

Environment Board Update, 25th July 2019, LGA

The Environment Board met on 25th July, the hottest day on record. The hot weather and rail disruption meant that some colleagues dialled in to the meeting rather than travel to London. Fittingly, our first speaker was Sarah Woodhall from Public Health England (PHE), who are developing a single adverse weather plan as required under the second National Adaptation Programme. This will bring together guidance for the health sector, councils and local communities to reduce and manage health risks associated with extreme weather. PHE are talking to a wide range of stakeholders, and looking particularly at how local authorities are preparing for the health impacts of climate change. The meeting discussed how can PHE and ADEPT best work together on the adaptation agenda (including regional engagement events), and the role for Place directorates in adverse weather planning. PHE are now represented on the Local Adaptation Advisory Panel (LAAP). They will share lessons learnt from real extreme weather events with councils and help to translate these into simple local actions, and look to engage further with the business community and infrastructure providers.

The second substantive item was an update on the Environment Bill by Katherine Mountain and Brendan Mahon from Defra's Stakeholder Engagement Team. The scope of the Bill covers:

- A new system of green governance
- Improving air quality
- Restoring and enhancing nature (including new duty to consult before felling any street trees)
- Improving waste management and resource efficiency
- Improving surface water, ground water and waste water management.

There remains some uncertainty due to the change of Government and Secretary of State. The Bill will include new powers and duties, but the detail will follow in secondary legislation. Defra will bring ADEPT and the LGA into the Bill implementation engagement process, and continue to develop their LA engagement plan.

Keith Crane from Defra's Local Air Quality team gave an update on the air quality part of the Bill. Noting that:

- responsibility and accountability for tackling air quality is not always where powers and levers to take effective action sit
- air pollution crosses administrative boundaries
- the Clean Air Act is not always well enforced,

he indicated it is likely that the 1995 Act will be amended to give stronger duties at local level to enable a more collaborative approach within and across local government structures. Co-operation between councils and by 'relevant public authorities' (not yet defined) will be a requirement. There will be more emphasis on prevention, and possibly measures to protect vulnerable groups. The discussion covered whether national transport infrastructure owners and operators (roads, rail, ports, airports, waste, water) will be included, and how new burdens on councils will be funded (part of the next spending review).

Jane Houghton of Natural England (NE) updated on their Green Infrastructure standards project. The aim is to provide a practical set of standards that are simple for professionals, land managers, etc. to use, consisting of a framework of 10 key principles – an approach, not measures. The standards will be launched in summer 2020 and be piloted in 15 places: seven of them will have some capacity and support given by NE's contractor on this project. There is a long list of potential pilot areas including West of England, Newcastle, Manchester and Exeter, but this has not been finally agreed.

David Sutherland (Buckinghamshire County Council) updated on the Oxford/Cambridge growth arc Local Natural Capital Plan. The Ox/Cam arc was initially promoted by the NIC, and is seen as a

testbed for biodiversity net gain, local natural capital plans, and nature recovery networks. The project is ambitious and moving quickly, with Paul Leinster as Steering Group Chair. The plan is to be produced by March 2020 at a cost of £1.2m – Highways England are funding this, it is uncertain how it would be funded elsewhere. The Environment Agency is coordinating the production of the plan.

Other business included:

- reports back from three Working Groups – Waste, Flood and Water Management, and Natural Capital & Heritage
- an update on the climate change programme '50 for 30' case studies on rapid transitions to deliver councils' climate emergency declarations/ambitions
- planning for the Autumn Conference – Paula Hewitt is the lead Vice President for conference planning, she will chair a plenary on 'Preparing for a changing world', to include the 25 YEP and local industrial strategies
- and a call for key messages to be included in a letter from the ADEPT President to the new Secretary of State for the Environment.

There was a successful workshop in the afternoon, organised by the Energy Working Group on the theme of Achieving Clean Growth – Pathways to a Net Zero 2050. Carolyn McKenzie (EWG Chair) set the scene with a presentation on Clean Growth and Net Zero Emissions 2050/2030: What does it mean for Place?

There were also speakers on:

- Supporting Local Clean Growth and Net Zero Emissions – Patrick Allcorn, Head of Local Energy, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- Clean Growth- A LEP perspective – Andy Hulme Cheshire and Warrington LEP
- Local Energy Markets – Risk or Reward? LASER Energy Company