

Notes

From the
Housing Advisory Sub-Group meeting

Monday 12 November at 6.00pm

All members of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group were present.

Attending officers: Caroline Green, Paul Staines, Jennifer Thompson

The meeting considered the items below.

Affordable housing - Year One position as reported to Homes England and Programmes for Years 2 and 3

The Group considered the draft quarter 2 report to be presented to the Growth Board and Homes England, and an update on the proposed programme for years 2 and 3 of the Deal

They noted from the presentation and discussion:

1. On-target delivery* of the agreed housing units** in the Year 1 programme was crucial so the programme took a conservative view and included those schemes which were certain or highly likely to deliver additional affordable housing by March 2019.
2. Council-owned companies and councils building their own housing were crucial to overall delivery of the Year 1-3 programme, although Cherwell were finding the limited numbers of houses they could own because they had no housing revenue account held up their building programme.
3. Risks included:
 - a. Planning delays caused by poor project management or the size and complexity of sites. Some risks could be mitigated by good project management in preparing planning applications.
 - b. Building delays, due to shortages of suitable contractors or labour force, delaying start or completion dates. Some risk could be mitigated by carefully commissioning the programme and having a coherent long term plan to avoid exacerbating the problems across different authorities and sites. Investment in apprenticeships and long-term developments on large sites provided continuity of both workforce and work.
4. Deal funding was paid to the Growth Board on delivered units in arrears annually. The Growth Board was considering how to use funds up-front to improve the speed of delivery and encourage RSLs to apply to the Deal, with appropriate safeguards.

5. While there was a focus on delivering Year 1 target, work had started to secure delivery of Year 2 and 3 targets to make sure the Growth Board were in a good position to meet these.
6. Each local authority needed to carefully monitor progress of developments, risk management, and completions with RSLs working in their area.
7. The Deal terms did not allow double-counting of affordable housing already planned: hence the considerable number of homes already planned with Homes England and RSL funding were not shown.

Note:

- *‘delivery’ was defined as having a binding contract to start work on the site (or units), not a habitable house or work commenced on site
- **the figures only show **additional** affordable housing from the Deal funding over and above those already delivered or planned through other programmes, not the total number to be delivered overall.

The Group discussed housing types, in particular the use of good quality modular buildings constructed off-site. Oxford City Council was using these for two small, constrained and hard to access sites.

They noted that modular houses allowed for faster completions. Making larger orders (around 100 units), perhaps by aggregating orders for several sites across the county, would give more secure, cheaper and faster delivery. It could for example be used for key worker housing on school sites or small exception sites, where the land - but not the expertise or labour to build -was available, to help retain experienced young staff.

They discussed the funding gap for delivering affordable housing between the grant available in the Deal and the price of additional units and the options for use of unallocated S106 funds to offer top-up grants to RSLs for additional affordable housing. Councils’ officers were aware of this option and had been asked to consider offering grants through their own council’s planning and funding processes.

They noted that delivering the Year 2 and Year 3 targets was a sizable but achievable challenge and required new products and ways of working.

These formed two of a range of innovations that may contribute to narrowing the gap between the Y2 and Y3 targets and guaranteed houses. This was a sizable but achievable challenge and required new ways of working and assisting with delivery.

The Housing Advisory Sub-Group noted the report, progress against the affordable housing target at Quarter 2 and the achievement of the Deal milestone to produce an indicative programme for years 2 to 3 which it recommends to the Growth Board for endorsement.

The Sub Group also recommends that clear definitions of the terms in ‘delivery of additional affordable units’ should be used in future reports.

Attributing housing to infrastructure

The Group heard and considered an update from Caroline Green on attributing housing to infrastructure in order to accurately report the additional affordable housing delivered through the Deal’s infrastructure investment.

They noted that Homes England and the Growth Board had agreed a methodology, subject to refinement, starting from OXIS (the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy) and mapping housing sites to infrastructure essential for delivery. Homes England wanted a clear evidence trail that defines which and how many units are built as a result of Deal funding and/or infrastructure funding.

This was easier for sites of over 100 units, but less clear-cut for multiple small rural sites so these would be clustered to work out the impact and requirements. ‘Induced’ housing (that enabled as a consequence of overall infrastructure improvements, but not either directly or indirectly attributable) also needed to be included in the calculations.

Affordable housing launch

The Group considered a presentation from Paul Staines about the affordable housing launch event on 18 October and the Affordable Housing prospectus.

They noted good attendance; that the feedback was generally positive; and the momentum would be maintained. It was clear that local authorities needed to build direct relationships and links with the development companies – these were usually with their planning agents. There was a risk of councils and RSLs inadvertently competing for developers and construction firms, undermining delivery, so the overall programme and funding needed careful and firm project management across the county.

Dates and times of future meetings

The Housing Advisory Sub Group agreed to meet in Oxford Town Hall at 6.00pm on
Tuesday 15 January
Tuesday 12 March
Tuesday 21 May

Councillor Susan Brown, Chair of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group, (Leader of Oxford City Council)

Note: Housing Advisory Sub-Group members

Councillor Susan Brown (Chair)	Oxfordshire Growth Board/ Oxford City Council
Councillor John Donaldson	Cherwell District Council
Councillor Mike Rowley	Oxford City Council
Councillor Liz Brighouse	Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Imran Lokhon	South Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Janet Shelley	Vale of White Horse District Council
Councillor Jeff Haine	West Oxfordshire District Council