

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

8 October 2007

**Joint Report of the Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for
Housing**

Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken
by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 USE OF REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD RESOURCES TO TACKLE
DISREPAIR IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Summary

This report seeks Members approval to allocate funding to an external organisation to assist the Council in maximising spend of the 2007/08 Regional Housing Board (RHB) funding for private sector housing renewal.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Council received a capital allocation of £262,227 from the South East Regional Housing Board for 2006/07 to support the private sector housing strategy to improve private sector housing in the borough. A further capital allocation of £241,100 was awarded for 2007/08.

1.1.2 To utilise this funding a report on the Housing Assistance Policy was brought to the Board in February 2007. The report sought to widen the scope of our grants programme for tackling non-decent housing in the private sector.

1.2 Progress

1.2.1 The total expenditure for 2006/07 on discretionary housing assistance grants was £91,000. Expenditure to mid September 2007 on housing assistance grants was £64,000 with a further £110,000 committed. Since the adoption of the new housing assistance policies there has been an increase in take up of grants. Of note has been the greater take up of First Time Buyers and Warm Homes Assistance grants. This leaves a net balance of approximately £238,000 of uncommitted RHB funding.

1.2.2 While the RHB have not explicitly stated that any monies unspent by 31 March 2008 will have to be returned, I want to ensure the Council is able to utilise the whole allocation in tackling poor housing occupied by local residents. It is therefore proposed to bring in additional specialist expertise to help carry out works to people's homes and spend the remaining funding allocation.

1.3 Proposal

- 1.3.1 To assist in committing the allocation by 31 March 2008 it is proposed to allocate a sum of grant funding to the *in touch* Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to help bring private sector housing up to the Decent Homes Standard in the borough.
- 1.3.2 The *in touch* HIA would market the Council's Housing Assistance grants to local residents, offering HIA services and support to vulnerable or older clients through the grant process by
- drawing up schedules of work and specifications;
 - arranging contractors to tender for the works;
 - overseeing contractors undertaking the works; and
 - arranging payments.
- 1.3.3 This should allow the Council to access extra staffing and marketing resources in addition to our existing in house team.
- 1.3.4 A Service Level Agreement between the Council and *in touch* would be in place to ensure effective delivery. The Council would maintain overall control of the grant funding and would carry out quality checks to ensure a high standard of work was maintained. Monitoring of performance would also be administered by officers from the grants team. An allocation of up to £100,000 is proposed which will cover grant expenditure on works and fees to *in touch*.
- 1.3.5 Marketing of the grants would take place via a multi-agency approach through a range of advertising mediums, partner organisations and public presentations.

1.4 Why *in touch*?

- 1.4.1 Members will be aware that we have an in-house HIA but unfortunately because of their existing heavy caseload and available resources they would not be in a position to take on this additional workload to maximise spend by 31 March 2008.
- 1.4.2 The *in touch* HIA are the only other HIA operating in Kent in a position to offer the resources and the necessary specialist skills to facilitate maximising spend of the Regional Housing Board allocation within the time frame.
- 1.4.3 The *in touch* HIA already provide an HIA service in 10 out of the 13 Kent local authority areas and have recently been able to assist us with the management of 20 cases that our own in house HIA had on their waiting list; as reported to this Board in July 2007.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 *In touch* are the only other HIA operating in Kent able to resource and provide the necessary specialist skills to deliver our private sector Decent Homes programme. The proposal to allocate a proportion of RHB grant funding to them requires an exception to seeking three quotations as permitted within the Financial Procedure Rules in the Council's constitution (see below).

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 *In touch* would seek commission at 11 per cent on each successful grant application which in itself is legitimate expenditure covered by the grant. It is anticipated that costs to year end lie in the £2,500 - £15,000 range. The Council's Financial Procedure Rules provide for the Director of Health and Housing, following consultation with the Chief Executive, to issue an order for services to a sole supplier where it would be uneconomic or impractical to seek three different quotations (Financial Procedure Rule 22.6).
- 1.6.2 Any allocation of funding to the *in touch* HIA is included within the 2007/08 capital plan. There are no additional budgetary implications arising from this proposal.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 *In touch* are a recognised HIA. They have been awarded the Quality Mark from foundations (National Co-ordinating Body for HIA's) and are subject to audits by the Supporting People team. A service level agreement will be in place for delivery of this proposal. The Council will carry out checks on the performance of '*in touch*' and the work they are progressing to protect both the Council and the service users.

1.8 Recommendation

- 1.8.1 Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to **ENDORSE** the proposed increase in the role of '*in touch*' Home Improvement Agency in the support of the Council's private sector Housing Assistance programmes.

The Director of Health and Housing confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Hazel Skinner

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing

Councillor Jill Anderson
Cabinet Member for Housing