

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD**

**7 January 2008**

**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 HOUSING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK IN WEST KENT**

**Summary**

**This report seeks Cabinet approval to develop proposals to provide supported housing for young people.**

**1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 The Joint Homelessness Strategy developed by the three west Kent districts and partners has identified a need for supported housing accommodation for young people at risk in west Kent. The Action Plan identifies provision of such a project in Tonbridge as a priority.
- 1.1.2 Throughout the review of homelessness and consultation for the Joint Homelessness Strategy the issues of homelessness for young people often dominated. Accommodation for young people, particularly 16/17 year olds is limited in the three local authority areas. Whilst there is some supported provision in Tunbridge Wells, this is not specialist provision for 16/17 year olds and each scheme has a long waiting list. Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling do not have any such schemes for young people.
- 1.1.3 The Kent Supporting People Team through its review of short term accommodation based services has also identified a need for supported housing for young people at risk in west Kent. Funding for this client group has been prioritised as a growth item. It is envisaged, therefore, that subject to confirmation of the Supporting People (SP) budget, that SP revenue funding would be available to fund up to 18 units of supported accommodation across west Kent, ideally three times six bed projects, one in each borough. The six unit model is considered the smallest viable cluster model to allow for self-contained flats, some staff office space and communal facilities for training etc.

## **1.2 Housing Duties**

- 1.2.1 Local housing authorities have a duty to house 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless and young people who have been (but are no longer) in care. Care leavers can be aged up to 21, or 24 years if still in education. The three councils welcomed the government's announcement in November 2006 that it wanted to bring to an end the use of bed and breakfast for 16/17 year olds.
- 1.2.2 However, no further funding has been made available to assist local authorities in reducing its usage. Supported lodgings have been piloted but finding host families has proved difficult and this intensive support model is very expensive.

## **1.3 Evidence of need**

- 1.3.1 Housing need is evidenced through homelessness approaches, referrals to the Council's Joint Assessment Referral Procedure (JARP) and young people seeking housing advice through the housing options service, Bridge Trust, Connexions etc. The Council's housing options service dealt with 80 enquiries from young people in the first half of this year and 47 young people (includes young parents) have been accepted for housing through the homelessness & joint assessment routes. Accommodation options are much more restricted for young people starting out who have limited means and little life experience. A period in a supported project where various life skills can be learned together with planned move on arrangements would make a significant difference to the chances of the young person successfully maintaining a tenancy in future. Help with tenancy sustainment is essential to prevent the young person being drawn into the cycle of repeat homelessness.

## **1.4 Progress**

- 1.4.1 Expressions of interest were invited from RSLs to provide the three supported housing projects for 16-24 year olds across west Kent. Russet Homes on behalf of Circle Anglia has been selected as the preferred partner and work has commenced to identify potential sites in the three local authority areas.
- 1.4.2 The Supporting People Team has identified potential revenue funding for this project subject to confirmation of the SP budget and agreement of the Commissioning Body to ring-fence this funding at their meeting on 20 December 2007 (Officers will be able to provide a verbal update at your meeting). This is an important issue as clearly, Russet Homes will require a commitment from Supporting People to fund the support required. The support provider would be selected through a separate tender process.

## **1.5 Summary of Proposed Support Service**

- 1.5.1 The project brief is for a needs led short-term accommodation based support service. Support plans would be based around a maximum of two years in the supported living scheme when service users will be helped to move on to

permanent accommodation. This may involve outreach or floating support until fully independent in their new home. Support will be delivered through comprehensive support planning and reviewed in conjunction with family, advocates and appropriate agencies. Supporting People funding will be limited to 17.5 hours per week per client so it is targeted to young clients with low to medium support needs.

## 1.5.2 **Housing Management**

1.5.3 The Supporting People agenda separates housing management and support functions. The proposed project is intended to cater for young people with support needs so there will be a need for a more specialist housing management and support service. Although the intention is to have a staff office, there will not be a permanent staff presence at the project. It is essential, therefore, that out of hours arrangements are sufficiently robust and factored into the project. Russet Homes through its specialist support arm, Invicta Telecare, will be the landlord responsible for all aspects of housing management including signing up tenants, day to day repairs, managing the rent accounts, ensuring compliance with conditions of tenancy etc.

1.5.4 Provision of the support service will be tendered for separately with suitably qualified support providers invited to tender for the contract. It is particularly important that there is clarity about the respective roles of Russet Homes/Invicta as landlord and the support provider so that the identified functions and responsibilities can be built into the service specification for the support service and framed into a service level agreement between the respective parties. Housing support includes:

- increasing young people's ability to live independently in mainstream housing, through a mixture of practical and personal support.
- linking with the individual to assist them in moving on from supported accommodation towards independence.
- acting as a broker for a wider set of services that the young person may need.

1.5.5 There are various ways that the out of hours arrangements can be handled. Russet Homes operates a duty rota for out of hours emergencies whereby senior officers can be contacted via the Invicta Telecare call centre. The support provider will also be asked to factor out of hours cover into their tender submission. The young people will also have individual support plans agreed as a condition of being allocated a tenancy at the project. There will, therefore, be various agencies with a vested interest in ensuring that the young person makes a success of the tenancy.

## **1.6 Eligibility**

- 1.6.1 The scheme is designed to assist 16-24 year olds with identified support needs in west Kent. Members need to be aware, however, that providers of Supporting People funded services are required to provide equal access to services so local connection considerations should not be applied. This means that applicants for the projects could be from any area although it is more likely that young applicants would have some links to the local area. It should also be remembered that the aim of this project is to address an identified gap in provision in west Kent to bring the sub regional provision in line with the rest of the county. Officers would, however, seek to negotiate an arrangement whereby the three supported projects had an open nominations policy via the JARP process but restricted to applicants from west Kent. Move on arrangements would then be agreed in accordance with the Kent Reconnection Policy which links offers of permanent accommodation back to the area of local connection.

## **1.7 Funding**

- 1.7.1 Capital funding for the project will be sought via a bid to the Housing Corporation for Social Housing Grant (SHG). At a recent meeting with the Housing Corporation, this scheme was flagged up as a potential scheme through the market engagement funding route. The Housing Corporation does not require a guarantee of revenue funding before it will invest in a supported housing project. They will, however, only fund projects which meet identified needs, and hence are likely to obtain the necessary funding. The Housing Corporation also wants to ensure that there is flexibility to respond to changing demand or client group with minimum additional capital expenditure.
- 1.7.2 Revenue funding for the project will be sought via Supporting People at the meeting of the Commissioning Body on 20 December 2007. It is hoped that funding will be allocated to the project with an undertaking to ring-fence the monies until the project is built. This financial commitment is required before Russet Homes can enter into contract on land etc.

## **1.8 Exit Strategy**

- 1.8.1 The availability of revenue funding is essential for this project. There is, however, little certainty about the availability of funding in future years so an exit strategy is required. As part of the bid to the Housing Corporation, therefore, Russet Homes will need to demonstrate that the project is capable of conversion into an alternative use without significant capital expenditure. The scheme design will, therefore, allow for flexibility of use e.g. the design will allow for the office space to be incorporated into one of the self-contained flats to create a two bed flat. The block of one and two bed flats could then be used as rented accommodation for general needs.

## 1.9 Legal Implications

1.9.1 The Council has a statutory duty to house 16/17 year olds who are homeless in accommodation suitable for their needs.

1.9.2 Failure to make adequate provision for this client group could leave the Council open to legal challenge.

## 1.10 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.10.1 Adequate provision for this client group will reduce spend on bed and breakfast and supported lodgings.

## 1.11 Risk Assessment

1.11.1 As a pre-requisite to Council support any scheme for young people in the borough must have:

- appropriate levels of support in place to ensure young people can sustain their accommodation/tenancy
- a commitment from Kent Supporting People to fund the support element
- satisfactory site management and supervision arrangements
- suitable move on arrangements in place to promote independence

## 1.12 Policy Considerations

1.12.1 The Joint Homelessness Strategy has identified a need for supported housing for young people at risk in west Kent.

## 1.13 Recommendations

1.13.1 That subject to the caveats identified in para 1.11.1 the Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to **ENDORSE** the proposal to provide supported accommodation for young people at risk in west Kent.

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:

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Nil

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