

South East Plan

Joint Approach to Consultation on District-Level Housing Figures

This guidance was originally produced by the South East County Councils with subsequent input from representatives of unitary and district councils and Assembly social, economic and environmental partners.

1. Background

The Regional Assembly has commissioned the Principal Authorities (County and Unitary Councils) to formulate District-level housing figures working closely with the District Councils. The Assembly's brief requires the Authorities to submit the figures to the Assembly by 9 December 2005, after having undertaken a minimum six-week public consultation on them.

The Assembly's brief does not specify the nature of the public consultation, but leaves that for decision at local level. There are however good reasons for attempting to secure some degree of consistency across the region in how that consultation is undertaken; this paper seeks to achieve that. This note, however, is not intended to exclude any additional activities deemed appropriate. Consultation should be carried out in line with the principles set out in PPS11.

2. Parameters

2.1 The plenary meeting of the Regional Assembly on 13 July 2005 determined the overall rate of housebuilding to be planned for in the South East, together with component allocations for a number of defined sub-regions and for each geographical county area. The task of the Principal Authorities is accordingly to prepare District-level housing distributions consistent with the sub-regional and county-level figures.

2.2 One or more District-level housing distributions will be presented for public comment during the consultation stage, as the principal authorities consider appropriate. However, the consultation document will explain the rationale for the distribution(s) presented, and any other options which had previously been considered but discounted. If Authorities presenting alternative District-level housing distributions for consultation have a preferred distribution, that will be made clear in the consultation material.

2.3 For practical reasons, the consultation will be undertaken on the basis of geographical county areas. A single consultation document will be produced for each county area. A model form of words for inclusion in the introduction to the documents is in the attached appendix.

2.4 Although the Principal Authorities, working closely with the District Councils, are formulating the District-level housing figures and undertaking the public consultation thereon, they are doing so at the request of the Regional Assembly. Overall responsibility for the South East Plan of which these figures will become part, remains with the Assembly. To that end, the Assembly will

produce a short contextual note, to accompany the consultation material, explaining how the figures have emerged and how they will be taken forward in subsequent stages of the process.

3. Engagement

3.1 The Principal Authorities in each sub-region will employ the following core set of consultation techniques in undertaking the consultation:-

- i) Engagement with particular sectors or groups of stakeholders (e.g. local businesses and County/Local Strategic Partnerships, neighbouring Regional Planning Bodies)
- ii) A public leaflet/booklet (with web address for more info)
- iii) Direct mailing (as hard copy or e-mail) of the leaflet/booklet to statutory and other consultees
- iv) Press releases and media coverage
- v) Information on Council websites (using an on-line questionnaire where appropriate)
- vi) Information within council offices, libraries etc.
- vii) Articles in local authorities' newspapers/magazines (subject to print deadlines)

3.2 In addition, individual Principal Authorities, District Councils and other stakeholders may wish to undertake other complementary initiatives or events to encourage residents and organisations to respond to the consultation and to inform their own decisions. These may include:

- i) Community workshops
- ii) Focus Groups, e.g. with structured representative groups
- iii) Public meetings
- iv) Meetings with local organisations, e.g. Parish Councils
- v) Meetings with key stakeholders, e.g. statutory agencies or key service providers
- vi) Residents Panels (or similar)
- vii) Public exhibitions

3.3 If practicable, at least one event should take place in each District Council area during the consultation period and where possible, opportunities should be taken to tie in with any LDF consultation exercises taking place at that time.

3.4 In deciding the forms of engagement to take place in their area, the Principal Authorities in each sub-region will specifically consider 'hard to reach' groups, drawing upon their own information about the incidence of such groups within their areas. The Regional Assembly and Social and Environmental partners have agreed to assist in this process, where possible providing advice on appropriate representative/voluntary organisations that should be included in the consultation process outlined above.

3.5 There will be a single reply address for each county area for those wishing to comment (such as a PO Box number). Consideration will also be given to the creation of a system to deal with misdirected responses.

3.6 Consultation will be undertaken during September and October. The Principal Authorities in each sub-region will determine the precise timescales for their engagement and also the financial and other resources to be deployed.

4. Analysis

4.1 The Principal Authorities in each sub-region will ensure that all responses are analysed in a structured way, either 'in-house' or through the use of consultants. The nature of the analysis will be set by individual authorities, which will use a variety of techniques in response to the different means of engagement outlined above. However, time and other resource constraints will inevitably moderate what can realistically be delivered in this regard. This may imply the use of a structured "multiple-choice" type questionnaire (the precise design of which will be for individual authorities to determine) as part of the suite of consultation techniques, albeit with provision for additional written comments to be made by those respondents who are so inclined.

4.2 A summary paper outlining the conclusions from each consultation will be prepared by the Principal Authorities and passed to the Assembly by 9 December 2005 along with the District-level Housing figures. This will also be accompanied by a statement indicating the different consultation methods used; details of any consultation meetings held; the number of responses received (disaggregated by respondent type where possible¹); and an appraisal of how successful the consultation was considered to be.

4.3 In providing the Assembly with a preferred housing distribution for each sub-region as part of the 9 December submission, the Principal Authorities will explain how the results of engagement have been taken into account and influenced their advice.

4.4 The Principal Authorities will, in due course, look to the Assembly for evidence that their advice has fed into South East Plan, particularly as regards the further development of the sub-regional frameworks.

¹ Including by age, gender, postcode, ethnicity, District of residence etc, but probably only likely to be possible for individual, "pro-forma" responses, given the time and other resource constraints