

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 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the following:

- **the waiting times/list for children's Occupational Therapy assessments;**
- **the Disabled Facilities Grant spend in 2010/11;**
- **the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation for 2011/12;**
- **the review of the Disabled Facilities Grant process;**
- **the Housing Assistance spend in 2010/11; and**
- **evaluation of customer feedback for 2010/11.**

1.1 Update on the waiting times/list for children's Occupational Therapy assessments

1.1.1 Members are aware of the ongoing dialogue with Kent County Council regarding the waiting times for children's Occupational Therapy (OT) assessments in Tonbridge & Malling.

1.1.2 I reported at the last meeting that a locum OT had been appointed to progress the cases awaiting full assessment in Tonbridge & Malling.

1.1.3 As at 10 May 2011 I am told that there are thirteen cases on the Tonbridge & Malling Occupational Therapy waiting list. This is made up of the following:

- **three cases awaiting re-housing (so will not come forward as DFGs) and supporting letters have been completed (one referred in October 2010, one February 2011 and one March 2011);**

- one case unable to progress as awaiting further information to see if it meets eligibility criteria (referral March 2010);
- one case unable to progress as awaiting further information from Russet Homes (referral April 2010). Please note my Officers are involved in this case and are urging Russet to conclude on decisions to be made;
- one case awaiting initial assessment – unable to progress due to child protection issues (referral March 2011);
- three cases referred in May 2011 where initial OT assessment dates have been set;
- one case where initial OT assessment date has yet to be set as new referral; and
- three cases where initial OT assessments have been carried out and they are now awaiting allocation to the OT. All these three cases are priority B and two were referrals in March 2011 and one in April 2011.

1.1.4 I can confirm that the locum OT has been in touch regularly with my officers over the last six weeks regarding cases and a number of feasibility visits have taken place. Some cases are now progressing through the DFG process and there are presently no delays in issuing approval for works to go ahead once a valid application has been received.

1.1.5 I believe that Kent County Council has finally delivered on what they promised sometime ago now and we will see children's OT assessments in Tonbridge & Malling brought within realistic waiting times for families and disabled children. Clearly this is due largely to the employment of additional resources and it is not clear for how long this will continue. It will be important to continue to monitor the waiting list and times taken for assessment in order to react quickly to any future build up of cases.

1.2 Update on the Disabled Facilities Grant spend in 2010/11

1.2.1 Members are reminded that the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) budget for 2010/11 was £611,000. This was made up of £410,000 Government allocation and £201,000 Council funding.

1.2.2 I can confirm that the total spend on DFGs in 2010/11 was £593,000. The underspend of £18,000 is due to schemes that were approved not materialising into actual spend within the financial year. As these schemes will be completed in 2011/12 and require payment the Director of Finance will be seeking approval to carry the underspend forward into 2011/12.

1.2.3 Members will recall that Cabinet agreed in 2010/11 the proposal to meet the overspend on the DFG budget in 2009/10 which was £138,700 from the Council's

revenue reserve for capital schemes as part of the closure of accounts procedure. This enabled a more realistic budget of £611,000 to be set for 2010/11 and this has proven to be a helpful decision in managing the DFG budget this year.

1.3 Update on the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation for 2011/12

- 1.3.1 At the last meeting of this Board I made Members aware of an additional £11 million from central Government for DFGs in 2011/12. I can confirm that, as expected, Tonbridge & Malling B.C. will not receive any of this additional funding. Our central Government allocation remains at £410,000. The Council's contribution is £201,000 and, with the £18,000 underspend mentioned above, gives a total DFG budget for 2011/12 of £629,000.
- 1.3.2 Members will recall in 2010/11 we agreed a notional allocation from the DFG budget of £300,000 for Russet. In actual fact Russet spent in the region of £200,000 of our DFG budget and contributed approximately a further £200,000 themselves towards adaptations. I am sure Members will appreciate this ongoing commitment from Russet to partnership working in delivering adaptations for their tenants.
- 1.3.3 I have recommended to Russet a notional allocation of £200,000 for 2011/12 with an expectation of a similar level of funding being provided by them again for adaptation works. I will update Members further at the meeting on these discussions.

1.4 Update on the review of the Disabled Facilities Grant process

- 1.4.1 A review of the Disabled Facilities Grant process is ongoing and my Officers are continually seeking ways in which the overly bureaucratic process can be simplified for the applicants but still of course staying within the legal constraints.
- 1.4.2 A new grants I.T. module where new cases are now stored and progressed is assisting in an internal review of the process. Where possible information is being stored electronically rather than in paper form and the use of email is being made with partner agencies rather than hard copy. The new grant process is due to be audited as part of the Internal Audit work programme in the second quarter of this year and this will be a useful learning exercise in respect of how the new approach meets their requirements.
- 1.4.3 Meetings are being held with the Occupational Therapy Service to streamline the paperwork that is generated between the two agencies for referrals and ongoing support of cases. It is particularly important that there is a consistent approach being used by the Occupational Therapy Service as we now have two area offices (Tonbridge Wells and Maidstone) covering the Tonbridge & Malling area.
- 1.4.4 As Members are aware Russet have funded a number of adaptation works in their properties over the last two years. This process has been completely streamlined

in that we do not get involved in these cases at all. Clearly this enables a quicker service for the tenant and less confusion which agency does what.

- 1.4.5 Members will recall a Kent Housing Group led agreement between local authorities and Kent Housing Providers has been drafted to improve DFG processes for tenants of all Housing Providers. Tonbridge & Malling continues to lead on pressing this forward and shortly all Housing Providers will be asked formally to sign up to the agreement. This should mean an agreement on funding as well as named contacts in each of the Housing Providers for adaptation work and a commitment to helping their tenants through the DFG process.

1.5 Update on the Housing Assistance spend in 2010/11

- 1.5.1 The total Housing Assistance budget for this Council's activities in 2010/11 was £781,000. This is made up of £651,000 Regional Housing Board (RHB) funding, and £130,000 Council funding.
- 1.5.2 The total spent on Council internally managed Housing Assistance activities for 2010/11 was approximately £270,000. A further £253,375 was allocated to our partner, Creative Environmental Network (CEN) to take forward energy efficiency related grants. These include grants for solar hot water installations, renewable energy grants, insulation for hard to heat properties, and grants for measures such as insulation and heating under a 'Coldbusters' grant.
- 1.5.3 At the beginning of the year, we set out what we intended to achieve in 2010/11 in terms of type and number of grants. A summary of this and the actual number of grants completed is provided in **TABLE 1**.

TABLE 1

Type of grant	Target number of completions	Actual number of completions
Renewable energy assistance	2	2
Solar Hot Water Heating	31	12
Warm Homes Assistance	58	90
Empty Homes Assistance	1	0
Landlord Assistance	1	1
Decent Homes Assistance	25	32
Hard to Heat Homes Assistance	1	4
First Time Buyer Assistance	10	5

1.5.4 Due to the low take-up of the solar hot water heating grant, funding was re-directed into the hard to heat homes assistance. Similarly funding for the first time buyer assistance was re-directed into the decent homes assistance.

1.5.5 As a result of the above activities it has delivered:

- 144 homes being made decent, including having category 1 hazards removed as assessed using the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System; 1 home moving towards being made decent;
- 69 homes made decent for vulnerable households (in receipt of an income or disability related benefit);
- 286 measures, where a measure may include electrics, roof works, new double glazed windows, new central heating boilers, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation etc.
- an estimated 75.44 tonnes of CO₂ saved by installing:
 - 88 new central heating/hot water boilers;
 - nine homes with cavity wall insulation;
 - four hard to heat homes with external wall insulation;
 - 23 homes with improved loft insulation;
 - 12 solar hot water heating systems; and
 - 15 homes with double glazed windows.

1.5.6 As significant, the quality of life of 144 families living in the borough has been appreciably enhanced.

1.5.7 I am recommending that any unspent budget in 2010/11 may be carried over to 2011/12 to meet existing commitments.

1.5.8 The housing assistance budget for 2011/12 is £137,000, which is from Council funding; £37,000 of the funding is recycled from repaid housing assistance in 2010/11. Government is not providing any funding for private sector renewal for this financial year and as a result the budget is significantly reduced. This reduction in budget has required changes in the housing assistance policy to target assistance at those most in need and improve housing resources. The revised housing assistance policy descriptions are included at **[Annex 1]**.

1.6 Evaluation of customer feedback for 2010/11

1.6.1 As part of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and the Housing Assistance Grant processes a customer feedback survey form is sent to the applicant on completion

of the process. Customer feedback surveys are undertaken by Russet Homes for those DFG applicants where the DFG is funded from the Council DFG allocation to Russet Homes.

- 1.6.2 For the period 2010/11 a total of 33 DFG customer feedback surveys were returned, 15 of those were from Housing Association tenants. Of the 33 DFG surveys returned, 23 were from applicants of white British origin and 10 not responded. Of the 33 DFG surveys:
- 13 were from applicants over 75 years of age;
 - four where the applicant is aged 61 to 75 years;
 - three where the applicant is aged 41 to 60 years;
 - one where the applicant is aged 26 to 40 years; and
 - 12 did not respond.
- 1.6.3 The table at **[Annex 2]** tabulates the combined 33 responses to the customer feedback DFG survey questions of interest to the Council.
- 1.6.4 From the responses shown in 1.6.3 in the main, DFG applicants are happy with the service they receive from the Council and the work undertaken by their builders. The main issue applicants dislike about the DFG process is the time it takes to complete.
- 1.6.5 For the period 2010/11 a total of 29 Housing Assistance customer feedback surveys were returned. Of the 29 surveys returned, 24 were from applicants of white British origin, one from a white Irish and four did not respond. Of the 29 Housing Assistance surveys, 11 of those were from applicants with a disability and five did not respond if they had a disability. Of the 29 surveys:
- five were from applicants over 75 years of age;
 - 15 where the applicant is aged 61 to 75 years;
 - four where the applicant is aged 41 to 60 years;
 - none where the applicant is aged 26 to 40 years; and
 - five did not respond.
- 1.6.6 The table at **[Annex 3]** tabulates the combined 29 responses to the customer feedback Housing Assistance survey questions of interest to the Council.
- 1.6.7 From the responses shown in 1.6.6 in the main, Housing Assistance applicants are happy with the service they receive from the Council and the work undertaken

by their builders. The main issue applicants dislike about the Housing Assistance process is the delays or the time it takes.

- 1.6.8 The responses from the DFG and Housing Assistance surveys are used to help improve the service delivery to the customer for DFGs and Housing Assistance grants. In response to this we are changing our processes to try and reduce the time it takes for a DFG adaptation to be completed; as discussed in paragraph 1.4 onwards earlier in this report. Also for Housing Assistance cases, more frequent regular progress meetings are undertaken to highlight those that may not be progressing as expected and to take appropriate action.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 DFGs are a mandatory grant and valid applications have to be approved or refused within six months.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 As explained in this report.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 Continuing vigilance is needed to ensure adequate resources are secured to sustain programmes of disabled facilities grants and housing assistance to assist households in need in Tonbridge and Malling. This is particularly the case for the housing assistance budget for this financial year as it has been significantly reduced as the Council will not receive any funding from Government for private sector renewal.

1.10 Policy Considerations

- 1.10.1 The broad range of policies 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 biodiversity/sustainability.

Background papers:

Nil

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