

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 16 JANUARY 2007

Present:

Board Members

Trevor Beattie
Cllr Mrs Gillian Brown
Cllr Mrs Elizabeth Cartwright - Chairman
Fiona Cruickshank
Cllr John Goddard
Douglas Horner
Cllr Keith House
Ann Santry

Officers

Paul Bevan
Heather Bolton
Cath Stubbings
Alison Bailey
Louise Wilby
Lee Amor
Howard Ewing
Pat Tempany
Steve Kethero
Chris Woolf
Sharon Smith
Paul Abey
Dominick Veasey

In Attendance

Rhian Windridge

1. Apologies and Substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Ian Coates, Leigh Herington, Sheila Drew-Smith and Cllr Don Turner.
- 1.2 The Chairman welcomed Cllr Mrs Gillian Brown (Arun District Council), Howard Ewing, Director of Housing and Planning (GOSE) and Rhian Windridge (English Partnerships).
- 1.3 Douglas Horner drew to the attention of the Board his declaration of interest registered with the Regional Assembly secretariat.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 6 October 2007

- 2.1 It was noted that Fiona Cruickshank attended the meeting as the Board representative for the Housing Corporation.

The Minutes were AGREED subject to this amendment.

3. Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

- 3.1 Para 7.1: The presentation on the Sub-regional Housing Market Assessments would be presented at the Board's next meeting on 2 March 2007.
- 3.2 Agenda Item 8a Brownfield Land Portfolio - The Board accepted the Housing Corporation's offer to fund local authority training on the use of their financial viability model.

4. Private Sector Funding 2007-08 - Review and Funding Options

- 4.1 The Housing Team Leader (GOSE) introduced the report. He confirmed the recent announcement by Communities and Local Government (CLG) of an 8% reduction in Regional Housing Pot (RHP) funding for private sector renewal from £20 million to £18.4 million for 2007-8. He confirmed that detailed plans for private sector renewal had been received from local authorities. A list of local authority urban areas, eligible for funding, is attached.
- 4.2 Concern was expressed about the short notice, of the announcement, requiring RHBs to resubmit recommendations by 1 February concerning expected outputs for the financial year commencing 2007/08.

It was AGREED:

- 1. To retain the initially submitted distribution of allocation with a pro-rata reduction as a result of the cut in overall funds available and**
- 2. In submitting this recommendation, register the Board's concern about the reduction in resources and disappointment at the short timeframe in which to finalise its recommendations.**

5. Regional Housing Strategy - draft for consultation

- 5.1 The Planning Manager advised that the Board's comments on the reports in Agenda Items 5 and 6 would be incorporated into the final draft of the Regional Housing Strategy Review Consultation (February 2007). The consultation document takes into account recent research that has been commissioned to address identified gaps in the existing Regional Housing Strategy as well as building upon the most recent work associated with the draft South East Plan (SEP) and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).
- 5.2 She asked the Board to consider the degree to which all commissioned research is accurately reflected in the two reports, the extent to which key issues relating to updated policy and consultation have been included and the likelihood of the proposed questions eliciting the most informative responses.
- 5.3 There was considerable discussion about funding for housing in small villages. The Director of the Housing Corporation expressed disappointment that the recommendation to retain funding for housing in small villages at the current

level would result in a reduction in the proportion of funding to small villages in real terms from 14.9% in 2003-4 to 5.8% in the current programme. She suggested that data from current research into communities in rural areas should be included in the report and that actual figures should be used in preference to percentages.

- 5.4 It was **NOTED** that a question should be asked on the proportion of the Board's funding that should be spent in small villages or in market towns.
- 5.5 It was **NOTED** that the figure of £40m in Agenda Item 6 para 15.1 was allocated every two years to support the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas not every year, as stated.
- 5.6 It was **AGREED** to include a table showing the fluctuations in the number of affordable homes delivered over time.
- 5.7 It was acknowledged that historically funding had been targeted at urban areas. It was suggested that the section relating to supporting rural communities should be strengthened to reflect demographic changes and economic and social needs.
- 5.8 Whilst acknowledging that sustainable rural communities required different kinds of housing, the continuing reduction in the agricultural workforce could mean that these communities were likely to be unsustainable in the long-term.
- 5.9 It was **AGREED** that the Project Team would include a suitably challenging question concerning the provision of affordable housing in rural communities.
- 5.10 In responding to a question about monitoring, the Planning Manager advised that regional partners were seeking to devise a single model, from existing monitoring processes, to monitor new provision of affordable housing and the delivery of both the SEP and the RHS.
- 5.11 It was **NOTED** that the Minister had announced compliance of all publicly administered homes with level three of the new Code for Sustainable Homes. It was agreed that the Board should support this standard but noted that delivery will be challenging and have a financial implication.
- 5.12 It was **AGREED** that the report needed strengthening with respect to supporting the Housing Corporation's Homelessness Strategy. With reference to Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) page 2 para 2, further consideration needs to be given to whether the Board wishes to:
- encourage and monitor the provision of smaller sites and
 - encourage local authorities to use their planning policies to deliver mixed developments.
- 5.13 It was **AGREED** that the evidence base for supported housing referred to on page 11 para 4.6 needed strengthening.

- 5.14 The Board **AGREED** to include references to the geographical context, in particular an explanation of the Regional Hubs. Useful links could be made between the need for more affordable housing and the need for a skilled workforce.
- 5.15 Para 5.9 on page 14 should be broadened to include the environmental constraints particularly that posed by the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Acknowledgement needs to be given to the potential to unlock affordable housing if the related issues are resolved.
- 5.16 It was **AGREED** that the wording of Question 6, relating to homelessness, needed to be made clearer. It was **AGREED** that the wording of the questions throughout the paper needed to be reviewed and amended in the light of the comments made by the Board.
- 5.17 The RHS will be cross referenced with the draft South East Plan and the RES. It will also list the contributory research which will be available on the Regional Assembly's website.
- 5.18 Concern was expressed about inadequate Government funding for affordable housing.

The Board APPROVED the contents of the report, subject to the agreed suggestions and amendments, as forming part of the consultation document.

6. Regional Housing Strategy -Funding Options 2008-11

- 6.1 There was a lengthy discussion about the Regional Infrastructure Fund (RIF). The Director of the Housing Corporation made the point that the scenarios, referred to in Table 1 on page 9, should include the baseline position, not including the RIF, to demonstrate progress made.
- 6.2 The Chief Executive explained the concept of the RIF as an innovative idea which was supported by the region's submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). It offered the real possibility of attracting additional private sector funding. The RIF would use public sector funds to act as a catalyst for investment that is recovered through contributions from the private sector.
- 6.3 In this context, consideration was given to the need for funding affordable housing. A robust case, based on a strategic view, will be made to ensure that affordable housing will benefit in the long term, from setting aside a relatively small amount in the short term, to attract Government and private sector funding. Consideration was given to linking this with Agenda Item 5 by emphasising exemplar projects, as qualitative outcomes, which would deliver affordable homes of a good quality over a longer time scale.
- 6.4 It was **AGREED** to delete para 9.3 from page 3 because it focused on homes rather than communities and the environment.

- 6.5 It was **AGREED** that Question 12 be amended to emphasise the need for the RIF to be returned to the region on a recyclable basis.
- 6.6 It was **AGREED** to amend the wording of para 16.4 so that it gave a more accurate representation of the affordable housing programme.
- 6.7 It was **AGREED** that there needed to be a question to reflect the need for flexibility in providing a better mix and size of houses to meet the needs of growing families. Reference would be made to the research by DTZ.
- 6.8 It was **AGREED** that the Housing Policy Advisor will collate the views of the Board, which would be available for the Board to view electronically prior to publication. The Communications Director will advise on the wording of the final document.

The Board AGREED to approve the contents of this report, subject to the approved suggestions and amendments to strengthen the document.

7. Regional Housing Strategy Review - consultation arrangements

- 7.1 The Communication Director outlined the proposed consultation arrangements for the Regional Housing Strategy Review.
- 7.2 Much of the twelve week consultation will focus on mailing and web-based opinion polling to seek the views of regional stakeholders. 3000 organisations will be consulted including house builders and gypsy and travellers groups. Six stakeholder events have been organised in addition to a debate at the Regional Assembly's Plenary on 7 March. MORI have been commissioned to undertake a structure opinion survey on key issues associated with the review. To aid analysis the consultation will mainly request quantitative information and provide opportunities for more qualitative data through the use of supplementary questions. English Partnerships offered to suggest additional organisations to be consulted.

The Regional Housing Board APPROVED the proposed arrangements for consultation on the review of the Regional Housing Strategy and funding options for 2008 - 11.

8. Government Consultation on Housing Investment in the Regions

- 8.1 The Housing Team Leader (GOSE) introduced the report and recommended that the report be considered alongside a number of proposals under consideration which will potentially impact on the South East.
- 8.2 Referring to Annex A page 5 para 2, the Chairman queried the rationale for putting overcrowded, shared and concealed households in a single grouping with the potential for double counting. In the ensuing discussion the Housing Team Leader advised that the formula presents relative regional information rather than an absolute measurement. It was suggested that the current and

future business strength of the region should be emphasised to maximise the delivery of the required housing numbers for future economic growth.

- 8.3 The Housing Forum outlined its concerns about the impact the proposed indicators might have on the delivery of affordable housing and decent homes. It advised that there was a discrepancy between national and district figures. It took the view that the indicators were a blunt instrument and cautioned against the use of national surveys to determine local needs suggesting that the Housing Needs Surveys was a more suitable measure.
- 8.4 Commenting on the house price/earnings ratio, it was suggested that raising the threshold to 9 would exclude some areas experiencing high demand and high prices and suggested maintaining the current threshold but giving a higher weighting to 9 and above. The Chief Executive stressed the need to keep the indicator bar high in order to bring funding into the region as a whole.
- 8.5 The Housing Forum suggested that the mixed communities' indicator could be useful in highlighting areas experiencing pressure on existing stock through high levels of asylum seekers and migrant workers.

The Regional Housing Board APPROVED the proposed draft response and noted that further consultation and actions are planned in relation to regional funding for housing.

9. Draft Protocol: Housing Roles and Responsibilities of Regional Assemblies, Communities and Local Government and the Housing Corporation

- 9.1 The Housing Policy Advisor introduced the report indicating that it sought to update and clarify existing arrangements in the context of the RHB's responsibilities with respect to the Regional Assembly.

It was AGREED that:

- 1. The RHB welcome the clarification of roles and arrangements for reporting delivery of the National Affordable Housing Programme;**
- 2. The RHB will receive quarterly reports from the Housing Corporation, on the delivery of the Programme.**

10. Gypsy and Travellers Grant Applications and Protocol for Assessing Bids between Board Meetings

- 10.1 The Housing Team Leader (GOSE) drew the Board's attention to the letter received by the Highways Agency, from East Sussex County Council, regarding the proposal to widen the road at Bridies' Tan. The letter advised that any consideration of this matter would need to take account of planning applications relating to the Gypsy and Traveller Site.

- 10.2 Reference was made to the report setting out the applications submitted for the second round of the 2006 Grant Applications and the improvements local authorities are proposing to undertake to raise the standard of accommodation for the Travelling Community.
- 10.3 The Housing Team Leader (GOSE) introduced the single protocol outlined by CLG in the Annex to the report.
- 10.4 He reminded the Board that the assessments of the bids were not previously available and that the completed assessments suggested that the bids be supported as part of the 2006-07 funding package.
- 10.5 A concern was expressed about the lack of contextual evidence on which to base a decision in particular the responsibility for evaluating the bids as being suitable for funding. The Housing Policy Advisor reported on a recent event, organised by DCLG, which explained the national evaluation process, applied to all bid applications. She advised that this will be provided, in summary form, for applications in future bidding rounds.
- 10.6 The Chairman suggested that following the provision of local authority maps showing the evaluation of need it will be possible to consider the alignment of grants to meet gaps in current provision. She acknowledged the difficulty faced by local authorities in finding suitable sites.
- 10.7 It was suggested that the Board needed to clarify, in the Regional Housing Strategy, that it was being required to make decisions relating to the prioritisation of funding for available sites rather than considering the merits of individual bids. Howard Ewing (GOSE) agreed to clarify whether the Board was being required to provide a light touch approval of GOSE recommendations based on assessments of a more in depth consideration of the required sites by DCLG's consultants. He undertook to report to the next meeting of the Board.
- 10.8 Concern was also expressed about the timeframe of one week, for the communication of members' views, referred to in page 3 para 2 of the protocol.

The following recommendations were AGREED:

- 1. That the Regional Housing Board Members approve the application for funding of Twyford Orchard Caravan Park, Twyford, Berkshire; and the two applications for funding at Hever Road Gypsy Site, Edenbridge, Kent.**
- 2. The remaining Gypsy and Traveller site grant under-spend for the current financial year is made available for investment in other Board priorities, and is recovered through an appropriate adjustment in the allocation of funds for the financial year 2007/08.**

Consideration will be given at the next meeting of the proposal for a protocol for assessing Gypsy and Traveller site grant bid applications in between Board meetings.

11. London Regional Housing Strategy

- 11.1 The Planning Manager introduced the report and suggested that the Board should welcome the proposal to increase the housing target for London to 30,500 dwellings per annum. The consultation document also stresses the importance of achieving the correct mix of housing to meet needs, particularly the provision of large affordable homes, and the need for mobility to access new housing.
- 11.2 There was some discussion about the meaning of the reference to “Policies for Change” in the document. The Director of the Housing Corporation undertook to seek further information on the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. The Planning Manager agreed to further research the scale of the Policies for Change and the potential impact on the South East.
- 11.3 Some concern was expressed about the implication on balanced communities across the whole of London if 50% of the capacity in the East will be affordable housing.
- 11.4 Douglas Horner declared an interest as a London house owner.
- 11.5 The Director of the Housing Corporation and the Planning Manager undertook to research the matter further and report to the next meeting.

12. Items for Information

- 12.1 The Chief Executive explained the context for the item on the revised terms of reference by referring to the agreement by the Board in March 2005, recorded in the Minutes and endorsed by the Minister that the Housing Board would transfer to the Regional Assembly.
- 12.2 The Housing Team leader (GOSE) sought clarification about the composition of the Board with respect to voting rights. The Chief Executive referred to the minutes of that meeting and advised that the composition had not changed. He had discussed the matter with the Chief Executives of GOSE and SEEDA and confirmed the composition of the Board in writing.
- 12.3 He advised that the minutes had recorded that there was an issue relating to the capacity for GOSE, SEEDA, English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation to provide non-executive members. This had been addressed through the Terms of Reference which had referred to an official or non-executive from each of those institutions.
- 12.4 It was **NOTED** that that the standards of conduct and probity, established by the Nolan and Neill Committees, were currently under discussion by the English Regions Network (ERN) with respect to clarifying arrangements in relation to the Housing Corporation and the CBI (Confederation of British Industry).

The Committee noted the contents of this report.

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1 The Communications Director reported that the Board would have a unique branding to mark its transfer to the Regional Assembly. The branding will be used for the RHS review.
- 13.2 There being no other business the meeting closed at 16.00.