

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

11 November 2013

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

Summary

In accordance with Part VI Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011), the Council has a legal duty to determine housing need in the borough and to produce a housing allocation scheme which explains how affordable housing is allocated to those in housing need. The Localism Act 2011 allows local housing authorities in England to make major revisions to existing housing allocation schemes to reflect local needs. This report updates Members on the implementation of the revisions to our housing allocation scheme.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Council's housing allocation scheme was revised in 2009 with the introduction of choice based lettings. This scheme was complex, with no requirement for applicants to have any immediate need for housing or to have any connections to the borough. This led to large numbers of cases being registered with a low priority with little prospect of being housed, and a number of properties allocated to households from other areas.
- 1.1.2 Members will be aware from previous reports to this Board, that the 2009 scheme has been replaced with a simpler four band hierarchical scheme, broadly equating to Band A (urgent priority), Band B (high priority), Band C (medium priority) and Band D (low priority). We have also introduced two new qualification criteria which mean that all applicants must have both a local connection to the borough and a verified housing need before they will be included on the housing register. These changes will give greater priority to local people and families in housing need and to enable the Council to properly target its resources on assessing and meeting those needs. The emphasis is on local housing for those with local connections rather than the previous open approach which has tended to dilute the housing allocations effort.
- 1.1.3 Following a consultation period, Members approved the implementation of the changes to the housing allocation scheme at the May 2013 meeting of this Board.

1.2 Implementation

- 1.2.1 The housing register was closed on 2 September 2013 to allow existing applicants to be reassessed against the new criteria. At this time there were 1,653 applicants on the housing register. We wrote to 180 applicants identified as having no local connection and a further 551 applicants identified as having no housing need. These applicants were advised that their application would be suspended as they no longer qualified to be included on the housing register and invited to request a review if they disagreed with this decision. At the time of writing this report, we have conducted 39 reviews of 'no local connection' cases (of which 17 have been overturned) and 83 reviews of 'no housing need' cases (of which 33 have been overturned). Most of the reviews that were successful were due to a change in the applicant's circumstances.
- 1.2.2 Before and during the closedown in September, customers were kept informed of the process by messages on the Council and Kent Homechoice websites. Customers calling the Homechoice team were given information about the closedown and invited to check the websites. Those needing immediate help were directed to the housing options team. The frontline customer services team and the directorate administration team were given training in how to deal with initial enquiries which enabled the Homechoice team to focus on the reassessment of applicants and ensured that the closedown period was kept to a minimum.
- 1.2.3 Following the reassessment of existing applicants, a total of 967 applications remained 'live' on the housing register and eligible to bid once the bidding process resumed at the end of September.
- 1.2.4 The following table shows the breakdown of applicants pre and post review:

Band	Snapshot on 1.8.13	Snapshot on 7.10.13
A	97 (6%)	85 (9%)
B	141 (9%)	178 (18%)
C	569 (34%)	401 (41%)
D	846 (51%)	303 (31%)
Total	1,653	967

- 1.2.5 Following the review, underoccupation accounts for 59 households in Band A, 65 households in Band B and 38 households in Band C, a total of 162 households (17per cent of the total).
- 1.2.6 Overcrowded households account for 37 cases in Band B and 230 cases in Band C, a total of 267 households (28 per cent of the total). A further 196 households in

Band D (20 per cent of the total) are sharing facilities such as a kitchen or bathroom.

- 1.2.7 25 households in Band A need wheelchair accessible homes, with a further 72 households in Band B and 86 households in Band D needing to move on medical, disability or welfare grounds. These categories account for 183 households (19 per cent of the total)
- 1.2.8 Applicants that are homeless or at risk of homelessness account for a further 105 households in Band C (11 per cent of the total).
- 1.2.9 The split between homeseekers and existing tenants on the housing register is broadly similar following the review, but there have been some changes within each band:

Band	Snapshot on 1.8.13		Snapshot on 7.10.13	
	Homeseekers	Transfers	Homeseekers	Transfers
A	13 (13%)	84 (87%)	9 (11%)	76 (89%)
B	66 (47%)	75 (53%)	51 (29%)	127 (71%)
C	323 (57%)	246 (43%)	272 (68%)	129 (32%)
D	622 (74%)	224 (26%)	255 (84%)	48 (16%)
Total	1024 (62%)	629 (38%)	587 (61%)	380 (39%)

- 1.2.10 The following table shows the breakdown of live applicants by the number of bedrooms that they require (as at 22 October 2013):

Band	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4+ bedrooms	Total
A	73	23	3	4	90
B	97	41	16	20	174
C	149	150	65	42	406
D	210	74	13	1	298
Total	529	288	97	67	968

1.2.11 The following table shows the breakdown of live applicants by recorded household type (as at 22 October 2013):

Band	Single people	Couples + other households without children	Families with 1 child	Families with 2 children	Families with 3+ children	Total
A	56	25	2	4	3	90
B	69	50	18	9	28	174
C	126	43	104	56	77	406
D	190	43	40	20	5	298
Total	441	161	167	89	113	968

1.3 New Applications

1.3.1 During the closedown period in September, we received 88 new applications to join the housing register. Non urgent applications were held pending for up to four weeks and all of these have now been considered. The current average waiting time for completed applications to be assessed is around two weeks.

1.4 Further Review

1.4.1 Early indications show that the revisions to the housing allocation scheme have been well understood by customers. The scheme is due to be reviewed in 2014 when it has been in operation for 12 months.

1.4.2 The Department for Communities and Local Government is now proposing further amendments to strengthen the statutory guidance on social housing allocations which was published in draft as recently as 14 October 2013. It strongly recommends that local authorities should now adopt a two year residency test as part of their qualification criteria and reminds local authorities of the desirability of operating a housing options approach alongside a restricted waiting list which of course is a positive practice closely followed here. Any appropriate consequential changes to our housing allocation scheme when the statutory guidance is finalised next year can be captured in the review of our scheme next year.

Background papers:

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Nil

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