

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

17 May 2010

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 CHOICE BASED LETTINGS – PROGRESS UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the progress of choice based lettings since its implementation in Tonbridge and Malling in April 2009.

1.1 Applications

1.1.1 At the time of writing this report there were 2,505 applicants on the housing register, of which:

- 87 (3.5 per cent) were in Band A (urgent needs);
- 189 (7.5 per cent) were in Band B (high priority);
- 817 (32.6 per cent) were in Band C (medium priority), and
- 1,412 (56.4 per cent) were in Band D (low priority)

1.1.2 The overall participation rate is currently 41 per cent with 1,481 applicants who have not yet placed any bids.

1.2 Lettings

1.2.1 At the time of writing this report 476 properties have been let in the borough through choice based lettings, of which:

- 50 (11 per cent) were let to applicants in Band A;
- 193 (41 per cent) were let to applicants in Band B;
- 184 (39 per cent) were let to applicants in Band C, and
- 49 (10 per cent) were let to applicants in Band D

1.2.2 The 476 properties included 47 x sheltered homes, 175 x studio and one bedroomed homes, 141 x two bedroomed homes, 109 x three bedroomed homes, and four x four bedroomed homes.

1.2.3 Average waiting times for properties that have been let are as follows:

Type/size	Shortest wait	Longest wait	Average wait
Sheltered	6 days	8 years	7 months
Studio – general needs	5 weeks	12 weeks	8 weeks
1 bed – general needs	7 days	7 years	11 months
2 bed flat or maisonette	1 day	10 years	12 months
2 bed house	5 days	34 months	6 months
3 bed flat or maisonette	8 months	8 months	8 months
3 bed house	14 days	7 years	15 months
4 bed house	5 weeks	3 years	14 months

1.2.4 It should be noted that these waiting times only reflect those applicants who have been successful in bidding, many of whom will have been awarded a high priority. It remains the case that applicants in the lower priority bands, particularly those requiring larger properties, could be waiting much longer than the average figures suggest.

1.2.5 It will be noted from paragraph 1.4.2 of the Housing Needs Update Report to this Board, that there has been a significant increase in the number of households applying to be included on the housing register, which continues to impact on the workload of the housing register team.

1.3 Freesheets

1.3.1 There have been two bidding cycles since the freesheet (property advertisement booklet) was withdrawn on 2 April 2010. Early indications show that this has not impacted significantly in the number of bids placed which has remained at an average of 35 per property. The number of bids placed via the internet has increased from 84 per cent to 90 per cent, with the number of bids placed by coupon dropping to less than two per cent.

1.3.2 Lists of current property advertisements are circulated electronically to key partners and agencies every two weeks who are able to print hard copies for customers. This includes Russet Homes, libraries, social services, support workers, Tonbridge citizens' advice bureau and connexions. Copies are also available at Council offices on request. Vulnerable people can be sent a personalised list of properties that are available for them to bid on. We maintain a list of vulnerable people who require assistance with bidding (currently 27 people registered). Locata also provide a subscription service for applicants on demand.

1.4 Customer survey

- 1.4.1 All applicants on the housing register are contacted annually to review their application on or around the anniversary of their registration. However, in April 2009 all applicants were reviewed to coincide with the introduction of choice based lettings and the amended allocations scheme.
- 1.4.2 We have recently commenced a monthly rolling review, and have included a brief customer survey with the review letters to gauge understanding of the bidding process. This follows discussion at the February Board meeting when Members raised concerns about the ability of some members of the community to access choice based lettings. The survey questionnaire was designed in consultation with Councillor Jean Atkinson, Councillor Barbara Brown and Alan White, Kent Homechoice Co-ordinator.
- 1.4.3 Surveys will be sent to the first 600 applications reviewed, and it is anticipated that the response rate will be improved by including this with the review letter. Customers are invited to make comments about bidding for homes and make suggestions as to how we could improve the service. The results of this survey will be reported to a future meeting of this board.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 None arising from this report

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 None arising from this report

Background papers:

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Nil

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Director of Health and Housing