

Individual Decisions

The attached reports will be taken as an
Individual Portfolio Member Decisions on:

20 April 2007 (date)

Ref:	Title	Portfolio Member	Page No.
ID1438	Proposed Comments on draft Regional Housing Strategy Review, February 2007	Cllr Franks	1

Individual Decision

Title of Report:	Proposed Comments on draft Regional Housing Strategy Review, February 2007		
Report to be considered by:	Councillor Marcus Franks, Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture	on:	20 April 2007
Forward Plan Ref:	ID1438		

Purpose of Report:

To agree the Council's response to the Regional Housing strategy review consultation.

Recommended Action:

That the Housing Strategy Manager submit the draft response to the Regional Housing Board on behalf of the Council.

Reason for decision to be taken:

The Regional Housing Strategy sets the priorities for funding within the South East region. The decisions made within the strategy will impact on the Council's ability to attract funding in support of its strategic housing objectives.

List of other options considered:

N/A

Key background documentation:

Regional Housing Strategy Review Draft for Consultation, February 2007

Portfolio Member:	Councillor Marcus Franks
Tel. No.:	01635 841552
E-mail Address:	mfranks@westberks.gov.uk

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Melanie Brain
Job Title:	Housing Strategy Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519403
E-mail Address:	mbrain@westberks.gov.uk

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The current version of the Regional Housing Strategy was published in July 2005. The South East Regional Housing Board is due to submit its advice on the allocation of the housing element of the regional Funding Allocation in summer 2007, and have published a review of the regional housing Strategy for consultation to assist in setting those priorities, based on updated and recent research and evidence.
- 1.2 In summary, the Regional Housing Board's proposed priorities for funding in the period 2008-2011 are as follows:
- Maintain a strong focus on delivering affordable housing
 - Maintain a commitment to provide funding for improvements to ensure decent homes
 - Maintain focus in investment in urban areas
 - Increased emphasis on providing the right size and type of housing
 - Maintain support for programmes that assist key workers
 - Invest in pump priming, innovative delivery mechanisms, such as Brownfield Assembly Trust and the Regional Infrastructure Fund, that will unlock housing potential
 - Maintain a commitment to invest in accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers.
- 1.3 The Regional Housing Board have asked for responses to be returned using a standard proforma. This is attached at Appendix A with indicative responses, and reflects the key priorities of the RHS.

Recommendation

That the Housing Strategy Manager submit the draft response to the Regional Housing Board on behalf of the Council

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Response to the Review of the Regional Housing Strategy

Implications

Policy:	The review of the Regional Housing Strategy is not changing policy but is suggesting some changes in focus with respect to funding priorities.
Financial:	The review of the Regional Housing Strategy is setting funding priorities for the period 2008-2011. This has the potential to impact on the Council's ability to attract funding in support of its own strategic housing objectives.
Personnel:	None
Legal:	None
Environmental:	None
Equalities:	None
Partnering:	None
Property:	None
Risk Management:	None

Community Safety: None

Consultation Responses

Members:

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 – Strongly supports the view that S106 exception affordable housing sites in rural villages help to sustain vibrant villages and their communities.
Councillor Barbara Alexander
Councillor Gordon Lundie

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted: June Graves, Head of Housing & Performance
Bob Watson, Group Accountant
Colin Chapman, Team Leader, Planning Policy

Trade Union: N/A



Regional Housing Strategy Review

Consultation February - April 2007

Response Form and Questionnaire

The Regional Housing Board is reviewing the Regional Housing Strategy and has produced a draft review for consultation. The consultation period runs from 5 February to 27 April 2007. We would very much like to hear your views on the issues which will influence how regional funding will be used during 2008-11.

If possible please submit your answers online at www.southeast-ra.gov.uk where this form is available electronically. If you do not have access to the internet, please complete this paper copy and return to the address at the end of the form.

Please answer the questions below. If you wish to make specific comments on the questions, we have provided boxes for this. **Figures in brackets denote paragraphs in the consultation document.** There is also a further section for additional general comments.

Section 1: About you

In what capacity are you responding to this questionnaire?

Regional Assembly Member	<input type="checkbox"/>	Business Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional Housing Board Member	<input type="checkbox"/>	Town or Parish Council Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Principal Authority (County / Unitary)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Environmental Sector Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Planning Authority (District / Borough)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Government Department / Agency / NDPB	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing Sector Representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	South East Resident / Individual	<input type="checkbox"/>
MP, MEP	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary Sector Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide your name and address. We cannot accept anonymous or confidential consultation responses or submissions.

Name: MELANIE BRAIN

Organisation: WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

Address: HOUSING STRATEGY, ENABLING + GRANTS

MARKET STREET

NEWBURY

Postcode: RG14 5LD Email Address: mbrain@westberks.gov.uk

Section 2: Overall allocation of funds

Q1: In selecting areas for investment in affordable housing, should the Regional Housing Board (para 5.3):

(pick just one option)

- Measure homelessness, overcrowding and affordability, as it does now?
- Focus on areas that deliver sustainable development by supporting the regional priorities in the South East Plan (see map in Annex 1)?

Any additional comments / reasons for choice:

MEASURES THAT FOCUS ON LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS AND OVERCROWDING CAN PENALISE AUTHORITIES THAT ARE SUCCESSFUL AT PREVENTION WORK.
ECONOMIC NEED/GROWTH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

Q2: Should the Regional Housing Board allocate funds based on (para 5.2):

(pick just one option)

- A percentage of the total funding available?
- The number of homes to be delivered?

Any additional comments / reasons for choice:

THIS COULD ALLOW MORE CHALLENGING TARGETS TO BE SET WHILST ENSURING VALUE FOR MONEY.

Section 3: Funding for different types of project

Q3: How much affordable housing funding should the Regional Housing Board invest in large strategic sites (para 2.8.1, 5.7)?

(pick just one option)

- 5% (around £22m a year)?
- 10% (around £44m a year)?
- Other (please state)

Q4: The Regional Housing Board plans to spend 1% of its budget (around £5m a year) on providing and refurbishing Gypsy and Traveller sites (para 11.1 - 11.3). Is this:

(pick just one option)

- Too low?
- About right?
- Too high?

Q5: How much should the Regional Housing Board invest in improving the condition of private sector housing (para 12.1 - 12.5)?

(pick just one option)

- 3% (around £12m a year, below the current level)?
- 5% (around £20m a year, the current level)?
- 7% (around £30m a year)?
- 9% (around £40m a year)?
- Other (please state)

Q6: What should be the criteria for funding to improve private sector homes (para 12.3 - 12.4)?

Comments:

THE FUNDING SHOULD SUPPORT INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PRODUCTS (E.G. EQUITY RELEASE OR LOANS) THAT CAN BENEFIT ALL AUTHORITIES IN THE SOUTH EAST. THE FUNDING SHOULD PROMOTE GOOD PRACTICE AND FOCUS ON SCHEMES WHERE FUNDING CAN BE RECYCLED.

Q7: Do you support the Regional Housing Board using funds for loans or equity release schemes as a way to improve the condition of private sector housing (para 12.5)?

(pick just one option)

- Yes
- No

Q8: What should be the Regional Housing Board's minimum target for rural affordable housing in small settlements (para 4.10 and 15)?

(pick just one option)

- 360 homes per year (the current level)?
- 500 homes per year?
- Other (please state)

Q9: The evidence base for the draft South East Plan suggests that 70% of new affordable housing should be social rented. A proportion of this is likely to be achieved without public subsidy. How many of the Regional Housing Board's affordable homes should be social rented accommodation (para 3.2, 16)?

(pick just one option)

- 70%?
- 60%?
- 50%?
- Other (please state)

Q10: To emphasise the need for large, family-sized affordable housing, should the Regional Housing Board adopt (para 16.3 - 16.6):

(pick just one option)

- A single regional target applied to the total of all affordable housing?
- Separate regional targets for social rented and shared ownership housing?
- Other suggestion (please state and add reasons below)

Any additional comments / reasons for recommending an alternative approach:

THIS WILL MORE ACCURATELY REFLECT THE NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF SUB-REGIONS.

Q11: Should the Regional Housing Board fund low cost home ownership for 'essential' local workers (para 17)?

(pick just one option)

Yes

No

Q12: If the Regional Housing Board decided to fund low cost home ownership for essential workers, what type of workers at what income levels should be eligible (para 17)?

Comments:

'ESSENTIAL' WORKERS SHOULD BE DETERMINED LOCALLY, OR AT SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL, IN CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS. INCOME LEVELS SHOULD REFLECT THE DEFINITION OF 'LOCAL' ESSENTIAL WORKER AND THEREFORE SHOULD BE SET ONCE THE DEFINITION IS DECIDED.

WEST BERKSHIRE, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WOKINGHAM AND READING, HAS UNDERTAKEN THIS RESEARCH, RESULTING IN A DETAILED DEFINITION OF ESSENTIAL WORKER, WITH AVERAGE SALARIES BEING BETWEEN £20,000 - £32,000 (78% OF LOCAL KEYWORKERS).

Section 4: Infrastructure and land

Q13: How important is infrastructure to support new affordable homes (para 14)?

(pick just one option)

Very important?

Important?

Not at all important?

Q14: Do you support the Regional Housing Board's intention to use a proportion of its funds (approximately 2%), on a recyclable basis, towards creating a Regional Infrastructure Fund that will ensure infrastructure is delivered alongside development (para 14)?

(pick just one option)

Yes

No

Q15: Do you support the Regional Housing Board's aim to buy surplus public sector brownfield land for affordable housing developments (para 13)?

(pick just one option)

Yes

No

Section 5: Additional general comments

If you have any further comments, please add them below.

Additional comments:

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL IS EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED TO SEE THAT IN REAL TERM, THE RURAL HOUSING PROGRAMME HAS DECREASED AS A PROPORTION OF THE OVERALL PROGRAMME. THE COUNCIL DISAGREES WITH THE COMMENTS THAT IMPLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING DOES NOT GUARANTEE SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITIES OR THAT HOUSING NEED MUST BE MET WHERE IT OCCURS. AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONTRIBUTES TO THE VITALITY AND VIBRANCY OF VILLAGES AND CAN HELP TO ENSURE THAT LOCAL AMENITIES, EG, SHOPS, STAY OPEN.

THE COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO SEE RESOURCES FOR THE RURAL PROGRAMME INCREASE SO THAT IT IS AT LEAST MAINTAINED AS THE SAME PROPORTION OF THE OVERALL PROGRAMME, AND WOULD STRONGLY ARGUE FOR AN INCREASE OVER AND ABOVE THIS.

When completed, please return to the Assembly (details below) by 27 April 2007.

Post: Regional Housing Strategy Review Consultation
C/O Catherine Stubbings
South East England Regional Assembly
Berkeley House
Cross Lanes
Guildford
GU1 1UN

Fax: 01483 555250

Email: catherinestubbings@southeast-ra.gov.uk