

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

22 July 2013

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

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 meet the housing needs of local residents. The number of households seeking advice and/or applying for social rented accommodation remains significantly high, 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 continues to be high and is expected to increase as many families will be affected by the Government's changes to the benefit system. The benefit cap which will be in force from 15 July 2013 will undoubtedly put further pressure on low income families in the Borough. The Housing Options Team are committed to assisting households who get in to difficulties because of these changes and prevent those families from becoming homeless.

Month	New homeless applications	Duty to house accepted	Duty to house rejected	Average No of days to process applications
April 2013	4	0	4	14
May 2013	2	2	3	16
June 2013	2	2	0	24

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.

Month	Contact Made	Advice Only	Prevented	Relieved	Open
April 2013	69	14	2	0	53
May 2013	55	6	6	0	48
June 2013	50	7	6	0	44

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
30.04.13	4	9	13
31.05.13	4	4	8
30.06.13	4	3	7

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 best long-term solution for the customer.

1.4 Rent Deposit Scheme

Month	Number of Loans approved	Bonds	Customers assisted into a private rented property without a deposit loan or bond
April	2	3	4
May	2	0	3
June	2	0	1

1.5 DCLG Homelessness Funding

- 1.5.1 The tender process for the proposed Kent Advice Service for Single Homeless (KASSH) which has been devised by Kent and Medway local authorities to bolster front line provision for non-priority customers, has now been completed.
- 1.5.2 The overall aim of the service will be to prevent homelessness for non-priority (single homeless) persons; or remedy homelessness for those accessing as homeless for example, sofa surfers or rough sleepers. The service will include a dedicated telephone service which will operate from 11 am to 7 pm, six days a week. This will also including an out of hours service using an established customer service centre. Referrals taken out of hours will be passed to a support worker the next working day following the initial contact.
- 1.5.3 Officers from the housing service assisted in the evaluation of the tenders. All the tenders were comprehensive, scoring consistently 60-70 per cent, however one provider achieved an overall score of 85 per cent which was significantly higher and within price.
- 1.5.4 It was decided by the evaluation group to proceed to award this provider with the contract. It is hoped the service will be mobilised by October 2013. The successful provider has proposed a launch event on 15 October 2013 to which commissioners, Stakeholders and the public will be invited.
- 1.5.5 Members will be kept updated on the progress.

1.6 Porchlight Reactive Rough Sleeper Service

- 1.6.1 In 2012 Porchlight received funding from the Homelessness Transition Fund and local authorities across Kent and Medway to provide a reactive rough sleeper service. This was a rapid response service enabling early intervention to those who are new to the streets with the aim of preventing them from becoming entrenched.
- 1.6.2 This funding has now come to an end and Porchlight are expecting to continue to deliver the service using its own reserves until the end of the financial year.
- 1.6.3 We remain committed to supporting Porchlight in the delivery of this invaluable service. However, it is felt that the early intervention work which will now include the innovative new Kent Advice Service for Single Homeless will meet the needs of many people who are rough sleeping.

1.7 Housing Register

- 1.7.1 Demand for social housing remains at a high level. The number of applications received during 2012/2013 increased by 5.9 per cent compared to the previous year. 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
April 2013	143	164	1664 (transfers 603)
May 2013	133	176	1508 (transfers 556)
June 2013	133	Not yet available	1585 (transfers 589)

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

Month	Homeseekers	Transfers	Total
April 2013	16 (59%)	11(41%)	27
May 2013	23 (66%)	12 (34%)	35

1.8 Housing Allocation scheme

- 1.8.1 The new housing allocation scheme received approval by Cabinet on 19 June 2013. Since then, information about scheme has been made available via our website and the Kent Homechoice website. Information has also been provided in *Here & Now*, as well as separate publications for tenants of Russet Homes and Southern Housing Group. We are currently talking to other housing associations operating in the borough to establish whether there is an opportunity to run articles in their tenant publications as well.
- 1.8.2 Posters are on display in the reception areas at both Kings Hill and the Gateway at Tonbridge Castle. Key partner agencies and stakeholders including the Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK and the Parish Councils will also be kept fully informed.
- 1.8.3 We have agreed with our software providers the technical changes that are necessary to enable the new housing allocation scheme to be implemented. It is estimated that they will take approximately six weeks to complete (we are approximately two weeks in), at which point we will begin testing the system.
- 1.8.4 We will need to re-assess all applicants currently on the register and we will be recruiting and training temporary staff to assist with this task. The housing register will be closed to new applicants for a period of four weeks during September. During this period, new applications will be held in pending status. However, any urgent cases, such as customers who are threatened with homelessness, will be dealt with by the appropriate team without delay. The Customer Services Team will assist by giving customers general information and identifying applicants who need to speak urgently with the Housing Team.
- 1.8.5 Some applicants will no longer be eligible to remain on the housing register because they have no local connection or housing need. These applications will

be suspended for a period of up to six months, and each household will be advised that if their circumstances have changed, and they may still be eligible to remain on the register as a result, then they will be reassessed.

1.8.6 We will also be advising all applicants who will remain on the register, with an explanation of their new priority accompanied by a booklet containing information about the scheme.

1.8.7 The new scheme is expected to go live on 1 October 2013.

Background papers:

contact: Jane Smither

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health