

The Rt Hon David Miliband MP
Minister of Communities and Local Government
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

27 January 2006

Dear Minister,

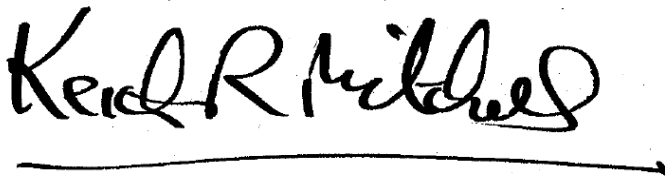
MERGER OF REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD INTO THE ASSEMBLY

Further to your letter of 18 November I am writing to set out the arrangements agreed in the South East for the transfer of the Regional Housing Board to the Regional Assembly. As you have requested the attached paper furthermore sets out the Assembly's structure and ways of working in some detail in order to demonstrate its fitness for purpose against the revised guidance issued with your letter.

There is an urgent policy context in the South East. Affordable housing and transport infrastructure remain at the very top of the agenda for this region. Not only are we about to submit the South East Plan for public examination, but we need now to work through with Government the significant changes in both policy and approach expected in response to Barker.

We laid the ground last year for the transfer of the Regional Housing Board with effect from September 2005. We have the financial capacity to take on this important responsibility, and we are certain that still closer regional co-ordination of housing, planning, transport and, indeed, economic development will make a real difference to the delivery of sustainable communities in the South East. The sooner we move forward, the sooner the region, and the country, will reap the benefits. I would be pleased therefore, with your blessing, to see the transfer of the Regional Housing Board take place with effect from 1 April 2006.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Cllr Keith Mitchell
Chairman of the Regional Assembly

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND: MERGER OF THE REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD INTO THE ASSEMBLY

Assembly structure and membership

When it was created in 1999, the South East's Assembly, unlike the other seven partnership assemblies in England, did not emerge from an established regional local government association. Since no such body existed for the region, the Assembly was created *ab initio* as a regional partnership in the context of the original Government guidance. Accordingly careful consideration was given to such matters as inclusivity and openness, equality of status between stakeholder and local government members, and the proportionality of voting power both to population and to the stakeholder/local government balance within the Assembly. In subsequent refinements of the Assembly's constitution we have introduced accessible, jargon-free rules of procedure and debate, strengthened the accountability of office-holders to the wider Assembly membership, and taken steps to increase diversity in our membership. By virtue of its origins, this Assembly was also the first to create a not-for-profit company as a legal vehicle, affording complete financial transparency and probity to the conduct of our affairs.

The Assembly adopts an inclusive approach to the representation of this large and diverse region. There are 112 members as follows:

- One representative nominated from all 74 local authorities in the region (with the exception at present of Medway Council);
- Three representatives of town and parish councils nominated from the South East County Associations Forum;
- One representative of the New Forest National Park Authority;
- 17 social and environmental partners;
- 17 economic partners.

The Assembly's constitution requires all member organisations to make their nominations in a fair, open and transparent manner, to have regard to gender and ethnic minority balance, and to secure opportunities for members with disabilities. Key Assembly offices have been and continue to be held by women.

The Assembly has an officer team of 37 full-time equivalent staff, the majority of whom support the strategic planning function. However, we have a matrix management approach that promotes integrated policy development across the regional agenda. We also fund an Assembly Partners Support Unit through the voluntary sector umbrella body for the region. The two staff in this unit provide policy and administrative back-up to the 34 stakeholder and three town and parish council members on the Assembly in order to assist their participation in the Assembly's affairs.

Ways of working

The Assembly membership is organised on the basis of six party and partner groups - the three main political parties, a group bringing together councillors from other parties including independents, and the two stakeholder groups. The composition of stakeholder representation is open to periodic review by the Assembly's Executive Committee; indeed a review has recently been undertaken with the specific aim of strengthening the representation of business, ethnic minorities and young people within the Assembly. This review included wide consultation among stakeholder groups. The current and proposed make-up of the two stakeholder groups is appended. Elected councillors cannot be nominated as stakeholder representatives, nor can anyone hold dual membership of the RDA Board and the Assembly.

From among the leaders of the six party and partner groups the Assembly each year elects by single transferable vote a Chairman (who must be an elected councillor) and a Deputy Chair; the remaining four group leaders are *de facto* Vice-Chairs of the Assembly.

While the Assembly aims to reach consensus there is provision for voting, both by show of hands and by card ballot. All committee and most plenary votes are by the former, on a one-member-one-vote basis. Card ballots may be called for however, and they involve a system of weighted voting in order to maintain a proportionate balance between tiers of local government on the one hand and, on the other hand between local government and stakeholders on the Assembly.

In the Assembly's weighted voting system, the region's 55 district councils have one vote each, and the seven county councils covering the same territory have 55 votes between them – one for each district in their county. The region's 12 unitary councils receive a number of votes in proportion to population, so that the total of unitary votes (45) is proportionate to their combined population in comparison to the population in the two tier areas of the region combined. In order to maintain the 70:30 balance between local government and stakeholders in votes as well as membership, the stakeholder members have two votes each.

Cities and sub-regions

Although it is the largest region or country by population in the UK, South East England is itself a polycentric region within the even greater 'mega-city region' of London. Its largest urban areas - Brighton and Hove, Medway Towns, Milton Keynes, Portsmouth, Reading and Southampton - are unitary authorities with distinct representation on the Assembly and voting strength proportionate to their population.

In its approach to regional policy making moreover the Assembly has been concerned to ensure that the role of the regions, cities and towns in driving and accommodating growth is properly recognised. To this end the draft South East Plan has a strong sub-

regional dimension and a powerful emphasis on urban renaissance 'hubs' as the basis for sustainable prosperity. By identifying nine functional sub-regions in the South East, the Plan has prompted innovative cross-boundary working between local authorities to develop shared visions and strategic policies for key cities and towns and their hinterlands. The success of sub-regional co-operation at the level both of politicians and officials in the South East demonstrates the capacity for taking forward the 'city regions' agenda within existing local and regional architecture.

Streamlined decision-making

The Assembly usually meets in full plenary session only on three days a year, its day-to-day business being undertaken by an Executive Committee comprising 27 members nominated by the six party and partner groups in 70:30 proportion of local government and stakeholders. For local government members a political template is calculated to allocate places by party according to the number of council seats held across the region. The Chairman of the Assembly also chairs the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is delegated to act on the Assembly's behalf on all matters except approving the budget and key regional strategies.

The other main committee of the Assembly is the Regional Planning Committee, comprising 25 members, again in 70:30 proportion. While the Assembly as a whole is the Regional Planning Body, the Planning Committee advises the Executive and the Assembly on regional planning matters. Party and partner groups between them can nominate to the Planning Committee up to ten people who are not actually Assembly members but who have particular expertise to offer – for example, lead members on planning from local authorities or RDA board members.

Both the Executive and Planning Committees convene about six times a year. In addition, the Chairman, Deputy Chair, the four Vice-Chairs and the Planning Committee Chairman together comprise the Assembly's Leadership Group. The Leadership Group works with the officer team to manage the Assembly's business, advising on priorities, lines to take, etc. The six group leaders also, with the Chief Executive, make up the Board of SEERA Ltd, the accountable body and employer on the Assembly's behalf; in that capacity they therefore have particular responsibility for financial management and the viability of the organisation.

Accountability

Accountability of committees to the full Assembly is by means of routine reports to the Assembly by the Assembly Chairman and the Planning Committee Chairman; these occasions provide opportunities for cross-examination and debate on matters dealt with on the Assembly's behalf since its last meeting. The Assembly Chairman also presents the Assembly's Annual Report to members each year (the latest is enclosed).

In addition, the Assembly prides itself on its communications, having a well-established suite of web sites, rated as 'gold star' in the recent evaluation undertaken by Arup for

ODPM, including specialist planning and youth sites. We have from the outset had a clear policy of open governance: all formal meetings take place in public, we have a long-standing access to information policy and we comply wholly with the Freedom of Information Act. Not only is all the Assembly business accessible via the web, with email alerts signalling the posting of committee papers, but accessible bulletins are routinely published summarising committee proceedings for members and stakeholders. Our quarterly newsletter (Voice) provides more in-depth coverage of the Assembly's work, and is widely circulated by direct mail and via the region's business magazine.

We have also pursued active engagement with regional, national and specialist media. Since April 2005 for example we have issued 25 news releases and have succeeded in securing 2,370 items of news coverage. Ever since 2000 we have undertaken regular opinion surveys using MORI to track public perceptions of the Assembly; we have evidence that the level of awareness among citizens has grown from 19% to 56% over that period. Our recent public consultation on the Regional Spatial Strategy was the most ambitious ever attempted on regional planning in this country; it included interviews with samples of over 10,000 residents, postal questionnaires to 3.4 million households, and a range of focus groups and workshops.

Alignment

The Assembly takes the lead in preparing, monitoring and reviewing the Integrated Regional Framework (IRF); this is the overarching regional vision statement, comprising 25 quality of life objectives, together with 52 indicators by which progress towards them is tracked. Agreed and published collectively by all the regional partners in 2004, the IRF is an evolution of the Sustainable Development Framework for the region. Because all regional strategies take the IRF objectives as their point of departure, it provides a powerful tool for ensuring the alignment of regional policies across South East England.

Scrutiny

Our scrutiny of the RDA has a number of dimensions. Firstly, the RDA Chief Executive reports to each meeting of the Assembly's Executive Committee, and the RDA Chairman gives account to the Assembly's annual meeting. Secondly there are regular liaison meetings between our Leadership Group and the RDA Chairman and board members to agree and track the Assembly's scrutiny programme, to review the RDA's performance against its corporate plan and to address policy issues of common concern; the last meeting for example considered the region's response on Regional Funding Allocations.

Thirdly, the formal scrutiny programme itself takes the form of task and finish select committees – three a year – that examine the impact of a particular aspect of the RDA's work. Each select committee is chaired by an Executive Committee member (as often as not a stakeholder rather than a councillor), and comprises ten members nominated proportionally. Since each select committee convenes only for two or three occasions, this approach provides an excellent means of involving the wider Assembly membership

in detailed committee work. Our scrutiny model involves a 'context and issues' report commissioned from experts, on the basis of which evidence is invited from local authorities and other partners across the region. Open public debates are then held with the RDA to hear and discuss the submissions made, and a report with recommendations to the Executive Committee is subsequently agreed by the select committee. The RDA responds to the report formally at the Executive Committee, while follow up work takes place at officer level and through the Leadership / RDA Board liaison.

Finally, we work closely with the RDA to ensure that our scrutiny is integrated within its own evaluation processes. This works both through the corporate planning process, where scrutiny findings are referenced, and by the Assembly's presentation of its scrutiny programme each year to the RDA's annual public meeting. We hope this integrated approach can be developed further in the forthcoming year by our contribution to the new process of RDA independent performance assessment through the National Audit Office.

Our approach to scrutiny is one of constructive criticism, not confrontation; the aim is to achieve better outcomes for the region and the strong partnership we have forged between regional agencies has helped the South East punch its weight. We also have well established accountability arrangements with the Environment Agency, through an annual dialogue meeting, and with health, through our Healthy Region Forum and annual Regional Health Summit. We publish an Annual Scrutiny Report detailing all this work (the latest is enclosed).

Regional Housing Board

The Housing Board in the South East has always benefited from a significant democratic dimension; rather than confine participation to officials, the region agreed from the start to a non-executive Assembly representation of five – three elected councillors, one from each main party, plus an economic partner and a social/environmental partner. These have sat alongside non-exec representatives from SEEDA, the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships under the chairmanship of the Government Office regional director. As long ago as 18 March 2005, in the light of the Barker report and the Government's initial response to it, the Board debated and agreed arrangements to transfer responsibility for its operation from the Government Office to the Assembly. The Assembly's Executive Committee endorsed these proposals last June (a copy is attached).

Continuity has been agreed as a key principle of the transfer; although there have been proposals to widen membership it has been agreed that any such review would be best left until the new arrangements have settled down. Under the Assembly the Board will remain a partnership board, albeit set within the Assembly structure along side the Regional Planning Committee. The current non-executive/executive distinction will go. The Board will comprise nominees from the current bodies in the same numbers; the Assembly's representation will be members, other partners may nominate officials. The

Board will be chaired by an Assembly member, who, like the Chairman of the Planning Committee, will have *ex officio* membership of the Assembly's Executive Committee.

There will be an officer support group comprising senior officials from each partner body, chaired by the Assembly. There will continue to be an important link for liaison and consultation purposes to all 67 housing authorities in the region and other stakeholders through the Regional Housing Forum.

Regional Transport Board

We see close parallels between the Housing Board and the South East's Regional Transport Board, which transferred from the Government Office to the Assembly in September 2005. The Transport Board began as a Department for Transport pilot, and has developed into an effective and credible arrangement for agreeing advice to Government on regional transport spending and priorities. The Transport Board comprises Assembly members, nominees (board members and officials) from other partners including GOSE, the RDA, Highways Agency, the SE Forum for Sustainability, Network Rail and the Bus and Coach Council. It is supported by an officer group to which all the partner bodies contribute, and links to the region's 19 transport authorities through a region-wide forum. In addition, transport portfolio holders from local authorities are invited as observers to all the Board meetings, with the opportunity to speak on request. The Board Chairman again is an *ex officio* member of the Assembly's Executive Committee.

The task of prioritizing regional transport interventions is something of a poisoned chalice, but the Transport Board has achieved buy-in across the region by developing an objective and transparent methodology to rank schemes. Because the approach has been an open and inclusive one, with all business available through the web and all meetings held in public, the Board has earned credibility in spite of its challenging responsibilities.

Partnership boards

The partnership board approach is, then, a very comfortable one for a partnership assembly such as ours. The strength of the Assembly is after all in its representative capacity; our aim is as far as possible to unite and articulate a voice for the region as a whole. The main task of the Housing and Transport Boards is to provide advice to Ministers on the region's behalf. While we see both Boards as the within the Assembly structure they are not therefore, as Boards, 'accountable to' the Assembly or to the Executive Committee.

It follows that the Assembly, or the Executive Committee, while receiving advice from the Housing and Transport Boards, will not have authority to overrule them. The Assembly members on the two Boards are themselves accountable, so if disagreement emerges with a Board's advice, the Assembly can request its nominees to press a particular line. If consensus remains out of reach, the Assembly, and any other partner

body to the two Boards, is also at liberty publicly to demur. The price of course is that conflicting views within the region weaken our collective influence.

Performance

The regional agenda was never designed for the South East, but the region's councils and stakeholders have worked strongly through the Assembly to forge both coherent regional policy and a cohesive regional voice. The Assembly, perhaps in part because of the sceptical context, has prioritised the efficient and focused delivery of its core business.

This Assembly has an acknowledged representation for inclusive, effective joined up working. We have performed consistently well according to every audit and evaluation undertaken over the six years we have been established. The latest, undertaken by Arup for the ODPM last year, recorded specifically:

- Our strong focus on core business, in contrast to other regions where assemblies have sought to establish their locus in a wider range of public policy areas, sometimes in anticipation of elected status.
- The efficiency of the Assembly operation, administratively and technically; our communications and website were particularly praised.
- Our strong issues-based engagement with the public; our ambitious South East Plan consultation was marked out for praise.
- The technical and evidence based focus; our unparalleled investment in research for the Plan gives us a robust foundation of knowledge for working with other regional partners and informing the wider policy agenda.
- A growing profile and credibility: thanks to both the high level of public awareness and the quality and scope of the Assembly's intellectual property, acquired through research, analysis and policy development.

When the lead consultant for Arup presented their findings to our members, he was asked what lessons or best practice we in the South East could learn from other regions; his response was that in his view 'all the best practice is here'.

Paul Bevan
Chief Executive
January 2006

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY STAKEHOLDER MEMBERSHIP

(one place per organisation unless otherwise stated)

As at 30 November 2005:

Social and Environmental partners

Regional Action and Involvement South East (voluntary and community sector)	7
South East Forum for Sustainability	3
South East Faith Forum	2
Culture South East	
Arts Council England South East	
Sport England South East	
National Housing Federation	
Strategic Health Authorities	

Economic partners

South East economic partnerships	10
South East TUC	2
CBI	
Federation of Small Businesses	
South East Chambers of Commerce	
Higher Education South East	
Further Education (Association of South East Colleges)	

As proposed for March 2006:

Social and Environmental partners

Regional Action and Involvement South East (voluntary and community sector)	7
South East Forum for Sustainability	3
South East Faith Forum	2
Culture South East	
Sport England South East	
National Housing Federation	
Strategic Health Authorities	
UK Youth Parliament South East	

Economic partners

South East economic partnerships	5
South East TUC	2
CBI	
Federation of Small Businesses	
South East Chambers of Commerce	
Higher Education South East	
Further Education (Association of South East Colleges)	
Construction Industry Council South East	
Engineering Employers Federation South	
South East Multi-Ethnic Development Agency	
Arts Council England South East	

Paper agreed by the Regional Housing Board in March 2005 and by the Regional Assembly Executive Committee in June 2005

TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD TO THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose how the transfer of Regional Housing Board functions to the Regional Assembly should take place.
- 1.2 The paper sets out the Government's requirements for the regional, strategic housing and planning functions to be brought together within regional assemblies; it emphasises the importance of maintaining continuity and the collaborative approach that has been adopted hitherto, and suggests guiding principles for the transfer accordingly.

2. Background

- 2.1 Regional Housing Boards (RHBs), were established in 2003 by the Sustainable Communities Plan. Their role is to:
 - Develop Regional Housing Strategies (RHSs)
 - Advise Ministers on the allocation of funding for housing investment.
- 2.2 They are structured on a partnership basis with membership drawn from Government Office for the region, the Housing Corporation (HC), Regional Assembly, Regional Development Agency and English Partnerships. Other partners and stakeholders are represented in some regions.
- 2.3 The ODPM consultation paper "Housing and Planning in the Regions", issued in September 2004, took the Board's role forward by envisaging greater integration of regional housing and spatial strategies. The paper consulted on recommendation 6 of Kate Barker's report "Review of housing supply – Delivering Stability: Securing our Future Housing Needs", which stated that:
 - Regional Housing and Planning bodies should be merged; and
 - Regional Planning Executives should be established to give independent advice on future housing numbers.

2.4 The consultation paper stated that the Government had already accepted the case for merger and for other reforms recommended in the Barker report but proposed a single national unit to advise on matters such as setting affordability targets. The consultation stated that the Government expects the merger of RHBs and Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) (the responsibility for regional spatial planning already lies with the regional assemblies) to generate the following positive outcomes:

- i) even closer working between those developing RHBs and Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), including linking funding for new affordable housing and the means of delivery, leading to greater synergy;
- ii) an inclusive, efficient and transparent process with clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders drawing on a common evidence base;
- iii) continuity: building on the achievements already delivered in a short space of time by RHBs and accelerating the pace of collaboration: shared evidence bases, joint consultation events and multi-disciplinary teams are emerging;
- iv) the ability to balance delivery of regional, sub-regional and neighbourhood priorities and targets alongside national ones;
- v) the ability to take risks and innovate at a local level by responding quickly to indicators of low demand;
- vi) greater accountability to regional stakeholders;
- vii) a significant development in the role of regions.

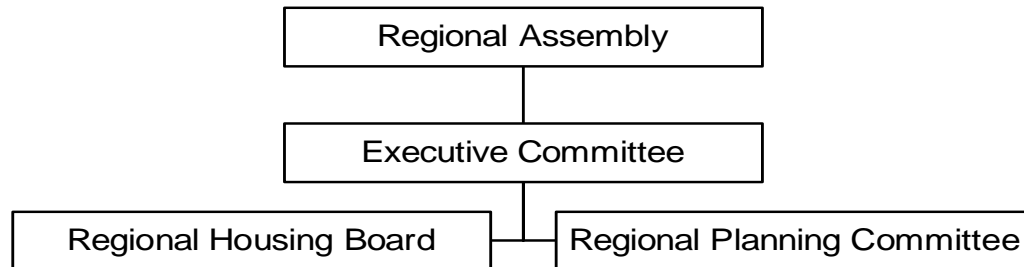
2.5 ODPM guidance post-consultation is not yet available but is expected to confirm that regional assemblies should take responsibility for RHB functions and should establish arrangements for this by September 2005. A considerable degree of flexibility is envisaged, enabling boards to make the transition to assemblies in ways that reflect regional diversity and ways of working.

3. Merger in the South East

3.1 While the RHB is a non-statutory partnership of public organisations, the Regional Assembly is a formally constituted body, answerable to councillors nominated by every council in the region plus partners drawn from the social, environmental and economic sectors.

3.2 In order to maintain continuity and to recognise the significance of regional housing issues, it is proposed that the integrity of the RHB should be maintained in transferring its functions to the Assembly; in particular, the partnership structure of the Board is valued and seen as essential to its effective operation. However, in becoming the responsibility of the Assembly, it is logical that the Board should be incorporated into the Assembly's decision-making structure.

- 3.3 It is therefore proposed that the Board should be positioned alongside the Regional Planning Committee (RPC), with both bodies reporting relevant decisions to the Executive Committee and ultimately to the full Assembly. The RHB and RPC should keep each other in touch with their developing agendas and priorities. The Executive Committee would be responsible for addressing any disparity of policy or approach between the housing and planning bodies.



- 3.4 The constitution of the Assembly will accordingly need amendment:

- to accommodate the role of the Board;
- to establish the membership as a partnership board involving Government Office, SEEDA, English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation; and
- to set out the Board's terms of reference and its own responsibilities.

- 3.5 At present there is some overlap of membership between the Executive, the RPC and the RHB. Such overlap is healthy and assists read-across and integration; equally there is a large Assembly membership capable of contributing skills to the work of all these forums. As a minimum, as with the RPC, the Chair of the RHB should have ex officio, non-voting membership of the Executive Committee if they are not already on it.

- 3.6 A further means of promoting integration of the housing and planning functions is for special joint meetings of the RHB and RPC to consider matters of common interest.

3.7 Terms of Reference of the Board

- 3.7.1 The current RHB terms of reference were drawn up at its inception. Although some updating is needed, they remain broadly appropriate and relevant. A proposed revised set of terms of reference are set out below:

The Regional Housing Board is a partnership body the purpose of which is to provide strategic advice on the implementation of housing policy and the co-ordination of housing investment in the South East region.

The Board will:

- i) Develop an understanding of the key housing issues and priorities in the South East using research where appropriate;
- ii) Develop a Regional Housing Strategy and keep it up to date and under review;
- iii) Develop a broad consensus for the strategy, working with the Regional Housing Forum;
- iv) Develop a clear set of priorities for the distribution of resources for housing in the South East;
- v) Advise on the allocation of housing funds in line with the regional strategy;
- vi) Ensure consistency between the regional housing strategy, regional spatial strategy, including the regional transport strategy, and regional economic strategy, and other regional plans for the South East and adjoining regions;
- vii) Develop and implement an information and dissemination strategy to inform and involve relevant organisations in the Region;
- viii) Advise on matters of regional and inter-regional significance especially where national policy may not relate well to regional needs;
- ix) Liaise with the Boards of adjoining regions on matters of common interest.

Board membership will be drawn from the Regional Assembly, the Government Office for the South East, the South East England Development Agency, the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships.

3.8 Membership of the Board

3.8.1 The South East Regional Housing Board currently has 14 members, seven of whom are officials acting as core executive members, and seven of whom are non-execs (see annex). The non-execs include five Assembly members, one from each of the main political and partner groups on the Assembly.

3.8.2 Although the overall size and pattern of Board representation seems appropriate, it would now be consistent with the Assembly's overall view on roles to restructure these arrangements and that non-executives should now make up the core Board, i.e. Assembly members and Board members of the Government agencies. Bodies without non-executive board members, principally the Government Office, would retain an official as a full member of the Board with voting rights. On this basis, the Board will consist of 9 members, as follows:

Regional Assembly	5 members
SEEDA	1 member

Government Office	1 member
Housing Corporation	1 member
English Partnerships	1 member

3.8.3 The Board would in turn be supported by a team of senior officials drawn from the constituent bodies. They would fully participate in Board meetings but would not have a vote.

3.8.4 Although the RHB should not be free to co-opt members, the Board should be able to invite experts and representatives able to contribute to debates to attend its meetings. A similar arrangement is available to the RPC.

3.8.5 It would be appropriate for an Assembly member to chair the Board.

3.9 Rules of Procedure

3.9.1 These are not explicitly set out for the Board at present. The transfer provides the opportunity for the Board to adopt the Assembly's ways of working, the main implications of which are:

- One vote per Board member;
- A quorum of one third of Board membership;
- Declarations of interest to be made in line with the Assembly's rules;
- Length of service to be decided by nominating organisation;
- A minimum of four meetings a year with additional meetings as necessary;
- Meetings to be open to the public, with agendas and minutes available on the web.

3.10 Supporting the work of the Board

3.10.1 To date, the Board's work has been primarily focused on the development of the RHS and associated investment programme. The completion of the 2006- 2009 RHS will enable a work programme to be developed to encompass other aspects of the Board's terms of reference which have not received close attention to date.

3.10.2 The work of the Board has been carried out principally through regular meetings. Board members have also attended an awayday and taken part in RHS consultation events. Reports to the Board have been prepared by the RHB project/support team and officers in partner organisations. Standing Task Groups chaired by the Assembly, SEEDA and the Housing Corporation have contributed material for the RHS.

3.10.3 The partner organisations all contribute to the work of the Board by contributing advice and information. The links through the project team members are critical to this process. This would continue with each organisation

contributing in their own areas of expertise and responsibility e.g. GOSE on investment, Housing Corporation on funding allocations and performance of affordable housing development programmes, the Assembly on planning matters, SEEDA on regeneration, English Partnerships on land assembly and large scale development.

3.10.4 It is proposed that these working arrangements continue with the Board supported by a project team drawn from the partner organisations and led by Assembly officers for both technical and administrative purposes. The project team will coordinate the work of the Board by developing the Board's work programme, ensuring that papers are produced for consideration by the Board, including documents on monitoring activity and strategy development. The potential for the Board's work programme to develop is very much dependent on adequate resources being available. Partner organisations are in the process of considering the level of support they can offer for the coming year.

3.10.5 The Assembly would become the lead body within the project team, taking responsibility for technical coordination and coordinating and administering its meetings and work programme in consultation with the Board partners.

3.11 Developing the role of the Board

3.11.1 The work of the Board has focused on strategy development, commissioning supporting research and stakeholder consultation. These aspects will continue to form the core of the Board's work.

3.11.2 New areas of activity as a consequence of the merging of regional housing and planning functions might be:

- Liaison and communication between RHB and RPC/ Executive Committee
- Liaison with technical advice unit (subject to outcome of ODPM consultation)
- Communication with other RHBs
- A systematic financial planning process
- A combined approach to facilitating the delivery of affordable housing

3.11.3 Beyond this, the Board's work programme will see increased activity in the following areas:

- Strategy monitoring
- Promotion of good practice within the region
- advocacy role on behalf of housing interests within the region – both within the Assembly and to government.
- Capacity building for the Board (advice on Government guidance, policy change, raising awareness on innovative ideas or areas of concern)

- Website – develop into a reference tool
- Increase the Board’s visibility in the region
- Draw more directly on the expertise of the Regional Housing Forum and the task groups
- Strengthen the liaison with adjoining regions.

3.11.4 We believe there is an important continuing role for the Regional Housing Forum and Task Groups but suggest their precise role is reviewed as a second stage once this initial stage of transition is agreed.

3.12 Resource requirements

3.12.1 The work of the project team has been described above. It is envisaged that the Housing Corporation, GOSE, SEEDA and the Assembly will continue to make staff time available for the project team. English Partnerships should be encouraged to do the same in order to ensure that their activities are fully represented.

3.12.2 It is envisaged that the Assembly will take over GOSE’s lead administrative and technical support function in respect of the RHB. This resource will need to be strengthened to support the Board in developing its new areas of activity. The workload is expected to be relatively stable, once the new arrangements and expanded work programme are in place, with support for advocacy, capacity building, commissioning and project managing research projects and developing the Board’s wider role taking place during the intervals between periods of strategy development and consultation.

3.12.3 It is estimated that 3 full time equivalent posts will be needed in addition to the current level of staff time contributed by HC and SEEDA and a reduced level of support from GOSE:

- RHB support team leader (F/T)
- Technical support officer (0.8)
- Administrative officer (F/T)
- Specialist support (website development and maintenance; public relations, advice from regional planners) (0.2).

In addition, the Assembly will need to devote management resource to the Board.

3.12.4 The resource requirements of this core team are already under discussion with Government, and it is anticipated that additional funding will be forthcoming.

4. Summary of proposals

4.1 In summary this report's proposals are:

- i) So far as possible, the principle of continuity should be followed with modest changes to current arrangements as necessary;
- ii) The RHB should continue to exist as a partnership body with the same constituent bodies;
- iii) The Board should comprise non-exec members with an Assembly chair, supported by an officer team;
- iv) The Board should be positioned alongside the Regional Planning Committee within the Assembly structure and the Assembly constitution amended accordingly;
- v) The RHB chair should be an ex officio member of the Assembly Executive;
- vi) Overlapping membership of the Executive, RHB and RPC is allowed;
- vii) RHB terms of reference should be updated and Assembly ways of working adopted;
- viii) All Board members should have the same voting status;
- ix) Current working arrangements should continue with the Board supported by a technical project team drawn from the partner organisations;
- x) A new team of three FTEs be established within the Assembly to lead the support work.

5. Consultation and next steps

5.1 "Housing and Planning in the Regions", stipulates that current RHB members and other key stakeholders should be consulted on the proposed arrangements. The proposals made in this report are therefore offered as the basis for discussion with the members of the RHB and their organisations at the March meeting of the RHB, with an opportunity for further comment following the meeting. ODPM will be kept informed.

5.2 Final proposals, taking into account responses to consultation, should be considered by the Assembly Executive Committee on 8 April 2005, and report back to the Regional Housing Board in May 2005, with a view to implementation

in September 2005. The Assembly plenary in July 2005 would be invited to agree the changes required to the Assembly's constitution.

Mike Gwilliam
Director of Planning and Transport
South East England Regional Assembly

8 March 2005

Membership

The South East Regional Housing Board currently has 14 members. Those marked with an asterisk are non-executive members.

Paul Martin	Regional Director at GOSE
Mark Bilsborough	Director of Regeneration & Housing at GOSE
Colin Byrne	Director of Planning at GOSE
Paul Hudson	Director of Development & Infrastructure at SEEDA
Mike Gwilliam	Director of Planning & Transport at the Regional Assembly
Fiona Cruickshank	SE Investment Director at the Housing Corporation
Trevor Beattie	Corporate Strategy Director at English Partnerships
Cllr Keith House*	SEEDA Board Member
Sheila Drew Smith*	Housing Corporation Board Member
Cllr Elizabeth Cartwright*	Regional Assembly – Conservative
Cllr Don Turner*	Regional Assembly – Labour
Cllr Brian Gurden*	Regional Assembly – Liberal Democrat
Douglas Horner*	Regional Assembly – Economic Partners
Sharon Hedges*	Regional Assembly – Social/Environmental Partners