

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

9 November 2009

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING NEEDS UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the activity of the Housing Options, Homelessness and Housing Register Services.

- 1.1.1 Following the return of homelessness and housing register services in March 2008, there have been a number of significant improvements in service delivery, particularly in relation to homeless prevention and temporary accommodation.

1.2 Housing options and prevention of homelessness

- 1.2.1 The number of new homeless applications taken each month has remained at a low level, and currently the Council accepts a statutory duty to re-house around two applicants per month as a result of their homelessness.

Date / number of outstanding applications	New applications taken during the month	Duty to re-house accepted	Duty to re-house rejected
31.1.09 – 3	January – 7	January – 1	January – 8
28.2.09 – 2	February – 4	February – 0	February - 4
31.3.09 – 5	March – 6	March – 4	March – 3
30.4.09 – 3	April – 3	April –2	April –3
31.5.09 – 1	May –2	May – 3	May – 3
30.6.09 – 5	June – 5	June – 1	June – 3
31.7.09 – 4	July – 8	July – 3	July – 6
31.8.09 – 3	August – 4	August – 0	August – 7
30.9.09 - 2	September - 9	September - 3	September -10

- 1.2.2 The applications listed in columns three and four are not necessarily the same as those in column two. This is because a decision on a homelessness application not may be reached during the same calendar month it was made.

- 1.2.3 Approximately one third of all new approaches to the Housing Options team are given detailed advice on homelessness prevention and alternative re-housing

options over the telephone during their initial call and do not need to make any further contact. Many cases had their housing need resolved either by casework, including negotiations with landlords or checking entitlement to welfare benefits, or by assistance with securing suitable privately rented accommodation. Other cases are ongoing and are continuing to receive advice and assistance.

Month	Number of new approaches to Housing Options team	Advised on homeless prevention/private renting
January 2009	103	Approx 81
February 2009	148	Approx 122
March 2009	178	Approx 149
April 2009	121	Approx 97
May 2009	89	Approx 74
June 2009	140	Approx 119
July 2009	158	Approx 127
August 2009	208	Approx 162
September 2009	181	Approx 159

1.3 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.3.1 The Council is committed to reducing the number of households placed into temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation, as a result of becoming homeless. In 2004 the Government set a target to halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010. Our 2010 target is 41 households and we have already exceeded this, with a total of 20 households in temporary accommodation at the end of September 2009.
- 1.3.2 The number of applicants in temporary accommodation is now a national indicator (NI156), which is reported on an annual basis.
- 1.3.3 We are continuing to keep in regular contact with all applicants in temporary accommodation to ensure any problems with rent arrears are addressed and that they are actively participating in Choice Based Lettings.

Date	Number in Temporary Accommodation (AST)	Households in B&B	No of new B&B bookings made during month	Total no of B&B nights booked & average no of nights per household	No of households leaving B&B during month & total no of nights they stayed
31.1.09	37	4	3	122 24	2 59
28.2.09	36	4	1	105 21	1 32
31.3.09	34	5	5	121	0 n/a

				17		
30.4.09	35	3	5	17 6	3	17
31.5.09	37	3	1	65 22	1	38
30.6.09	34	7	8	172 14	4	146
31.7.09	24	6	3	165 21	3	68
31.8.09	15	5	5	187 19	5	71
30.9.09	15	5	4	182 20	4	73

1.3.4 In the last quarter, the number of households in temporary accommodation has reduced significantly. Most of these have been housed permanently.

1.3.5 Although numbers of bed and breakfast bookings have fluctuated in recent months, there is no significant reason for this. We have compared our performance with that of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council and it will be noted from the table below both authorities had a greater number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of the first two quarters this year:

Date	Sevenoaks Temporary Accommodation	Sevenoaks B&B	Tunbridge Wells Temporary Accommodation	Tunbridge Wells B&B
30.6.09	25	0	32	5
30.9.09	26	0	28	10

1.4 Housing Register

The table below shows number of applicants joining and leaving the housing register:

Date	Applications Received (month)	Applications Cancelled (month)	Number on Housing Register
30.4.09	April – 105	April – 233	1,364
31.5.09	May – 126	May - 71	1,978 (includes 486 transfers)
30.6.09	June - 129	June - 34	2,073 (includes 519 transfers)
31.7.09	July – 174	July – 97	2,087 (includes 527 transfers)
31.8.09	August – 168	August – 103	2,050 (includes 544 transfers)
30.9.09	September - 182	September - 103	2,097 (includes 562 transfers)

1.4.1 Although the number of homeseekers has remained relatively static, the number of tenants seeking a transfer has increased by around 16 per cent since the introduction of choice based lettings. This has impacted significantly on the work of the team, since existing tenants are increasingly seeking a transfer to resolve neighbour disputes and other housing management issues.

1.5 Choice Based Lettings

1.5.1 At the time of writing this report, the number of applicants registered for housing was 2,117, which includes 572 existing tenants of Russet Homes seeking a transfer. Of these, 69 (3.3 per cent) were in Band A (urgent), 180 (8.5 per cent) were in Band B (high priority), 702 (33.2 per cent) were in Band C (medium priority) and 1,166 (55.1 per cent) were in Band D (low priority).

1.5.2 To date, 12 advertisement/bidding cycles have been completed. From the feedback reports published in the free sheets, which only include those properties let at the time of publication, 216 properties have been let with a further 11 withdrawn from the process.

Issue	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Withdrawn
22	0	6	0	2	0
23	4	7	4	1	0
24	3	1	6	0	2
25	1	6	2	1	1
26	2	11	12	3	1
27	2	12	8	1	1
28	1	10	9	1	3
29	1	6	14	0	0
30	2	6	8	6	2
31	2	12	19	2	0
32	5	8	9	0	1
Total	23 (10.6%)	85 (39.4%)	91 (42.1%)	17 (7.9%)	11

1.5.3 Of the 11 properties that were withdrawn, three did not become vacant as the tenants decided to remain, three were used for urgent decants for existing tenants temporarily displaced due to fire or subsidence, (but will be re-advertised when the decanted tenants can return home), one was not ready to let due to major repairs, one was withdrawn for an urgent homeless family, one was withdrawn temporarily due to an error on the advertisement but subsequently re-advertised and let, one was designated for applicants with support needs, and as such, should not have been advertised, and one is being used temporarily for community safety purposes.

- 1.5.4 The table below gives details of how bids have been placed by Tonbridge and Malling applicants per edition of the advertisement free sheet:

Editions	20 - 23	24 - 27	28 - 31	All (20 - 31)	% All
Coupon	69	90	77	236	3.18%
Phone	56	59	28	143	1.93%
SMS	38	36	36	110	1.48%
Staff	182	434	217	833	11.24%
Web	1600	2555	1937	6092	82.17%
TOTAL	1945	3174	2295	7414	100%

- 1.5.5 The future of the free sheet publication has recently been considered by the Kent CBL Partnership Board, as it is clear that most applicants throughout Kent choose to bid via the internet. It has been agreed that free sheets will no longer be provided from April 2010. The cost of the free sheets are a significant part of Kent Homechoice's outgoings (and consequently those of the partners) and the need for them to be phased out was recognised as a key factor in reducing costs in the Memorandum of Understanding that was adopted by the Board in December 2008. The proposal was informed by a customer survey that was undertaken during the summer.
- 1.5.6 The participation rate in choice based lettings for applicants on Tonbridge and Malling's housing register is around 35 per cent, which is similar to the all local authorities in the Kent Homechoice scheme. We carried out a snapshot survey on 24 September to look at those applicants that were not participating. Of the 2,077 applicants registered on that date, 1,455 or 70 per cent had never placed a bid. Of the 1,455 applicants, three were in Band A and 20 in Band B. We contacted these 23 high priority applicants, who gave the following reasons for not bidding:

Number	Reason
5	No suitable vacancies to meet specific need
4	Not wanting to move at present time
7	Found alternative accommodation/been rehoused outside the borough
2	Only recently applied
1	Only recently been awarded a high priority
1	Did not understand how CBL works
3	Unknown as unable to contact by telephone/no response to correspondence

- 1.5.7 Forthcoming developments include the proposal that Medway Council and Medway Housing Society (MHS) join Kent Homechoice. With 14,990 affordable homes in the area, Medway's participation would mean a 19 per cent increase in the total number of homes subject to choice based lettings throughout Kent. Also, Medway is engaged in a major development programme, with 144 sites

earmarked for affordable housing. In 2008/09, their housing partners completed 427 affordable homes.

- 1.5.8 The number of households currently registered for housing in Medway is 9,247, with a further 800 MHS tenants registered for a transfer. This compares with 29,992 applications currently registered for Kent Homechoice. The combined total of Medway Council and MHS housing applicants joining Kent Homechoice would result in a 33.5 per cent increase in live cases. The Kent Homechoice Partnership Board is in consultation with Medway Council and MHS in order to progress this.
- 1.5.9 The Kent Homechoice Partnership is also committed to introducing cross boundary mobility to enhance the quality of services by improving job opportunities to homeseekers and tenants. The Partnership Board has proposed that ten per cent of vacant homes from each local authority area are advertised on a cross-boundary basis with effect from April 2010.
- 1.5.10 Further details of these developments, including details of how the Project Board proposes to implement cross boundary mobility will be the subject of a further report to the Strategic Housing Advisory Board in early 2010.

1.6 Customer satisfaction surveys

- 1.6.1 Customers who contact the housing options team are sent a questionnaire, inviting them to score the service they received and make any comments about how the service could be improved. The table below gives details of the responses received, and the number of customers who were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service received. Questionnaires were not sent out between October and December 2008 however, as the database was being updated.
- 1.6.2 More households are being encouraged to return their survey forms so that we can better appreciate the views of customers and hopefully use the information to better inform service delivery.

Month	Number of surveys sent	Number of surveys returned	Number who were satisfied or very satisfied with the service
January 2008	25	2	0 (0%)
February 2008	38	10	8 (80%)
March 2008	46	10	7 (70%)
April 2008	94	17	10 (59%)
May 2008	111	23	11 (48%)
June 2008	147	1	1 (100%)
July 2008	2	11	9 (82%)

August 2008	35	8	4 (50%)
September 2008	2	1	0 (0%)
January 2009	58	2	0 (0%)
February 2009	33	4	1 (25%)
March 2009	60	1	1 (100%)
April 2009	66	15	11 (73%)
May 2009	80	4	3 (75%)
June 2009	13	6	3 (50%)
July 2009	105	8	7 (88%)
August 2009	48	5	4 (80%)
September 2009	146	20	8 (40%)

1.7 Deposit bond scheme

1.7.1 Members approved the use of the reviewed Rent Deposit and Deposit Bond Scheme in May 2009. Since then, we have assisted 19 families who were either threatened with homelessness or actually homeless into suitable rented accommodation in the private sector. Seven of these families have been assisted by way of a rent deposit bond, with a total potential liability of £4,491.18. Five households have been provided with a rent deposit payment, to be repaid over a period of 12 to 24 months with a total outlay of £2,495. A further seven households were assisted with no financial outlay or ongoing liability to the Council.

1.8 Legal Implications

1.8.1 None arising from this report.

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.9.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

contact: Lynn Wilders

Nil

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