

Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board – report from Cllr Peter Box (Chair)

1. Party conference season usually dominates the political agenda for the autumn, but this year has been particularly significant as a final opportunity to influence party manifestoes in the run-up to the General Election in 2015. I'd particularly like to thank Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport board colleagues who have spoken at and contributed to a wide range of fringe events and roundtables across the party conferences to ensure we maximise the LGA's impact on EEHT issues. Our influence is not confined to Conference however, as demonstrated in member participation in this month's transport, recycling and affordable housing engagements and in our continuing work on Hidden Talents, planning and local environmental issues.

Party conferences

2. At the Labour Conference, I attended six events run by the Federation of Master Builders, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, the British Property Federation, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and Living Streets. Cllr Ed Turner attended a number of housing debate fringes, particularly those organised by London and Quadrant (L&Q) Housing on sustainable communities and housing in London.
3. At Conservative conference, Cllr Mike Jones, Vice-Chair of the EEHT Board attended seven events including ones run by L&Q on housing, a Crisis event on homelessness, an Enterprise Forum event on flooding and drought, and a Royal Town Planning Institute event looking at the future of planning. Cllr Deborah Croney attending the Federation of Master Builders, Electrical Safety First and CILT events and Cllr Ann Steward attending a panel debate on parking.
4. At Liberal Democrat conference, Deputy Chair, Cllr Keith House, attended a number of housing and planning events organised by L&Q housing, TCPA and RIBA. The People and Places Board Deputy Chair, Cllr Heather Kidd also spoke at events relevant to the board's remit held by the Woodland Trust, the British Parking Association and the Federation of Master Builders.

Hidden talents

5. The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board is leading in collaboration with the Children and Young People Board on the LGA's Hidden talents campaign, which seeks to improve outcomes for young people in the areas of skills, apprenticeships and careers advice. Work has taken place in the last month in the following areas:
 - 5.1. **Youth transitions** - A new report, 'Youth transitions, helping every young person reach their full potential', will be launched at the National Children and Adult Service conference in October. Building on the First 100 Days campaign, the report will set out the case for a decentralised approach helping young people transition from school into the world of work, including recommendations for skills, apprenticeships, careers advice and support for more vulnerable young people.

- 5.2. **Local government and apprenticeships** – The LGA is working with the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) looking at the different ways councils are helping young people into apprenticeships in order to help build learning across the sector, and to make recommendations to government on the future of apprenticeships policy. A roundtable event with councils is being held in Newcastle on 30 October, with a final report expected in December 2014.
- 5.3. **The future of careers advice for young people** – The LGA is working with the councils, the National Careers Council and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) to understand the impact of careers advice reforms on the outcomes for young people, the different strategies taken by councils to support careers advice provision in the face of budget cuts, and to develop propositions for the future of careers advice provision.
- 5.4. **Using data to improve outcomes for young people** – The LGA has started a new project working with councils to look at council good practice using local and national data to engage partners and develop coordinated provision that helps meet their duty to 'secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16-19'. An initial workshop was held on 29 September, and we are now working with councils to develop a good practice guide for January 2015. More information is available online at www.lga.gov.uk/hidden-talents.

LGA Transport Conference

6. 'Gridlock 2040: How councils can save our roads' was the title of a successful LGA conference that took place on 7 October, focusing on the role of councils and what needs to be done now and in the future to ensure that roads users, communities and businesses can access a fit-for-purpose highways infrastructure. As well as issues such as highways maintenance, expert speakers covered issues such as the impact of driverless cars, extreme weather resilience and transport devolution. Chaired by Cllr Tony Newman from the LGA's Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board, speakers included the Shadow Secretary of State, Mary Creagh MP, Cllr David Hodge, Surrey County Council, and Bob Gallienne, Chief Executive of the National Joint Utilities Group. Presentations can be found on the LGA's events [webpage](#).

WRAP meeting

7. Cllr Mike Jones met with Dr Liz Goodwin, WRAP in September to discuss opportunities for join up across key areas of work. WRAP and the LGA discussed progress to meet the current recycling target of 50% by 2020 and the support on offer to local authorities. Joint work will include identifying those authorities where support could be targeted to highlight the opportunities for service improvements and mitigating the risk of EU fines. WRAP and LGA also discussed the EU Commission's proposals to increase the recycling target to 70% and agreed to continue to share data and positions on this proposal.

Affordable Housing debate

8. Cllr Tony Newman took part in a debate hosted by Trowers & Hamlins LLP 'The future of affordable housing – Common ground or turf war?' on 25 September. Participants discussed findings from Trowers & Hamlins report on affordable housing and future steps that those involved in the delivery of affordable housing may consider taking. In his contribution, Cllr Newman took the opportunity to promote a number of the local authority “asks” contained within the LGA’s 100 days document, including lifting the borrowing cap.

Lyons Housing Review published

9. The Lyons Housing Review was published on 16th October 2014. The report places councils at the centre of supporting good quality and sustainable housing development and agrees with the LGA’s proposals for a reform of the Right to Buy, locally set planning fees, broader CPO powers and powers to incentivise sites with planning permission to be built out. The report also sees large scale development led by accountable local government through the establishment of housing zones and housing development corporations with access to devolved funding and a revolving infrastructure pot. The report however does not go as far as lifting the HRA borrowing cap, instead proposing that HMT should consider using the existing borrowing more effectively and extending individual borrowing caps on a case by case basis within the overall HRA borrowing envelope.

Planning

10. Cllr Mike Jones wrote to Brandon Lewis MP to press for greater flexibilities for councils to vary the national information requirements on planning applications imposed by government. The flexibilities, which would be voluntary for councils to take up, would allow councils to vary requirements so that the information requested is proportionate to the risk, size and scale of the development and it would allow authorities to establish the principle of development thereby reducing risk and costs for applicants where appropriate locally.

Media Coverage

11. Our published [research](#) into the impact of relaxed planning regulations allowing offices to be converted into homes without planning permission received significant media coverage. It found rules have resulted in existing business being forced out of their offices and reduced affordable housing provision. The release secured coverage in the Telegraph, Daily Mail, BBC Online and in the Financial Times two days in a row. Our concerns were also backed up by the Business Secretary, Vince Cable and the Mayor of London.

12. The LGA has had national [media coverage](#) for its call for new powers for councils to tackle fly-tippers. The new powers would enable councils to issue fixed penalties for low level fly-tipping which currently can only be dealt with through the courts, which is expensive and can take months. We also called for councils to be awarded full costs for the fly-tipping and enviro-crime prosecutions they carry out, which responds to the limited pay outs many authorities have seen in recent years.

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