

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

Housing, Planning and Homelessness

Implementation of plan-making reforms

1. The LGA responded to the Government's [consultation on implementation of reforms to the plan-making system](#) which included proposals to introduce a 30-month timeframe for plan-preparation, digitisation and standardisation of plan-making and evidence, gateway assessments to check progress on plan-making and approaches to community engagement. We continue to work with DLUHC as they bring forward reforms to the planning system, as well as engaging with other sector stakeholders.

Coming Home: How local authorities and the Church of England can meet housing need.

2. The LGA jointly hosted a webinar with Church Housing 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. More than 40 local authorities attended the webinar.

Council housebuilding

3. We continue to call for the Government to support councils to resume their historic role as major builders of affordable homes by implementing [a six-point plan](#) for social housing.
4. Councillor Rodwell wrote a [comment piece](#) for Inside Housing's 'Build Social' campaign, outlining our six point-plan which would support councils to properly resume their historic role as a major builder of affordable homes.
5. We have commissioned Pragmatix Advisory to undertake a research project to assess the economic, social and environmental benefits of 5-year local housing deals to support our six-point plan for housing.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) consultation on changes to its fees regime.

6. We responded to this consultation expressing our concern that there has been no consultation with the sector on the principle of having to pay an annual fee to the RSH to cover the cost of the regulation. We are also expressed concerns given our ongoing communication with the government about the financial pressures on Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs) that a unilateral decision has been made, that now is an appropriate time to move to 100 per cent full cost recovery, and in

doing so add more than £12.5 million in unanticipated costs to HRAs across the country every year.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) consultation on consumer standards.

7. We responded to this consultation and were broadly supportive of the four revised consumer standards and the accompanying Code of Practice, and that these set out the right expectations of landlords. We urged the Regulator to commit to a review of the standards and how they are being proactively regulated after a specified period post-implementation - with processes, the standards and the Code of Practice being tweaked as needed.

Planning fees

8. Following long-standing calls from the LGA, legislative amendments to increase planning application fees took effect on 6 December 2023. Application fees have increased by 25 per cent across the board, rising to 35 per cent for major schemes.

Renters Reform Bill

9. We have provided a briefing for the Committee Stage welcoming the long-awaited Bill, but highlighting our concerns about the delay in ending Section 21 'no fault' eviction notices. We continue to engage with stakeholders and government as the Bill progresses. Mayor Dennett (Salford City Council) gave oral evidence to the Renters Reform Bill Committee on 14 November.

The Criminal Justice Bill

10. We have highlighted our concerns about the measure related to rough sleeping, particularly the risks that councils will be expected to enforce measures that criminalise rough sleeping and that, instead, there should be a prevention-first approach. Cllr Sue Wooley gave oral evidence to the Criminal Justice Bill Committee on 14 December.

Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel: Prevention sub-group

11. As a member of the Government's Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel, set up to scrutinise its '[Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy](#)', the LGA and St Basils he led a sub-group on over summer to specifically scrutinise progress and gaps on rough sleeping prevention. This as in addition to two other sub-groups focussing on intervention and recovery, and transparent and joined up systems. All sub-groups subsequently developed reports and these are published on the LGA's website.

Local Housing Allowance Rates

12. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates govern the maximum amount of Housing Benefit that low-income tenants of private landlords can receive. In the Autumn Statement the Chancellor announced that the private sector Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate would be restored to the 30th percentile of market rents in April 2024 before being re-frozen in April 2025, at a cost of £1.2 billion. However, The LHA rate for Temporary Accommodation (TA) is set separately from the rate in the PRS and has been frozen since 2011. This has meant that councils have seen an ever-widening gap in the subsidy that they receive from the DWP. This was not addressed in the Autumn Statement. We are procuring research to review councils' TA subsidy loss for 2022/23 (and mid-year estimates for 2023/24) and compare this to the likely impact of allowing the TA rate to rise in line with rents.

Streamlined Asylum Processing

13. The Home Office previously 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 lobbied hard for the Home Office to maximise notice and ensure wider support is available to mitigate homelessness and other risks and they have subsequently reverted back to the 28 day notice.

Rural homelessness

14. The LGA has worked with English Rural to run a series of workshops throughout May, July and October with a small selection of rural councils to determine practice needed to develop effective action in rural communities. We have developed this into a report which is due for publication on 29 January.

Empty Homes

15. The LGA has worked 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. A [report](#) was published in November 2023.

Transport Accessibility

16. On 22 November Cllr Linda Taylor gave oral evidence to the [Transport Committee inquiry on Accessible Transport](#). A variety of legal obligations to ensure accessibility apply to transport operators and local licensing authorities

across different modes of transport - the Transport Committee is conducting an inquiry into these legal obligations and whether they are being met.

17. Cllr Taylor's evidence included issues in relation to pavement clutter and pavement parking, reiterating the LGA's support for banning pavement parking. The challenges facing home-to school transport were also discussed, including the deficit and the exemptions from PSVAR which expire in 2026, as well the inability for councils to enforce against taxi's registered in other areas but operating in their area.

Street works - fines and lane rental surplus funds

18. The DfT have launched a [consultation](#) on a series of reforms to street works regulations, which include:

- 18.1. requiring at least 50 per cent of any surplus lane rental funds to be spent on repairing potholes.
- 18.2. raising the level of fixed penalty notices that can be issued for 5 street works offences.
- 18.3. allowing overrun charges to apply at weekends and bank holidays.

19. The LGA intends to respond. The changes should help strengthen councils' ability to deal with street works and deter poor practice and delays. However, we will seek views as to whether further action could be helpful, for example if the Government could remove the requirement for Secretary of State approval for the setting up of such schemes. Councils are encouraged to respond to the consultation and share their submissions with the LGA with either Kamal Panchal kamal.panchal@local.gov.uk or Simon Jeffrey simon.jeffrey@local.gov.uk.

Highways maintenance allocation

20. On 4 October 2023, the government announced £8.3 billion of additional highways maintenance funding over the period 2023 to 2024 and the next 10 years for local road resurfacing and wider maintenance activity on the local highway network. This consists of:

- 20.1. £3.3 billion for local authorities (LAs) in the North West, North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber
- 20.2. £2.2 billion for LAs in the West Midlands and East Midlands
- 20.3. £2.8 billion for LAs in the East of England, South East, South West and London.

21. The DfT have now confirmed and [published](#) the funding levels for 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025, and the indicative minimum additional funding allocations between 2023 to 2024 and 2033 to 2034 inclusive. This new money is additional to the existing [Highways Maintenance Block \(HMB\) and Pothole Fund](#). At

England level, the additional funding is £150 million for the 23/24 and £150 million for 24/25. The minimum additional overall uplift between 2024-25 and 2033-34 will be £6.9 billion, and £1.245 billion is to be allocated at a future date. The LGA have consistently called for a greater funding to help tackle the £14 billion backlog of road repairs and that future funding should come with long-term year-on-year certainty to help councils prioritise long-term preventative improvements, rather than more expensive reactive pot-hole repairs.

Climate Change and Energy

Local Net Zero Forum

22. The second ministerial level Local Net Zero Forum meeting was held on 21 November with Lord Callanan representing government. LGA member reps welcomed the progression to date whilst making it clear that the work of the forum was far from completed and now needed to enter a period of acceleration.

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

23. Cllr Paula Widdowson gave evidence on behalf of the LGA Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board at their **heating our homes inquiry**. Cllr Widdowson delivered the LGA lines on Local Climate Action being more cost effective than national action. [Parliamentlive.tv - Energy Security and Net Zero Committee](https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event?id=parliamentlive://event/energy-security-and-net-zero-committee)

COP position statement

24. Cllr Darren Rodwell sent a letter to the President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) partially endorsing CEMR position statement ahead of COP28.

Heat Networks Pricing Consultation

25. On 27 October the LGA submitted evidence to governments Heat networks pricing consultation <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/heat-networks-regulation-consumer-protection>.

Renewable Energy Good Practice webinar

26. On 21 November the LGA hosted a webinar with Local Partnerships and Net Zero Go to present the updated version of the "[Renewable Energy Good Practice Guidance](#)" originally published in September 2020 and highlight how Net Zero Go can support councils implementing renewable energy and net zero programmes. [Presentations are available to view online.](#)

Back Local Climate Action

27. On 24 November, the LGA along with DCN, CCN and London Councils [wrote to Claire Coutinho MP](#), and hosted a parliamentary event to promote our Back Local Climate Action campaign. The event was well attended with at least eleven MP's and Peers attending and discussing with members and officers why local climate action can achieve net zero at half the cost of national action and deliver three times the financial returns and wider benefits.

Opinion Poll

28. New YouGov polling commissioned by the LGA shows that just 5 per cent of the public feel prepared for the impacts of climate change. Polling also showed that the public trust their council the most to lead the effort to prepare for the impacts. Also found 63 per cent are worried about climate change, with storms, flooding, and heatwaves being the top 3 impacts.

Solar taskforce subgroups

29. Officers have been representing member councils on the Solar Taskforce Subgroups for Rooftop Solar and Communications. Through the communications subgroup, Solar Energy UK (SEUK) have been preparing guidance on community benefits and engagement for ground mounted solar farms that are increasingly exceeding 50GW and being considered Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP).

Waste

30. Defra set the next steps for household waste and recycling policy under a new name of "simpler recycling" in October. This confirmed that councils will have local flexibility in the design of collection systems, a change that the LGA has long argued for. The LGA responded to two consultations that followed the announcement, asking for clarity on the funding and implementation plan for the challenging dates set out by Defra including the start of mandatory weekly food waste collections from 1 April 2026.

31. Regulations came into force on 31 December 2023 removing council's power to charge for certain types of "DIY" type waste such at household waste and recycling centres. It is disappointing that government decided to waive the requirement to cover any financial loss to councils through the new burdens funding regime.

32. Waste and recycling services face further changes and the LGA is working closely with Defra and the waste officer networks to understand the impact of the new packaging extended producer responsibility scheme and the proposal for

waste incineration to pay for carbon emission through the national carbon trading scheme.

33. The LGA has commissioned work through SLR to look at current practice on commercial waste. The less waste = better business project will look at the opportunity to reduce the environmental impact of waste from businesses, and learning from councils on how waste services to businesses can be financially sustainable.

Environment

34. Government has confirmed that they are not putting forward a legislative solution to the challenge of nutrient neutrality. The first tranche of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund has been allocated to lead local planning authorities (£57 million) and DLUHC is starting conversations with affected catchment areas about the next tranche of funding.
35. The implementation of biodiversity net gain is moving forward, following a delay to the expected go live date of November 2023. Defra and DLUHC published draft biodiversity net gain guidance and regulation at the end of November and implementation for large sites is expected in late January or early February, with the exact date depending on the parliamentary timetable for signing of the statutory instrument. Implementation for small sites is still expected in April. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is providing support to local authorities including a practitioner network of 800 local authority officers. The LGA is working with PAS and the Future Homes Hub to advise Defra and DLUHC on implementation, including clarity on new burden funding for councils and support on gaps in ecological expertise.

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