



POLICY AND INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Issue 08 2012/13**

Performance Improvement Unit

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1. POLICY AND INFORMATION BULLETIN - ISSUE 08 2012/13

The Policy and Information Bulletin is published on a regular basis, to highlight news announcements, and reports, publications and consultation documents issued by the Government and other agencies and organisations, which affect the work of the Council or may be of interest to members and officers. The Bulletin is designed to ensure that relevant matters, which may have corporate as well as service specific implications, are drawn to the attention of the appropriate members, service directors and other officers.

The Policy and Information Bulletin provides a summary of new and emerging issues, and provides website links to the full versions of relevant reports, publications and consultation documents. The document also gives details of forthcoming events and conferences of relevance to the Council's activities, that are facilitated by government departments or local authority organisations. Although members and/or officers may already be aware of issues specific to particular services, functions, responsibilities or interests, the Bulletin is intended to raise corporate awareness of relevant matters and to ensure that nothing of importance to the Council is overlooked.

Website links published within the Policy and Information Bulletin are reviewed when the document is compiled. The Council is not responsible for the reliability or continued availability of links to external websites and, whilst care is taken to provide correct working links, it cannot be guaranteed that these will work all the time. The Council has no control over the availability of externally linked webpages or websites.

If members or officers wish to discuss any of the items published in the Policy and Information Bulletin, or require further information or reports on specific issues, they should contact the relevant service director in the first instance. Feedback in respect of the format and content of the Bulletin can be made to the Performance Improvement Unit at performance@eppingforestdc.gov.uk.

PART A - NEWS ITEMS

2. £1.3M TO HAND POWER BACK TO TENANTS (28 AUGUST 2012)

The Housing Minister has unveiled a new fund of £1.3m to help give more power to communities over their social homes. Grant Shapps hopes the scheme will help bring the passion of the Olympic volunteers and last year's broom armies to local communities by giving housing association and council tenants a voice to lead change in their area.

Mr. Shapps said the Tenant Empowerment Programme would offer a "springboard for success" to communities across the country who want to see their local needs reflected in the services they receive. This could be by helping tenants learn the skills they need to engage and negotiate confidently with their landlords; forming

tenant panels to come together to demand the best value-for-money services; or even to take control of local services themselves if they feel that they could deliver more for less. The Minister also highlighted the benefits to landlords of getting their tenants involved, from community involvement in scrutinising new repairs contracts or tenants working together with local authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour. The Minister invited charities and benevolent societies to submit their ideas for delivering a national programme that will:

- encourage the creation of more tenant panels - groups of tenants who can challenge landlords, shape services and get involved in local decision making; and
- help individual tenants engage with their landlords on a range of issues and services.

A new Community Cashback scheme will also be at the heart of the Tenant Empowerment Programme, allowing groups of tenants who choose to take on the management of services, such as maintenance and repairs, to reinvest any savings they make from running these services themselves into other community priorities.

Of interest to:

Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Housing

3. TOWN HALLS MUST TACKLE £1BN COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT FRAUD AND ERROR THROUGH LOCALISATION (28 AUGUST 2012)

Local authorities must get to grips with the £200m of Council Tax Benefit lost each year through fraud and error so they can fully support hard working families and genuinely vulnerable people, Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles has said.

Spending on council tax benefit has more than doubled since 1997. Figures show that since 2006, council tax benefit fraud and error has cost the taxpayer an estimated £1.1bn, an average of around £3m per council. Welfare reform is an important part of the Government's strategy to repair the national deficit. Giving councils a stake in providing council tax support will assist local job creation, promote enterprise and reduce welfare dependency. Government reforms will localise council tax support putting councils, who already raise and collect the tax, in charge of the discount. This will give councils a stronger incentive to support local firms, cut fraud, promote local enterprise, end the something for nothing culture and get people into work. As part of that deficit reduction strategy councils will be expected to save over £400m a year when they begin running local council tax support schemes next year. Councils will keep all savings they can make from reducing fraud and error. Between 1997 and 2010 council tax bills more than doubled. The Coalition Government has worked with councils to freeze council tax for two years, cutting council tax in real terms.

Of interest to:

Finance & Technology Portfolio Holder
Director of Finance & ICT

4. CASH BOOST FOR COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING (29 AUGUST 2012)

New funding to help communities bring jobs and homes to their neighbourhood using improved planning powers, has been announced by Planning Minister Greg Clark.

Neighbourhood planning gives people a major say in shaping development in their area. It gives communities the power to help decide where development should go and the type and design of development that can be granted automatic planning permission. A £10 million fund is now available to help councils ensure their communities are able to finalise people's plans for homes, businesses and facilities in their neighbourhood. More than 200 communities are already using the new planning powers introduced in the Localism Act to work up plans that can, for example, decide the location of new homes and decide the green spaces communities are keen to protect. Councils are now invited to apply for grants of up to £30,000 for each scheme to help pay for the costs of getting plans in place. Payments will be paid to councils to help them support and advise groups taking forward neighbourhood plans and to pay towards the examination of plans and a local referendum.

Of interest to:

Planning Portfolio Holder
Director of Planning & Economic Development

5. PLANNING REFORM TO CREATE MORE HOMES AND BOOST THE HIGH STREET (1 SEPTEMBER 2012)

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has approved a new measure that will increase the number of homes in town centres and help increase footfall on high streets.

New planning rights will allow more flats to be created above shops without the need for planning permission. Two flats will be allowed to be created in office or storage space under new permitted development rights coming into force. The change further streamlines the planning system, making it easier, quicker and cheaper for people to create new homes in existing underused space. It has the potential to help increase the amount of affordable housing and ensures better use is made of existing developed land. Relaxing planning restrictions on creating flats above shops can also help increase the vitality of town centres. The Government has already taken steps to improve the planning system through the National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Act, which are already delivering results. It has also announced proposed measures to simplify the planning system further by making it easier to temporarily re-use some buildings without needing planning permission, streamlining the paper work needed for planning applications and speeding up planning appeal decisions. The Government has also outlined a package of

measures to help high streets reclaim their role at the heart of our communities. These include encouraging town centres to become Town Team partners to benefit from the support and advice available from the Government and leading retail experts.

Of interest to:

Asset Management & Economic Development Portfolio Holder Director of Planning & Economic Development

6. PLAN TO BOOST BRITISH HOUSEBUILDING, JOBS AND THE ECONOMY (6 SEPTEMBER 2012)

The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, alongside the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles, have set out a major housing and planning package that will help deliver:

- up to 70,000 new homes, including affordable housing and opportunities for first-time buyers to get onto the housing ladder;
- 140,000 jobs and a boost to the construction sector; and
- £40 billion guarantee for major infrastructure projects and £10 billion for new homes.

This includes a series of measures aimed at supporting businesses, developers and first-time buyers, while slashing unnecessary red tape across the planning system. The measures include:

- removing restrictions on house builders to help unlock 75,000 homes currently stalled due to sites being commercially unviable. Developers who can prove that council's costly affordable housing requirements make the project unviable will see them removed;
- new legislation for Government guarantees of up to £40 billion worth of major infrastructure projects and up to £10 billion of new homes. The Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill will include guaranteeing the debt of Housing Associations and private sector developers;
- up to 15,000 affordable homes and bringing 5,000 empty homes back into use using new capital funding of £300m and the infrastructure guarantee;
- an additional 5,000 homes built for rent at market rates in line with proposals outlined in Sir Adrian Montague's report to Government on boosting the private rented sector;
- thousands of big commercial and residential applications to be directed to a major infrastructure fast track and, where councils are poor at processing decisions, developers can opt to have their decision taken by the Planning Inspectorate. More applications also will go into a fast track appeal process;
- 16,500 first-time buyers helped with a £280m extension of the successful 'FirstBuy' scheme, which offers aspiring homeowners a much-needed deposit and a crucial first step on the housing ladder; and
- for a time limited period, slashing planning red tape, including sweeping away the rules and bureaucracy that prevent families and businesses from making

improvements to their properties, helping tens of thousands of home owners and companies.

Of interest to:

Housing Portfolio Holder
Planning Portfolio Holder
Asset Management & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
Director of Housing
Director of Planning & Economic Development

7. RED TAPE BLITZ TO BOOST BUSINESS GROWTH (10 SEPTEMBER 2012)

Shops, offices, pubs and clubs will no longer face burdensome health and safety inspections, and over 3,000 regulations will be scrapped or overhauled, in a radical plan by the Government to curb red tape and boost British business growth.

From April 2013, the Government intends to introduce binding new rules on both the Health & Safety Executive and on local authorities, that will exempt hundreds of thousands of businesses from burdensome, regular health & safety inspections. In future, businesses will only face health and safety inspections if they are operating in higher risk areas such as construction, or if they have an incident or a track record of poor performance. In addition, the Government will introduce legislation to ensure that businesses will only be held liable for civil damages in health and safety cases if they can be shown to have acted negligently. This will end the current situation where businesses can automatically be liable for damages even if they were not actually negligent.

The Government is also taking radical action on red tape in a further measure to boost growth and jobs in the economy. The Government is systematically examining some 6,500 substantive regulations that it inherited through the Red Tape Challenge process. The Government is now committing to abolish or substantially reduce at least 3,000 of these regulations and it will complete the identification of the regulations to be scrapped or overhauled by December 2013.

This commitment constitutes the most ambitious action ever proposed by a modern British government to slash the burden of regulation and set businesses free. It will save British companies millions of pounds in wasted time and money, and help spur economic growth and innovation across the UK. The Red Tape Challenge has already resulted in a series of red tape cuts including a radical package of employment tribunal reforms, expected to deliver £40 million of savings per year to employers.

Of interest to:

Asset Management & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
Director of Environment & Street Scene

8. SURVEILLANCE CAMERA COMMISSIONER APPOINTED (13 SEPTEMBER 2012)

The public will be given more power to challenge the use of surveillance cameras by police and local authorities, through the creation of a new code of practice, the government has announced.

To oversee the code Andrew Rennison has also been appointed as the first ever surveillance camera commissioner. He will report back to parliament on how CCTV and automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) systems are being used and raise any concerns through a report to parliament. The code of practice is designed to encourage greater transparency in the use of CCTV and ANPR and, as well as ensuring these systems are being used proportionately, it will provide coherent guidance for police forces and local authorities to increase image quality and boost the chances of catching criminals. Mr. Rennison will represent the interests of the public, ensuring police and local authorities use surveillance camera systems responsibly and follow the code of practice agreed by Parliament. The commissioner will encourage operators to follow the code and will lay an annual report before parliament in which he can draw attention to any failings and make recommendations to improve how CCTV is used. He will help develop the code to ensure its continued impact and effectiveness and provide advice to users and the public. The voluntary code is expected to come into effect from April 2013 and, as well as setting the general principals for the operation of surveillance camera systems, will promote technical and occupational standards to make them more effective.

Of interest to:

Safer, Greener & Highways Portfolio Holder
Director of Environment & Street Scene

9. SOCIAL LANDLORDS CAN BRANCH OUT TO MEET DEMAND FOR PRIVATE RENT (17 SEPTEMBER 2012)

Housing Minister Mark Prisk has laid down the gauntlet to social landlords across the country, to branch out and help meet the growing demand for rented homes.

Mr. Prisk urged housing associations to turn their expertise in providing social homes to also building new homes for private rent, and called on landlords to bid for a share of a £10billion Government Guarantee and "provide the spark to get Britain building", delivering homes built for new tenants, whether in social homes or for private rent. A review of the private rented sector by Sir Adrian Montague highlighted real potential for the development of homes built specifically for private rent, with funding for these new properties coming from institutional investors. Speaking to the National Housing Federation in Birmingham, Mr. Prisk argued that social landlords could also make the most of the potential that Sir Adrian's report identified. The Government has brought forward a range of positive measures to get Britain building, and Mr Prisk pointed out that landlords could be using these to make the most of this potential market. The measures include:

- new legislation for Government guarantees of up to £10billion for new rented homes; and
- £300million capital funding towards delivering up to 15,000 new affordable homes and bringing 5,000 empty homes back into use.

Of interest to:

Housing Portfolio Holder
Director of Housing

10. LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS RECEIVE BOOST (17 SEPTEMBER 2012)

The Government has announced core funding for Local Enterprise Partnerships, to allow them to drive forward their growth priorities.

Local Enterprise Partnerships are central to the Government's approach to driving local economic growth and for ensuring that every community is able to fulfil its potential. This offer of over £24million from Government could unlock up to £20million locally and will enable Local Enterprise Partnerships to deliver their local plans for growth. An interim £5million funding package will be made available immediately for all Local Enterprise Partnerships to draw upon for the remainder of this financial year. This will be followed by up to £250,000 per Local Enterprise Partnership per year for the following two years. Where matched by funds locally the overall funding pot could equate up to £45million over this period. The central government funding will be provided on a 50/50 basis by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Local Enterprise Partnerships will be invited to bid for matched funding for 2013/14 and 2014/15, setting out how they would be able to offer a cash match from public or private resources. Details on the scope of the match will be discussed with Local Enterprise Partnerships shortly. The Government made £5million of core funding available to Local Enterprise Partnerships last year to help them start up and establish themselves through financial support for things such as board support, development of priorities and business engagement. This was followed by a further £4million to build capacity over a four year period.

Of interest to:

Asset Management & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
Director of Planning & Economic Development

PART B - REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

11. CLAMPDOWN ON ILLEGAL ENCAMPMENTS (28 AUGUST 2012)

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has called on councils to clamp down on illegal encampments and to stop unauthorised traveller sites being set up.

New guidance has been sent to all council leaders advising how to act swiftly. The advice sets out the strong powers councils and landowners have to remove illegal and unauthorised encampments, such as traveller sites, protest camps and squatter sites from both public and private land. The guidance makes clear that councils should work with agencies, such as the police and Highways Agency, and make full use of the powers that can stop illegal camps ever starting. Councils have seen a number of cases of people setting up unauthorised encampments at weekends, for example, and using that time to develop land illegally while council offices are closed.

Setting up camps during a weekend often means enforcement action needed to stop unauthorised camps and development, such as actions to stop the cutting down of protected trees or laying of concrete drives, is delayed or too late.

Mr Pickles has urged councils to ensure planning officers are ready to take swift enforcement action and use the tough powers available to tackle rogue encampments. Powers that can be used include:

- pre-emptive injunctions to protect vulnerable land from unauthorised encampments;
- possession orders to remove trespassers from land;
- police powers to order unauthorised campers to leave land;
- temporary stop notices to stop work that breaches planning rules, allowing councils to decide whether further enforcement action is needed;
- powers of entry onto land so authorised officers can obtain information for enforcement purposes;
- planning contravention notices to stop work on development if there appears to be a breach of planning rules or a council needs more information about the activities on the land;
- enforcement notices to remedy a breach of planning rules; and
- ensuring sites have valid caravan or tent site licenses.

The Government is committed to protecting the nation's green spaces and this guidance will help protect Green Belt land and the countryside from illegal encampments. The Government has already introduced new rights for travellers who play by the rules. These include stronger tenancy rights on authorised council sites, incentives through the New Homes Bonus scheme for councils to build more authorised sites, and the abolition of Whitehall Planning Circulars on travellers. It is spending £60million on helping local communities establish properly approved and planned sites and earlier this year published new planning policy on traveller sites.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2205763.pdf>

Of interest to:
Planning Portfolio Holder
Director of Planning & Economic Development

12. 'PLANNING FOR GROWTH' (4 SEPTEMBER 2012)

The planning system, subject of significant reform over the past eighteen months, is playing its role in enabling growth and councils are overwhelmingly saying 'yes' to badly-needed housing development.

This Local Government Association (LGA) briefing note presents a summary of key data sets and new LGA research to provide a factual analysis of the positive role the planning system is playing to bring forward investment and new housing developments.

http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e0738e71-3903-4b61-9300-50bcf2380ec1&groupId=10171

Of interest to:

Asset Management & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
Housing Portfolio Holder
Director of Planning & Economic Development

13. ADMINISTRATION OF POLLS HELD IN MAY 2012 (10 SEPTEMBER 2012)

This Electoral Commission summary report on all polls held on 3 May 2012, outlines that while the polls were well run, there are still a number of important issues that need to be addressed before Police and Crime Commissioner elections in November 2012.

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/150504/May-2012-Summary-report.pdf

Of interest to:

Support Services Portfolio Holder
Assistant to the Chief Executive

14. ARE YOU BEING SERVED? BENCHMARKING RESIDENT SATISFACTION DATA (19 SEPTEMBER 2012)

Councils will now be able to gauge their residents' perception of their local area, crime and community cohesion and compare satisfaction rates directly with other local authorities, thanks to new guidance being issued today.

The Local Government Association and London Councils, the body which represents London's local authorities, have launched 'Are you being served?', a guidance document containing a standard set of resident satisfaction questions and outlining the steps that should be taken to ensure the results can be compared with those of other local authorities. The guidance is designed to suit local circumstances and minimise the cost to councils of collecting the data. It does this by allowing councils

to use only those questions that are of interest locally, and fit these questions in with existing survey plans.

The guidance is based on the findings of a review by Ipsos MORI, which identified a set of conditions that would need to be met to ensure that any comparisons being made are robust, fair and valid, and that each council's data is of a good quality that will stand up to scrutiny. The criteria were then refined on the basis of an extensive consultation with local authorities.

http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f3fe6659-ef48-4e1e-a44b-a02f9f2e368d&groupId=10171

Of interest to:

Leisure & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder Acting Chief Executive
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PART C - CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS

15. LOCALISING SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL TAX - COUNCIL TAX BASE AND FUNDING FOR LOCAL PRECEPTING AUTHORITIES (28 AUGUST 2012)

This Department for Communities and Local Government consultation sets out the government's proposals to provide certainty to local precepting authorities by allowing the council tax base for those areas to be calculated excluding localised council tax support reductions. Localising council tax support is part of a wider set of reforms to the welfare system. The closing date for response to the consultation is 9 October 2012.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/2206075.pdf>

Of interest to:

Finance & Technology Portfolio Holder Director of Finance & ICT
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16. NEW WAY TO MEASURE FUEL POVERTY (18 SEPTEMBER 2012)

A new way to measure fuel poverty in England is being proposed by the Government, following the independent review published in March this year.

Ensuring more accurate measurement will help to design effective solutions to fuel poverty, allowing the resources available to be targeted where they are needed most.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) is proposing to adopt a new definition based on the overall framework suggested by the review. This new proposed definition includes dual indicators separating the extent of the issue (the number of people affected) from its depth (how badly people are affected) as a way

to measure the problem. The consultation also considers the implication of changing the definition for the fuel poverty target which is currently set out in the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000. As the definition of fuel poverty proposed is relative but the current target is focused on eradication as far as reasonably practicable by an end date of 2016, the consultation asks for views on whether the target should be amended to align it with a new type of definition, as recommended by the independent review. This is not confirmation of a change in the fuel poverty target; it is recognition of the fact that a new definition may not align with the target as it currently stands and this needs to be considered.

DECC will publish its decisions following consultation early next year, alongside an updated fuel poverty strategy to ensure resources are being used in the best possible way. The closing date for response to the consultation is 30 November 2012.

<http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/consultation/fuel%20poverty/6406-fuel-poverty-changing-the-framework-for-measureme.pdf>

Of interest to:

Environment Portfolio Holder Director of Planning & Economic Development

PART D - EVENTS & CONFERENCES

17. NEW EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

The following events and conferences etc. may be of interest to relevant members and officers:

(a) Housing the Nation? Financing new homes

Supporting development will require sustained and joint work from councils, developers, lenders and central government. It is a case of 'all hands to the pump' to build new homes and invest in existing ones. The Local Government Association has long supported greater local financial control to support councils to play their part in delivering homes quickly, efficiently and sustainably. Recent changes to self-financing further enable councils to do so. How can we make the most of the opportunity self financing presents to invest in new and existing homes and what more needs to be done to provide local authorities with the financial freedoms they need to play their role in bringing forward the homes that are so desperately needed?

High land prices and the limited availability of finance underpin the housing and wider economic crisis. How can councils and developers work together to unlock access to development and finance?

This Local Government Association conference in London on 19 December 2012 explores these issues further. Delegates can expect to hear from central government

on their plans to support new housing development and investment in existing homes; to reflect, discuss and exchange ideas with others on how housing growth could be financed and how to work with stakeholders; and find out more about using new delivery models to overcome the barriers to economic growth through the housing system.

http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/events/-/journal_content/56/10171/3685132/EVENT-TEMPLATE

Of interest to:

Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Housing

18. FORTHCOMING EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Details of the following forthcoming events and conferences etc. have previously been published in the Policy and Information Bulletin:

Event	Date	Venue
LGA Equality Framework Conference	24 September 2012	London
LGA Night-Time Economy Conference	26 September 2012	London
LGA Community Budgeting Event	4 October 2012	London