

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

18 May 2009

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 YOUNG PERSONS ACCOMMODATION

Summary

This report seeks to update Members on the Council's proposals to provide supported housing for young people at risk.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Members will recall that the Council has been working on a west Kent project with Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to provide accommodation for young people at risk. As previously reported to this Board the Joint Homelessness Strategy developed by the three West Kent districts and partners, identified a need for supported housing accommodation for young people at risk in west Kent. The strategy's Action Plan identified 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 very 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. The Kent Supporting People Team through its review of short term accommodation based services also identified a need for supported housing for young people at risk in west Kent.

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 council's 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.

1.3 Evidence of need

- 1.3.1 Housing need is evidenced through homelessness approaches, young people seeking housing advice through the housing options service, Bridge Trust, and Connexions etc. In 2008-09 the Council's housing options service accepted 17 young people (includes young parents) for housing through the homelessness route. 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 RSL's to provide the three supported housing projects for 16-24 year olds across west Kent. Russet Homes on behalf of Circle Anglia was selected as the preferred partner and work commenced to identify potential sites in the three local authority areas.
- 1.4.2 The Supporting People Team identified and ring-fenced revenue funding for the project, 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 the young persons are 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 17.5 hours per week per client, (the highest support level in the south east for this nature of scheme), so it is targeted at young clients with low to medium support needs.

1.6 The Proposed Scheme

- 1.6.1 The proposed scheme is located on New Wharf Road in Tonbridge. A planning application has been submitted, detailing a commercial space on the ground floor, nine self contained units, and a managers office that doubles as a training room for residents.

- 1.6.2 Capital funding for the project will be sought via a bid to the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA), who are in principle supporting the project and have agreed grant per unit rates with Russet Homes.

1.7 Housing Management

- 1.7.1 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 scheme has 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 are factored into the project.
- 1.7.2 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 as landlord and the support provider so that the identified functions and responsibilities will be built into the service specification for the support service and framed into a service level agreement between the respective parties.

1.8 Eligibility

- 1.8.1 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, 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.

1.9 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; and
- suitable move on arrangements in place to allow young persons to move on to greater 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.

Background papers:

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Nil

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