

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD**

**20 February 2012**

**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:**

- **Home Improvement Agency Service contracts;**
- **an Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of children's Occupational Therapy Services;**
- **Disabled Facilities Grant funding for 2011/12;**
- **the 'Green Deal' and 'Energy Company Obligation'; and**
- **the Housing Assistance policy.**

**1.2 Home Improvement Agency Service contracts**

1.2.1 Members are aware from a report to the last meeting of this Board that the Council needed to enter into a new contract with In Touch Support (now owned by Family Mosaic rather than Hyde Housing) for the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service up until 31 March 2012. I am pleased to report this contract has now been signed by both parties. I reiterate that throughout this whole process of renewing the contract there has been no effect on the day to day operation of the HIA in Tonbridge & Malling in providing the vital service to vulnerable residents.

1.2.2 In relation to an ongoing HIA service after March 2012 I reported into the last meeting of this Board that Kent County Council Supporting People Team (KCC) were to tender for HIA services across Kent from March 2012. This tender process was due to begin in October 2011 however it has still not started. It is clear there is still some discussion required between KCC and district authorities about the service specification. As a result of this a report was presented to the Supporting People in Kent Commissioning Body on 26/01/12 where recommendations to delay the procurement process and to extend the current contracts for the HIA service to 30 September 2012 were agreed. KCC have

agreed to use reserves of £345k to support the extension of the existing service provision to the end of September 2012.

### **1.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of children's Occupational Therapy Services**

- 1.3.1 It is proposed that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the children's Occupational Therapy Service in light of recent reports into this Board and the long wait that some families have had in recent years for an Occupational Therapy assessment.
- 1.3.2 A scoping paper for the review has yet to be drafted and agreed. However I expect the review to focus on recognising all the good work achieved over recent months by all agencies especially Kent County Council in turning around a difficult problem with a focus on the continuing excellent working relationship between County and Borough Council case workers. The review should emphasise how important the improvements have been and therefore the need for them to continue.
- 1.3.3 I will keep Members of this Board updated on the review.

### **1.4 Disabled Facilities Grant funding for 2011/12**

- 1.4.1 Members are aware that Russet had a notional allocation from the 2011/12 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) budget of £200,000. In November 2011 we received a request from Russet for an increase to the notional allocation as they were close to committing all the DFG funding and their own funding of £250,000.
- 1.4.2 Having considered the levels of current spend and commitment against the DFG budget overall, and in consultation with the Director of Finance, I have agreed an increase in the notional allocation for Russet to £250,000. This is still a reduction on the £300,000 from the previous year and in fact match funds the amount that Russet is putting into major adaptations for its tenants for the current year. I believe this remains an excellent partnership arrangement to achieving adaptations for Russet tenants and the level of investment Russet are willing to put into this area of work should continue to be commended.
- 1.4.3 Government recently announced an additional £20 million DFG funding nationally for 2011/12. We have been notified that Tonbridge & Malling B.C. will receive an additional £37,404 of this funding. This makes the total DFG budget for 2011/12 £671,404 of which £447,404 is Government funding.

### **1.5 'Green Deal' and 'Energy Company Obligation'**

- 1.5.1 The Government recently consulted on proposals to introduce a new financial framework to assist with improving the energy efficiency of UK homes and businesses. The Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation is proposed to commence in October 2012, and will replace the current insulation and heating

government grant and discounted schemes; which will come to an end in December 2012.

- 1.5.2 The Green Deal (GD) and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) aims to reduce carbon emissions, improve homes and reduce the number of families in fuel poverty.
- 1.5.3 The consultation states “the role of local authority and other partners is also likely to be crucial in ensuring effective and intensive delivery of ECO and Green Deal in particular areas. We believe that many natural incentives will encourage effective partnership to form, and no particular regulatory requirements are needed. The Big Society agenda also has the potential to support local partnerships”.
- 1.5.4 We are currently looking at the role the Council can play in delivering the Green Deal and the ECO particularly with regard to partnership working.
- 1.5.5 The GD scheme will provide upfront capital to enable householders to fund single or a package of energy efficiency measures such as heating and insulation, which have been identified through a comprehensive independent energy efficiency assessment. The GD recommendations include for the ‘Golden Rule’ that any charge attached to the GD finance package must be less than the expected savings on the householder’s energy bill.
- 1.5.6 The scheme is designed to be consumer led, with householders choosing the best offer available from an open market of GD providers. GD providers may be commercial or social organisations, or local authorities acting alone or in partnership. It is intended that there will be an impartial GD advice line to assist householders with any queries they may have.
- 1.5.7 The scheme recognises that in some households the cost of the recommended measures will not meet the Golden Rule and will therefore not be able to be fully funded through the GD finance assistance, for example hard to treat properties such as solid wall homes. In addition, low income or vulnerable households who may not be able to afford to heat their home effectively will not achieve the expected bill savings. For these households it is expected they will be able to benefit from the ECO funding.
- 1.5.8 Under the Energy Act 2011, the Government has introduced the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) which places a legal obligation on the larger utility suppliers to meet an annual carbon saving target and provide support to low income and vulnerable households.
- 1.5.9 The ECO includes a Carbon Saving Obligation to provide support to reduce carbon emissions in hard to treat homes and an Affordable Warmth Obligation (AWO) to provide energy efficiency measures to assist low income and vulnerable households in private tenures to improve the thermal performance of their properties. It is proposed that the AWO will be targeted at certain income related benefits and it is likely it will be 100 percent funded.

1.5.10 The ECO will work alongside the GD, with eligible households receiving a package of GD finance and ECO funded measures.

## **1.6 Housing Assistance policy**

1.6.1 At the November 2011 meeting Members will recall that the Director of Health & Housing was authorised to investigate the development of a scheme with British Gas to help householders fund the installation of external wall insulation works.

1.6.2 Officers have discussed several options for the management of an external wall insulation scheme utilising CERT funding from British Gas, and in consultation with the Chief Solicitor have established the most appropriate option. The scheme has not progressed at the current time, as we understand British Gas is still developing the preferred scheme option; we are however actively expressing an interest. When further details are available, we will be able to consider these and decide if we wish to amend the housing assistance policy to incorporate an external wall insulation scheme.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Linda Hibbs, Hazel  
Skinner

John Batty  
Director for Health and Housing