



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of an **INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION** will be held in SF4 - Civic Offices on **MONDAY 4 JUNE 2018 AT 9.10 AM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manjeet Gill'.

Manjeet Gill
Interim Chief Executive
Published on 24 May 2018

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, an even better place to do business

Our Priorities

Improve educational attainment and focus on every child achieving their potential

Invest in regenerating towns and villages, support social and economic prosperity, whilst encouraging business growth

Ensure strong sustainable communities that are vibrant and supported by well designed development

Tackle traffic congestion in specific areas of the Borough

Improve the customer experience when accessing Council services

The Underpinning Principles

Offer excellent value for your Council Tax

Provide affordable homes

Look after the vulnerable

Improve health, wellbeing and quality of life

Maintain and improve the waste collection, recycling and fuel efficiency

Deliver quality in all that we do

For consideration by

Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Leader of the Council

Officers Present

Ian Bellinger, Category Manager, Growth and Delivery

Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

IMD NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	
IMD 2018/26	None Specific	RESPONSE FROM THE WESTERN BERKSHIRE HOUSING MARKET AREA AUTHORITIES TO SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL	5 - 12

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Agenda Item IMD26

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2018/26

TITLE	Response from the Western Berkshire Housing Market Area Authorities to Slough Borough Council
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Leader of the Council – Charlotte Haitham Taylor
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	4 June 2018 SF4, 9.10am
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR	Interim Director of Environment - Josie Wragg

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that the strategic planning of housing reflects evidenced functional geography and all reasonable opportunities to sustainably meet needs.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Leader of the Council agrees that Wokingham Borough Council agrees to the proposed joint response to Slough Borough Council as contained in Appendix A.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Slough Borough Council is unlikely to be able to meet its future housing need and have therefore approached other local authorities.

The Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identified two identified two HMA relevant to the Berkshire local authorities – an Western Berkshire HMA focused on Reading (which includes Wokingham Borough), and an Eastern Berkshire HMA focused on Slough. The Berkshire local authorities have accepted the recommendation of the SHMA and have agreed in principle that strategic planning of housing should be based on the two HMA. Government planning policy expects housing need to be met within the relevant HMA.

Wokingham Borough is subject to significant challenges and constraints. Emerging evidence strongly suggests that there is no capacity to assist with unmet needs from other local authorities. The other local authorities in the Western Berkshire HMA advise similarly.

A joint response from the Western Berkshire HMA local authorities has been drafted which confirms the above (see Appendix A). It is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council sign this as our formal response to Slough Borough Council.

Background

Slough Borough Council are progressing evidence to support an update to their Local Plan. Initial analysis of housing capacity provided alongside the council's Issues and Options Consultation suggests there is insufficient capacity to meet the calculated housing need within Slough Borough itself. Options were presented to increase capacity both internally within Slough and beyond in other local authority areas.

The Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was published in 2016. The study was joint commissioned by the six Berkshire local authorities¹ in partnership with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The SHMA identified two HMA relevant to the Berkshire local authorities – a Western Berkshire HMA focused on Reading, and an Eastern Berkshire HMA focused on Slough (see Table 1)

Table 1: Berkshire (Including South Bucks) SHMA	
HMA	Local Authorities
Western Berkshire HMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bracknell Forest Council• Reading Borough Council• West Berkshire Council• Wokingham Borough Council
Eastern Berkshire HMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slough Borough Council• South Bucks District Council• Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

The Berkshire local authorities have accepted the recommendation of the SHMA and have agreed in principle that the strategic planning of housing should be based on the two HMA. To formally record this, each of the Berkshire local authorities has been asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

It should be noted that South Bucks District Council and Chiltern District Council disagree with the SHMA analysis. It is their position that Berkshire comprises a single HMA including all six local authorities, and that on a best-fit basis that South Bucks District Council does not form part of a Berkshire HMA but is part of the Central Buckinghamshire HMA. The best-fit position is advanced on the basis that South Bucks District Council and Chiltern District Council have agreed produce a single, joint local plan. The Berkshire local authorities are content that the SHMA provides robust analysis of the principal functional links and is fit for purpose.

Slough Borough Council has engaged with surrounding local authorities to understand whether any are in a position to provide for any unmet housing need. Those authorities in the Western Berkshire HMA, which includes Wokingham Borough Council, are one of the group that have been approached.

¹ Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

Analysis of Issues

Government planning policy expects housing need to be met within the relevant HMA. For Slough Borough Council, the SHMA identified the relevant HMA to comprise Slough Borough Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and South Bucks District Council.

Whilst South Bucks District Council / Chiltern District Council take a different view towards the definition of HMA and the interpretation of 'best fit', the SHMA is considered robust, having taken into account an analysis of house price, migration, and commuting data. Best fit being applied to local authority boundaries is supported by advice by the Planning Advisory Service.

It is clear that Slough Borough Council will struggle to meet identified housing need and approaches to other local authorities are justified.

Wokingham Borough as per all of the local authorities within the Western Berkshire HMA are subject to significant challenges and constraints. In the case of Wokingham Borough, the identified housing need is also substantially higher than the other Berkshire local authorities (with the exception of Slough) and South Bucks District Council.

Wokingham Borough Council faces a considerable challenge in meeting housing need arising here in a sustainable way. The Local Plan Update process continues, however initial engagement on sites and analysis strongly suggests there is no scope to assist other local authorities in meeting development needs. There is also a strong argument that unmet needs should be met nearer to Slough where there is a greater opportunity to provide for sustainable travel. There is also no evidence that all reasonable opportunities to meet needs within the Eastern Berkshire HMA have been fully investigated.

It is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council respond to Slough Borough Council as part of a joint Western Berkshire HMA authorities response. A draft response has been prepared between the local authorities as set out in Appendix A.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None anticipated.

Cross-Council Implications
None anticipated.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No comments received.
Monitoring Officer	No specific comments.
Leader of the Council	No comments received.

List of Background Papers
1. National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, March 2012).
2. Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2016).

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Duty to cooperate response from the Western Berkshire housing market area authorities to Slough Borough Council

1.0 The SHMA and Housing Market Areas

1.1 The “Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016” (hereafter referred to as the Berkshire SHMA) was jointly commissioned by the six Berkshire authorities. In terms of “Housing Market Areas” (HMAs) the Berkshire SHMA states at paragraph 5:

“Using a best fit to local authority boundaries, there is strong evidence to support definition of two separate HMAs containing the Berkshire authorities and South Bucks – a Western Berkshire HMA covering Bracknell Forest, Wokingham Borough, Reading Borough and West Berkshire; and an Eastern Berks and South Bucks HMA comprising Slough Borough and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) together with South Bucks”.

1.2 In addition, paragraph 6 states:

“There is also a significant level of self-containment within both HMAs with the Eastern Berks & South Bucks area having a lower level due to its proximity to London and the volume of people moving to and from the capital.”

2.0 The Western Berkshire Housing Market Area

2.1 The six Berkshire authorities support the findings of the Berkshire SHMA and are preparing their local plans in line with these findings, i.e. using the two separate HMAs identified.

2.2 The authorities within the Western Berkshire HMA have produced an additional, non-statutory, document, “*The West of Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework*”, which is clear evidence of joint working within the defined HMA. It demonstrates that, notwithstanding the different constraints discussed below which each authority must consider as part of the process; Bracknell Forest, Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham will work collectively and meet the Western Berkshire HMA’s identified housing needs.

3.0 Bracknell Forest

3.1 The north/north eastern area of the Borough (approx. 35%) forms part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt in which development is strictly controlled. Small areas of land in the north eastern part of the Borough also fall within the Windsor Forest and Great Park Special Area of Conservation and an extensive area of land in the south/south eastern area of the Borough falls within the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) (1,300 hectares). This means that there are severe restrictions on any net increase in dwellings, up to 7km from the boundary of the SPA.

3.2 Further constraints to development include areas subject to flooding (fluvial, surface water and groundwater issues), the need to respect heritage assets, minimise impacts on biodiversity and the capacity of existing infrastructure.

3.3 Following an assessment of sites submitted for consideration for future development, a Draft Bracknell Forest Local Plan was published for consultation during February/March 2018. Whilst the document identifies possible sites to meet the local housing need, the process has proved challenging due to the range of constraints limiting development potential. The capacity of sites is yet to be finalised in the light of comments received and new evidence. It appears that it will not be possible to meet the need for employment development, as set out in the Central Berkshire Economic Development Needs Assessment and that discussions on dealing with the shortfall will need to continue with other authorities in the Central Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA).

4.0 Reading

4.1 Reading, like Slough, is a geographically small authority forming the core of a contiguous urban area that extends beyond the local authority boundary. The area is almost entirely built up, and what little undeveloped land exists is largely at high risk of flooding.

4.2 In terms of housing, Reading is in a similar position to Slough, in that it cannot meet its full objectively assessed need within its boundaries, albeit that the scale of Reading's shortfall is likely to be significantly lower than Slough's. A thorough assessment of the capacity to meet needs in Reading has been undertaken in a Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, and informed the Draft Local Plan, which comes to the conclusion that there is a shortfall of 943 dwellings to 2036, which will need to be accommodated elsewhere. Reading Borough Council made a formal request to West Berkshire District Council and Wokingham Borough Council to consider accommodating this shortfall in January 2017, and discussions across the Western Berkshire HMA about this issue are still ongoing.

4.3 In terms of employment development, Reading has been able to identify broadly sufficient land to meet its own significant industrial and warehouse needs as set out in the Central Berkshire Economic Development Needs Assessment, but no capacity to exceed these needs has been identified. For offices, on current figures, Reading may exceed identified needs, due largely to the high number of existing planning permissions. It is conceivable that this could contribute to making up a shortfall elsewhere, but the priority in that case would be any unmet needs within the Central Berkshire FEMA which also contains Wokingham, Bracknell Forest and RBWM, in line with the principles of planning for functional areas.

5.0 West Berkshire

5.1 West Berkshire lies on the western fringe of the South East Region. It makes up over half of the geographical area of the county of Berkshire and is primarily a rural district. Just under three quarters of the District (74%) forms part of The North Wessex Downs Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Within the AONB, housing is focused on meeting identified local needs in accordance with government policy.

5.2 The urban area in the east of the District is constrained by the immediately adjacent AONB and by extensive areas of floodplain. There are constraints in the East Kennet Valley area associated with the presence of Atomic Weapons Establishments at Aldermaston and Burghfield. Further constraints to development include those associated with infrastructure provision, areas subject to flooding and the need to respect the historic environment, including a number of Historic Parks and Gardens and the area to the west of Newbury which is a designated Historic Battlefield.

5.3 Work on the local plan review has commenced and through the local plan process, West Berkshire will seek to meet its identified housing need and employment need within its borders.

6.0 Wokingham

6.1 Wokingham is a small authority situated on the edge of Reading and comprises of a number of settlements intermixed with surrounding countryside and linked by a largely rural road network. High levels of traffic towards Reading, Basingstoke and London pass through the borough. The built up areas of Woodley, Earley and Winnersh are contiguous with Reading.

6.2 The northern area of the Wokingham Borough (approx. 16%) forms part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt in which development is strictly controlled. The borough is also affected by flooding with the River Thames to the north, the rivers Loddon and Blackwater flowing through the centre and a number of other brooks.

6.3 The Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment is situated beyond the borough's western boundary (within West Berkshire Council). The Detailed Emergency Planning Zone extends into Wokingham Borough with further 5km and 7km consultation zone extending further.

6.4 The Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (TBH SPA) spreads across a number of local authorities within the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. Whilst Wokingham Borough does not include any of the TBH SPA itself, the borough's main settlements lie within the 5km and 7km buffer zones around the heaths. This means that there are severe restrictions on any net increase in dwellings, up to 7km from the boundary of the SPA.

6.5 Work on the new local plan has commenced. Wokingham Borough has been assessed as having the highest housing need within the Western Berkshire HMA. Providing for development needs whilst retaining the separate identity of settlements and dealing with existing traffic congestion and potential new traffic presents a considerable challenge.

7.0 Slough Borough Council's position

7.1 The Western Berkshire HMA authorities understand that Slough Borough Council, which is located within the Eastern Berkshire HMA, has looked at various options for trying to accommodate its housing need, as identified in the SHMA, including:

- intensifying development in the town centre,
- releasing all Green Belt sites, and
- estate renewal.

Notwithstanding this the Western Berkshire HMA authorities accept that Slough Borough Council will still struggle to meet its housing needs.

8.0 The Western Berkshire HMA authorities' position

8.1 The Western Berkshire HMA authorities note that Slough's local plan 'Issues and Options' document refers to a possible northern expansion into South Bucks and a southern expansion (involving small sites) into the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM).

8.2 Given that RBWM and part of South Bucks form the Eastern Berkshire HMA together with Slough; the Western Berkshire HMA authorities support this approach. Areas adjacent to the urban area of Slough and within easy reach of Slough town centre and its transport links clearly have significantly greater potential to meet Slough's housing needs than the Western Berkshire HMA where the functional relationship with Slough is far less clear.

8.3 Furthermore, given the findings of the Berkshire SHMA and the constraints which each of the authorities in the Western Berkshire HMA must consider; the authorities do not consider that it would be appropriate for any of Slough's unmet need to be located within the Western Berkshire HMA.