

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP



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9:1 This section proposes and presents the development of Partnership working by:

- Preparing for the merger of the RHB and RPB
- Developing Partnership arrangements for the four HMAs
- The relationship between the RHS and the WMRSS
- The role of County Planning Authorities in supporting the RHS

9:2 It also develops the manner in which Partnership working should be structured and explains the expectations of the RHB in this regard. The section begins with the Government's current intentions towards Regional institutions and merger under the WMRA of the RHB and RPB some time in 2005 or 2006. The RHB is keen to see two dimensions to joint working strengthened. These are joint working between LHAs in furthering Sub-Regional market analysis within the same structures as far as possible, and unified approaches to working between LHAs and LPAs.

9:3 This RHS acknowledges that there may be circumstances where housing analysis for a smaller area, for example at parish or neighbourhood level, is required. In such instances neither a sub-regional approach nor joint working would be required. However it encourages the use of the Core Survey questionnaire, wherever possible. (See Appendix 3).

9:4 To strengthen partnership working at local level, the RHB encourages LAs to involve HAs as integral partners in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and other similar initiatives, to allow them to contribute fully to all aspects of regeneration.

9:5 Equally important is the need for themed policy topic groups to continue to support implementation, monitoring and review at Regional level and to support structures for taking forward Regional housing and sub-regional work, including the roles of the RHP, the WMRA Secretariat and the Government Office for the West Midlands.

A new Partnership Forum comprising representatives from each of the four HMAs has been suggested to filter and collate data for the RHS and WMRSS, together with the development of a Central HMA strategic implementation group. The RHB welcomes the development of these partnerships and also encourages LAs to include LSPs in future HMA working. All future structures will be subject to discussion following the publication of the adopted RHS 2005.

Merger of Regional Housing Boards with Regional Planning Bodies

9:6 The development of this RHS for the West Midlands has been led by the Regional Housing Partnership on behalf of the Regional Housing Board. The RHP comprises housing interest groups from public, private and voluntary sectors. The RHB is currently (May 2005) led by the Government Office and includes officers from local government, Advantage West Midlands, English Partnerships, the Department of Health and the Housing Corporation and the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

9:7 ODPM has announced proposals for RHBs to merge with Regional Planning Bodies under Regional Assemblies, and for Regional Assemblies to take responsibility for developing and implementing RHS. The West Midlands Regional Assembly in consultation with the RHP has welcomed this proposal.

9:8 A response from ODPM on the timing and resourcing of the merger is awaited. The current RHB, the RHP and the West Midlands Regional Assembly are all committed to ensuring that any changes to regional structures serve to strengthen the capacity to develop and deliver this RHS, and to make decision making more open, transparent and inclusive.

9:9 Both the WMRSS and the RHS must be underpinned by robust assessments of housing markets and imbalances between housing supply and demand. Work is well advanced in the West Midlands to secure a shared evidence base.

- 9:10 Support should be directed towards local markets and initiatives within LAs or across borders where partnerships or common issues exist.
- 9:11 The RHB is also working to ensure that the RHS informs and reflects other key regional strategies and plans, especially economic development.

HMA working groups: overall approach

- 9:12 The Region has had the advantage of several sub-regional, county based or part county-based Housing Partnerships (for example, SHOG – Shropshire Housing Officers Group) These have contributed to the research agenda and the consultation process and could act as examples of good practice for cross-authority working in the future.
- 9:13 This RHS's preceding research opened up several areas of key housing need. There is much further to go in understanding issues and trends and developing policy. The interrelations between these areas, their synthesis and the evolution of the housing market over time require partnership working to keep Regional institutions informed by relevant perspectives. The large Central housing market area is underpinned by a common housing economy but has several distinct and diverse sets of problems. The RHP will wish to work with LHAs and their partners in order to manage this scale of housing strategy development by regional government and its partners.
- 9:14 ODPM's requirements of RHBs are that the RHS should be based upon an understanding of principal Housing Market Areas within the Region in partnership with all stakeholders. It is expected therefore that ongoing furtherance of this RHS should be based in large part on continued engagement of sub-regional stakeholders and that this will continue to be in alignment with the WMRSS and the WMES. HMA Consultation events have already demonstrated the value of bringing together participants in the four Housing Market Areas based on those in Chapter 3, The West Midlands Region: Four Housing Market Areas. At HMA or sub-HMA level there will be a need for joint local housing assessments and the development of joint policies to deal with activities which cross borough boundaries (for example, Housing Market Renewal Areas). LAs may also find it helpful to prepare joint Local Development Documents and Local Housing Strategies to develop a consistent and linked approach to the planning process. Common housing registers could also usefully be prepared across borough boundaries.

POLICY:

9.1 The RHB will support in whole or part the costs of further joint LHA working where this involves researching a closer understanding of the dynamics and issues within the sub-regional housing markets, their neighbourhoods, towns, villages and parishes. The RHB will particularly wish to encourage such joint working with LPAs.

- 9:15 As these approaches are translated down in scale to LAs it is intended that the best practice of joint Regional working will be strengthened. This should be especially evident as LAs respond to ODPM guidance on undertaking Local Housing Market and Needs assessments. The RHB would not wish to see LHAs or LPAs acting in isolation from the understanding we now have of Regional housing markets and the RHS policies designed to address these.

POLICY:

9.2 The RHB strongly urges LHAs and LPAs to proceed jointly with the development of Housing and Planning policy for housing, on the basis of the understanding of housing markets presented in this RHS, the RHS policies designed to address these, and the supporting suite of Research. The RHB does not wish to see local housing policy developed in isolation from the understanding given in this RHS 2005.

- 9:16 There is therefore merit in setting up four individual HMA Partnership Groups. Their responsibilities will include:

- Leading in the implementation, and assist an enhanced Regional Monitoring Officers Group (RMOG) on monitoring of the RHS
- Advising the RHB via the RHP on further research and if approved, preparing practice guides as recommended in the RHS
- Promoting good practice to local authorities and housing providers
- Supporting members in understanding Regional issues more fully
- Benchmarking and monitoring systems
- Setting in place joint operational arrangements between local authorities within HMAs in discussion with the Regional Housing Partnership

9:17 The West Midlands Regional Assembly will fully support the RHB in encouraging and where appropriate commenting upon the quality of joint working between local authority Planning and Housing sectors. The RHB's expectation of LAs is that they will act together across sectors, and where beneficial to the delivery of the RHS, as groups of LAs working together. Such joint working will be expected in the treatment of all housing market interventions and their management, and especially in the monitoring and delivery of the RHS, understanding local housing markets, delivering affordable housing and contributing to urban and rural renaissance.

The Black Country Sub Regional Study – Establishing effective partnerships

9:18 The major regeneration intervention intended for the Black Country has been explained in Chapter 3, **The West Midlands Region: Four Housing Market Areas**. Effective partnership between the Black Country boroughs, Local Strategic Partnerships, Government Agencies, Non-Governmental organisations, special delivery vehicles and private investors will be key to Black Country renaissance. Housing providers and local communities also need to be involved at an early stage.

9:19 This partnership-led process is being taken forward through the initiative of the Black Country Consortium which has, for example, brokered the bringing together of LAs to prepare the Borough LDFs as a single consistent Black Country wide strategy (the Single Core Strategy). They have co-operated to establish a planning and housing group which will, for example, deliver transformational demonstration projects which engage with developers, test housebuilding capacity and demographic predictions, establish principles of quality design and monitor design standards of proposed development across all four boroughs.

Themed working groups

9:20 Much good work has already been done by a number of themed working groups including those dealing with Supporting People, Homelessness, Rural Housing, BME Issues and Affordable Housing. All these groups have expressed an interest in continuing to work together to implement the RHS and promote good practice. It is intended that themed working groups continue and are represented on the existing RHP. Within HMAs there may be scope for thematic and HMA stakeholder groups to work together. Themed working groups should if possible include representatives from each HMA and will be charged with taking forward delivery of the RHS.

9:21 Research to support the evidence base has helped to reinforce existing groups of regional experts on Asylum Seekers and Refugees. The other key themes of the RHS such as Urban Renaissance are dealt with via RPB working groups. Further development of Regional groups to address Gypsies and Travellers and 'Sustainable Homes' issues will be considered by the RHP. Their responsibilities will mirror those of the HMA groups as outlined above.

Relationship between Sub Regions in the WMRSS and the RHS

9:22 ODPM guidance requires the RHB to base its RHS upon an understanding of sub regional housing markets and to define these without regard to administrative boundaries. In addition ODPM require the development of both RHS and WMRSS policy on housing to draw from, and be consistent with, a foundation of evidence about housing markets that both Strategies then share in common. The resultant policies are to be aligned. The de-

velopment of this RHS has rigorously followed this guidance. In the event, and by coincidence, HMA boundaries fell surprisingly close to Regional and District Housing Authority boundaries, except in a few cases where compromise was possible through negotiation with the particular authorities, by including a District wholly within one HMA without prejudicing the integrity of the empirical basis of the major divisions the work identified. Thus the West Midlands Region has been able to place every one of its LHAs comfortably within one of four HMAs. In the process two Counties' Strategic Planning Authorities straddle HMA boundaries: Warwickshire in the South and Central and Staffordshire in the North and Central. These consequences reflect the functional operation of the markets as ODPM required. For the LHAs these are boundaries they can engage within and they are making progress in forging common housing priority agendas for discussion at Regional level.

9:23 Shared evidence work on the nature of housing markets in the West Midlands has identified the existence of four distinct housing markets within the Region. Following the requirements of the WMRSS paragraph 6.25, the RHB wishes the RPB to consider the role these 'functional sub-areas for housing' will play in the implementation of the Regional Spatial Strategy. If the empirical evidence and plain logic of the housing market circumstances, with shared distinctive price and inter-relational characteristics shows a coherent coalescence within each of these boundaries for the strategic purpose of clearing markets, then the RHB will expect to see HMAs taken into the WMRSS Partial Review. In addition the logic of having the same sub regional boundaries between Regional Strategies built up from a shared base of empirical evidence is much more straight forward to explain to the public and to local communities.

Role of the County Planning Authorities (CPAs) in framing and delivering Regional Housing Strategy

9:24 It is appropriate to consider the role of County Councils in relation to housing policy as covered in the RHS especially in the context of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase 2004.

9:25 Given that both Regional Planning and Housing policy are developed in different legal and regulatory frameworks, these have to be consciously used in clear mutual support, utilising their different regulatory characteristics to build one complete and effective set of policy tools to deliver the objectives of both planning and housing within the overview of Community Strategies.

9:26 The role of all tiers of the planning system working together with the housing function in delivering new build and other aspects of the RHS is paramount. Not only is a clear and shared understanding needed of these markets, needs and the drivers of change, there also has to be total synergy in the objectives of planning and housing functions from Regional to Local Authority organisations.

9:27 It is in this context that the RHB looks to County Planning Authorities to assist District Authorities in co-ordinating and delivering change in housing markets in the Shire County areas through their work as Section 4(4) Authorities. Here County Councils are in a unique position as strategic planning authorities, and fill an important tier in the hierarchy of governance currently lacking in the formal regulatory regime applying to the coordination of housing policy in Shire areas. Whilst it is recognised and valued that LHAs do work together well in County wide Partnerships, the ability of CPAs to contribute on several fronts is recognised and sought. These would include a resourced intelligence function on housing market change, assistance in the co-ordination of LPAs' joint response to regional and sub-regional housing market requirements, plus their role in monitoring, PMM, and commenting on matters of general conformity to the RPB regarding forward plans and larger planning applications. All this makes the Counties, alongside the other Strategic Planning Authorities, key partners in the delivery of the RHS in the Section 4(4) strategic capacity.

9:28 Government's future expectation is that LAs should act in concert to utilise scarce resources effectively, working together in a range of Partnerships from the informal and less structured through to joint local housing strategies and LDFs. CPAs can play a major part in helping to set the strategic context and support for these new, innovative methods of working which are essential if urban and rural housing markets are to be sustained with newly mixed and balanced housing provision.

9:29 Functions carried out at County level which impact on housing include Supporting People revenue funding, provision of schools, leisure facilities, highways and transport. These will particularly affect negotiation of S106 Agreements, and the ability to develop a coherent Supporting People policy. Provision of good social and community infrastructure is also key to urban and rural renaissance. Counties therefore have a key role to play in participation in any HMA groups in their area.

9:30 Counties can also play an important role in sharing good practice, developing common protocols, encouraging inter authority working and developing better relationships with housing providers and housebuilders.

Private Sector Housebuilders

9:31 This RHS is designed to ensure that there is sufficient housing within the Region for everyone to have access to a decent home at a price that they can afford. The resources to meet this objective are principally those associated with the existing stock of housing within the West Midlands, across all tenures. The nature, condition, type and location of these housing options is the product of previous patterns of investment in the Region, and patterns of residential mobility reflect the choices that people make in relation to this housing stock, and the aspirations as well as the resources of households to access different market areas.

9:32 The RHS is principally concerned with patterns of new investment and the need to grow and reshape housing provision within the West Midlands to meet the objectives that have been set out. This means meeting the most obvious needs (associated with homelessness, supporting people, and households living in inadequate conditions) and fulfilling the aspirations of newly forming households and households seeking to move and improve their housing situation.

9:33 But housing strategy is about more than simply meeting housing needs. It is also about contributing to wider agendas for the regional economy, sustainability and social cohesion and regeneration. In this context there are particular issues regarding rebalancing housing resources in different parts of the Region and providing a greater variety and mix of tenures, property types and routes into the housing market in different places. In some parts of the Region this means increasing the provision of social rented housing and balancing the proportion of detached houses with a greater mix of different types of property at different prices. In other places, the intension is to increase the proportion of private housing and introduce pathways of choice within the private housing market to enable people to trade up and move to different types of housing without having to leave a familiar area where their children attend school and where they have existing friends and networks. In both cases, the concern is with providing pathways of choice between and within tenures, and reshaping the housing market to meet the needs of the Region and its population. Creating pathways of choice means creating a vibrant and flourishing housing market where people have the ability to trade up or down, to buy homes of a size, in a place and at price they can afford, or to access high quality rented housing.

9:34 This process involves contributions from both public and private sectors, and the voluntary sector. The re-generation agenda within Major Urban Areas will typically involve the development of mixed tenure areas and plans to develop secure, mixed and balanced communities, which meet the housing aspirations of different groups of households at different stages in their lives. The contribution of private developers is crucial to these initiatives as well as to the construction of housing for sale and for rent. Joint working between the private sector and other bodies should be designed to maximise developers' contribution to all parts of the strategy. Private developers should be enabled to contribute positively to regeneration, developing attractive housing in older urban areas, providing housing to meet the aspirations of black and minority ethnic households and providing housing which meets high standards in terms of design, energy efficiency and sustainability, irrespective of tenure. The contribution of the private sector is vital for delivery of housing in the West Midlands within the framework set by the Regional Spatial Strategy, and essential to the delivery of Urban and Rural Renaissance. Whether improving homes to Decent Homes Standard or beyond, providing high quality rural affordable housing or regenerating major urban areas, the private sector will be at the forefront of the Region's progress towards a Renaissance.

9:35 The RHB will wish to understand where the private sector faces difficulties in delivering the RHS, where policy is not being followed and where unforeseen consequences are hindering development.

POLICY:

9.3 The RHB will continue to engage in a regular dialogue with the representatives of the private house building, and urban regeneration sectors to develop mutual understanding and to facilitate the achievement Regional Strategy objectives by drawing upon the insight, understanding and expertise of the Sector.