

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

19 May 2008

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Summary

This report informs Members of the publication of the Regional Housing Strategy 2008-11 and provides a brief overview of its contents. Copies of the document will be made available for Members at the meeting.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Regional Housing Strategy 2008 -11 (RHS) was published on March 2008. It sets out a framework for targeting the housing resources available at the priorities for investment. The strategy sets out the investment priorities across the region for 2008 -11.
- 1.1.2 Members will recall the Council submitted a response to the earlier consultation draft which was reported to the May 2007 meeting of the Board. At that time we expressed particular concern that the 'unaffordability' of housing should be seen as a key indicator of housing need, which, as Members will be aware, is a problem facing West Kent. Similarly areas with high levels of homelessness should be prioritised for investment.

1.2 Overview of Regional Housing Strategy 2008-11

- 1.2.1 The RHS covers a wide range of housing issues and the following summary highlights some key themes for Members.
- 1.2.2 The RHS emphasises the construction of a greater number of larger, family sized homes to meet identified local need and create mixed communities. It views level three of the Code for Sustainable Homes as the minimum standard to which affordable homes should be built, and that this should also be applied to the refurbishment of existing homes.
- 1.2.3 The RHS looks to work with regional partners to develop new delivery mechanisms for affordable housing for example, working with the Brownfield Land Assembly Company who are specialists at unlocking the delivery of small urban sites for affordable housing. Regional Infrastructure Funding (RIF) is another

example, (this is a mechanism by which the public sector can forward fund infrastructure that is necessary to enable the delivery of affordable housing).

- 1.2.4 The RHB will look to maximise the potential to deliver affordable housing without the need for grant from the public sector, whilst continuing to work hard to secure on the region's behalf the resources required. The strategy describes that priority for funding will be targeted at schemes which would not be viable without grant.
- 1.2.5 The strategy promotes a tenure split of 70:30 in favour of social rented. Thresholds will be evidence based from data within Strategic Housing Market Assessments.
- 1.2.6 Priority is placed on the right homes in the right places, to help combat overcrowding and reduce the amount of time families may spend in temporary accommodation.
- 1.2.7 The RHS considers the need for targeting funding for rural schemes to larger settlements, particularly where that investment enables the settlement to sustain its function as part of a wider community. This will be done on an evidence basis, based on the twin considerations of need and sustainability. The RHS aims to increase the number of rural affordable homes to 500 across the region, (in settlements with a population of less than 3,000).
- 1.2.8 The strategy contains a comprehensive action plan with the purpose of monitoring the investment priorities over the period, along with listing possible challenges for the future such as demographic changes and maintaining sustainability.
- 1.2.9 The three priorities of the strategy remain as:
- build more affordable homes;
 - bring decent housing within the reach of people on lower incomes; and
 - improve the quality of new housing and existing stock.
- 1.2.10 I am pleased to report that the Council's draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (AH SPD) already captures many of these aims – for example, tenure mix; emphasis on providing family housing; promoting grant free schemes; encouraging high quality design; and promoting rural affordable housing.
- 1.2.11 **Conclusions**
- 1.2.12 Members will probably not be surprised to learn that the key concerns expressed by the Council in our consultation response have not been taken forward in the final strategy document. That said, Members should view the influence of the strategy in the context of two other reports on tonight's agenda concerning preferred partnering and resources for private sector renewal. While the particular issues facing West Kent may not be viewed as a priority for investment,

nevertheless, the Housing Corporation and the Regional Housing Board appear highly supportive of the Council's plans as evidenced by their commitment to providing social housing grant and capital resources for private sector renewal, respectively!

1.2.13 It is however pleasing to note that the emerging Affordable Housing Supplementary Housing Document already seeks to advance a number of themes contained in the strategy.

1.2.14 Copies of the Regional Housing Strategy document will be available for Members at the meeting.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 None arising from this report.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 The Regional Housing Strategy will shape the allocation of funds for housing investment in the south east region.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

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Regional Housing Strategy 2008-11

[Annex 1] Regional Housing Strategy Response Form

May 2007

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