

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 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 Although the numbers of people seeking housing advice have increased in the last few months, the number of new homeless applications taken each month has remained at a relatively low level, and currently the Council accepts a statutory duty to re-house around five applicants per month as a result of their homelessness.

Month	New homeless applications taken	Duty to house accepted	Duty to house rejected
April 2009	3	2	3
May 2009	2	3	3
June 2009	5	1	3
July 2009	8	3	6
August 2009	4	0	7
September 2009	9	3	10
October 2009	9	2	4
November 2009	5	0	4
December 2009	6	1	3
January 2010	9	3	10
February 2010	10	4	5
March 2010	12	6	5
Total 2009/10	82	28	63

- 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 have 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
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
October 2009	152	Approx 121
November 2009	109	Approx 82
December 2009	130	Approx 103
January 2010	143	Approx 118
February 2010	151	Approx 115
March 2010	182	Approx 157
Total 2009/10	1764	Approx 1434

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 31 March 2010. Our 2010 target was 41 households and we achieved this at the end of September 2008. Other than two months when the figure temporarily exceeded 41 (in October 2008 and June 2009) we have maintained the level below this figure, with a current total of 19 households in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2010.

- 1.3.2 The number of applicants in temporary accommodation is now a national indicator (NI156), which is reported on an annual basis.

Date	Number in Temporary Accommodation (AST)	Number in B&B	Total
30.04.09	35	3	38
31.05.09	37	3	40
30.06.09	37	7	44
31.07.09	24	6	31
31.08.09	15	5	20
30.09.09	15	5	20
31.10.09	14	6	20
30.11.09	15	5	20
31.12.09	15	5	20
31.01.10	15	5	20
28.02.10	15	3	18
31.03.10	13	6	19

- 1.3.3 The reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation has been achieved mainly as a result of the permanent re-housing of many of these households.

14 Housing Register

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

Month	Applications Received	Applications Cancelled	Number on Housing Register
April 2009	105	233	1,364
May 2009	126	71	1,978 (includes 486 transfers)
June 2009	129	34	2,073 (includes 519 transfers)
July 2009	174	97	2,087 (includes 527 transfers)
August 2009	168	103	2,050 (includes 544 transfers)
September 2009	182	103	2,097 (includes 547 transfers)
October 2009	143	97	2,089 (includes 555 transfers)
November 2009	139	57	2,152 (includes 574 transfers)
December 2009	86	119	2,204 (includes 601 transfers)
January 2010	177	74	2,229 (includes 606 transfers)

February 2010	157	54	2,372 (includes 661 transfers)
March 2010	244	98	2,492 (includes 695 transfers)
Total 2009/10	1,830	1,140	

1.4.2 In the last twelve months the number of registered homeseekers has increased by 32 per cent, with a significant increase in applications in the past six to eight weeks. However, the number of tenants seeking a transfer has increased disproportionately by 43 per cent. Members will recall from the last board meeting that this has impacted significantly on the work of the team, since existing social tenants are increasingly seeking a transfer to resolve neighbour disputes and other housing management issues. We are dealing with frequent calls and correspondence from tenants and their advocates, who often contact us in the first instance with their housing difficulties, which we ultimately have to refer back to their landlords. This is a matter I intend raising with the interim Managing Director of Russet Homes to satisfy myself that Russet's housing management responsibilities are not being circumvented by transfer requests.

1.4.3 The number of requests for medical and welfare assessments, and reviews of decisions made on priority has similarly increased, which is causing delays in the processing and updating of applications. We have temporarily increased the number of Housing Medical and Welfare Panel meetings to twice a week to meet the demand.

1.5 Youth homelessness education programme

1.5.1 In 2009/10 Communities and Local Government (CLG) awarded £7,500 to each local authority in Kent to reduce the impact of the recession (Recession Impact Funding). Members will be aware from a previous report to this Board (May 2009) that this funding was originally earmarked to boost the limited financial provision for the proposed amendments to the Rent Deposit Bond Scheme. The funding was not subsequently required for this purpose, and has as a result been transferred to a joint project developed by the Kent Housing Options Group to provide a youth homelessness education programme.

1.5.2 The Kent Housing Options Group has worked collectively to identify areas of joint working which could be feasible by combining the funding. Ten local authorities (Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells) have developed a youth homelessness education programme in conjunction with Porchlight, who will provide this service. Porchlight have appointed a co-ordinator who will be responsible for writing, developing and monitoring the programme, which will be delivered to secondary schools (year eight, nine and ten pupils aged 12 to 15 years) throughout the participating authorities over the next 12 months.

- 1.5.3 The programme will be flexible to fit in with individual schools, and it will be delivered as part of the Citizenship curriculum. Porchlight will also visit youth groups and pupil referral groups etc as identified by the local authorities. The schools will be visited as directed by each authority, so we will roll out the programme to the schools whose pupils will benefit most in the first phase. As schools usually plan their curriculum a year in advance, the visits are more likely to be taking place in the 2010/11 academic year, although Porchlight will be running the programme this academic year as well. The funding will last for the remainder of this academic year and for 2010/11. A DVD has been produced, which is shown as part of the presentation. Young people who have been homeless will speak to pupils about their experiences and there is a mixture of information and activities such as quizzes to get young people thinking about homelessness issues.
- 1.5.4 The first phase of schools in this borough to be included in the programme include Aylesford School Sports College in Aylesford, Holmesdale Technology College in Snodland, The Malling School in East Malling, Hugh Christie Technology College in Tonbridge and Hayesbrook School in Tonbridge. Wrotham School has been visited by the housing options team already this year.
- 1.5.5 Feedback from the programme will be reported to a future meeting of this board.

1.6 Fair and Flexible statutory guidance on social allocations

- 1.6.1 Members will recall that the Council responded to the consultation on the draft statutory guidance prior to its publication on 4 December 2009. Whilst we propose to amend our housing allocations scheme in the light of this guidance, this has been postponed pending further discussion with other local authority partners of Kent Homechoice. Whilst it may not be practical to introduce a Kent-wide allocations scheme, it is proposed to introduce a common assessment framework, based on a simple banding scheme which would also simplify the process for cross borough mobility. It is anticipated that a draft assessment framework will be produced by Kent Housing Group, and available for consultation by the end of May 2010.
- 1.6.2 Any proposed amendments to the housing allocation scheme will be the subject of a further report to this Board prior to public consultation.

1.7 Severe Weather Procedure for rough sleepers

- 1.7.1 The uptake of the provision of emergency accommodation for rough sleepers during periods of severe weather during the winter months was very low. As previously reported, we were approached by four rough sleepers in January, of which three decided not to take up the option of emergency accommodation. We received no further approaches, and the procedure will become operational again next winter.

1.8 Rent Deposit Bond Scheme

- 1.8.1 Members approved the use of the reviewed Rent Deposit and Deposit Bond Scheme in May 2009. Since April 2009 we have assisted 54 families who were either threatened with homelessness or actually homeless into suitable rented accommodation in the private sector. 13 of these families have been assisted by way of a rent deposit bond, and a further 18 households have been provided with a rent deposit or rent in advance payment. An additional 23 households have been assisted with no financial outlay or ongoing liability to the Council.
- 1.8.2 Since April 2009, £6,120.91 has been paid in respect of repayable rent in advance loans for ten households, and £4,493 has been paid in respect of repayable rent deposit loans for eight households. There are currently 13 households where the landlord has accepted a deposit bond, with a total potential financial liability of £10,824.18.
- 1.8.3 The Repossession Prevention funding has been used to prevent homelessness for a further ten households. To date £10,770.50 has been used, mostly to private sector landlords and RSLs in payments towards arrears to enable households to remain in their home. Of the £10,770.50 used, £4,630.23 was paid to five families as non repayable grants and the remaining £6,140.27 is currently being repaid.
- 1.8.4 In one case, a payment was made to reduce rent arrears to enable a household with three dependent children to remain in their privately rented home. The customer had been made redundant twice within the last 12 months and had not known they could claim housing benefit until the rent arrears had built up and the landlord had started possession proceedings. They are now back in full time work and are repaying the loan at an affordable level.
- 1.8.5 One family with five children has been assisted with a qualifying offer in the private sector to move them out of bed and breakfast accommodation. £1,495 was paid to the landlord in respect of a deposit and rent in advance for this property.

1.9 Legal Implications

- 1.9.1 None arising from this report

1.10 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.10.1 None arising from this report

Background papers:

contact: Lynn Wilders

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing