

## Note of last Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board meeting

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**Title:** Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board  
**Date:** Thursday 2 October 2014  
**Venue:** Terrace lounge, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note.

Item	Decisions and actions	Action								
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome, Introductions and Declaration of Interest</b>									
	<p>The Chair opened the meeting with a round of introductions and noted the apologies that had been received.</p> <p>No declarations of interest were made.</p>									
<b>2</b>	<b>Terms of Reference and Membership</b>									
	<p>The Chair briefly introduced the report which set out the Board's Terms of Reference and Membership. In doing so, he highlighted the importance of developing a flexible way of working to enable the Board to manage the broad range of policy areas within its remit with only four formal meetings a year.</p> <p>In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In discussing the importance of developing a flexible, inclusive and consensual way of working outside the formal Board structure, suggestions included: the creation of ad hoc task and finish groups as and when required; linking pieces of work to improvement activities; and the creation of a secure online area to facilitate information sharing in between Board meetings which all members and substitutes could access.</li><li>• There was unanimous support for the proposal that each of the Board's Lead Members be assigned a portfolio area which they would be responsible for championing. The portfolios were agreed as follows:<table border="0"><tr><td>Cllr Peter Box</td><td>Growth, Infrastructure and Transport</td></tr><tr><td>Cllr Mike Jones</td><td>Planning</td></tr><tr><td>Cllr Keith House</td><td>Housing</td></tr><tr><td>Cllr John Northcott</td><td>Environment</td></tr></table></li></ul>	Cllr Peter Box	Growth, Infrastructure and Transport	Cllr Mike Jones	Planning	Cllr Keith House	Housing	Cllr John Northcott	Environment	
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Cllr Keith House	Housing									
Cllr John Northcott	Environment									

- Members agreed that the political group offices would coordinate the Board's appointments to outside bodies, which would be signed off by Lead Members.

### **Decisions**

That the Board:

- i. noted its Terms of Reference and Membership;
- ii. agreed that each of the Board's Lead Members be assigned a portfolio area to champion as set out above;
- iii. agreed that the Board's appointments to outside bodies would be approved by Lead Members; and
- iv. agreed that the Board's Lead Members would agree a flexible and inclusive way of working to enable the Board to effectively fulfil its mandate.

### **Actions**

Lead Members to meet to agree: (a) working practises to enable the Board to fulfil its remit; and (b) appointments to outside bodies. These decisions to be circulated to the Board for information. **Member Services Officer.**

Circulate the legacy reports, and previous Chair's reports, from former Environment and Housing and Economy and Transport Boards to Board Members. **Member Services Officer.**

## **3 Chair's report**

The Chair introduced the report, which was for information, without further comment.

### **Decision**

That the Board noted the report.

### **Actions**

Circulate to Board Members: (a) any Ministerial responses to correspondence sent by the former Environment and Housing Board Chairman; and (b) LGA's recent press release on affordable housing. **Member Services Officer.**

## **4 Panel Discussion Locally Led Growth: Challenges, Opportunities and Board Priorities**

The Chair introduced a series of four reports which summarised the achievements of the former Economy & Transport and Environment & Housing Boards, as well outlining some suggested priorities for the

coming year in the areas of: Economy; Transport; Housing; Planning; and Environment.

The Board was invited to listen to a panel of external speakers on their views on what the key issue opportunities and challenges were for local government in these policy areas. Members were then asked to discuss these key issues and agree a series of priorities to be developed into a detailed Board work programme which would be signed off by Lead Members.

a) Economy and Transport

Dave Simmons from the Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion highlighted the role of local authorities in shaping and delivering employment opportunities and skills training to meet the specific needs of localities. He paid particular attention to the challenge of addressing youth unemployment and highlighted a number of ways councils could help drive the employment and skills agenda in their localities.

Stephen Joseph from Campaign for Better Transport outlined the priorities and challenges for local growth from a transport perspective. These included: making the case for a devolved transport funding settlement; diversity in performance and accountability of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); the implications of decreasing funding on bus provision and road maintenance; and integrating transport planning within the wider devolution debate.

In the discussion that followed, Members' made a number of comments, including:

- Member suggested that as part of the work programme, the Board develop a series of key 'asks' which clearly articulate what 'devolution' means in practice from an Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport (EEHT) perspective.

**Economy and Skills**

- There was strong feeling that the next round of growth deals must be more inclusive and recognise the value of rural as well as urban economies in driving growth.
- Members discussed maximising the value of recent LGA research which highlighted the centralised and fragmented nature of the current funding landscape. Particular concern was expressed regarding the financial and resource implications of bidding for multiple funding streams.
- Addressing the gap between employment opportunities and skills and training services was seen as a key priority, both in terms of adults and young people. Members emphasised the importance of making the case for

empowering local authorities to join up employment and skills services at a local level. It was suggested that a task and finish group focus on addressing youth unemployment and under-employment.

### **Transport**

- There was a detailed discussion regarding Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plans and linking strategic transport planning to the wider devolutionary debate, particularly around the devolution of revenue funding and integrated services. Suggestions included: developing a single transport fund pilot; promoting greater cross boundary collaboration; and giving local authorities' powers in Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 relating to civil enforcement of traffic contraventions.
- Active travel was highlighted as an important issue with regard to transport planning, particularly with reference to local authorities' environmental and public health responsibilities.
- There was an acknowledgement that in addition to strategic considerations, operational issues were also of importance to the Board given their significant impact on communities.

## b) Housing, Planning and Environment

Paul Swinney from the Centre for Cities highlighted a number of the challenges around addressing the demand for housing supply and affordability. In doing so, he highlighted the importance of locally-led and place based housing growth, tailored to meet the specific needs of localities rather than driven by centrally set targets.

Trudi Elliot from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) spoke about the opportunities for local government to influence the conditions in which planning operates, as well how the RTPI could help local authorities address some of the challenges around planning. These included: funding; resourcing; infrastructure; and meeting the combined interests of the public, developers and central government.

In the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments, including:

### **Housing**

- Increasing housing supply to meet local needs was emphasised as a key priority, with Members seeing the Board as having a critical role in lobbying Government to help unblock the barriers to house building and in shifting the debate so that councils are perceived as 'deliverers of development'. In discussing the challenges, suggestions included: effectively linking up infrastructure planning and

funding with housing development; releasing Government owned buildings and land banks for housing use; supporting councils to develop a workforce equipped with planning and development skills; providing greater flexibilities and longer timeframes for housing development; and grounding strategic planning decisions in locally democratic structures.

- In discussing the affordability crisis within specific housing markets, Members discussed a number of tools to address the challenges, including: linking local housing allowance and real rents; robustly community impact testing solutions against long term inflationary implications; and encouraging greater economic decentralisation away from the current centralised system.
- Whilst Members were supportive of the LGA's call to lift the cap on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), there were a number of suggestions about how to frame the issue so that it gained maximum political traction. These included: greater focus on investment rather than borrowing; calling for better use of funding within the current HRA cap; and lobbying for HRA underspend to be devolved to local government.
- In discussing the importance of housing quality as well as supply, there was strong support for greater emphasis in the work programme on councils' role in holding the private rented sector to account in terms of standards and security for tenants.
- Member emphasised the importance of maximising the lobbying opportunities which might arise from the publication of the two housing reviews by the Government and Sir Michael Lyons, should these reviews' findings align with the LGA's position.

### **Planning**

- In discussing the Board's role in supporting a locally led planning system, Members emphasised the need for a strategic approach to planning.
- Members highlighted the challenges of delivering existing planning permissions in addition to new ones, and discussed the potential to treat groups of existing permissions as virtual garden cities rather than as individual projects.
- Concerns were expressed regarding centrally set Government targets and space standards, which could be both costly and lead to perverse behaviours.

### **Environment**

- It was noted communications and research activities were being taken in response to the potential risk that a number

of local authorities could be to be subject to an EU financial sanction relating to breaches of EU waste legislation.

- Reference was made to the significant reduction in landfill waste per household and the importance of communicating this success story to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- It was suggested that the work programme include scope for exploring income generating opportunities around issues such as: deployable renewable energy; energy efficiency; and local energy markets to tackle fuel poverty.
- With reference to the extreme weather experienced towards the end of 2013, Members discussed the critical role of councils' in providing effective resilience support and the interest in this topic which the one year anniversary might bring.

## **Decisions**

That the Board:

- i. asked that their views inform the development of the Board's work programme for 2014-15; and
- ii. agreed that Lead Members approve the final Board Work Programme.

## **Actions**

Lead Members to meet and agree the Board's work programme for 2014-15. The agreed work programme to then be circulated to the Board for information. **Member Services Officer and Heads of Programmes.**

The Board to be sent: (a) the notes from the most recent WRAP meeting; and (b) an LGA graph on housing demand and supply. **Member Services Officer**

**Appendix A -Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Peter Box CBE	Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Mike Jones	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr John Northcott	Mole Valley District Council
Members	Cllr Brenda Arthur	Norwich City Council
	Cllr / Dr Joan Dixon	Derbyshire County Council
	Cllr James Lewis	Leeds City Council
	Cllr Timothy Moore	Liverpool City Council
	Cllr Tony Newman	Croydon Council
	Cllr Ed Turner	Oxford City Council
	Cllr Deborah Croney	North Dorset District Council
	Cllr Jim Harker OBE	Northamptonshire County Council
	Cllr Steve Count	Cambridgeshire County Council
	Cllr Mrs Ann Steward	Breckland Council
	Cllr Geoffrey Theobald OBE	Brighton & Hove City Council
	Cllr Roger Symonds	Bath & North East Somerset Council
	Cllr Julian German	Cornwall Council
Apologies	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire County Council
In Attendance		
LGA Officers		
Michael Lockwood		
Paul Raynes		
Ian Hughes		