

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 REVIEW OF HOMEBUY ALLOCATIONS PROCEDURE

Summary

This report informs Members of the review of the Council's Protocol with Moat for prioritising applicants for local low cost home ownership opportunities. The review was a required outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment of Strategic & Enabling function of the housing service.

1.1 Background

1.2 Members will be aware that government has a range of low cost home ownership products to help first-time buyers access the private housing market. The schemes have operated under various names over time, such as Open Market HomeBuy, HomeBuy, and now Rent to Buy. For many years the housing association Moat have acted as the HomeBuy Agent for Tonbridge & Malling, administering local low cost home ownership initiatives on behalf of our housing association partners. The changes to this scheme and the launch of Rent to Buy are described in more detail within other papers to this Board.

1.3 Shared Ownership Demand

1.3.1 Demand for any shared ownership product is naturally related to prevailing market conditions, and the experience of our Registered Provider Partners echoes wider national reports that whilst demand is not at the level it has been in recent times, (from first-time buyers in particular) it remains high. It is important we maintain a close eye on the market both in the planning of new affordable housing and in relation to possible increases in homelessness as a result of mortgage repossessions.

1.4 Low Cost Home Ownership Allocating Procedure

1.4.1 The Housing Service plays an active role in prioritising applicants for low cost home ownership products in order to ensure that local people in particular are able to benefit from the available schemes and products within the Borough. In 2007 a Protocol was agreed with Moat to ensure that the Council are able to strategically influence nominations put forward for shared ownership homes (in

the main, ensuring nominees have a local connection to the borough). In 2008 Members of this Board formally endorsed the Protocol, a revised copy of which is attached as **[Annex 1]** HomeBuy Allocation Updated Protocol.

1.4.2 Housing Strategy Action Plan 2013-16

1.4.3 The Housing Strategy 2013-2016 was considered and approved by Council at its meeting on 16 April 2013. A subsequent paper to this Board presented an accompanying Action Plan to cover the first year of the new Housing Strategy. Within the Action Plan's "Priority 1 Provision of Affordable Housing" is the action to "Review and update the Homebuy Allocations Policy" with a commitment to report the review to this Board.

1.4.4 The review was prompted by the Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategic and Enabling function which was undertaken in 2012. It arose because the Protocol actively prioritises those with a local connection to the Borough to the detriment of prospective nominees with no local connection.

1.4.5 Review of the Protocol

1.4.6 Officers believe that the Protocol still has immense value in ensuring that shared ownership homes within Tonbridge & Malling remain prioritised for applicants with a local connection to the Borough. Local connection is achieved through either living or working within Tonbridge & Malling, or a combination of both. Therefore both the need for and principle aims of the Protocol are to remain as before in this regard.

1.4.7 Members will appreciate that the Protocol does need refreshing in relation to the title of the shared ownership products on offer through the Rent to Buy Agent, along with other updates that reflect technical changes to how social and affordable housing is described and delivered since the document's inception in 2007. The document has therefore been updated to reflect these changes, but this will not impact the basic operation of the Protocol or the requirement for local connection when prioritising nominees applying for shared ownership homes.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 None arising from this report.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 None arising from this report.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

contact: Chris Knowles

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health