

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY HOUSING ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 28 July 2006

Present:	Leigh Herington	Chairman
	Paul Abey	Housing Corporation
	Graham Ashworth	New Forest District Council
	Alison Bailey	Regional Assembly
	Edward Dawson	SEFS/CPRE
	Yvonne Edgar	Thames Valley Housing Association
	Dick Feasey	Kent County Council
	Chris Kenneford	Buckinghamshire County Council
	Sunethra Mendis	GOSE
	Catriona Riddell	Regional Assembly
	Peter Shadbolt	Surrey County Council
	Sharon Smith	Chair, Regional Housing Forum
	Cath Stubbings	South East England Regional Assembly
	Barbara Thorndick	West Kent Housing Association
	Gerry Wyld	Slough Borough Council

In opening the meeting, the Chairman reminded the Group that this was its first meeting under its new terms of reference and membership and welcomed new members.

Item 1: Apologies for Absence

Michael Crofton-Briggs, Oxford City Council; Ian Haynes, Milton Keynes Council; Dominick Veasey, Regional Assembly; Barbara Compton, Southampton City Council; Robin Edwards, Chairman, Demography Sub-Group; Adrian Maunders, Guildford Borough Council

Item 2: Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

- (i) One correction was identified within the minutes of the 12 May meeting:

Item 4: second action point

This should read, "Any existing Group members wishing to step down should advise the Assembly by 19 May".

- (ii) As Robin Edwards was not available, the Demography update was postponed until the September meeting.
- (iii) In response to a question from Edward Dawson, the Chairman clarified the reason for the discussion regarding Imperial College.

Action: Demography update to be included on the agenda for the next meeting

Item 3 (i): Advisory Group Review

- (i) Catriona Riddell (Regional Assembly) confirmed that the review process was concluding. She emphasised the importance of the South East Plan Sounding Board in addressing issues such as behavioural change and implementation.
- (ii) The revised membership and Terms of Reference for all advisory groups are on the Assembly website. The Regional Housing Forum Terms of Reference were yet to be updated.

- (iii) The Chairman queried how the link was to be made between HAG and the Regional Housing Board. Catriona Riddell advised this will be via the Board's project team/ Assembly secretariat and attendance of the Advisory Group Chairman at Board meetings.

Item 3(ii): Affordable Housing Task Group

- (i) Cath Stubbings (Regional Assembly) updated the Group on progress in reviewing the role of the Task Group. Terms of Reference are being developed by the secretariat. Sharon Smith requested that proposals regarding communication between HAG and AHTG be replicated for the Regional Housing Forum.

Actions:

- **The Group agreed that the proposed role and communication arrangements be included in the Task Group Terms of Reference.**
- **The Group agreed the recommended work programme for the Task Group.**

Item 4: South East Plan

4(i) Housing Delivery Action Plans

- (i) Catriona Riddell introduced the item, seeking views on the value of continuing with Housing Delivery Action Plans (HDAPs) as opposed to focusing on consistency through the LDF process.
- (ii) In discussion, the Group concluded that duplication and unnecessarily onerous processes should be avoided but that HDAPs were valuable in linking affordable housing policies and delivery, especially in relation to the cost of dealing with environmental issues and where monitoring shows a problem in delivery. It was also suggested that deletion of South East Plan Policy H2 would be retrograde in moving from a spatial to a land allocation plan, with negative effects on the linking of programmes (eg to infrastructure).
- (iii) Sunethra Mendis indicated that GOSE previously focussed on working to analyse and help overcome barriers in areas of particular concern. HDAPs were perceived as too resource-intensive to apply across the board.
- (iv) It was suggested that:
- HDAPs may be a limited tool, able to identify problems but not resolve them
 - Planning Delivery Grant could act as an incentive
 - The principles could be incorporated in brownfield land strategies
 - The policy could be linked to monitoring and problem areas
 - Incentives to local authorities to deliver proactively were to be encouraged
 - HDAPs would be another tool available to local authorities in particular circumstances. Further thought might be given to what these circumstances would be.

Action:

- **Catriona Riddell to take away comments for consideration**

4(ii) Gypsies and Travellers Partial review

- (i) Catriona Riddell advised of a timetable change in response to comment received from Chief Executives. Slippage of three months was now proposed to

accommodate May 2007 elections and sign-off by Plenary. No local authorities have indicated that they will not cooperate. The updated timetable is available on the Assembly website. It has been made clear to the Minister that this timescale represents the shortest that can be achieved.

- (ii) Jointly commissioned work between DCLG and the East, South West and South East Regional Assemblies is proposed to support the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategy reviews of accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. The study will develop a robust evidence base and methodology for comparing and benchmarking the outcome of local accommodation assessments into regional pitch requirements and distribution at the local authority level. This will facilitate a consistent approach across the regions and reliable results at the national level.
- (iii) A representative from HAG was required for the officer task group.
- (iv) Barbara Thorndick reported that West Kent HA has introduced an initiative to work with the settled traveller community which could potentially improve links into the wider gypsy and traveller community.

Action: Gerry Wyld agreed to attend the officer task group.

4(iii) RTP's Augmenting the Evidence Base

- (i) Catriona Riddell reported the view expressed at Regional Planning Committee that the report was useful in highlighting the robustness of the South East Plan. She indicated that SEEDA may not support the report as it considers employment rather than economic growth. Generally it was being regarded as simply information to be considered in preparing evidence for the EiP.

4(iv) Research on the Viability of Affordable Housing Provision

- (i) Alison Bailey reminded the Group of the commitment in Policy H4 to provide guidance on financial viability and reported that the Assembly had taken note of previous advice from HAG and the Affordable Housing Task Group to proceed with caution by sending a questionnaire to local authorities (heads of both housing and planning).
- (ii) Group discussion highlighted:
 - The importance of the skills and expertise of operators of any model
 - The quality of data input and crudeness of current models
 - The risk of delays
 - A model could prove more confrontational than negotiation
 - Opposition of developers
 - Existence of more sophisticated Housing Corporation model developed by GVA Grimley.

Action:

- **A further report to be made at the next meeting, in advance of the RHB meeting on 6 October.**

Item 5: Regional Housing Strategy review

5(i) The Role of Advisory Groups

- (i) Cath Stubbings reported on proposals to date. It was suggested that HAG would be well placed to advise on links with the economy, transport and the voluntary sector.

Action:

- **Timetable/project plan and details of the scope of the review to be circulated to HAG as soon as possible.**

5(ii) Rural Affordable Housing Need in the South East

- (i) Cath Stubbings presented the background to the research and requested comments with particular reference to the planning policy context.
- (ii) The Group was concerned that the report appears to assume at the outset that a better balance can/should be struck between the need/demand for affordable housing in rural areas and supply rather than allowing findings on need/demand to emerge through analysis. The report should focus more on developing an argument for a higher target for funding affordable housing in rural areas based on the realities of delivery.
- (iii) Concerns were expressed in particular regarding:
- the need for closer alignment with SE Plan spatial policy
 - the distinction between housing need and demand/aspiration
 - the need for a much clearer explanation of the way on which the methodology deals with households in the private rented sector who are assumed to be in housing need due to affordability problems
 - references to rural targets in the SE Plan which are incorrect and should be removed; and
 - greater clarity as to how certain figures were arrived at.

Actions:

- **Cath Stubbings to feed back to the consultants, requesting that the recommendations be made more specific and to attribute responsibility for them.**
- **Robin Edwards to be asked to comment on queries raised regarding the data and methodology.**

Item 6: Use of the Existing Housing Stock

- (i) Alison Bailey presented the research report summary and advised that practical recommendations were made which do not appear in the summary. The Group was asked to give views on any recommendations which are not already common practice or knowledge which might form the basis for publication as good practice guidance. The full report is available on request from Nicole Badham.
- (ii) Barbara Thorndick highlighted gaps in relation to economic migrants and overcrowding. A general discussion followed during which the Group agreed that better understanding was needed of the long term impacts of economic migration.
- (iii) Conflicting policy drivers were identified in that older people remaining in family homes aspire to the type of stock which is under pressure from homeless nominees.

Action: Comments to Alison Bailey by 11 August.

Item 7: Interim Barker report

- (i) Catriona Riddell drew this to the Group's attention and referred to a recent discussion by the Planning Officers Society which suggested that there was nothing to be gained by responding to the wider issues raised. It would be of greater benefit to address more specific points such as the efficient use of land.
- (ii) Concern was expressed at the failure of the report to portray the enabling role of planning.

Item 8: National Housing and Planning Advice Unit

- (i) Catriona Riddell advised that the Unit will have a wider remit than previously anticipated. The Assembly will be making a response to DCLG through ERN with a view to influencing the way the Unit develops.
- (ii) The Chairman suggested that the Unit could be seen as increasing centralisation and that the LGA and other local authority groups might wish to respond.
- (iii) Concern was expressed at the status of advice from the Unit.

Item 9: Any Other Business

- (i) Peter Shadbolt requested that the next meeting include a discussion of growth points in the South East Plan.

Action: Catriona Riddell to circulate RPC paper regarding the relationship between hubs, diamonds and other growth points.

- (ii) Edward Dawson reported that the NHF and CPRE have formed an unprecedented alliance to call for more rural affordable homes, demonstrating the ability of two groups with different viewpoints to come together on planning policy issues. The press release is available at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/news-releases/news-rel-2006/40-06.htm>
- (iii) The Kent Structure Plan was adopted on 6 July.

Item 10: Date of Next Meeting(s)

The next meeting will take place in Milton Keynes on 15 September. Members are asked to keep the day clear for a meeting and a tour.

Future (quarterly) meeting dates will be confirmed and will be scheduled between meetings of the Regional Housing Board.