

## Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board Update Report

### Purpose of Report

For information.

**Is this report confidential? No**

### Summary

This paper provides updates on a range of issues within the remit of the Board that have not already been covered in other Board agenda items.

**LGA Plan Theme:** Committed to a sustainable future

### Recommendation

**That the Board note the update.**

### Contact details

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## EEHT Board Update Report

### Housing, planning and homelessness

#### Consultation on increases to planning fees and improving performance

1. We have [responded](#) to the Government's technical consultation on proposals to increase planning application fees and improve the performance monitoring framework for local authority planning departments in April 2023. In our response we welcomed the proposal to increase planning application fees. However, our modelling showed that even if all application fees were uplifted by 35 per cent, the overall national shortfall for 2020/21 would have remained above £80 million. We have called on Government to give councils the flexibility to set planning fees at local level to cover their costs relating to planning.

#### Planning Reform

2. The LGA Chairman, Cllr James Jamieson, [gave oral evidence at the Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee](#) in March 2023 on the proposed reforms to national planning policy. This followed the LGA's [submission](#) in March to the Government's consultation on reforms to national planning policy.

#### Infrastructure Levy consultation

3. The Government has recently closed a [consultation on the proposed Infrastructure Levy](#) (IL), designed to replace the current system of developer contributions for infrastructure spending. A paper was brought to EEHT Lead Members on Tuesday 9 May seeking direction on the LGA's response to the consultation. At that meeting, it was agreed that LGA officers would pursue a joint letter with sector allies to publicly oppose the introduction of the IL.
4. We have worked with other organisations who have local government membership including the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), District Councils Network (DCN), County Councils Network (CCN) and London Councils as well as private sector organisations to draft a pan-sector letter. The letter will be made public in the week following the consultation deadline alongside a joint media campaign.

#### Short-term lets consultation

5. We have recently responded to two consultations regarding short-term lets, one proposing to [introduce a registration scheme](#) and one proposing to introduce a

[new use class for short-term lets and associated permitted development rights](#).

These consultations respond to findings from an earlier government consultation and both proposals are [ideas that were put forward by us on behalf of our members in our response](#). These follow up consultations explore the detail of how these proposals could work.

### **Environmental Outcomes Reports – technical consultation**

6. The government has recently closed a consultation on a new system of environmental assessment known as [Environmental Outcomes Reports](#). This will allow the government to replace the EU-derived Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment processes.
7. In our view, the consultation does not contain the level of detail required to understand how Environmental Outcome Reports (EOR's) will work in practice, so we have prepared a letter setting out our primary concerns and priorities for the next steps of engagement with local authorities.

### **Housing Revenue Account sustainability**

8. On 26 April, the LGA ran a joint Ministerial workshop with DLUHC discussing Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) across the country. 11 local authorities attended the session with the LGA Chairman, Rachel Maclean MP, Minister for Housing and Planning, and Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE and discussed the challenges local authority landlords face in managing social housing stock, delivering on multiple priorities and regulatory requirements, and on collaborative solutions that could ease upcoming costs.
9. DLUHC and LGA officials are working together with attendees to develop examples and evidence of themes discussed and report back to ministers in June. A series of virtual council roundtables are also being planned for later this year.

### **Housing Sector Professionalisation**

10. The government has tabled an amendment in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, which aims to professionalise housing management, by requiring relevant staff to complete qualifications up to a certain level. In advance of a government consultation and stakeholder roundtables, the LGA has issued a survey to council housing directors which will form a snapshot of how this amendment might affect the sector. We also supported a local authority roundtable on 24 May with DLUHC officials to understand the sector's views.

## **Residential Leasehold Building Insurance**

11. We are working to understand the detail and scale of issues councils are experiencing when obtaining insurance on behalf of leaseholders. We are engaging with DLUHC and the insurance industry to explore potential solutions, which includes tracking the progress of the risk pooling initiative being set up following the Financial Conduct Authority [report](#) in Autumn 2022. A local authority roundtable will be hosted in due course to explore the issue further.

## **Empty Homes Research Report**

12. We are in the process of commissioning a new piece of work on empty homes. This will take the form of an updated status report on empty homes which summarises the scale of the current issue, promotes council good practice and outlines key recommendations to bring more empty homes back into use. It will also cover an element of horizon scanning on what this issue could look like in the future.

## **Houses in Multiple Occupancy**

13. The Government introduced a Statutory Instrument to temporarily exempt asylum accommodation from Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMO) licensing requirements, which sets out the national minimum standards that HMO accommodation must meet to ensure the safety and quality of accommodation, such as protections around occupancy rates, compliance with safety requirements and a fit and proper persons test for landlords.
14. We have set out our position through a [briefing](#) to Lords, which was referenced several times, and highlighted our concerns around the potential of creating a ‘two-tier’ system and urged the Government to work collaboratively with councils and the LGA to successfully implement any changes. We will be following up on the Government’s stated commitment to engage with the LGA and councils.

## **Rural homelessness**

15. A coalition of organisations commissioned [rural homelessness research](#) in March which highlighted specific rural challenges such as dispersed support services, urban-centric national policies, challenges of geography and stigma around accessing support in rural areas. The Chairman attended a roundtable with Minister Buchan and other stakeholders to discuss the research’s implications for councils on 20 April. Further, the LGA is collaborating with English Rural and the Centre for Homelessness Impact to work with a small

selection of rural councils to utilise a more data-led approach to rough sleeping in a rural context. The LGA, English Rural and the Centre for Homelessness Impact delivered the first workshop on 30 May 2023 with further workshops due to occur over summer.

### **Out of Area Placement Guidance**

16. In January, we published [Out of Area Placement Guidance](#) accompanied by a workshop for local authorities. During the workshop, we discussed the guidance at length and the ways councils could implement it. Discussion also focused on what elements would be difficult for councils to implement without further support or resources from central government. Following the workshop, we have worked with sub-regions to support implementation of the guidance in the different contexts of different areas. We have run a workshop with councils in Lancashire and are producing a report on their next steps in developing a sub-regional protocol. We are also working with councils in Essex to run a similar event in the near future.

### **Afghan bridging accommodation**

17. The Government is working to move Afghan households on from bridging hotels by 31 August. The LGA continues to stress the need for more effective engagement across local government as the programme develops. Following on from the recently issued information on funding, [changes to the matching process](#) and [criteria for vulnerable people](#), the Government has also shared updated and translated resources on the 'Find Your Own Accommodation' pathway with Home Office Liaison Officers working alongside councils in bridging hotels. These resources are also available on the Government's Afghan Resettlement Knowledge Hub group, alongside other information to support Afghans. We are continuing to stress the need for more effective engagement with councils as the programme develops and have worked with DLUHC and the Home Office to set up a ministerial webinar for council leaders on 6 June and a webinar for chief executives with senior officials on 7 June.

### **Improvement**

18. On 18 May, the LGA ran a joint workshop with the National Housing Federation (NHF) reflecting on five years of the Homelessness Reduction Act with 48 delegates in attendance. The workshop focused on the housing association's adoption of the 'Commitment to Refer' – whereby housing associations have voluntarily signed up to refer to councils anyone who is homeless or at risk of

homelessness – and the future of place-based partnership working. We will continue running our series of workshops with the NHF in future.

## Renters Reform Bill

19. The Government introduced the [Renters Reform Bill](#) to Parliament on 17 May. We have provided a Renters Reform Bill second reading briefing (Appendix A to agenda item 2) and will continue to work with parliamentarians and officials to fully reflect the sector's views on individual clauses. More information can be found on agenda item 2.

## Economy

20. On 17 March Cllr Loïc Rich chaired a webinar to share Green Economy's findings of their LGA commissioned report on identifying the social and economic benefits of having businesses located in a local authority area that provide low carbon and environmental goods and services and suggest what measures councils can take to make their area attractive for these businesses to locate in. The panel was made up of representatives from Green Economy, Manchester City Council and Hertfordshire County Council and Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership and the final report will be on the LGA website shortly.

## Waste

### Waste and recycling reforms

21. The Board continues to press for further details on the waste and recycling reforms, and to urge against further delays. Our calls have been widely reported across the media, raised in meetings with Ministers, and regular meetings with officials at a strategic level and detailed level on elements of the reforms. Packaging producers are now calling publicly for the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme to be delayed, which the Board has [warned against](#).

### Persistent Organic Pollutants

22. With a live situation for councils in dealing with chemical pollutants (POPs) in sofas and soft seating, the LGA commented on the potential for more chemicals to be added to the list of POPs. Our [response to consultation](#) raised alarm over the number of everyday items such as carpets and textiles that could come into the scope of POPs regulations. We called for a new relationship with Defra and

the Environment Agency and a long-term strategy for managing POPs in household waste.

### **All-Party Parliamentary Group on sustainable packaging**

23. Councillor Linda Taylor attended a meeting of the APPG meeting on sustainable resources on 5 June to discuss the future of a circular economy for packaging, focussing on refillable and reusable packaging. The group invited the LGA to hear about the role of councils in the circular economy and understand our views on the actions necessary to reduce waste and unnecessary packaging.

## **Environment**

### **Local Nature Recovery Strategies**

24. Defra has provided greater clarity on local nature recovery strategies in new [statutory guidance](#) and [regulations](#). The development of local nature recovery strategies was set out in the Environment Act of 2021 and the next stage will be for Defra to appoint the responsible authorities, which can be either councils or Natural England, and confirm levels of funding to cover the additional responsibility. Councils are concerned by the delays in the process of developing LNRSs, for instance in appointing Responsible Authorities, determining funding, and timeframes. There is a wider concern about the role of LNRSs in leveraging funding into projects.

### **Bio-diversity reporting**

25. On 17 May Defra published [guidance](#) to public authorities on how to comply with their new duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, which came into force on 1 January 2023. This includes [guidance](#) to local government on how to deliver on their duty to provide local biodiversity reports, linked to the Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain.

### **Bio-diversity Net Gain**

26. Local government is raising concerns about the timetables for BNG and the range of work still to do before it begins for large sites from November 2023, and small sites in April 2024. The Board is considering writing to Ministers to propose how councils can ensure the policy is a success, and what the government should do to enable this.

## Climate Change

### Local Net zero Forum

27. On 4 May the Local Net Zero Forum officer group met in Smith Square to discuss next steps. The meeting was well attended with representatives from DESNZ and Treasury, Local Government and the Local Government Association. We are now working with government on the details through a set of task and finish groups that aim to bring proposals to Ministers and council leaders later this year.

### Adaptation

28. The Board has launched a report [Accelerating adaptation action](#), which has fed into Defra as part of the development of the third National Adaptation Programme. The [press release](#) of report was widely covered by the media, including the [Mail](#), Express, and Independent. On 28 March the LGA held a webinar to disseminate early findings. The panel was made up of representatives from Defra, Local Partnerships, Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, Kirklees Council and The Met Office. The final report will be on the LGA website shortly.

### Green heat: heat and buildings decarbonisation

29. The LGA published its [Green Heat](#) report which explores the critical components of heat decarbonisation and how local and central government can work together to deliver heat and building decarbonisation by 2050. The report was widely covered in the media, including in the [independent](#) and [evening standard](#).

## Energy

### Role of local government in future energy planning

30. On 10 May 2023 the LGA responded to [Ofgem's consultation on Future energy institutions and governance](#). The response focused on the pivotal role councils need to play in effective energy system planning and operation at the sub national level as they are democratically elected strategic planners and place makers. <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lga-submission-ofgems-consultation-future-local-energy>

### Future of local electricity event

31. On 16 May 2023 Councillor Pippa Heylings Chaired our in person Future Local Electricity Networks seminar. Panellists included representatives from the Distribution Network Operators (DNO) in England, National Grid ESO, Ofgem,



community energy associations, Energy UK, Energy Systems Catapult and councils to discuss the challenges and opportunities each sector faces and agree a way forward. Discussions were had on how DNOs and Councils can work proactively together, what the role of the Regional System Planner is likely to be, how that supports councils spatial planning and place making responsibilities and how energy system planning can be undertaken at best value. <https://www.local.gov.uk/future-local-electricity-networks-creating-partnership-approach-growth-16-may-2023>

## Transport

### Bus funding extended

32. The Government has [announced](#) it will extend its support for the £2 bus fares cap until the end of October and thereafter to £2.50 until November 2024. A further £300 million is confirmed for local authorities and operators until 2025 to protect vital routes. This consists of £150m this year (for 9 months) and £150m next year (for 12 months). Of this £80m pa will go to LAs and £70m to operators. Funding to local transport authorities will begin to be consolidated into a single BSIP+ allocation which will cover existing BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) and LA BSOG (Bus Services Operators Grant that goes to local authorities) together with any new funding from the £80m. Final BSIP allocations can be found [here](#). The LGA have [previously called](#) for longer-term, multi-year certainty of funding to help patronage levels to recover and grow. LGA officers have continued to liaise with DfT officials on future funding scenarios. The DfT has also published an [interim evaluation](#) of the £2 fares cap initiative, which has shown some tentative and yet positive impacts on patronage and modal shift.

### National Networks National Planning Statement – LGA response

33. The LGA responded to the Government's [draft revised National Networks National Planning Statement](#) (NNNPS) which covers the strategic road and rail networks and strategic rail freight interchanges (SRFIs). Our response highlighted two issues: the inconsistency in policies between local and national transport networks; and to highlight the fact that local transport is integral to national infrastructure – providing the 'last and first mile' of most journeys.

### Inclusive streets

34. The Board has previously discussed several issues which relate to the accessibility of our streets. Pavements blocked by parked cars, wheelie bins, A-boards, uneven surfaces and high kerbs are a nuisance to many people but

discrimination for others; long stretches without benches to rest, and bus stops served by infrequent and expensive services diminish the dignity and opportunities available to residents. Soon we will expect to see more EV chargepoints and trailing cables as people charge their cars outside their homes.

35. As well as raising awareness for our membership, the project aims to capture good practice in terms of local strategies and interventions as well as barriers that exist to prevent councils doing more. We will use this in our lobbying and our work to influence manifestos.

### **Funding for electric vehicle chargepoints**

36. Following a pilot phase, the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) launched the [Local EV Infrastructure \(LEVI\) Fund](#) to support local authorities in England to plan and deliver chargepoint infrastructure for residents without off-street parking. To support member councils with their initial expressions of interest, the LGA hosted a joint webinar with OZEV and the LEVI Support Body. Presentations and a recording of the event can be found [here](#).

### **Air Quality**

37. The LGA responded to the Government's consultation on the revised [National Air Quality Strategy](#) (AQS) which sets out the actions that Defra expects local authorities to take in support of the national long-term air quality goals, including new PM2.5 targets. The LGA response highlighted: councils would like to do more, e.g. greater enforcement action, but are hampered by demands on their already stretched budgets; that a statutory duty for councils to act on polluters was not the right answer but if one was being considered it must be fully funded; the importance of the forthcoming Local Transport Plan guidance; and the importance of long-term consistency in national policy, funding and messaging. A summary of consultation responses and the Government's response can be found [here](#).
38. The LGA also responded to the Environmental Audit Committee's [inquiry into outdoor and indoor air quality targets](#). Our response set out the barriers to achieving national targets and highlighted the lack of adequate powers and funding to effectively decarbonise and reduce PM2.5 emissions within their local transport systems and to deal with domestic burning. With regards to indoor air quality, we highlighted the importance of safe, well-maintained and healthy homes and reductions in the public health grant. Cllr Pippa Heylings will be providing oral evidence on behalf of the LGA.