

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

Monday, 6th October, 2008

Present: Cllr D J Cure (Chairman), Cllr R W Dalton (Vice-Chairman), Cllr A W Allison, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr C Brown, Cllr P J Homewood, Cllr R D Lancaster, Cllr D W Smith, Cllr Ms S V Spence and Cllr L A Withey.

Councillors Aikman, Mrs Anderson, Thornewell, Mrs Woodger and Worrall were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No. 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sayer and Mrs Simpson.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

**SH
08/043 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**SH
08/044 MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board held on 19 May 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**SH
08/045 GLOSSARY**

The Director of Health and Housing submitted a glossary of terms used within reports to the Advisory Board.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

**SH
08/046 UPDATE OF CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME**

Decision Notice D080171MEM

The joint report of the Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for Housing set out the progress in implementation of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) through the Kent CBL Partnership following the signing of the Kent Choice Based Lettings Deed of Agreement.

Members expressed concern at the complicated process involved and sought assurance that potentially vulnerable groups would be able to access the service. Officers confirmed that appropriate support would be provided to ensure accessibility for all, the Vulnerable Person

Strategy assisting in identifying vulnerable persons early in the process.

The Advisory Board was concerned about this model of housing allocation but recognised that the Government expected all local authorities to adopt a CBL scheme by 2010. Members were keen to secure the best service possible for local people by aiming to influence best practice and welcomed the 10% mobility limit in the Borough once the scheme was rolled out.

RECOMMENDED: That

(1) the proposed implementation timetable of Kent Homechoice CBL be endorsed with a view to it being fully implemented in Tonbridge and Malling in April 2009; and

(2) further reports on the progress of CBL implementation be presented in due course.

**SH
08/047**

UPDATE ON HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

Decision Notice D080172MEM

The Director of Health and Housing referred to the need to undertake a further review of the Council's housing allocations scheme to incorporate the changes arising from the forthcoming implementation of Choice Based Lettings. A revised draft scheme was proposed taking account of best practice and the Code of Guidance.

The main changes to the scheme were the introduction of Choice Based Lettings as a means of allocating affordable housing and a move from a points based system to a banding scheme as a primary determinant of priority.

RECOMMENDED: That the Draft Housing Allocations Scheme set out at Annex 1 to the report be endorsed for the purposes of formal consultation ending on 12 January 2009.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

**SH
08/048**

USE OF HEATSEEKERS SCHEME IN TONBRIDGE & MALLING

The Director of Health and Housing introduced the 'Heatseekers' scheme, which was being investigated further. The report gave details of the scheme and its potential benefits to residents in the Borough.

Members noted that the initiative appeared to be an innovative way of targeting installation of home insulation to a large number of residents. It could prove a useful tool in efforts to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty across the Borough. However, reservations were expressed about the 'opt in opt out' element to the scheme. The Director of Health and Housing indicated that when Officers were satisfied that appropriate checks had been made and favourable

results were available from other local authorities a further report would be presented at a future meeting of the Advisory Board.

**SH
08/049**

LAUNCH OF ENERGY SAVINGS TRUST ADVICE SERVICE

The report gave details of changes to the Kent Energy Centre and its service from 6 October 2008. The Energy Savings Trust would in future provide the first point of contact for advice on cost effective energy saving, renewables and low carbon transport choices.

Members noted and welcomed potential savings of £1,500 per annum as the Borough Council was no longer required to contribute towards the cost of operating the Kent Energy Centre call centre.

**SH
08/050**

UPDATE ON HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICES

The report of the Director of Health and Housing updated Members on the transfer of the Home Improvement Agency to 'in touch' which had taken place on 4 August 2008.

The Chairman reminded Members that 'in touch' had agreed to operate an office in the Tonbridge and Malling area and they would be reminded of this commitment.

**SH
08/051**

USE OF REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD FUNDING 2006-08

Members were updated on how the Regional Housing Board funding for 2006/08 was spent in improving the condition and energy efficiency of the private sector housing stock within the Borough.

**SH
08/052**

UPDATE ON DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT FUNDING 2008-09

The Director of Health and Housing updated Members on the expenditure against the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) budget for 2008/09, highlighting concern that the budget would again be under severe pressure.

A letter had been sent to the Government Office for the South East explaining the current DFG position at Tonbridge and Malling and seeking an increased allocation for this year. The Advisory Board would be updated on any response received at the next meeting.

Attention was drawn to the fact that as at 11 September 2008 73% of the DFG budget spent was on RSL properties, the majority of which was Russet Homes. This was a reflection on the improved procedures in place at Russet, which were speeding up the process and adding pressure to the budget. Russet Homes would therefore be approached to make a contribution to assist with the financial pressure.

Members were assured that the DFG budget would be monitored carefully with a further update provided at the next meeting of the Advisory Board.

Members suggested that the Director of Health and Housing write to the local Members of Parliament outlining the problems and difficulties being experienced and seeking their assistance.

SH
08/053

DISABLED CHILDREN AND HOUSING

Members were advised that the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, had launched a drive to highlight the housing needs of families with disabled children. They had identified priority actions on which they aimed to lobby Government Ministers, key regional and local decision-makers and social housing providers.

Members noted the impact of the issues surrounding the paediatric Occupational Therapy Service on the Borough Council's ability to deliver an effective service and that ways of addressing this were being explored.

SH
08/054

UPDATE ON HOUSING NEEDS SERVICE

The report of the Director of Health and Housing updated Members following the return in-house on 17 March 2008 of the homelessness and housing register services, previously provided under contract by Russet Homes.

Members welcomed the reduction in the number of households placed in temporary accommodation and the overall number of applicants on the housing register.

The operation of a County Court Desk Service offering independent legal advice and representation 'on the day' for residents facing repossession was outlined in the report. It was noted that the desk service could be providing assistance for residents in neighbouring authorities as it was important to advise those in debt wanting to access the service.

SH
08/055

GOVERNMENT HOUSING MARKET INITIATIVE PROPOSALS

The report indicated that the Government had announced a range of initiatives in response to the slowing of the housing market. Members were informed of the key elements of those initiatives and noted that the operational details for many of these schemes were not yet available.

Members asked that the Director of Health and Housing write to both local Members of Parliament stressing the importance of these schemes and asking for their implementation urgently to prevent financial difficulties for residents.

SH
08/056

DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The report of the Director of Health and Housing updated Members on the progress being made by the Council's Registered Social Landlord

partners in providing new affordable housing in the Borough and summarised the programme for 2008/09 and 2009/10.

**SH
08/057**

SERVICE OF STATUTORY NOTICES

Members noted the statutory notices served since the last meeting of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board.

**SH
08/058**

EXTERNAL CONSULTATIONS

The external consultations responded to since the last meeting of the Advisory Board were noted by Members.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

**SH
08/059**

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

No items were considered in private.

The meeting ended at 2059 hours.

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION

Decision Taken By: CABINET MEMBER FOR

Housing

Decision No: D080171MEM

Date: 6th October 2008

Decision(s) and Reason(s)

Update of Choice Based Lettings Scheme

**(Joint Report of Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for Housing)
(Annex 1)**

The report set out the progress in implementation of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) through the Kent CBL Partnership following the signing of the Kent Choice Based Lettings Deed of Agreement.

Following consideration by the Strategic Housing Advisory Board, the Cabinet Member for Housing resolved that:

- 1) the proposed implementation timetable of Kent Homechoice CBL be endorsed with a view to it being fully implemented in Tonbridge and Malling in April 2009; and
- 2) further reports on the progress of CBL implementation be presented in due course.

Reasons: As set out in the report submitted to the Strategic Housing Advisory Board of 6 October 2008.

Signed Cabinet Member for J Anderson
Housing:

Signed Leader: M Worrall

Signed Chief Executive: D Hughes

Date of publication: 10 October 2008

This decision will come into force and may then be implemented on the expiry of 5 working days after publication unless it is called in.

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION

**Decision Taken By: CABINET MEMBER FOR
Housing**

Decision No: D080172MEM

Date: 6th October 2008

Decision(s) and Reason(s)

Update on Housing Allocations Scheme

**(Joint Report of Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet
Member for Housing)
(Annex 1)**

**The report referred to the need to undertake a further review of the
Council's housing allocations scheme to incorporate the changes
arising from the forthcoming implementation of Choice Based
Lettings. A revised draft scheme was proposed taking account of
best practice and the Code of Guidance.**

Following consideration by the Strategic Housing Advisory Board, the
Cabinet Member for Housing resolved that the Draft Housing Allocations
Scheme set out at Annex 1 to the report be endorsed for the purposes of
formal consultation ending on 12 January 2009.

Reasons: As set out in the report submitted to the Strategic Housing
Advisory Board of 6 October 2008.

Signed Cabinet Member for J Anderson
Housing:

Signed Leader: M Worrall

Signed Chief Executive: D Hughes

Date of publication: 10 October 2008

This decision will come into force and may then be implemented on the expiry of 5
working days after publication unless it is called in.