

**Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Home Improvement Agency
Advisory Group Meeting**

Tuesday 1 June @ 10.00 am

Present:	Hazel Skinner – Housing Officer - Chairperson Cllr John Balcome – Councillor Cllr Jean Atkins – Councillor Cllr Barbara Brown – Councillor David Eaton – Service Manager in touch Lesley Wheal - Caseworker in touch Aric Goss – Senior Surveyor in touch Helen Ryan – Senior Administrator in touch	To Action
Apologies:	Chris Thomas – Pension & Disabilities Service Linda Hibbs – Housing Officer	
Previous minutes:	<p>Unfortunately Cllr Cure is no longer able to be a member of this group. He was thanked for all his help and support over the last few years.</p> <p>3.3</p> <p>Regarding having a Children’s OT attend the group, the head of the specialist children’s service had been invited to attend the Council’s May Strategic Housing Advisory Board meeting but had not been available. A subsequent meeting with the head of the specialist children’s service is to take place on 21 June. The information from this meeting can feed back through to this advisory group.</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>Hazel confirmed there is a service level agreement between the OTs, the Council and Russet Homes, which is currently being reviewed. Linda Hibbs is at a meeting today regarding this.</p>	

<p>3.5</p> <p>4.2</p> <p>4.6</p> <p>4.5</p> <p>4.12</p>	<p>Unfortunately Mr Jillians has passed away. The committee said that this was a sad loss.</p> <p>Robin Cahill, not present, to confirm if he had been contacted regarding Community Care Grants.</p> <p>Under the restructure of <i>in touch</i> the Ancillary Services Team Leader role will no longer go ahead. It was felt that this was an unnecessary role and will be covered by the Senior Handyperson role.</p> <p>It had been agreed with Linda Hibbs that a target of 400 Handyperson jobs for the Tonbridge and Malling be set as a realistic figure for 2010- 2011. The service is still growing at present.</p> <p>The date for the DFG forum has been set for the 14 June, this meeting will include grants officers, OT's, in touch and a representative from Foundations. The forum will look at timescales of DFG's and will report back on this through the next advisory group. Supporting people are not sure if they will attend. It was felt that sharing information is the best way forward. There is also a strategic meeting solely for Children's DFG's on the 21 June.</p> <p>The quality mark by foundations is now chargeable and as we now have four agencies, it is expected to cost around £3,000 to £4,000. The Supporting People review is due to be finished at the end of November so we will look at the outcome and make a decision to renew all four areas quality mark then.</p> <p>The minutes were agreed as a true and correct record of the previous meeting.</p>	<p>RC</p>
<p>3) Matters Arising:</p>	<p>3.1 The matters arising from the minutes were dealt with as above.</p>	

<p>4) Project Managers Report</p>	<p>The agency report now has figures from all 4 areas within the agency so that they can be compared to each other. The numbers of enquiries, value of work and welfare benefits are all up. Overall in touch are very happy with the performance and output of the T&M agency. The handyperson service is increasingly popular but does need some more promotion. We are often involved in promotions in all the areas and will concentrate some time within the T&M area particularly on the Handyperson service.</p> <p>It was suggested that we put some information in the local GP surgeries and with care agencies that operate in the area. Helen agreed to liaise with Daniel Locke to do this. The councillors also agreed to have some postcards to distribute when they are visiting their constituents.</p> <p>Once again, overall the performance of the Handyperson service is very good and this year has already made excellent progress.</p> <p>4.1 The new Decorating Service is also going very well and already has completed £9K of work. We also now have a Gardener for the new Gardening Service and that is about to get underway. Both pilot schemes are going to run until December when we will look at all the data and margins to see if they can be run cost efficiently. As both of these services are provided without public funding it does need to be profitable and at present the mileage costs are a great problem. The Gardening is £15.00 per hour to the client and the decorating is around £20.00 per hour. These are a little expensive but all the staff are employed by <i>in touch</i> and CRB checked. There has been a steering group set up to look at the schemes and David will report back at the next advisory group</p>	<p>HR</p>
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4.2 As T&M know Bob Bushell has now left as the travelling commitments to the offices are too much and he has found a new job with the Thanet Council. Whilst waiting to appoint a new surveyor *in touch* will be using a bank staff surveyor to help with the T&M works plus the resource within the existing surveying team.

4.3 Under the Future Job Fund Scheme, *in touch* now have 4 extra members of staff, 3 Assistant Handypersons and 1 Assistant Administrator. This is a scheme where unemployed young people are given the chance to work for 6 months in a role that they are interested in. The KCC partly fund the placement and *in touch* have agreed to mentor and support these young people. *In touch* are committed to support these people and are using workbooks to monitor and encourage their progress. These include tasks to complete and different behaviours expected in the workplace. As the emphasis is on getting them back to work permanently, we help them to look for work and have asked our contractors if they would be interested in us recommending the staff once they have finished their 6 months with us or perhaps they could spend a day with the contractors if they have suitable vacancies.

Unfortunately with the change in government it is not sure how long this scheme is going to run but with the very impressive start to the scheme with benefits to both *in touch* staff and FJF staff it was hoped that it would continue. The current assistants that we have will complete their 6 months with us but it is unsure as to whether we will employ any more.

One of the FJF staff, Mark Morely, has recently been employed in a full time capacity as a Handyperson and will start his new role in August.

	<p>4.4 Our approved Contractors have now been asked to join Constructionline. This is an organisation specialising in vetting companies for agencies like ours to use them. They make stringent checks on the companies, including financial and insurance information. It has become increasingly difficult for <i>in touch</i> to carry out these checks and have felt that it now needs expertise in this area to make sure contractors meet all requirements. The contractors have to pay a fee to join which starts from £90 per year. <i>In touch</i> then also subscribe to become a member. Aric explained that we must have a consistent approach to this and unless the contractors are prepared to join Constructionline they will be unable to tender for works with the agency. David will send an email to all the grants officers to let them know when this system is operational.</p> <p>4.5 We are currently involved with the BBC who is interested in the HIA to be featured in a programme called Saints and Scroungers. This is a series of 8 programmes featuring Saints, who are usually public services like ours and Scroungers, who are usually benefit fraudsters. This will mean a camera crew and the presenter Dom Littlewood going out to visit a client, including an interview with the client and footage of the handyperson job.</p> <p>This is an excellent opportunity for the agency and for our HIA service. It is also hoped that the local press will want to get involved as well so this will promote our service in the local area.</p> <p>4.6 The Advisory Group consultation has been a slow process and David is now keen to take this forward and organise a single advisory group meeting across the four local authorities. David will email the grants officers, heads of OT and the list of people drawn up by the consultation and invite them to one advisory group meeting. It was agreed that the chairperson needs to be independent. It will be difficult to find someone who is independent but it was suggested that members could be asked to express an interest in becoming Chairperson and then could be elected at the meeting. It was thought that the best place to hold this meeting would be Tonbridge and Malling as this is a central office where parking is available. It was agreed that David will schedule a date for one new Advisory Group meeting and it can be taken forward from there.</p>	<p>DE</p> <p>DE</p> <p>DE</p>

<p>5) Technical Report</p>	<p>5.1 Aric presented the Technical Report which gives a good comparison of works over the last two quarters. The Value of work and number of jobs has increased although the speed of service is very inconsistent. Aric did explain that one or two jobs with long timescales can affect all the figures. Aric explained that these key performance indicators (KPI's) would be looked at in order that we can get more detail including planning and building consents for the major works like extensions. He also explained that we are now reporting on the live works across the areas which have been quite consistent.</p> <p>The budget expectations for this year are £300k which is £100k more than last year.</p> <p>Hazel asked if a breakdown of the customer feedback could be included on the report.</p> <p>Hazel asked about cover for the surveyor now that Bob Bushell has left. Aric explained that himself and Simon Bowman, a floating surveyor would be covering the works for Tonbridge and Malling. It was important that the works currently in the process are not delayed however it was thought that there may be some delay in the new referrals coming through.</p>	<p>DE</p>
<p>6) Housing Officer Report</p>	<p>6.1 Hazel said that a report went to SHAB on 17 May regarding the DFG spend for the 2009/10 budget. The total spend for this year was £632,700.00 and caused an overspend of £138,700.00. It has been overspent in previous years but to carry over this amount of spend would create an unrealistic budget. It has been agreed to meet this overspend from Council reserves in order that this financial year can be started with a clean sheet.</p> <p>Following successful petitioning to Government the Council have seen an increase in allocation for 2010/11 to £410,000. With the Council's own funding the total budget for DFGs is £611,000. An arrangement has been made with Russett Homes so that they have a notional allocation of £300,000 leaving potentially approximately £300,000 for DFGs in other properties. At this meeting they also discussed the children's DFG cases and a further meeting with the Head of Specialist Children's Services is set for the 21 June. At present there are 25 cases waiting with the oldest case dating back to 2007. Cllr Balcome asked if Russett homes have always had a limit on their allocation and Hazel advised there was no limit but they had a notional allocation last year.</p>	

<p>7) Any other Business</p>	<p>David explained that <i>in touch</i> have tendered for KCC Home Energy Assessments and have won the contract for the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells area. This involves an Energy Assessment and having free equipment installed to measure energy used. All of the <i>in touch</i> surveyors and our senior handyman will go on a 3 day course to obtain a City & Guilds qualification. The first phase will go live between September and November at which time we will have 3 months to carry out the assessments. This involves visiting clients who have already received a letter about the scheme and arranging a Home Energy Assessment. We have to achieve 300 surveys in each area which means an average of 4 to 5 assessments each day.</p> <p>This is an area where funding will be going to in the future as it is expected that Regional Housing Board funding will disappear and it is important that we are involved in these new funded areas.</p> <p>This is another exciting opportunity and one that is very important for <i>in touch</i> to perform well in. It is an excellent opportunity for our staff to improve their skills and qualifications in an area that is going to see great growth.</p> <p>David also said that <i>in touch</i> have been invited to assist Orbit Housing Association with their grant applications within the Tonbridge & Malling area. <i>In touch</i> will then charge a fee to Orbit Housing, for help in completing grant application forms and submitting them to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. Hazel advised that progress with DFGs for non Russet Homes Housing Association tenants was very slow as often the Housing Associations were unable to provide a service to help their tenants progress through the DFG process. It is great that the HIA will now be able to help to move these forward. <i>In touch</i> already help Golding Homes with their applications in Maidstone and this has already improved the process for their tenants so it is hoped that the same will happen with Orbit tenants. Cllr Balcome hoped that perhaps <i>in touch</i> could help other Housing Associations and it was suggested that Linda could ask to see if the HIA could help with their applications. It makes excellent sense to all parties involved.</p> <p>It was agreed that David would write to the members of the new advisory group about a new chairperson. It was also felt that a new Terms of Reference was needed for the group as well so that it is clear what the group wants to achieve.</p>	<p>LH</p> <p>DE</p>

Date of next Meeting	It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in September. This will avoid annual leave for many members. The first two quarters can then be discussed. David will contact members when the date is set.	DE
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