

London Congress

Tuesday 14 July 2015, 10:30am, London Councils

GLA

Boris Johnson
Sir Edward Lister

Stephen Greenhalgh
Richard Blakeway

Mayor of London
Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for Policy
and Planning
Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
Deputy Mayor for Housing, Land and
Property

London Councils

Present:

BARKING AND DAGENHAM
BARNET
BEXLEY
BRENT
BROMLEY
CAMDEN
CROYDON
EALING
ENFIELD
GREENWICH
HACKNEY
HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM
HARINGEY
HARROW
HAVERING
HILLINGDON
HOUNSLOW
ISLINGTON
KENSINGTON & CHELSEA
KINGSTON
LAMBETH
LEWISHAM
MERTON
NEWHAM
REDBRIDGE
RICHMOND UPON THAMES
SOUTHWARK
SUTTON
TOWER HAMLETS
WALTHAM FOREST
WANDSWORTH
WESTMINSTER
CITY OF LONDON

Cllr Darren Rodwell
Cllr Daniel Thomas
Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE
Cllr M. A. Butt
-
Cllr Sarah Hayward
Cllr Tony Newman
Cllr Julian Bell
Cllr Doug Taylor
Cllr John Fahy
Mayor Jules Pipe, Congress Chair
Cllr Mike Cartwright
Cllr Alan Strickland
Cllr Keith Ferry
Cllr Roger Ramsey
Cllr Philip Corthorne
Cllr Steve Curran
Cllr Richard Watts
-
Cllr Kevin Davis
Cllr Lib Peck
Mayor Sir Steve Bullock
Cllr Stephen Alambritis
Cllr Ken Clark
Cllr Jas Athwal
Cllr Lord True
Cllr Peter John
Cllr Ruth Dombey
Mayor John Biggs
Cllr Clyde Loakes
Cllr Ravi Govindia
Cllr Tim Mitchell
Mr Mark Boleat

GLA Officers

Jeff Jacobs

Head of Paid Service; Executive Director
Fiona Fletcher Smith Executive Director
(Development, Enterprise and Environment)
Executive Director, Housing and Land

David Lunts

London Councils

John O'Brien

Chief Executive

Apologies: Cllr Richard Cornelius (Barnet), Cllr Stephen Carr (Bromley) Cllr Denise Hyland (Greenwich), Cllr Stephen Cowan (Hammersmith and Fulham), Cllr Claire Kober OBE (Haringey), Cllr David Perry (Harrow), Cllr Ray Puddifoot MBE (Hillingdon), Cllr Nicholas Paget-Brown (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea), Mayor Sir Robin Wales (Newham), Cllr Chris Robbins (Waltham Forrest) and Cllr Philippa Roe (Westminster).

In attendance were London Councils' officers and the following Chief Executives, members of the Devolution and Public Service Reform Sub-group

Paul Martin
Lesley Seary
Andrew Travers
Charlie Parker
Tim Shields

Wandsworth
Islington
Barnet
Westminster
Hackney

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Joint-Chair, Mayor Jules Pipe welcomed the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson and his colleagues from the GLA to the Congress of Leaders and received the apologies for absence listed.

On behalf of all those assembled he congratulated Cllr Claire Kober OBE and Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE for their recognition in the Birthday Honours list and Mayor John Biggs for his recent election as Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

2. Devolution and Public Service Reform

Cllr Julian Bell and Cllr Darren Rodwell declared an interest in the item in respect of the Housing Association Right-to-Buy issue and indicated that they would take no part in the discussion.

The Chair introduced the item saying:

- The outline position, that London, like other cities, should have significant responsibilities devolved from the national level, had been agreed by the Mayor of London and London Councils Executive at the Congress Executive meetings in

- late 2014 and 2015. Since then there had been joint working between officers from the boroughs, including the Chief Executives in attendance at the meeting and GLA colleagues as well as preliminary discussions with ministers.
- Progress with the negotiations had been and would be reported to Leaders' Committee, the Executive and the Congress Executive, with the ultimate aim of securing a London devolution and public service reform agreement later in the year.
 - Other localities were well advanced with their devolution negotiations with Government
 - A binding agreement in which the parties were dictated to was not being sought but instead a platform for negotiation with Government in the run-up to the autumn Spending Review
 - The document which formed the basis of these negotiations *Devolution and Public Service Reform* which was attached as an appendix to the report described proposals for devolution and reform in relation to:
 - a. Employment
 - b. Skills
 - c. Business Support
 - d. Crime and Justice
 - e. Health
 - f. Housing
 - Ministers would expect to see a convincing proposal for governance before agreeing significant devolution of responsibilities to London.
 - Consequently, the proposition set out how London's elected leaders and mayors at borough and London level would govern areas of devolved responsibility in partnership and how they would take decisions collectively.
 - This joint machinery would only have oversight over areas of newly devolved responsibilities and all areas of activity currently under the authority of either the London Mayor, or London boroughs would remain sovereign to each individual body
 - In some service areas, voluntarily constituted borough partnerships would be the preferred operational leadership for newly devolved responsibilities
 - This phase of the negotiations would need to be concluded by mid-September 2015, given the likely Spending Review timetable
 - Borough Leaders and the Mayor of London would be asked to review, amend and refocus the position at a political level in the early autumn at the next meeting of Leaders' Committee and the next meeting of the Congress Executive.

The Chair proposed and Congress agreed the proposition as a framework for negotiation by officers with Government, over the summer period on Employment, Skills, Business Support and Crime and Justice.

The Chair then turned his attention to the two areas not yet resolved, Health and Housing. On Health he pointed out that a meeting was scheduled in two weeks' time with the Chief Executive of NHS England, Simon Stevens. On Housing he argued that, whatever view was taken of the Government's proposals to offer the Right-to-Buy to Housing Association tenants and pay for replacement stock by the sale of high-value council houses, a strong case must be made to maximise the re-investment of proceeds from council house sales back into London and for London's unique social mix to be maintained.

Mayor Johnson replied by expressing his agreement with Mayor Pipe's comments and saying:

- That the reports were good and the authors deserved thanks and he agreed there were two tough issues, Health and Housing
- He was pleased to see that the boroughs were being far more ambitious on Health and was sure Simon Stevens would be interested in the ideas being developed
- He felt sure that the new Secretary of State at Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Greg Clark MP would also be receptive to calls for further devolution
- Housing was more difficult but he thought that the principles of the response, in terms of the Housing Association Right-to-Buy proposals, on retention of receipts, more low costs homes, and retention of London's social mix - were right

The Chair then opened the discussion to the floor and Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE commented that:

- It was clear from her meeting with Greg Clark that he would like to see London boroughs articulate its case for devolution in an iterative way
- One key outstanding area for resolution was the question of governance
- She pointed out that the document *Devolution and Public Service Reform* attached as an appendix to the report contained proposals in the section entitled Governing London in Partnership that defined a threshold that would have to be met for agreement to be reached on certain, reserved, matters for full Congress but not for the Congress Executive which would require one
- She also argued that the sentence in the report:

It is likely to be desirable to recognise this aspect of London's governance by providing for the Assembly to exercise some scrutiny oversight of the work of Congress in relation to its governance of an agreed devolution package.

gave the London assembly greater powers of scrutiny over the work on Congress than that held by the boroughs which she considered unacceptable.

Congress agreed to reconsider the sentence highlighted by Cllr O'Neill outside of the meeting and formulate a replacement.

The Chair described Health as a work in progress and turned to Housing.

Cllr Lib Peck described a constructive discussion that had been had with the Mayor's team on the Government's proposals on the extension of the Right-to-Buy to Housing Association tenants and its financing by the sale of high-value council properties, that was well encapsulated in the bullet point principles listed in the report:

- it must support an increase in housing supply, including affordable housing
- any money raised in London, whether from the sale of housing association or high value council homes, must be retained in London for reinvestment
- London's unique social mix must not be undermined.

However, she did not agree with the sentence that began the third paragraph of the Housing section:

Whilst we are supportive of the right to buy for housing association tenants in principle...

And argued for, and Congress agreed to, its replacement by:

We recognise the Government's desire to extend the Right-to-Buy for Housing Associations...

This change was agreed.

Cllr Ravi Govindia argued that London's growth and housing needs must be looked at in a wider context. Many of London's workers did not live within London's boundaries and the position of boroughs that were challenged by high land values needed to be examined. A holistic view of policy in this area was required.

Cllr Richard Watts raised the question of the Government's proposals for the disposal of high value properties, defined as a third of those in any given area, and asked whether there was scope for a London definition of high value.

Mayor Sir Steve Bullock said this could be considered but the further work that London Councils and the GLA were intending would get into the detail of the issues.

Cllr Kevin Davies said that the paper identified a range of resources and that there were things that could be done anyway and argued for a pan-London approach to viability.

Deputy Mayor Richard Blakeway pointed out that the report combined Housing and Planning proposals and agreed on the question of matters that could be pursued together, for example the GLA was keen to pursue supporting Small Builders with London Councils.

Deputy Mayor Sir Edward Lister argued that, since the Government's announcement on Productivity, provisions of the London Plan would have to be considered.

Cllr Lord True made the following points:

- The degree of trust that all parties had in the overall policy environment was an important influence on the extent to which progress could be made
- There was a danger of power being sucked away from boroughs, not devolved to them
- The same governance arrangements were not needed for all aspects, much was already in place that could be built on
- If a contract was signed about devolution that went into statute, care needed to be taken that the resources were there to pay for the commitments.

The Chair agreed with Cllr True and saw the risk of a *caveat emptor* in any devolution arrangement whereby the Government may be fully aware of the extent of the commitment that boroughs were entering into but the boroughs may not. He went on to remind Congress that any arrangement would be entered into on an 'opt-in' basis.

Mayor Johnson argued that Government considered that London had failed to deliver enough homes for fifty years and it was essential to show Government London's preparedness to tackle the problem. He also agreed with the point about the need to look at London in the context of the wider South East.

In response to a question from Cllr Govindia about how many additional planning staff would be required by the GLA in response to the government's proposal to allow the Mayor to call in planning applications of 50 homes or more, Deputy Mayor Lister pointed out that that could, in theory, entail about one hundred schemes but that the Mayor would have to decide which cases he would intervene in. Cllr Govindia hoped that all parties would recognise the strong performance of a number of London's planning authorities

Closing remarks from Chair

Mayor Pipe concluded the session by saying that:

- The document required the changes agreed in respect of housing suggested by Cllr Peck and the governance and scrutiny comments following Cllr O'Neill's comments
- The threshold required for agreement of issues amongst the London Councils Executive would need to be clarified in the section on governance
- Further reports would come back to the Executive, Congress Executive and Leaders' Committee

- With those changes, the document was agreed as the 'work-in-progress' negotiating platform for further devolution and public service reform.

The Anniversary Games

Mayor Johnson ended the meeting by urging all those present to encourage attendance at the Anniversary Games to be held on 24th-26th July and in particular on Sunday 26th when the Paralympic Day would be held and for which 250 free tickets would go to each borough. A mechanism for implementing this would be communicated directly to boroughs.

The Chair thanked Mayor Johnson and his colleagues for coming and looked forward to further cooperation on the issues discussed.

The meeting closed at 11:30