the DLUHC hosted roundtable on homelessness prevention.

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

12. The Housing Improvement grant for 2022/23 has now been finalised and we are moving forward with the design of the 2022/23 programme. We expect to start recruitment for HAP cohort 6 in autumn 2022.

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

13. We have developed a Social Housing Management Peer Challenge that will support host councils to reflect on, receive feedback on and learn how to improve the service provided to social housing residents. It will also assess their readiness and plan for a new emerging consumer regulation regime. The peer challenge was piloted at South Holland District Council in February 2022, and we are in the process of redeveloping the guidance and scope following evaluation and feedback from the council and the peer team. South Holland District Council will give an Innovation Zone presentation on their experience of the peer challenge at the LGA Annual Conference..

## **Economy**

#### *Public-Private Partnerships: Driving Growth, Building Resilience*

14. Against a backdrop of significant uncertainty and challenge, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and continued pressures on budgets, councils across the country are continuing to look to unlock a range of social, environmental, and economic benefits aligned to local and national priorities. This LGA commissioned this good practice guide which aims to support councils to plan and establish more effective public-private partnerships, which can unlock and deliver the investment, development and services that are essential to boosting economic growth and recovery.

### *Supporting councils with business engagement.*

15. Relationships between councils and businesses have always been essential. The pandemic accelerated and emphasised the importance of that relationship and has become even more central to maintaining quality place-shaping and vibrant local economies – there was a rapid scaling up the interaction between private and public sector. LGA commissioned research to identify and capture the learning from councils' extensive contact with businesses in the context of COVID-19. This report sets out how councils can engage more effectively with businesses in the future to support economic recovery.

## **Environment and Climate Change**

### *Local Net Zero Forum*

16. The LGA has been working with the Government on the establishment of the Local Net Zero Forum, which will aim to advance the collaboration between local and central Government Departments from across Whitehall in achieving climate change mitigation and adaptation in places. It is likely the Forum will focus on priorities set out in the Net Zero Strategy, including roles and responsibilities, funding, and capacity and capability. The LGA has a seat on the Forum.

### *Financing the Green Ambition*

17. In May, we commissioned Local Partnerships to update the LGAs [Green Finance Guide](#) reflecting the launch of the UK Investment Bank, the response to the Public Loans Board consultation in November 2020 and the Net Zero Strategy in Autumn 2021. We also held a very well attended webinar on Wednesday 4 May 2022 where we heard from Local Partnerships, UK Investment Bank and the UK Municipal Bond Agency on the type of finance that is and will be available for local authorities. Presentations from the webinar [are available](#) on the LGA website.

### *Fuel Poverty*

18. The LGA is undertaking some work seeking to under the impact of energy price increases on the number of households in fuel poverty, the costs of bringing these properties up to EPC C standard, and the benefits of this for energy cost savings and wider health savings. The work will be used to explore and make the case for councils lead role in improving the energy efficiency of fuel poor households, and the links to the wider green economy and decarbonisation ambitions.

### *Retrofit - Heat and Buildings Decarbonisation by 2050*

19. The LGA will undertake a project to design an approach whereby local and central government would work together to further enable decarbonisation of heat and buildings up to 2050, building on existing local strategies and bringing them together into a single national framework. It will focus on: the objectives and value added of locally led approaches; the governance and process for how existing and new local strategic approaches can be brought together into a single coherent framework clarifying roles and responsibilities, and how to shift to joined-up multi funding plans for delivering outcomes and market change.

### *Green Streets*

20. We have commissioned a piece of work that will seek to demonstrate the case for a local approach to decarbonising buildings and transport at the street or neighbourhood

level. Through a combination of literature review and interviews identifying national and international best practice, the case will be heavily evidenced and implementable in the UK. Publication of the final report and a webinar to present the finds are expected in the summer.

#### *Future of local energy institutions and governance*

21. We will be responding to Ofgem's call for [input into future local energy institutions and governance](#). The call seeks input from stakeholders on energy system functions needed at sub-national level to facilitate the transition to net zero, the suitability of current and planned institutional and governance arrangements and the opportunities and risks of change.

#### *Hard to decarbonise homes*

22. The LGA has co-funded a piece of research with the National Housing Federation to identify hard-to-decarbonise homes and policy solutions for increasing the viability of retrofit. Parity Projects have undertaken the work and the final report will be available in June.

### **Environment**

#### *Nutrient and water neutrality*

23. We are shortly launching a policy enquiry on nutrient and water neutrality. Both issues relate to river catchment areas and advice to local planning authorities to stop housing development immediately in order to protect weakened natural environments. The enquiry will be led by a team of LGA politicians and will include a survey to understand the full impact of the neutrality advice, as well as roundtable discussions with stakeholders. The enquiry will present recommendations in the Autumn.

#### *Tackling waste crime*

24. Defra set out proposals to reform [waste tracking systems](#) and the [regulation of waste businesses](#) as part of measures to crack down on waste crime. Our responses to the consultation papers supported the broad approach, noting that Defra's approach must be robust enough to discourage the criminals but avoid placing excessive requirements on local authorities and responsible private waste businesses. This was an opportunity to put forward the powers that councils need to crack down on fly-tipping, particularly the ongoing issue with prosecution leading to paltry fines in so many cases. The LGA is calling for an urgent review of sentencing guidelines for fly-tipping.

#### *Next steps on the Resources and Waste strategy*

25. The outcome of consultations on greater consistency in household and business recycling and a new deposit return scheme are still awaited. Defra has set out further detail on the implementation of a new system of extended producer responsibility for packaging material (EPR). This will see manufacturers and retailers paying councils for the cost of dealing with packaging in household waste, a welcome move that the LGA has long called for. Defra confirmed that payments to councils will start from April 2024 with a phased implementation. This is later than proposed but not unexpected due to the complexity of setting up the new payment system. We will be working with Defra on the

next steps and we are calling on them to rethink the decision to exclude the cost of dealing with litter as part of the payments producers must make to councils.

### *Biodiversity net gain*

26. A requirement for developers to provide a net gain to biodiversity on all new sites will come into force in November 2023. The LGA [responded to the release of draft regulations and Defra's implementation plan](#). This was largely a technical consultation and it was good to see Defra engage with councils in a series of Q&A sessions organised by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). We asked Defra for clarity on new burdens funding along with an offer to work with them to ensure that the resource implications are fully understood.

## **Transport**

### *Moving traffic offences*

27. The final Parliamentary scrutiny stage for councils to be able to apply for powers to enforce against moving traffic offences has now passed meaning that highways authorities can now apply for designated powers. This is a significant win for local government. The LGA has long called for powers that already exist in London to be made available to all local areas outside London, and had provided substantial [evidence](#) in support. This will help highways authorities to deal with a range of traffic contraventions such as yellow-box junctions, banned turns and overweight vehicles on weight restricted roads. The Draft Civil Enforcement of Road Traffic Contraventions (Representations and Appeals) (England) Regulations 2022 cleared scrutiny stages through both houses last week and will become law from 31st May 2022.

### *National Bus Strategy – funding*

28. The LGA wrote to the Buses Minister, Baroness Vere of Norbiton on the recent [Bus Service Improvement Plan \(BSIP\)](#). The letter acknowledged the value of the funding for those places in line to receive funding but adds that it falls short of local authority/operator partnerships' and the Government's own ambition for buses and asks whether the national bus strategy is truly 'national'. Fewer than half of Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) were funded. Cllr David Renard also attended the Transport Select Committee to give evidence on the National Bus Strategy.

### *Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy*

29. The Government has published its [UK Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Infrastructure Strategy](#). The strategy sets out a raft of measures to rapidly scale up public EV charge points across the country. The strategy also announced that the Government will be increasing the Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund to £450 million and will be providing up to a further £50 million to support local authority skills and capacity. The Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) launched a £10 million pilot of the LEVI Fund for local authorities. The expectation is that combined authorities will take the lead on developing local EV infrastructure strategies and outside of these, that highways authorities will take the lead (in consultation with district councils in two-tier areas). The Government will also look to take pre-emptive powers, subject to consultation, to ensure there is a clear statutory obligation on councils to develop local charging infrastructure strategies and oversee their delivery. [The LGA welcomed the boost in funding](#) and the important role that councils can play.

### *Last Mile Deliveries*

30. With the growth in online shopping and freight traffic the LGA commissioned independent research into local authority views on 'last mile deliveries' and the potential role of councils and what changes need to be considered for councils to play a more effective role, building on DfT's Transport Decarbonisation Plan. This work has been led by University of West of England, and has involved workshops with councils as well as a workshop with elected members (across EEHT, P&P and City Region boards). The findings have now been captured in a report which can be found [here](#).

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