

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES & HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

08 June 2016

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on key issues across the Housing Service and performance over 2015/16 period.

1.1.1 Affordable Housing Development Program

1.1.2 This section of the report updates Members on the progress being made by the Council's Registered Provider (RP) Partners in providing new affordable housing in the Borough and summarises the programmes for 2014/15 to 2018 and beyond.

1.1.3 While we work with our partners to plan and ensure timely delivery of new housing, the Council also has a role to play in facilitating progress and in tracking performance. Set out at **[Annex 1]** is a monitoring spreadsheet showing the completed schemes from the previous period, the year to date, and the development programme up to 2018.

1.1.4 Members should be aware that details on some schemes may alter where planning permission has yet to be secured and some may not proceed. The number of units to be provided is therefore an indicative figure for strategic planning purposes, pending confirmation of final scheme details. As new schemes come forward these will be also be added to the schedule.

1.1.5 Members will see that 110 affordable homes have been delivered through our Registered Provider Partners in the period 2015 to 2016. It is important to note that this level of delivery is across a diverse range of tenures, dwelling types, and locations in the borough. A selection of photographs showing affordable homes developed in the borough for the period 2015 to 2016 are set out in **[Annex 2]**.

1.1.6 Despite the very challenging environment posed by changes to funding for affordable housing and ongoing welfare reform, the Council maintains a reasonable program of supply moving forward. Members will note that this focuses on the evolving housing need in the borough for smaller family units, with an emphasis on delivering a range of tenures. However, a note of caution is required relating to the potential for developers to seek to revisit and renegotiate

the Affordable Housing contributions already secured on site, a practice which has been given a measure of encouragement in emerging national policy. Our approach as far as possible will be to maintain the Borough Council's currently adopted position in terms of affordable housing within wider residential schemes but we also need to be alive to the need for pragmatism in negotiations.

1.1.7 **HCA Funding Prospectus**

1.1.8 The Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) have announced a new funding programme, described in their new "Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme 2016 to 2021" Prospectus.

1.1.9 As the name of this initiative suggests, the money is predominately to assist the delivery of affordable tenures that increase owner occupation as opposed to the more traditional products of Social and Affordable Rent. The Prospectus describes that the £4.7 billion of grant funding for the period 2016 to 2021 is to deliver:

- 135,000 homes for Shared Ownership
- 10,000 homes for Rent to Buy
- 8,000 homes for specialised housing

1.1.10 This funding round is a major change from previous years, which has historically sought to assist a wide range of affordable housing products and tenures. The very clear impact of this shift will be that homes for Social and Affordable Rent will be much more challenging to deliver through our Registered Provider Partners in the future due to the absence of any capital grant funding.

1.1.11 The initial bid round for Registered Providers closes on 2 September 2016. It is important to note that the funding can be accessed by organisations other than just housing associations, if they qualify as HCA investment partners.

1.1.12 The Council will continue to aid our Preferred Registered Provider Partners to engage with the HCA for this funding, including the administration of the bid proformas and assistance through the planning process.

1.1.13 **Registered Provider Partner Mergers**

1.1.14 The current changing regulative and financial environment within with Registered Providers all operate has led to many exploring the potential to merge with each other to create operating efficiencies. There are currently two separate such mergers understood to be taking place in relation to the Council's Registered Provider Preferred Partners.

1.1.15 The first concerns the 70,000 home Circle Housing (which incorporates Circle Housing Russet) and the 57,000 home Affinity Sutton. The boards for both organisations have approved a business case for merger with the aim to invest

more in their communities and deliver better services. The merged organisation would consist of approximately 127,000 homes and target 50,000 new homes to be built within the next ten years.

- 1.1.16 The merger has so far included extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders with all existing residents retaining the security of their tenancies and no rental increases as a result of the merger.
- 1.1.17 The merger is aimed to be finalised later this year, subject to approval from the Homes and Communities Agency as regulator for the sector.
- 1.1.18 The second merger is between the Council's Preferred Registered Providers Hyde Housing (49,000 homes) and London & Quadrant (L&Q, 71,000 homes), with non-partner East Thames (15,000 homes). This would create an organisation with over 135,000 homes. Under the proposed structure, L&Q and Hyde would amalgamate and East Thames would be a subsidiary of the amalgamated entity. The new organisation would look to build 100,000 homes over the next 10 years.
- 1.1.19 For both mergers the positive implications are that the Partners will have an increased development capacity with the prospect of more homes being built in the borough. However, the Council will want to understand what this means in terms of the "local offer" to tenants in Tonbridge & Malling, and how existing and historic services may change and evolve.
- 1.1.20 Members should be reassured to know that Circle Housing Russet continue to work closely with the Council at strategic and operational levels and in relation to the progress of the proposed merger. In this way we hope to keep close to what the changes may mean for the many residents of the borough's main provider of social and affordable housing.
- 1.1.21 **Housing & Planning Act 2016 and Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016**
- 1.1.22 Members will note that the Housing & Planning Act 2016 and Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016 have both now gained Royal Assent. These Acts include provisions such as Pay to Stay, the new Right to Buy for Housing Association Tenants, Lifetime Tenancies, Starter Homes, and the forced sale of higher value.
- 1.1.23 It is important to note that much of the operational detail will be clarified in secondary legislation being brought forward by the Secretary of State.
- 1.1.24 Officers are monitoring the impacts of these many changes to the operation of affordable housing in the borough and will update Members through future reports to this Board.
- 1.1.25 **West Kent Housing & Homelessness Strategy**
- 1.1.26 From previous Board reports Members will recall that we aim to build on the activity we have undertaken individually and jointly and to set out how we will work

over the next five years to meet our statutory duties and responsibilities. As all three local authorities are non-stock holding authorities, the draft Strategy will look to the following areas:

- enabling the forward supply of affordable housing;
- the prevention of homelessness and assisting homeless households;
- improving housing conditions, including enforcement in the private rented and owner occupied sectors; and
- promoting the health and wellbeing of residents and building partnerships to deliver this.

1.1.27 The Strategy will be developed against the backdrop of the, as yet unknown, impacts of ongoing reform to housing and welfare policy. This means that the document will have to be flexible and iterative and able to accommodate the impacts of these changes as they unfold throughout the life of the strategy.

1.1.28 Consultation will be carried out with key stakeholders for all three West Kent authorities and the wider County partners to inform the direction of the work and to ensure the Strategy is robust.

1.1.29 The progress of the draft Strategy will be reported to further meetings of this board.

1.1.30 **KCC Young Persons Consultation Responses**

1.1.31 Members will recall that Kent County Council (KCC) engaged in a consultation exercise regarding proposed changes to the supported accommodation and floating support services in the County. That exercise has now concluded, and KCC have published their post consultation report, making the following recommendations as set out in **[Annex 3]**.

1.1.32 **Who can access services?**

1.1.33 It is recommended that the new service will continue to cater for the following groups, with priority to services based on individual needs:

- 16 and 17 year old Children in Care including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Care Leavers including former UASC
- 16 and 17 year olds who are at risk of homelessness
- Vulnerable 18 to 21 year olds
- Teenage Parents

1.1.34 **Reviewing the service offer**

1.1.35 It is recommended that the new service provides a generic accommodation and support offer that is able to cater for the needs of all young people. However, accommodation and support should take into consideration the individual needs of all young people, notably teenage parents.

1.1.36 **Joining up accommodation based support and floating support services for high, medium and low needs**

1.1.37 The new service will provide flexible, joined up accommodation based support and floating support services for high, medium and low needs.

1.1.38 **Aligning services with areas of the County**

1.1.39 Of the three options presented, 48 per cent of the respondents were in favour of aligning services with 4 areas of the County. Therefore, it is recommended that the new services be aligned to the 4 Specialist Children's Services area boundaries –North, South, East and West.

1.1.40 In summary, services will continue to be offered to the existing groups but now through a generic support and accommodation model. This offer will be across a spectrum of needs and will now be split within 4 new service areas within Kent.

1.1.41 **Housing Needs Update**

1.1.42 The table below illustrates the number of customers approaching the Housing Options team. The majority of contacts are for advice to avoid the loss of a current home or to seek assistance in finding alternative accommodation.

Month	Options Presentations	Resolved at first point of contact	Homelessness Prevented	Ongoing Cases
Apr 2015	62	37	12	4
May 2015	53	38	8	3
June 2015	42	27	11	2
Jul 2015	64	48	8	0
Aug 2015	52	30	10	2
Sep 2015	70	50	10	4
Oct 2015	58	36	8	2
Nov 2015	63	36	6	4
Dec 2015	36	19	2	0
Jan 2016	88	53	12	7
Feb 2016	94	49	10	9
Mar 2016	67	47	3	8
Total	749	470	100	45

1.1.43 Additionally in 2015/16 we dealt with 235 homeless applications and accepted the full housing duty for 134 households. Of the remainder, 42 were found not to be homeless, 27 were found not to have a priority need for accommodation and a further 32 were found to have become homeless intentionally. These households were given ongoing advice and assistance in order to resolve their housing needs.

1.1.44 A general feature of the calls on the Housing Options service is that the range of issues seem to be broadening. Consequently, the advice and signposting provided has needed to adapt to become more holistic to include financial guidance, health related advice and community safety awareness in addition to core accommodation issues. That also means that the Housing service must be closely linked to other sections of the Council and external agencies and organisations.

1.1.45 Temporary Accommodation

The following table provides a 'snapshot' number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month. The number remains relatively high as we continue to assist homeless households until a housing solution is found. The majority of homeless households require two bedroom accommodation, which is in high demand meaning that they can be waiting for longer periods to be rehoused.

Date	Number in self contained temporary accommodation (AST)	Number in self contained temporary accommodation (nightly paid)	Number in traditional bed & breakfast	Total
30.04.15	3	13	4	20
31.05.15	3	14	3	20
30.06.15	3	12	0	15
31.07.15	3	11	3	17
31.08.15	3	9	2	14
30.09.15	3	16	2	21
31.10.15	3	16	4	23
31.11.15	4	16	4	24
31.12.15	4	16	4	24
31.01.16	4	16	5	25
29.02.16	4	20	4	28
31.03.16	4	21	4	29

1.1.46 There are a number of options we are pursuing to help reduce the use of and length of stay in temporary accommodation. This includes:

- working with our Registered Provider Partners, in particular Circle Housing Russet (CHR), to make direct offers of accommodation outside of Choice Based Lettings so that we can move households on to more suitable accommodation in a timely manner;
- dialogue with our Registered Provider Partners, to reach an agreement for a handful of existing general needs, self-contained properties to be used as emergency accommodation as an alternative to Bed & Breakfast.
- Exploring options within the private sector.

1.1.47 Accessing the Private Rented Sector

1.1.48 It remains challenging for those on a low income to access the private sector as many private landlords are seeking rent levels considerably higher than the local housing allowance rates and additionally require tenants to have guarantors who are homeowners and/or have a relatively high income.

1.1.49 Despite the gap between local housing allowance levels and market rent, which remains the biggest obstacle in accessing the private sector, the Housing Options Team is working hard to negotiate with landlords and offer additional incentives to make it a more attractive proposition.

1.1.50 Housing Register

1.1.51 The number of households on the housing register has remained stable over the past year. On average, home seekers represent 65 per cent of households on the housing register and transferring housing association tenants represent the remaining 35 per cent of the total. The table below shows the distribution of live applications by size of property required:

Month	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
April 2015	768	457	99	50	18	1,392
May 2015	781	459	108	53	18	1,419
June 2015	784	464	111	54	16	1,429
July 2015	543	342	78	41	7	1,011
August 2015	529	344	80	42	7	1,002
September 2015	549	359	89	43	7	1,047
October 2015	523	340	89	41	7	1,000
November 2015	525	352	89	41	7	1,014
December 2015	527	342	99	44	7	1,019
January 2016	522	343	97	45	4	1,011
February 2016	524	342	107	47	4	1,024
March 2016	545	349	117	47	4	1,062

1.1.52 The table below shows the number of households housed via Kent Homechoice during the last twelve months, broken down by bed need.

Month	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
April 2015	10	10	10	0	1	31
May 2015	12	6	7	2	0	27
June 2015	28	15	9	2	0	54
July 2015	26	19	13	1	0	59
August 2015	24	5	11	0	0	40
September 2015	15	8	13	0	0	36
October 2015	8	11	16	1	0	36
November 2015	16	10	6	1	0	33
December 2015	13	12	4	0	0	29
January 2016	18	7	9	1	0	35
February 2016	19	11	3	1	0	34
March 2016	19	7	6	0	0	32
Total	208	121	107	9	1	446

1.1.53 The following table shows the waiting times of applicants that have been housed via Kent Homechoice during the six month period between 1 November 2015 and 30 April 2016, broken down by size and type of accommodation. Waiting time is impacted to a large degree by the availability of each property type and bidding behaviours, as some applicants are prepared to wait for particular property types or particular location before placing bids:

Property type	Number of lets	Shortest wait	Longest wait	Average wait
Sheltered	26	11 days	16 years	18 months
1 bed	73	5 weeks	11 years	18 months
2 bed flat	21	8 weeks	6 years	18 months
2 bed house	33	9 weeks	9 years	26 months
3 bed house	34	3 months	7 years	14 months
4 bed house	3	32 months	12 years	6 years

1.2 Private Sector Housing Activity 2015/16

1.2.1 In 2015/16 the Private Sector Housing (PSH) Team responded to a total of 223 service requests, the breakdown of the service requests are shown in the following table:

Service request activity	Number of requests
Housing conditions	143
Caravan sites	6
Empty home property conditions	7
Immigration related visits	4
Rent deposit visits	23
Temporary accommodation visits	37
Arrange Public Health funeral	3
Total	223

1.2.2 The majority of the 143 housing condition related service requests were dealt with informally but where there are significant hazards as determined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessment and the landlord is not undertaking the appropriate remedial works then formal enforcement action is taken. Under the Housing Act 2004, Improvement Notices were served on three privately rented properties, One Hazard Awareness Notices was served on an owner occupied property and one Prohibition Order on a house in multiple occupation (HMO).

1.2.3 In 2015/16 one HMO licence was renewed, four caravan site licenses transferred and one new caravan site licence issued.

1.2.4 A total of seven long term empty properties were brought back into use through the following interventions:

- two properties were renovated utilising the Council's Home Improvement Assistance;
- two properties were renovated through the Kent County Council 'No Use Empty' scheme;
- two property owners were given empty homes advice and information; and
- one property was rented to a tenant who was assisted with funding for the deposit.

1.3 Disabled Facilities Grants

1.3.1 In 2015/16 the Private Sector Housing Team received 76 applications for a Disabled Facilities Grant and completed a total of 73 Disabled Facilities Grants (grants may run over from year to year so it may not be the same grants being received and completed in one year). The team have a statutory timeframe of six months to determine an application. On average we were able to approve a completed application within thirteen working days of receipt. The works being carried out under Disabled Facilities Grant aim to help residents remain independent at home and are based on recommendations from Kent County Council's Occupational Therapy service. Types of adaptations in 2015/16 included:

- Provision of 47 level access showers;
- Provision of 23 stairlifts/through floor lifts;
- Improving access to 9 properties e.g. ramping;
- Providing 7 other types of adaptations e.g. wash/dry toilet, kitchen alterations, door entry system; and
- Helping 1 family to move to a more suitable property by providing financial assistance with moving costs.

1.3.2 In certain cases the Council can place a charge on the property for works completed under a Disabled Facilities Grant and recover this charge if the property is sold. In 2015/16 we recovered £29,000 of repayable grants.

1.4 Housing Assistance

1.4.1 In 2015/16 the Private Sector Housing Team also completed 19 Housing Assistance grants totalling approximately £38,000. The works carried out included:

- Making 5 homes warm;
- Bringing 1 empty home back into use;
- Reducing falls hazard in 2 homes; and
- Helping to make the homes of 11 domestic abuse victims more secure so they feel safer.

1.4.2 We have continued to try and improve our links with the health sector including local GPs and Falls Prevention teams. We have attended team meetings and training events to promote the work we do and the assistance we may be able to

provide residents. Our aim is to build partnerships with some key local health colleagues to better tackle the housing and health links.

- 1.4.3 We now have access to a Housing Health Cost Calculator (HHCC) tool which calculates the cost savings to health and the wider society from housing interventions. A recent example has shown that where we have assisted a vulnerable homeowner to improve heating and insulation. Not only has this meant the family is warmer and will save money on their fuel bills but that the interventions will save the NHS £2,932 annually through less visits to the GP and/or hospital admissions and £7,330 annual savings to wider society such as adult social care. The work cost in the region of £3,000 and demonstrates the immediate value of housing improvements.
- 1.4.4 Another example is where a handrail was provided on a staircase, the lighting was improved and a glass door at the bottom of the staircase was removed to reduce the risk of harm from a fall on stairs. As well as providing a safer environment for the householder the HHCC estimated that annual savings to the NHS were £550 with annual savings to the wider society being £1,375. The work cost in the region of £350.

1.5 Winter Warmth Scheme

- 1.5.1 As well as access to our own Housing Assistance funding, Kent County Council continued to allocate a small amount of funding to districts to help residents who were vulnerable to a winter death because they had a health condition and poor heating provision. We were able to help 3 residents through the winter period to improve their heating so they were no longer as susceptible to a winter death from excess cold.

1.6 West Kent Landlord Forum

- 1.6.1 We continue to work in partnership to deliver Landlord Forums with colleagues at Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells and the National Landlords Association. The overall usefulness of these forums is to drive up quality standards in the private sector and promote opportunities for joint working to widen the range of options that the Borough Council has available to address housing need.
- 1.6.2 The most recent Landlord Forum was held at Tunbridge Wells on 14 March 2016 where landlords were updated on insurance, residential investment opportunities, current and upcoming legislation and other relevant matters. There were 56 attendees and all who completed evaluation forms indicated the forum had been useful.
- 1.6.3 The next Landlord Fair is scheduled for October 2016 and will be held at Sevenoaks.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 None arising from this report

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 A review of the DFG and Housing Assistance budget will be required for future years to ensure that budgets are set in accordance with the demand for the service.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

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Nil

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