

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

12 February 2008

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON ALLOCATION SCHEME CONSULTATION

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the responses received to the formal consultation period of the revised Housing Allocation Scheme.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Since the Housing Allocation Scheme was last reviewed (2002/03) there have been a number of legislative and procedural changes to the way in which applications for social housing are considered and prioritised, with a move towards homelessness prevention and increasing choice for applicants in housing need. The current allocation scheme has been reviewed to reflect these changes and to coincide with the return of housing register and homelessness services from Russet Homes.

1.1.2 Prior to implementation, the draft scheme was subject to a formal public consultation period of 12 weeks, which began on 15 October 2007 and ended on 7 January 2008. A copy of the draft Housing Allocation Scheme was sent to all RSLs with whom the Council has nomination rights, other partners and referral bodies such as Kent Adult Social Services, health authorities, Connexions, Kent Supporting People team and relevant voluntary sector organisations; as well as being made available to service users and members of the public at the Council's offices and on the Council's website.

1.2 Responses to the consultation

1.2.1 Despite wide publicity, very few responses were received during the consultation period:

- a response was received from a member of the public regarding the priority given on the grounds of residency within the borough, suggesting that this priority be extended to the neighbouring West Kent boroughs of Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells;

- two responses were received from officers of Tonbridge and Malling borough council, the first suggesting that information be included regarding the assistance available to applicants who require an assessment form in another format or who are unable to complete the form themselves, and the second suggesting that the age that two children of the opposite sex would be expected to share a double bedroom be increased from seven to ten; and
- a response was received from Kent Adult Social Services supporting the proposal to give priority to vulnerable adults in supported accommodation to move on to less supported or general needs housing.

1.2.2 The consultation deadline was extended to allow Russet Homes time to respond. However, at the date of writing this report, no responses had been received from any of the Council's RSL partners including Russet Homes.

1.3 Amendments to the Draft Allocations Scheme

1.3.1 After consideration, the suggestion to extend the additional priority on the grounds of local connection to neighbouring boroughs has not been incorporated. Local connection priority is awarded to those with a connection to the borough, not just as a result of residency, but also those with ties through employment or family members. The allocations schemes operated by Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells similarly award priority to applicants with a local connection to their respective boroughs. To extend the local connection criteria from individual boroughs to the West Kent region solely for those applying to Tonbridge and Malling would be confusing for applicants, who could also apply to Tunbridge Wells and/or Sevenoaks and not be awarded additional local connection priority.

1.3.2 Information regarding the assistance available to applicants when making an application or requiring a copy of the document in an alternative format has been included within the Housing Allocation Scheme document and will also be included on the Council's website when the scheme is implemented.

1.3.3 In respect of the suggestion that the age that two children of the opposite sex would be expected to share a double bedroom be increased from seven to ten, further information has been sought from Russet Homes to scope the extent and effect of this on housing register applicants. This does not apply to existing tenants of Russet Homes with children who require larger accommodation, who will be considered under their Transfer Policy.

1.4 Progress

1.4.1 Members are requested to note the feedback received from the consultation exercise. Subject to the smooth transition of the new in house arrangements from April 2008, it is proposed to recommend adoption of the revised Scheme at either the May or July meeting of the Board. In the interim, officers will be preparing for

the implementation of the scheme and reviewing the effects of the amendments to the allocations scheme on existing applicants.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 The Council has a legal duty under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) to determine housing need in the borough, and to produce an allocations scheme which explains how affordable housing is allocated to those in housing need.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 None arising from this report.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 Failure to properly assess housing need and homelessness would leave vulnerable households at risk of homelessness and the Council open to legal challenge.

Background papers:

contact: Lynn Wilders

Held with Housing Services

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing