

Date: 24/06/2019
Our Ref: RFI2693
Your Ref: FOI Request – Guildford Borough Council HIF
Tel: 0300 1234 500
Email: foi@homesengland.gov.uk



Homes
England

██████████
By Email Only

Windsor House
Homes England – 6th Floor
50 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0TL

Dear ██████████

RE: Request for Information – RFI2693

Thank you for your recent email, which was processed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). For clarification, you requested the following information:

1. ***The Agency employed by Homes England to verify the bid for funding.*** *The local council has employed AECOM to write the proposal, and to conduct the council's part in due diligence. If Homes England employed AECOM to verify the bid, and/or to be involved in the Homes England side of the due diligence process, this would surely be unacceptable. Did Homes England use, or are they planning to use, AECOM as a consultant on any part of this bid?*
2. ***The Benefit Cost Analysis.*** *The Approved Local Plan and supporting documents, now in force, state that 750 homes would be facilitated by this bid and that the bridge would cost £15 million. Was the estimated cost of the bridge, as specified in the bid documents £15 million? Was the number of homes facilitated by the bid 750? If neither of these are the numbers provided, what was the estimated cost of the bridge and the number of homes to be facilitated?*
3. ***Statement of Local Support.*** *The Marginal Viability Fund, where this money would be sourced from, specifically asks: "local authorities to demonstrate that their infrastructure proposals have support locally." As local residents, we should have a right to see how our council is representing local views.*

This was in relation to a previous request (RFI2655), which relates to Guildford Borough Council's HIF (Housing Infrastructure Fund) application.

Response

We can confirm that we do hold some of the requested information. We will respond to each of your points in turn.

1) The Agency employed by Homes England to verify the bid for funding.

- *Did Homes England use, or are they planning to use, AECOM as a consultant on any part of this bid?*

This is not a request for any recorded information held by Homes England under the FOIA 2000, however we have provided a response to your question as a discretionary disclosure outside of the act.

Discretionary disclosure:

Homes England, on procuring consultants to help the assessment and due-diligence of bids, follow strict conflict of interest guidelines. We can therefore confirm that AECOM did not form part of the consultant team who assessed or conducted due diligence on the bid.

2) The Benefit Cost Analysis.

- *Was the estimated cost of the bridge, as specified in the bid documents £15 million?*
- *Was the number of homes facilitated by the bid 750?*

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The original application (bid documents) was on the basis of 734 units and bridge costs estimated to be £15.85m. This is documented in the bid submission to the HIF (Housing Infrastructure Fund) Portal (an on-line system). The Benefit Cost Analysis was assessed on 734 units.

During the clarification phase after bid submission and Benefit Cost Analysis, in consultation with the LA, the assessor established that there were instead 714 units that were actually being unlocked by HIF and the bridge costs were more accurately estimated to be £21.8m. Due to the small revision to the number of housing units and the grant request remaining the same, a revised Benefit Cost Analysis was not required. These revised figures are documented in the assessors' Funding Clarification Report and subsequent Grant Recommendation Report.

3) Statement of Local Support.

We are happy to supply the 'Local Community' evidence supplied as part of this bid. This is attached as Annex A.

Section 40 – Personal information

We have redacted information on the grounds that it constitutes third party personal data and therefore engages section 40(2) of the FOIA.

To disclose personal data, such as names, contact details, addresses, email addresses and personal opinions could lead to the identification of third parties and would breach one or more of the data protection principles.

Section 40 is an absolute exemption which means that we do not need to consider the public interest in disclosure. Once it is established that the information is personal data of a third party and release would breach one or more of the data protection principles, then the exemption is engaged.

The full text in the legislation can be found on the following link;

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/40>

Right to Appeal

If you are not happy with the information that has been provided or the way in which your request has been handled you may request an internal review by writing to;

The Information Access Team
Homes England – 6th Floor
Windsor House
50 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0TL

Or by email to foi@homesengland.gov.uk

You may also complain to the Information Commissioner however, the Information Commissioner does usually expect the internal review procedure to be exhausted in the first instance.

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The Information Commissioner's details can be found via the following link

<https://ico.org.uk/>

Please note that the contents of your request and this response are also subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Homes England may be required to disclose your request and our response accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

Information Access Team
For Homes England