

WEST MIDLANDS IN CONTEXT

ISSUE 14, JANUARY 2017

West Midlands in Context highlights a broad mix of reports, statistics and other material that has something to say about the West Midlands or that help provide a wider context to the work of councils and other organisations in the region.

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SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

The changing nature of council funding

Big mouth strikes again

It is a while now since Barnet Council produced their graph of doom showing the divergence between the growing cost of meeting the demand for services and the decreasing resources available to meet them. The then Leader of Birmingham, Sir Albert Bore referred to the situation in his own council as the jaws of doom. There have been a number of reports analysing the state of council funding over the years, recently the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) provided an update, which may help us at least partly gauge the size of the jaws that are menacing councils around the UK and the West Midlands in particular.

In looking at the extent of council funding cuts, excluding education, police and fire service grants, they found that in England councils' revenue in 2016/17 will be 26% less than in 2009/10. However, the use of reserves has mitigated the impact somewhat, so that according to the IFS, overall spending power will be down by 23%.

Money changes everything

Of course, not all places are as dependent upon grants as others. The IFS suggest that some areas were more vulnerable, when the “*long standing idea that grant allocations should take account of grant dependence*” broke down. This, added to the fact that wealthier areas are able to raise more money from council tax, has meant that the cuts have been “*much larger for poorer, more grant-dependent councils than their richer neighbours*”. From 2016/17 the allocations once more took account of the level of grant dependence, resulting in “*more equal cuts to overall spending power across councils*”.

The IFS’s figures show that on average, the 10% of English councils most dependent on grants in 2009 saw cuts in spending of 33%, compared to 12% for the 10% of authorities least dependent on grants. The figures for the West Midlands are set out below, with district and county data combined by the IFS into a single figure.

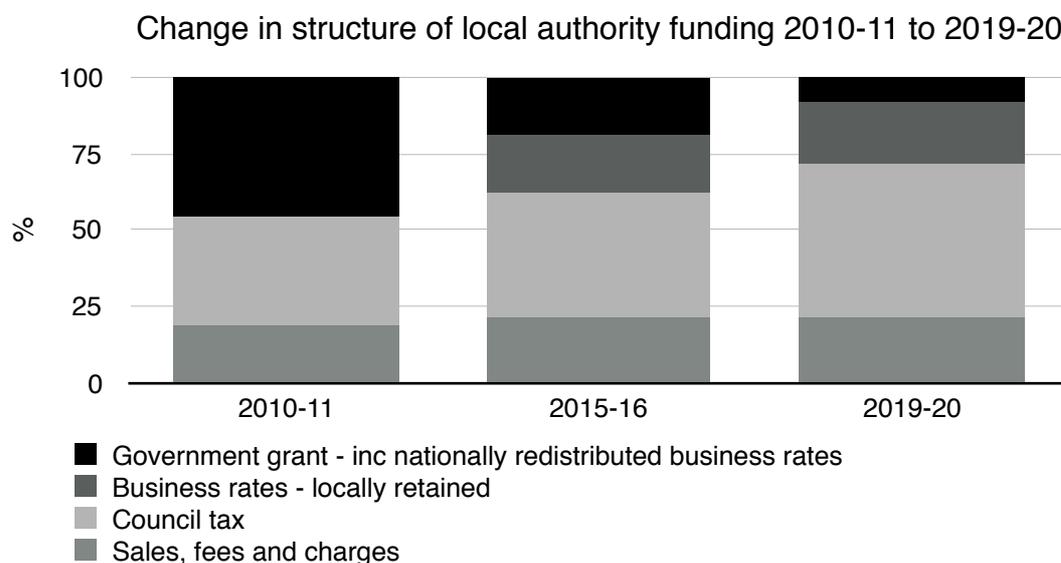
Authority area	Grant Dependence 2009/10	Spending cut % - 2009/10 - 2016/17
Birmingham	72%	-34%
Sandwell	71%	-21%
Stoke on Trent	69%	-23%
Wolverhampton	66%	-18%
Coventry	64%	-16%
Walsall	63%	-10%
Telford and the Wrekin UA	60%	-15%
Dudley	60%	-15%
Shropshire UA	49%	-13%
Solihull	49%	-18%
Herefordshire UA	48%	-21%
Staffordshire	46%	-19%
Worcestershire	44%	-10%
Warwickshire	41%	-9%

Source: IFS - Council level figures on spending cuts and business rates November 2016

The rise of council tax and the fall of the government grant

Last year, the National Audit Office (ONS) produced some interesting figures showing how the nature of local government funding is changing. For example, these showed that in 2010/11 some 46% of council funding came from Government grants (including nationally redistributed business rates). However, by 2015/16 this had fallen to 20% and by 2019/20 it is estimated that it will be as little as 8%. Over the same time-frame, the percentage of income from Council Tax is expected to rise from 36% in 2010/11 to make up over half of council funding by 2019/20. Council income from sales, fees and charges are expected to

make up an unchanged percentage 21% of income from 2015/16 to 2019/20, while the share from locally retained business rates will grow slightly from 19% to 20%.



Source - NAO Local government overview , October 2016

The NAO noted that the local government finance settlement for the period up to 2019/20, amounted to a 2% a year real-terms cut in spending power. This, they say, is something of an easing of the pressures on councils. In comparison, between 2010/11 and 2015/16 the reduction equated to 4.7% per annum, or 23.4% over the whole period. The NAO noted that the easing in the rate of the reduction in spending power is *“solely the result of anticipated increases in council tax income”*.

With local areas looking to boost their economic performance, it is interesting to note that according to the NAO, the parts of councils that have seen the biggest percentage spending reductions are those involved in development. Planning & development and housing have had the biggest percentage cuts in spending, while transport has had the fourth heaviest, behind culture and related services. The only major service area experiencing any increase has been children’s social care. At £7.4 billion it is the second biggest area of expenditure for local government, but is still little over half the amount being spent on the biggest area of expenditure, adult social care at £14.4 billion. Since the NAO report came out, the government has increased the level of the social care precept that councils can levy if they choose. It remains to be seen what impact this will have.

Sources

- Institute of Fiscal Studies - Council-level figures on spending cuts and business rates income, November 2016
- Institute of Fiscal Studies - A time of revolution: British local government finance in the 2010s, October 2016
- National Audit Office - Local government overview 2015-16, October 2016
- DCLG - Provisional local government finance settlement 2017 to 2018, December 2016



DEVOLUTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The PAC-Man cometh

Devolution and accountability

In its work on local government finance the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has commented that the last six years has been *“characterised by opaque and unstable grant policies”*. This issue of transparency is something that was echoed in the recent report by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on devolution in England. Among its deliberations, the Committee noted the concern expressed in its evidence sessions that devolution is being conducted by deals done behind closed doors rather than through legislation.

The Committee did not look at the policy of devolution, but had concerns about the risks inherent in its implementation. Indeed, the Committee found that beyond broad generalities of the potential benefits of devolution, there was little detailed strategy or clarity about what was expected to be achieved by the process. This absence make it hard to assess *“the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public spending”*. The report went on to state that it is *“vital”* there is a list of expected outcomes and metrics to measure success.

Another related issue for the PAC was the lack of a clear audit trail following how public money is allocated, who is spending it, what its effect is and who is responsible if it fails to provide value for money. Moreover, in devolving responsibilities on health and social care, the Committee warned that Government must not *“absolve itself of its responsibility to ensure that devolved areas receive adequate funding for sustainable services”*. The Committee Chair wrote that *“devolution is not a miracle cure and central government cannot expect to wash its hands of problems to which it has no solutions”*.

Aware of the varied geography and nature of devolution the Committee commented that devolution benefits need to *“work for all local areas and not just central zones or key cities”* so that a form of *“local centralism”* does not develop where *“power and decision-making sits in the dominant city heart of a combined authority”*.

LEP - accountability

Less than impressed with the Government’s responses to the accountability issues already raised by the Committee in its *Cities and Local Growth* report, the Committee continued to have concerns about local scrutiny and accountability including the availability of the resources and capacity needed. Among the areas highlighted by the PAC was the *“opaque nature of accountability for the activities of Local Enterprise Partnerships”*. In this respect its perhaps worth triangulating this view with the findings of the LEP questionnaire survey published last month by the National Audit Office (NAO).

With an 100% response rate, the NAO found that 95% of LEPs *“agreed”* or *“strongly agreed”* that they were open and transparent, with 87% agreeing that there were *“clear lines of accountability from LEPs to central government”*. However, that figure fell significantly to less than 50%, when it came to accountability to the local electorate, and to 43% for accountability to Parliament. In comparing themselves to councils, 64% of LEPs believed that they were held to an equally high standard of transparency over spending as local authorities.

The NAO survey also found that 77% of LEPs had annual accounts, the same proportion as had an annual report, although in both cases a smaller proportion of LEPs had published them. Some 64% of LEPs had consolidated their expenditure into local authority accounts.

While generally happy with their own levels of transparency, LEPs are less clear about Government processes with only 39% agreeing that funding decisions to LEPs are made “*openly and transparently*”. Perhaps reflecting the lack of clarity about the Government’s devolution strategy reported by the PAC, it also seems that some LEPs were, at least at the time of the survey, uncertain about their role in the context of combined authorities and devolution.

Single investment fund

Both the National Audit Office (NAO) and Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) have found particularly deep cuts for planning, housing and transport. In this context, it is interesting to note the PAC’s view that government needs to do more to “*demonstrably understand the link between devolution and economic growth*”. The Committee were concerned that devolution is being considered in isolation with “*less importance placed on housing, land, education and skills*”. As if to emphasise the disconnection, research by the Local Government Association (LGA) showed that some £23 billion of growth funding is spread across 70 funding streams and 22 government departments and agencies. Even if these were well coordinated, at least on first view, it would seem an inefficient system. However, the LGA also found that in “*most areas 63% of the funding streams have little or no connection to local efforts to drive growth and create jobs*”, although areas with devolved deals fare better having “*influence or control*” over 47% of funds. As a result the LGA are calling for funds to be devolved directly to local areas through a single investment fund, which will help councils develop a single place-based strategy, “*which meets the needs of people rather than separate institutions*”.

Sources:

- Public Accounts Committee - [Devolution, financial accountability and following the taxpayer pound](#), December 2016
 - IFS presentation - [A time of revolution: British local government finance in 2010s](#), October 2016
 - Institute for Fiscal Studies - [Council-level figures on spending cuts and business rate income](#), November 2016
 - National Audit Office - [Local government overview](#), October 2016
 - National Audit Office - [Local Enterprise Partnership census](#), December 2016
 - Local Government Association Press release - [Devolve funding to increase building and job creation](#), December 2016
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AIN'T NOTHING GOING ON BUT THE RENT

THE CHANGING NATURE OF POVERTY IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

The rise of the working poor

Last month the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) published its latest snapshot of UK poverty. In 2014/15 around 21% of the UK population was living in poverty. Although this headline figure has remained largely unchanged since 2002/03, there have been significant changes in its characteristics. For example, the proportion of people in poverty in privately rented accommodation has increased dramatically, so that there are now as many people in poverty privately renting as in social housing. Another notable trend has been the increase of people in poverty in working households. This has risen from 45% over ten years to a record high of 55% across the country (52% in England and the West Midlands). The JRF note that the majority of workless households contain disabled members, pensioners or lone parents. More positively, the JRF note that the number of children in long-term workless households has declined over the past four years.

Median incomes rise across the country but fall in the West Midlands

The JRF report that 2014/15 saw median incomes reach an all time high across the country. The most well-off benefited by the most, with the richest 20% seeing a 6% increase, while the poorest 20% were below where they were a decade before. Looking at the picture geographically, Scotland had the largest increase of £27 in weekly median pay, with only London and the West Midlands experiencing decreases at £7 and £2 respectively. Measured using a three year average, at around £360 a week, the West Midlands had the second lowest median income. Elsewhere the Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures for April 2016 showed that the West Midlands had the joint highest proportion of jobs paid below the minimum wage in Britain.

At 23% the West Midlands' poverty rate is the UK's second highest. The figures show that 52% of people in poverty in the region live in households where at least one person is in work, while 24% of people in poverty are disabled, just above the UK average. On the other hand, the percentage in private housing (28%) is below the UK average of 33%. However, this national ratio is heavily skewed by the south of England, where the rate is as high as 40% in London.

Housing benefit in the West Midlands

Increasing housing costs are having a growing impact. Compared to 30% a decade ago, some 40% of the poorest 20% of households are spending more than a third of their income on housing costs. For those renting privately, this figure rises to 70% of the poorest 20% of households. Despite this, the number of people claiming housing benefit has fallen from its 2013 peak as unemployment has decreased. However, while the proportion of claims by workless households has fallen, the number of working families claiming housing benefit is now higher than 2013. In the West Midlands, there were around 440,000 households on housing benefit in 2016, over 50% of all renting families, receiving on average £86 a week. Some 34% were in private rented accommodation and 28% were working families, the joint highest figure outside of the south and east of England.



Homelessness

Adding to the picture, evictions have increased significantly across the country. The JRF's collective figure for the Midlands, Wales and the South West shows evictions rising from over 5,000 to around 7,500 between 2010/11 and 2015/16. Evictions by social landlords make up by far the largest proportion.

Across England the number of statutory homeless households has risen by almost 50% since 2009/10, even though the number outside of London and the wider South East has fallen slightly. Five years ago the most common reason for homelessness was friends or family no longer providing accommodation. Currently, the main reason is the ending of a short hold tenancy or falling into rent arrears. The swing towards this is the most pronounced in the south and eastern parts of the country, but is also significant elsewhere in England.

Educational attainment, free school meals and special needs

The JRF report looked at a number of the different dimensions of poverty. Looking at education, for example, it highlights its deleterious effects on educational attainment. Among the statistics highlighted is that children receiving Free School Meals (FSM) are twice as likely as other pupils not to reach expected standards in reading, writing and maths at 11 years old. For the 16 year old age group, it seems the attainment gap between disadvantaged children, which included looked after children as well as those on FSM, compared to other pupils is not quite so large. However, neither has the gap changed significantly over the past five years.

Indeed, the latest report by the Social Mobility Commission found that despite the focus on improving attainment in schools *"the link between social demography and educational destiny was not been broken"*. As an example, only 5% of children eligible for FSMs gain 5 A grades at GCSE. There's a geographical dimension to this as well, with children in England's most disadvantaged areas 27 times more likely to go to an inadequate school than a child in the least disadvantaged areas.

Pupils receiving free school meals make up a disproportionate 40% of all exclusions, although they only make up around 15% of pupils in total. Pupils identified as having some form of special educational need are particularly over represented, making up 56% of permanent exclusions. It seems there is a strong relationship between special educational needs (SEN) and poverty with SEN pupils more likely to be receiving FSM than other pupils. Indeed, 34% of pupils with with severe learning difficulties and those with social, emotional and mental health difficulties receive FSM, over twice the headline rate for pupils as a whole.

To help address some of these issues, the government recently announced additional support for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). This will give councils an extra £4.2 million to help meet the challenges of the SEND system of education and health care plans, bringing the total up to £40 million for next year. In addition £20 million is being provided to support parents and carers.

Sources:

- JRF - [Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2016](#), December 2016
- Office of National Statistics - [Low pay in the UK: Apr 2016](#), October 2016
- Social Mobility Commission - [State of the nation 2016](#), November 2016
- Department for Education - [Funding for SEN confirmed](#), January 2017

THE HEADMASTER RITUAL - THE FINANCIAL VIABILITY OF SCHOOLS

EFFICIENCY SAVINGS, FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL RISKS, AND PUPIL/TEACHER RATIOS

Hazard warning

Last month the National Audit Office (NAO) cast its eyes over the risks to the financial viability of schools in the light of increasing cost pressures. It found schools will have to make £3 billion worth of efficiency savings by 2019-20 *“against a background of growing pupil numbers and a real-terms reduction in funding per pupil”*. To counteract cost pressures, the government wants schools to make 8% savings through better procurement (£1.3 billion) and by using their staff more efficiently (£1.7 billion). Indicating the scale of the challenge, the NAO noted that 60% of secondary academies spent more than their income in 2014-15.

In making the cuts, the NAO found significant risks that *“need to be actively managed”* by the Department for Education (DfE). It seems a key problem is that the Department has not *“clearly communicated to schools the scale and pace of the saving required”*, nor yet provided the support needed by schools to plan for and make the savings without affecting educational outcomes. Partly due to this, the NAO suggests that the DfE did not know whether the savings will be achieved in practice.

Worryingly, the NAO consider that the DfE’s estimates do not take into account the cost implications of its policy changes and may risk imposing additional cost pressures on schools. The Department is expecting schools to have the capacity to deal with its policy changes, but had insufficient evidence to support this assumption. As grist to their mill, the NAO note that schools failed to make the £1 billion back office and procurement savings that the DfE aspired to in the last Parliament, but instead costs increased by nearly £500 million.

Educational Services Grant

Looking at one of the policy changes, like the Local Government Association (LGA), the NAO had concerns about the phasing out of the Education Services Grant. The grant is used by councils and academies to provide support and improve education services in schools, including speech therapy, physiotherapy and activities such as planning for more school places and running recruitment criminal checks. The LGA has opposed the cuts. They say councils already top up their £600 million grant and express concern that they have been told to expect around £50 million to do the *“exact same duties that normally cost them £815 million annually”*.

Cost cutter - teacher numbers, pupil/teacher ratios and disadvantage

In making cuts, the NAO noted *“that schools tend to reduce the proportion of their spending on teaching staff before other areas of spending”*. As context to the challenges schools are facing in the West Midlands, it’s perhaps worth looking at the DfE’s staffing statistics. Across the country, the number of primary school teachers has increased with the rise in primary pupils. At the same time, the number of secondary teachers has fallen with the decline in secondary pupils. However, the extent of the changes is not the same in each region.

The figures for the West Midlands show that between 2011 and 2016, the number of primary school children increased by 10.3%, while over the slightly different time-frame of 2010 to

2015, teacher numbers increased by 9.5%. This was the smallest increase in teachers of the ten education regions. The figures show the West Midlands had the third highest pupil/teacher ratio and was one of four regions where the ratio increased between 2010 and 2015, although the DfE note there was little difference between many regions.

Between 2011 and 2016 the only regions that saw increases in the number of secondary school pupils were Inner and Outer London. In the rest of the country numbers had fallen, with the West Midlands experiencing the smallest percentage fall of all. The DfE's report gives the teacher numbers over the slightly earlier five year period of 2010 to 2015, which makes direct comparisons difficult. However, for this period the percentage fall in the teacher numbers was the second largest in England. In line with all the other regions there was an increase in the West Midlands' secondary school pupil/teacher ratio. As for primary schools, many regions had similar ratios, with the West Midlands' the sixth highest.

When other staff are included in the ratio, such as teaching assistants and other support staff, the pupil/adult ratio has fallen for primary schools in all regions. There is however, some variation for secondary schools, where, along with the majority of regions, the West Midlands' pupil/adult ratio had increased slightly between 2011 and 2015.

Pupil/teacher ratios and deprivation

By and large, across the country, there were lower pupil/teacher ratios in deprived areas. However, these areas also had the highest proportions of unqualified teachers and the highest proportion of teachers leaving for other schools. For example, primary schools in the most deprived 20% of areas have about twice as many unqualified teachers as the least deprived 20% of areas. There was a similar increase for secondary schools, but the difference only doubled when measured by the level of deprivation of the pupils attending (Free School Meals), rather than the level of deprivation of where the school is located.

The DfE statistics also show that schools in less deprived areas found it easier to hold onto teachers both in terms of those leaving the sector and those moving to other schools. Of the other issues related to deprivation in the report, it is worth noting that the proportion of hours spent teaching EBacc subjects by the relevant specialist teachers declined with increasing levels of deprivation.

On this theme, the Sutton Trust recently looked at the outcomes of FSM eligible children and suggested more was needed to encourage highly qualified teachers into deprived schools. They found that financial incentives and more free periods would "best attract" teachers to deprived schools. Among their other recommendations was the need to implement more targeted attainment programmes for different groups of disadvantaged pupils.

Sources:

- National Audit Office - [Financial sustainability of schools](#), December 2016
- Local Government Association press release - [Councils call for Education Services Grant cut to be reversed](#), December 2016
- Department for Education - [Local analysis of teacher workforce](#), September 2016
- Department for Education - [Schools workforce in England 2010 to 2015: trends and geographical comparisons](#), September 2016
- The Sutton Trust - [Class differences. Ethnicity and disadvantage](#), November 2016



CONSULTATIONS AND CALLS FOR EVIDENCE

PLEASE CHECK CONSULTATION DEADLINES AND DETAILS ON THE APPROPRIATE WEBSITE

TACKLING INEQUALITIES FACED BY GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER

COMMUNITIES - INQUIRY

WOMAN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE – SUBMISSIONS 27TH JANUARY 2017

The Committee highlighted the poorer health, worse educational outcomes and the high level of infant mortality of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller of communities compared to many other groups in launching this review.

The Committee invites written evidence on issues including: the progress made in tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers to achieve the commitments made by the Ministerial Working Group; how well this work has been led, managed, monitored and funded across government; whether there has been a tangible improvement as a result; the adequacy of the data needed to under-pin policy; how policy takes into account the diverse needs of different Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; the effectiveness of methods of engagement and dialogue between national and local policy makers with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; and whether there are any particular challenges faced by groups within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities such as women and LGB&T people?

Full details here: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2015/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities-inquiry-launch-16-17/>

SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION: USING A LEGISLATIVE REFORM ORDER TO ESTABLISH THE REGULATOR AS A STAND-ALONE-BODY - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT - CLOSES 27TH JANUARY 2017

The Department is inviting views on the proposals to use a Legislative Reform Order to establish the social housing regulator as a stand-alone non-departmental body, as recommended by the Tailored Review of the Homes and Communities Agency. This is intended to address the potential conflict of interest that arises from the Agency's current configurations.

This consultation sets out the proposed legislative changes to the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 to implement the separation and to reflect the principles of better regulation, especially transparency and accountability. The measures will not change how registered providers are regulated.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/social-housing-regulation-using-a-legislative-reform-order-to-establish-the-regulator-as-a-stand-alone-body>



LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE RATE - CONSULTATION

HM TREASURY AND SIMON KIRBY MP - CLOSES 28TH JANUARY 2017

The Government is consulting on offering discounted borrowing to local authorities to support infrastructure projects that are high value for the money. This follows the announcement at the Autumn Statement that the Government would consult on lending local authorities up to £1 billion at a discounted rate to support projects such as these. The Local Infrastructure Rate would be set at a gilts + 60 points basis with loans available for three years, having a maximum term of fifty years.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-infrastructure-rate>

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT - JOINT TECHNICAL CONSULTATION: PLANNING CHANGES TO REGULATIONS ON FORESTRY, AGRICULTURE, WATER RESOURCES, LAND DRAINAGE AND MARINE WORKS - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS – CLOSES 30TH JANUARY 2017

The proposed changes, first agreed in 2014, are intended to make the EIA regulations work more efficiently, focusing more on where environmental protection is really needed. The consultation is being jointly run by Defra, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/environmental-impact-assessment-joint-technical-consultation-planning-changes-to-regulations-on-forestry-agriculture-water-resources-land-drainage>

ENGLISH CHURCHES AND CATHEDRALS SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT – CLOSES 31ST JANUARY 2017

The English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review was commissioned by the Government in March 2016. Chaired by Bernard Taylor and supported by a distinguished panel of experts, the Review will consider the challenges faced by our ecclesiastical heritage buildings and their long term sustainability.

The challenge in ensuring that these outstanding buildings continue to be an integral part of local life is significant given the increasing level of support and expertise required to maintain them at a time when the limited resources in the community are becoming ever more stretched.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/english-churches-and-cathedrals-sustainability-review>



AMENDING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT - CLOSES 1ST FEBRUARY 2017

The Department are consulting on amending the Town and Country and Infrastructure planning regulations, transposing the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. This European Directive is an amendment to an existing Directive and applies to the town and country planning system in England and to the nationally significant infrastructure planning regime established by the Planning Act in 2008. Member States have until 16th May 2017 to transpose the Directive into domestic legislation.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/amending-environmental-impact-assessment-regulations>

SUPPORTED HOUSING FUNDING REFORM - INQUIRY

COMMONS WORK AND PENSIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES –

SUBMISSIONS BY 3RD FEBRUARY 2017

The Work and Pensions Committee and the Local Government Committee launched a joint inquiry into the Government's funding reform for supported housing. The inquiry is examining the planned changes for 2019-20, when core rent and services charges for supported housing will be funded through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit up to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. For costs above this, funding will go to local authorities for disbursement locally.

The Committees are considering whether the new system will ensure that the varied rate of the LHA caps will not adversely affect tenants and providers in low-value parts of the country. It examines how existing tenants will be protected and asks whether the changes should be piloted. The inquiry also looks at the effect that uncertainty about the new model is having on the sector and explores whether separate funding models are needed for refugees and other short-term supported housing services, or sheltered housing services for the elderly, which would require a higher cap.

How localised funding pots would work, including how the money will be ring-fenced and which factors should be used to determine an area's allocation are also being investigated the Committees.

Full details here: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2015/future-of-supported-housing-launch-16-17/>



NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE ASSESSMENT - CALL FOR EVIDENCE

NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSION - SUBMISSIONS BY 10TH FEBRUARY 2017

The National Infrastructure Commission is seeking views on the development of a National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) of the UK's long-term needs over a 30 year horizon. The Commission's role is to provide impartial, expert advice on major long-term infrastructure challenges, including a binding fiscal remit to ensure that the Commission's recommendations are affordable.

The Commission is a permanent body that "will operate independently, at arm's length from government, as an executive agency of HM Treasury". It is operating in an interim form until it is formally established on a permanent basis, however no distinction is made between its interim and permanent forms.

In terms of individual sectors, the Commission will cover: transport, digital communications, energy, water and wastewater (drainage and sewerage), flood risk management, and solid waste.

The Commission will publish a Vision and Priorities document in summer 2017. This will inform the full NIA, which will be published in 2018.

Please note that this call for evidence is separate from the recently completed [call for ideas](#) which was run jointly by the National Infrastructure Commission and HM Treasury to inform decisions on the Commission's next in-depth study or studies.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infrastructure-assessment-call-for-evidence>

HIGH SPEED RAIL (LONDON - WEST MIDLANDS) BILL: DRAFT CLASS APPROVAL CONTENT - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT – CLOSES 13TH FEBRUARY 2017

The Department for Transport is seeking views on the contents of the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill draft class approval. The class approval allows the Secretary of State to:

- approve appropriate measures to apply to the HS2 Phase One works
- remove the need for repeated individual approvals from planning authorities

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/high-speed-rail-london-west-midlands-bill-draft-class-approval-content>



POLICING FOR THE FUTURE: CHANGING DEMANDS AND NEW CHALLENGES - INQUIRY

HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE - CLOSES 16TH FEBRUARY 2017

This inquiry explores the challenges of modern policing and examines whether police forces are sufficiently equipped and resourced to keep the public safe and to respond to evolving demands and changing patterns of crime. This includes the emergence of on-line crime which changed the nature and impact on victims and communities. Technological change also presents new opportunities at a time of increased focus on efficiency and innovation.

The inquiry notes that many crimes are under-reported and that the police need to be proactive in certain communities and that a large proportion of police time is directed to non-criminal work, such as mental health crisis work. At the same time there remains a complex relationship between public expectations and policing realities in the face of spending cuts.

Full details here: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2015/170111-new-inquiry-policing-future/>

IMPROVING LIVES

WORK, HEALTH AND DISABILITY - GREEN PAPER

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, THE RT HON DAMIEN GREEN MP AND THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP - CLOSES 17TH FEBRUARY 2017

The Green Paper notes that less than half of disabled people are in employment compared to 80% of the non-disabled population. Some 4.6 million disabled people and people with long term health conditions are out of work, leaving individuals, and some large parts of communities disconnected from the benefits that work brings. People who are unemployed have higher rates of mortality and a lower quality of life.

The green paper sets out the nature of the problem and why change is needed by employers, the welfare system, health and care providers, and all of us, and asks how:

- big a role can we expect employers to play
- can work coaches play a more active role
- can we improve the welfare system
- can we promote mental and physical health and ensure timely access to the health and employment support
- can we develop better occupational health support
- to reinforce work as a health outcome
- can we encourage, harness and spread innovation
- can we built a culture of high hopes and expectations

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/work-health-and-disability-improving-lives>



SOCIAL WORK: NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION SYSTEM - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION – CLOSES 14TH MARCH 2017

The Department is seeking views on a new national assessment and accreditation system for child and family social workers, as part of their reforms. They are inviting views on:

- a future pathway for child and family social workers
- the place of a national assessment and accreditation system in that pathway

The national assessment and accreditation system is intended to introduce a new practice-focused methodology to establish the knowledge and skills that child and family social workers need for statutory child and family social work.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/social-work-national-assessment-and-accreditation-system>

BENEFITS OF DRONES TO THE UK ECONOMY - CONSULTATION

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT – CLOSES 15TH MARCH 2017

The Department for Transport is seeking views on proposals to harness the positive benefits of drones for the public and commercial services and the benefits to the UK economy.

It puts forward a number of proposals:

- to develop the UK's policy and regulatory framework
- to keep pace with this fast and emerging market
- balance the challenges appropriately without restricting the opportunity to ensure global competitiveness
- innovation and technological investment

The consultation is only for the civil use of drones and not military drones.

Full details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/benefits-of-drones-to-the-uk-economy>

EVENTS

If you have a suitable event you would like to suggest for inclusion in this section please email: swong@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk

Leadership Essentials for Health and Wellbeing Chairs and Vice Chairs

Local Government Association
24-25th January 2017

This two day, fully funded residential session will support Health and Wellbeing Board chairs and vice chairs to meet the challenges coming their way by meeting together away from the day job to reflect on the effectiveness of their Health and Well-Being Board in the current context, actively learn from each other and share experiences through the LGA's tried and tested approach to leaderships development. The session is led by member and Clinical Commissioning Group peers with input from national partners.

More information can be found [here](#).

WEST MIDLANDS IN CONTEXT

West Midlands in Context is written and produced by Sherman Wong for the West Midlands Chief Executives Group with design and distribution supported by [IEWM](#), Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands. Every effort is made to ensure accuracy but please refer to the source material via the links and references provided.

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