

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

29 May 2018

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING NEED AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

This report provides a summary update in various key areas across the Council's housing service.

1.1 Homelessness Reduction Act

1.1.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act came in to force on 3 April 2018. The aim of the Act is to modify and extend the previous homelessness duties required by Local Authorities, the key changes being;

- To improve the advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness to everyone in the Councils district.
- To extend the period during which a person becomes threatened with homelessness from the previous 28 days to 56 days, allowing more time for the council to prevent households from becoming homeless.
- To introduce new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people regardless of priority need and intentionality.
- To introduce assessments and personal housing plans setting out the actions that will be taken by the council and the applicant to prevent homelessness or secure alternative accommodation to relieve homelessness.

1.1.2 It was expected that these changes would result in an increase in the number of customers approaching the Council for assistance and an increased work-load on Officers and so in preparation the Council recruited an additional Housing Options and Support Officer, increasing the team to five full time Officers and one part time Officer.

1.1.3 Working alongside the Housing Options and Support Team a new Accommodation Team comprising two full time Accommodation and Support Officers was created specifically to work on initiatives to find and secure accommodation from the private sector intended to increase the Councils access to affordable housing options to resolve housing need and prevent and relieve

homelessness. The Accommodation team is also responsible for the management of emergency and temporary accommodation.

1.1.4 Under the new Act there are four distinct stages.

- The initial triage stage where an assessment of the customer's eligibility and support needs are established.
- The Prevention stage, if a customer is threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days and where efforts will be made to prevent the applicant from becoming homeless, this will include compiling a personal housing plan with the customer who will be expected to comply with the steps agreed.
- The Relief stage, if the customer is already homeless and efforts are made to resolve their homelessness by finding and securing accommodation either on an interim basis while a more permanent solution is found or by securing permanent housing.
- The final stage is the Assessment and this is where the Council will decide what final duties are owed to a customer who's homelessness has not been prevented or relieved.

1.1.5 To enable the team to manage the expected increase in numbers of customers attending the Council offices for help, and to ensure interviews are structured to be compliant with the new duties, a new appointment system was created allowing two hours for each customer. Initially these appointments were restricted to three each day whilst Officers got to grips with the new ways of working. This has now been increased to five appointments each day. Appointments are being booked 7 days in advance currently.

1.1.6 We have a new IT system to help us carry out our activities associated with recording and managing our casework which has been created by our existing IT provider Locata to be compliant with the HRA and is being used across Kent. Whilst the team received a limited programme of training on how to use the new system, it was not fully operational until a few days before the HRA was implemented and this has been a challenge.

1.1.7 Early indications indicate that business has increased as expected. For the period 3 April 2018 to 3 May 2018, the team dealt with 75 new customers under HRA and this compares to an average of 66 new customers for the same time period over the previous 6 months demonstrating an increase of 13% in footfall for the first month. Whilst this may only seem a small increase at present, it should be noted that appointments have been managed whilst Officers become familiar with dealing with customers in accordance with the new law. Of course, our time spent on each interview and enquiry has also increased due to the new approach introduced by the HRA.

1.1.8 Further detail on the number of new approaches are demonstrated below;

	Triage Stage	Prevention Stage	Relief Stage
Number of new approaches	47	15 (of which 2 have been prevented successfully)	13 (of which 1 has been relieved)

1.2 On-line Registration

- 1.2.1 As members are aware, the Borough Council currently use the Choice Based Lettings system, Kent Homechoice, for the allocation of social housing in the borough. Applicants wishing to be considered for affordable and social housing must initially apply to join the Council's housing register in order to have access to Kent Homechoice. To make an application, customers have until now been required to complete a paper application form which they submit to the Housing Options and Support team for assessment.
- 1.2.2 Since 3 April 2018 alongside implementation of the HRA, the Council are offering our customers the option of on-line registration giving them the choice of how they wish to submit their application for housing. Many of our customers already use an on-line pre-assessment tool which informs them if they are eligible to join the register and we have received feedback from those customers that they would like to have the rest of the form available on line.
- 1.2.3 Customers are also able to up-load the required documents in support of their application making the process a lot more streamlined and user friendly.
- 1.2.4 During the first month since this option has been available there have been 139 new applications submitted and of these 41 were submitted on-line. It is hoped that as new customers are made aware of the new on-line option to submit an application, the paper application will reduce further. This will reduce the administration in processing new applications and dealing with applicant's personal information directly as well as helping us to identify those households with housing difficulties at an earlier stage.

1.3 Housing Register

- 1.3.1 There are currently 1145 live applications on the Council's housing register (waiting list). The table below shows the distribution of live applications on the housing register by size of property required over the last six months.

Month	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
November 2017	552	329	144	51	8	1084
December 2017	550	318	142	50	8	1068
January 2018	561	325	146	53	8	1085

February 2018	568	323	148	54	8	1100
March 2018	578	313	153	55	7	1106
April 2018	586	313	151	56	7	1113

1.3.2 There have been 167 households housed via Kent Homechoice during the last 6 months, the table below shows the number of lets broken down by bed need.

Month	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
November 2017	11	28	6	0	0	45
December 2017	5	9	4	4	0	22
January 2018	6	11	6	0	0	23
February 2018	9	13	5	0	0	27
March 2018	10	10	3	0	0	23
April 2018	12	8	7	0	0	27
Total	53	79	31	4	0	167

1.3.3 The following table shows the waiting times of applicants who have been housed via Kent Homechoice during the period 1 April 2017 and 30 September 2017, broken down by size and type of accommodation. The figures in grey depict the previous six months which show that average waiting times remain consistent although the wait for two bedroom houses has reduced over this period. 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	12	15 days	14 months	4 months
	19	10 weeks	19 months	6 months
1 bed general needs	65	4 weeks	5 years	11 months
	53	6 weeks	5 years	10 months
2 bed flat or maisonette	49	7 weeks	17 months	11 months
	56	6 weeks	6 years	12 months
2 bed house	26	16 months	15 years	29 months
	23	8 months	29 months	18 months
3 bed house	33	8 weeks	31 months	12 months
	29	7 months	3 years	15 months
4 bed house	3	12 month	3 years	27 months
	4	30 months	7 years	3 years

1.4 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)

- 1.4.1 The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme was launched by Government in January 2014 with the intention of identifying families most at risk and providing sanctuary to those in the greatest need including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture and women and children at risk.
- 1.4.2 Members may recall the Council committed to receiving at least 10 families under the scheme over the preceding 5 years since the launch of the scheme. We have to date received and accommodated two households.
- 1.4.3 We are happy to report that the Council has now facilitated the arrival of two new families under the Scheme, bringing our total to four.
- 1.4.4 The first of these new arrivals are due on 22 May 2018, is a family of seven, consisting two adults and their five children 2 of which are over the age of 18. The family will be relocating this family to a large property in Wouldham which has been sourced from a private landlord.
- 1.4.5 The property is currently being furnished in preparation for the family's arrival and this is being arranged by West Kent Extra furniture project who supply good quality second hand and new furniture for people on low incomes. Although the landlord has also donated several good items of furniture with the property.
- 1.4.6 The next arrival on 29 June 2018, is a family of 6, comprising two adults and four children, all under the age of six. This family will be relocating to Tonbridge and again this property has been provided by a private landlord. Similar preparations will be made to prepare the property before the family arrive.
- 1.4.7 Both families will be supported by Centra who provide specialist support services to vulnerable households and who have been commissioned by Kent County Council to deliver this support to families arriving in Kent under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

1.5 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.5.1 Local housing authorities in England have a duty to secure accommodation for homeless households in priority need under Part 7 of the *Housing Act 1996* (as amended).
- 1.5.2 As at 9 May 2018 there were 32 households residing in temporary accommodation. The following table gives a breakdown of these households.

Household type	Housing Association	Directly with a private sector landlord	Nightly paid, privately managed	Nightly paid, privately managed - Shared Facilities	Total
Couple expecting a child			1		1
Couple +1			4		4
Couple +2			1		1
Single person	1		5		6
Single person & 1 child	2	1	6	1	10
Single person & 2 children	2		5		7
Single person & 3 children			1		1
Single person & 4 or more children			2		2
Grand Total	5	1	25	1	32

- 1.5.3 Between 1 January 2018 and 30 April 2018, 48 households moved on from temporary accommodation. These households spent an average of four months in temporary accommodation. However, 10 (21%) of these households lived in temporary accommodation for six months or more, and 17 (35%) for three months or more.
- 1.5.4 Increasing demand for social housing coupled with supply shortages has resulted in an increase of homeless households living in temporary accommodation.
- 1.5.5 According to a House of Commons briefing paper (Households in temporary accommodation (England), 02110, 22 March 2018) there was a national increase of 201% in the number of households placed in temporary accommodation outside of their local authority between December 2011 and December 2017. It was also reported that Local authority expenditure on homelessness services, including temporary accommodation, has steadily increased since 2010.
- 1.5.6 As competition for temporary accommodation increases throughout the South East, it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure accommodation for homeless households to whom the Council owe an interim housing duty. This has contributed to the Council increasing the use of temporary accommodation outside the Borough.

1.5.7 As at 9 May 2018, 22 (69%) of the households living in temporary accommodation were accommodated outside of the borough, the furthest placement being Sheerness.

1.5.8 The following table gives a breakdown of placements by area at 9 May 2018:

Area	Housing Association	Directly with a private sector landlord	Nightly paid, privately managed	Nightly paid, privately managed - Shared Facilities	Total
Gravesham			1		1
Maidstone			9		9
Medway			9	1	10
Swale			2		2
Tonbridge & Malling	5	1	4		10
Grand Total	5	1	25	1	32

1.5.9 The Council recognises that our customers face additional challenges where their temporary accommodation is located away from the Borough, as well as increased risk to health and wellbeing.

1.5.10 The Council must, where it is reasonably practicable, secure temporary accommodation that is within the Borough. To this end the Council has taken positive steps towards identifying in Borough solutions, which includes working in partnership with Clarion Housing to secure temporary homes within their social housing stock. Further opportunities within this sector are also being explored with Clarion and other partners.

1.5.11 In addition, the Council has recently agreed the acquisition of a property, utilising Section 106 funding, comprising 5 one bedroom flats and 1 two bedroom flat, located in Tonbridge High Street. It is intended that this provision will be used as medium term temporary accommodation, similar to the Housing Association homes currently provided by Clarion Housing. This will provide a much needed resource in the South of the Borough. The Council is currently seeking partnership with Clarion Housing to deliver maintenance and repairs for these flats. Further opportunities for purchase elsewhere in the Borough are currently being explored.

1.6 Affordable Housing Update

1.6.1 Officers are working with Registered Provider partners to ensure a forward supply of affordable homes in the Borough. The spreadsheet in **[Annex 1]** shows the schemes completed in 2017/18 and those due to come forward in 2018.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 The Council, as a Local Housing Authority, has a broad range of new duties and responsibilities by virtue of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force on 3rd April 2018.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 None arising from this report.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

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Nil

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