

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

24 July 2017

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING SERVICES ACTIVITY 2016/17

Summary

This report provides an update on the work of the Housing Service for the financial year 2016/17.

1.1 Affordable Housing Update

- 1.1.1 Officers continue to work in partnership with the Council's Registered Provider Partners to ensure a forward supply of affordable homes in the Borough. The spreadsheet at **[Annex 1]** shows the completed schemes for 2016/17 along with the forward development programme.
- 1.1.2 Members will note that 155 new affordable homes were delivered in 2016/17, of which 71 were low cost home ownership, 71 affordable rent, 5 social rent and 8 discounted market sale homes. Negotiating a level of rent that is truly affordable continues to be a challenge but officers are continuing to persevere.
- 1.1.3 The outturn for this financial year is looking healthy and Members will note that MHS Homes will deliver their first affordable homes in our Borough at the Preston Hall development, Aylesford. MHS homes own and manage approximately 8,500 homes, predominately in Medway, Maidstone and Gravesham. They operate a group structure with three arms: mhs homes, Heart of Medway Housing Association and mhs community charity. Mhs have expressed a strong ambition to continue to expand their portfolio within Tonbridge & Malling.
- 1.1.4 Members will be pleased to hear that the new domestic abuse refuge being built within the Borough remains on course for completion early 2018. As part of the recent commissioning process for domestic abuse services, led by Kent County Council, Look Ahead (supported accommodation provider) was successful in its bid to provide services across West Kent, including managing refuge provision.

1.2 West Kent Housing & Homelessness Strategy

- 1.2.1 From previous Board reports Members may recall that since 2016 we have been working jointly with colleagues from Tunbridge Wells & Sevenoaks Councils in formulating the next West Kent Housing & Homelessness Strategy. There has

been a slight delay in finalising the strategy due to the announcement of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The draft has been revisited to address the implications of the Act.

1.2.2 To recap, the approach taken in the strategy is to set out some broad objectives which act as a framework to influence the councils' and partners' priorities. The strategy reflects the reality of the role played by a wide range of organisations and agencies in delivering the housing and homelessness objectives contained within the strategy. The four main ambitions of the strategy are:

- Preventing homelessness and improving the availability of housing for all
- Improving housing supply
- Improving housing standards
- Improving the health and wellbeing of our residents

1.2.3 The Strategy has been 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 in order to accommodate the impacts of these changes as they unfold throughout the life of the strategy.

1.2.4 The strategy is currently out to consultation, which closes at the end of this month and a further report will be brought to the next meeting of this Board seeking Members' endorsement to adopt it.

1.3 Private Sector Housing Activity for 2016/17

1.3.1 The Private Sector Housing (PSH) team responded to a total of 214 service requests, the breakdown of the service requests are shown below.

Service request activity	Number of requests
Housing conditions	121
Illegal eviction/landlord harassment	7
Caravan site	3
Empty home visits	23
Immigration related visits	3
Rent deposit visits	33
Temporary accommodation visits	22
Arrange Public Health funeral	2
Total	214

- 1.3.2 The majority of the 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.
- 1.3.3 One Compliance Notice under section 9A of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 was served on a caravan site licence holder requiring remedial works to comply with the licence conditions. Only some of the works were completed and a prosecution case is subsequently being compiled. Two Section 4 Notices under the Prevention of Damage By Pests Act 1949 were served on two property owners requiring them to undertake a pest control treatment to destroy rats or mice, clearance of vegetation and undertake pest proofing works. One Improvement Notice under section 11 of the Housing Act 2004 was served on a landlord requiring him to undertake remedial works to remove a category 1 hazard for excess cold, electrical, and damp and mould hazards. In addition, two new house in multiple occupation (HMO) licences and four HMO licence renewals were issued and one caravan site licence for a caravan site that had recently obtained planning consent.
- 1.3.4 An interim Empty Dwelling Management Order under the Housing Act 2004 for a long term empty property in West Malling has also been obtained to enable the Council to undertake renovation works and bring it back into use. As part of the work of the Corporate Empty Property Group the PSH team have actively been working on those properties that have been empty for over two years and where Council Tax is not aware of any action being taken to bring these back into use. A visit and an empty property assessment of those properties has been undertaken to score their rating to enable effective prioritisation to bring the empty homes back into use. In addition, 15 long term empty properties have been brought back into use, 7 of those following advice and information from the PSH team given to the owner, 3 following receipt of funding from a Housing Assistance grant and 5 following receipt of funding from the Kent County Council No Use Empty loan.
- 1.3.5 For the period 2016/17, 12 Housing Assistance cases were completed. These included:
- Renovation works bringing 2 empty homes back into use;
 - Helping to make 5 homes warmer by providing Warm Homes Assistance for heating;
 - Helping to make the home of 3 domestic abuse victims more secure so they feel safer; and
 - Helping to make 2 homes safer through Home Safety Assistance for changing the lock to the front door and a survey of the drain.

1.4 Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Report

1.4.1 Under revisions to the guidance for the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 all local authorities (with a housing responsibility) were asked to publish a report on their website by 31 March 2013 identifying ‘the energy conservation measures that the authority considers practicable, cost effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in the area’. Subsequent to this, local authorities are required to provide a report on progress made in implementing these measures every two years. The Council published the latest HECA report on 31 March 2017, which can be found at **[Annex 2]**.

1.5 Energy Company Obligation – Flexible Eligibility Scheme

1.5.1 As Members may be aware, the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), introduced in January 2013, was the latest scheme to use energy supplier obligations to fund energy efficiency improvements. It was designed to reduce carbon emissions from domestic stock. The Affordable Warmth Obligation under ECO aims to improve energy efficiency in domestic properties in order to reduce bills and increase comfort for low income and vulnerable households on a long term basis thus reducing the risk of being in fuel poverty. The ECO scheme has now been extended to 30 September 2018.

1.5.2 Government has recently issued “Energy Company Obligation – Flexible Eligibility” guidance to local authorities on a newly introduced eligibility mechanism known as Flexible Eligibility, whereby obligated energy companies are able to allocate ten percent of their Affordable Warmth Obligation by installing energy efficiency measures in households declared as eligible by a local authority.

1.5.3 The Flexible Eligibility approach provides an opportunity for local authorities to engage with energy suppliers by identifying and making referrals of those fuel poor households not in receipt of income related benefits and low income households, who are vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home, and whose homes would benefit from energy efficiency improvements. Participation in flexible eligibility is optional for both energy suppliers and local authorities.

1.5.4 Participating local authorities must publish a statement of intent on their website advising how they intend to identify eligible households for referral. A local authority declaration must be made determining the reason a household meets the flexible eligibility criteria. It should be noted that including a household in a declaration does not guarantee the installation of measures. The final decision rests with the energy company and is subject to additional factors, such as, survey of the property and cost of measure, energy savings that can be achieved by installing the measure/s and whether the energy company has met or is close to their obligation target. The Council is currently developing a statement of intent to enable those fuel poor households in the borough to benefit from energy efficiency improvements.

1.6 Housing Needs Update for 2016/17

- 1.6.1 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 who approached the team during 2016/17.

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
Oct 2016	62	42	5	5
Nov 2016	64	39	13	2
Dec 2016	59	42	4	4
Jan 2017	60	42	4	5
Feb 2017	42	21	5	6
Mar 2017	59	23	6	10
Total	685	386	89	107

- 1.6.2 In addition to this, the team investigated 137 homeless applications. The full housing duty was accepted for 74 households; 33 households were found not to be homeless, 17 households were found not to have a priority need for accommodation and a further 13 households were found to have become homeless intentionally. Even where a full housing duty is not owed to a household, the team will continue to provide advice and assistance to help households resolve their housing needs.

1.7 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.7.1 The following table provides a 'snapshot' number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month during this period.

Date	Number in self-contained temporary accommodation (AST)	Number in self-contained temporary accommodation (nightly paid)	Number in traditional bed & breakfast	Total
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
31.10.16	6	22	2	30
30.11.16	7	15	2	24
31.12.16	8	18	2	28
31.01.17	8	26	2	36
28.02.17	6	27	2	35
31.03.17	7	27	1	35

1.7.2 We are continuing to look at ways of reducing the time households stay in nightly paid temporary accommodation. We have recently negotiated three further properties from our main housing provider, Clarion Housing Group, for use as temporary accommodation. The rent on the properties is set at local housing allowance levels reducing the overall cost to the Council as well as providing customers with a more settled environment whilst waiting for a permanent allocation of accommodation.

1.8 Accessing the Private Rented Sector

1.8.1 It remains challenging for households on low incomes to access the private rented sector. This is because many private landlords in the Borough are able to achieve rents much higher than the local housing allowance (LHA) rates. This is being compounded by the LHA rates being set at the 30th percentile of rents and frozen until 2019 at the January 2015 levels.

1.9 Housing Register

1.9.1 The table below shows the distribution of live applications on the Housing Register by size of property required.

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
October 2016	439	327	103	40	6	915
November 2016	434	320	100	41	6	901
December 2016	434	319	97	41	6	897
January 2017	445	321	101	41	5	913
February 2017	453	333	101	45	5	937
March 2017	479	342	115	46	7	989

1.9.2 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 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
October 2016	10	10	5	1	0	26
November 2016	24	22	5	1	0	52
December 2016	15	12	8	1	0	36
January 2017	10	10	6	1	0	27
February 2017	22	21	8	0	0	51
March 2017	17	11	6	0	0	34
Total	181	144	72	7	0	404

1.9.3 The following table shows the waiting times of applicants that have been housed via Kent Homechoice during the period 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, 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. 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 accommodation	38	17 days	7 years	14 months
Studio general needs	0			
1 bed general needs	137	4 weeks	9 years	16 months
2 bed flat or maisonette	97	4 weeks	10 years	17 months
2 bed house	50	9 weeks	7 years	22 months
3 bed flat or maisonette	1	7 months	7 months	7 months
3 bed house	79	10 weeks	6 years	12 months
4 bed house	2	7 months	32 months	19 months

1.10 Legal Implications

1.10.1 None arising from this report.

1.11 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.11.1 None arising from this report.

1.12 Risk Assessment

1.12.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Housing Services
Managers

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health