

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

6 October 2008

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICES

Summary

This report updates Members on the transfer of the Home Improvement Agency Service (HIA) to *in touch* which took place on 4 August 2008

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Members will recall from the May meeting of this Board that it was agreed the Home Improvement Agency should be outsourced to *in touch* as soon as was reasonably practicable.

1.1.2 A scrutiny review of the service had led to an assessment that the in-house provision was limited by capacity and *in touch* could provide a much enhanced service at little or no extra cost to the Council.

1.2 Transfer of HIA

1.2.1 The transfer of the HIA took place on 4 August 2008. As Members are aware one member of staff was protected under the TUPE regulations and transferred to *in touch*. She has maintained the Tonbridge & Malling caseload and we are therefore benefitting from some continuity for our clients.

1.2.2 The Tonbridge & Malling caseload is currently being managed from the Maidstone office with appropriate administrative support being provided. The HIA telephone extensions at the Council have been redirected to *in touch* to prevent clients being passed from one organisation to another. In addition all clients have been sent an introduction letter by the Council and followed – up by contact by *in touch* to explain the handover of the service.

1.2.3 The recruitment process for a technical officer for the Tonbridge & Malling area is ongoing. In the meantime use of other technical officers within *in touch* is in place as well as additional support from external consultants.

1.2.4 *In touch* are currently prioritising the cases they have taken over, ensuring the computer system is updated fully with the Tonbridge & Malling caseload. I understand this is a significant task as the two organisations have utilised the IT systems differently and clearly *in touch* now wish to ensure consistency in their approach to management of cases and enable the provision of much needed monitoring information.

1.3 HomeSafe and Handyperson Scheme

1.3.1 The HomeSafe scheme has largely remained unchanged by the transfer as the technician was already employed by *in touch*. He now operates out of the Maidstone office where the administrative support is provided. Arrangements are in hand to transfer the HomeSafe scheme stock e.g. window locks, grab rails etc. from the Council's storage facility to another location identified by *in touch*.

1.3.2 *In touch* have appointed a handyperson to operate the Handyperson scheme in Tonbridge and Malling who started on 8 September 2008. He will obviously undergo a period of induction and training prior to being fully operational on the district. Members are reminded that this was a key service that the in house HIA did not provide and the transfer will now enable residents to access a responsive minor repairs service at reasonable prices and with trusted staff.

1.3.3 A formal launch of the Handyperson Scheme in Tonbridge & Malling is proposed and Members will be kept informed.

1.4 HIA Support Group

1.4.1 The last support group meeting for the in house HIA was held in July 2008. David Eaton, Project Manager, from *in touch* attended the meeting to introduce both himself and *in touch*. He was keen to reinforce the message that during the handover and for a settling-in period, the support group meetings for Tonbridge & Malling will remain in the same format. He emphasised that he needed the support group to play a key role in ensuring the service is awarded Grade 'A's in the Quality Assessment Framework inspection due in April 2009 and work towards this was already taking place. The next support group meeting is due on 6 November 2008 at which both Council officers and Members are due to attend.

1.5 Office Location

1.5.1 As Members are aware *in touch* are keen to establish one agency covering the areas of Tonbridge & Malling, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone. They have always indicated their intention to have the office for this new agency in the Tonbridge and Malling area. I understand that this continues to be the aim and a local office has been identified and I will update Members further at the meeting on progress.

1.6 Conclusions

- 1.6.1 I am pleased to report that the transfer of the HIA service to *in touch* went smoothly. *In touch* are now committed to tackling the Tonbridge & Malling caseload and improving homes for our residents.
- 1.6.2 The residents of Tonbridge & Malling will now benefit from a new Handyperson service which will help improve housing conditions across the Borough.

Background papers:

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Nil

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