

16 March 2016

## **EEHT Update Report**

### **Purpose**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

The report provides updates on a number of areas of work within the EEHT work programme which do not appear elsewhere on the agenda.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board note the updates included in the report.

### **Action**

Any actions to be taken forward as directed by members.

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### **Housing and Planning Bill**

1. The Housing and Planning Bill is currently at the Committee Stage in the House of Lords. The LGA continues to work with Peers and partners to support the drafting and tabling of amendments that mitigate the unintended consequences of the proposal on councils and their communities.
2. The Board continues to focus on key issues for councils and their tenants, covered in the [Bill briefing](#). The Board has also begun to make its case more publicly. Since the last meeting, the Board has gained significant national coverage for its analysis on the impact of reforms on the supply of [council homes](#), affordability of [starter homes](#), 'high income' [council tenants](#), and the welfare bill. It also had significant national coverage for research highlighting the number of [unimplemented planning permissions](#).
3. The Board continues to progress discussions with government and councils on the detail of proposals so that councils have the powers they need to meet local need. The scale of the Bill's impact will be heavily determined by detail in its regulations, for instance the LGA is encouraging all stock holding councils to consider the financial impacts of legislation requiring payments based on their vacant high value properties, because Government has not committed to defining 'high value' for different areas or to a level of funding councils might retain to replace homes sold.

### **Housing Commission**

4. The Housing Commission is focusing on four themes around which the LGA can provide additional value: council's role in housebuilding, place-making and growth, employment and housing, and housing an ageing population. Further information on the areas of focus is available on the [Housing Commission](#) webpage. Board Lead Members are each hosting a session on each of the four themes. Sessions have already been held on house-building and on place-making and growth. Sessions on employment and housing, and housing an ageing population will be hosted in April 2016.
5. The call for evidence closed on 26 February 2016 and we have received over 90 submissions from a wide range of local government, and key partners such as National Housing Federation, Shelter, Crisis, Chartered Institute for Housing, British Property Foundation, Royal Town and Planning Institute, Federation of Master Builders, National Health Service, Age UK, and many more. These are currently being independently assessed and summarised for the Board.
6. In the lead up to publishing a report at the LGA Annual Conference, the Housing Commission is funding a range of research (for instance around the skills and employment prospects of those in need of affordable housing) and peer improvement work (for instance in supporting councils to increase their housebuilding outside the Housing Revenue Account) to help evidence its case.

## **LGA Transport and Local Growth Conference**

7. Transport and local growth was the theme of an LGA conference that took place on 8<sup>th</sup> March, chaired by the Vice-chair of the EEHT Board, Cllr Martin Tett. The event was an opportunity for member councils to discuss a wide range of transport issues ranging from the very strategic, such as devolution, collaboration on plans, and making the most of Highways England and Network Rail investment, to local issues such as the role of parking and bus services to support growth and healthy high streets.
8. Nottingham City Council gave a presentation on the Workplace Parking Levy and how it was working to support their transport plans as well as local businesses. John Dowie, the Acting Director General at DfT, also provided a departmental and Government perspective on future public investment on transport. All slides are available from the events page from the events section of the LGA's website <http://tinyurl.com/hu7gnzk>.

## **Flooding**

9. With December 2015 being a record breaking month for rainfall in some parts of England and exceptional amounts of rain falling onto already saturated ground, councils have been at the forefront of activity to ensure communities are resilient and protected as far as possible. Cumbria, Lancashire and Northumberland were the main areas to be badly hit by flooding in early December, spreading across other parts of Yorkshire over the Christmas and New Year break.
10. The LGA's strategy has focused on promoting the work of councils and councillors working with the fire and rescue service and other partners on the ground through the media, our webpages and our engagement with government. The role of councils has been widely commended by national politicians and the widespread community spirit in order to help neighbours has been widely welcomed.
11. We set up a dedicated response and recovery team and in particular have been working behind the scenes to help councils deal with their immediate challenges. For example assisting local authorities with their requests for sourcing sandbags to shore up flood defences to minimise flooding in a number of areas. Whilst the LGA has not been formally involved in the national co-ordination mechanism (COBR) in relation to the flooding, we have worked with DCLG to put together a protocol on how LGA mutual aid arrangements regarding sandbags (and other resources) can be actioned following future emergencies. We circulated LGA guidance on communicating with residents during extreme weather and ran regional workshops on managing severe weather outbreaks and other emergencies in February. There will also be a plenary session on flooding at the LGA Annual Conference.
12. There have been multiple announcements about additional government funding for affected areas, totalling almost £200 million. In particular, previous LGA lobbying has meant that capital funding has been made available to repair roads and bridges in a number of places and small steps have been taken to introduce a more streamlined recovery package for Communities and Businesses – this includes business rates relief, council tax relief and £5000 flood resilience grants for affected properties. We have pushed for a firm commitment from government that councils will be reimbursed for flood recovery funding schemes and worked with councils to ascertain the total costs of repair

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to infrastructure across those areas affected - calling on government to ensure that councils continue to receive the support they need. Current estimates are that infrastructure repair costs alone, for example for damaged roads, bridges and public rights of way, are around £250 million, with the final cost likely to be higher as local authorities are still undertaking assessments.

13. Following calls from councils, the government has also recently confirmed it will apply to the EU Solidarity Fund, which will, if successful, provide vital financial support to help councils return their communities back to normal. We have submitted evidence to a number of government inquiries on flooding. This included attendance at the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry by Calderdale Council (supported by the LGA). In particular we continue to call for increased flexibility in the current approach to funding for flood protection infrastructure funding through devolution of both capital and revenue funding into a single place-based pot. Lead Members are also finalising a letter to the Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP to feed into the National Flood Resilience Review which he is chairing and is due to report in Summer 2016.

#### **Unlocking growth through partnership**

14. The British Property Federation and the LGA are undertaking a joint visit of Southampton City Council to explore how the public and private sector can work together to unlock growth. The purpose of this work is to revisit previous joint work from 2012 and to reflect on changes to the policy landscape and councils' resources. The visit takes place on 17<sup>th</sup> March and the outputs will help inform good practice resources on the LGA website as well as updating recommendations that support the funding and financing of infrastructure and development critical to local growth.