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FOR THE SOUTH EAST

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£724 MILLION BOOST FOR HOUSING IN THE SOUTH EAST

A £724 million boost for housing in the **South East** over the next three years has been unveiled by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

He praised the work of the Regional Housing boards in tackling the individual housing needs of each region. Announcing £5 billion housing allocation for across the country, he said:

“The task boards faced – balancing the competing needs within the region – was a difficult one. I have been impressed by what they, councils and other stakeholders have achieved in a short space of time.”

The South East will be allocated a total of £357 million for 2004 and £367 million for 2005/6 to drive forward the Government’s commitment to affordable housing, key workers and decent homes as set out in the Communities Plan.

Paul Martin, Chair of the South East Regional Housing Board and South East Regional Director said;

“Housing is a key priority for us in the South East. This excellent news releases more Government money to support affordable housing for those most in need, especially key workers who provide public services. We have worked closely with local authorities in developing this strategy and see them as partners in its implementation.”

The new key worker initiative will ensure support is better targeted to meet the needs of public services.

Assistance will continue to be directed toward priority categories such as health workers and teachers, but its also proposed that the programme be widened to include other public sector workers, so tackling recruitment and retention problems.

The programme will offer four simple options to help key workers into home ownership, upgrade to family homes or rent at affordable levels. There will also be more emphasis on larger homes, reflecting the problems faced by many key workers when they seek to upgrade to a family home.

The cash boost comes to support the South East's first Regional Housing Strategy aimed at promoting 'thriving, sustainable communities' in the region.

The strategy, produced by the South East Regional Housing Board, has set out the key housing investment priorities in the region.

It says that high housing costs affect the ability of business to attract and retain staff, particularly new entrants to the labour market. It says that those hardest hit include public sector workers in the service sector and support industries, all vital to underpinning a prosperous economy.

Note to Editors

1). Regional Housing Boards were set up earlier this year as part of the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan to ensure regional funding is directed to areas of greatest housing need, while at same time improving delivery on the ground through better integration with planning and economic development.

2). The South East Regional Housing Board was charged with:

- Developing a Regional Housing Strategy which set out and prioritised key housing issues facing the region
- Linking the Strategy with the range of other regional strategies and agencies
- Recommending how best to invest the new 'single housing pot'

3). The Board have set out the following priorities for the South East:

- Local Authorities with particular affordability and homelessness problems.
- Urban Renaissance/Regeneration
- Growth areas such as Thames Gateway. Milton Keynes/Aylesbury Vale and Ashford.
- Key strategic land releases.
- Housing need in rural settlements.
- Key housing groups

4). The Board in the South East includes the Government Office, South East Regional Assembly, South East Development Agency, the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships.

5). The Strategy (and more information on the work of the Board) is available on the Board's website www.serhb.org.uk

**Issued on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by GNN South East.
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