

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

7 June 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. The number of households seeking advice and/or applying for social rented accommodation remains at a significant level, 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 April 2010 – September 2011	75	26	42
October 2010	8	3	7
November 2010	3	6	3
December 2010	2	1	3
January 2011	0	0	3
February 2011	4	2	2
March 2011	3	0	3
Total 2010/11	95	38	63
April 2011	4	3	1

- 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 The last financial year has seen an increase in the numbers of households requesting assistance due to homelessness. In 2009/10 we received 82 homeless applications, of which 28 (average of two per month) resulted in the Council having a statutory duty to rehouse. This increased in 2010/11 to 95 applications, of which 38 (average three per month) were owed a full housing duty.
- 1.2.4 On 1 April 2011, a number of local authorities within the Kent Homechoice partnership, including Tonbridge and Malling, went live with an additional module to the Locata system to manage housing options cases and homeless applications. This module links to the choice based lettings system, and will increase efficiency within the housing options team by linking information and providing management and workflow reports and statistics.
- 1.2.5 The procedures used within the housing needs teams, including the use of this module, will be subject to a full equalities impact assessment later in the year.

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
31.10.10	13	4	17
30.11.10	11	4	15
31.12.10	12	2	14
31.1.11	11	0	11
28.2.11	10	0	10
31.3.11	9	1	10
30.4.11	9	2	11

1.4 Housing Register

- 1.4.1 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, including homeseekers (those applying for their first social tenancy) and transfers (existing social tenants applying for a move:

Month	Applications Received	Applications Cancelled	Number on Housing Register
Total: April 2010 –September 2010	950	1,014	
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 2011	164	163	2,156 (includes 700 transfers')
February 2011	142	252	2,040 (includes 666 transfers)
March 2011	194	304	1,921 (includes 642 transfers)
Total :2010/11	1,785	2,297	
April 2011	104	277	1,833 (includes 624 transfers)

1.4.2 Applications are regularly reviewed, and those who either fail to respond to their annual review, or have moved since their original application are cancelled.

1.4.3 The following table gives the breakdown of applicants who have been housed through choice based lettings:

Month	Homeseekers	Transfers	Total
Total: April 2010 – September 2010	177(64%)	99 (36%)	276
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
February 2011	23 (62%)	14 (38%)	37
March 2011	34 (63%)	20 (37%)	54
Total 2010/11	350 (66%)	184 (34%)	534
April 2011	22 (67%)	11 (33%)	33

1.4.4 Locata provides lettings feedback reports to enable customers to gauge how likely they are to be offered a social tenancy. The following table shows the average waiting times of all applicants that have been housed through choice based lettings. Many applicants are seeking a specific type or area of property and may choose to wait longer for a suitable property to become available:

Type	No. of lets	Shortest wait	Longest wait	Average wait
Sheltered	99	6 days	10 years	9 months
Studio flat	6	5 weeks	11 months	4 months
1 bed flat	352	7 days	9 years	10 months
2bed flat	158	1 day	10 years	10 months
2 bed house	170	4 days	5 years	7 months
3 bed flat	2	4 months	8 months	6 months
3 bed house	255	14 days	7 years	14 months
4 bed house	12	17 days	6 years	19 months
5 bed house	1	7 years	7 years	7 years

1.4.5 The table shows the average waiting times for one or two bedroomed properties is less than one year, with a slightly longer wait for the larger three or four bedroomed properties.

1.5 Housing medical and welfare assessment panel

1.5.1 Since the return of the service in March 2008, applicants for housing who have a need to move on medical or welfare grounds are assessed by a panel of officers and managers from the housing needs team, the private sector housing team, and Russet Homes. The panel was trained by *NowMedical*¹ a London-based company that was established in 1995 specifically to advise local authorities and other housing providers on matters such as medical priority for allocations and transfers, vulnerability for priority need, and special housing needs. The *NowMedical* doctors are all UK-registered GPs and psychiatrists in current medical practice and they currently advise over 100 housing organisations throughout the UK.

1.5.2 Where appropriate, the Medical and Welfare Panel will award priority (in the form of additional points) on the grounds of illness/disability and/or social/welfare needs where they are impacted by the applicant's current accommodation. If the accommodation meets the medical/welfare /support needs of the applicant, then no priority is awarded. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the decisions taken by the panel since September 2010.

¹ www.nowmedical.co.uk

Table 1: Medical cases

Month	No Priority (0 points)	Low Priority (5 points)	Medium Priority (15 points)	High Priority (40 points)
Sep 2010	31	6	6	15
Oct 2010	39	5	9	11
Nov 2010	55	5	3	5
Dec 2010	31	5	7	4
Jan 2011	38	0	11	3
Feb 2011	34	4	3	3
Mar 2011	45	6	5	13
Apr 2011	59	9	8	7
Total : 485	332 (68%)	40 (8%)	52 (11%)	61 (13%)

Table 2: Welfare cases

Month	No Priority (0 points)	Low Priority (5 points)	Medium Priority (15 points)	High Priority (40 points)
Jul 2010	4	2	8	4
Aug 2010	2	2	5	6
Sep 2010	1	1	5	7
Oct 2010	1	4	3	5
Nov 2010	2	5	2	7
Dec 2010	6	0	6	4
Jan 2011	6	7	4	10
Feb 2011	10	1	2	3
Mar 2011	17	3	8	6
Apr 2011	28	1	2	6
Total : 206	77 (37%)	26 (13%)	45 (22%)	58 (28%)

- 1.5.3 The panel meets twice weekly and assesses approximately 70-80 housing applications per month. The current average length of time taken to process a medical and/or welfare assessment is approximately two weeks from receipt of the completed assessment, although this can fluctuate at times of particularly high demand or staff absence.
- 1.5.4 This assessment process was the subject of a review by the Scrutiny Committee in March 2011. The review demonstrated that the process for assessing the medical and welfare priority for housing applicants is robust and effective. It is transparent, consistent, results in fewer delays than the previous approach, and is also more cost-effective. The ongoing support provided by *NowMedical* serves as a safety net to ensure that complex cases are assessed sympathetically and in accordance with the Council's policy.

1.5.3 A number of recommendations were made, including refresher training by *NowMedical* which took place on 18 May 2011. The content of the Medical and Welfare Assessment Form was reviewed, and measured against the Fog Index, which is a readability test that is designed to show how easy or difficult text is to read. The resultant amendments to the assessment form have significantly reduced the Fog Index.

1.6 Kent Homechoice Mobility Vanguard project

1.6.1 The DCLG consultation paper “Local Decisions: a fairer future for social housing” included proposals to introduce a national home swap scheme to make it easier for tenants to see possible exchange partners and will increase tenants’ choice and control over where they live. Kent Homechoice has been successful in its bid submission to the government to develop one of a number of mobility vanguard projects.

1.6.2 The project will build on what has already been achieved and increase opportunities for tenants to move through mutual exchange. Landlords should provide their tenants with access to good web-based home swap services, which include the provision of automated matching, and ensure that appropriate support is provided for those tenants that do not have internet access.

1.6.3 Members will be updated with progress with a further report to this board in due course.

1.7 Kent and Medway Rough Sleeper funding

1.7.1 At the end of March 2011, DCLG made a payment of £95,491.50 to Medway Council, for the purposes of supporting work to prevent and tackle rough sleeping across Kent and Medway. This one off payment is intended to support work across all of the local authority areas, specifically to address single homelessness and rough sleeping issues.

1.7.2 Medway Council will take on the role as the lead authority, with specific responsibility for coordinating a working group and holding the funding. The working group are considering a number of projects, including:

- Medway area – an outreach worker to identify and work with rough sleepers;
- A grant based rent deposit scheme for rough sleepers, to assist those not considered to be in priority need to rent privately;
- in order to address the ‘gap’ in assistance to entrenched rough sleepers with a mental health problem, funding support workers who specialise in mental health outreach to prevent them from ‘falling through the net’;

- looking at the feasibility of setting up winter shelters in the east and west of Kent; and
- to assist A8 nationals. From 2004, EEA nationals from the A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) who wanted to work in the UK had to register with the UK Border Agency under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS). These transitional provisions for A8 workers ended on 30 April, and since 1 May 2011 EEA nationals, including those from the A8 countries, will have access to income-related benefits if they are habitually resident. This includes establishing a right to reside as a job seeker, worker, self-employed or self-sufficient person and also demonstrating a settled intention to remain. This may not be possible for someone who is currently rough sleeping with an intermittent employment history.

1.7.3 Members will be updated with progress with a further report to this board in due course.

1.8 Customer satisfaction surveys

1.8.1 Customers who contact the housing options team are sent a questionnaire, inviting them to score the service they received and make any comments about how the service could be improved. The number of customers who were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service received for 2010/11 remains at an average of 61 per cent. However, the response rate is very low, with individual satisfaction levels ranging from 0 per cent to 100 per cent. This suggests that it is only those customers with very strong feelings who respond to the survey.

1.8.2 In view of this we will be reviewing the current customer survey questionnaire and assessing what is the best method and form of receiving customer feedback for 2011/12. We will be working with Sevenoaks Council to share and agree on ideas on how best to have customer engagement and feedback.

1.9 Single Agency Assessment

1.9.1 A single agency assessment approach is widely used by East Kent authorities, where a customer on the housing register needs to move and has housing related health or support needs. The relevant health professional or support worker completes an assessment form in conjunction with the service user, and recommends the level of priority to be awarded.

1.9.2 The remaining West Kent authorities, including Tonbridge and Malling, have recently agreed to use this format, which has been renamed as the Kent assessment. This will replace the JARP panel assessment of customers with support needs. The Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board will provide initial training in the use of the form to health professionals and support workers, and will monitor the use and outcomes of this assessment which will ensure consistency throughout Kent.

1.10 Porchlight Schools Programme

1.10.1 Porchlight's schools programme for Kent started in April 2010, and has been targeted at secondary schools, sixth form colleges and other youth groups and organisations such as Connexions. Porchlight have developed a range of resources to support a comprehensive education programme delivered to target groups.

1.10.2 The main objectives of the programme are

- to prevent youth homelessness and signpost young people to available services;
- to educate young people on the issues and responsibilities involved in managing a tenancy;
- to develop young people's financial awareness; and
- to change the attitudes of young people, their families and the education community towards homelessness

1.10.3 During 2010/11, Porchlight have delivered the programme to 60 schools, colleges and youth groups across Kent, reaching over 15,000 young people. The Youth Homeless Education team have worked in comprehensive schools, grammar schools, Pupil Referral Units, special schools for young people with emotional and behavioural issues, schools for young people with complex learning difficulties, colleges, scout groups and with NEET young people in Connexions Back on Track and Activity Agreement groups.

1.10.4 Within this borough, schools and groups that have benefitted from the programme include Hugh Christie School, Aylesford School, the Weald of Kent Grammar School, K College, the Horizon Project and the Foundation Learning Centre.

1.10.5 The schools, colleges and youth groups that Porchlight have worked with have all stated what an impact the programme has had on both teachers and students alike. It is clear from the workshops that the message being delivered to young people with regards to staying at home is being heard loud and clear and helps young people to see the bigger picture and realise that staying at home is the best place for them. Porchlight have secured additional funding to deliver the programme throughout Kent for another year.

Background papers: Nil

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