

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 28 JUNE 2006

Present:

Board Members

Paul Abey
Trevor Beattie
Elizabeth Cartwright - Chairman
Ian Coates
Douglas Horner
Keith House
Ann Santry
Sheila Drew Smith
Cec Tallack
Don Turner

Officers

Cath Stubbings
Alison Bailey
Louise Wilby
Lesley van Dijk
Sharon Smith
Kate Dallip
Pat Tempany
Steve Kethero
Chris Woolf

In Attendance

Andy Nelson

1. Apologies and Substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Fiona Cruickshank, Darren Richards, Martin Tugwell, Heather Bolton and Graeme Hough. The following substitution was declared: Paul Abey for Fiona Cruickshank.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 2 May 2006

The Minutes were AGREED subject to the following amendment to the last sentence on page 3 para 6.6. The word 'built' to be replaced with 'renovated.'

- 2.1 "In order for Government targets to be met there is a need for 5,000 properties to be renovated before 2005 and a further 36,000 between 2005-2010."

3. Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

Agenda Item 7 Sub-regional Housing Market Assessments latest news including the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference

- 3.1 The Regional Assembly's Housing Policy Advisor provided an update on Agenda Item 7 Sub-Regional Housing Market Assessments. She reported that regular meetings with the pilot groups are being maintained. Useful

information is emerging which is increasing understanding of what needs to be done to help the assessment process work effectively. More information concerning the current and future work of the pilot groups will be presented to the Board meeting in October. The pilot groups are all at different stages and it is therefore considered to be appropriate to postpone the proposed practical guidance for local authorities until the work has been completed later in the summer. A letter will be sent to the local authorities, in July, providing feedback from the work of the pilot groups.

Private Sector Renewal

- 3.2 The Head of Urban Renaissance and Housing, SEEDA, provided an update on the work on the private sector renewal. A meeting with stakeholders, including local authorities, the Energy Action Grants Agency and the Home Improvement Agency, took place on 5 June. Both the consultant's report and discussions with stakeholders have identified energy efficiency as the highest priority with the greatest potential for long-term impact. This issue is also the most complex involving many stakeholders. Other priorities for future work include opportunities for partnership working, rural issues, loans and incentives and private sector landlords.
- 3.3 Reports concerning work on these priorities will be presented to a future Board meeting. In addition there will be a report on the outcomes of a proposed meeting with the chairman of the South East Sustainable Energy Partnership which has a sub-group which deals with energy efficiency for homes. The sub-group is keen to work with SEEDA to identify the actions that need to be taken and to map the grant agencies to provide an overview of the available resources.
- 3.4 A conference on energy efficiency is planned for stakeholders in the third week of September. The date is to be confirmed and circulated to the Board.
- 3.5 It was suggested that information concerning the costs of the different proposed options be made available to the conference. It was agreed that these would be obtained from the Energy Centres in the region to assist discussions.
- 3.6 Members were advised that the conference would enable an assessment to be made of how and where resources are currently deployed to ensure that they are being targeted correctly. It would also facilitate improved working between agencies with greater information about available resources and improved co-ordination of existing resources. Desirable outcomes will include assisting the Board to target its own resources and facilitating discussions with DEFRA and DCLG to achieve improved direction of resources at a strategic level.

Agenda Item 10 Regional Housing Forum Work Programme Update Para 10.3

- 3.7 The Regional Assembly's Planning Manager advised Members that a letter had been sent to NOMS with regard to a request for administrative support for

the Accommodation Needs of Young Ex-offenders. The Assembly was awaiting a response.

4. First Time Buyers Initiative – Presentation by English Partnerships

- 4.1 Andy Nelson, Senior Regional Manager Programmes East Midlands and Milton Keynes, gave a presentation on the progress which is being made with the First Time Buyers Initiative which the Government has asked English Partnerships to design in response to the need for approximately 250,000 homes for first time buyers.
- 4.2 The shared equity scheme is based on the principle of enabling a growing number of first time buyers to step onto the housing ladder, with a small amount of assistance rather than providing more affordable housing.
- 4.3 The initiative is being delivered nationally and is targeted at lower middle income groups who are currently not homeowners and have stable incomes. The scheme is split equally between key workers and other groups. The project will be driven by local market demands.
- 4.4 Members raised a number of issues in response to the presentation. Clarification was sought about the target group for the product. The FTBI is seen as complementary to other schemes, providing a wider range of products for the intermediate market. The minimum buyer equity share is set at 50%. It is thought that an average equity share is likely to be in the region of 60 – 65%.
- 4.5 It was noted that it is essential to locate homes, purchased through the scheme, close to affordable transport to avoid increasing transport costs for those working elsewhere. Members were advised that, where possible, these homes are located in mixed developments.
- 4.6 It is intended that resale of homes will be on the open market with recycling of the initial public subsidy. It is not the intention to keep these homes as affordable in perpetuity. It is also intended to match the size of homes to buyers' current, rather than future, needs so that smaller homes would be offered to people without children. However, the quality standards correspond with those of the Housing Corporation which will provide a degree of flexibility for growing families in that it will be possible to subdivide larger units.

5. Research on Acute Affordability Problems: Proposals for further action – Report of Planning Implementation Director

- 5.1 The Regional Assembly's Planning Manager reminded Members that the Regional Assembly had commissioned work from consultants to help inform the latter stages of the South East Plan. The consultants reported their findings at the March meeting of the Regional Housing Board. This report is the Assembly's response to the Board's request to set out a proposed action plan.

- 5.2 The consultants had identified a number of complex, detailed and inter-related recommendations. This report summarises these recommendations into 9 categories and proposes priorities for action. The highest priority had been allocated to those actions that would directly support the forthcoming review of the Housing Strategy and/or the implementation of the South East Plan.
- 5.3 She reported that the Regional Assembly is currently working with DCLG and the Housing Corporation to identify a more robust method for collecting comprehensive monitoring data on the provision of affordable housing. This will be implemented in the 2007 based monitoring cycle. The Board will be kept informed of progress.
- 5.4 The Regional Planning Manager reported that there is a commitment in the South East Plan, for the Regional Assembly and Regional Housing Board to prepare guidance for local authorities on financial viability and availability of public subsidies for affordable housing. Since preparing the report the Assembly had begun scoping out a brief for a piece of commissioned work that could form the basis for the guidance. This had revealed that some local authorities have already prepared, or were in the process of preparing, their own frameworks for assessing financial viability. Before proceeding it would therefore be sensible to take stock and establish a better understanding of the existing and emerging local guidance and to assess the most appropriate and helpful form for future regional guidance. This was reflected in the revised recommendation tabled at the meeting.
- 5.5 It was suggested that as well as contacting local authorities, it would be important to contact the NHF for information on any Registered Social Landlord guidance on financial viability/availability of public subsidy.
- 5.6 The report also identified a number of priorities as medium priority. These include rural issues. Members were advised that the findings of the Rural Commission on Affordable Housing have been published and will be picked up as part of the Regional Housing Strategy review in the autumn.

The revised recommendations were AGREED.

- 1. Agree the actions proposed in Annex I;**
- 2. Note that the Regional Assembly intends to commission work to develop practical guidance to local authorities on evaluating financial viability and the role of public subsidy and on the processing of windfall sites, drawing on the expertise of the Affordable Housing Task Group;**
- 3. Agree that before the regional work is commissioned, the Regional Assembly should establish the extent and nature of any existing and emerging local guidance on evaluating financial viability and the role of public subsidy in the South East, and taking into account this and other information available, assess the most appropriate form and timing for regional guidance;**

4. Receive future reports following completion of research and other work currently planned or in progress.

The third revised recommendation was AGREED subject to the addition of the underlined text:

6. Future Work Programme and Review of the Regional Housing Strategy

- 6.1 The Regional Assembly's Housing Policy Advisor reminded Members that, at the last Regional Housing Board meeting, the Planning Implementation Director had suggested that a number of imminent events, including the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007, suggested that a review of the Regional Housing Strategy was required before the end of the first year following the launch of the strategy. This would provide an opportunity to take stock of how the merger of the Regional Housing Board and the Regional Assembly is progressing and to review the range of research work in the Board's Work Programme in the last year and inform the Board's investment recommendations for 2007.
- 6.2 A proposed outline Work Programme was set out in Annex I. Consultation with stakeholders and refinement of the recommendations on allocations for the Regional Housing Pot will be important components. A number of discussion papers relating to the review and providing a steer to the direction of future work will be presented at the next meeting. The programme provides sufficient flexibility to take account of the availability of new detailed information from DCLG.
- 6.3 An extensive discussion explored the purpose, timeliness and benefits of a review of the Regional Housing Strategy. The Board stressed that there needed to be greater clarity about the objectives for a review. The purpose will not be to overhaul strategic objectives, but to address each of the following:
- (i) Review the balance of investment priorities;
 - (ii) Review progress;
 - (iii) Address those issues that receive limited attention in the current RHS;
 - (iv) Advise on investment allocations;
 - (v) Achieve greater co-ordination with the RES and the South East Plan;
 - (vi) Be more innovative and wide-reaching in terms of consultation.
- 6.4 The Regional Assembly's Housing Policy Advisor reported that in the past consultation had been carried out with existing networks including councillors, professionals and tenants' groups. Future consultation will be more broadly based.
- 6.5 Consideration had been given, by the Regional Assembly, to the value of publicising the work of the Regional Housing Board in the media in the autumn to coincide with new projects coming on stream and relevant policies

being in place to support the Regional Housing Strategy. However, it was thought to be rather too early in the process.

- 6.6 The opportunity, provided by the review, to enter into dialogue and debate with other relevant committees of the Regional Assembly was welcomed whilst acknowledging the challenges posed by the different timescales governing the work of each group. It was suggested that it would be helpful to consider how the funding for both transport and housing could be linked to the long term objectives of the South East Plan. It was agreed that joint discussions would be beneficial in order to better understand the issues of mutual concern and to facilitate creative and joined-up thinking.
- 6.7 It was suggested that this approach might contribute to the need to encourage local authorities to deliver their strategic housing and planning responsibilities in a way to deliver consistently high quality outcomes.
- 6.8 It was acknowledged that the Regional Housing Forum would provide valuable experience from a diverse range of stakeholders and projects which have contributed to workshops and innovative practices. A planned workshop, to be held later this year, is seeking to bring together members of the Assembly's Housing Advisory Group, the Regional Housing Forum and the Affordable Housing Task Group.
- 6.9 In addition, the RHF has recently carried out an Annual Review and will bring its findings, including an outline of the Forum's work and achievements, to the next meeting of the RHB. It is also intended to provide a briefing paper to each subsequent meeting of the RHB.
- 6.10 Clarification was sought with respect to the offer made by the Regional Housing Forum to assist with the research review and gap analysis of the current Regional Housing Strategy. The Housing Policy Advisor confirmed that this would be helpful. It was suggested that the RHF could provide helpful assistance with consultancy events in 2007. It was also suggested that the Forum could be used to explore issues at a deeper level through localised consultancy with client groups.
- 6.11 The Project Team will consider revised proposals to the Work Programme beyond the Away Day in October to be brought to the next Board meeting.

It was AGREED that the Regional Housing Board endorse the Work Programme set out in Annex I subject to this consideration.

In addition it was AGREED that the Regional Assembly should consider opportunities for dialogue between the RHB and RPC/RTB.

7. Regional Economic Strategy – Report of Head of Urban Renaissance and Housing, SEEDA

- 7.1 The Head of Urban Renaissance and Housing provided Members with an updated table “RES Action and Implementation Plan – proposed amendments to date” and apologised for not providing this paper prior to the meeting.

- 7.2 The closing date for the consultation on the Regional Economic Strategy is 30 June 2006. It will then be presented to the SEEDA Board at its meeting in July. The report, together with the updated paper, provides a last opportunity for feedback from the RHB.
- 7.3 The original document attributes the RHB as the lead partner in delivering one of the proposed actions. In the new document the RHB is the lead partner in three of the actions. In presenting the papers SEEDA is seeking to ascertain the appropriateness of this and agreement relating to the chosen actions related to economic action.
- 7.4 There was a discussion concerning the appropriateness of the use of the words "labour force" at 5.b) on page 6 of the original document/page 2.b) on page 5 of the tabled document. It was suggested that there are other groups/factors which affect housing needs who are not necessarily related to economic activity and that this needs to be recognised in the RES.
- 7.5 In consideration of the rationale attached to action 48 on page 2 of the new document it was suggested that providing an adequate supply of the right type of housing needed to be emphasised so that provision of one kind of accommodation e.g. one/two bedroom flats was not provided to the exclusion of other types of required housing in order to facilitate a stable economy and workforce.
- 7.6 It was suggested that in preparation for the next RES it would be helpful for the Board to encourage SEEDA to consider targeted regeneration in order to stimulate entrepreneurship, especially in areas where there is a possibility of businesses going off-shore.
- 7.7 It was noted that the Implementation Plan of the RES has been aligned with the South East Plan and it is therefore considered appropriate for the RHB to become involved in the implementation of the RES.

The Board AGREED to:

- 1. Comment on the proposed text for the housing element of the Regional Economic Strategy;**
 - 2. Agree or suggest amendments to the proposed actions and lead partners set out in the action plan associated with the Regional Economic Strategy;**
 - 3. Comment specifically on the proposal to develop and implement a private sector housing renewal action plan for the region.**
- 8. Items for information:**
- a) Brownfield Land Portfolio - update on the work of the sub-group**

- 8.1 It was agreed at the meeting in December 2005 to look at the potential of brownfield sites to address the priorities of the RHB. To this end the sub-group has looked at the Register of Surplus Public Sector Land which comprises some 700 potential sites, to assess their potential for future housing development. There is a very varied range of sites including very small sites and large strategic sites. The register is dynamic, with sites being added to and removed from the Register all the time.
- 8.2 It was noted that sites over 0.4 hectares in size offer the potential for 3,000 homes of which 900 could be affordable. Sites less than 0.4 hectares have the potential for more houses but less affordable homes.
- 8.3 A big gap was reported with respect to registered local authority land which was recorded as close to nil. It was suggested that the Regional Assembly is asked to write to local authorities requesting that they identify surplus sites, on the same basis as the 700 sites already registered, in order to present a complete picture of the total land available.

It was AGREED to ask the Regional Assembly to write to all local authorities and county councils, on behalf of the RHB, to request that they register all surplus brownfield sites on the same basis as land already on the register.

b) Current Homelessness Issues

- 8.4 Clarification was sought about the meaning of “Housing Aspirations” on page 1 para 1.2 in the report. The term refers to initiatives such as the First Time Buyers’ Initiative.

c) Invitation to the Board to contribute to the National Housing Federation Regional Conference

- 8.5 Chris Woolf, GOSE, drew Members’ attention to the conference on 30 October which would help to raise the profile of the RHB and its agenda. The location is to be confirmed. Members were asked to indicate if they would be prepared to attend the conference as RHB representatives.

d) South East Plan Partial Review of Gypsies and Travellers

- 8.6 The Regional Assembly’s Planning Manager explained that the paper updates the RHB on the planning process and that the timetable for the South East Plan Partial Review is driven by the anticipated completion dates of the Gypsies and Travellers Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs). A detailed project plan was currently being prepared.
- 8.7 The Board discussed the potential for linking the South East Plan process, with the RHS review and the RHB allocations. It was noted that George Summers is involved with the Partial Review and was scheduled to discuss further allocations with the RHB. It was agreed that the Board should seek to make use of the GTAAs as they emerge and that the Assembly be asked to ensure that the Partial Review Project Plan addresses the question of linkages between the RSS and the RHS. The Housing Corporation and

Registered Social Landlords expressed a wish to be involved in the Partial Review process.

The Board noted the contents of the report.

The Regional Assembly was asked to ensure that the Project Plan for the South East Plan Partial Review includes reference to the need for alignment between the South East Plan and the Regional Housing Strategy.

9. Any other business notified to the Chairman before the start of the meeting

9.1 The Housing Policy Advisor tabled a list of quarterly future RHB meetings for the period to the end of 2007 which will be publicised alongside other Regional Assembly meetings. They have been scheduled to fit in with likely key dates related to important decisions which are likely to be needed in relation to the RHS review process. A later date for the autumn meeting together with a less formal Away Day on the same date is, therefore, proposed. An initial suggestion was received for an Away Day visit to the north of the region, following a visit to the Thames Gateway and the south of the region in 2005. The programme of meetings will also take into account the timetable for the work being carried out by George Summers in relation to the allocations for Gypsies and Travellers. The Chairman requested that the meeting on 2 May 2007 be rescheduled due to its proximity to the local elections.

9.2 The RHB dates for the remainder of the year and 2007 have been confirmed as follows. Please note the change of date to the May 07 meeting and change of venues for all dates.

Friday, 6 October 06 (including Board Away Day) (venue still TBC)

Wednesday, 6 December 06 at MWB starting at 2.00pm

Friday, 2 March 07 at MWB starting at 2.00pm

Monday, 14 May 07 at MWB starting at 2.00pm

Wednesday, 5 September 07 at MWB starting at 2.00pm

Wednesday, 5 December 07 at MWB starting at 2.00pm

9.3 Lesley van Dijk, Regional Assembly PR Executive, drew Members' attention to the Regional Assembly's regular Bulletin which updates Members about meetings and issues discussed by the Regional Assembly. It covers the work of the Regional Planning Committee, Executive Committee, Plenary, Regional Transport Board and the Regional Housing Board. It is available both electronically and as a hard copy. Members of the RHB are asked to contact Cath Stubbings if they would like to receive a copy.

10. Dates of Future Meetings

- 10.1 It was confirmed that the next meeting will be on Friday 6 October 2006. This will be an all day meeting and include a Board Away Day. The venue is to be confirmed.
- 10.2 The meeting closed at 15.47 p.m.