

Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board – Report from Cllr Darren Rodwell (Chair)

Housing, Planning and Homelessness

LGA Conference

1. Housing, planning and homelessness topics had good representation at LGA Annual Conference, which this year took place 4-6 July in Bournemouth. Sessions included:
 - 1.1 “Safe, warm and sheltered: the importance of housing quality” chaired by Cllr Vikki Slade which discussed how we can meet the challenge of making sure everyone is living in a home that meets their current and future needs.
 - 1.2 “Planning for the right homes in the right places: how local authorities can lead the way through uncertain times” chaired by Cllr Loïc Rich which covered planning reforms and their impact on future development and delivering homes.
 - 1.3 “Temporary accommodation: the money pit” chaired by Cllr Hannah Dalton which heard from speakers, including those with lived experience of temporary accommodation, on how we can tackle poor conditions and prevent homelessness.
 - 1.4 “Delivering a housing strategy that works for residents, partners and the environment” which welcomed Exeter City Council to the Innovation Zone to discuss how they hit their housing targets using their retrofit programme.
 - 1.5 “Essex Housing: Delivering better outcomes” which welcomed Essex Housing to the Innovation Zone to discuss how they work with partners to identify surplus public sector land/assets and provides end-to-end development services to bring forward housing.

Infrastructure Levy

2. The LGA and 29 other bodies across the sector [wrote to the government to urge them to refrain from introducing the proposed Infrastructure Levy \(IL\)](#). The signatories met with Rachel Maclean MP in July to discuss our concerns and proposed that retention and improvement of the current developer contribution system is the most appropriate solution.
3. Following on from this, the LGA [responded to the APPG for Housing and Planning inquiry on developer contributions](#), including Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements, setting out what practice works well and what improvements could be made to the system.

Environmental Outcomes Report – technical consultation

4. The LGA responded to the [Government’s consultation on a new system of environmental assessment](#) known as Environmental Outcomes Reports (EOR’s) with a letter setting out our primary concerns and priorities for the next steps of engagement

with local authorities as, in our view, the consultation did not contain the level of detail required to understand how EOR's will work in practice.

Permitted development rights - consultation

5. The Government has recently closed a [consultation on further extensions to permitted development rights \(PD\)](#) allowing additional flexibilities to delivering new homes as well as changes to existing agricultural or commercial businesses. We have prepared a [response setting out our opposition to PD](#) as it is an ad hoc, disconnected approach to development that undermines councils' and their communities' strategic long-term decisions and place-making ambitions.

Planning Fees

6. The Government announced in July that planning application fees would be uplifted by 35% for major applications and 25% for other/minor applications. We welcome this response but are [calling on Government urgently make parliamentary time to introduce the fee uplift](#), following the return of MPs to Parliament. We continue to call on Government to give councils the flexibility to set planning fees at local level to cover their costs relating to planning.

Housing Revenue Account sustainability

7. DLUHC officials and LGA officers have been working together to host roadshows over the summer with local authorities, discussing the recent changes to Right to Buy, the financial challenges across the country and how flexibilities to grants or powers may help councils deliver more homes. The conversations and evidence collected will be used by DLUHC to inform conversations with other Departments and ongoing engagement with Ministers.
8. Cllr Pippa Heylings gave evidence to the [Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee inquiry](#) into the finances and sustainability of the social housing sector in June, setting out the challenges local authorities are facing owing to multiple pressures on Housing Revenue Accounts.

Council Housebuilding

9. The Government set out their [long-term plan for housing](#), including plans to extend permitted development rights. We [continue to make the case](#) that these rights should be revoked as homes created through these rights are often of poor quality that impact people's health and well-being.
10. We are calling for the Government to go further and faster so councils can properly resume their historic role as major builders of affordable homes by implementing [a six-point plan](#) for social housing. Our plan includes rolling out five-year local housing deals to all areas of the country that want them by 2025 – combining funding from multiple national housing programmes into a single pot; Government support to set up a new

national council housebuilding delivery taskforce; continued access to preferential borrowing rates through the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB); further reform to Right to Buy; reviewing and increasing where needed the grant levels per home through the Affordable Homes Programme, as inflationary pressures have caused the cost of building new homes to rise; certainty on future rents, to enable councils to invest. The Government must also commit to a minimum 10-year rent deal for council landlords to allow a longer period of annual rent increases and long-term certainty.

Archbishop of Canterbury's roundtable on National Housing Strategy

11. On 11 September, the Archbishop of Canterbury held a roundtable aiming to draft an outcome-focused national housing strategy by the end of this year focusing on developing a collective vision. Cllr Darren Rodwell attended to set out the challenges facing councils and our aforementioned key asks.
12. LGA officers are working with Church Housing Association to host a webinar on the practical steps the Church is taking following the [Archbishop's Commission on Housing, Church and Community](#), and how local authorities can engage and partner with the Church to meet local housing needs. The webinar will take place in October.

Decent Homes Standard

13. The LGA, NFA (National Federation of ALMOs) and ARCH (Association of Retained Council Housing) wrote to Baroness Scott, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at DLUHC, to raise our concerns about the potential upcoming changes to the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). Our joint concerns primarily relate to implementation practicalities alongside how implementation will be funded. We will work with DLUHC officials to bring together a small group of local authorities to discuss implementation and timeline challenges.

Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel: Prevention sub-group

14. The LGA's Chief Executive, Mark Lloyd, is a member of the Government's Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel, set up to scrutinise its '[Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy](#)'. Alongside Jean Templeton, Chief Executive at St Basil's, he led a sub-group on 7 August to specifically scrutinise progress and gaps on rough sleeping prevention and provided a feedback note to civil servants. Mark also provided feedback to Minister Buchan at an Advisory Panel meeting on 19 September.

Local Housing Allowance Rates

15. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates govern the maximum amount of Housing Benefit that low-income tenants of private landlords can receive. It has been frozen since April 2020 at a time when rents have significantly increased, resulting in rents that cannot be covered by LHA. The LGA has consistently outlined evidence on the social benefits to raising LHA rates. We will soon be commissioning research to complement this

argument, considering the financial benefits to the public purse, particularly reduced temporary accommodation costs that would result from increasing LHA rates.

Streamlined Asylum Processing

16. The Home Office has updated its processes for asylum support cessations. Previously, this included sending an application decision followed by a notification to discontinue support in 28 days to the refugee. The new process combines the application decision and discontinuation of support notices, resulting in shorter eviction and support timeframes. We are pressing the Home Office to maximise notice and ensure wider support is available to mitigate homelessness and other risks.

Afghan bridging hotel closures

17. The Government closed bridging accommodation for Afghan households between 31 July and 31 August. Throughout summer, the Government agreed to retain households in Government-funded accommodation where there were specific needs, such as medical needs, or councils could commit to moving on households into long-term accommodation by 31 December.
18. Given the lack of data sharing by Government departments, in August 2023, the LGA issued an [online survey](#) to 44 councils in England with bridging hotels in their area. A total of 22 responded – a response rate of 50 per cent. This demonstrated the pressures facing the sector with homelessness presentations at 22%. DLUHC has responded by pledging to publish its data collections on Afghan homelessness presentations.
19. There is also a cohort of Afghans currently in third countries to whom the government has made a commitment to resettle in the UK either through ARAP or ACRS. The Home Office began issuing visas to this cohort from 10 July 2023. We are working with Government to ensure there are effective routes into housing for those in third countries to avoid the situation with bridging accommodation and increases to local pressures and homelessness.

Domestic Abuse and the Homelessness Reduction Act

20. In the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, victims of domestic abuse were included under the definition of priority need for homelessness, On the 19 July, Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Deputy Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, spoke at the All Party Group on Domestic Violence and Abuse on the challenges facing councils in finding suitable homelessness accommodation for at all those in priority need, referencing our key asks on homelessness prevention and council housebuilding.

Empty Homes

21. The LGA has been working in partnership with the Empty Homes Network on a research project exploring the role that councils can play in encouraging more homes to be proactively brought back into use. The LGA hosted its Empty Properties Report

Launch on the 21 September 2023. The webinar explored the current national picture of empty homes, ways in which local authorities can initiate and expand on current service provision and provided a series of recommendations for local authorities to bring more empty homes back into use. The final report is due to launch at the end of September.

Social housing regulation

22. The Regulator of Social Housing has recently published two consultations to support its enhanced regulatory role following the Royal Assent of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. The first [consultation](#) is on draft revised consumer standards. The outcome of the consultation will form the foundation of the new integrated regulatory regime for social housing. The second [consultation](#) proposes changes to the way the Regulator charges fees to social landlords. This follows an announcement by the government that, from July 2024, all social landlords will need to pay for the full costs of their regulation. The LGA will be responding to both consultation and we have also hosted a webinar with officers from the Regulator for councils to learn more about the proposals in both consultations.

Housing sector professionalisation

23. New requirements introduced in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will professionalise housing management, through requiring relevant staff to complete qualifications up to a certain level. To ascertain the potential impact of the introduction of new standards being introduced we issued a survey to Directors of Housing at stock-holding local authorities in June 2023. The [final report](#) showed that 66 per cent of senior housing managers at respondent councils were not yet sufficiently qualified to meet the new requirements. It also showed that respondent councils are likely to face almost £18 million in additional costs resulting from these requirements in the first two years. We have shared the findings with DLUHC and in [national press work](#) and continue to work with officials on the implementation plan.

Residential Leasehold Buildings Insurance

24. The LGA are aware that a number of local authorities are experiencing issues obtaining building insurance on behalf of leaseholders, due to insurance providers exiting the market. We held a roundtable on 10 July bringing together councils, industry and DLUHC to discuss the current market situation and potential next steps.

Press releases

25. We have issued proactive press releases on: [delays to planning fee increase continue to cost taxpayer £5 million a week](#); [new housing qualification requirements could cost councils £18m in first two years](#); [“Generational step-change” needed in council housebuilding](#). We have issued reactive press lines on: [Afghans already presenting as homeless](#); [LGA responds to Government housing announcement](#); [LGA responds to MPs’ report on housing targets](#).

Transport and Economy

Buses reform

26. On 23rd September, the LGA and Urban Transport Group published a [joint report](#) reviewing the Bus Services Act 2017 to empower local areas. The report specifically looks at how Enhanced Partnerships can be improved to lead to significant improvements in bus services; how franchising can be streamlined so that all areas can more easily benefit; how municipal bus companies can once again be created; and how funding streams can be reformed to support these improvements.

Electric Vehicles

27. In response to a [new inquiry by the Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee](#) the LGA submitted a response on electric vehicles (EVs), focusing on charging infrastructure issues and how councils will make decisions within the overall context of transport decarbonisation and local transport priorities.

Air quality

28. On 6th September, Cllr Rodwell gave [oral evidence](#) to the Commons Environmental Audit Committee on outdoor and indoor air quality targets. Cllr Rodwell responded to questions on funding, the role of local government and schools, and dealing with transboundary issues.

Accessible pavements

29. On 27th September, Cllr Loic Rich chaired a LGA webinar on making pavements accessible to all. Kate Dickins and Alisha Pathania, respectively from Sustrans and Transport for All, shared their emerging findings of research they are conducting for the LGA. They were joined by experts from Lambeth and Cornwall councils. The [presentations](#) are now available and the report is expected to be published in November on the LGA website.

Annual conference

30. Cllr Linda Taylor chaired a packed and engaging session at the LGA Annual Conference on the demand for car travel and whether we need to change the way we travel. Cllr Taylor was joined by a highly respected panel of speakers, including Chris Boardman, Commissioner for Active Travel England, Steve Gooding CBE, Director, RAC Foundation and Dame Jane Roberts, Chair, Living Streets.

Plan for drivers

31. On 2nd October, the Department for Transport set out a [plan](#) on how government is working to improve the experience of driving and services provided for motorists. It focuses on a plan of actions to deal with the following issues: smoother journeys, stopping unfair enforcement, easier parking, cracking down on inconsiderate driving,

and helping the transition to zero emission driving. Cllr Rodwell [responded](#) by reiterating that it is councils who know their communities and it is they that should be trusted to make local transport decisions, not Whitehall.

Long-term Plan for Towns

32. On 1st October the Government published a new plan to support towns. [“Our Lon-Term Plan for Towns”](#) lists 55 towns that are set to benefit from £1.1 billion investment. Towns will receive funding and support of £20 million (25% Resource, 75% Capital split) to provide a range of interventions across investment themes and will have 10 years to deliver these. Newly created Town Boards will be given the responsibilities to set the priorities and will need to work with their local authority as the accountable body for the funding. Cllr Martin Tett [responded](#) on behalf of the LGA by agreeing that it was good that the funding was to be allocated by need, rather than competition, but that all councils, faced with a £3bn funding gap over the next 2 years, need adequate long-term resources to protect vital services and create vibrant high streets.

Green growth opportunities report

33. In June we published our [Green Growth Opportunities report - Identifying and promoting green growth opportunities | Local Government Association](#). This report explores the ways in which councils can use their powers and influence to attract and stimulate a low carbon business base.

Repurposing shopping centres: Review and best practice guide

34. On 27 July, we published our review and best practice guide identifying councils that have acquired failing shopping centres in their town centres and assisting councils that are considering intervening. The report follows a well-attended webinar earlier in the year. <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/repurposing-shopping-centres-review-and-best-practice-guide>

Climate Change and Energy

Developing Local Partnerships for Onshore Wind in England consultation

35. On 12 July, the GLA submitted [its response](#) to Governments consultation on Developing Local Partnerships For Onshore Wind In England. The response focused on how councils, if empowered and resourced, can support communities and developers in negotiating the community benefits that communities deserve.

Annual conference

36. This year's LGA Annual Conference in Bournemouth included five sessions in the innovation zone on climate including a session on local climate action in the Netherlands, LB Sutton speaking about their Green Enterprise Partnership, East Devon DC on their large district heating scheme, and GMCA on how to attract finance into

nature projects. The main conference sessions on climate looked at Electricity Grid Capacity, Growing the Green Economy, and workforce challenges. Speakers for the climate sessions included Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP and Shadow Climate Change Minister Kerry McCarthy MP. Presentations from all the sessions are available on the LGA's past event presentation pages.

Grid capacity

37. On 12 July the LGA issued [a press release](#) highlighting that 1,300 renewable energy projects, that have received planning permission, are awaiting construction with many pointing to delays in connecting to grid infrastructure. The news item was [picked up by Sky News](#) highlighting that some developers have been told they will have to wait years or decades to join the grid.

Local Net Zero Forum

38. On 18 July DESNZ hosted the latest Local Net Zero Forum officer meeting. Items discussed included the work of the task and finish group looking at how lessons learned from the trailblazers (Greater Manchester Combined Authority and West Midlands Combined Authority) could inform the roll out of local climate action. The next political level meeting will be held later in the year.

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

39. On 24 August we submitted evidence to the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee's inquiry on Heating our homes. Our submission focussed on local climate action being more efficient and more profitable than national action and central and local government should agree a way forward that gives every council what it needs to build on its own strengths today, to accelerate climate action everywhere into the future.

Renewable Energy Good Practice Guidance 2023

40. The LGA has just published an updated version of the [Renewable Energy Good Practice Guidance](#) originally published in September 2020 to provide additional information in relation to industry and policy changes. This guide will support councils who are considering asset ownership to manage potential risk and benefits. Webinar 21 November.

Environmental Audit Committee

41. We have submitted evidence to the Environmental Audit Committees enquiry into heat resilience and sustainable cooling. Councillor Linda Taylor, Vice Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board has been invited to give oral evidence on behalf of the LGA at the second oral evidence session on Wednesday 25th October.

Make it local

42. The LGA launched its [Make it Local campaign](#) focusing on how we reshape and reset how we deliver on public policy, ahead of the next general election. The campaign focusses on eight policy areas including 'Acting on climate change' that presents a new case into national political parties for [Accelerating Local Climate Action](#). Our case highlights that local climate action can hit net zero by 2050 for a third of the cost and twice the returns compared to a national delivery programme. It sets out that government should put in place a national climate action framework with policy, regulatory and investment certainty and deliver through local climate action agreements with councils underpinned by multi-year place-based funding allocations.

International learning on the governance of national and local collaboration on climate action

43. The LGA has just awarded ARUP with a contract to explore International learning on the governance of national and local collaboration on climate action. The project will identify at least five examples of national and local collaboration on climate action, examine the governance arrangements and present opportunities to replicate structure in England that would lead to a faster, more efficient implementation of decarbonisation.

Waste

44. Disposable vapes are an environmental hazard and there is growing evidence of increased use by young people. Members of the EEHT Board, the CWB Board, and the SSC Board agreed that the LGA should call for a ban on disposable vapes. There is a role for vaping as part of the drive to stop smoking, and the call for a ban only applies to the types of vapes designed to be disposable. The LGA's call for a ban was widely reported in the media and this is rapidly developing area of policy. A FAQ page on the LGA website sets out the impact of vapes and why a ban is needed. At the time of drafting, the Government has indicated that it is considering banning disposable vapes.
45. Defra announced in late August that there will be delay to the implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, and therefore consistent collections for household recycling, which will make decisions on food waste, garden waste, and dry recyclables. The LGA will continue to lobby Defra for urgent clarity on proposals, making the case for councils to maintain flexibility in delivering national objectives, and full funding for any changes. Minister Rebecca Pow has agreed to meet the LGA following representations and we are in the process of arranging this. Our response was widely covered in the national press.
46. The LGA has made a range of representations to government regarding proposals to ban councils from charging fees for disposing 'DIY' waste at household waste recycling centres. The proposal would remove over £1million income a year from many local waste services, we highlighted the challenges this would present councils in maintaining the current service office. A survey found that a third of councils considering closing some waste and recycling sites, a quarter considering reducing opening hours.

47. The LGA's written evidence to the PAC inquiry into the Government's waste and recycling reforms set out our concerns and the LGA was quoted in the PAC's oral evidence session with senior Defra officials.
48. A "reduce reuse, recycle" series of LGA webinars ran over September. The first webinar on 8 September on "Reducing waste: how to slim the bin" was attended by 125 delegates and "Don't dispose reuse" had 115 delegates, and 160 for the "recycling fit for the future" webinar on 18 September. The webinars are highlighting council innovation, international learning and research into behaviours and factors that can encourage more waste prevention and recycling.
49. The LGA annual conference in July featured a workshop session on "Wasted: the future of waste services and moving to net zero". Speakers included Councillor Sarah Nelmes, the Leader of Three Rivers Councils, Dr Anne Velenturf from the University of Leeds, Emma Beal, Local Authority Waste Network Chair and speakers from WRAP and Defra.

Environment

50. On 9 June Councillor Linda Taylor wrote to Trudy Harrison, Defra Minister, about the implementation of biodiversity net gain. The letter noted the LGA's interest in making biodiversity net gain a success and set out recommendations to Defra for making the best use of time and resources in the run up to implementation in November. LGA vice presidents tabled written questions to parliament on the process of implementation and Defra's plans to provide support and resources for councils. Since then, Government has announced a delay to the implementation of biodiversity net gain and set out a revised timetable for issuing government guidance and the statutory instruments that underpin biodiversity net gain.
51. The LGA briefed on Government's proposed amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration on nutrient neutrality ahead of the debate on 13 September. Our briefing reflected the recommendations from the LGA's inquiry into nutrient and water neutrality from March 2023 for a package of measures to reduce water pollution at source, bring forward mitigating schemes, and support partnership action. The Government's amendments proved to be controversial, particularly with organisations representing wildlife and preservation of the natural environment. The amendments were not passed by the House of Lords.

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