

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

28 February 2017

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE

Summary

This report details changes in housing policy and provides Members with an update on various initiatives being undertaken by the Housing Service.

1.1 Housing Strategy & Enabling

1.1.1 Members will recall that a letter from the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, to our local MPs raising concerns in respect of national welfare and housing policy changes that are impacting on our ability to meet housing need of residents not able to access homeownership was shared with the Board. A response to this has been received from the Housing & Planning Minister, Gavin Barwell and is set out in **[Annex 1]**.

1.1.2 Previous update reports to this Board have detailed the shift in the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) grant funded programme, “Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme 2016- 2021” to focus predominately on shared ownership and rent to buy tenures. The Board will be pleased to hear that as part of the Autumn Spending Review 2016, an additional injection of £1.4bn was made into the Affordable Homes programme, including greater flexibility for providers to build homes for all tenures. Effectively, bidders will now able to use this additional funding to build homes for affordable rent in addition to shared ownership and rent to buy. Whilst this is welcome news, there remains an expectation that affordable rents will still be set at 80 percent of market rents, doing little to address the growing affordability issues facing many of our residents seeking a home. The government expects that ‘the majority of expenditure’ will still be used to support home ownership.

1.2 Housing White Paper

1.2.1 On 7th Feb 2017 the Government published its long-awaited and much anticipated Housing White Paper – “Fixing our Broken Housing Market”. The paper sets out “ambitious proposals to help fix the housing market so that more ordinary working people from across the country can have the security of a decent place to live”.

1.2.2 Many of the measures outlined in the paper have a strong planning focus and will influence how we approach future plan making and housing allocation. A detailed report on these will be presented to the Planning and Transportation Board later this month. The headline themes of the white paper are:

- Getting the right homes built in the right places – consulting on the principle of a new, standardised way of calculating housing demand to reflect current and future housing pressures;
- Speeding up house building – giving local authorities the tools to speed up house building as well as powers to make sure developers build homes on time;
- Diversifying the market – action to help small independent builders enter the market given including through the £3bn Home Building Fund.

1.2.3 Measures included that will more directly impact on the Housing Service are outlined below:

- 1.2.4 **Housing Associations:** In due course, a rent policy for social housing landlords (housing associations and local authority landlords) will be introduced for the period beyond 2020 to help them to borrow against future income, and will undertake further discussions with the sector before doing so.
- 1.2.5 Social housing regulation will be put on a more independent footing, making the Social Housing Regulator a stand-alone body.
- 1.2.6 The White Paper reiterates that housing associations belong in the private sector and the government is committed to implementing the necessary deregulatory measures to allow them to be classified as private sector bodies
- 1.2.7 There is an expectation that housing associations make every effort to improve their efficiency, in order to release additional resources for housebuilding
- 1.2.8 **The Homes and Communities Agency:** this will be relaunched in the summer as Homes England with a clear, unifying purpose: ‘To make a home within reach for everyone’
- 1.2.9 **Starter Homes:** to make clear through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that starter homes, like shared ownership homes, should be available to households that need them most, with an income of less than £80,000 (£90,000 for London). Eligible first time buyers will also be required to have a mortgage.
- 1.2.10 There will also be a 15 year repayment period for a starter home and clarification that starter homes, with appropriate local connection tests, can be acceptable on rural exception sites.
- 1.2.11 **New homes for Shared Ownership, Affordable Rent and Rent to Buy:** At the Autumn Statement an extra £1.4bn of investment into the Affordable Homes

Programme was announced, taking total investment in this programme to over £7bn to build around 225,000 affordable homes in this Parliament. The programme has now been opened up, relaxing restrictions on funding so providers can build a range of homes including for affordable rent.

- 1.2.12 **Diversifying the Market:** Change the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) so authorities know they should plan proactively for Build to Rent where there is a need, and to make it easier for Build to Rent developers to offer affordable private rental homes instead of other types of affordable housing
- 1.2.13 Ensure that family-friendly tenancies of three or more years are available on new build rental homes
- 1.2.14 **Revise the definition of affordable housing in the NPPF:** to include starter homes, discounted market sales housing and affordable private rented housing
- 1.2.15 **A fairer deal for renters and leaseholders:** consultation will take place this year, ahead of bringing forward legislation as soon as Parliamentary time allows, to ban letting agent fees to tenants. The Government will implement measures introduced in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which will introduce banning orders to remove the worst landlords or agents from operating, and enable local councils to issue fines as well as prosecute.
- 1.2.16 **Empty Homes:** support local authorities to encourage efficient use of our existing stock, making best use of homes that are long-term empty
- 1.2.17 **Housing for our future population:** The Government is introducing a new statutory duty through the Neighbourhood Planning Bill on the Secretary of State to produce guidance for local planning authorities on how their local development documents should meet the housing needs of older and disabled people.
- 1.2.18 **Preventing homelessness:** The Government is supporting Bob Blackman MP's Homelessness Reduction Bill, doubling the size of the Rough Sleeping Fund and establishing a network of expert advisors to work closely with all local authorities to help bring them to the standard of the best.
- 1.2.19 There is a wide ranging and significant series of policy changes within the White Paper and the announcements that have accompanied it. These will take some while to filter through, especially where they require legislation. Getting to grips with how best we can operate with partners and on behalf of our residents in the new environment will be a key task for the housing team and other colleagues.

1.3 Affordable Housing Update

- 1.3.1 Members will be pleased to note that a number of our Registered Provider Partners have been successful with bids to the initial round of the HCAs Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Programme (this did not include general needs affordable rented homes) as set out in the table below.

Lead Partner Name	Offer Line Name	Post Code	Site Description	No of Units
Hyde Housing Association Limited	Rougemont, Kings Hill	ME19 4QD	Rougemont, Kings Hill	2
Orbit Group Limited	16-21 Leybourne Grange	ME19 5HR	16-21 Leybourne Grange	36
The Abbeyfield Kent Society	Older Persons Shared Ownership Wateringbury extra care	ME18 5BP	OPSO Wateringbury EC 16 the Orpines	2
The Abbeyfield Kent Society	Wateringbury extra care	ME18 5BP	16 The Orpines , Wateringbury	16
West Kent Housing Association	WKHA Bunyards Farmyard, Allington	ME16 0LP	WKHA Bunyards Farmyard, Allington	4

- 1.3.2 Set out at **[Annex 2]** is the development programme showing the completed schemes from the previous period, the year to date, and the development programme up to 2018. Members will note from **[Annex 3]** the successful completion of new rented and shared ownership homes at The Sycamores at Leybourne Chase, by Orbit Homes and Bunyards Farmyard, Allington by West Kent Housing and respectively.

1.4 Community Housing Fund

- 1.4.1 The Board will be pleased to note that Tonbridge & Malling BC has been allocated £23,655 of Community Housing Funding. At the 2016 Budget a £60 million fund was announced to support community led housing developments in areas where the impact of second homes is particularly acute. The funding has been allocated proportionate to the number of second homes in the local area and taking account of the affordability of housing to local people.
- 1.4.2 The purpose of the fund is to enable local community groups to deliver mixed tenure affordable housing on sites which are likely to be of little interest to mainstream housebuilders and will thereby contribute to the overall national effort to boost housing supply Officers are exploring how best to utilise this funding including taking a joined up approach across the three west Kent Authorities.

1.5 Behavioural Insights Programme

- 1.5.1 We are pleased to report a successful joint bid with neighbouring authorities to the Local Government Association with an award of £30,000 to help us to fund the projects outlined below.
- 1.5.2 The Local Government Association (LGA) launched the second phase of funding opportunities for its Behavioural Insights Programme in November 2016, offering contributory funding towards projects by Local Authorities to support households in taking appropriate actions to reduce the risks to them of becoming homeless.
- 1.5.3 Following discussions with Local Authorities across Kent, we submitted a joint bid with four other Kent Authorities, Tunbridge Wells BC, Sevenoaks DC, Maidstone BC and Swale BC focusing on the following objectives:
- Managing the expectations of applicants to the housing register and helping them to be realistic about what they can afford to enable them to successfully sustain a tenancy.
 - Promoting the use of shared accommodation such as house shares to single people particularly those applicants who are under 35.
 - Encouraging customers who are facing homelessness to be more responsible for sustaining their accommodation through tenancy training.
- 1.5.4 The project is very much at the inception stage and Members will be provided with further updates as things progress.

1.6 Housing in Multiple Occupation and residential property licensing reforms' consultation

- 1.6.1 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 launched a further consultation where the closing date for responses was the 13 December 2016. The private sector housing team lead on the consultation response for Tonbridge & Malling in discussion with colleagues across Kent.
- 1.6.2 The consultation covered 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.
- 1.6.3 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. This was felt a sensible approach as the poorest housing conditions and poor management practices are not just associated with those three or more storey HMOs. Further detail is needed with regard to how licensing will apply to flats in purpose built blocks and converted buildings.
- 1.6.4 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. This is to be welcomed but concerns are raised in cases where a couple sharing a room have a child which would immediately breach the licence condition, whereas in reality the child would be practically able to share the room for several months whilst parents are looking for more suitable accommodation.
- 1.6.5 It is proposed that 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. This is sensible and would remove the opportunity for applicants not to disclose any offences they may have committed.
- 1.6.6 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. A common problem often associated with larger HMOs is that of, overflow refuse bins resulting from potential for waste from five separate households going into a bin often only sized for one household.
- 1.6.7 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 50 % discount on the licence fee. Such a high discount has been queried as the local authority still has to do a similar level of work when determining the HMO licence application.

1.7 Hospital Discharge Scheme and Co-Location Of Occupational Therapists (OT)

- 1.7.1 As Members are aware a West Kent Hospital Discharge Scheme has now been established jointly by the three west Kent Authorities, working in partnership with Family Mosaic to provide a Health & Housing Coordinator based in Pembury Hospital's Integrated Discharge Team and a Handyperson link to the service. The Health & Housing Coordinator is now working full time and continues to establish herself within the wider hospital services such as Occupational Therapy and

Accident & Emergency. Between November 2016 and mid-January 2017, 35 patients had been referred to the service.

- 1.7.2 Initial feedback is very positive and the service appears to be achieving “instant wins” enabling patients to be discharged home quickly and safely from hospital into their homes, in turn helping in a small way to relieve pressure on acute hospital beds.
- 1.7.3 The handyperson service is responding to any issues identified by the Health & Housing Coordinator to enable prompt discharge from hospital. In addition we are using the handyperson in a pro-active way in cases where we can prevent hospital admission in the first place. A recent example of this is where the Occupational Therapist co-located within the housing team responded to a resident who had contacted the service as a result of the promotional activity we had undertaken. The resident was found to be at high risk of falling at home and required a repair to an external step and a handrail. Having the facility to instantly access the Handyperson service enabled the work to be completed within days, reducing the risk of falls within the home and potential hospital admission.
- 1.7.4 Having the OTs co-located in the Housing service is proving to be invaluable. It provides the opportunity to refer cases directly rather than first having to be triaged via Kent County Council, thus streamlining the deployment of Disabled Facilities Grants, amongst other advantages.
- 1.7.5 The arrangement is also working positively across the whole housing team with Housing Options and Support Officers able to discuss housing needs reports produce by the OTs in more detail and receive instant clarification on issues related to accommodation needs.
- 1.7.6 The OTs report that they feel the secondments are working well and it is a two way process in that they are now learning about some of the pressures that housing face with availability and suitability of housing.

1.8 Legal Implications

- 1.8.1 None arising from this report

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.9.1 None arising from this report

1.10 Risk Assessment

- 1.10.1 None arising from this report

Background papers:

Nil

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