

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

19 July 2010

### Joint Report of the Director of Health and Housing and the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure Services

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

### 1 THE HCA SINGLE CONVERSATION PROCESS

#### Summary

**This report updates Members on the progress being made by the Council's housing and planning officers with the Single Conversation. It goes on to describe recent changes to the process, whilst outlining the next stages.**

#### 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will recall that the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) have been engaging local authorities and their development partners in the Single Conversation, which is the new vehicle for making investment decisions nationwide for affordable housing.
- 1.1.2 The Single Conversation occurs within various prescribed sub regions, and this borough is part of the west Kent sub region which also includes Sevenoaks District Council, Maidstone Borough Council, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
- 1.1.3 The Single Conversation has evolved since the election and is now titled the "Local Investment Plan", (LIP). The LIP is the key output of the process, and describes which projects and schemes are prioritised across the sub region, in accordance to agreed shared aims and objectives.
- 1.1.4 The remit of the HCA has also evolved, and is now understood to be broader than just the original provision of affordable housing, and includes newer elements such as skills creation, infrastructure, and economic development. It has to be said however that the current process and the availability of funds at the conclusion remains less than clear.
- 1.1.5 The four district authorities along with Kent County Council (KCC) are currently working with the HCA in the preparation of three draft Working Papers which detail the shared vision for the sub region.

- 1.1.6 Our housing and planning officers been working closely and to extraordinarily tight deadlines to ensure we promote our existing and proposed sites, both small and strategic, to ensure that the draft Working Papers accurately reflect our adopted policy framework. We are also working on some longer term information to do with Tonbridge town centre and infrastructure requirements in the Borough.
- 1.1.7 There have been two important events in July, namely a west Kent Briefing Event on the 13 July to discuss and agree work performed to date, and a Partners' Workshop on the 16 July to consult external parties such as housing associations on the progress of the LIP.
- 1.1.8 The HCA has prescribed a September 2010 deadline to construct a draft LIP. The reason given for this deadline by the HCA is that the submissions will inform the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).
- 1.1.9 We are most concerned that given the scope and likely importance of the LIP it will be very challenging to engage in and create a robust document in this timeframe, given the level of cross borough working required alone. It is also very difficult at this stage to be able to take a view of priorities across the sub region that might be put forward and we would wish to do this well before the final submission is made.
- 1.1.10 The work involved in the LIP has created a hectic schedule of milestones, but the HCA are correct in describing this as currently "the only game in town" for local authorities who want to attract grant for both the short and long term initiatives. The pace of work has not enabled a wider and more democratic process to be adopted that would allow all Members to be involved and informed in the shaping of what the Council seek to achieve from the LIP.
- 1.1.11 Whilst this is very unfortunate, from a practical viewpoint we have had no choice but to try to put the best picture of the Borough's needs forward in the time allowed. Concerns about the whole process highlighting these points and enquiring about the possibility of implementing a more realistic deadline have been made to the Regional Director of the HCA.
- 1.1.12 Members will be kept up to date on LIP matters through future papers to this board.

## **1.2 Legal Implications**

- 1.2.1 None arising from this report.

## **1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.3.1 None arising from this report.

## **1.4 Risk Assessment**

- 1.4.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

contact: Chris Knowles

Nil

John Batty  
Director of Health and Housing

Steve Humphrey  
Director of Planning Transportation and Leisure Services