

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

7 November 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 agreement with Russet on funding adaptations;**
- **the Kent Housing Group agreement on adaptations;**
- **the In Touch Home Improvement Agency Advisory Group;**
- **Home Improvement Agency Service contracts;**
- **West Kent Landlord Forums;**
- **the Overcrowding Protocol;**
- **Registered Provider progress in meeting the Decent Homes Standard by 31 December 2010; and**
- **The Private Sector House Condition Survey.**

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 As of 13 September 2011 I am advised there were seven cases awaiting assessment in Tonbridge & Malling. Of these three were priority A and four were priority B. The oldest priority A case dates back to a referral in June 2011 and it is a case awaiting adaptations (likely to become a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)).

The other two priority A cases were referrals made in July 2011 and are cases requiring equipment/re-housing letters. All the four priority B cases are awaiting adaptations (likely to become DFGs) and were referrals made in March 2011 (two cases), June 2011 and September 2011.

- 1.1.3 As I am sure you can appreciate, the position with regard to the waiting list has improved significantly. I can confirm that the locum OT has been retained at the present time by Kent County Council and continues to work in the Tonbridge & Malling area. My team have received 11 DFG referrals to date in 2011 for children's cases compared to four in the whole of 2010. The cases that are in the system continue to progress quickly with a number now being at approval or actual works being commenced stage.
- 1.1.4 I propose to continue to monitor the waiting list for children's OT assessments via the regular meetings that my Officers attend with the OTs. If there is a future concern regarding an increasing list and/or waiting time I will of course report this issue back to Members at a future meeting of this Board.

1.2 Agreement with Russet re funding adaptations

- 1.2.1 Members will recall at the last meeting of this Board I advised that I had recommended to Russet a notional allocation of £200,000 for 2011/12 from the Council's DFG budget with an expectation that they provide a similar level of funding for adaptation works.
- 1.2.2 I can confirm that this notional allocation was accepted by Russet and they also advise that they have allocated £200,000 towards adaptation works in their stock.
- 1.2.3 I did commit to reviewing the notional allocation (given that we had reduced it from £300,000 the previous year to better reflect actual spend) if Russet felt their spend level in the current year was significantly increasing. Clearly any review and subsequent increase in their notional allocation would be within the context of the overall spend being achieved against the total DFG budget. At this stage given the levels of current spend I do not expect any request to review the notional allocation to be forthcoming from Russet.

1.3 Update on Kent Housing Group agreement on adaptations

- 1.3.1 Members will recall a Kent Housing Group (KHG) led agreement between local authorities and Kent Housing Providers was drafted to improve DFG processes for tenants of all Housing Providers. The agreement covers funding arrangements and ensures named contacts are in place within each Housing Provider for adaptation work as well as securing a commitment from the Housing Provider to help their tenants through the DFG process.
- 1.3.2 Since the last meeting of this Board, some Housing Providers have been asked to formally sign up to the agreement by the KHG. Seven out of seventeen Housing Providers approached have so far signed up to the agreement including a couple

who have limited housing stock in Tonbridge & Malling. I am pleased to report Russet have signed up to the agreement however our local agreement regarding funding arrangements will stand outside of this KHG agreement. My Officers will continue to work with KHG to ensure that all Housing Providers who have housing stock in this borough are approached about the agreement and are encouraged to sign up.

1.4 In touch Home Improvement Agency Advisory Group

1.4.1 I attach the minutes from the last meeting of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) Advisory Group held on 10 May 2011 at **[Annex 1]**.

1.4.2 As Members will see from the minutes the next meeting was due September/October time however in May 2011 the Project Manager for the Mid & West Kent HIA temporarily swapped roles with the Project Manager for Dartford & Gravesham and then went on long term sick. This has meant there has been one HIA Project Manager covering the whole of the Mid, North and West Kent area. In addition Hyde Housing transferred the In Touch business to Family Mosaic (a housing association operating in London, Essex and Suffolk) from 01 August 2011. The HIA will retain the name In Touch HIA.

1.4.3 I understand arrangements are being made to hold the next Advisory Group meeting as soon as possible. I am however confident that in terms of how In Touch HIA are performing in taking cases forward this is closely monitored via the regular meetings held between my Officers and In Touch staff. My Officers are to meet the Managing Director of In Touch, who has gone over to Family Mosaic to lead the integration, to discuss the changes being made.

1.5 Home Improvement Agency Service contracts

1.5.1 Members will be aware that the Council's contract with In Touch to provide a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service in the borough came to an end on 04 August 2011. In Touch are contracted to provide an HIA service in our borough by Kent County Council Supporting People Team until 31 March 2012. We therefore needed to enter into a new contract with In Touch to take us from the period 5 August 2011 to 31 March 2012. The value of this contract was expected to be £29, 516. A waiver of the requirement set out in the Purchasing Guide to obtain three quotations for contracts in excess of £5,000 had been obtained and a contract was being drawn up by legal. However mid July 2011 we were informed that Hyde Housing were transferring the HIA business to Family Mosaic from 1 August 2011. We are in the process of checking whether we can enter into a contract with In Touch Support (as was previously) and also carrying out the necessary checks on Family Mosaic before we are able to enter into the new contract. This has not affected in any way the way the day to day operation of the HIA in T&M in providing the vital service to vulnerable residents.

1.5.2 Kent County Council (KCC) Supporting People Team are to tender for HIA services across Kent from March 2012. The tender process is expected to begin

in October 2011. We have been in discussions with the Chief Solicitor to ensure we are happy with the way KCC are proposing to tender and we will have some involvement in the procurement process. I will of course keep Members updated via this Board.

1.6 West Kent Landlord Forums

- 1.6.1 Since the papers were finalised for the last meeting of this Board two West Kent landlord forums have taken place.
- 1.6.2 On 23 May 2011 a forum was held at Tunbridge Wells B.C. offices. Approximately 20 landlords attended and heard presentations on accreditation schemes, the hazard of “excess cold”, improving energy efficiency and the Green Deal and crime in the private rented sector.
- 1.6.3 On 3 October 2011 a West Kent landlord fair was held at Tonbridge & Malling B.C. offices. A number of presentations were held including the value of the private rented sector in Kent, the opportunities that empty properties present, legal advice on tenancies and a general round up from the National Landlords Association. In addition workshops on the changes to local housing allowance, a bright future for buy to let and how to source tenants gave landlords the opportunity to listen to the experts in smaller groups. Throughout the fair, various trade and agency “stalls” were open where landlords could obtain advice and support. Approximately 50 landlords attended and the feedback we received indicated the landlords had all found the forum useful. Feedback on future speakers/topics and improvements were received and will be considered by the partnership for future forums.
- 1.6.4 The next forum is due to be held in February 2012 in Tunbridge Wells. I will of course keep Members updated through this Board.

1.7 Overcrowding Protocol for Registered Providers Accommodation

- 1.7.1 The Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced a new risk based methodology for assessing hazards in residential dwellings, including crowding and space.
- 1.7.2 The HHSRS Enforcement Guidance states that the statutory overcrowding provisions in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985 remain in force but Councils are advised to use HHSRS rather than Part 10. Part 10 is an outdated legislative system, which does not reflect modern day standards.
- 1.7.3 Councils have a statutory duty to take enforcement action to tackle category 1 crowding and space hazards. However the use of enforcement action, for example a prohibition order, could lead to occupants becoming displaced from their homes into temporary accommodation. Given the mismatch between demand and supply of social housing, many families could have a long wait before being allocated a larger home.

- 1.7.4 A protocol as shown in **[ANNEX 2]** has been produced to give guidance to Registered Providers allocation teams on the maximum number of persons a home is suitable for to avoid overcrowding and crowding and space hazards when allocating void properties. The protocol outlines the enforcement approach the Council would adopt with regard to significant crowding and space hazards. Obviously problems with crowding and space can occur when the family is added to and the protocol outlines the approach that will be taken in this case also.
- 1.7.5 The protocol has been circulated to all Registered Providers. The only comment to be returned was concerns over the sufficient living space guidelines but as advised this is only guidance to act as a general guide and there may be some occasions where individual advice from the Council enforcement officer is needed.

1.8 Registered Providers (RPs) Progress in Meeting the Decent Homes Standard

- 1.8.1 As Members will be aware, on the 1 April 2001 a national baseline was set using data from the 2001 English House Condition Survey regarding the number of non-decent homes in the social sector. Following this the Government put an annual reporting programme in place and set a target that all social housing should be decent by the end of 2010.
- 1.8.2 Progress on meeting the Decent Homes Standard is reported annually in July by the RPs via the Regulatory Statistical Return to the previously known Housing Corporation (now the Homes and Communities Agency). All RPs have previously reported they were on track to meet this 2010 target.
- 1.8.3 This year six RPs (Riverside, Housing 21, Southern, Sanctuary, Hanover and Moat) with housing in the borough have responded to a request for Decent Homes information. Those RPs report that all homes currently meet the Decent Homes Standard. Moat anticipates that seventeen properties will become non-decent in the short term (up to 2016) if no investment is made in improvements.

1.9 Private Sector House Condition Survey Update

- 1.9.1 As previously reported to this Board in November 2010 the survey was expected to take place during 2010/11 but it was felt prudent to delay the survey to look at other viable alternatives, and in particular the use of a combination of desktop and street surveys to gather reliable and informative data on the condition of the housing stock. Sevenoaks District Council has taken this alternative approach.
- 1.9.2 Sevenoaks instructed the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to undertake a desktop survey to produce a model for their borough based on national data from for example the English House Condition Survey and the Census 2001. This desktop model can then produce estimates for a range of stock indicators down to street level areas to provide a Housing Stock Model. This modelling information can then be built on further by overlaying known local data, for example energy efficiency data and complementing with targeted street survey data.

- 1.9.3 Officers have met with the BRE to discuss the costs of them providing a Housing Stock Model and assist with the setting up of a housing stock database, which will include our existing local data for example on properties that have cavity wall insulation installed. They have also met with Sevenoaks to get their feedback from this approach. Officers are currently looking at the costs and value for money of this approach versus the traditional house condition survey and will report further to this board on their preferred approach.

Background papers:

Nil

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