

Council – 21st February 2019 – Leader's Report

1. **Taxi licensing crackdown**

The Department for Transport is planning a raft of new measures aimed at improving safety for taxi passengers, including the installation of CCTV in all cabs. Drivers also face tougher criminal record checks, and ministers intend to set up a national database to prevent them from working away from the area where they hold a licence. It follows a review into the industry after several sexual exploitation scandals in towns such as Rotherham and Rochdale. A consultation on the statutory guidelines for all local authorities was published last week.

2. **Unauthorised encampments letter**

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Secretary have released a joint letter outlining the Government's plans to tackle illegal traveller sites. These plans include the consideration of a new criminal trespass offence, additional support for local authority enforcement activities, further reforms to the planning system to tackle unauthorised development and encampments, and measures to support law-abiding Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. You can read the letter [here](#).

3. **Public developers' contributions database**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh's Exacom database – which gives the public access to figures for developer contributions towards infrastructure all the way back to 1974 – has been nominated for the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) Awards for Planning Excellence. The database, which is the first of its kind in the country, is in the running for an award within the Excellence in Tech Within Planning Practice category. As it is the first such database to be published Mid Suffolk, along with Babergh, have been designated Pilot Authorities by the developer. You can find out more on [our website](#).

4. **District Council Network Conference**

I recently attended the DCN Conference held over two days at Kenilworth. There was a good presence from government (two cabinet ministers and several ministers of state), but no great announcements from anyone. Chief Secretary to the Treasury Liz Truss stated that "You are leading experts in what will make a difference to people's lives... We do need to give more freedom to local councils". It'll be interesting to see what comes out of the Fairer Funding Review.

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Communities Secretary James Brokenshire stated, "I am optimistic, positive and confident about what the future holds for local government...I can see district councils coming into their own as part of a reinvigorated, stronger, more self-sufficient system".

Regarding the future of unitary councils, he stated that only initiatives that improved service delivery; and that provided financial stability; that had a credible geography; that improved service delivery and excellence in accountability, and had the unanimous support of all involved, would be considered in the future.

He confirmed that Government wanted to create a housing market that works for everyone. He said that 222,000 new houses had been built in 2018 which was 12% up on the previous year, and he announced that £497m had been provided for housing associations to build an additional 11,000 new houses. He wanted local government to work with government on place shaping so that design for better social inclusion and healthy outcomes were championed and that he hoped to see more joint spatial plans like those in Oxfordshire. He also announced that the Government would shortly be publishing their response to the Letwin Report on build-out.

Rishi Sunak the under-Secretary of State for Housing confirmed that financial stability is essential, and that economic growth is the way to achieve this. The measure of success should not be how much we spend, but how we're doing and that we need to be innovative. To assist local councils, a Local Digital Collaboration Unit has been set up at the MHCLG.

Cllr. Nick Gowrley
Leader – Mid Suffolk District Council
10th February 2019