

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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