

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

12 November 2012

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

This report updates Members on the following:

- **Home Improvement Agency Service contract;**
- **Landlord Forums held in May and October 2012;**
- **free insulation schemes for residents;**
- **Private Sector Housing team customer feedback;**
- **new arrangements for reporting on energy efficiency work; and**
- **DCLG publication on “Dealing with Rogue Landlords”.**

1.1 Home Improvement Agency Service contract

1.1.1 Members are aware that Kent County Council Supporting People Team (KCC) were tendering for a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service across Kent to take effect from 1 October 2012.

1.1.2 The contract to operate an HIA service across most of Kent was won by In Touch, our existing provider. The only local authority area that will not be covered by In Touch are Swale B.C. who continue to have an in-house HIA.

1.1.3 I understand that a contract between KCC and In Touch has now been signed and the two parties are dealing with the details of the ongoing service delivery and service specification. I will advise members as soon as any further information is available.

1.2 Landlord Forums

1.2.1 Since the last Private Sector Housing Update paper to this Board in May 2012 there have been two landlord forums/fairs organised by the partnership of

Sevenoaks D.C., Tonbridge & Malling B.C., Tunbridge Wells B.C. and the National Landlords Association.

- 1.2.2 A West Kent Landlord Forum was held at Sevenoaks D.C. on 21 May 2012. Thirty landlords attended and presentations were given on energy performance certificate changes, tenancy deposit protection, financial assistance available to landlords and getting possession of property.
- 1.2.3 A West Kent Landlord Fair was held on 11 October 2012 at Tonbridge & Malling B.C. This was the annual event where, as well as presentations, we had a number of workshops and stands. Thirty six landlords attended the event and subjects covered included Green Deal, fire sprinklers, legal advice on repairs, welfare reform, tax issues and the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.
- 1.2.4 The partnership will shortly be reviewing how we advertise and operate the forums/fairs in order to try and increase the attendance. The next event is due to be held in January 2013 at Tunbridge Wells B.C.

1.3 Free insulation schemes

- 1.3.1 As Members are aware at the May 2012 meeting of this Board it was agreed to endorse the promotion and support for the Yorkshire Energy Services (YES) free insulation scheme and other similar schemes to homeowners with properties within the Tonbridge and Malling area.
- 1.3.2 We have since been in contact with YES and three other similar free insulation scheme providers to advise we would consider endorsing schemes for inclusion on an approved list, subject to suitable checks and satisfactory references.
- 1.3.3 Officers have developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure that each endorsed scheme met certain criteria, including for example ensuring no cold calling of residents, suitable insurances and health and safety procedures are in place.
- 1.3.4 We have completed enquiries and obtained satisfactory references for two schemes. We have requested each complete and return the signed MOU, and return scheme literature for approval. We have not received the signed MOU and scheme literature to date but we continue to promote various other free insulation and discount schemes to residents in the borough whilst the grant funding is still available.

1.4 Private Sector Housing team customer feedback

- 1.4.1 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.

- 1.4.2 For the period 2011/12 a total of 28 DFG customer feedback surveys were returned, of which 13 were from Housing Association tenants. Of the 28 DFG surveys returned the ethnicity of the applicants was broadly in line with the general population of our area. The majority of the applicants returning the survey who had a DFG adaptation were over 75 years of age.
- 1.4.3 From the responses to the DFG customer feedback survey, in the main DFG applicants are happy and grateful for the service they receive from the Council and the work undertaken by their builders. The main issue applicants continue to dislike about the DFG process is the time it takes to complete.
- 1.4.4 For the period 2011/12 of the 34 properties improved and meeting the Decent Homes Standard through Housing Assistance, only six customer satisfaction surveys were returned. Unfortunately due to the low response rate we are unable to make any valid interpretations on service delivery.
- 1.4.5 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. The number of surveys returned for Housing Assistance cases is low and we are looking at ways of improving the response rate, for example revising the format of the survey form or allowing online completion.

1.5 New arrangements for reporting on energy efficiency work

- 1.5.1 Members may recall that each year from 1995 to 2010 the Council was required under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1985 (HECA) to report on changes in the energy efficiency of housing stock in the area, and activities undertaken to assist with our then HECA strategy.
- 1.5.2 New guidance for local authorities was published on 26 July 2012, which explains that all local authorities with housing responsibilities are required to prepare further reports, to identify proposed measures to deliver significant energy efficiency improvements of all residential accommodation in their areas. In clarifying proposed measures, we understand a key aspect of this will be how local authorities might deliver Green Deal to residents and how working with local partners may realise the benefits of Green Deal.
- 1.5.3 Reports are to be published in an electronic format on the Council's website by 31 March 2013. Authorities must subsequently provide further reports every two years to identify the progress in implementing these measures.
- 1.5.4 The Green Deal is the Governments' new scheme to encourage the uptake of energy efficiency measures by households and commercial operators such as insulation, including insulation for solid wall/hard to heat homes and heating systems. The Green Deal is a finance mechanism that enables measures to be installed at no upfront cost with the cost of the measures being repaid through the electricity bill. The golden rule being that the cost of the energy efficiency installation measures should be less than or equal to the savings on the energy

bill achieved by having the measures installed. The Green Deal is due to be implemented at the end of January 2013. Alongside the Green Deal sits the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) which funds the installation of measures where the achieved savings won't meet the golden rule, such as for vulnerable or low income households or properties with solid walls. The ECO funding is available from October 2012.

- 1.5.5 Green Deal is seen as an opportunity for local authorities to consider how they might utilise this potential investment to improve the energy efficiency and warmth of housing in their area, and assist with driving economic growth through potential investment and support of jobs.
- 1.5.6 A Kent and Medway Green Deal Partnership has been set up consisting of Kent local authorities, social housing providers, Kent County Council and other interested parties. The Kent and Medway Green Deal Partnership has been formed to support Kent residents and businesses to take advantage of both Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation.

1.6 DCLG guidance on “Dealing with Rogue Landlords”

- 1.6.1 In August 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a guide for local authorities on “Dealing with Rogue Landlords”.
- 1.6.2 The guide identifies rogue landlords as those who target vulnerable tenants and place them in overcrowded or poorly maintained accommodation. It explains that in some places there has been an increase in the use of outbuildings as living accommodation. As well as the impact on tenants, these poor living conditions can have a huge impact on neighbourhoods leading to problems with excessive waste, sewage and in some cases an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour. In some places, rogue landlords have specifically targeted migrants, some of whom are in the UK illegally. This can lead to serious problems in a neighbourhood including illegal working, benefit fraud and tensions between communities.
- 1.6.3 The guide recommends that local authorities should:
- understand the nature and extent of the problems in their area;
 - take swift and decisive action to stop rogue landlords using unsuitable accommodation to house tenants; and
 - prosecute rogue landlords and deter others by publicising successful prosecutions.
- 1.6.4 The guidance provides practical advice on how local authorities can step up their work to tackle rogue landlords drawing on the experience of local authorities already working on these issues.

- 1.6.5 I am pleased to report that Tonbridge & Malling B.C. does not appear to have rogue landlords to the degree explained in this guidance. There are occasionally landlords who fail to keep their properties up to the relevant housing standard and do not respond to informal methods to encourage them to undertake repairs/improvements. Members will know from the “Service of Statutory Notices” report into this Board that where formal action is required against landlords, this is carried out and followed through to a successful conclusion.
- 1.6.6 Whilst I support the messages in this guide in the right context the approach in Tonbridge & Malling will always be to work proactively with local landlords and to use the powers available to us when there is no alternative.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 There are none associated with this report.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 The free insulation schemes referred to in this report do not require any capital budget outlay by the Council and utilise existing government CERT funding.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 There are none associated with this report.

Background papers:

Nil

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