

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

19 July 2010

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 INTERNAL AUDITS 2009/10

Summary

This report outlines progress to date in implementing the recommendations from the internal audits of the homelessness function (audit report no.33) and the housing register and Kent Homechoice lettings scheme (audit report no. 43). Both audits were reported to the Audit Committee on 21 June 2010.

1.1 Homelessness Audit (Audit Report No. 33 2009/10)

- 1.1.1 Audit fieldwork commenced during early October 2009. A first draft of the report was produced at the beginning of February and it was finalised during the middle of May.
- 1.1.2 The audit examined the procedures for assessing and reviewing homelessness applications; and the procedures for placing customers into emergency accommodation including the arrangements for the collection of rent and service charges.
- 1.1.3 The audit found that all homelessness applications had been processed efficiently and effectively. In all cases tested there were good reasons for the decisions that were made and all had been processed within the required time scale. From a customer perspective therefore, the service is very well run.
- 1.1.4 The Housing Options Team deal with approximately 150 new housing options cases every month and each officer has at least 30 ongoing cases at any one time. Each case is different, and finding a solution that suits each household is a demanding and time-consuming process.
- 1.1.5 Despite this the number of households that are placed in emergency accommodation remains low, averaging approximately five at any one time. It is therefore a relatively small proportion of the overall work of the team however the audit revealed a number of procedural irregularities which the Housing Options Team are currently in the process of addressing.

1.1.6 The audit report contains seven recommendations, three of which are already completed with the remainder due for completion during this month. A copy of the action plan is attached at **[Annex 1]**.

1.2 Housing Register and Kent Homechoice Letting Scheme Audit (Audit Report No. 43 2009/10)

1.2.1 The audit examined the internal controls relating to the housing register and the choice-based lettings scheme which was implemented in May 2009. The objective was to ensure that policies, procedures, audit trails and internal controls were in place and that both the housing register and the choice-based lettings scheme were run efficiently.

1.2.2 The audit identified an absence of adequate written procedures and a number of procedural shortcomings which are reflected in eleven recommendations. A copy of the action plan is attached at **[Annex 2]** and Members will note that as with the actions arising from the homelessness audit, staff are making excellent progress in implementing the recommendations.

1.2.3 Of particular note is recommendation three – *Perform an Experian check on applicants to the housing register and perform the checks mentioned in this report.* This has been the subject of further discussion between staff in the Finance and Housing teams and rather than undertaking Experian checks on all applicants, they will instead be performed on a risk-assessed basis in order to minimise unnecessary expenditure. Any budgetary implications arising from these arrangements will be addressed at revised estimate stage. The steps proposed will also form part of the Council's response to the national initiative aimed at tackling housing fraud.

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 Risk management is addressed in both audit reports and the risk register for the Housing Service has been updated to reflect the risks identified.

Background papers:

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Nil

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