

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 HOUSING NEEDS UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the activity of the Housing Options and Housing Register Services.

- 1.1.1 Following the return of homelessness and housing register services from Russet Homes in March 2008, a number of significant improvements in service delivery have been sustained, particularly in relation to homeless prevention and temporary accommodation. However the number of households seeking advice and/or applying for social rented accommodation continues to increase each month. The workload on the Housing Needs Team has significantly increased, with a resultant backlog of applications awaiting assessment.

1.2 Housing options and prevention of homelessness

- 1.2.1 Although the number of people contacting the housing options team for advice has increased in recent months, the number of formal homeless applications taken each month has remained a relatively low proportion of the total. However, the number of households who have a priority need and have become homeless through no fault of their own, where the council has a duty to rehouse has increased significantly over the first six months of 2010/11 to an average of five per month, from an average of two per month for 2009/10.

Month	New homeless applications	Duty to house accepted	Duty to house rejected
Total : 2009/10	82	28 (average 2 per month)	63
April 2010	15	5	9
May 2010	18	5	9
June 2010	10	10	7
July 2010	11	6	2
August 2010	7	0	6
September 2010	14	5	9

- 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 A Kent wide protocol has recently been agreed regarding the assessment of homeless 16 and 17 year olds, setting out the joint responsibilities of Social Services and local housing authorities. The Housing Options Team have introduced joint assessments of young people presenting as homeless by partnership working with Social Services.
- 1.2.4 Our quarterly return to CLG gives a breakdown of the households where we have accepted a duty to re-house due to homelessness. The main reasons for homelessness for this group are due to parental eviction (particularly for young people), and relationship breakdown – see table below. The Housing Options Team carry out a detailed housing need assessment, and where appropriate, a home visit is undertaken to reduce the need for emergency accommodation and provide a planned transition to independent living or intermediate supported accommodation such as the Trinity Foyer in Maidstone.

Reason for homelessness	Jul – Sep 2009	Oct – Dec 2009	Jan – Mar 2010	Apr – Jun 2010	Jul – Sep 2010
Parental exclusion	1	1	7	5	3
Friend/relative exclusion	0	1	3	1	1
Relationship breakdown (non violent)	1	3	2	4	4
Relationship breakdown (violent)	0	0	1	5	2
Harassment	1	1	0	0	1
Leaving hospital	2	0	0	0	0
Termination of AST*	1	0	0	4	0
Other loss of rented	0	0	0	1	1
Mortgage arrears	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	6	13	20	13

*Assured Shorthold Tenancy

- 1.2.5 Alongside the households where a homelessness duty is accepted, we also report to CLG the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented by ongoing casework – see table below. This includes households who have been

able to remain in their home with the intervention of the Housing Options Team, and those who have been assisted into alternative accommodation:

	Jul – Sep 2009	Oct – Dec 2009	Jan – Mar 2010	Apr – Jun 2010
Homelessness prevented	59	48	43	45

- 1.2.6 Since the introduction of the Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme in December 2008, despite the restrictions of the scheme, we have assisted five homeowners in mortgage difficulties to remain in their homes.
- 1.2.7 Approximately one third of all customers approaching 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. The number of new customers contacting the team has increased to an average of 167 per month for the first six months of 2010/11.

Month	Number of new approaches to Housing Options team	Advised on homeless prevention/private renting
Total : 2009/10	1764 (average 147 per month)	Approx 1434
April 2010	172	Approx 146
May 2010	155	Approx 118
June 2010	168	Approx 131
July 2010	184	Approx 152
August 2010	141	Approx 139
September 2010	182	Approx 153

1.3 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.3.1 The Council is committed to reducing the number of homeless households placed into temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation. In 2004 the Government set a national target for all local authorities 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. Although the total rose again on a couple of subsequent occasions to 44, there has been a steady decrease since July 2009.
- 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
30.4.10	12	7	19
31.5.10	11	5	16
30.6.10	13	4	17
31.7.10	12	5	17
31.8.10	12	4	16
30.9.10	13	8	21

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.

1.3.4 Emergency placements into bed and breakfast accommodation continue to be necessary due to the limited availability of other temporary accommodation, and difficulties in securing privately rented properties.

1.4 Housing Options Team

1.4.1 The current Housing Options Team Manager has accepted a new position in another local authority and will be leaving Tonbridge and Malling at the end of November. Although it is anticipated that this will increase the pressures on the remaining members of the team, we are exploring the possibility of sharing services with Gravesham Borough Council's Housing Options team.

1.5 Emergency Accommodation Protocol

1.5.1 The Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB) have introduced a Kent-wide protocol for the placement of homeless households in bed and breakfast or other emergency accommodation. This is in response to the large number of vulnerable households who were being placed in an emergency into poor quality accommodation in Cliftonville, Thanet, and increasing demand for local resources in the second most deprived ward in the county. The majority of these households did not originate from the Thanet area, but from other local authorities in Kent and London. Tonbridge and Malling has never placed any homeless households in emergency accommodation in Thanet. Where we need to place a homeless household into bed and breakfast accommodation we only use good quality premises in Maidstone, Medway or Flimwell, all of which are subject to an annual health and safety inspection by the Council's private sector housing team.

1.5.2 The protocol requires local authorities to place homeless households in emergency accommodation within their own borough wherever possible. Where a household is placed in another area, the referring authority must notify the receiving authority, and take responsibility for reconnecting the household with

their originating area. Only Thanet District Council will be able to use emergency placements within Thanet.

- 1.5.3 The JPPB will monitor out of area placements and outcomes on a quarterly basis.

1.6 Housing Register

- 1.6.1 Demand for social housing remains at a high level, with increasing numbers seeking a move on medical or welfare grounds. The number of medical and welfare assessments has continued to increase from an average of 49 per month for 2008/09, to an average of 61 per month for 2009/10 and a current average of 78 per month for the first six months of 2010/11.

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

Month	Applications Received	Applications Cancelled	Number on Housing Register
Total : 2009/10	1830	1105	
April 2010	165	84	2,507 (includes 702 transfers)
May 2010	160	146	2,576 (includes 712 transfers)
June 2010	158	192	2,5432 (includes 717 transfers)
July 2010	166	350	2,411 (includes 692 transfers)
August 2010	138	80	2,389 (includes 690 transfers)
September 2010	163	162	2,410 (includes 707 transfers)

- 1.6.3 In July, 350 applications were cancelled, including those who either failed to respond to the first quarter's annual review, or had moved since their original application.

- 1.6.4 Kent Homechoice has recently introduced an on-line mutual exchange service, where tenants can register their details, whether or not they are also on the housing register. Once approved, their property will be advertised on the Kent Homechoice website, and tenants will be able to search for homes throughout Kent and beyond. If a tenant finds a suitable property to swap with, they will also be able to download the landlord's application form from the website.

- 1.6.5 Changes to the bidding cycle have recently been agreed by the Kent Homechoice Partnership, and will commence in April 2011. The current two weekly bidding cycle will be amended to reduce the amount of time applicants have to bid from ten days (including two weekends) to six days (including one weekend). This

should improve void times without significantly impacting on customers, most of whom place bids within the first three days of the bidding cycle.

- 1.6.6 The table below shows the breakdown of applicants housed via Kent Homechoice:

Month	Homeseekers	Transfers	Total
Total: 2009/10	266 (69%)	118 (31%)	384
April 2010	23 (58%)	17 (42%)	40
May 2010	14 (38%)	22 (62%)	36
June 2010	37 (65%)	20 (35%)	57
July 2010	33 (67%)	15 (33%)	48
August 2010	29 (76%)	9 (24%)	38
September 2010	41 (72%)	16 (28%)	57

- 1.5.7 The table below shows details of applicants housed by banding and bedroom need since the commencement of choice based lettings:

Band	Bedrooms	Total
A	1 (including studios)	39
	2	17
	3	13
	4	5
A Total		74(10% of total)
B	1 (including studios)	122
	2	130
	3	47
	4	7
	5	1
B Total		307 (42% of total)
C	1 (including studios)	138
	2	59
	3	77
	4	7
C Total		281 (39% of total)
D	1 (including studios)	40
	2	15
	3	10
	4	1
D Total		66 (9% of total)
Overall Total		691

1.7 Guidance to the Mortgage Repossessions Act 2010

- 1.7.1 The Mortgage Repossessions (Protection of Tenants etc) Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010. CLG have published guidance to the Act to inform lenders, landlords and tenants of changes to their rights and responsibilities.
- 1.7.2 The Act provides 'unauthorised' tenants with the right to request a delay to eviction proceedings by up to two months, where their landlord falls into mortgage arrears and the lender commences possession proceedings. Unauthorised tenants are those who are renting a mortgaged property from a landlord who has let the property without consent from the lender, in contravention of the mortgage agreement.
- 1.7.3 Prior to this Act, unauthorised tenants could be evicted at very short notice, and had no right to be informed about or heard in possession proceedings. Now, lenders are required to send a notice of intention to repossess property to the property, addressed to 'the tenant or occupier' once a possession hearing date has been set. A similar notice is also sent to the housing department of the local authority within which the property is situated.
- 1.7.4 Where we receive such notices, the Housing Options Team send an information pack to the occupier, encouraging them to make contact if they require advice and assistance. Since November 2009, when notices were introduced on a voluntary basis, we have received details of 105 properties where the lender has commenced possession proceedings, and have written to all of these. Twenty owner occupiers received ongoing advice from the Housing Options Team as a result, and of these two have been re-housed into social rented housing, one has been accepted for a mortgage rescue by Moat Homes and two have been successful in securing accommodation in the private rented sector.

1.8 Rough sleeper street count

- 1.8.1 A street count took place in most of Kent, including Tonbridge, in the early hours of 21 October 2010, co-ordinated by the Bridge Trust and Porchlight. One person sleeping rough was found in Tonbridge railway station, and was referred to KCC Adult Social Services and Porchlight for ongoing support.

1.9 County Court Desk Update

- 1.9.1 Members will recall from a previous report to this Board that we received a Communities and Local Government grant to part fund County Court Desk services in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells County Courts for an approximate nine month period from 1 November 2008 to 31 July 2009 for residents in Tonbridge and Malling.
- 1.9.2 The County Court desk service continued after our funding was exhausted in July 2009. However, we have been advised by Maidstone CAB that they have not been able to provide a County Court desk service since August 2010, as their

alternative funding had also ended, and a further bidding round has not yet been scheduled by Community Legal Services. The County Court desk service at Tunbridge Wells County Court is still in operation, although their funding position for the future is not clear.

- 1.9.3 Although this means that residents with no legal representation will not be able to get last minute advice and assistance at Maidstone County Court, the housing options team will continue to work with customers to inform and prepare them for possession hearings.

Background papers:

contact: Lynn Wilders

Nil

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Director of Health and Housing