

**REGIONAL HOUSING ADVISORY FORUM**

**THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**Draft notes of the RHAF meeting held on Thursday 29 May 2008**

- 1. Present:** Steve Gregory (Chair/Central HMA), Bashir Ahmed (AWM), Liam Nagle (Central HMA), Jannine McMahon (GOWM), Paul Williams (NHF), Yvonne Leishman (CIH), Phil Street (South HMA), Alan Slater (North HMA), Mark Middleton (WMRA), Joanne Hill (WMRA), Emma Kiteley (WMRA), Steve Forrest (WMRA) Gemma Poxon (WMRA), Steve Price (West HMA), Ada Wells (RSS Policy Lead), Tamsin Hartley (North Staffs Partnership), David Brown (WMV&CSHN)

**In Attendance:** Abigaile Bromfield and Anthony Keown (ATLAS)

**Apologies:** John Horseman (GOWM), Ayaz Maqsood (Central HMA), Michael Walsh (Central HMA), Paul Spooner (English Partnerships), Richard Gabb (West HMA), Adam Russell, (Supporting People Lead), Jenny Dereham (WMBC), Peter Jones (Housing Corporation), Tim Watton (HBF), George Daley (Central HMA)

Steve Forrest recommended two new members to RHAF, both of which were endorsed - Simali Shah (SHELTER) and Prof Alan Murie (CURS – University of Birmingham) and it was agreed that biographies would be circulated subsequently.

- 2. Declaration of Interests**

No declarations were made.

- 3. ATLAS presentation**

RHAF received a presentation from ATLAS, the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) which had been established with English Partnerships, to guide stakeholders through the town planning process in relation to large, complex or strategic development projects.

**RHAF thanked ATLAS for their time and noted the presentation.**

- 4. Draft notes of the RHAF meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008 and Matters Arising**

It was agreed that the minutes were accurate and a true record but that Bashir Ahmed would be added to the attendance. There were no matters arising.

## **5. Update on the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP)**

Notwithstanding the absence of the Housing Corporation, RHAF was asked to receive a report which provided a general update on the NAHP Programme, Regular Market Engagement activities, recent Ministerial statements and the progress being made in regards to the establishment of the new Homes and Communities Agency (H&CA).

The following comments were received:

- Liam Nagle informed the group that Coventry was looking for an intermediate rent product and would welcome some guidance from the Housing Corporation on the direct purchases from house builders of standing stock - Steve Gregory stated that 'buying-off-the shelf' had the potential to create problems and some guidance was needed in relation to sustainability
- Paul Williams (NHF) suggested that clarity was needed on the actual amounts of funding being made available for 'mortgage rescue' - the NHF had understood the £200m was a top slice but the £100m was new money?
- Steve Price (West HMA) expressed concern about the rural programme and stated he would welcome more information in relation to rural targets, as Shropshire authorities and RSLs will have to do a lot more work to deliver and prices are still high - Paul Williams commented that the National Housing Federation doesn't see how the figures for the rural targets will stack up, although this will be come more apparent after the outcomes of the first round of Regular Market Engagement
- Yvonne Leishman (CiH) commented that rural RSLs would decline to bid through Regular Market Engagement as it is seen as difficult and inefficient, given the likely negative outcome

**It was agreed that:**

**1) Steve Forrest would feed back all comments to Peter Jones.**

**2) A separate meeting to discuss rural homes, intermediate rent products and 'buying-off-the-shelf stock' would be arranged by WMRA's Housing team.**

## **6. a) Update on RSS Phase 2 – Preferred Option and Phase 3**

Mark Middleton informed RHAF that the consultation date for Phase 2 had been extended to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2008, in order to give stakeholders sufficient time to respond to the Study (commissioned by Government Office in light of Baroness Andrews letter) and to take a closer look at the menu of Options presented by NLP. Consequently, the Phase 2 Examination in Public (EiP) is now due to take place around the end of April 2009.

### **RSS Revision Phase 2:**

Mark Middleton reminded RHAF that a seminar had been held earlier in May by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP), to provide an interim update on the study and further consultation across the Region was planned. NLP intended to meet with each authority, to ensure each Planning authority was kept abreast of progress. A second seminar was scheduled for July 2008, at which draft options would be presented, with the final report being published in early October 2008.

Mark Middleton also advised that NHPAU had still to submit their figures to Government, which will eventually feed in to the NLP study. The 2006 Household projection figures would also be released later in the year and there was an expectation that they will reveal a change in the migrant figures which may have implications for Phase 2.

RHAF were also asked to note that the figures in Phase 2 had been gathered over a long time period and it would be essential that the political and technical consensus is maintained. This was especially so, as some authorities were realising the implications posed by the Housing Green Paper figures and that massive challenges could lie ahead. Paul Williams (NHF) agreed that delivery would be challenging and highlighted the possible threat from the Community Infrastructure Fund, which had the potential to take funds from the section 106 agreements. Steve Gregory commented that all the work that has been put in over the last 4 years must not be wasted and that RHAF must continue to ensure that it focused upon the delivery of sustainable housing (i.e. not just numbers).

### **RSS Revision Phase 3:**

Mark Middleton advised that advice had now been sought from the Section 4 (4) authorities, with a deadline for responses of 25 July 2008. Following receipt of advice, Options would be developed and a Preferred Option submitted to GOWM in 2009. Regarding the timetable for Phase 3, GOWM had made it known that it would be keen to move forward as quickly as possible but the Assembly had identified this as an issue, as holding Phase 2 EiP at the same time as Phase 3 Options consultation would severely stretch officer and Stakeholders capacity. The Assembly would await a response from GOWM.

**RHAF noted the update.**

### **b) Eco-towns Consultation**

Jo Hill informed RHAF that the Government's consultation on Eco-towns was now open and asked for comment on WMRA's draft Regional response. RHAF generally supported the response but asked that paragraph 5 be re-written to strengthen the message in regards to the Regional Housing Strategy.

**It was agreed that:**

**1) Officers would forward any further comments to Jo Hill by 30 May 2008**  
[j.hill@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:j.hill@wmra.gov.uk)

## **7. Monitoring Local authority Capital Housing Allocations 07/08 and 08/11**

Emma Kiteley updated the meeting on the work in progress to finalise the monitoring of the 2007/08 outturns, relating to the use of capital housing allocations to local authorities from the Regional Housing Pot. Officers were reminded that the actual outcomes were needed to show CLG where added value from capital allocations has been achieved and that a monitoring form would be circulated. The Assembly would continue to be in close communication with CLG, to determine exactly which data would be required for monitoring 2008/11 but CLG had already stated it expected to receive a narrative along with the numbers (i.e. the story is just as important).

The Assembly would be highlighting the issue of poor conditions in the Private sector to CLG and argue that growth in equity will not alone solve the stock condition problems, which are becoming increasingly apparent.

**It was agreed that:**

**1) Officers would cascade the information regarding completion of the Monitoring form for 2007/08 to colleagues, as appropriate.**

## **8. Sub National Review**

### **a) Regional Housing Issues**

Steve Forrest informed RHAF that the circulated report had been specifically drafted for the AWM Board, to brief them on current housing issues within the West Midlands Region. The AWM Board will also be receiving reports on regional planning, transport and the environment at subsequent meetings.

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**RHAF noted the report.**

### **b) Planning Input into the SNR Consultation**

Mark Middleton advised that the West Midlands Region is hoping to submit one regional response to the SNR consultation, through the Strategic Transition Group.

**It was agreed:**

1) RHAF would forward in any comments to Mark Middleton.

## **For Information Only**

## **9. Update on sub-regional Housing Market Area Partnerships activities**

### **a. SOUTH HMA Partnership**

SHMA held a sub-regional conference on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008 to consider the future for the sub regional partnership and begin to explore the scope and possibility for building the capacity of the Partnership. Over 50 delegates attended, with most local authorities represented by their housing portfolio holders. In addition there were strategic housing managers, senior planners and

other local authority officers present. There was also representation from WMRA, AWM, GOWM, the Housing Corporation, a number of RSLs and other Agencies. The speakers included Gill Leng from HQN; Rose Poulter from AWM; Jeff Goode from Transform South Yorkshire.

SHMA Partnership meeting – SHMA Partnership meeting took place in Worcester on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008. All local authorities were represented and a number of RSLs. The meeting considered the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment; a report on the development of SHMA discussions; sub regional housing strategy and a meeting that was held with developers. The core strategic group continues to meet on a two monthly basis.

#### **b) NORTH HMA Partnership**

The North Housing Market Area Partnership Forum (wider stakeholder forum) met on the 15 May 2008 with an agenda focused on the progress being made by North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) and funding allocations made to the market area and the opportunities and implications of those allocations. The core group continues to include county council representation through Helen Trousdale and Planning and other colleagues continue to be invited as appropriate.

In regards to a work programme, concerns exist regarding housing numbers and their distribution and the potential impact of this issue upon market dynamics and population flows within the market area. The introduction of a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings system is now being taken forward and a project manager is to be seconded from Stoke to Newcastle to drive the project forward. Final work in relation to the sub-regional Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment continues and a report is due to be taken through the local authorities political decision making processes shortly, with recommendations to be implemented through a cross authority steering group. Work in relation to the impacts posed by the May local elections is also being undertaken, with local authorities considering the impact of new member representation on housing and broader regeneration issues.

#### **c) WEST HMA Partnership**

In the West, HMA Partnership activity has been shaped by the Local Government Review and the focus on preparations for Shropshire to become a unitary authority in 2009. The new staff structure is still being worked on and a draft Unitary Housing strategy is due shortly. Issues exist in relation to 2 out of the 5 Districts being stock holders and associated problems in relation to the Decent Homes standard. However, some large projects are nearing closure, with final amends to the West HMA GTAA due soon and last tweaks to the West SHMA expected imminently.

#### **d) CENTRAL HMA Partnership**

A joint Central HMA meeting was held on 2 June 2008, where the future to joint working in the future was discussed. Central HMAP members agreed that a single Central HMA Partnership should meet from Summer 2008 onwards, in recognition of the fact that the Central HMA is one economic entity and which would benefit from having a united voice. Members agreed that a strengthened voice would be of particular importance in the post SNR period and re-organisation of the existing Regional structure. Members also agreed that smaller 'Task & Finish' sub-groups would progress various aspects of their common interest and that a sub-regional Housing strategy would be developed.

**RHAF noted the sub-regional HMAP updates.**

#### **11a) Sub Regional Housing Market Assessments**

RHAF received an update on the sub regional Housing Market Assessments

- C1 –awaiting final draft end of summer
- C2 – final report challenged on some figures – not ambitious enough
- C3 – awaiting sign off
- North – signed off
- West – due to be signed off
- South – done –currently refreshing some detail and work

#### **11b) Update on Sub-Regional Housing Strategies**

GOWM is still awaiting Guidance from Government, which is due to be issued during July 2008.

#### **12. Starter Homes for Young People**

RHAF were provided with an updated version of the Starter Homes for Young People Executive Summary

**RHAF received the Summary.**

#### **13. Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF)**

Emma Kiteley updated RHAF on the CIF process that has been undertaken by a panel that comprised of WMRA's Senior Regional Advisor Housing and Strategic Transport Advisor, in conjunction with colleagues from Advantage West Midlands to identify Regional transport schemes for CIF funding. Final recommendations on priorities have been made by Olwen Dutton, Chief Executive of WMRA, delegated responsibility by the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Regional Planning Partnership (RPP), the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP), and the Regional Housing Executive (RHE).

AWM and WMRA did an appraisal of the 19 bids which had been received and judged them on criteria such as strategic fit, eligibility and deliverability.

**RHAF noted the report.**

**14. Sub-Regional roll out of the IDeA Housing Improvement Programme**

RHAF were updated on the sub-regional roll out of the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeAs) strategic housing improvement programme across the WM Region.

As a result of discussions had by WMRA, GOWM and the Housing Corporation with the IDeA during late 2007, as to how funding (provided by CLG) to improve the strategic housing function within local authorities could best be utilised within the West Midlands Region, a West Midlands strategic housing improvement programme was launched on 7 January 2008.

Subsequently, the Sub-Regional Housing Market Area Partnerships met to explore how the programme could be rolled out to each of the sub-regions / individual local authorities, with several events / activities having already being successfully delivered. Funding remained available for other authorities to use and the IDeA is welcoming expressions of interest to resource events / training within the WM Region by the end of September 2008.

Any authority interested in discussing options for IDeA support should contact Reniera O'Donnell – [reniera.odonnell@idea.gov.uk](mailto:reniera.odonnell@idea.gov.uk), tel: 020 7296 6773 or 07917 831 620.

**RHAF noted the update.**

**15. Letter from Sandwell PCT**

RHAF were provided with the written response to Sandwell PCT's letter, that had raised concerns in relation to the reduced capital allocations to Local authorities and the links between housing and health.

**RHAF noted the letter.**

**16. WMRA Housing team recruitment**

RHAF were informed the Research and Monitoring regional advisor interviews are taking place on 30 May 2008 and that the PT Housing Policy Officer vacancy would be re-advertised.

**17. AOB**

Annual Monitoring Review 2006 –Regional Housing Market Summary produced by Worcestershire County Council was made available for RHAF.

**18. Date of next RHAF meeting** – the next RHAF meeting will be held on Thursday 4 September 2008, at the Regional Partnership Centre, Birmingham.