

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

21 February 2011

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 in recent months, particularly as a result of the recession.

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 over the past 12 months, the number of formal homeless applications taken each month has remained a relatively low proportion of the total.

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	7	2
August 2010	7	3	6
September 2010	14	6	9
October 2010	8	3	6
November 2010	3	5	3
December 2010	2	0	2
January 2011	0	0	3

- 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 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.

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
October 2010	129	Approx 91
November 2010	123	Approx 106
December 2010	79	Approx 70
January 2011	97	Approx 84

1.3 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.3.1 There continues to be a steady decrease in the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation.

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
31.10.10	13	4	17
30.11.10	11	4	15
31.12.10	12	2	14
31.1.11	11	0	11

- 1.3.2 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.
- 1.3.3 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. However, I am pleased to report that at the time of writing, no families have been placed into bed and breakfast accommodation since November, and since then, there have only been three out of hours placements of less than a week.

1.4 Housing Options Team

- 1.4.1 We have been successful in recruiting a fourth Housing Options Officer on a twelve month contract, which will be an invaluable extra resource for the team. The Housing Options Team Manager post is currently being covered by the equivalent officer at Gravesham Borough Council on a shared service basis.

1.5 Housing Register

- 1.5.1 Demand for social housing remains at a high level, with increasing numbers seeking a move on medical or welfare grounds. 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)
October 2010	129	317	2,223 (includes 691 transfers)
November 2010	134	64	2,222 (includes 690 transfers)
December 2010	72	183	2,234 (includes 697 transfers)
January 2010	164	163	2,156 (includes 700 transfers')

- 1.5.2 In July and October 2010 a large number of applications were cancelled, including those who either failed to respond to their annual review, or had moved since their original application.
- 1.5.3 The following table gives the breakdown of applicants who have been housed through choice based lettings:

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
October 2010	28 (72%)	11 (28%)	39
November 2010	39 (63%)	23 (37%)	62
December 2010	19 (68%)	9 (32%)	28
January 2011	30 (79%)	8 (21%)	38

1.6 Kent Homechoice

- 1.6.1 Kent Homechoice launched a new on-line mutual exchange site in October 2010. In less than four months 3,232 registrations have taken place, with 2,427 tenants currently live on the system and 11 exchanges recorded. The local authority areas with the most tenants registered are Canterbury, with 274 households, followed by Dover, Medway and Thanet. There are 202 tenants registered from outside of Kent.
- 1.6.2 Within the members' area of the Kent Homechoice website, there is the ability to survey customers by placing an interactive question onto the site. Customers can respond by choosing one answer, and also by leaving a comment. As 93 per cent of bids are received via the website, on-line surveys can be an effective way of reaching the customer base and measuring a representative response.
- 1.6.3 An on-line survey was carried out between October and December 2010, to gauge levels of customer satisfaction with the Kent Homechoice service. The survey sought to measure satisfaction with choice based lettings and the bidding process and draw a distinction from issues around individual council's allocation policies. Customers were asked the question:

'Are you happy that you are able to place your bids on homes, even though the supply of homes does not meet demand?'

1.6.4 There were 1,195 unique responses to the survey. The table below details the responses received:

	Total responses	% total of responses
Happy to bid	691	57.8%
Not happy to bid	325	27.2%
Have not bid	82	6.9%
Don't know	97	8.1%

1.6.5 Changes to the bidding cycle agreed by the Kent Homechoice Partnership 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.

1.7 Vulnerable customers

1.7.1 Monitoring the participation levels of vulnerable groups is an important part of ensuring that all customers are readily able to access the choice based lettings service. At the time of writing, there are 43,585 live housing applications within Kent Homechoice. Of these households, 5,261 applications (12.1 per cent) are recorded as including someone with a vulnerability. Overall, 953 vulnerable households have been housed, which equates to 16.9 per cent of the total housed. This suggests that vulnerable groups are not experiencing difficulties with accessing the Kent Homechoice service.

1.7.2 Vulnerable groups who have been housed include:

- ex offenders (25.4 per cent);
- may need help with bidding (24.6 per cent); and
- issues with drug misuse (24.3 per cent).

The categories with the lowest percentage include those for whom English is not their first language, those who are isolated with no support and those who have issues with alcohol.

1.8 Common assessment framework for social allocations

- 1.8.1 Members will recall from a previous report to this Board in July 2010, that it is proposed to introduce a common assessment framework for all applicants seeking housing in Kent, based on a simple banding scheme, which would also simplify the process for cross borough mobility.
- 1.8.2 Plans to complete a draft assessment framework have been put on hold by Kent Housing Group, pending the outcome of the government's consultation on changes to social housing allocation, and any resultant changes in legislation and statutory guidance. The review of our housing allocations scheme is similarly on hold pending the changes.

Background papers:

contact: Lynn Wilders

Nil

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