

CLACTON TOWN BOARD**Meeting of Town Board Chairs with
Jacob Young MP,
Parl Under-Secretary of State Department for Levelling Up, Homes & Communities
and Adam Hawksbee, Interim Chair, Towns Unit DLUHC (AH)**

1. The meeting was held on Wednesday, 15 May at Central Hall, Westminster, led by Adam Hawksbee and his team from the Towns Unit (TU) and followed by a reception at No 10 Downing Street, hosted by Jacob Young MP, the Minister responsible for Towns and also the Member of Parliament for Redcar.
2. At Central Hall I participated in a number of round-tables, bringing together Coastal Towns, Transport & Connectivity & Regions. Because of the low numbers representing the South and East of England, this roundtable stretched from Clacton/Great Yarmouth to Torbay.
3. There was not much time for questions and answers, but a number of interesting comments were made by AH.
4. **The Ten Year Plan**
By 1 August the Towns Unit is expecting to see a Ten Year Vision for Clacton and a plan for the first three years. The Vision need not be an extensive document and the TU is expecting to see new projects rather than projects which have been promoted by Local Authorities under other submissions for financial support.
In the Three Year Plan it will be acceptable to provide an outline of a project with the full Business Case to be developed in Year 2 or 3. It appears however that full Business Cases need to be provided which runs somewhat counter to the light touch approach we were promised and does put additional load on LA officers as the only ones with the knowledge to prepare Business Cases.
Essentially the TU are looking for new and fresh ideas and suggestions.
5. **Consultancies**
While there is not prohibition on hiring consultants, it is clear that what is paramount is the engagement of the widest section of the local community.
Somewhat surprisingly the Department then sprung on us a consultancy that they themselves are using which acts for a number of Government Departments and the Metropolitan Police among others: Zencity
6. **Zencity**
Zencity is a company based in Israel and “provides a platform that helps government and law enforcement agencies make informed decisions, build trust and improve community services through data-driven insights.”
Zencity is partnered with TU to customise a best practice set of questions to ensure that Town Boards are able to elicit the right information from the community. This is done by means of a survey, ensuring that a representative sample is collected. The data is then analysed to extract key insights and conclusions and a report will be provided to each Town Board. There is cost to the Town Board or the LA.
This will be followed by bi-annual surveys to monitor the impact of the Town Boards’ activities.
The initial Report will be available on 20th June.
This centrally managed intervention concerns me somewhat as our questions at the meeting did not elicit either the size of sample or the survey questions to be put. I have asked Emily Attwood, our Regional Lead, to provide me with more information so that I can report to the Board.

7. Long-term commitment by Government

This question was raised by a number of Chairs present before our meeting with the Minister. While AH understandably could not commit any future Government he did say that the new approach of this initiative was welcomed on a cross-party basis.

8. Forward Borrowing

In response to a question about projects exceeding £2 million in any one year, AH stated that the LA as Accountable Body could borrow against the future revenue streams.

9. While I had useful exchanges with other Chairs, particularly coastal towns like Hastings and Bexhill-on-Sea, I had a more extended conversation with Henry Cator of Great Yarmouth and we agreed to meet up from time to time. Currently there are only two Towns in the East of England in the first wave – Clacton and Great Yarmouth, three additional towns have recently been added in the second wave: King's Lynn and Thetford in Norfolk and Canvey Island in Essex.

George Kieffer
Chair

16 May 2024