

REFRESH OF THE HOUSING STRATEGY - RESPONSE QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: Janet Walton

POSITION: Chief Housing Officer

ORGANISATION: Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

QUESTION 1: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE ASKS OF GOVERNMENT. ARE THESE APPROPRIATE? ARE THERE OTHERS YOU FEEL SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

Yes, they are all appropriate. However:

- § Ask 1 (welfare reform): The consequences of benefit recipients having to manage and budget for all of their outgoings when Universal Credit is introduced will be far-reaching not only for the recipients themselves but also for private landlords, registered providers, support providers and local housing authorities. Rent arrears will rise, as will the frequency of evictions and homelessness approaches, placing more pressure on the private rented sector. We feel that this is worthy of a separate ask of Government, emphasising the vital need for pre-tenancy training and other tenancy sustainment initiatives as per section 7.2 of the draft strategy.
- § Ask 9 (ageing population): This could be more specific about what we really want Government to do. If all it does is *recognise* the importance of housing the ageing population will it really make a significant difference?
- § It would also be appropriate to ask Government for support with private sector renewal to improve the quality of existing housing. The County has lost a significant amount of private sector renewal funding since the end of the 2008-11 Regional Housing Board programme. This should also be recognised in the "Setting the Scene" section.

QUESTION 2: DO YOU AGREE THAT THESE ISSUES ARE KEY PRIORITIES FOR KENT AND MEDWAY? ARE THERE OTHERS YOU FEEL SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

These are undoubtedly all key priorities for Kent and Medway, but we note that they aren't actually referred to as such in any one part of the draft strategy, As a result, we're struggling to understand their position in relation to:

- § The five challenges on page 4
- § The five ambitions on page 5, which link to each of the five themes on page 12
- § The nine asks of Government on page 9
- § The eight things we want to achieve on page 12.

Assuming that the seven key priorities set out on page 3 of the consultation document are all new key priorities, it would be helpful to have them, along

with any existing key priorities, identified in a single location in the strategy.

Other key priorities could address:

- § Older people
- § Tackling empty homes
- § Ensuring the viability of rural communities.
- § Responding to the Government's new Traveller Policy and demonstrating the duty to cooperate in assessing and planning for future accommodation needs.

QUESTION 3: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

- § Recommendation 1 (theme 1) – the proposed K&M protocol for neighbourhood planning needs to be based on a full understanding of the opportunities, limitations, risks and process for neighbourhood planning. The draft strategy as currently worded implies that local neighbourhood planning forums would have a greater degree of discretion in determining housing numbers in their area than is in fact the case and does not acknowledge the need to secure support through a referendum.
- § Recommendation 2 (theme 1) – the proposal to pool CIL receipts for countywide infrastructure runs contrary to the CIL Regulations which state that only up to five developments can be pooled for an individual project (CIL Reg 122). It is also premature to consider a protocol at this stage as most Kent districts are only at an early stage in considering a CIL charging regime and will need to carry out viability testing and consultations before determining how any funds might be spent.
- § Recommendation 4 (theme 1) – this builds on the aspirations of the paper that was submitted to Ambition Board 2 in January, and it therefore particularly welcome.
- § Recommendation 11 (theme 2) – this recommendation in the 2011 version of the strategy required that a similar approach be followed for reducing flood risk and the impact of flooding, but it is omitted from the update. Has this already been progressed?
- § Theme 2, final paragraph page 39 – should the development of countywide “designing out crime” guidance not be a separate recommendation?
- § Theme 3, section 6, page 46 – the reference to the emerging common assessment framework implies that all partners are signed up to it but in its present form, this is not the case.
- § Theme 3, section 6.1, page 47 – should the monitoring of the impact of Right to Buy not be a separate recommendation?
- § Recommendation 18 (theme 4) – surely there is also a role here for the PSH sub-group? This group have a key part to play in ensuring that the Kent Health inequality Strategy reinforces the message about the impact of poor housing on health.
- § Theme 4, section 2, page 51 – it is not so much the use of the Housing

Act powers that are unlikely to deal with the poor condition of properties but rather the lack of resources to enforce those powers. Private sector housing teams are shrinking to such an extent that some no longer have access to qualified environmental health officers. This, combined with the lack of private sector renewal funding is significantly limiting the capacity to improve the condition of existing housing.

- § Recommendation 21 (theme 5) suggest amend as follows: *Kent Housing Group should ~~to~~ continue to monitor the use of homelessness and temporary accommodation across Kent and Medway and feedback to Government....*
- § Theme 5, page 55 – typo: *...there is an urgency to ensure that when a young person is in custody but will be without an address on release that they is assessed by social workers....*
- § Theme 5, page 57 – T & M also seek at least 10% new accommodation to be wheelchair-user accessible.
- § Recommendation 23 (theme 5) – could this incorporate a further push to ensure that those who have yet to sign up to the funding protocol to do so? It would also be helpful if it addressed good practice at the allocations stage – some OTs have noted that not all RPs give families with disabled members sufficient time to decide on the suitability of properties that they have bid on.

QUESTION 4: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE INDICATORS. ARE THERE OTHERS THAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

- § Page 33 makes reference to Kent and Medway lagging behind the rest of the South East in Many economic indicators. It does not state which, but has this been taken into account when developing the draft indicators outlined in the consultation document?
- § The list seems light on private sector indicators, given ever-growing importance of that sector.

QUESTION 5: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT. ARE THE ASSUMPTIONS IN THE ASSESSMENT CORRECT?

- § Theme 3, section 2, Access to Home ownership – in a recent equality impact assessment of the Council's Strategy and Enabling function, it was noted that Muslims may not be able to obtain mortgage products to access low-cost home ownership products. This has subsequently been investigated and the HCA has confirmed that it does not see HomeBuy products suiting Sharia - compliant mortgages.

PLEASE PROVIDE ANY FURTHER COMMENTS ON THE CONTENT OF THE REFRESHED STRATEGY

- § There are several references throughout the draft strategy stating that the Regional Spatial Strategies (or South East Plan) have been abolished (e.g. page 15, 2nd para, page 21, para 1.1, section 2 and the Glossary). In fact, while there are now powers in place enabling the Secretary of State to abolish the RSS, these powers have not been used to date and the South East Plan remains part of the development plan for Kent.
- § Section 3.2 of the draft strategy refers to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Although mostly contextual these paragraphs are potentially misleading. For example CIL is intended to meet some of the infrastructure needs arising from new development, but it is unlikely that all needs will be funded from this source alone; the range of infrastructure that CIL is intended to provide is much wider than suggested in the opening paragraph; the levy is referred to as revenue (references to TIF are described in a later section as capital); CIL can be used for both capital and revenue, but it should not be used to replace existing revenue funding for existing services; there are exceptions that do not qualify for CIL and it is only payable on net additional floor space – this is not made clear in the 3rd paragraph, which suggests CIL can be used where S106 cannot. This section should also recognise that a proportion of CIL will be retained by the community in which developments take place.
- § Section 4 (page 28) of the strategy proposes releasing public assets to deliver managed growth. This section should also refer to the Community Right to Bid for Assets of Community Value introduced by the Localism Act, as this may have implications for this potential funding source.
- § Section 9 dealing with Gypsy and Travellers should be expanded to address this important countywide issue for housing and include references to the new Government policy for Travellers (March 2012) and the Duty to Cooperate introduced by the Localism Act.
- § The entries in the Glossary should be reviewed to address some inaccuracies and omissions. In addition to the comments made above in respect of RSS and CIL, the following should be amended: there is an entry for Local Development Frameworks but not for Local Plans; the entry for the National Planning Policy Framework states that it has replaced all previous national planning policies. This is not true, for example, the NPPF makes clear that it does not address waste policy and therefore PPS10 remains.