

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD**

**14 November 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 the period April to September 2016.**

**1.1 Housing Policy Update**

- 1.1.1 At the last Board meeting, Members raised concerns in respect of national social policy changes that are impacting on our ability to meet housing need of those households who cannot, for a variety of reasons, access homeownership and are being impacted by the widening affordability gap. A letter set out in **[Annex 1]** capturing these challenges and highlighting Members concerns has been sent by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, to our local MPs.
- 1.1.2 Following the change of Prime Minister and Cabinet in July, Sajid Javid has been appointed as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Gavin Barwell as the new Housing and Planning Minister. At the Conservative party conference in September the Secretary of State announced a £3bn Housebuilding Fund. The purpose of this is to help small and medium enterprises to build 25,000 new homes by 2020. The fund will be used to encourage builders to use more modern building techniques which can deliver homes twice as quickly as conventional build methods, with a strong focus on off-site construction.
- 1.1.3 There was a further announcement that a Housing White Paper will be published later this year with further significant measures to assist the government's ambition of a million new homes by 2020. Future reports to this Board will keep Members updated as the detail emerges.

**1.2 Welfare Changes**

- 1.2.1 Changes to the Benefit cap announced in 2015 will come into force from 7 November 2016. This is the total amount of benefits a household can receive, including housing benefit. For our borough this will initially impact circa 200 house households, 100 of which are Circle Housing Russet (CHR) tenants. The Housing Service is working closely with CHR, Housing Benefit team and Department of

Works of Pension to work with these households to encourage them to become economically active. Early indications are that those households affected will see a reduction in their housing benefit ranging from £2-£200 a week. We will be closely monitoring the impact of the cap on our residents' ability to meet housing costs.

### **1.3 Affordable Housing**

1.3.1 We continue to work with our partners to plan and ensure timely delivery of new housing. Set out at **[Annex 2]** is a monitoring spreadsheet showing the completed schemes from the previous period, the year to date, and the development programme up to 2018.

1.3.2 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.

### **1.4 Private Sector Housing**

1.4.1 Extending The Scope of Mandatory Licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation

Government published their formal response to the technical discussion paper 'Extending mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation in England' on the 18 October 2016. As a result Government has launched a further consultation on the detail of the proposals, which covers the following areas:

- Extending the scope of mandatory house in multiple occupation (HMO) licensing
- National minimum room sizes in licensed HMOs
- Fit and proper test
- Refuse disposal facilities
- Purpose built student housing.

1.4.2 Government is looking to extend the existing mandatory HMO licensing to include all large HMOs regardless of the number of storeys, where currently it is only for HMOs that are three or more storeys with five or more persons in two or more households. They are also looking to include flats above and below high risk business premises.

1.4.3 Government is looking to insert a new mandatory condition into HMO licences requiring rooms used for sleeping for one or two persons to meet certain minimum room sizes in line with the Housing Act 1985 overcrowding standard.

- 1.4.4 It is proposed the fit and proper person test for an applicant applying for a licence be updated to require a standard disclosure certificate from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) rather than requiring the applicant to answer a series of questions on offences on the application form as currently.
- 1.4.5 Government proposes a mandatory licence condition requiring adequate receptacles for the storage and disposal of normal household waste based on the number of households or persons permitted to occupy the HMO under the licence.
- 1.4.6 For private providers of purpose built student housing where the accommodation meets approved codes of practice it is proposed that they be eligible for a discount on the licence fee.
- 1.4.7 The private sector housing team will be leading on the consultation response for Tonbridge & Malling in discussion with colleagues across Kent. The closing date for responses is the 13 December 2016.

## 1.5 Activity in the first six months of 2016/17

- 1.5.1 The Private Sector Housing (PSH) team responded to a total of 253 service requests, the breakdown of the service requests are shown below.

<b>Service request activity</b>	<b>Number of requests</b>
Housing conditions	59
Caravan site	3
Empty home visits	165
Immigration related visits	0
Rent deposit visits	17
Temporary accommodation visits	9
Arrange Public Health funeral	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>

- 1.5.2 The majority of the 59 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 one interim Empty Dwelling Management Order has been made on a long term empty property in West Malling. One new HMO licence has been approved and one application for the transfer of a caravan site licence.
- 1.5.3 As part of the work of the Corporate Empty Property Group the PSH team are working with Council Tax to visit those properties across the borough that are identified as empty and to determine if they still remain empty or are now

occupied. These visits help maintain accurate Council Tax records and contribute to the Council receiving the appropriate New Homes Bonus funding.

## **1.6 Housing Assistance**

1.6.1 To date 3 Housing Assistance grants have been completed. The works carried out included:

- Bringing 2 empty homes back into use;
- Helping to make the home of 1 domestic abuse victim more secure so they feel safer.

1.6.2 We have continued to promote to local health colleagues our housing assistance policy to better tackle the housing and health links. A recent success that is going through the grant process at the moment is a link with the local Falls Prevention classes. As a result of liaison with the provider of the classes and a talk to the residents who attend we visited the home of a vulnerable resident in Tonbridge where we identified major falls hazards to the staircase and the garden path/patio. Using our Housing Assistance policy we are able to rectify these issues for the resident so that not only is she building her strength and stability at the Falls Prevention classes but when she goes home her chances of falling again are greatly reduced.

1.6.3 In most Housing Assistance cases the Council places a charge on the property and recovers this charge if the property is sold. So far this year we have recovered £22,000 of repayable grants.

## **1.7 Winter Warmth Scheme**

1.7.1 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 are vulnerable to a winter death because they had a health condition and poor heating provision. We have assisted 3 residents so far to improve their heating so they are no longer as susceptible to a winter death from excess cold.

## **1.8 West Kent Landlord Forum**

1.8.1 We continue to work in partnership to deliver Landlord Fairs/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.

1.8.2 The most recent Landlord Fair was held at Sevenoaks in October 2016 where landlords were updated on tax changes, a look at the future for the private rented sector, links between housing and health, current and upcoming legislation and

other relevant matters. There were approximately 45 attendees and the event was very well received.

- 1.8.3 The next Landlord Forum is scheduled for March 2017 and will be held here at Tonbridge & Malling B.C.

## 1.9 Housing Needs Update

- 1.9.1 The majority of customers contacting the Housing Options and Support team need help to keep their current home or to find and secure a new home. The table below shows the number of customers approaching the team

Month	Options Presentations	Resolved at first point of contact	Homelessness Prevented	Ongoing Cases
Apr 2016	66	51	8	0
May 2016	44	26	9	3
Jun 2016	54	23	14	12
Jul 2016	55	32	10	8
Aug 2016	58	29	7	16
Sep 2016	62	16	4	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>75</b>

- 1.9.2 In addition in the first 6 months of this financial year the team dealt with 64 homeless applications. The full housing duty was accepted for 38 households, 13 households were found not to be homeless, 7 households were found not to have a priority need for accommodation and a further 6 households were found to have become homeless intentionally. Even where a full duty is not owed, the team will continue to provide advice and assistance to help households resolve their housing needs.

## 1.10 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.10.1 The following table provides a 'snapshot' number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month. The majority of homeless households are currently waiting for two bedroom accommodation, which is in high demand both from Kent Homechoice and the private sector where two bedroom properties are often priced higher than the current local housing allowance levels. This means that they can be waiting for longer periods before households are rehoused.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Number in self contained temporary accommodation (AST)</b>	<b>Number in self contained temporary accommodation (nightly paid)</b>	<b>Number in traditional bed &amp; breakfast</b>	<b>Total</b>
30.04.16	4	20	1	25
31.05.16	4	19	7	30
30.06.16	4	19	7	30
31.07.16	4	16	6	26
31.08.16	5	15	7	27
30.09.16	8	17	5	30

1.10.2 We continue to look at different options to reduce the time households stay in nightly paid temporary accommodation and have recently been successful in securing four on one bedroom properties from the private sector. These include a one bedroom apartment in Snodland and three one bedroom apartments in Tonbridge. The rent on the properties is set at local housing allowance levels reducing the overall cost to the Council as well as allowing the customer to be more settled in accommodation whilst waiting for a permanent allocation from the housing register or a private rented sector offer.

### **1.11 Accessing the Private Rented Sector**

1.11.1 It is challenging for households on a low income to access the private sector as many private landlords are seeking rent levels considerably higher than the local housing allowance (LHA) rates.

1.11.2 Many households are choosing to consider properties that are smaller than their household would ideally need, for example many one bedroom properties in the borough are priced more in line with the two bedroom LHA rate. This means a couple with one child on a low income would be entitled to financial assistance for the two bedrooms LHA rate but could only afford to rent a one bedroom property private rented property.

### **1.12 Homeless Reduction Bill**

1.12.1 The Homeless Reduction Bill, had its second reading in parliament on 28 October 2016 and aims to introduce new duties on councils assisting customers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The proposals include;

- A requirement to assist households who are likely to become homeless within 56 days, a change from the existing 28 days.
- A duty to accommodate applicants, regardless of priority need and local connection (although these two tests will have to be satisfied before the

authority makes a final decision on the longer term duties owed to the applicant).

- 1.12.2 The main impacts of the bill in its current form to Local Authorities will be an increase in the number of households owed an accommodation duty. This is likely to see a significant rise in numbers of households accommodated in temporary accommodation at any one time and put further pressure on the limited stock available to the Council.

### 1.13 Housing Register

- 1.13.1 The table below shows the distribution of live applications by size of property required on the housing register.

Month	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
April 2016	538	342	112	48	4	1044
May 2016	533	351	106	48	4	1042
June 2016	446	323	100	44	4	917
July 2016	426	327	91	42	4	890
August 2016	416	327	92	41	4	880
September 2016	423	321	98	41	6	889

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

Month	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
April 2016	15	8	3	0	0	26
May 2016	13	6	3	1	0	23
June 2016	16	13	5	0	0	34
July 2016	15	9	8	0	0	32
August 2016	14	9	9	0	0	32
September 2016	10	13	6	2	0	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>178</b>

- 1.13.3 The following table shows the waiting times of applicants that have been housed via Kent Homechoice during the six month period between 1 April 2016 and 30 September 2016, broken down by size and type of accommodation. Whilst these figures can be helpful in demonstrating timescales involved from application to allocation it should be noted that some applicants will wait longer for particular property types or locations and this will affect the overall waiting times and so the average waiting times on the far right of the table is realistic for the majority of applicants .

Property type	Number of lets	Shortest wait	Longest wait	Average wait
Sheltered	23	5 weeks	6 years	8 months
1 bed	58	5 weeks	6 years	16 months
2 bed flat	39	4 weeks	6 years	18 months

2 bed house	26	9 weeks	7 years	22 months
3 bed house	41	3 months	5 years	12 months
4 bed house	0			

#### **1.14 Legal Implications**

1.14.1 None arising from this report.

#### **1.15 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.15.1 None arising from this report.

#### **1.16 Risk Assessment**

1.16.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

Nil

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