

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

REGIONAL HOUSING FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2008

Present:

Sharon Smith	CIH SE Regional Committee – Chair
Andrea Cannon	SERIG
Arlene Kersley	Community Council for Berkshire
Cath Stubbings	Regional Assembly
Genevieve Haywood	Regional Assembly
Ian Walker	Housing Advisory Group Representative
John Littlemore	Kent Housing Group
Karen MacDonald	SE NHF Development Forum
Kate Dallip	SEEDA
Kathryn Williamson	RAISE
Kevin Hetherington	Reigate – Banstead District Council
Lynne Croker	Hampshire Strategic Housing Officers Group
Mathew Bush	National Housing Federation – SE
Michael Veryard	Buckinghamshire Housing Enabler Steering Group
Michelle Chivunga	Chartered Institute of Housing
Nick Ronald	National Housing Federation
Paul Abey	Housing Corporation
Rutuja Kulkarni	SE Public Health Group
Steve Kethero	GOSE

1. Apologies for absence and substitutions:

Alison Bailey	Regional Assembly
Barbara Compton	Cities in the South East
Brian Horton	National Housing Federation
Caroline Tindall	NHS Key Workers
Graham Ashworth	Housing Advisory Group Representative
Helen Burton	West Sussex Chief Housing Officer Group
Ian Fitzpatrick	for Neil Fuller, East Sussex Chief Housing Officers Group
Karen Stalbow	Shelter
Martin Nurse	National Housing Federation
Pete Errington	The Home Builders Federation

2 Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a true record.
- 2.2 Item 2.3: End of year report on homelessness – still not complete; will be available in due course.

3. Update from Regional Housing Board: Cath Stubbings

- 3.1 Discussion at the Regional Housing Board (RHB) meeting on 5 December 07 focussed on affordable housing and the regional completions assessment. The Board debated how to overcome the 15% shortfall of affordable housing delivery.
- 3.2 The debate will continue at the meeting on 17 January with a report on barriers to delivery of affordable housing which will be followed up with seminars organised by the Housing Corporation. SEEDA are keen to promote skills improvement to improve delivery. The Board will also debate the Regional Funding Allocations and how to advance the argument to increase funding to make sure we can deliver the Regional Housing Strategy.
- 3.3 The updated Regional Housing Strategy is waiting on the Board's work programme which has been delayed by the CLG strategy on the ageing population. The work programme will be circulated over the next few weeks.
- 3.4 Sharon Smith suggested that the Housing Strategy be launched at the South East Chartered Institute of Housing conference at the beginning of March.
 - **Action: Cath Stubbings to look into possibility of launching the RHS at the CIH conference.**
- 3.5 Comments to feedback to the Regional Housing Board
- 3.6 **Barriers to delivery:** The recommended course of action for the Board was generally seen as appropriate and was welcomed.
- 3.7 **Economic Advisory Toolkit (EAT):** There is some scepticism about the use of EAT which confirms that further work in that area would be worthwhile. This is partly because it did not come across at the seminars that local authorities rather than RSLs should be taking the lead role in using EAT.
- 3.8 The Forum emphasised that scope for influence is limited by the action of the market and that infrastructure will continue to be a big issue.
- 3.9 An additional action point was suggested: "to encourage and support local authorities to maximise affordable housing through LDFs".
- 3.10 An example was given of affordable housing DPD being brought forward ahead of a local authority's core strategy. John Littlemore from Maidstone CC offered to act as an advocate.
- 3.11 The NHS representative commented that through supporting more affordable housing the Board can address fuel poverty and the resulting impact on health.
- 3.12 Forum members advised that from April 2008 DEFRA funding for rural housing enablers will either be cut or discontinued representing a significant risk to the continuity of supply of rural sites. The Forum requested that the Board take up the matter.

- **Action: Sharon will feed the Forum's advice into the discussion at the Board meeting.**

4. Regional Funding Allocations announcement: Cath Stubbings

4.1 Cath Stubbings updated the meeting on the final Regional Funding Allocations announcement.

4.2 It was suggested that grants for Gypsy and Traveller sites refurbishment/ extension be extended to privately owned sites in line with Private sector renewal.

- **Action: Steve Kethero – to consult with GOSE/CLG and report to the next RHF meeting.**

4.3 The group queried the variations in private sector renewal funding in other regions over the years and why the amount of funding for London seems too little.

4.4 Steve Kethero replied that it will be due to local circumstances eg an under spend in previous years. In London it could be that there is an expectation that people are more likely to undertake improvements themselves.

4.5 The Growth Support Fund is seen as an opportunity for the region, but members did not see it as an attractive option while other funds allocated to the region, which do not have the same conditions attached, remain unallocated.

5. Update on RHB/RHF work programme

5.1 Cath Stubbings updated the meeting on the RHB work programme due to be finalised following the 17 January meeting.

5.2 The meeting discussed the role of the Housing Forum in light of the SNR. Cath Stubbings reported that as yet we do not know when the consultation is due to start.

5.3 An additional action was proposed to look at the impact of A8/ European migration on affordable housing need, and overcrowding particularly in rural areas. Cath Stubbings informed the meeting that the Demography Sub-Group of the Housing Advisory Group look at migration and it will get picked up in the first review of the South East Plan.

5.4 The SERIG representative updated the meeting that they are actively seeking funding from Supporting People authorities to undertake work to quantify move-on requirements and requested that the Regional Assembly comment on their draft. If this work goes ahead it will address the Board's action point regarding supported housing.

- **Action: Cath Stubbings to comment on SERIG's draft letter**

- 6. Tackling Overcrowding in England – CLG Action Plan: Sharon Smith**
- 6.1 Sharon Smith asked the group for comments on the Action Plan in anticipation of the consultation planned by CLG on changes to the statutory definition of overcrowding and to local authority allocations policies to which the Board or Assembly may wish to respond and to identify any regional work that might be helpful to local authorities.
- 6.2 Pilots and pathfinders (paragraph 9):** The group expressed disappointment that there weren't any areas in the SE chosen for pilots and pathfinders. A pilot in the L B of Camden regarding adaptations to enable overcrowded owner occupiers to remain in their existing homes was not expanded upon in the action plan. The Forum would be interested to know more about this and considered it should have been given greater prominence in the document as one of the range of options available to local authorities.
- 6.2 Under occupation (Paragraph 10):** Concern was expressed at the lack of guidance in achieving the right balance in allocations policies between competing demands. Giving overcrowding a statutory basis as a "reasonable preference", would overcome risk of policies being challenged as being over-flexible.
- 6.4 Mapping overcrowding (Paragraph 12):** No value was seen in mapping overcrowding as recently carried out in London unless it was linked to funding opportunities.
- 6.5 Breathing Space (Paragraph 13):** Interest was expressed in the L.B. Kingston Breathing Spaces pilot. The group would like to know what is the added value and if the health benefits are being monitored.
- **Action: Cath Stubbings/Genevieve Haywood to investigate the possibility of a presentation to the Forum.**
- 6.6 Seaside/Country Homes Scheme (paragraph 22):** The Forum support further development of the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme for older tenants.
- 6.7 Overcrowding strategies (paragraph 23/24):** The action plan looks to local authorities to produce separate overcrowding strategies. This was not seen as a good use of resources: where it is a significant local issue it will have appropriate prominence in the local housing strategy.
- 6.8 Bedroom Standard (paragraph 30):** Moving to the Bedroom Standard as the statutory definition and providing a statutory obligation to give "reasonable preference" in allocations polices were seen as positive. However, moving to the Bedroom Standard would result in more homes being classed as overcrowded which would have implications for local authority resources for enforcement activity.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 The Homelessness Forum Awayday is on 24 January at Wonersh, Guildford.

8. Date of next meeting: 7 April 2008 at 2.00pm

The meeting closed at 4:00 p.m.