

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

08 November 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:

- RSL progress in meeting the Decent Homes Standard;
- events that took place in the borough during Child Safety Week;
- outcome of the landlord fair held on the 11 October 2010;
- progress on the Energy Activity Programme for 2010-11;
- progress of the private sector stock condition survey; and
- the North & West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership.

1.2 Update on RSL progress in meeting the Decent Homes Standard

- 1.2.1 On the 1 April 2001 a national baseline was set using data from the 2001 English House Condition Survey regarding the number of non-decent homes in the social sector. Following this, Government put an annual reporting programme in place and set a target that all social housing should be decent by the end of 2010.
- 1.2.2 Progress in meeting this target is reported annually in July by the RSLs via the Regulatory Statistical Return to the previously known Housing Corporation (now the Homes and Communities Agency).
- 1.2.3 The table in **[Annex 1]** details progress of RSLs, with housing in the borough, in meeting this target. As illustrated in **[Annex 1]** the RSLs would appear to be on target to have all social housing in the borough being made decent by the end of December 2010.

1.3 Child Safety Week

- 1.3.1 To coincide with national Child Safety Week 21-27 June 2010, the Private Sector Housing team ran a 'Safety in the Home' scheme to encourage parents to take time to think about the causes of accidents in the home. Child Safety Week is organised by the Child Accident Prevention Trust and this year's theme was 'Make Time for Safety'.
- 1.3.2 The Council's scheme aimed to highlight that simple measures can be taken to prevent accidents in the home, pointing out that small actions, such as moving furniture away from windows to prevent young children climbing on the window, installing locks or safety catches to restrict open windows, placing suitable handrails on stairs and repairing uneven floor surfaces can make a difference.
- 1.3.3 The scheme also highlighted the importance of getting gas appliances, gas fires and central heating regularly checked by a Gas Safe registered engineer and regularly checking smoke alarms are working.
- 1.3.4 Housing officers visited venues across the borough at Larkfield Leisure Centre and Wear 'M Out, Tonbridge during Child Safety Week to provide information and advice to help raise awareness of child safety issues. Parents could also register for a free carbon monoxide alarm and home safety check by contacting the Private Sector Housing Team.
- 1.3.5 The Council worked with *in touch* Mid and West Kent Home Improvement Agency to provide and install carbon monoxide (CO) alarms free of charge for households with children under the age of five. Free home safety checks were carried out by the Handyperson, who fitted window locks and railings where these would help prevent falls in the home.
- 1.3.6 A total of 14 referrals were made to the Handyperson scheme, installing free CO alarms and carrying out home security checks.

1.4 Landlord Fair

- 1.4.1 A Landlord Fair for private sector landlords was held on 11 October 2010. This fair was a move away from the traditional landlord forums as the number of attendees had been dwindling and we felt a new approach was needed.
- 1.4.2 The venue was moved away from the Council offices to the neutral Marriot Hotel, Pembury. The event was led this time by the National Landlords Association (NLA) and supported by ourselves, Tunbridge Wells B.C. and Sevenoaks D.C. The format of the evening was changed to allow for an exhibition and break-out sessions as well as three key speeches.
- 1.4.3 The evening was extremely successful with 80-90 landlords attending and approximately 15 exhibitors. Feedback and comments are currently being collated and will feed back into a review of where we take the forums in the future. Early

thoughts are that we may hold this type of event once a year and complement it with one or two smaller traditional forums at Council offices. I will keep Members updated.

1.5 Energy Activity Programme

1.5.1 The Council has funded Creative Environmental Networks (CEN) to undertake an Energy Efficiency Activity Programme, which targets resources at alleviating fuel poverty across the borough.

1.5.2 The programme includes the following:

- targeted mailing campaign;
- community referrals support; and
- press release or topical web content.

1.5.3 For the targeted mailing campaign the Council will utilise existing data from Home Energy surveys to identify homes with a low energy efficiency rating and where householders did not subsequently contact the Energy Saving Trust for further information on energy saving measures or refer to an energy scheme. A targeted mailing is due to be undertaken by the end of October/ early November 2010 to encourage these householders to consider improving the energy efficiency of their property and to contact the Energy Saving Trust who will assist them in identifying the energy improvement scheme best suited to them. A further target mail out is also planned to two thousand homes in rural off gas network areas to encourage householders in these areas to contact the Energy Saving Trust for energy efficiency advice.

1.5.4 For the Community Referrals Support scheme, CEN have developed an affordable warmth programme to provide targeted assistance to reduce the impact of fuel poverty. This year we are working with Age UK Malling and Tonbridge offices (previously Age Concern) and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide their staff with:

- **a briefing on fuel poverty and affordable warmth to help identify and support households at risk, access support services by detailing relevant contacts;**
- **a referral form for use by staff to assist clients with energy efficiency upgrades; and**
- **supporting energy information.**

The first affordable warmth surgery took place at Age UK on 18 October 2010. Age UK identified an 'energy champion', one for each office, who received a briefing on fuel poverty and an induction to the referral process. The champions

will act as a central contact distributing resources, advice and support as appropriate.

The second surgery took place at CAB on 3 November 2010 during a scheduled staff meeting providing a briefing on fuel poverty and affordable warmth, information on local and national grant schemes and an induction to the assisted referral process.

- 1.5.5 CEN have also provided a draft press release article on reducing fuel bills, which featured in the autumn 2010 edition of Here & Now and on the Council website. A further article is planned for later in the year on renewable energy initiatives.

1.6 Private Sector Stock Condition Survey

- 1.6.1 Under section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 the Council, as the local housing authority, must keep the housing conditions in its area under regular review. This has previously been achieved by undertaking a house condition survey every five years. The last house condition survey took place in 2005 and the final report was produced in 2006. The next survey is therefore due.
- 1.6.2 The house condition survey provides information on the condition of the housing stock and other household related information such as income and age of the head of the household. This information is used to monitor progress against national targets for Decent Homes, the Home Energy Conservation Act 1985, fuel poverty and other national and local performance indicators. The results will also form the evidence base to inform our housing strategy, the housing statistical returns and our housing assistance policy.
- 1.6.3 Budgetary provision has been made to cover the cost of surveys conducted on a five year cycle. An important initial stage of the house condition survey action plan will be to prepare the specification and evaluate the most cost effective and quality survey method.
- 1.6.4 Cost savings can be made by undertaking a joint procurement exercise for a house condition survey as undertaken by eight authorities in Kent.
- 1.6.5 The timing of that procurement exercise was not right for Tonbridge & Malling and four other Kent local authorities to participate. Nonetheless a range of options are being explored including undertaking the survey in house.
- 1.6.6 In July 2009 the Audit Commission produced supplementary guidance on undertaking private sector stock condition surveys. The guidance recommended that Council's utilise a combination of desktop and street surveys to gather reliable and informative data.

- 1.6.7 Sevenoaks instructed the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to undertake a desktop survey to produce a model for their borough based on national data, from for example the English House Condition Survey and the Census 2001. This desk top model can then produce estimates for a range of stock indicators down to street level areas. This modelling information can then be built on further by overlaying known local data, for example energy efficiency data and complementing with targeted street survey data.
- 1.6.8 Officers are exploring the Sevenoaks approach but considering gathering all the existing local data together and overlaying onto our property database before asking the BRE to produce a model. This modelling information can then be complemented with targeted street survey data and maintained using known local data, reducing the need for a whole borough survey every five years.
- 1.6.9 As previously reported to this Board the survey was expected to take place during 2010/11. Given the information above I believe it prudent for officers to look at the cost and value for money of the Sevenoaks approach other options before reporting further to this Board.

1.7 North and West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership

- 1.7.1 As Members are aware the above partnership was audited in 2009 and one of the recommendations was that the partnership should have a formal agreement in place. I am pleased to report that a partnership agreement has now been drawn up, agreed and signed by all parties involved.
- 1.7.2 The partnership usually has to provide monitoring information to GOSE on a six monthly basis however GOSE have indicated they will not be undertaking any further monitoring. The partnership has however decided to continue its own monitoring and this is currently being collated for the period April to September 2010. This will play an important part in the partnership taking stock of where we are with spend and whether any likely redistribution is required to ensure a full spend by the end of 2010/11.

1.8 Legal Implications

- 1.8.1 The Council has a legal duty to keep the housing conditions in their area under regular review. This duty is usually met by undertaking a house condition survey every five years.

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.9.1 As explained in the report.

1.10 Risk Assessment

1.10.1 Continuing vigilance is needed to ensure adequate resources are secured to sustain housing assistance programmes to assist households in need in Tonbridge and Malling.

1.11 Policy Considerations

1.11.1 The broad range of activities 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 sustainability.

Background papers:

Nil

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