

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 HOUSING NEEDS UPDATE

Summary

The Council's Housing Options team continues to promote the prevention of homelessness and seeking to meet the housing needs of local residents. The number of households seeking advice and/or applying for social rented accommodation remains at a significant level, particularly as a result of the economic downturn.

1.1 Housing options and prevention of homelessness

1.1.1 The number of people contacting the housing options team for advice remains high and is expected to increase as many families will undoubtedly be affected by the Government's proposed changes to the benefit system and resultant reduction in income due to benefit capping. It will be noted that the number of formal homelessness applications increased dramatically in December however it is too early to say if this trend will continue. The Housing Options Team remain committed to preventing families from becoming homeless.

Month	New homeless applications	Duty to house accepted	Duty to house rejected
April – Aug 2012	27	11	13
September 2012	9	5	4
October 2012	3	1	2
November 2012	4	2	2
December 2012	8	6	2
January 2013	6	3	3
Total 2012/13 to date	57	28	26

1.2.2 The applications listed in columns three and four are not necessarily the same as those in column two. This is because a decision on a homelessness application may not be reached during the same calendar month as it was made.

1.2 Housing options approaches

- 1.2.1 The following table gives a breakdown of all recorded approaches to the housing options team.

2012/13	Contact Made	Advice Only	Prevented	Relieved	Open
September	46	15	7	0	31
October	55	33	2	0	20
November	44	20	2	2	20
December	34	11	0	2	21
January	50	11	4	0	35
Total	229	90	15	4	127

Contact made - Total number of customers approaching Options Team.

Advice Only – Customer able to solve their own housing problems following advice and assistance from the Options team.

Prevented – Advice and assistance from the Options Team to secure accommodation to prevent customer from becoming homeless.

Relieved - Advice and assistance from the Options Team allowing customer to remain in their home, from where they have been threatened with homelessness.

Open – Continued advice and assistance to prevent or relieve homelessness.

1.3 Temporary accommodation

- 1.3.1 The following table gives the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month.

Date	Number in Temporary Accommodation (AST)	Number in B&B	Total
30.09.12	5	6	11
31.10.12	5	7	12
30.11.12	5	3	8
31.12.12	5	6	11
31.01.13	5	10	15

- 1.3.2 It will be noted that the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation continues to remain stable, which is testament to the success of the preventative agenda. But homelessness casework has undoubtedly become more complex. No two cases are the same, and the majority require considerable officer input in order to prevent homelessness and secure the right long-term solution for the customer.

1.4 DCLG Homelessness Funding

- 1.4.1 Members may recall from the update to this board in May 2012 that Kent and Medway local authorities received funding of £577K from Department of Community and Local Government (DCLG). The expectation from DCLG is that the funding be used to bolster front line provision across regional groupings to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 1.4.2 Medway Council was chosen as the lead authority for the Kent grouping which includes, Medway, Ashford, Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Gravesham, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells. Specialist advisors from DCLG have told the group that the funding will remain as a single approach and will not be split between the authorities within the designated group.
- 1.4.3 A task and finish group was set up, consisting of a representative from each of the 13 local authorities. The group met regularly throughout 2012 to decide the best way to use the funding. It has been decided by the group that the best way to ensure that the needs of this client group are met in a consistent manner across Kent and so avoiding migration to areas with more services available is to appoint a Specialist Service Provider. It is envisaged that this provider will;
- provide a front line service for single people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as a first point of contact;
 - undertake an assessment of each person's needs to help them to prevent homelessness and improve their opportunities to sustain a home in the future;
 - ensure that there is close coordination with the relevant local authority to ensure that any homelessness duties are met; and
 - where single person households are homeless or at risk of homelessness offer advice, support and available intervention(s) to help prevent their homelessness.
- 1.4.4 It is hoped that this new service will work alongside the council's Housing Options team and will be of great benefit to resident of the borough in this client group for whom there is currently little assistance available.
- 1.4.5 A full specification has now been drawn up and sent out for procurement; early indications are that there has been significant interest from organisations well placed to deliver the service.

1.5 Shelter Housing Aid

- 1.5.1 Recent Government cuts to Legal Aid in England has led to the strong possibility that all Shelter face to face services will close in Kent from the 31 March 2013

1.5.2 Shelter offices at Ashford, Chatham and Dover will therefore no longer be taking on new clients requiring Housing advice, welfare benefit or debt advice from **31 January 2013**.

1.5.3 The loss of this valuable resource to many of our customers will clearly have a huge impact on our own advice service. Although the Shelter Helpline will continue to be available to customers, it is likely that customers requiring face to face contact with an adviser will turn to their local authorities and Citizens Advice Bureau for assistance.

1.6 Housing Register

1.6.1 Demand for social housing remains at a high level, with increasing numbers of households seeking a move on medical or welfare grounds. The table below shows the number of applicants joining and leaving the housing register, including homeseekers (those applying for their first social tenancy) and transfers (existing social tenants applying for a move).

Month	Applications Received	Applications Cancelled	Number on Housing Register
September 2012	164	144	1,906 (includes 655 transfers)
October 2012	152	233	1,855 (includes 651 transfers)
November 2012	129	304	1,671 (includes 597 transfers)
December 2012	77	44	1,704 (includes 608 transfers)
January 2012	128	178	1736 (includes 629 transfers)

1.6.2 Applications are regularly reviewed, and those who either fail to respond to their annual review, or have moved since their original application are cancelled.

1.6.3 The following table gives the breakdown of applicants who have been housed through choice based lettings:

Month	Homeseekers	Transfers	Total
September 2012	23(66%)	12(34%)	35
October 2012	22 (73%)	8 (27%)	30
November 2012	12 (43%)	16 (57%)	28
December 2012	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	20
January 2012	15 (56%)	12 (44%)	20

1.7 Mobile App

- 1.7.1 Locata is currently developing a mobile app for customers. Over 30 per cent of customers access the Kent homechoice website from their mobile phone so it is expected this will be a very popular innovative.

1.8 On-line Registration

- 1.8.1 Sevenoaks District Council and Medway Council are currently the only two authorities with on-line registration. A further six Kent authorities will go live over the next few months. T&MBC are not due to adopt on-line registration until late in 2013.

1.9 Exchange Locata

- 1.9.1 Exchange Locata is the new national online social housing exchange service. The service aims to make finding a new home quicker and easier for applicants. Further information can be found at www.exchangelocata.org.uk

1.10 Job Title Changes

- 1.10.1 There has been a change to job titles in the Homechoice Team. The Choice Based Lettings Manager will now be called the Homechoice Team Manager and the Housing Register Assistants will be called Homechoice Officers.

Background papers:

contact: Jane Smither

Nil

John Batty

Director of Health and Housing