

To: Heads of Housing

5 September 2006

Dear Colleague,

RE: SUB-REGIONAL HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENTS

In October 2005 the Chair of the South East Regional Housing Board wrote to all local authorities in the region setting out the Board's views on sub-regional partnership working and the development of this through joint working on housing market assessments. This letter reports on progress to date and on what is planned for the coming months.

It was originally envisaged that the four housing market assessment (HMA) pilot studies (Berkshire, Hastings and Rother, Oxfordshire and PUSH), initiated in autumn 2005, would report their findings and contribute to the content of a "practical guide to HMAs" planned for September 2006. In the event, the studies are at differing stages of completion and some significant outputs will not be available by September. To ensure the practical guide is as comprehensive and helpful as possible it will be developed for publication early in 2007.

However the Board is keen to share initial feedback about the new market assessment process with the region and has prepared the accompanying paper (Annex A) which draws together early impressions from the pilot authorities.

The value of understanding how housing markets work and the benefit of authorities working across borders emerges clearly.

The draft HMA Guidance published in November last year is being refined by DCLG, linked with the work to finalise the housing Planning Policy Statement (PPS3). This is work being informed by feedback from a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including our pilot authorities' experience of working with the draft Guidance. The revised guidance will need to consider a number of practical issues about moving to basing housing and planning policies on HMAs rather than detailed local housing needs surveys. The revised edition of the guidance is expected early in 2007.

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The pilot studies have also identified a number of issues associated with the development and use of HMAs in the region which require further consideration. In particular the relationship between the HMA and the policy direction set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy (the South East Plan) is one issue that needs further examination. This may result in a need to reflect on whether the areas covered by partnerships are the most appropriate. Accordingly while the overall aspiration is that HMAs for the region should be completed by spring 2008, this may need to be reviewed.

While the Board contributed a small amount of pump-priming funding to the four pilot studies it has to be recognised that calls on the Board's resources have increased since the publication the Regional Housing Strategy. Accordingly the Board will be considering over the next few months how it might best add value to the work on HMAs.

The staff in GOSE's area housing teams are available to support housing market assessment partnership boards as they form and to link to the Regional Housing Board's Secretariat. If you and your neighbouring districts are considering a sub-regional housing market assessment during the current financial year an early discussion with your usual GOSE housing representative would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Cartwright". Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Cllr Elizabeth Cartwright
Chairman of the Regional Housing Board

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