

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 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the recent announcement of an increased Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation for Tonbridge & Malling in 2007/08. It also brings Members up to date with the West Kent Landlord Forum and the Kent Empty Property Initiative.

1.1 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation

- 1.1.1 Members are aware from the last meeting of this Board that officers had requested a further £35,000 Government grant from Government Office for the South East (GOSE) in order to meet a predicted £58,000 shortfall in the DFG budget for 2007/08.
- 1.1.2 On the 14 January 2008, GOSE announced that Government had made available some additional DFG funding for 2007/08 and that the allocation for Tonbridge & Malling would be increased by £35,000.
- 1.1.3 The Council has committed to providing the requisite 40 per cent top-up funding of £23,000 from capital funds. This is achieved through a re-profiling of the DFG budget over the next five years.
- 1.1.4 The total DFG budget for 2007/08 is now £560,000 and I remain confident that this will be fully spent by the end of the year.
- 1.1.5 As discussed at the last meeting of this Board, your Officers will continue to lobby Government for the required funding to meet the ever increasing demand on the DFG budget.

1.2 West Kent Landlord Forum

- 1.2.1 Members are aware that the Council is working in partnership with Tunbridge Wells BC and Sevenoaks DC and the National Federation of Residential Landlords (NFRL) (previously the Southern Private Landlords Association) to deliver landlord forums. Since October 2007 the National Landlords Association

has also joined the partnership. It is a significant achievement to have two major landlord associations working with the local authorities on these events. As well as helping to deliver information to a wider audience of landlords these organisations are also contributing financially to reduce the costs for all of holding the forums. They are also pro-active in assisting with presentations and advice for attendees.

- 1.2.2 Attendance at the forums has continued to improve as the steering group has become more experienced and clearer about the kinds of issues of importance to landlords and would-be landlords. A continuing successful part of the forums is the presence of council officers, particularly from private sector housing and housing advice/needs teams, who are happy to discuss a range of issues/concerns.
- 1.2.3 The most recent event was 11 October 2007 at Tonbridge & Malling BC and attracted in excess of 60 landlords/managing agents from across Kent. The main topic for the evening was the forthcoming Local Housing Allowance (LHA) scheme. Presentations were given by a member of the NFRL on the experiences from the pilot authorities and Andrew Rosevear (Principal Benefits Officer for Tonbridge & Malling BC) on the implications for the Council and local landlords. A presentation was also given by Danae Spencer (Housing Officer – Tonbridge & Malling BC) on the Council's rent deposit schemes.
- 1.2.4 This forum was considered to be the most successful so far and it appears that holding the forums in the evening, three times a year is proving popular.
- 1.2.5 The latest forum was on 30 January 2008 at Sevenoaks DC. The topics included practical energy efficiency improvements that landlords can undertake and what financial assistance is available to assist with the improvements. The next forum at Tonbridge & Malling will be held on 8 October 2008.

1.3 Kent Empty Property Initiative

- 1.3.1 Members will recall the report to the October 2007 meeting of this Board where it was agreed that the Council should join the Kent County Council (KCC) 'No Use Empty' initiative when it is rolled out Kent wide in January 2008.
- 1.3.2 The initiative aims to tackle and reduce the negative impact of empty properties, for example vandalism, rubbish dumping, and bring them back into use as housing accommodation. KCC developed the East Kent 'No Use Empty' initiative in partnership with four East Kent district councils using Public Service Agreement grant funding. The three year scheme was launched in 2005 and runs to 2008. As part of 'Towards 2010' policy document Kent County Council is committed to roll out the current initiative across the whole of Kent from January 2008 to help reduce empty properties across the county. No funding contribution, capital or revenue, is required for councils to enter the initiative.
- 1.3.3 The initiative was formally launched for West Kent on 23 January 2008. Key stakeholders were invited to the event and presentations were given on the West

Kent perspective on empty homes, background to the initiative and case studies from the progress already made in East Kent.

- 1.3.4 Further discussions will take place with KCC to ensure that Tonbridge & Malling utilises fully and appropriately the resources this initiative offers. An update report will be presented to a future meeting of this Board.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 Disabled Facilities Grants are a mandatory grant under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 The Council has received additional funding from GOSE for DFG work and have match funded this as required (40 per cent) by a re-profiling of the budget over the next five years. The demand on the DFG budget remains high.
- 1.5.2 The West Kent Landlord Forum provides for joint working across the sub-region resulting in a saving of resources. With the additional financial input from the two landlord organisations the forums and all they achieve provide excellent value for money.
- 1.5.3 All capital and revenue costs relating to the No Use Empty scheme will be funded by Kent County Council for the duration of the initiative 2008-2010. The Council will not have to contribute revenue or capital funding. It is anticipated that there will be a limited amount of 'in kind' funding, for example attendance at 'No Use Empty' meetings.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

contact: Linda Hibbs

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing