

Blog

The Strategic Network

July 2018

Local Government Association Conference: the real housing event?

There were probably as many housing-related announcements (and debates) in Birmingham at the LGA Conference as there were at the Housing Conference the previous week.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Homes England launched and/or highlighted a number of initiatives:

- First wave of eight strategic partnerships between Homes England and housing association to deliver over 14,000 new affordable homes by 2022 in housing pressure areas
- Community-engagement fund of £163 million to help deliver community-led affordable homes
- Homes England update on its land disposal programme with 1,250 hectares to be made available over the next 12 months
- Guidance for social housing landlords on bidding for funds to tackle ACM cladding
- Consultation on longer tenancies in the private rented sector
- Domestic abuse fund prospectus.

In addition, there were a number of broader announcements relevant to the housing sector including:

- Digital charter between MHCLG and councils to deliver better services, which links to the recent Chartered Institute of Housing report on digital services
- Social Care Green Paper in the autumn will now incorporate the care needs of working age households rather than only older people.

Finally, the LGA launched a series of reports in advance of the government's public spending review in 2019. They included a briefing paper on 'housing, planning and homelessness'.

So, what should one make of this avalanche? Rumours suggested that MHCLG made these announcements at the LGA Conference merely because Ministers were not available the previous week because of the politics of Brexit, a third runway at Heathrow etc.

Delegates, nevertheless, were generally not impressed by the announcements or the Secretary of State's speech. Although he acknowledged the challenges faced by councils, there was nothing new on the big issues such as local government finance, the cost of social care, the austerity agenda and the impact of Brexit for councils that benefit from EU funding. These 'cans have been kicked along the road' until the Budget in the autumn and the public spending review.

From a housing perspective, delegates were frustrated but not surprised that there was no mention of the abolition of the housing revenue account borrowing debt cap. Councils in the Midlands and the North were also still exasperated that the selective relaxation of the debt cap generally favours councils in the Greater South East. As a number of delegates vociferously argued, 'so much once again for the government's real commitment to the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine' even though the Secretary of State confirmed that he is now the lead minister for the latter!

About the author

Tim Brown BSc(Hons), Dip TP, PhD, MCIH, MeRSA is a qualified town planner and a corporate member of the Chartered Institute of Housing. He is an independent consultant and a Senior Research Associate in Housing and Local Government at De Montfort University. He was previously Director of the Centre for Comparative Housing Research. He has been a board member and chair of a number of housing associations, a director of two social enterprises and a member of Coventry Partnership. His main areas of expertise are the housing needs of older people, economic development and regeneration, housing policy and local government and social housing allocations systems. Current projects include work on boosting housing supply, housing and safeguarding and the private rented sector.