



Regional Housing Strategies

Advice Notes

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November 2003

REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGIES ADVICE NOTES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 2003 the Government's '*Sustainable Communities Plan*' launched Regional Housing Boards – nine new structures charged with delivery of the policies set out within the Plan. These new regional bodies, responsible for the allocation of funds from the Regional Housing Pots, were each required to produce a Regional Housing Strategy – the first editions of which were submitted to ODPM in July 2003.
- 1.2 The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) has been commissioned by ODPM to evaluate the nine Regional Housing Strategies (RHSs) produced in 2003 in order to draw out some of the issues involved in their development and examples of good practice, with a view to informing the process for developing future editions of the strategies.
- 1.3 As part of the process of developing these Advice Notes, CIH undertook an evaluation of the strategies based initially on telephone interviews with many of those closely involved in the drafting/drawing up of the first strategies. The key issues and elements identified from those interviews (detailed in the phase 1 evaluation report provided to ODPM) formed the basis of a seminar involving many of those key players. These Advice Notes were produced following those discussions. CIH would like to thank all those who gave their time and thoughtful comments on this process.
- 1.4 These Advice Notes are not intended to be prescriptive by detailing a single way in which regional housing strategies should be developed and written. Rather the document is intended to provide advice and options for regions to consider, by detailing some of the issues that should be reflected upon, giving examples of good practice that emerged from the first round of strategies and providing checklists as a framework that can be used as appropriate.
- 1.5 The Advice Notes have been developed to highlight a range of issues that regions may want to consider in relation to each of the stages of the development of their strategy documents. They are based on an analysis and evaluation of how the regions have taken different pathways to resolving these issues.
- 1.6 Note: RHF is used as a general term to mean the Regional Housing Forum or other similar body in the regions, e.g. the Regional Housing Partnership in the WM, and the Regional Housing Task Group in the EM

Using the Notes

- 1.7 The Notes are divided into 3 sections covering:
- the process of developing Regional Housing Strategies (section 2);
 - the structure and content of the strategies (section 3); and
 - the monitoring arrangements and ongoing strategy development process (section 4).
- 1.8 Within each section a number of issues are identified as headlines, followed by a discussion of the differing approaches that could be taken to tackling these issues. The Notes also provide good practice and case study examples to illustrate some of those approaches, and develop some key points in detail – in many cases following further discussions with key players in the regions.
- 1.9 Where particular pathways appear to have produced positive results in terms of good practice and the effectiveness of the strategies these have been used as the basis for recommendations and checklists. The checklists have been designed to assist with the process of pulling together all the issues to be considered at the various stages of the strategy development process.

2. Processes

- 2.1 Section 2 provides guidance on the processes undertaken in developing RHSs. It covers roles and responsibilities, the process of drawing up the strategy, consultation arrangements and issues relating to the wider regional context.

Roles of different regional groups in the RHS process.

- 2.2 In each region the different organisations involved in the RHS process will take on different roles and responsibilities. There is no one correct approach but it is important to ensure that there is clarity over the structures, relationships and responsibilities of the different bodies - and that this information is clearly and widely disseminated to the stakeholders in the region.
- 2.3 Confused and/or overlapping organisational roles, responsibilities and memberships can make it more difficult to engage wider stakeholder groups – particularly tenants and residents and those outside the housing sector. It also limits the effectiveness of lobbying organisations and those charged with delivering the strategies' objectives. At the most extreme it can threaten to undermine the RHS process itself.
- 2.4 All regional partners need to be aware of how the relationships, roles and responsibilities in relation to the RHS process are working. This includes being clear about the remits of the various vehicles through which regional housing investment is prioritised, delivered and monitored. Crucially, priorities set through a robust process agreed by regional stakeholders who understand and accept their relative roles and responsibilities should be widely supported helping to ensure effective delivery of RHS objectives.

Regional Housing Boards (RHBs)

- 2.5 **RHB Roles.** The RHBs were originally established with the remit of drawing up a regional housing strategy and to make recommendations to Ministers over the regional allocation of funding. In order for these structures to develop and function effectively ODPM needs to further clarify their role, remit and powers – particularly in relation to:
- their ongoing role – is it to continue to be responsible for ensuring the production of RHSs and making resource allocation recommendations to Ministers, or is it to undertake a wider role to oversee the delivery of the strategy and the monitoring of outcomes; and
 - their relationship with the Housing Corporation - should the RHB set the RHS priorities and make specific recommendations concerning resource allocation, with the Housing Corporation ensuring delivery and monitoring outcomes or should these latter tasks also be the responsibility of the RHBs?
- 2.6 **RHB Membership.** Whilst RHBs retain responsibility for giving advice to Ministers concerning the allocation of funding within their region these structures should, as a minimum, consist of the regional commissioners (see checklist in section 2.11).
- 2.7 Beyond this core membership there is discretion concerning which organisations are invited to join the RHBs and the regions have chosen different representatives. Considerations regarding membership include:
- what is the appropriate involvement of elected members of local authorities?
 - what are the appropriate roles of professional, trade and lobbying organisations? and
 - how can the RHB gain access to the required mix of skills and expertise to complete its agreed tasks?
- 2.8 The inclusion of local authority **elected members** may bring a sense of democratic authority and accountability to the process of drafting the RHS and of setting regional priorities. It does however, raise a number of issues including who are the elected members representing on the RHB – their own local authority or the elected contingent? It is important to engage elected members not least so that the regional level strategic work is fed back into existing democratic processes. However,

there may be better ways of achieving this than having one or two members represented on the RHBs. Proper structures and support mechanisms should be in place to enable the full and effective participation of all local authority members in the process.

2.9 The inclusion of **professional/trade/lobbying bodies** raises similar questions. In some regions organisations representing key players such as housing associations (National Housing Federation) and speculative house builders (House Builders Federation) have been included on the Board, the main reason being the absence of other adequate mechanisms to engage these groups and tap into the housing market knowledge and expertise that they bring.

2.10 There are four possible approaches to ensuring the RHB has the **expertise** to make decisions and recommendations on allocations for the region:

- Inclusion of trade bodies on a broad based RHF, and ensuring its input to the RHB not only through the chair of the RHF, but through the development of a RHF technical advisory panel to the RHB.
- Where the RHF is not well developed / broad based and inclusive, the trade bodies themselves could take on a specialist advisor role to the RHB
- Inclusion of representatives of all interested trade bodies and other regional groups on the RHB, with either
 - conflict of interest declarations, or
 - limited or no voting rights, so that the board is equipped but its effectiveness and probity are not considered to be compromised.
- Splitting the RHB into an executive (commissioning bodies with full voting rights) and a working group of elected members, trade bodies etc.

2.11

Checklist: RHB Membership			
Core regional commissioners		Discretionary members	
Government Office		RHF Chair	
Housing Corporation		Elected members	
Regional Local Government Association		Trade body representatives	
Regional Development Agency			
English Partnerships			
Regional Assembly			
Regional Planning Body			

Regional Housing Forum (RHF)

2.12 **RHF Membership.** The inclusion of a wide range of regional stakeholders and interest groups within the RHF framework can lead to development of a robust awareness and understanding of housing markets operating within the region. It can also be the platform on which to widen input still further to groups with a peripheral but still important insight into the housing needs of various regional groups (e.g. through links with social services, health etc).

2.13 **RHF Role.** As a basic role the RHF should be the key consultative forums, as in this first round, because of the networks they have established.

2.14 Other functions could include:

- Clear responsibility for preparing the strategy, drawing on the wide range of expertise and individuals with an awareness and understanding of housing markets in its membership. Where the RHF has taken the lead in producing the strategy, this has enabled a wider input and involvement in the process rather than relying upon key individuals to write the strategies. It has also provided a useful separation between the drawing up of the strategy and decisions over recommendations for allocations, adding to the robustness of the process.
- The RHF could also act as a lobbying body to the RHB, based on its knowledge of the region and its wide ranging representation. This would involve having opportunity to influence the development of the strategy, but not to draft it.

- The RHF could develop as a technical advisory body to the RHB, ensuring it gains a clear and broad understanding of the region, undertaking or commissioning specific pieces of work, suggesting alternative routes for investment.

2.15 The last two proposals would ensure that the full ownership of strategy development remained with the RHB, whilst the first would utilise more fully the networks and resources of the wider group of regional stakeholders. That in turn may encourage a greater ownership of the strategy and help to secure stakeholders' roles in delivery of that strategy.

2.16 Once the role of the RHF is established, the means through which the RHB and RHF link and work together may also need to be adjusted and communicated to stakeholders.

Recommendations

- That RHBs should review the organisational arrangements and processes in their region for drawing up the strategy, undertaking consultation and making recommendations for allocations. The aim should be clarity, ownership, transparency and accountability of arrangements and a strategy that is based on robust evidence, supports the wider regional agenda and has the support of regional stakeholders.

Good Practice

- To identify the roles and responsibilities of and relationships between all organisations involved in the process and disseminate this widely.
- To consider methods to ensure the avoidance of conflicts of interest, where membership of the RHB is extensive and includes elected members and trade bodies, through:
 - Introducing declaration of interest agreements, so there is a transparency of roles on the RHB
 - Having a technical working group with members/trade body representatives etc, and an executive of commissioners
 - Allowing membership of RHB but without voting rights
 - Introduce a specialist advisor role for trade bodies
- To ensure decision-making is robust, evidence-based and transparent.

Case Study Example: London Housing Board and the Housing Forum

As one of its first actions, the London Housing Board agreed details of exactly how they intended to work alongside the Housing Forum. This was subsequently published (along with the minutes of all their meetings) on the Government Office for London website. This reduced the likelihood of confusion or disagreement at a later stage and established clear criteria for positive partnership working.

http://www.go-london.gov.uk/housing/downloads/lhb_260203_forum.pdf

Producing the strategy

Resources

2.17 Most strategies have been drawn up using consultants, although some regions have used working groups of the RHB to produce the strategy. Whichever process is used, adequate resources are needed if robust strategies are to be developed, something that should be recognised by ODPM. In many regions such as the East, the work on a regional housing strategy, which began before its requirement in the 'Sustainable Communities Plan', was funded by resources committed by key regional stakeholders (Chartered Institute of Housing, National Housing Federation, Housing Corporation etc). Government resources should be made available for regions to use to fund the on-going work of preparing and reviewing their RHS, either in-house or through a consultant as they determine.

Clarity/Dissemination

- 2.18 The strategy also needs to be clearly established as part of the wider context of regional strategies (also see sections 2.45 – 2.49 on the wider regional context). The RHB and other regional strategies should be available to the public, easy to obtain and clear to understand. A Plain English check would be helpful.

Recommendations

- That, in drawing up the strategy, there is an auditing role to ensure the goals and priorities tie in with the wider regional vision of the RES and RPG. This is perhaps an important function that Regional Assemblies can bring to the process, in their overarching strategic role in the regions.

Good Practice

- To ensure that the strategy, which is a public document, should be clear for any regional stakeholder to understand by seeking the Crystal Mark for Plain English, as London has previously done for regional housing statements.

Case Study Example: South East

The South East began their strategy by highlighting the extent to which the spatial priorities that they promote overlap with those of the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Planning Guidance and the Housing Corporation's 2003/04 Regional Investment Strategy. They outlined in the actual strategy the ways in which it complements or conflicts with the other regional strategies.

The building blocks for the RHSs

- 2.19 RHSs can be built up in a number of ways. In this round the most common approach was either through geographically defined sub-regions or through sub-groups focused on a number of key themes/priorities identified as being of importance locally, or both. RHS objectives were commonly developed from these initial themes.

Thematic groups

- 2.20 There is no one 'right' set of themes on which to build a RHS but it is important to be clear about how any region's own menu of key issues has been established – and to be similarly clear about the precise nature of the objectives arising from them.
- 2.21 Those closely involved need to consider the public nature of the RHS documents and reflect on how the themes and priorities will be understood by stakeholders. Regions should clarify the development of the themes – a critical friend would help to highlight where the objectives are too vague and require greater definition in order to be properly understood and actioned.
- 2.22 Development of the strategy through themes allows stakeholders to be engaged at their point of interest, regardless of where they are based within the region.

Geographical sub-regions

- 2.23 There was wide and varied opinion as to the usefulness or otherwise of some of the geographical sub-regions used in generating the strategies. Some issues are found at a lower level than sub-regions, housing markets can cross sub regional boundaries, and government initiatives such as the growth areas and Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders all challenge the capacity of sub

regions to develop and deliver the foundations for the strategy. Again in some cases the objectives they developed were vague, and require greater definition as above in relation to the audience's understanding.

2.24 Sub-regions provide a useful structure:

- Where they add value to regional work, bringing greater and clearer definition to key issues by joint research/analysis and co-operative working
- Where the sub-regions involve active stakeholders and are given real responsibility, in strategic development
- Where the sub-regions are well developed to enable delivery through them for example devolved decision making at this level as in Yorkshire and Humberside.

2.25 They are less useful where:

- They become entrenched to the exclusion of doing important co-operative work across other local authority boundaries
- They lack clear purpose
- The division into sub-regions hinders understanding of housing markets that cross authorities and boundaries
- The divisions differ from those of Regional Development Agency and Regional Planning Body sub-regions and this leads to difficulty in aligning the goals of the different strategies.

Recommendations

- That regions should be clear about the rationale behind their approach – whether they use sub-regions or themes or both as the building blocks for the strategy, as this affects the shape of the strategy, and the methods for stakeholder to engage in the process.
- That, where RHB sub-regions do not align with those of the Regional Development Agency and Regional Planning Body, there should be some consideration of how the potential difficulties in aligning strategies will be addressed.

Good Practice

- To involve a 'critical friend' provides a helpful test when drawing up the strategy.

Case Study Example: East of England sub-regional structures

The formation of the 10 sub-regions in the East came about from various routes. In some cases such as around Cambridge local authorities had already recognised the need and begun cross boundary work. In other cases, the sub regional structures were suggested for the purposes of drafting the RHS and could be revised depending on how well the working arrangements develop. There is a formal process tying the sub regions to the wider regional structure through representatives of each sub region having a place on the RHF.

Case Study Example: North West

The North West has a sub regional Local Strategic Partnership and Supporting People Strategy, but otherwise regional strategies such as the Regional Planning Guidance refer to the urban belt – Merseyside to Manchester etc. The other recognised sub-regions are counties or groups of counties, which are purely administrative, not reflecting the reality of markets. (For example the Manchester and Salford Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder did not follow boundaries but cut across local authority boundaries). The RHB took the view that it would be better to concentrate on themes that would help encourage partnership. So, Manchester and Salford work together on low demand whilst Stockport and Trafford focus on problems of high demand.

This approach worked regionally to achieve strategic outcomes although there is an arguable case that Cumbria is a sub-region on its own on the basis that it is geographically isolated and is the only area where the themes are not distinct to a particular area – i.e. it has the problems (themes) of high and low demand side by side (West Coast / National Park). Across the rest of the region it is predominantly one or the other. This has been accepted to a certain degree in the RHS

Information and research

- 2.26 The quality of RHSs depends partly on the quality of data available. There is a lack of data available at the regional and sub-regional levels because there has not before been the requirement to produce it.

Existing information sources

- 2.27 Information needs vary from region to region, but there are some common requirements. Some of the common sources of existing data are identified in the checklist below and should include housing-related as well as purely housing data. However, current data is of variable quality and regions should be aware of the limitations of the different sources. For example, individual local authority housing needs studies frequently use different methodologies and are likely to contain inconsistent data – making it difficult to successfully aggregate them to form a regional or sub-regional understanding of housing need. Different approaches are also taken to stock condition surveys.

Checklist: Existing Information Sources			
LA/HA housing needs/demands studies covering all tenures		Specially commissioned housing market studies (for example covering sub-regions, neighbourhoods or specific client groups)	
LA/HA stock condition surveys for social rented and private sector stock		ONS regions in figures, and data on housing at a regional level	
HIP data - ODPM			
Dwelling stock tables – covering tenure, gains and losses etc) ODPM			
Census information			
House Price Index by region			
Social housing figures including homeless statistics - ODPM			

Gaps in information and research

- 2.28 The RHBs need to identify gaps in their information and research and consider how these can be bridged. Common information gaps that have been identified include:
- BME housing needs and aspirations
 - Needs of homeless and asylum seekers
 - Supported housing issues
 - Migration patterns
 - Stock condition (particularly private housing)
 - Housing aspirations
 - Private rented sector
 - Private housing generally

New responsibilities for RHBs

- 2.29 A recent consultation on Planning Policy Guidance note 3 (PPG3) on housing, proposed that the "RHBS should coordinate a programme of housing needs assessments to be undertaken by constituent local authorities and maintain consistency of approach". It also suggests that the assessments might be best conducted at the sub-regional level to allow coverage of housing markets areas that cross administrative boundaries.
- 2.30 ODPM is starting work on updating the current guidance on housing needs assessments to take on board the operation of the whole housing market. This will assist the RHBs in coordinating these programmes and achieve better data, but will not be immediately available.
- 2.31 The Audit Commission's CPA processes will need to be revised so that local authorities are not penalised for undertaking assessments of housing markets jointly with other authorities rather than individually. ODPM may need to make this case to the Audit Commission.

Information collection and use

- 2.32 It is doubtful that any region will have all the information it needs to develop and update its housing strategy in a comprehensive fashion. In any case, it is expected that the ODPM work on housing needs assessments may identify some requirements for information that are not currently collected. Researchers and other experts should be involved in identifying the key information requirements, as well as ODPM, the RHBs and the Regional Planning Bodies.
- 2.33 It will be necessary to review information requirements at different spatial levels to inform future RHSs and to put in place mechanisms for collecting information that can be used for research to underpin the strategies. In this way the complex interplay of factors on housing markets will be better understood.
- 2.34 ODPM could facilitate this by revisiting the way it gathers and analyses data to see if there are any ways in which better regional data-sets can be created. There may be a role for the Regional Observatories or other regional research groups to continuously collate and make relevant data available. Also, more consistent data would be generated if local authorities could agree on common formats for data collection.
- 2.35 Regional Planning Bodies will need to be involved in identifying the regions' information and research needs, as they also have responsibilities for assessing housing requirements of the entire market. It is important that the content of RHSs and Regional Planning Guidance is coordinated (over time) to avoid contradictions and overlaps.
- 2.36 Continuous data collection would provide the best data-sets from which research could be undertaken and updated and would allow trends to be tracked more easily.
- 2.37 The Housing Corporation is developing a Geographical Information System (GIS) which may be able to provide key information which the regions can then analyse and use to underpin their strategies. This should be made available in an accessible format to inform the RHSs.

2.38 Collection and analysis of data are resource-intensive activities. An expanded information and research programme will need to be properly funded.

Recommendations

- That regional and local bodies should consider how they can develop systems and common procedures for data collection on a continuous basis.
- That Regional Planning Bodies should be involved in developing information systems and undertaking research to ensure better coordination of RHSs and Regional Planning Guidance.
- That robust and consistent methodologies are developed for understanding housing markets and assessing the full range of housing requirements that can read across all regional strategies.
- Regional bodies should undertake and maintain an audit of information and make this available to all stakeholders.

Good Practice

- To complete and maintain an audit of the information available within a region.
- To identify which organisation will be responsible for providing and analysing what data and develop processes to ensure this happens regularly.
- To make use of housing related as well as housing data (for example economic information).
- To identify information gaps and develop an ongoing shared programme of research to fill them.
- To consider jointly commissioning research work to shape and inform RHSs (for example, in partnership with the Regional Development Agency or through a coalition of local authorities).
- To ensure that the various regionally based strategies (RHS, Regional Planning Guidance, Regional Economic Strategy etc) are built up from a consistent or shared evidence base.
- To make effective use of tools such as GIS and information management systems to analyse data.
- To develop a consistent methodology for collecting core demand/supply data across local authorities
- To resource the central collection and analysis of data at the regional level.

Case Study Example: East of England's work on housing needs methodologies

The East Region has highlighted the need to have a robust and consistent methodology for housing needs. Work has begun in the London Commuter Belt to develop one, aiming to produce empirical evidence and robust information to help planning for the future. It will encompass the changing nature of housing need, balancing needs and aspirations, property types and tenures etc. Potentially, it will look at information at ward level, so that it can be joined up usefully with other social and economic data at that level to produce a coherent picture that can also be effectively aggregated to a sub-regional level. Procurement of the study through a partnering approach will enable the development of ongoing information tracking changing trends and support an effective response to those changes.

Case Study Example: London Region's future research programme

London has an action plan, with 65 individual action points. As a number of these involve conducting research to inform future investment decisions, with a host of agencies involved, they decided that it was essential to coordinate their activities in some way. The various stakeholder organisations of the Board and Forum therefore periodically share details of research activities that they are each planning to conduct. The extent to which this knowledge-sharing can be described as a 'joint' or even 'coordinated' research programme remains unclear, as decisions about what to study still seem to be taken by individual organisations.

Case Study Example: North East plans for future work

The North East consultation process revealed several key areas with gaps in research and a robust evidence base to impact the RHS and the RHB is looking at the most effective ways to address these, to inform future RHS. They are looking to increase the capacity of the RHB to develop its sub groups through which, working with partners, it can coordinate research – in particular by identifying more specifically what knowledge is missing, the most effective means to address that, and how to resource the work required.

Consultation

2.39 Effective consultation is an important element of the RHS development process. It involves information and opinion gathering, information giving and specific feedback to consultees to encourage continued commitment to the process. Wide and inclusive consultation requires time and is resource intensive even when using existing networks.

2.40 It is also important that consultation provides the context in which local housing strategies can inform and align with the wider regional housing context.

Purpose and methodology for consultation

2.41 Regions need to be clear about what they want to achieve through consultation at any given point in the process. That will then establish the extent and purpose of that consultation, whether it is:

- To set the regional priorities
- To shape the vision or
- To comment on the priorities and vision already set
- To bring in stakeholders and encourage ownership and ultimately delivery of the strategy.

2.42 Once this has been identified, consultation should be planned rather than allowed to evolve, to ensure it achieves those ends. Clarification of the purposes will also help to ensure that consultation moves beyond bland statements to which everyone can agree, and allow debate and decisions to be made on some of the more difficult issues.

2.43 The scope of the consultation needs to be thought through in terms of the groups that should be reached and the best methods to achieve that, in particular groups that are traditionally hard to

reach for consultation. There is likely to be a need to build the capacity of potential consultees to contribute to the process in some instances.

- 2.44 Regions also need to consider if and how they will demonstrate the results of consultation. This is important to ensure that consultees remain engaged in the process, seeing that consultation is not tokenistic, but has value.

Recommendations

- That the RHB/RHF should establish a framework for consultation establishing:
 - The roles of the various housing bodies in the process of drafting the strategy
 - The responsibilities of the different regional groups in the process of consultation
 - A timetable identifying the phases of strategy development and the opportunities and means to engage and give views
 - Methods and techniques that will be used, giving particular consideration to gaining the input of hard to reach groups
 - Identify how the tracking of consultation responses will be done and made available to consultees, to ensure they are kept informed and engaged in the process

Good Practice

- To make consultation open and inclusive, encompassing a wide range of stakeholders, including tenants and residents. Feedback should be encouraged at as many stages in the process as possible, and through a wide range of methods, to enable maximum opportunity for stakeholders to engage.
- To start consultation early in the process, allowing the framework of the strategy to be set by stakeholders – where possible as a starting point for the wider regional agenda, to ensure that it also ties effectively into the wider regional context.
- To use existing mechanisms or networks where possible, including non housing ones, such as health and social services. Use of the RHF usually ensures the inclusion of voluntary groups and wider professionals such as planners, and tenants representatives.
- To seek input actively, rather than calling people to meetings, particularly for special interest or hard to reach groups.
- To hold meetings on both a geographical and thematic basis, to engage people at their level of concern or interest.
- To gain a wide input from residents, consider using surveys in addition to invitations to meetings, and inviting tenants and residents to be representatives on RHF's.
- To develop a system to track consultation suggestions, so that consultees can see the impact, and understand where the suggestions are not applied

Case study Example: West Midlands

In order to show the impact of the various responses from consultation, the West Midlands produced a paper, assimilating the various points, advising how these had been used to shape the final strategy, and where the points would influence the next steps to be taken following on from the strategy, which included seminars on key topics such as affordability, design, etc.

Case Study Example: South East

The South East listed all written respondents to the draft strategy in the final document, which acknowledges the contribution of these organisations and may encourage others to respond in future. It also holds the Board and Forum to account, as it reflects the success, or otherwise, of their consultation.

Case Study Example: North East

A feature of the North East's process was to organise themed consultation events centred on major issues such as planning, the economy, community and voluntary, rural and health issues for invited groups to discuss. The discussions were developed into focused reports, which fed directly into the RHS. This was considered a strong and successful feature of the process and may be repeated for future strategies.

The Wider Regional Context

- 2.45 RHSs are set within an already established regional strategic context, key influences of which are the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance. These strategies must share an overarching vision and common goals for the region and together give the direction and means by which regional stakeholders will work towards that vision.

Roles of the various regional groups

- 2.46 The RHBs are required to develop what should be essentially the housing element of a broad regional strategy. It is therefore important that regions consider how best to:
- Incorporate the expertise of the Regional Planning Body and Regional Development Agency to inform the RHS process and ensure a coherent regional approach and vision. Representatives are included on the RHB, but where others – for example, the RHF – are involved in developing the strategy, it is important to ensure that officers of the Regional Planning Body and Regional Development Agency are also involved. The effectiveness of joint working is influenced by the levels at which interaction takes place. Ideally it should take place at operational and development level, and at the executive level to ensure that funding decisions are also linked in.
 - Develop robust information gathering and research on housing needs and other related housing information to inform the RHS, the Regional Planning Guidance and the Regional Economic Strategy through, for example, joint working groups and joint commissioning of regional research (also see sections 2.26 to 2.38 on information and research).
- 2.47 The Government departments, including OPDM, should consider how the timetables for reviewing the different regional strategies link together, so that strategic directions taken in developing one strategy can be effectively fed through to the others. The Public Inquiry system for Regional Planning Guidance may make this difficult. However, it is very important that there is a circular process of development with each strategy informing and building on the others, with adjustments being made to coordinate the different elements of regional strategy.
- 2.48 The Regional Development Agencies have nationally set targets none of which require them to consider housing and this has worked against efforts to make housing markets more sustainable in some regions. The preparation of the RHS has been a catalyst for developing connections

between the strategies but Government Departments, including ODPM, should also review all nationally set regional targets to ensure they work together to achieve wider regional objectives.

- 2.49 In some areas the housing figures generated for the RHS did not match those in the Regional Planning Guidance, reflecting both the different methodologies used to derive housing requirements, and the fact that housing markets have changed since the Regional Planning Guidance was produced. The challenge that this has posed has been helpful to highlight issues and will eventually develop better strategic outcomes at the regional level. RHBs and Regional Planning Bodies should work closely together when deriving requirements for new housing, as well as the requirement for demolition and market restructuring.
- 2.50 Regions also need to consider the wider policy environment and how best to influence it. For example, Community Plans drawn up by Local Strategic Partnerships need to be harmonious with regional goals. The importance of wide and inclusive consultation, and the role of RHF, could be a means for addressing this.

Recommendations

- That mechanisms are established to help bring about an understanding of the interaction necessary between the strategies to deliver the overarching regional vision and linked goals and objectives
- That a circular process is developed so that the Regional Economic Strategy, focusing on economic growth, RHS setting housing goals in the light of that growth, and Regional Planning Guidance setting out the spatial strategy underpinning this, can coordinate and reinforce each other, minimising conflicts
- That Regional Assemblies take on the role of auditing regional strategies to ensure they work towards a shared regional vision and that any conflicts are understood and resolved, as part of wider work towards integrating the regional strategies

Good Practice

- To initiate joint working and research to look at the linkages between the strategies to set an overall regional vision
- To link priorities and actions directly between the regional strategies to achieve a shared regional vision
- To set timetables for review of strategies that facilitates joint working on research/information to inform strategies
- To obtain agreement between economic development, housing and planning on the assessment of housing need
- To involve planning, housing and economic specialists at RHB and RHF, to help the integration of strategic vision and objectives

Case Study Example: East Midlands Regional Integrated Strategy.

In 1999 the East Midlands Regional Assembly undertook research into policy development in the region. It found that there was no agreed regional vision or set of objectives, no links made across strategies, and that the targets they expressed were nationally rather than regionally generated.

The response was to set up a Policy Forum to lead on preparation of the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS). As a starting point, an agreed regional vision and 18 sustainable development objectives (covering economic, social, environmental and spatial aspects) have been set.

All regional strategies (including housing) are developed as component parts of the IRS, driven by the common set of objectives against which they are appraised. Those drafting the strategies are encouraged to make horizontal links to all other component strategies and to take account of sub regional and local issues. Likewise action plans to implement the strategies have to make clear the action at sub-regional and local levels, and the strategies' performance indicators contribute to high level indicators to measure sustainable development.

Further details and the full IRS can be located at <http://www.eastmidlandsassembly.org.uk/>

Case Study Example: Yorkshire and Humber – Report on Links and Consistency between regional strategies.

Yorkshire Forward, the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Development Agency, commissioned work by the Universities of Hull and Leeds Metropolitan into the consistencies and potential tensions between the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Planning Guidance and the Regional Housing Statement as it then was. This research involved a desk top review, interviews with stakeholders, and review of practices elsewhere.

The research found many areas of consistency, and even where there was the potential for tension, acknowledged this would depend on how the policies within the strategies were actioned.

However, within that positive picture, concerns over the different professional cultures were raised, and an apparent lack of understanding and dialogue between professional groups. There was a danger of pursuing individual goals and visions, due to a lack of common objectives and partnership working, and resolution of the tensions between sub-regional and regional strategies. A key way of moving forward and resolving such tensions suggested was through the development of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework as the foundation document or alternatively the development of an Integrated Regional Strategy.

Case Study Example: East of England: joint commissioning of affordability study

Recognition of the need for joint working and a cross organisational approach to regional issues in the East crystallised when it came to light that 4 separate regional organisations intended to undertake studies into housing needs and particularly affordable housing need, through the presence of key representatives on the RHF. Instead, the organisations together funded and commissioned one study to inform both the Regional Planning Guidance and RHS. The success of this has increased awareness of the need to continue and develop housing and planning links in particular, due to the interrelationship of the strategies and the impact of one upon the other. The main regional organisations were thus consciously working to make these links when the '*Sustainable Communities Plan*' and establishment of the RHBs were announced.

3. Structure and Content

- 3.1 Section 3 covers the structure and broad content of the RHSs. It is not concerned with the extent to which a given region has or has not correctly identified the most pressing housing priorities in its area but looks at the value of including key elements such as vision statements and action plans.

Vision

- 3.2 The term 'vision statement' has become a somewhat devalued term over recent years. It is, though, important that RHSs provide a clear statement about how they see the future of their region developing - what it is aiming for and how it intends to bring about the necessary changes to reach that point. However difficult, it is also suggested that this vision should cover the medium and longer term as well as the short-term. This enables all stakeholders to understand how they can participate in the growth and development of their area and helps to ensure that the activities of a wide range of organisations are all pulling in the same direction. Where no such vision exists, developments can occur which do not add to the effective economic growth of or to the development of sustainable communities within the region.

How to develop an effective and inclusive vision

- 3.3 Different approaches can be taken to the development of vision statements. Each region should consider how they go about adopting their vision. In essence visions can be determined by:
- wide and open consultation;
 - adoption of the wider strategic vision already set in the Regional Economic Strategy; and/or
 - the use of national targets.
- 3.4 **Wide and open consultation.** (Also see sections 2.39 to 2.44 on consultation). ODPM timeframes for the first round of RHSs limited regions' ability to develop a vision through wide and open consultation. However, some regions succeeded and this approach may be a way forward for future editions of the documents. Consideration should be given as to how to ensure that any vision developed is tied into those encompassed within the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance. One method of achieving this may be to develop an overarching vision for regional development and growth that encompasses the economic, spatial and housing elements. This will obviously be time consuming and will need to involve strategic players from the Regional Development Agencies, Regional Planning Bodies and RHB/RHF, and possibly others too.
- 3.5 Taking a consultative approach has its own risks – that of ensuring that the vision remains effective and meaningful. There is always the possibility that vision statements can become broad banal statements that mean all things to all people.
- 3.6 **Adoption of the wider strategic vision.** Regions may decide that, to ensure consistency, the RHS vision needs to reflect those already developed through the Regional Economic Strategy and/or Regional Planning Guidance processes. Setting the RHS vision in this way calls for a long term regional vision to be developed and, could be seen as restricting the freedom of the housing sector to determine its priorities. Any such loss of freedom should, however, be weighed against the benefits of having a RHS, Regional Economic Strategies and Regional Planning Guidance driving towards common overarching goals.
- 3.7 **National targets.** It is important that ODPM makes clear to what extent it expects the RHS vision and objectives to incorporate national policies and targets (for example, those contained within the '*Sustainable Communities Plan*'). Given experience from the first editions of the RHS many regions will seek the flexibility to determine a slightly different set of priorities for their area as defined by central government and, on the assumption that this approach will continue, the RHBs need to know the implications of so doing.

Recommendations

- That RHSs include a long term (20-30) year vision for their region.
- That RHBs should agree the approach they intend to adopt for developing their vision.
- That RHS visions should be aligned with those included in the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance for the area and be well articulated.
- That RHS visions should take account of national targets and policies.

Good Practice

- To ensure that the RHS contains a long-term vision for housing in the region.
- To involve a broad set of stakeholders in developing this vision to maximise buy-in – including the private sector and traditionally hard to reach groups.
- To resource the consultation process, including capacity building activities.
- To provide an accessible prospectus outlining the options available in the region and the resources available for allocation to encourage participation in the vision creation process.
- To ensure synergy with the housing visions contained within the Regional Economic Strategy / Regional Planning Guidance.
- To reflect government policy and national targets within the overall vision for the region.

Case Study Example: West Midlands

The West Midlands facilitated the integration of housing and economic priorities and targets by integrating officers of the Regional Development Agency on the RHF, as well as on the RHB.

Case Study Example: North West

The North West vision was tied into the Regional Economic Strategy and the priorities identified reflect directly back to the priorities set in that strategy.

Key topics

- 3.8 Although the precise content of each RHS will vary it must comprehensively cover the full housing picture within its area if it is to be robust. A checklist of those topics that are most commonly neglected and therefore warrant specific consideration include:

Checklist: Frequently neglected topics			
Supply/demand issues across all tenures (including owner occupation, private rented and different types of affordable housing)		Specific housing issues (including supported housing, lifetime homes, eco-friendly homes)	
Property condition (including decency) across all tenures		Asylum seekers and refugees	
Rural and urban housing issues		BME housing needs	
Demographic patterns and projections		Homelessness	
Housing aspirations		Sources of funding – in addition to HIP and ADP – across all tenures (covering revenue / capital need & availability)	

Incorporating private sector housing issues

- 3.9 RHBs should ensure that their RHSs incorporate strategies for private as well as social rented sector housing, including:

- Strategies for improving private sector housing (through private sector housing renewal programmes, clearance and encouraging owners to invest in their own dwellings);
- Strategies for delivering new private housing to meet regional population projections and economic forecasts (including the need for different types of market, and affordable and key worker housing) – this is likely to overlap with the content of Regional Planning Guidance and should be coordinated with it;
- land supply and planning issues – also part of the remit of Regional Planning Guidance; and
- the nature and extent of the private rented sector (including revenue funding issues).

Meeting needs of the whole community

- 3.10 It will also be important for RHBs to ensure that they engage a range of special needs and community groups in the development of the RHSs in order to evolve an understanding of the needs and aspirations of BME communities, refugees, asylum seekers, groups with support needs and those experiencing homelessness. Applying some form of ‘diversity proofing’ to the process of drawing up the RHSs may be beneficial.
- 3.11 In relation to supported housing, ODPM should consider how current funding arrangements for Supporting People are impacting on the regions’ capacity to plan for regional needs, and ensure revenue funding is secured in the long term to support plans for capital investment. ODPM should aim to give guidance on the links between the RHS and the Supporting People framework. Regions also need to build up to regionally agreed strategies from the local Supporting People strategies currently being developed.

Rural issues

- 3.12 The government already seeks to ensure that all strategies are automatically rural-proofed, including RHS, although full rural proofing was not widely achieved on this occasion. The Countryside Agency is producing a tool to help this process. Achieving this in a meaningful manner can be an expensive and time consuming process so will need to be adequately resourced.

Recommendations

- That RHSs should provide a robust analysis of all key elements of the housing market within their area.
- That rural and diversity proofing be built into the process of drawing up the RHSs.
- That resource support be identified to undertake rural and diversity proofing.
- That regions to develop strategies for addressing the needs and aspirations of homeless people, people from BME groups, refugee and asylum seekers
- That local Supporting People strategies are tied into the wider regional picture to inform and develop greater understanding of supported housing
- That resources are provided for capacity building to ensure participation of rural stakeholders, BME groups and other hard to reach groups such as asylum seekers / refugees / homeless people / those fleeing domestic violence etc.

Good Practice

- To ensure RHSs cover private sector housing issues properly
- To ensure RHSs pay particular attention to topics that may otherwise be neglected.

Case Study Example: West Midlands Regional Supporting People Strategy.

The RHS acknowledged the need to develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the requirement for supported housing across the West Midlands, and outline work was undertaken in 2002/03 to attempt to create a Regional Supporting People Strategy. Whilst this did not occur due to lack of time and resources, it is to be progressed, aided by some funding from the Regional Housing Pot. It is to provide a planning framework for the region, integrating and informing regional strategic planning across housing, support, care, health, social inclusion and community safety agendas. Protocols and agreements to support Supporting People delivery at regional and local levels will also be developed. The Regional Housing Partnership along with other affected agencies will endorse it, tying it directly into the delivery of the regional priorities and effectively informing the development of future RHS.

Case Study Example: North West

In the North West, a formal rural proofing toolkit and 'integrated appraisal toolkit' developed by the assembly was used.

Priorities

Precedence of national or regional priorities

- 3.13 RHBs and regional players need to know whether the purpose of the RHS is to act primarily as a delivery vehicle for nationally set priorities, ensuring they are delivered in a way best suited to the region, or whether the RHSs will provide a means to ensure that national priorities are built up from robustly researched regional priorities. ODPM needs to make clear how it sees this balance adjusting in the future, and in particular to let the regions know if there is room for negotiation on any of the national priorities.
- 3.14 In particular, it would be helpful if ODPM could make clear the balance between national and regional targets and the level of discretion, if any, that the regions have in addressing initiatives in ways that may better reflect regional patterns and methods of approach. There is a case for giving greater regional autonomy where the RHBs can demonstrate effective delivery and outcomes.
- 3.15 National initiatives such as the Growth Areas and Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders cut across regional and sub-regional boundaries, and create tensions. Area based initiatives operate more effectively where the wider regional influences impacting them can be understood, and the RHSs can provide that framework.
- 3.16 The strategies of the three regions making up the Greater South East were rewritten by ODPM to incorporate the Government target for key workers. Likewise, the East Midlands had to reconsider its recommendations over HIP allocations. A better way forward would be for ODPM to advise the regions on areas that are not negotiable to ensure that this does not recur in future rounds.

Good Practice

- To ensure, within the context of a clear understanding of precedence, that priorities set in the strategy are clear, owned by those delivering them, appropriate for the region and help to deliver national targets.
- To develop unambiguous priorities that give a clear steer for investment and development
- To set priorities that deliver the strategic vision and that are clearly built from the evidence base
- To ensure a clear structuring of priorities, so that within the context of limited resources the primary priorities are clear
- To use crosscutting thematic goals and geographical areas to define priorities
- To tie in RHB priorities to those set in other regional strategies

Action Plans

- 3.17 Having established a set of clear priorities, a robust and effective RHS should also incorporate a detailed action plan. Whilst the precise nature of such a plan will vary it is likely to incorporate a list of discreet activities / action points, together with identified agencies responsible for their delivery and agreed timescales. Action plans are a key tool for the monitoring of the delivery and effectiveness of the RHS.

Ownership and delivery

- 3.18 Ideally, an action plan should incorporate elements that assist with delivering and measuring both outputs, and wide ranging outcomes of the strategy – i.e. the bigger aims and objectives of the strategy.
- 3.19 An effective action plan, and the potential to deliver it, requires ownership of the strategy by key agencies and stakeholders as partners accepting their responsibility to deliver it. The regions need to consider how best to achieve this. At a minimum, it will be necessary to involve all the affected stakeholders when assigning actions.
- 3.20 As the process of developing the regional strategy matures, and relationships between stakeholders established, action plans should be able to become much more detailed and specific in identifying the delivery agents.
- 3.21 ODPM also needs to consider its role in supporting regions to achieve this. In particular the remit and extent of autonomy for RHBs needs to be considered and made clear. Where the RHS is primarily about delivering national priorities in the regions, ODPM and RHBs may struggle to achieve that wider support and commitment to deliver. Where the RHB and RHS can focus on delivery of regional priorities, the ownership is likely to be more extensive.

Recommendations

- That RHSs include detailed action plans, drawn up in conjunction with stakeholders.

Good Practice

- To ensure RHSs incorporate detailed action plans.
- To ensure that the activities detailed in action plans can be linked to the vision / objectives / priorities previously identified in the RHS.
- To identify organisations involved in delivery and, where appropriate, a responsible agency for all activities.
- To identify timescales and resources for all activities
- To produce action points that are measurable in terms of timeframe and outcome
- To ensure that each action point has an identified agency or agencies to complete it
- To develop action points that are easy to track and monitor
- To use a critical friend to assess how clear the strategy is in terms of direction, and steer for investment

4. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

- 4.1 Section 4 provides advice on the monitoring element of the RHSs (including the development of effective monitoring arrangements), together with consideration of ongoing strategy development.
- 4.2 Such monitoring will be essential both to demonstrate the effective delivery of RHS objectives and to provide crucial feedback to inform subsequent editions of the strategy documents. It may also be the case that future resource allocation decisions are based in part on the successful delivery of agreed programmes.
- 4.3 It will be useful to establish a baseline position from which progress can be measured. If this was not possible in advance of the first round of RHSs it may still be worth completing before the second editions are developed.

Who does the monitoring?

- 4.4 The RHBs have not been explicitly commissioned by ODPM to undertake the monitoring of the delivery of the RHS. For the time being current monitoring arrangements through both the nine Government Offices in the Regions and the Housing Corporation's regional offices will continue, in addition to any monitoring undertaken by the RHBs.
- 4.5 Whilst it is important that regions do not experience an onerous increase in monitoring requirements it is also important that sufficient monitoring is undertaken to ensure the effective tracking of the delivery of the RHSs – and that this monitoring is pulled together by one agency with overall responsibility for the RHS.
- 4.6 It is therefore recommended that ODPM makes clear the nature of the ongoing role and responsibilities of the RHBs as well as those of the Government Offices and Housing Corporation for delivery, data collection, monitoring and progression of RHSs.
- 4.7 It is further recommended that the RHBs specify which organisations will be responsible for which aspects of RHS monitoring to avoid duplication of effort and make effective use of existing arrangements. It may also be advisable to nominate one organisation to act as the responsible agency for pulling together all monitoring information and for feeding this data back into the strategy development process.
- 4.8 Regions may want to consider the use of their Regional Assembly as the responsible agency in this context.

What to monitor?

- 4.9 It is suggested that the RHS should specify the outputs and outcomes that will be monitored to demonstrate delivery. It is important that these are clear and explicit so that all involved in the process know their role in delivery and what is required of them.
- 4.10 Broader outcomes are harder to monitor than outputs but however problematic, this activity is essential if the true impact of the RHSs is to be assessed. Monitoring of outcomes is important to assess whether they are actually achieving the overall objectives and vision for the region or, if not, triggers investigation into where the process is failing.
- 4.11 There are a number of strands of outcome/output monitoring including that of:
- actual investment against the agreed priority areas and the identified scale;
 - the activities/timescales of identified agencies against the action plan; and
 - the wider strategic overview to ensure that all the individual investment decisions work towards the overall delivery of the broad strategic objectives specified in the RHS.
- 4.12 It is also important that ODPM makes clear at the earliest possible stage in the process what specific aspects of delivery it expects to be monitored, so that this can be factored into the arrangements.

How to monitor?

- 4.13 The starting point for all regions is to be aware of what monitoring is already being undertaken by whom, how effective it is and how useful it would be in meeting the specific monitoring requirements of the RHSs. Where a RHS output / outcome is not currently being monitored arrangements should be agreed to collect and evaluate this data.
- 4.14 There are 3 potential routes that the responsible agency can consider to monitor delivery and to inform the ongoing development of the next strategy:
- The use of existing mechanisms such as the monitoring of local authority HIP data and Housing Corporation ADP returns. Where such existing mechanisms are used, it will be important for the responsible agency to assess how effective this is in monitoring the delivery of the RHS objectives. Where there are gaps, it will be necessary to negotiate additional elements to the monitoring requirements. The strengths of this approach are that it will be relatively easy (and cost effective) to establish the weaknesses include possible gaps and a lack of integration with other regional strategies.
 - The development of a new monitoring framework that is integrated with those already used by other organisations in connection with their regional strategies. Regional Assemblies may play a useful role here. As the RHSs develop, it may be that regions will gradually move towards an integrated framework over time, particularly if they can focus more on the delivery of regionally established priorities rather than wider national priorities.
 - The development of a new monitoring framework based on the building blocks established to develop the RHS – whether spatial sub-regions or thematic sub-groups. This approach would be dependant on the responsibility for monitoring resting with the RHB itself and therefore on clarity from ODPM concerning the role and remit of the RHB (see 4.6 above).
- 4.15 The monitoring of outcomes may require a different approach from that of monitoring outputs such as use of Mori polls to ascertain residents' views. The key is to adapt the methodology best suited to robustly assess the outcome in question.

Reporting and Using the Monitoring Information

- 4.16 Finally it will be important to clarify how the monitoring information will be reported, made public and used.
- 4.17 The aims of the strategy, and the progress being made in delivering them could be made accessible to stakeholders, including tenants and residents through an annual summary and /or a website. This will also increase the profile and accountability of the RHBs and partners in delivering objectives that impact the region, and increase regional buy-in and accountability.
- 4.18 Effective monitoring is fundamental to equip RHBs to assess whether outputs are achieving the desired outcomes set in the strategy, and to enable changes where it is not being delivered. It also provides the base from which to assess whether the outcomes are still appropriate or need to be modified due to changes in the region, in housing markets etc, to facilitate the process of ongoing strategy development.
- 4.19 The ongoing strategy development process also needs to be underpinned by establishing the continuous process of information collection and analysis to understand and track trends that impact housing markets and needs.

Recommendations

- That on-going monitoring arrangements are put in place by RHBs both to measure the progress of RHSs in delivering their objectives and to inform the development of subsequent strategies

Good Practice

- To establish a baseline data-set from which to measure progress in delivering RHS objectives.
- To agree and specify within the RHS which outputs and outcomes will be monitored.
- To agree and specify within the RHS the nature of this monitoring (including methods to be used).
- To agree and specify within the RHS which organisations will contribute to the data collection / monitoring and which will take overall responsibility for collecting, analysing and reporting this information.
- To agree and specify within the RHS what monitoring information will be made public, when and in what formats (including appropriate translations).
- To make key monitoring information available on relevant websites.
- To collect and use qualitative as well as quantitative monitoring data.
- To build in funding to elicit regular customer feedback.
- To make use of existing data and monitoring mechanisms where possible but arrange for any data gaps to be filled by new monitoring arrangements.
- To consider integrating RHS monitoring with the monitoring undertaken for other regional strategies.
- To involve existing spatial or thematic sub-groups to undertake monitoring.
- To ensure appropriate equality and diversity monitoring is undertaken.
- To ensure that monitoring information is used to inform subsequent strategies.

Case Study Example: East Midlands

The East Midlands are developing Delivery Agreements with local authorities to track use of HIP; this could be extended and developed into agreements on the use and tracking delivery of investment from the Regional Housing Pot.

Case Study Example: South West

In the South West the agencies that will spend the Regional Housing Pot (the Housing Corporation, and local authorities via the Government Office in the region) will produce a Spending Statement for the South West Regional Housing Body, although how these will inform and influence future strategies is still to be developed.