

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

25 February 2013

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 LIAISON PANEL UPDATE

Summary

This report explains the outcomes of a successful programme of meetings with the Council's Registered Provider Partners at the Housing Associations Liaison Panel Meetings.

- 1.1.1 Members will be aware that the Council regularly holds meetings of the Housing Associations Liaison Panel, with selected Registered Provider Preferred Partners. This round of the Panel was held between October and December and with Russet Homes, West Kent Housing Association, Orbit South, Moat, Hyde Housing, Town & Country Housing Group, and Southern Housing Group.
- 1.1.2 The meetings were held against a wider context of current and emerging housing and welfare reforms impacting both on the housing associations, the Council and more importantly our residents. Members of the Liaison Panel took the opportunity to discuss a wide ranging agenda with each partner, in relation to their own existing presence and future aspirations in the borough. This included organisational structure, opportunities for future investment in Tonbridge and Malling, local community development and support initiatives, and approach to antisocial behaviour. The Council's new draft Tenancy Strategy and draft Housing Allocation Scheme were also discussed.

1.2 **Future Investment Opportunities**

- 1.2.1 All of the housing associations were actively seeking to continue their programme of new providing new affordable housing in the borough. This would, as before, be across a range of tenures but primarily now the new affordable rent tenure, in place of social rent. Some housing associations also had an aspiration to provide new homes for market rent, as well as possibly for outright sale. This would allow for increased crossed subsidy to assist the provision of more units for affordable rent, and form part of a broader offer to meet housing need. The need for continuing supply of some social rent was also acknowledged.

- 1.2.2 Some housing associations were seeking to move away from the S106 model of provision and instead target schemes that they had outright control of, to be more secure from changes in the market. In terms of tenure balance shared ownership remained a priority for all, as well as homes for to see an equitable split between homes for rent and shared ownership.
- 1.2.3 When exploring future unit type requirements all the housing associations were conscious that welfare reforms and the “bedroom tax” will incentivise some households to seek smaller homes that were not always necessarily available in the existing stock profile. There was also a general consensus across organisations that that four bed homes or larger for rent were only going to be provided in very exceptional cases due to caps to housing benefit levels, and that the immediate focus would be on additional units that were three bed or smaller. This raises a disconnect in supply to address the needs of larger households.

1.3 Housing Allocation Scheme Update

- 1.3.1 The Council provided details of how the draft Housing Allocation Scheme was likely to be revised, in terms of simplifying the process and giving increased weight to local connection.
- 1.3.2 The Council’s partners acknowledged the changing policy context that the revised Allocation Scheme was being drafted within, and wished to be actively involved as a the final document emerged.

1.4 Local Community Development and Support Initiatives

- 1.4.1 Most of the Council’s partners had ongoing initiatives that focus on providing apprenticeships, improving IT access, job training and financial inclusion training. These continue to be welcomed by the Council.

1.5 Welfare Reform Discussion

- 1.5.1 All the housing associations saw a real challenge with Universal Credit in terms of communicating to some tenants that rent and housing costs must be prioritised over other lesser living costs, in terms of the transition to Direct Payments and the need for household budgeting skills. Many were hoping to create several new bespoke officer roles to enhance financial inclusion and work with more vulnerable households.
- 1.5.2 The Council expressed a desire to work closely with each of our partners as the impacts of welfare reform become clearer, with a particular focus on more vulnerable households.
- 1.5.3 The Council also took the opportunity to outlined our position and decision making processes in relation to future changes in Council Tax.

1.6 Tenancy Strategy

- 1.6.1 Officers described the emerging Tenancy Strategy, built upon the Kent Housing Group work in this area (that this Council led on). The Council's partners had been continually engaged with this work as key stakeholders, so were content with the emerging themes.
- 1.6.2 As with the draft Housing Allocations Scheme the panel wished to ensure that any possible impact on vulnerable households was placed under close scrutiny.
- 1.6.3 Each housing association was invited to participate on the forth coming consultation process on the Council's final draft Tenancy Strategy.

1.7 Approach to ASB

- 1.7.1 The Council wished to hear from each partner their approach to tackling sustainability and antisocial behaviour issues, and we described our high expectations for this area of their operations.
- 1.7.2 The housing associations described their policies in this regard and the resource levels available, as well as recent experience of challenges and successes in this area.

1.8 Conclusions

- 1.8.1 The continued practice of meeting our Registered Provider Partners has proved invaluable at cementing the relationships we have with them. It is clear they also view this approach as an excellent opportunity to engage with Members and officers across a broad range of matters, and to strengthen their strategic partnership with the Council.

1.9 Legal Implications

- 1.9.1 None arising from this report.

1.10 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.10.1 Successful joint planning for the increased supply of affordable housing will assist avoid future revenue growth pressures on other less satisfactory forms of accommodation, including temporary accommodation.

1.11 Risk Assessment

- 1.11.1 The maintaining of excellent relationships with our Registered Provider Partners is critical to being able to robustly perform the Council's functions as the strategic housing authority, and deliver our strategic housing priorities.

Background papers:

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Nil

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