

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND  
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

Date: 20 June 2007

Subject: **Monitoring Affordable Housing Provision**

Report of: Planning Manager

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Regional Housing Board notes the new approach to affordable housing monitoring being introduced by the Regional Assembly.

**Purpose of the Report:**

To outline to the Board the Regional Assembly's new approach to monitoring the provision of affordable housing in the South East.

**Key Issues:**

- The Regional Assembly is required to monitor the provision of affordable housing as part of its role as regional planning body. In the past this has proved problematic in some areas.
- The Assembly has been working with consultants and a steering group of regional and local partners to develop a new approach to monitoring progress towards the South East Plan's affordable housing targets.
- The new approach seeks to simplify the information that is sought and to provide practical advice and assistance to the local authorities providing the data. In particular, it aims to make best use of other data sources and to encourage joint working between planning and housing colleagues within local authorities.
- The new request for data will be sent to the Assembly's housing monitoring contacts later this month. The data will be reported in the 2007 Regional Monitoring Report.

## **I Introduction**

- 1.1 There is a long history of monitoring the provision of affordable housing in the South East. However, determining how well the region is performing in terms of affordable housing provision has proved difficult. There are various sources of information, each of which counts affordable housing in a different way. Because sources such as CLG and the Housing Corporation have not provided the sort of information required to monitor RPG 9's 'indicative affordable housing target', the Regional Assembly collected data from local authorities through its annual housing supply survey. However, we know that this data is not comprehensive and that it is more robust in some areas than others. Instead, as an interim measure, we have reported data provided by the Housing Corporation but restricted to grant-funded new build and conversions. We also indicated a commitment to improve the quality of the affordable housing data reported in future Regional Monitoring Reports.
- 1.2 As the Board is aware, the South East Plan includes a regional target for affordable housing, together with separate targets for social rented and intermediate housing<sup>1</sup>. Working with consultants and a steering group comprising partners from CLG and the Housing Corporation and a number of local authority data experts, the Regional Assembly is in the process of finalising a new approach that is designed to effectively and efficiently monitor the delivery of the affordable housing targets identified in the South East Plan.
- 1.3 This means that the data must be accurate, comprehensive (with no double-counting or omissions) and timely, reflect the Plan's definition of affordable housing, separately identify social rented and intermediate housing, avoid duplication of effort in terms of reporting and, crucially, tie-in with the monitoring of Policy H1 (total net additional dwellings). The affordable housing monitoring must pick up provision through new build or conversions (but not residential refurbishments or 'off-the shelf' purchases) and provision through Section 106 agreements and through grant funding. The monitoring must also satisfy the requirements of the core output indicator for regional planning identified by CLG, namely 'affordable housing completions by local authority area'.

## **2. New Approach**

- 2.1 The starting point has been to simplify the information that is sought. There are two tables that will need to be completed. The first deals with gains and losses through development. The second asks for supporting information which provides a fuller picture of progress in terms of tenure, subsidy, rural exceptions policy etc. Because we know that monitoring affordable housing poses at least some local authorities with real practical difficulties, the approach being developed takes the form of a 'how to' guide. There is guidance on definitions and worked examples and advice on joint working between planning and housing colleagues within authorities. One of the principles is that those providing the data to the Assembly should make as much use of other data sources as possible. Supporting information will therefore be provided for each local authority. This will comprise:

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to in the Plan as 'other forms of affordable housing'.

- a list provided by the Housing Corporation showing grant-funded schemes 2006/07, including details by tenure and whether they are in settlements of less than 3,000 population;
- a copy of the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) to end of March 2006;
- (if available) a list of HSSA contacts.

2.2 These other sources of data can, however, only provide assistance and act as a check for the data which will be sent to the Assembly as part of the planning monitoring function. This is because the affordable housing monitoring needs to tie in with the monitoring of total housing completions and other monitoring data. Also, the Board in particular will need to be aware that the definition of a 'completion' can vary. For example, the Housing Corporation may define a completion differently from a local planning authority. The Assembly's monitoring will need to use the same definition of a completion for affordable housing as for market housing. It is therefore likely that the monitoring data the Board receives from the Corporation will not be exactly the same as that reported by the Regional Assembly in the Regional Monitoring Report.

### 3. Next Steps

- 3.1 The request for data on affordable housing provision will be sent to the Assembly's housing monitoring contacts during June<sup>2</sup>, for return with the rest of the annual housing monitoring survey at the end of September. The data (covering 2006/07) will be reported in the 2007 Regional Monitoring Report. The Assembly intends to review experience of the new data request towards the end of the year, so that any lessons learned can be taken on board in next year's survey.
- 3.2 The Assembly will also be pulling together information from other sources to provide estimates of the overall changes to the affordable housing stock in the South East. These will include information on Open Market Homebuy and Right-to-Buy and Right-to-Acquire sales.

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Contact: **Alison Bailey: Planning Manager**  
 Tel: 01483 555216  
 E: [alisonbailey@southeast-ra.gov.uk](mailto:alisonbailey@southeast-ra.gov.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> Generally the first points of contact are officers in county and unitary authorities.