

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND  
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 5 DECEMBER 2007**

Present:

Board Members

Cllr Elizabeth Cartwright  
Cllr Gillian Brown  
David Edwards  
Howard Ewing  
Cllr John Goddard  
Cllr Keith House  
Cllr Tony Page  
Ann Santry  
Sheila Drew-Smith

Regional Assembly (Chairman)  
Regional Assembly  
English Partnerships  
GOSE  
Regional Assembly  
SEEDA  
Regional Assembly  
Regional Assembly  
Housing Corporation

Officers

Martin Tugwell  
Heather Bolton  
Alison Bailey  
Cath Stubbings  
Louise Wilby  
Mark Williams  
Fiona Cruickshank  
Pat Tempny  
Steve Kethero  
Chris Woolf  
Paul White

In attendance

Steve Baker  
Caroline Bosdet  
Genevieve Haywood  
George Summers  
J Thorpe  
Kate Dallip

**1. Apologies and Substitutions**

1.1 Apologies were received from Nigel Horton-Baker (Regional Assembly)

**2. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 20 June 2007**

2.1 The Minutes were **AGREED** as a true record of the meeting.

**3. Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda**

3.1 Page 8, para 8.7

Steve Kethero reported that the proposed CLG taskforce to consider the practice of investment to stand empty and investment to rent, had not yet met.

## **4 Delivering Affordable Housing**

### **a) 2007/2008 National Affordable Housing Programme Progress**

- 4.1 Fiona Cruickshank introduced the report which covered progress in the period to September 2007.
- 4.2 She drew attention to the slow progress outlined in para 2.2 of the report and noted that this was a combination of planning issues compounded more recently by problems with the housing market. She emphasised the important role that all partners have in helping the Housing Corporation deliver its programme.
- 4.3 Ann Santry acknowledged that the scale of, and availability of grant, together with delays in the planning system, particularly in relation to Section 106 agreements, contributed to the problem. A number of Board members noted a growing concern within the house building sector about the current state of the market. The view appeared to be that the current downturn was likely to be more serious and long-term than was anticipated.
- 4.4 Fiona Cruickshank explained that the HC was working hard with partners to endeavour to ensure that the proposed programme was delivered on the ground. Sheila Drew-Smith indicated that long-standing issues related to delivery had become worse due to the pressure on the planning system caused by the lack of skilled planners.
- 4.5 Fiona Cruickshank noted that the proposed changes to the management of the investment programme from 2008 were intended to enable the Corporation to avoid the 'end-of-year' rush that is currently experienced.
- 4.6 Ann Santry explained that Housing Associations have traditionally responded to a delay in the delivery of proposals by substituting schemes which have been purchased from developers. With the current softening of the market developers were seeking to sell more of their developments to offset their risk. However, such properties will not meet eco-homes very good standard or Code for Sustainable Homes level three; as such this route to maintaining supply may not be open in the future.

**The report was NOTED.**

### **b) Affordable Housing Completions Monitoring Data**

- 4.7 Alison Bailey indicated that the Assembly's monitoring of affordable housing provision had provided the most comprehensive set of data to date. This information will feed into the Annual Monitoring Report produced by the Assembly (which will be considered by the Assembly's Regional Planning Committee at its next meeting). She explained that the report provided a picture of delivery of affordable housing until March 2007. Analysis of the data supported the conclusions of the HC that there was a real need to better understand and address underperformance of delivery.

- 4.8 Responding to a question about the availability of data about the size and type of housing completions in specific locations Alison Bailey advised that she hoped to use NHBC data which provided robust regional data but was unlikely to provide specific local information.
- 4.9 Cllr John Goddard asked why South Oxfordshire had not provided data on provision of affordable housing without public subsidy and how it could be assisted to improve delivery. Alison Bailey advised that the Assembly had circulated extensive guidance and advice with the survey questionnaire. It was intended to carry out further evaluation and provide examples of good practice to assist local authorities who had not responded.
- 4.10 Fiona Cruickshank referred to the HC's seminar on the use of the economic assessment tool. It was intended to organise future sessions by local authorities currently providing good practice in relation to Section 106 negotiations. The Chairman welcomed this initiative.
- 4.11 Ann Santry reported that some Housing Associations were prepared to subsidise developments from their own resources rather than seek to deliver using grant from the HC. It should not therefore be assumed that the lack of start on site information necessarily indicated inactivity.
- 4.12 Responding to a question about a previous piece of work on best regional practice associated with Section 106 Martin Tugwell indicated that the work needed to be commissioned taking account of the potential implications for affordable housing as a consequence of the proposal by Government to introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Howard Ewing said that he believed that affordable housing requirements would have first call on the CIL.
- 4.13 The Chairman asked whether authorities which were performing well were spending off site contributions to subsidise the delivery. Alison Bailey advised that interrogation of the data would provide this information.

#### **The Board:**

- (i) **NOTED the monitoring data on affordable housing completions 2006/07;**
- (ii) **AGREED to urgently undertake further work to establish the underlying reasons for the continued under-delivery of affordable housing and the actions that the region needs to overcome them, based on the approach set out in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of this report.**
- (iii) **AGREED to undertake further research into delivery without grant.**

## **5 Strategic Housing Regional Improvement Programme**

- 5.1 Caroline Bosdet from the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government gave a presentation on the Strategic Housing Programme South East.
- 5.2 It was noted that there was the potential to achieve synergy between the programme promoted by IDeA and the work of the Board. It was agreed that this would be managed by the project team.
- 5.3 Sheila Drew-Smith suggested longer term tracking of the impact of the programme and that action be taken to draw together all good practice for dissemination and reference.

### **The Board:**

- i) Welcomed the support being provided to improve delivery of the strategic housing role and**
- ii) Agreed to work with the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) to deliver common objectives through the programme.**

## **6 Private Sector Renewal - funding allocation 2008-11**

- 6.1 Steve Kethero reported on the bidding round for the funds identified by the Board for investment in private sector renewal. He outlined the assessment process and the recommendations of the Assessment Panel in respect of the allocation of funding.
- 6.2 He noted the positive response with all but two local authorities bidding for funding and the potential improvement of private sector housing. Steve Kethero explained that Basingstoke and Dean Council had advised that they did not believe they needed additional resources to progress work within the Surrey and Hants partnership. Chris Woolf confirmed that support for the Isle of Wight was being provided through the Strategic Housing Programme South East and PUSH.
- 6.3 Responding to a question about whether wider regeneration needs had been reflected in the assessments Steve Kethero reported that areas with the lowest deprivation and the fewest number of unfit homes had made appropriately lower bids. The Panel was, therefore satisfied that there was a suitable fit between the evidence base and the bid. In response to a subsequent question about value for money he advised that local authorities receiving lower funding allocations were looking to develop their work in a new way.
- 6.4 Sheila Drew-Smith expressed her unease about the effectiveness of regeneration not having been taken into account. She suggested that there were models available and that consideration should be given to making some connection with these in future bidding rounds.

- 6.5 Cllr Keith House believed that the measures outlined in the report would ensure the appropriate checks and balances and suggested that it would be helpful to consider incentive measures and to gain an understanding of current and future actions.
- 6.6 Cllr Tony Page asked about the difference in the bid value of £16m for SERLAP in the table on page 3 of the report and the amount of the bid £20m in Annex 3. Steve Kethero explained that the figure in the table took into account the 82% reduction. The Board noted that there may be a need to adjust the allocations in light of the final announcement on the level of regional funding available and **AGREED** that any adjustment would be made on a pro-rata basis.

### **The Board**

- i) **Approved the programme of bids and recommended it to Ministers.**
- ii) **Approved the payment arrangements to local authorities as set out in paragraphs 5.3 to 5.5 of this report.**
- iii) **Approved the use of half year progress reports described in the bid prospectus as a verification tool for the distribution of funds.**

## **7 Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant - funding allocation**

- 7.1 George Summers (GOSE) introduced the report and advised that the bids represented the fourth and final round for the two year period 2006/08. He advised that a new three year period of grants would commence from April 08.
- 7.2 He recommended the Board's approval of 11 bids (value £1.848m) to provide 24 new pitches and refurbishment work on 10 sites with 89 pitches. A balance of £0.452m remained unspent for the current financial year which, subject to end of year flexibility, should be available for the next bidding round. He advised that confirmation of any carry-over was anticipated early in the New Year. As the value of the bids did not exceed the sum available the Board did not have to prioritise the bids.
- 7.3 He drew the Board's attention to the expected additional information referred to in paras 3.3 and 3.4 of his report and advised that the recommendation was subject to its inclusion.
- 7.4 He explained that the majority of expenditure was on refurbishment work on existing sites due to the difficulty of finding suitable sites in the region. He hoped that new sites would come forward in the next bidding round and emphasised the need for both refurbishment of existing accommodation and new accommodation which met the standards in CLG guidance. He referred to the historical problems of some sites which had not been well managed

which, combined with lack of funding, had contributed to the current poor provision.

- 7.5 Cllr Tony Page sought clarity with respect to the status and role of the RHB with respect to the provision of housing for Gypsies and Travellers. He believed that this matter was a housing issue and should not be regarded as simply a planning matter and sought reassurance on this point.
- 7.6 Martin Tugwell explained that responsibility for assessing the planning need for Gypsies and Travellers rests with the Regional Assembly as the Regional Planning Body. The RHB's role is to advise on the allocation of funding in response to proposals that meet the identified need for sites. He accepted that there was a relationship between the two areas of work which was why the Board received regular progress reports on the partial review being taken forward by the Assembly and why Board members had been invited to attend a workshop with the Assembly's RPC.
- 7.7 The Chairman asked whether Gypsies and Travellers had been asked whether they would be willing to be accommodated in houses since this provision would be easier than the provision of pitches. George Summers confirmed that the question had been included in the assessment work that will underpin the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA)s.
- 7.8 Martin Tugwell noted that the evidence base underpinning the forthcoming consultation on the Gypsy and Traveller partial review would be freely available. He assured members that the RHB would continue to be kept advised of progress with the partial review. He advised that the Assembly's Plenary on 5 March 2008 would decide the content of the consultation and provide advice to Government which would subsequently be subject to an Examination in Public (EiP).

**It was AGREED that the Regional Housing Board advise the Secretary of State that it recommended that the bids for Gypsy and Traveller grant funding be supported.**

## **8. Brownfield Land Assembly Company (BLAC)**

- 8.1 Cath Stubbings introduced the report which sought to address the issues raised previously by Board members. She reported on progress in addressing issues regarding governance, accountability and level of risk. She noted that detailed modelling showed that for a net cost of £7.4m the Board's investment will enable sites to the value of £30m to be brought forward for affordable housing.
- 8.2 David Edwards recommended that the report be viewed as a work in progress with final proposals being considered at the Board's next meeting on 17 January 2007. This would enable on-going dialogue between BLAC, English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation to be taken into account.

- 8.3 Ann Santry requested consideration of the criteria for assessing project viability. Shelia Drew Smith asked for the inclusion of examples of beneficial working and related figures.
- 8.4 Cllr Tony Page asked about the potential for local authorities to address the issues of derelict empty homes by use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) and refurbishment by BLAC. Paul White explained that although SEEDA had CPO powers BLAC did not and was not seeking to undertake refurbishment work on derelict sites.
- 8.5 The Chairman queried the need for monthly meetings for the Project Committee. It was suggested that decisions be agreed electronically where appropriate.

**The Board AGREED to request the Project Team work with BLAC and English Partnerships to prepare a funding agreement that sets out the basis on which the investment in BLAC is to be taken forward.**

Recommendations 1 and 3 were deferred until the next meeting for consideration with more detailed viability criteria and arrangements for 'virtual meetings' in the standing orders for the Project Committee.

## **9. Items for Information**

### **RHS Update and Making the Case**

- 9.1 Martin Tugwell advised that completion of the RHS update document was awaiting the confirmation of the funding figures from CLG. Progress was being made with the Making the Case document and a draft would be circulated to RHB members by the end of the week.
- 9.2 The Board **NOTED** the remaining Items for Information.

The meeting closed at 3.53 p.m.

**Date of next meeting:** 17 January 2008 at 11.15 at the Institute of Materials, London. The meeting will be preceded by a workshop from 10.00-11.00.