

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 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the following:

- **details of outcomes of housing assistance spend in 2009/10;**
- **details of outcomes of disabled facilities grant spend in 2009/10;**
- **evaluation of customer feedback for 2009/10;**
- ***in touch* Home Improvement Agency Advisory Group minutes;**
- **the DFG notional allocation agreement with Russet Homes for 2010/11; and**
- **the waiting times for children's Occupational Therapy assessments.**

1.1 Details of outcomes of housing assistance spend in 2009/10

1.1.1 The total Housing Assistance budget for this Council's activities in 2009/10 was £984,387. This is made up of £665,387 Regional Housing Board (RHB) funding, £100,000 Council funding and a re-allocation of £219,000 of RHB funding from our partners in the North and West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership.

1.1.2 The total spent on Council internally managed Housing Assistance activities for 2009/10 was approximately £540,000. A further £333,777 was allocated to our partner, Creative Environmental Network (CEN) to take forward energy efficiency related grants. These include grants for solar hot water installations, renewable energy grants, insulation for hard to heat properties, and grants for measures such as insulation and heating under a 'Coldbusters' grant.

1.1.3 At the beginning of the year, we set out what we intended to achieve in 2009/10 in terms of type and number of grants. A summary of this and the actual number of grants completed is provided in **TABLE 1**.

TABLE 1

Type of grant	Target number of completions	Actual number of completions
Renewable energy assistance	2	0
Solar Hot Water Heating	33	18
Warm Homes Assistance	67	101
Empty Homes Assistance	1	1
Landlord Assistance	1	6
Decent Homes Assistance	32	31
Hard to Heat Homes Assistance	1	7
First Time Buyer Assistance	8	6

1.1.4 The Energy Efficiency contract with CEN commenced in October 2009, hence the timing for promotion of the solar hot water grants wasn't ideal and probably resulted in a lower take-up. Funding for the solar hot water and the renewable energy grants has been rolled over to 2010/11 and marketing of these grants is being increased.

1.1.5 As a result of the above activities it has delivered:

- 102 homes being made decent, including having category 1 hazards removed as assessed using the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System; 11 homes moving towards being decent;
- 304 measures, where a measure may include electrics, roof works, new double glazed windows, new central heating boilers, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation etc.
- an estimated 75 tonnes of CO₂ saved by installing:
 - 94 new central heating/hot water boilers;
 - 20 homes with cavity wall insulation;
 - three hard to heat homes with external wall insulation;
 - four hard to heat homes with internal wall insulation;
 - 21 homes with improved loft insulation; and
 - 18 solar hot water heating systems.

- 1.1.6 As significant, the quality of life of 102 families living in the borough has been appreciably enhanced.

1.2 Details of outcomes of disabled facilities grant spend in 2009/10

- 1.2.1 In 2009/10 122 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) were completed. Of these 89 were for housing association tenants, 32 for owner occupiers and one for a privately renting tenant. The total spend in 2009/10 was £632,700 and Members will recall from the last meeting of this Board agreement was sought for the overspend to be met from the revenue reserve for capital schemes.
- 1.2.2 The main adaptation work that is carried out under a DFG remains either provision of a flush floor shower to replace a bath and/or provision of a stairlift. There were no grants completed in 2009/10 that reached the maximum £30,000 DFG limit.
- 1.2.3 The average DFG awarded was £5,200 with 93 cases being less than £5,000. There is some initial discussion ongoing with *in touch* as to whether 'simple' adaptation works could be taken outside of the DFG process to avoid bureaucracy and hopefully speed up the process. This has been recognised as good practice by Foundations, the National Co-ordinating Body for Home Improvement Agencies. A key factor in any future pilot of such a scheme is whether the Council would be adversely affected in any future DFG allocations process and we are currently seeking the advice of the CLG on this. Any proposed changes to the way in which we carry out adaptations will of course be reported into a future meeting of this Board.
- 1.2.4 The average time taken to approve a valid DFG application was well outside the 28 day target that we set ourselves. However Members will recall that the Council used the six month period it has in which to approve or refuse an application as a method of controlling spend against the budget and therefore the time taken is no longer a measure of performance of the team.
- 1.2.5 In addition to DFG spend on adaptations, Russet Homes committed a further £150,000 of their own funding to complete adaptations on their tenants properties in 2009/10. This funding was used once they had reached their agreed notional allocation of £350,000 from the DFG budget. They completed further adaptations at forty-seven properties with this funding which would otherwise have come through to the Council as DFG applications.

1.3 Evaluation of customer feedback for 2009/10

- 1.3.1 As part of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and the Housing Assistance Grant processes a customer feedback survey form is sent to the applicant on completion of the process.
- 1.3.2 For the period 2009/10 a total of 70 DFG customer feedback surveys were returned, 51 of those were from Housing Association tenants, predominantly Russet Homes. Of the 70 DFG surveys returned, 60 were from applicants of

white british origin, one of gypsy and traveller origin, one of white irish origin and eight not responded. Of the 70 DFG surveys:

- 34 were from applicants over 75 years of age;
- 15 where the applicant is aged 61 to 75 years;
- six where the applicant is aged 41 to 60 years;
- one where the applicant is aged 26 to 40 years; and
- 14 did not respond.

1.3.3 The DFG customer feedback survey is shared with Russet Homes for their tenant DFG applicants to avoid the duplication of Russet sending out a separate survey.

1.3.4 The table at **[Annex 1]** tabulates the combined 70 responses to the customer feedback DFG survey questions of interest to the Council.

1.3.5 From the responses shown in 1.3.4 in the main, DFG applicants are happy with the service they receive from the Council and the work undertaken by the builders. The main issue applicants dislike about the DFG process is the time it takes to complete.

1.3.6 For the period 2009/10 a total of 71 Housing Assistance customer feedback surveys were returned. Of the 71 surveys returned, 55 were from applicants of white british origin, one from a mixed white and black caribbean and 15 did not respond. Of the 71 Housing Assistance surveys, 15 of those were from applicants with a disability and 16 did not respond if they had a disability. Of the 71 surveys:

- 11 were from applicants over 75 years of age;
- 28 where the applicant is aged 61 to 75 years;
- 15 where the applicant is aged 41 to 60 years;
- four where the applicant is aged 26 to 40 years; and
- 13 did not respond.

1.3.7 The table at **[Annex 2]** tabulates the combined 71 responses to the customer feedback Housing Assistance survey questions of interest to the Council.

1.3.8 From the responses shown in 1.3.7 in the main, Housing Assistance applicants are happy with the service they receive from the Council and the work undertaken by the builders. The main issue applicants dislike about the Housing Assistance process is the lack of regular communication from the Council on the progress of their Housing Assistance enquiry.

1.3.9 The responses from the DFG and Housing Assistance surveys are used to help improve the service delivery to the customer for DFGs and Housing Assistance grants. I am hopeful that with the budget announcements in place for 2010/11 (see paragraph 1.2.1) and the spending arrangements negotiated with Russet Homes (see paragraph 1.5.1) it will not be necessary to control spending this financial year using time to approve the grant as a control mechanism.

1.4 *in touch* Home Improvement Agency Advisory Group minutes

1.4.1 The minutes of the last Tonbridge & Malling Home Improvement Agency (HIA) Advisory Group meeting on 1 June 2010 are attached at **[Annex 3]**.

1.4.2 As reported to Members of this board in July 2009 it is the intention of the *in touch* Mid and West Kent Home Improvement Agency to establish one Advisory Group covering the mid and west Kent area, namely Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks.

1.4.3 The new Advisory Group will meet in September at Tonbridge & Malling. It is intended that representatives from each local borough; appropriate parties from Kent County Council such as Adult Services, Children's Services and Supporting People; the Health Service; voluntary bodies; service users and *in touch* be invited. One of the first actions will be to vote for a Chairman, ideally from one of the Voluntary Bodies, and to agree the terms of reference.

1.4.4 The Mid & West Kent Home Improvement Agency Management Report 2009-10 prepared by *in touch* is attached at **[Annex 4]**. In 2009/10 the agency came together under one roof at new offices in Kings Hill. Members will note that the Handyperson service enquiries and completed jobs are significantly lower for 2009/10 when compared to the other authorities within mid and west Kent. *In touch* are to improve promotion of the handyperson service within GP surgeries, to care agencies that operate in the area and to parish and Council Members to try to target those hard to reach groups who are often those most in need of the service.

1.5 DFG notional allocation agreement with Russet Homes for 2010/11

1.5.1 Members were made aware at the last meeting of this Board that we were seeking to re-negotiate with Russet Homes a notional allocation from the DFG budget for this current year. I can confirm that we have agreed an allocation from the 2010/11 DFG budget of £300,000 and Russet Homes have committed at least a further £150,000 towards major adaptation works for their tenants.

1.5.2 The allocation agreed for this financial year is a reduction of £50,000 and leaves a budget of £311,000 for owner occupier, private tenant and other housing association tenant DFG applications. This is a major step towards ensuring the Council's DFG spend is more equitable across the tenures and reducing some of the pressure off the Council in having to meet the total DFG spend each year.

- 1.5.3 I would like to take this opportunity to thank Russet Homes for their co-operation in this agreement that I hope will be a long term one and I recognise the major part they are now playing in meeting the needs of their disabled tenants. That said we will need to revisit this budget once the outcome of the forth coming Comprehensive Spending Review is known.

1.6 Waiting times for children's Occupational Therapy assessments

- 1.6.1 As Members are aware a meeting took place on 21 June 2010 between this Council and Kent County Council to discuss the waiting times for children's occupational therapy assessments. The meeting was attended by Leyland Ridings (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education - KCC), Liz Totman (Head of Specialist Children's Services – KCC), Rosemary Henn-Macrae (West Kent Manager – Disabled Children Service – KCC) and Councillors Mark Worrall and Mrs Jill Anderson, Hazel Skinner and Linda Hibbs from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.
- 1.6.2 We were informed that there were now 30 children awaiting an OT assessment in the Tonbridge & Malling area. Five of these cases date back to October to December 2007, eight cases from 2008, ten cases from 2009 and seven from 2010. Liz Totman has kindly agreed to attend this meeting to outline plans to address this backlog of work which applies across the west of the County.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 DFGs are a mandatory grant and valid applications have to be approved or refused within six months.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 As explained in this report.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 Continuing vigilance is needed to ensure adequate resources are secured to sustain programmes of disabled facilities grants and housing assistance to assist households in need in Tonbridge and Malling.

1.10 Policy Considerations

- 1.10.1 The broad range of policies progressed in this paper are making a positive contribution to improving the lives and living conditions of vulnerable households within the borough, thereby impacting the policy agenda in relation to healthy lifestyles, equality and diversity, safeguarding children and biodiversity/sustainability.

Background papers:

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing

contact: Hazel Skinner/
Linda Hibbs