

**Oral Evidence Session to Communities and Local Government Select Committee
(Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government The Rt. Hon Eric Pickles MP, Minister
for Decentralisation Greg Clark MP and Kristina Sporle Chief Executive of The Planning
Inspectorate)**

**23rd November 2010
5.15pm
Grimond Room, Portcullis House**

Summary

An hour long session to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee with evidence given by the Secretary of State (EP), Minister for Decentralisation (GC) and Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate (KS), on the implications of the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) and the CALA Homes Legal Challenge, possible aspects in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill and details of the New Homes Bonus Scheme.

A Question was put to EP on whether the RSSs are still in existence as a result of the CALA homes decision:

- EP responded – The RSSs are one of the many factors against which LA's have to consider a planning application. However the intention to abolish the RSSs within the Decentralisation and Localism Bill over the coming days and the publication of the draft clause are also aspects which should be factored into LA's considerations.
- KS suggested as always Inspectors must start with the Local Plans which have to be in conformity with the RSSs figures. As such, yes the RSSs are still in existence until new legislation says otherwise.

There was concern raised by the Chairman Clive Betts MP that the abolition of the RSSs did leave a policy vacuum and throughout the evidence being given to the committee a common thread has emerged in the need for some transitional measures to the new system of Localism:

- EP suggested we are already in transition with the consultation on the New Homes Bonus Scheme to finish by the end of the year and for these incentives to be available to houses being built now.
- GC confirmed there is a need for housing numbers to be in place in order for planning decisions to be made on a sound evidence base and that overtime it is expected that LA's will collect evidence for their new housing figures. However, in terms of transitional measures, there are clear areas in which the new system is already progressed.
- KS suggested The Planning Inspectorate has never been so busy with 60 Local Authorities presenting their Local Plans. There seems to be movement under the new emerging plans.
- EP does not accept the idea that there is any confusion or a policy vacuum with elements of the new system such as the New Homes Bonus Scheme already underway and being consulted on.
- EP suggested the new system is based upon the desire to see more housing where the RS were ambitious targets which resulted in very little. The new system is one based on incentives for a local community.

A question was put forward on LEP's asking whether the duty to co-operate applies in this case.

- GC responded that the duty to co-operate does apply to the LEP's and where convenient LA's may wish to pool their sovereign planning powers together in order to best plan for their region. No statutory status will be given to the LEP's for them to override a planning authority but in essence a voluntary statutory status can exist if power is pooled in this way.
- EP suggested it won't be long before more of the country is covered by LEP's with more announcements on successful bids to be made shortly.

Another question was put forward on the need for Regional Strategic thinking in terms of planning for waste, energy, minerals etc

- EP responded that he was confident that local communities would recognise the needs of the wider community and that with national planning decisions it is still wise to gain local consent for schemes.

EP was asked to respond on the research carried out by Tetlow King Planning on the loss of 180,000 houses as a result of scrapping the Regional Strategies.

- EP suggested the numbers were "iffy" as they are not based on actual planning decisions.

EP was also asked to comment on the New Homes Bonus Scheme and how the money will be distributed to the local community.

- EP reaffirmed an 80/20 split in a two tier system and that how the LA's contributions to the local communities will be entirely open and flexible.
- CIL will also be an area where local communities can benefit.
- EP hoped the funding from the NHB and CIL would invigorate Local Authorities and allow Ward Members realise what can be achieved for a local community in terms of facilities provided for through the planning process.

The Chairman sought clarity on the impact of the New Homes Bonus scheme in asking whether there is direct evidence or research is been carried out that concludes the New Homes Bonus scheme will make a difference in producing more housing.

- EP reiterated that the old planning system was a mess and failure and it was deluded to think anything was being done about the shortfall in housing. With the NHB the incentives for LA's are such that there will be an improvement to the number of houses being built.
- EP could not comment on a plan for if the Bonus did not produce more housing but did suggest as in previous conversations that an increase to the Bonus could be an option.

-Ends-

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