

## **Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board – report from Cllr Peter Box CBE (Chair)**

### **Promoting our *First 100 Days* Housing Proposals**

1. Over recent months, Board colleagues and I have been actively promoting the LGA's *First 100 Days* campaign through a number of speaking and engagement events.
2. On Friday 7 November 2014, I gave a keynote speech at the Northern Housing Consortium Conference, which was themed "*lead not plead*". I had the opportunity to talk to delegates about the LGA's proposals for devolution of housing and economic powers, in the context of the challenges facing the North of England.
3. Also in November, Councillor Mike Jones (Deputy Chairman of the Board) spoke at the Quality Housing Construction Conference on the *First 100 Days* and the local authority view of offsite construction techniques.
4. The LGA Chair, Councillor David Sparks OBE, had an introductory meeting with Emma Reynolds MP in early November to discuss the LGA's *First 100 Days* housing proposals and the Lyons Housing Review.

### **Housing**

5. Board colleagues and I were pleased to welcome Sir Michael Lyons to our most recent meeting on 2 December 2014 for a discussion of his recent housing review. Sir Michael endorsed several LGA housing proposals and we await the publication of the Government's housing review with interest.
6. In December, we submitted a response to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on arrangements for pooling right to buy receipts with the Treasury. We argued that councils should have full control over receipts from the sale of homes under the right to buy.
7. Also in December, we responded to a consultation from DCLG on a "right to build" including proposals for encouraging the development of self-build housing. We were pleased to see that the consultation paper already recognised the good work that councils are already doing in this area. Our recommendations set out how central government could help councils to build on this work, for example by making sure that the cost of setting up a self-build register can be fully recouped through fees.

### **Sustainable Drainage Systems**

8. The Government has announced that it plans to amend its approach to deliver sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) on new developments in response to lobbying by the Board regarding our concerns about the financial implications of the Government's proposals. This will include one consenting regime through the planning process and a removal of the requirement for local authorities to adopt and maintain SuDS.
9. Councillor Mike Jones wrote to Liz Truss MP earlier this month to press for clarity on the resources available to councils to prepare for and deliver the new arrangements. We continue to pursue our proposal for water companies to approve, adopt and maintain SuDS through the Infrastructure Bill.

### **Planning**

10. Fellow Board Member Councillor Ed Turner recently met with Stephen Williams MP to discuss the implications of the Government's proposals to introduce a simplified set of standards for new homes at a national level. This focused on the transitional arrangements including: the impact of proposals on the status of existing local plans; the impact on the progress of emerging plans; and the overall resource implications for local government. Councillor Turner pressed for a light touch approach to transition which would minimise the resource burden on the local government sector.

### **Environment**

11. In December, I met with the Deputy Chair of the Environment Agency, Robert Light. In doing so, I made the case for continued funding to support the LGA's Climate Local Programme, as well as highlighted the importance of longer-term investment scenarios for flood and coastal defences and linking the economic case for investment. Other areas covered included: councils' preparedness for winter weather; the key findings from the LGA's annual winter readiness survey; and lessons learnt from the Winter 2013/14 floods.

### **Winter Readiness**

12. The LGA's annual winter readiness survey, which took place between September and November 2014, showed that councils were well prepared for the storms over Christmas and further extreme weather events expected in the following winter months. Findings showed that councils have topped up their salt supplies – after using less grit than usual during last year's mild winter - and are ready to use innovative technology to cope with the sub-zero conditions. Further information on the survey findings can be found here on the LGA website at: <http://tinyurl.com/n7stjfd>.

### **Highways Maintenance Funding Allocation 2015/16 - 2020/21**

13. Following a short consultation period, on 23 December the Department for Transport (DfT) announced the allocation of local highways maintenance funding by authority for the 2015-2021 financial years. The announcement confirmed that from a total of £5.8 billion allocated for local roads maintenance for the 6 year period from 2015, £4.7 billion will be allocated on a needs base, £575 million will be used to create a competitive 'Challenge Fund' and the remaining £578 would be ringfenced for an 'incentives fund.'
14. The LGA has called for all of the £5.8 billion funding to be allocated on a needs basis. This would provide councils with valuable certainty of funding, enabling them to focus on making roads resilient, rather than on more expensive reactive repairs and costly bidding exercises for competitive funds. Our lobbying helped to ensure that the amounts ringfenced for the challenge and incentives funds were markedly lower than originally proposed, thereby providing more certainty for councils. Further information can be found on the LGA website here: <http://tinyurl.com/k8hfxdt>.

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