

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 ALLOCATIONS SCHEME UPDATE

Summary

This report informs Members on the implementation of the amended housing allocations scheme in conjunction with the introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

- 1.1.1 Further to the report to Members on 23 February 2009, revisions to the Council's housing allocations scheme have been finalised, and a housing allocation scheme summary document sent to all applicants registered for housing.
- 1.1.2 Additional comments were received from Russet Homes on 9 March 2009, in relation to their conversion to a charity on 1 April 2009. Russet Homes requested provisions in the scheme stating that they have an absolute right to reject applicants if the applicants do not, in Russet Homes' opinion, meet the criteria for being considered proper charitable beneficiaries of Russet Homes. Further comments were made on the simplistic income and savings thresholds for determining that a person "may have sufficient income or savings to afford to rent or buy in the private sector" which may not be compatible with Russet Homes' charitable status
- 1.1.3 Although these comments were received outside of the formal consultation period, the clause dealing with financial considerations has been amended to state that "Most housing associations have charitable status and provide services within the local community to satisfy needs that cannot be met by other means. Housing associations with charitable status may refuse to offer you a tenancy if they decide that you cannot be considered to be a charitable beneficiary. This means (in most cases) that tenancies will only be offered to those who cannot afford to buy or rent a suitable home on the open market, or who are in housing need for other reasons for example by reason of age or chronic illness".
- 1.1.4 The issue of income and savings thresholds is already stated within the scheme as subject to an annual review in January, and will be reconsidered at this point.

- 1.1.5 All applicants registered for housing have been reassessed and placed into one of four priority bands in accordance with the provisions of the scheme. On 27 April 2009, when the Council officially went live with choice based lettings, there were a total of 1,845 applications registered for housing. This included 1,343 registered as Homeseekers and 502 Russet tenants registered for a transfer.
- 1.1.6 During the reassessment process, 253 applications were cancelled. This includes 58 applications which were removed from the register in accordance with the scheme, as they were not awarded any points, and had no local connection with Tonbridge and Malling. The breakdown of those registered by Band was as follows:

Band	Number of Homeseekers	Number of Russet Homes Tenants
Band A	12	54
Band B	98	53
Band C	412	161
Band D	821	234
Total	1343	502

- 1.1.7 A review of those placed in Band A was undertaken to establish the reasons for the variance between the proportion of homeseekers and transfer applicants in Band A. The allocations scheme awards Band A priority to housing association tenants needing a home with two or more bedrooms less than they currently occupy. A similar priority is not awarded to those in the private sector in the same situation. The review revealed that a high proportion of transfer applicants in Band A fell into this category.

1.2 Further updates

- 1.2.1 The Government has recently issued a circular giving further statutory guidance when dealing with serving and former members of the armed forces. The circular gives effect to a commitment in the Command Paper *'The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans'* issued in July 2008.
- 1.2.2 The circular states that Service personnel who have been seriously injured or disabled in action, and who have an urgent need for social housing should be given high priority within local authorities' allocations schemes in recognition of their service. Within this Council's allocations scheme, this will be given effect by the award of high priority on welfare grounds to eligible applicants.
- 1.2.3 Within the allocations scheme, there are a number of examples of situations that warrant the award of high priority on welfare grounds. The following additional example has been included in the scheme as a result of the circular: *'you need to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical*

condition or disability which you, or a member of your household, have sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces.'

1.2.4 One further example of when high priority on welfare grounds will be awarded has been added, to reduce the need for emergency accommodation for households in priority need who are at imminent risk of homelessness. High priority will be awarded for a maximum of three months to prevent homelessness for those households where the Council would otherwise have a duty to provide interim accommodation.

1.2.5 The following additional example has been included in the scheme: *'you are at imminent risk of homelessness, and the Council would have a duty to provide you with interim or emergency accommodation because you are in priority need of accommodation. You will be awarded high priority on welfare grounds for a maximum period of three months, to enable you to participate in CBL to help to prevent homelessness.'*

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 None arising from this report

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 None arising from this report

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 None arising from this report

Background papers:

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Nil

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