

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

Monday, 10th January, 2011

Present: Cllr Ms J A Atkinson (Chairman), Cllr Mrs B A Brown (Vice-Chairman), Cllr A W Allison, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr Mrs E M Holland, Cllr R D Lancaster, Cllr Miss A Moloney, Cllr Mrs E A Simpson, Cllr D W Smith, Cllr Ms S V Spence and Cllr Mrs C J Woodger.

Councillors Mrs Anderson, Baldock, Coffin, Court, N Heslop, Sullivan and Worrall were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rogers.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

**SH
11/001 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor N Heslop declared a personal interest in any items that might have implications for the Bridge Trust on the grounds that he was a member of their Board.

**SH
11/002 BENEFITS UPDATE**

The report of the Director of Finance advised Members of current issues arising in the benefits field that could assist in the wider consideration of the response to the Department for Communities and Local Government consultation document on Local Decisions: A fairer future for social housing. The two major points of significance were reforms to Housing Benefits and the phased introduction of the Universal Credit. It was noted that all measures to reduce Local Housing Allowance rates would come into effect for new claims in April 2011 and included setting rates at the 30th percentile. The report warned that the changes to Local Housing Allowance and non-dependant deductions would initially bring about the decrease in the ability of tenants in the private sector, who claimed housing benefit, to pay their rent; a direct decrease in the availability of affordable private rented accommodation and an increase in the reluctance of landlords to let to tenants known to be in receipt of housing benefit. The changes outlined had the potential to cause financial difficulty for those households reliant on housing and council tax benefits to support their day-to-day living costs.

Members expressed concern that the impact of housing benefit reforms and the introduction of the universal credit would place greater pressure on social housing and the Borough's housing need. The

dramatic and significant effects on many residents in terms of potential financial difficulties were also recognised.

Additionally, Members expressed major concern regarding the administration of council tax benefit and housing benefit if this was returned to the Department for Work and Pensions as they were not convinced that benefit claims would be progressed quickly enough to address homelessness issues and tenancy rent payments.

The Director of Finance indicated that there appeared to be an opportunity to comment on the White Paper and offered to report the Borough Council's draft response to either the next meeting of the Finance and Property Advisory Board or to Cabinet, whichever provided the quickest timeframe.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

**SH
11/003**

CLG CONSULTATION: LOCAL DECISIONS: A FAIRER FUTURE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Decision Notice D110004MEM

The joint report of the Director of Health and Housing and the Cabinet Member for Housing summarised the main proposals contained in the consultation document Local Decisions: A fairer future for social housing, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 22 November 2010. The report also presented the Borough Council's draft response to the consultation document.

Members expressed profound and grave concerns about some of the proposed changes outlined, which could see far reaching and dramatic consequences for those requiring access to social housing; adverse implications for social stability and cohesion and the potential detriment of the local community by not providing a sense of belonging, security, shelter and balanced socio-economic mix.

In-depth discussion followed on a range of issues including the duty on local authorities to publish a strategic tenancy policy, setting out the broad objectives to be considered by social landlords when granting tenancies and the importance of establishing a clear policy framework within which registered providers should be required to operate. The Director of Health and Housing emphasised the importance of the income stream generated by registered providers from affordable rents, which should be invested in the borough. Members sought assurances that any future funding and investment for new development by registered providers would remain in Tonbridge and Malling.

However, despite their concerns Members welcomed the proposals for empty homes and the retention of the reasonable preference categories when allocating housing and supported the general principle of reform as long as those in most need were not adversely affected or discriminated against.

Additionally, Members requested that the final submission of the consultation response be shared with the local Members of Parliament for Tonbridge and Malling so that they were aware of any significant areas of concern.

RECOMMENDED: That the final submission of the consultation response document be drawn up in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Chairman of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board and the Opposition Spokesperson for Housing and comments be invited from other local providers in the timeframe available before the consultation deadline.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

**SH
11/004**

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

No items were considered in private.

The meeting ended at 2130 hours

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION

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

Decision No: D110004MEM

Date: 10th January 2011

Decision(s) and Reason(s)

CLG Consultation: Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing

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

The report summarised the main proposals contained in the consultation document Local Decisions: A fairer future for social housing, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 22 November 2010. The report also presented the Borough Council's draft response to the consultation document.

Members expressed profound and grave concerns about some of the proposed changes outlined, which could see far reaching and dramatic consequences for those requiring access to social housing; adverse implications for social stability and cohesion and the potential detriment of the local community by not providing a sense of belonging, security, shelter and balanced socio-economic mix.

Additionally, Members requested that the final submission of the consultation response be shared with the local Members of Parliament for Tonbridge and Malling so that they were aware of any significant areas of concern.

Following consideration by the Strategic Housing Advisory Board, the Cabinet Member for Housing resolved that the final submission of the consultation response be drawn up in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Chairman of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board and the Opposition Spokesperson for Housing and comments be invited from other local providers in the timeframe available before the consultation deadline.

As set out in the report submitted to the Strategic Housing Advisory Board of 10 January 2011.

Signed Cabinet Member for Mrs J Anderson
Housing:

Signed Leader: M Worrall

Signed Chief Executive: D Hughes

Date of publication: 14 January 2011

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.