

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 17 JANUARY 2008

Present:

Board Members

Cllr Elizabeth Cartwright	Regional Assembly (Chairman)
Cllr Gillian Brown	Regional Assembly
David Edwards	English Partnerships
Howard Ewing	GOSE
Cllr John Goddard	Regional Assembly
Cllr Keith House	SEEDA
Cllr Tony Page	Regional Assembly
Ann Santry	Regional Assembly
Sheila Drew-Smith	Housing Corporation

Officers

Martin Tugwell
Paul Bevan
Heather Bolton
Cath Stubbings
Louise Wilby
Fiona Cruickshanke
Graham Hough
Lee Amor
Pat Tempny
Steve Kethero
Chris Woolf
Sharon Smith

In attendance

Paul White
Genevieve Haywood
Jo Shockley
Kate Dallip
Paul Abey

Ia. Chairman's Announcement

- Ia.1 The Chairman advised that following the Ministers' decision on the allocation of the housing element of the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) for 2008-2011 a discussion on the Board's support for the Brownfield Land Assembly Company (BLAC) would be deferred until the next meeting. She noted that officers from the Regional Assembly and SEEDA were meeting with CLG on 22 January 2008 to discuss the decision letter and its implications for alternative funding mechanisms.
- Ia.2 David Edwards noted that a number of meetings had taken place between English Partnerships (EP), CLG and GOSE at which BLAC and RIF had been discussed and he hoped this would enable progress to be made with the proposal.

I. Apologies and Substitutions

- I.1 There were no apologies.

2. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 5 December 2008

- 2.1 The Minutes were **AGREED** subject to the following amendments in bold text:
- 2.2 Page 4, para 6.2
Howard Ewing requested that the final sentence be amended to read, “**Chris Woolf will explore the support available to the Isle of Wight with the Improvement Agency for the Development of Local Government (IDeA).**”
- 2.3 Cllr Keith House stated that it was important to acknowledge that the Isle of Wight had distinct issues which created difficulties for partnership working with Hampshire. The Chairman asked Howard Ewing to follow up the matter.
- 2.4 Page 2, para 4.3
Ann Santry asked for the first sentence to be amended to read, “**Ann Santry advised that the market slow down in the planning system had contributed to the problem of delays for planners and developers.**”
- 2.5 Page 5, para 6.12
The Chairman noted that the first sentence should read, “Steve Kethero explained that the figure in the table took into account the **reduction to 82%.**”

3. Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

- 3.1 There were no matters arising.

4. Regional Funding Allocation

- 4.1 Martin Tugwell invited the Board to consider the implications of the Secretary of State’s recent decision on the housing element of the RFA for 2008-2011. He highlighted the need to explore with CLG the implications for the region of the Growth Support (Affordable Housing) Fund.
- 4.2 Fiona Cruickshank noted that Growth Support Fund had not been well publicised; a factor that would have contributed to the lack of take up to date. A total of £600m of funding over three years had been earmarked for the Fund; split over the three years as follows, £100m, £200m and £300m.
- 4.3 The intention was that affordable housing providers, supported by local authorities, will submit bids for social rented housing. To be successful the bids needed to make provision for at least 30% of the affordable housing to be available for tenants from London. She explained that London nominations would be made through a website choice based letting scheme which would be up and running shortly. In the event of insufficient schemes coming forward the money will revert to London.

- 4.4 The Board heard that that the whole region was eligible to apply but that the scheme focused on Growth Points, Growth Areas and areas close to London. Further details of the scheme will be published in the near future.
- 4.5 Picking up on the issue of the Housing Revenue Account, Cllr John Goddard expressed concern about the severe restrictions that the system was having on Oxford City Council's ability to deliver affordable homes. Sheila Drew-Smith reported that Yvette Cooper had recently announced a review of the housing revenue accounts and suggested that a briefing by GOSE would be welcomed.
- 4.6 Howard Ewing advised that the Minister's statement on 12 December 2007 had confirmed that this was scheduled for spring 2008. Stakeholders were encouraged to engage in the review.
- 4.7 Sharon Smith reported that at a meeting of the Regional Housing Forum (RHF) on 14 January 2008, concern had been expressed about the ending of overall funding for rural enablers and the impact on their central role to achieve housing targets for rural areas. The RHF took the view that funding needed to be confirmed and current funding arrangements retained.

The Board AGREED to:

1. **Note the Ministers' final decisions on the regional funding allocations for housing 2008 to 2011.**
 2. **Continue to make the case for additional funding for affordable housing for the South East.**
 3. **Explore with CLG the impact that the national housing subsidy system has on the South East.**
 4. **Clarify with CLG its intention regarding the use of funding for affordable housing for the provision of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers.**
 5. **Agree the proposed approach to allocating the small additional amount of funding available for private sector renewal.**
 6. **Seek a dialogue with CLG on the workings of the Growth Support (Affordable Housing) Fund to ensure that the South East benefits from the opportunities the fund offers.**
5. **Barriers to Affordable Housing Delivery**
- 5.1 Cath Stubbings introduced the report which had been discussed at the recent RHF meeting. She asked the Board to agree future actions to address both ongoing and newly emerging factors hindering the delivery of affordable housing.

- 5.2 Referring to page 4, para 3.3 (ii), Pat Tempany noted that SEEDA's role was somewhat different from that proposed. She suggested an informal approach to training for local authority officers on negotiation skills and development economics, focussing on best practice to promote mutual understanding.
- 5.3 The Chairman noted that there was evidence that local authorities had variable levels of skill in delivering affordable housing with and without grants and therefore had different training needs. David Edwards emphasised the importance of disseminating good practice with regard to the negotiations associated with Section 106 agreements. He requested that the Board explore ways in which it might help in this respect.
- 5.4 Howard Ewing strongly supported this view. Whilst he believed that dispelling misconceptions about affordable housing was important he believed that the need to address the barriers to provision was more important. He considered that greater prominence needed to be given to the timely provision of infrastructure. He also believed that it was important to utilise the enthusiasm of the National Housing Federation (NHF) which had offered to assist on this topic.
- 5.5 Sheila Drew-Smith suggested that the Board consider drawing on the Audit Commission work on Section 106, in particular a web-based toolkit for officers and councillor. She also asked the Board to give further consideration to the importance of effective communication and working practices referred to on page 3, para 2.2.5.
- 5.6 Fiona Cartwright highlighted the Housing Corporation seminars on good practice. She reported that both ATLAS and a number of local authorities had agreed to participate. [ATLAS is an advisory service managed by EP, funded by CLG, for local authorities managing large scale planning applications].
- 5.7 Cllr Gillian Brown suggested that the Board consider creating a website to facilitate the sharing of good practice. Heather Bolton, Communications Director, advised that this could be explored alongside a similar facility being developed for the RTB.
- 5.8 Cllr Keith House noted that there was also a need for both officers and members to better understand development economics and the key issues underlying planning applications. The Chairman re-iterated the importance of consistency of approach between councils to enhance the understanding of developers.
- 5.9 Sharon Smith referred to a local authority member of the RHF who had offered to share good practice relating to Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) and the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs). Cath Stubbings agreed to pursue the matter. Sharon Smith also noted that the RHF had identified the need for a stronger message about who should use the joint EAT Housing Corporation model, referred to on page 4, para 3.3 (i), and when it should be used. The Board clarified that local authorities should take the lead.

The Board AGREED to instruct the Board's Project Team to take forward the actions proposed in paragraphs 3.2. and 3.3 of the report and provide an update on progress at the next Board meeting.

6. Regional Infrastructure Fund

- 6.1 Martin Tugwell emphasised that the RIF was fully supported by SEEDA and the Assembly and had been viewed positively by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and the Department for Transport (DfT).
- 6.2 He explained the need to secure the initial core funding. He referred to the planned discussions with CLG later in the month to consider the possibilities of using a portion of the housing funding. He also explained that as part of the SEEDA Corporate Plan consideration was being given to identify a sum to make available to the RIF. The RTB would be giving consideration to identifying a contribution at its next meeting.
- 6.3 Commenting on the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Martin Tugwell advised that it had the potential to provide a contribution that will fund investment of sub-regional and regional significance. He indicated that the RIF had the potential to forward fund infrastructure investment that will be recovered through the planning system as part of CIL.
- 6.4 The Chairman asked whether it was known what percentage of the levy will be returned to the local authority which raised it. Martin Tugwell replied that unlike Planning Gain Supplement (PGS) local authorities would be in complete control. The Planning Bill makes provision for any authority with responsibility for town and country planning to be empowered to charge Community Infrastructure Levy. On that basis the Bill would enable Local Planning Authorities, Principal Authorities and Regional Planning Bodies to identify a charge.
- 6.5 Howard Ewing asked whether it was realistic to be in a position to draw on funding from 1 April 2008. Martin Tugwell acknowledged that this was a challenging but realistic target. He also confirmed that the South West Regional Assembly was at the same stage as the South East.
- 6.6 Lee Amor advised that SEEDA was committed to making funding available from 1 April 2008 either for consultation or set up if suitable projects were ready. He confirmed the RIF as part of SEEDA's Corporate Plan, which will go out to consultation at the end of January 2008.
- 6.7 He advised that the second phase, needed to go beyond the South West model based on public sector funding and test the value for money of leverage of private sector financing with a view to recycling funds and bringing projects forward. He noted the greater need for infrastructure in the South East and the consequential need for a higher level of funding. SEEDA wished

to ensure that ministers and CLG understood this issue in relation to delivering housing numbers.

- 6.8 He expressed his disappointment about the Minister's decision on RFAs and advised that SEEDA will encourage the Minister to release appropriate funding to deliver the required number of houses.
- 6.9 Howard Ewing emphasised the importance of demonstrating successful outputs and value for money in order to unlock funding for affordable housing in the second year of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Ann Santry sought clarity about the role of the Board in respect of the document 'Making the Case'. Whilst she recognised that 'Making the Case' was an Assembly document she suggested that there was a perception that the RHB had agreed the document, particularly in respect of RIF and BLAC.
- 7.2 Martin Tugwell gave assurance that particular care had been taken to ensure that no part of the document was attributed to the Board. Paul Bevan noted that support in principle for both RIF and BLAC was included in the Regional Housing Strategy.

The meeting closed at 12.05 p.m.

Date of next meeting:

15 May 2008 at 10.30 a.m. at the Institute of Materials, London.