

# Briefing: East of England Housing Strategy

May 2007



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## What is the East of England Housing Strategy?

The East of England Housing Strategy 2005-2010 is a strategic document produced by the East of England Assembly to influence the delivery of housing in the region. The document set out what type/types of housing are needed in the region and is closely linked to the East of England Plan, which sets out planning quotas (where this should be built) for each local authority.

Both documents are available to download off the East of England Assembly website at [www.eera.org.uk](http://www.eera.org.uk)

## Purpose

The East of England Housing Strategy (the regional housing strategy) is written by the Department of Infrastructure and Development at GO East. It is produced to offer a local indication of the governments housing priorities and is used by local authorities/sub regional housing partnerships to ensure that their plans/strategies reflect this and any subsequent funding to follow.

As 90% of housebuilding in the UK is carried out by private sector bodies, regional housing strategies have little power of compulsion. They establish a set of priorities or direction of travel which local authorities are expected to follow and Housing Associations must prove they compliment in obtaining Housing Corporation funding.

On a practical level each regional housing board (in our case the East of England Sustainable Communities & Housing Panel at the East of England Assembly) is given a regional allocation to fund social and affordable housing. The Single Regional Housing Pot is made available to local authorities every three years under a set of criteria set out in the East of England Housing Strategy. This document therefore articulates how much of this pot, totalling £143m in 2004-2007, should be spent on homelessness.

## Affordable housing

The regional strategy aims “to ensure everyone can live in a decent home which meets their needs, at a price they can afford & in locations that are sustainable”.

The East of England is a region home to some 5.5m people but by 2021 this figure is expected to rise by an 478,000, 40% of these people coming from London & 20% from overseas. As in-migration increases and people live in smaller sized households (89% of household growth comes from demographic changes) there is a need to considerably increase on current building rates.

The Housing Strategy calls for an additional 23,900 houses to built annually up until 2021 in the region. It stipulates that 11,000(40%) should be affordable and 7,200 socially rented.

In order to achieve 40% affordable housing the Regional Housing Strategy(RHS) must create the right economic conditions and planning policies to ensure housing developers invest in this vision. It must ensure that both land and construction costs are reduced.

To that end the RHS instructs:

- All local authorities to keep a log of land they have available for affordable housing, annually reviewing all their current plots to see what could be made available for affordable housing. Local authorities are pressured to reduce the land value to support social investment.
- All public bodies acquiring new land for development to make a proportion of this available for affordable housing.
- That when local authority sells land to a private developer, it should factor in the “hope value”, an artificial inflation whereby the cost of the plot is considered once a development has been completed. Any additional “hope value” should be ploughed back into affordable housing elsewhere.
- For there to be sub regional champions, able to give advice on Section 106 agreements. Section 106 agreements are a way a local authority can stipulate in agreeing planning applications for a percentage of the site to be affordable, or a levy paid to support affordable housing elsewhere.
- Local authorities to partner with developers, landowners and housing providers to agree what stipulations on planning applications for affordable housing are reasonable and ensure that they are able to see a strategic pipeline of sites reducing their procurement costs.
- Construction companies to continue to develop Modern Methods of Construction which reduce costs. In 2004-2006 58% of new builds in the East of England were MMC, compared to 25% nationally.

## Design Quality

The regional housing strategy supports the government target that 100% of social housing stock should reach the governments “decent homes” target by 2010 and the way that local authorities are seeking to achieve this through large scale stock voluntary transfer (passing stock over to a housing association able to borrow against the cost of the stock), the establishment of arms length management organisations (passing of stock to independent companies linked strategically to local authorities but able to pull down funding from the treasury) or retaining stock (investing in their own stock through council taxes only). The proportion of properties not currently meeting the governments decent homes standard varies dramatically across the region, topping 62% in Broxbourne.

The regional housing board will honour commitments to support local authorities who have retained their stock through the Single Pot allocation.

The RHS also calls for a higher quality of housing design in its new build and has appointed a post from the Commission for Architecture & Building Excellence to advise local authorities.

## Homelessness

The RHS notes that between 1997 and 2003 homeless acceptances across the region increased 37% (above the national average). The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of 2003 was 7,900, up 157% on December 1997.

The housing strategy plans to tackle homelessness by:

- 1. Targetting investment in socially excluded groups thought to be disproportionately at risk i.e. BME groups and Gypsies & Travellers**

The RHS notes that the region is home to 25% of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK but only had 19% of the countries legal sites. 34% of this group live on “unauthorised” sites making them homeless. The strategy promises to invest in the number of legal sites.

The RHS notes that there is an increasing number of asylum seekers, given right to remain, and applying as homeless. In 2003/2004 31 cases were accepted as homeless having left NASS accommodation. The housing board is to provide guidance to local authorities on how to work with this group.

## 2. Ensuring that the new methods of accessing housing are understood by vulnerable groups

The RHS accepts that the governments pilot of choice based lettings identified how the difficulties some vulnerable groups had understanding the system and accessing property. The regional housing board will look at best practice on the roll out of CBL and produce regional guidance for the voluntary sector and local authorities.

## 3. Share best practice in the region

The regional housing board is to provide a good practice and research report on homeless prevention, specifically looking at youth homelessness. It is review the opportunities which exist for homeless organisations to influence housing policy at a regional level and support the role out of the Rehabilitation of Offenders accommodation pathway.

The regional housing strategy instructs the 9 sub regional housing partners that make up the region (sub regional housing partnerships are made up of local authorities thought to face similar areas or be linked by commuting/migration) produce sub regional homelessness strategies.

It commends the work of the Supporting People regional group (SPERG).

## Funding

The regional housing strategy sets out the percentages it will attribute to various courses in its first (2005-2008) and second rounds (2009-2011) of funding available under the Single Regional Housing Pot.

It commits 20% of this pot to local need/homelessness in both rounds and 8%/15% to the funding of supported housing. A detailed breakdown of spend is shown below.

Spending priority	Round 1 (%)	Round 2 (%)
Economic Growth	20	25
Local need/homelessness	20	20
Regeneration	10	10
Key workers	4	5
Supported housing	8	15
Existing stock	15	10
BME groups	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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