

LEICESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC SENIOR OFFICERS' GROUP

6TH SEPTEMBER 2006

REPORT OF LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

HOUSING IN LEICESTERSHIRE

Purpose of Report

1. To consider, in the light of recent government guidance and other developments, the need for Leicestershire Together to develop a strategic approach to housing issues in Leicestershire.

Background

2. A number of recent developments are encouraging strategic consideration of housing issues in Leicestershire. These include:
 - a) The Government's revised guidance on Local Area Agreements (published in March 2006) which indicates that housing issues should be covered within the economic development block of LAAs. More specifically for areas in receipt of new growth points funding a mandatory outcome for the LAA will be to 'increase housing supply in a sustainable way'. A number of detailed mandatory indicators are set out in the revised LAA guidance;
 - b) The submission of a bid for New Growth Points Funding to support the provision of infrastructure associated with the housing provision being proposed in the Three Cities sub-regional strategy (part of the Regional plan for the East Midlands). An announcement on whether the Three Cities area bid has been successful is expected in October 2006. New Growth Points Funding will be pooled within the LAA;
 - c) The development of housing provision figures and associated policies for the Leicestershire Housing Market Area (covering Leicester and Leicestershire) which is recognised as a policy area in the Three Cities sub-regional strategy;
 - d) The establishment, by the Regional Assembly, of a Regional Housing, Planning and Transport Board to better join up regional decision making across these three key issues.
 - e) The encouragement being given to local housing authorities to move away from producing individual housing strategies in favour of developing joint sub-regional housing market strategies. In a letter to the East Midlands Regional Assembly dated 27/6/06 DCLG has set out the Assembly's regional housing responsibilities. This encourages the Assembly to update the Regional Housing Strategy and to identify sub-regional housing markets. The letter goes onto state that

'because Housing markets do not respect local authority boundaries and regions comprise many housing markets, it is essential that the Regional Housing Boards continue to identify sub-regional housing markets and work with local authorities and other key stakeholders in each sub-region to develop sub-regional housing market strategies (where appropriate). We would be happy to see local authorities moving away from producing their own housing strategies in favour of these joint strategies, and would welcome the continued support of the Boards in achieving this'.

Within the Regional Spatial Strategy (to which the Regional Housing Strategy should be closely aligned) Leicester and Leicestershire is identified as one discrete Housing Market Area. It is understood that the Regional Assembly will begin considering the review of the Regional Housing Strategy, and the nature of its sub-regional elements, in autumn 2006.

- f) The possible opportunities provided by the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant, a consultation paper on which was issued by DCLG in July 2006;
- g) The appointment of a Leicestershire & Rutland Strategic Rural Housing Officer, based at Midlands Rural Housing and funded through Defra's Social and Community Programme (which is a funding stream pooled within the LAA). This post exists to develop a more strategic approach to tackling rural housing issues in Leicestershire, and complements the work of the Leicestershire Rural Housing Enabler.

Comment

- 3. Given the above SSOG is asked to consider the benefits (or otherwise) of developing a strategic approach to housing issues in Leicestershire, and to consider how this might initially be tackled. A small time-limited task group could be set up to consider what arrangements need to be established in Leicestershire. Such a group would need to consider the role of the LAA in relation to housing issues, the extent to which any new arrangements should include, or involve close liaison with, the City Council, and how partners in Leicestershire can best influence consideration of housing issues at regional level. It might most appropriately be led by a District Council officer and linked with any existing working or liaison groups related to housing.

Recommendation

- 4. ***It is recommended that the Group considers the approach to housing issues in the LAA***

Officer to contact

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