

LGA Summit 14th March 2013 – NJUG Note

1.0 Background

This summit was called by Councillor Peter Box, Chair of the Local Government Association (LGA) Economy and Transport Board following the publication of the LGA Report "*Holes in Our Pockets – How Utility Works are Damaging Local Growth*". Invitations to the summit were sent to many Chief Executives or senior executives of utility companies. Also in attendance were a number of local councillors, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, Norman Baker MP, Chair of the Transport Select Committee, Louise Ellman MP, Les Guest, then Chief Executive of NJUG Ltd., Anita Solanki, NJUG's Director of Public Affairs, the British Retail Association and Association of Convenience Stores.

2.0 Debate

Whilst it was acknowledged that anyone working in the street will have an impact, the discussions were focused only on utility activities. Much of the debate covered the following four main areas :

- Effect of utility work on small businesses.
- Compensation to small businesses affected by utility works.
- Planning and co-ordination.
- Contractor performance.

It became clear during the discussions that the LGA and councillors were not aware of many of the good things being done by utilities and their contractors and that their call for immediate improvement was made on their personal perceptions or information provided to them.

During the discussions both NJUG and utility members described many of the positive initiatives that were being undertaken with local authorities and communities, and also how seriously their contractors took quality of work and minimisation of disruption.

An excellent perspective and personal experiences were given by the British Retail Association and the Association of Convenience Stores on how works affected their members and their customers. The key concerns included the difficulty in receiving deliveries whilst works obstruct premises; attention to assisting pedestrian customers trying to get to their businesses; and the inconsistency and difficulties in seeking compensation if their (small) business is affected. Whilst the gas sector is legally committed to compensation, the process is perceived as very difficult. The water sector also has obligations rather than regulations, whereas the electricity and communications and indeed local authorities do not have the same legal commitments. There was a call from the Minister for the industry to look for voluntary improvements in this area.

3.0 Summary at the end of the summit.

- LGA will work with NJUG, to build on NJUG's initiatives rather than re-invent the wheel - it would also be useful to include the retailer associations too where

appropriate. Areas to consider include planning and coordination; quality of works; and competence of contractors carrying out activities.

- In particular, the LGA would like to work with NJUG on exploring industry self-regulation, and on collection and use of performance data to stimulate improvements.
- LGA believed that there is a need to develop a protocol to show what best practice looks like; what success looks like; and how it can be shared (perception means that we are only as good as the worst performers / companies).
- LGA believes that:
 - Using best practice, the Industry needs to find better and more consistent ways to inform local businesses of what is happening on site, what is due to happen and how it will affect them.
 - The utility industry needs to look at a more simplified way of compensating small businesses.
- Attendees at the summit will be invited to meet again in 3 months time to discuss progress.
- LGA would be interested in involving representatives from both the National Traffic Managers Forum and the LGA on the HAUC(UK) Strategy Group.

Additionally, NJUG has been asked by the LGA to work with and co-ordinate across utilities to seek to move things forward. To facilitate this – working alongside the two senior utility representatives identified by LGA's Charles Loft - **Samantha Brothwell, NJUG's Strategy and Risk Director (from Western Power Distribution) and Anita Solanki (from Severn Trent Water) will represent NJUG and all its members on the proposed Task Force** to specifically address:

- A clear and common understanding of what good looks like in the organisation and delivery of street works.
- A means of gathering and assessing information on the performance of contractors engaged in street works.
- Better communication on planned street works and relevant compensation schemes to businesses.