

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 DRAFT COMMON HOUSING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Summary

This report updates Members on the development of a Kent-wide common housing assessment (CHA) framework for housing allocations throughout the Kent Homechoice partnership.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Kent Housing Group are currently drafting a countywide CHA framework to take into account the statutory guidance on social housing allocations issued in December 2009, to provide a less complex method of determining priorities for housing that is common to all Members of Kent Homechoice.

1.1.2 Essentially, the main changes to be incorporated as a result of the guidance are:

- cumulative preference is no longer required within allocation schemes. Most simple Banding schemes have struggled to provide for cumulative preference;
- waiting time can be used as the main factor in determining priority between people who have a reasonable preference; and
- a small proportion of homes can be let to transferring social housing tenants who do not have a reasonable preference.

1.1.3 The guidance confirms that social housing should still be prioritised to those who are in the greatest housing need, which are people who fall within one of the reasonable preference categories. However, it goes on to tell local authorities that they should seek to achieve other outcomes, such as providing greater choice and mobility, and review policies to ensure they are fair and create more sustainable communities.

1.1.4 It should be noted that although it is proposed that all members of Kent Homechoice will introduce a common method of assessing housing need,

applicants who wish to be considered for social housing in more than one authority area will still need to complete an application and provide documentation as required to verify their circumstances for each authority. Local authorities will still retain separate housing allocations schemes which will allow for local flexibilities in the lettings process.

- 1.1.5 Our current system of prioritising applicants within bands by awarding points for housing needs will be replaced with a simpler four band system. It is proposed that all local authorities in Kent will adopt a similar banding system. Priority within each band will be determined according to the length of time applicants have been waiting on the housing register. Outlines of the criteria for bands are as follows:

Band A – urgent housing needs, including:

- victims of violence, harassment, intimidation or threats of violence likely to be carried out;
- urgent medical or welfare needs; and
- management transfer

Band B – reasonable preference, applicants where none of the above in band A applies but who meet the following criteria:

- people who are homeless;
- people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability;
- people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or to others. For example, to give or receive care, or to take up employment; and
- also where band A applies but they have no local connection with the district.

Band C – general, applicants where none of the above in band A or band B applies, including:

- people who are intentionally homeless, or who have deliberately worsened their housing circumstances;
- people who are homeless by another local authority;

- where band B applies but they have no local connection with the district; and
- where band B applies but they meet or exceed the financial threshold for HomeBuy. This threshold will change during time but as a guide persons will need to have access to (or savings of) £3,500 to cover the initial costs. They will also need to be in full time employment on a regular income that is sufficient to sustain a mortgage and/or rent payments.

Band D – general without priority, including

- applications from persons where none of the above in band A or band B applies, and:
- they have no local connection with the district, and/or
- they meet or exceed the financial threshold for HomeBuy

1.2 Implementation Plan

- 1.2.1 Further meetings to finalise the details of the draft CHA are scheduled to take place in November and December. It is proposed to proceed with a formal consultation process early in 2011, with any amendments to the draft agreed and signed off by local authorities by the end of March 2011. Members will have the opportunity to participate in the consultation process, but due to the scheduling of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board, the consultation process is likely to have commenced before the next meeting of the Board.
- 1.2.2 Members will be asked to approve the final document following the consultation period. During April to June 2011, the CHA will be incorporated into each local authority's revised housing allocations scheme, and a common application form developed and tested.
- 1.2.3 The CHA is anticipated to go live in September 2011, following staff training, and a publicity and awareness action plan for customers and other stakeholders.

Background papers:

contact: Lynn Wilders

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Health and Housing