
PARTNERSHIP REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council has a programme to review its major partnerships with approximately five reviews carried out each year. This report presents Members with the results of the review of the Thames Gateway South Essex Housing Strategy Forum carried out during 2007/08.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The review considered four key components of each partnership and these are:-
- The need for the partnership to continue
 - The commitment, role and responsibilities of the various partners
 - The value of the partnership to the Council and its own role and responsibilities
 - The governance, performance management, financial and risk management arrangements of the Partnership
- 2.2 A review of the Thames Gateway South Essex Housing Strategy forum is provided in Appendix 1. The concerns identified during the audit were referred to the Strategy and Partnership Management Team for discussion. In line with their recommendation the report was then referred by the Chief Executive to the Executive Committee for Thames Gateway, of which he is a member, for their consideration and further action resulting in a delay in reporting through to Members.

3 FUTURE REVIEWS

- 3.1 Following the recent formation of the Corporate Policy and Partnerships Unit (CPPU) and the appointment of the Corporate Policy and Partnerships Manager, the Council is intending to undertake an appraisal of the way it will review partnerships in the future. This will involve Internal Audit working with CPPU to clearly define the roles of each team within the process. Any proposed changes will be reported to this Committee for consideration.

4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
That the findings of the review be endorsed.

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Background Papers:-

Partnership Review

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Appendix 1**Partnership Report - Thames Gateway South Essex Housing Strategy Forum****Introduction**

As part of the 2007/08 Audit Plan a review was carried out of the Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE) Housing Strategy Forum (HSF). The conclusion was that the partnership, while of benefit to the Council, had some issues that required attention in order to ensure the partnership continues to work effectively. As a result of this review the Chief Executive took the concerns raised to TGSE Executive Committee, of which he is a member, in September. As a result, a review of this and other TGSE sub-groups is underway to consider the governance arrangements, structures and connections. The Corporate Policy & Partnership Manager will be the Council's officer representative on this group, which will report into the TGSE Executive Committee and onto the Full Board in the New Year. The impact of this review upon the HSF will be followed up by Internal Audit during 2009/10.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the HSF is to contribute and influence the regional housing agenda through developing, implementing and updating the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy. In practice this means the HSF is intended to be the main body advancing the housing agenda within the TGSE region.

Partnership Arrangements

Membership is comprised of the five authorities in TGSE: Basildon, Thurrock, Southend, Castle Point and Rochford as well as five Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). These five RSL representatives are elected from an RSL forum, a subgroup of the HSF, to represent the whole subgroup. In addition to these members there is representation from the Housing Corporation, TGSE and Government Office East. There is also a Sub-Regional Housing Strategy Coordinator (HSC) employed by the Partnership to oversee its operation. There are a number of subgroups overseen by the main body. Membership of these is decided as and when required.

RDC contributes £10,000 per annum to the Partnership. All 5 Authorities and 5 RSLs make the same contribution, meaning a total of £100,000 per annum. Between £55,000 and £60,000 of this is spent on the post of HSC with the rest allocated to various projects across the lifespan of the Partnership.

Meetings must be held at least six-weekly and this has been the case over the previous year. RDC's representatives are the Strategic Housing Manager for the HSF and Cllr Mrs T J Capon to the Members Group in her role as Portfolio Holder for the Council on Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing. All working group and sub-group meetings are reported back to the main group at meetings.

No formal termination arrangements are in place. There is also no reference to how funds already paid would be managed in the event of a partner pulling out. If they were to request the return of all funds contributed to the Partnership, this could cause

financial hardship as all budget planning is based on the £100,000 per annum income.

The HSF has to date delivered the sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and, from this, the Sub- Regional Housing Strategy (SRHS) 2008-2011. This feeds into Rochford's own Housing Strategy. The representation of the Housing Corporation has enabled all members of the HSF to bid more effectively for funding. In addition, the partnership acts as a general forum for sharing knowledge and best practice relating to Housing.

Governance Arrangements

This would appear to be the area in which the HSF is less robust. Most governance arrangements are the responsibility of the HSC. This post was vacant due to the resignation of the previous post holder from November 2007 until September 2008, though it should be noted a seconded replacement was in place from February 2008 until the post was filled. This led to a situation where the partnership appeared to be drifting somewhat in that arrangements like performance management, financial management and risk management, usually integral functions of the HSC, had less focus placed upon them. Overall, the review concluded that measures to manage the performance of the HSF were only partially effective and action should be taken to address this.

A new HSC was appointed in September 2008, though it is too early to assess any impact upon the working of the partnership. This, coupled with the work done by the TGSE Executive Committee and also Main Board in acknowledging deficiencies and undertaking work to correct them, should be sufficient to improve the functioning of the partnership. Internal Audit will follow up the results of this review during 2009/10.

Conclusion

The report concluded that, while being part of the HSF had benefited the Council by delivering major projects, such as the SHMA and the SRHS, and had the potential to continue doing so, potential was not currently being fully realised. As mentioned above, a working group has been formed to investigate this and other issues, within the workings of the TGSE sub-groups. Thus, it is felt that raising recommendations at the current time would not be effective and this should be sufficient to address the concerns raised by this review.