

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 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the Rural Warm Homes Initiative and the Kent Fire & Rescue Service empty properties. The report also informs Members of a new funding opportunity for tackling rogue landlords in the private rented stock.

1.1 Rural Warm Homes Initiative

1.1.1 At the February meeting of this Board, Members endorsed a Rural Warm Homes Initiative to explore different approaches to raising energy efficiency awareness to homeowners in rural areas of the borough. Under the scheme residents in receipt of income related benefits in two rural ward locations were offered home energy advice and assistance and signposting where eligible to Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding that forms part of Green Deal.

1.1.2 Climate Energy's in house energy experts delivered the following approaches;

- tailored energy advice visits on how to save energy in the home and reduce fuel bills, referrals for energy saving measures where applicable and installation of small energy saving measures such as energy monitors and radiator reflective panels;
- a surgery at Offham Village Hall to deliver energy saving advice to residents and offer free radiator reflective panels and Hippo "save a flush" devices. Also attendance at the Thursday Club in Burham to give energy saving advice; and
- an 'Energy champion' training session offered across both rural locations to local residents identified through the advice surgery, and community organisations/members working in the area.

1.1.3 The energy advice visits were targeted at households in receipt of income related benefits. Whilst uptake of four percent was low, this can be attributed to the limited mailing size and compares well with other mailings delivered elsewhere. There

was little interest for the advice surgery in Offham, however 35 attendees at the Thursday Club venue in Burham were given advice on how to save energy and reduce their bills.

- 1.1.4 The 'energy champion' training session was attended by six people working in the rural communities. The trainer, an experienced Home Energy Advisor, was able to advise the participants on how to identify potential for energy saving in the home, and where to signpost residents interested in advice and information on energy saving and current sources of funding for energy-saving measures.
- 1.1.5 Climate Energy recommends utilising both mailing and community engagement approaches to raise awareness of the initiative and generate referrals to the appropriate funding scheme. Door to door engagement being particularly effective and often resulting in a twenty percent or higher response rate. They also recommended the Council hold a single event where all partner organisations and other appropriate agencies attend where they are provided with information and advice to disseminate to those people in the community they engage with.
- 1.1.6 Unfortunately due to the low take up of the approaches we are unable to conclude on which is the most effective approach to raise energy efficiency awareness to homeowners in rural areas of the borough. The Energy Champion training session has however established a link with a rural GP practice, and we have subsequently developed a briefing note outlining the work of the Private Sector Housing team and a single point of contact for any housing related queries. This is also part of the bigger agenda of linking health and housing and reducing health inequalities through the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board and the Council's 'Mind the Gap' document. A lot of work is currently ongoing in determining pathways and awareness of services to enable effective targeting of advice and information to residents in the borough which reflects the recommendation in 1.1.5.

1.2 Kent Fire and Rescue Service Empty Properties

- 1.2.1 Members will be aware that the Private Sector Housing team uses a range of options including advice and information, empty property loans and enforcement action to facilitate and encourage owners to bring long term empty properties back into use.
- 1.2.2 As a result of effective partnership working with Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) and Russet, six long term empty KFRS properties will be returned to use; five of these as affordable housing.
- 1.2.3 The properties are located near Larkfield and Tonbridge fire stations and have historically been used as day crew accommodation. Unfortunately with changes in service requirements it has meant they have become long term empty properties.
- 1.2.4 Initially KFRS contacted the Council for advice on the options to bring the empty properties back into occupation. A meeting was arranged with Russet to discuss a

potential pilot to manage the properties on KFRS's behalf, however after consideration KFRS decided to sell the empty properties. The Council and Russet were given the first option to purchase the properties; which Russet subsequently took up.

- 1.2.5 Russet is currently purchasing the five properties in Larkfield, and with TMBC support has successfully obtained HCA Empty Homes Funding of £225,000 (Round 2) to bring the homes into use as affordable housing. It is anticipated that the properties will be available for occupation by the end of the calendar year. The remaining KFRS empty property in Tonbridge was sold at auction in April 2013.

1.3 Funding for Tackling Rogue Landlords in the Private Rented Sector

- 1.3.1 We have recently been made aware that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is making up to £3 million available over the next two years to help tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector.
- 1.3.2 The invitation to bid from the Minister for Housing indicates that local housing authorities with particularly acute and complex problems relating to rogue landlords should submit applications by 20 September 2013.
- 1.3.3 Tonbridge & Malling does not have a huge problem with rogue landlords. Our preference to work informally with private landlords and alongside them at events such as the West Kent Landlords Forum is, in the main, a very successful approach. However we are intending to hold a session with our West Kent Private Sector Housing colleagues to explore further the topic and the merits of a joint bid.
- 1.3.4 If a bid is submitted I will of course update Members further at the November meeting of this Board.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 Successful joint working for the increased supply of affordable housing will avoid future revenue growth pressures on other less satisfactory forms of accommodation, including temporary accommodation.
- 1.5.2 If a bid for DCLG funding for tackling rogue landlords in the private rented sector is submitted and is successful it will bring additional resources into the Private Sector Housing work area.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

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Nil

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