

Individual Decision

Title of Report:	Interim Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire		
Report to be considered by:	Councillor Marcus Franks, Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture	on:	29 th January 2007
Forward Plan Ref:	ID1347		

Purpose of Report: To adopt the Interim Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire.

Recommended Action: That the Interim Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire be adopted by the Council.

Reason for decision to be taken: To give formal approval to the Strategy, demonstrating a commitment to joint-working to share good practice and expertise, maximise resources and seek to attract new funding.

List of other options considered: Not to engage with the sub-regional agenda. However, the Strategy provides us with an opportunity to maximise resources through sharing good practice and expertise and joint bids for funding. If the Strategy is not approved, the Council will miss out on the likely benefits from such an approach.

Key background documentation: Interim Sub-regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire

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Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The Interim Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire has been produced by the six Berkshire Local Authorities and their key RSL partners, in response to the growing emphasis on regional and sub-regional working to deliver the strategic housing agenda.

The Strategy contains five key aims, which are an amalgamation of the key aims in the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities Housing Strategies. These are:

- Maximising access and choice – focusing on increasing the supply of affordable housing
- Contributing to successful and sustainable communities
- Improving the quality of housing, living conditions and housing services
- Meeting the housing needs of the vulnerable and those with specific requirements
- Working together to achieve better results.

- 1.2 The Strategy does not represent a policy change for the Council and reflects the strategic aims of the Council's own Housing Strategy 2005-2010. Any actions or projects arising from the Strategy which may lead to a policy change for the Council will be brought back to Members for a decision. There is no requirement for the Council to proceed with any suggested policy changes or initiatives it does not wish to participate in.

- 1.3 The Strategy provides the Council with an opportunity to maximise resources through sharing good practice and expertise, and joint bids for funding. If the Strategy is not approved, the Council will miss out on the likely benefits from such an approach.

Recommendation

That the Individual Portfolio Holder, on behalf of the Council, adopts the Interim Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire.

Appendices

Appendix A - Interim Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for Berkshire.

Implications

Policy:	The implications for policy are as contained within the report.
Financial:	There are no new financial implications for the Council arising from this report.
Personnel:	None
Legal:	None
Environmental:	None
Equalities:	None
Partnering:	Strategy promotes partnership working with range of agencies, focusing on the sharing of good practice and expertise and identifying opportunities for joint bids for new funding.

Property:	None
Risk Management:	If the Strategy is not approved, the Council may lose out on the benefits identified under Partnering implications above.
Community Safety:	None

Consultation Responses

Leader of Council:	Councillor Graham Jones
Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Ward Members:	None – policy has district-wide applicability
Opposition Spokesperson:	Councillor Phil Barnett
Policy Development Commission Chairman:	Councillor Quentin Webb – Welcomed the report and its aims for a long-term planned strategy to increase the supply of quality homes and affordable housing.
	Councillor Barbara Alexander
	Councillor Gordon Lundie
Local Stakeholders:	
Officers Consulted:	June Graves, Head of Housing & Performance Bob Watson, Group Accountant
Trade Union:	N/A
The Following Additional Comments were also received from Members:	
Members:	Councillor Sally Hannon - I know that as this is a regional strategy it isn't really possible to alter it but I would make the following comments: I think that we are underestimating the demand for housing in Berkshire. We know that there is an increase because more people are setting up households. e.g people with Disabilities and the increase in single person households but there are also the hidden homeless. Not the homeless at home but people who are moving into the area either as legitimate migrants from EEC countries or as is the case in Slough as a result of people smuggling. This leads to overcrowding in properties...e.g in Reading it is known that people are sharing rooms and beds...and in Slough there is a calculation that every legitimate immigrant supports a number of illegal immigrants. People from EEC countries will have the right to join housing registers after a year. We also know that the influx of unskilled labour will potentially drive down wages which increases the number of people who need assistance with housing. I think that the statement is made that there is a net loss of people in the county. That may be an official figure but I don't think it is accurate.

The report says there are no new financial implications from the strategy. There is reference to the other 5 councils contributing to a study. How did West Berkshire get out of doing the same? I notice that the report was produced by consultants...I assume that this is in the budget.

There is mention of Homebuy etc but no reference that I could find the the scheme funded by the Home Office aimed at Police Employees - police officers and PCSO's. I think that this should be mentioned for two reasons - one it is an example of government assistance and it would be nice if the same could be done for Fire-fighters and perhaps the department of education and skills could contribute towards assisting teachers. It is also significant because it is assistance to move to a larger home and is a recognition that it isn't just first time buyers who need assistance on the property ladder.

The strategy doesn't state specifically that each Authority will have different priorities, although it is implied by the appendix. Following on from this point there is reference to key workers....the challenge for a sub regional strategy is that I suspect that all authorities will have a different definition of a key worker - should this be recognised in the strategy?

As I said at the beginning of this e-mail I appreciate that this is a strategy that has presumably been agreed by the RSL's and other councils and therefore it isn't possible to change it at this stage.

Councillor Anthony Stansfeld - I have a serious problem with this document. It appears to be an urban orientated document that makes absolutely no provision for local families in rural communities. They are briefly mentioned on page 37. The Homeless accepted as Homeless and Priority Needs Households (P27) means that locals whose families have lived for generations in an area often have fewer points than other families from elsewhere and consequently can never get houses in their own village or area. The mass immigration into the UK of people, who are almost by definition homeless, means that it will be increasingly difficult for village families to stay in their own villages. Hardly in line with our Vibrant Villages Policy.

The other side of this is that families are moved into villages which have little social infra structure, no banks or post offices, poor transport, no jobs, and few if any shops. They cannot afford to live in a rural community and this immediately causes both them and their neighbours a problem. This issue is ignored in the paper and as a result I believe the document is fundamentally flawed.

The Western Corridor also covers a large area of AONB West of the A 34. As this area is allocated large scale new housing it flies in the face of existing policies. The Western Corridor should only go West as far as the AONB, not across it.

As this Strategy is only Interim, I think we should make these inputs before we accept it. It is potentially a damaging document that will have an adverse effect on all Wards West of Newbury and the rural Wards East of Newbury. If we do not get these amendments we will live to regret it.