

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

5TH JANUARY 2011

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION
& COMMUNITIES**

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1. THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To advise the Cabinet on the options for the Strategic Housing Advisory Committee now the original period of its terms of reference has expired.

1.2 Recommendation of the Director of Regeneration & Communities

1.2.1 That SHAC recommends to Cabinet that SHAC should remain as the advisory body for Cabinet and Cabinet Member on matters relating to housing in Maidstone; with new terms of reference including the provision of affordable housing, the management of housing in the public and private rented sectors, and policy matters across all forms of tenure and ownership, as outline in Appendix A.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 Formed prior to stock transfer to advise the council on the process towards large scale voluntary transfer, the Strategic Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC) was subsequently given the remit to ensure the terms of the promise made to tenants as part of the transfer consultation were delivered by the newly created Maidstone Housing Trust (now Golding Homes).

1.3.2 The current terms of reference permit SHAC to give advice to the cabinet on the performance of MHT against specific measures. A number of measurable obligations were imposed on MHT at time of transfer and SHAC to monitor the progress made by MHT in delivering these and reported to the Executive accordingly. SHAC continued to meet regularly to review and monitor the performance of Maidstone Housing Trust. Certain of these promises were encapsulated into a

five year period, which has now come to an end. This provides an opportune moment to review the role of SHAC and its future.

- 1.3.3 Research has been undertaken to look at other models used by strategic housing authorities following stock transfer. Some Local Authorities have chosen to maintain the status quo after the ending of the 5 year period and concentrate on the relationship with the transferred housing association. This might include negotiating a further five-year agreement to cover decent homes standards, management standards, or investment in new build.
- 1.3.4 Alternatively local authorities have set up arrangements to enable interaction between various agencies, and across multiple departments with some relevant counterparts meeting as frequently as once a week, although more often on a monthly or quarterly basis. The housing associations are required to appear before committees every 3 – 6 months to respond to questions or concerns that elected members, or their constituents, may have.
- 1.3.5 Finally, some Local Authorities (LAs) that have transferred their stock have decided to institute a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – whilst partnership working is a growing feature of LA working, the Audit Commission has highlighted that an LSP can contribute most effectively to the emphasis that has been placed on the strategic role of LAs in delivering improvements to housing within their localities.
- 1.3.6 Whilst the make up and design of these strategic partnerships can vary, the broad structure and scope remains the same. The partnership is usually chaired by the local authority and is composed of invited members from the housing association sector and other Registered Providers such as private developers; together with some voluntary sector service providers to give a broader scope.
- 1.3.7 This approach would represent a significant broadening of the scope and membership of SHAC, and could absorb the Housing Sounding Board – which is the current mechanism used by Housing Services to consult with stakeholders other than housing associations. This approach would also recognise the proposed changes to the council's management structure with the bringing together of community services and housing.
- 1.3.8 Maintaining an advisory body with responsibility for advising the Cabinet Member with responsibility for housing and/or the Cabinet recognises the important and fundamental role that housing has in building stable and prosperous communities. A raft of significant changes has been announced by the Coalition Government that has implications for both public and private housing sectors. To enable the council to properly consider and take advantage of the changes a reconfigured SHAC is the best mechanism for achieving an advisory

role. This could be supported by reference to the Maidstone LSP on specific issues that could be tackled on a task & finish basis.

1.3.9 Other external influences to be considered include the dissolution of the Tenant Services Authority, which is due in 2011. Social Housing regulation will come under the auspices of the Homes & Communities Agency but in a far less regulatory way than previously. There will be less emphasis on inspection and an expectation that housing associations will be monitored at a local level. The Communities & Local Government consultation document on the future of social housing proposes 'an enhanced role for elected councillors, MPs and tenant panels in the complaints process'. A revised SHAC could form part of that aspiration.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The SHAC could consider maintaining the status quo but this approach is limited in its sphere of influence and out-dated in terms of its relationship with Golding Homes and is not recommended by the author of the report as a positive way forward. Other models have been considered such as a sub-group of Overview & Scrutiny but have not been recommended in view of the breadth of issues relating to the single banner of housing. The aspiration is to create a degree of housing expertise within a reformed SHAC that would be diluted through alternative mechanisms.

1.4.2 The SHAC could recommend to Cabinet that no single body is required to advise the Cabinet Member on housing matters. However, this would fail to recognise the important and fundamental role of housing in providing stable communities that promote opportunities and prosperity. Central government is exploring ways of devolving responsibilities to local councils and their communities; it would be remiss not to have an advisory committee for housing with a broad housing remit in order to respond to this new agenda.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

The recommendations to continue with a forum to advise the Cabinet Member on matters relating to housing would provide benefit towards achieving the priority "Maidstone to be a decent place to live".

1.6 Other Implications

1.6.1

- 1. Financial
- 2. Staffing
- 3. Legal

- 4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

1.7 Relevant Documents

1.7.1 Deed of Transfer

1.7.2 Local Decisions – a fairer future for Social Housing (CLG consultation)

1.7.3 MBC Constitution

1.7.4 Appendices

1.7.5 Appendix A – draft terms of reference

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?	
.....	
This is a Key Decision because:	
.....	
Wards/Parishes affected:	
.....	

1.7.6 Background Documents

1.7.7 None