

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2020

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING SERVICE ACTIVITY REPORT

Summary

This report updates Members on the activity of the Housing Service in the financial year 2019/20.

1.1 Private Sector Housing Activity for April 2019 to March 2020

1.1.1 The Private Sector Housing (PSH) team responded to a total of 206 service requests for the year April 2019 to March 2020. The breakdown of the service requests are shown below:

Service request activity	Number of requests
Housing conditions	135
Illegal eviction/landlord harassment	5
Caravan site	7
Empty home visits	9
Immigration related visits	4
Rent deposit visits	19
HMO licensing	7
Arrange Public Health funeral	4
Hospital Discharge Scheme	2
One You	14
Total	206

1.1.2 The majority of the housing condition related service requests were dealt with informally but where there were significant hazards, as determined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessment, and the landlord was not undertaking the appropriate remedial works, then formal enforcement action was

taken. As a result one landlord was served an Improvement Notice under section 11 of the Housing Act 2004 to repair or replace a boiler.

1.1.3 In addition, seven new houses in multiple occupation (HMO) licences were issued and one HMO licence renewed. Also two caravan site licences were transferred to new owners and two new caravan site licences issued.

1.1.4 For the period April 2019 to March 2020 a total of £1,007,000 was spent on mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and 100 DFGs were completed. Those completed were for the following works:

- Access to bedroom – 1 case
- Provision of ground floor bedroom/bathroom facilities – 4 cases
- Provision of a stair lift or through floor lift – 24 cases
- Stair lift repair – 3 cases
- Provision of level access shower facilities or bathroom adaptations – 55 cases
- Over bath shower – 8 cases
- Improving access – 27 cases
- Safety related works – 5 cases
- Other, including additional WC facilities, kitchen works and specialist baths – 19 cases.

1.1.5 There may be grants in 1.1.4 that cover more than one area of work and therefore the numbers will not add up to the total number of grants completed.

1.1.6 For the period April 2019 to March 2020 a total of £34,000 was spent on discretionary Housing Assistance and 17 cases were completed. These completed cases included:

- Ten Warm Homes Assistance cases for heating related works
- One Home Improvements Assistance for a replacement flush floor shower
- Six Home Safety Assistance cases to undertake minor works to improve resident's safety.

1.2 Housing Stock Modelling Project

1.2.1 Members will be aware the Council commissioned the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to undertake a private sector housing stock modelling project at the beginning of 2020. This work is now complete and the housing stock modelling report and integrated database have been delivered.

- 1.2.2 The project has a particular emphasis on identification of private rented stock in the borough, which has been funded through a successful bid to MHCLG Private Rented Sector (PRS) Innovation and Enforcement Grant Fund 2020/2021. The stock modelling integrated database will be an invaluable data resource to help identify the least energy efficient private rented stock in our area. It will also assist the Council to effectively participate in the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Year 2 PRS minimum energy efficiency compliance and enforcement pilot study.
- 1.2.3 Officers are currently reviewing both the report and integrated database to establish how this can be effectively utilised in support of our private sector housing strategy and enforcement work to improve sub-standard housing in the borough. Officers will provide a further update on the findings to Members at a future meeting of this Board.

1.3 Energy Deal

- 1.3.1 The Energy Deal collective switching scheme, part of the Big Community Switch run by iChoosr, continues to offer residents the opportunity to switch to a cheaper tariff at energy switching auctions held three times a year. Collective switching is where interested consumers collect together to negotiate a group deal with gas and electricity suppliers. Energy suppliers are invited to compete with their best offer at an energy auction. Residents registered with the scheme are sent a personalised offer showing how much they could save with the winning tariff and they can decide whether they want to accept. Registration is free and there is no obligation to accept the winning offer.
- 1.3.2 In February 2020 the average realised saving for a resident on a standard variable tariff was £326, £276 for a resident on a fixed tariff, or £287 for a resident within the 'switch window' for a fixed tariff (when any exit fee is usually not applied). For the 130 switchers living in our area this is a collective Carbon saving of 170 tonnes equivalent to 93 cars off the road (1.83 tonnes CO₂*) or 169 return flights to New York (1.01 tonnes CO₂**).

* Carbon saving figure provided by iChoosr, example is a Toyota Yaris 7,000 miles per year

** Carbon saving figure provided by iChoosr

- 1.3.3 The winners of the May Auction 2020 all supply green electricity too and we are currently awaiting details of the average saving for residents. With 59 percent of domestic electricity customers on standard variable (often the most expensive rate which can go up or down in price) or default tariffs and 56 percent of gas customers***, members are encouraged to let residents know about the Energy Deal scheme (www.energydealswitch.com). Particularly residents who do not have an email or internet connection as the Council is able to carry out 'offline registration' for them so they do not miss out on the opportunity to hear about a cheaper energy tariff.

*** Ofgem figure

- 1.3.4 The next registration period will open on 4 August 2020 with the auction taking place on 6 October 2020. The scheme will only offer 100 percent renewable electricity tariffs, which supports our aspiration for Tonbridge and Malling to be carbon neutral by 2030.

1.4 Affordable housing update

- 1.4.1 Officers continue to work 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 2019/20 and those due to come forward in 2020/21.

- 1.4.2 Further phases of the Peters Village development in Wouldham have completed with Hyde and Moat now offering affordable homes for rent and shared ownership. Hyde have completed 23 homes for rent and 8 for shared ownership so far, and Moat have 27 homes for rent and 34 for shared ownership.
- 1.4.3 A new extra care housing scheme with Rapport Housing and Care is being developed in Wateringbury, which will include 16 affordable homes. Extra care (sometimes known as assisted living) enables older people to live independently with some support tailored to their needs.

1.5 Pembury Road, Tonbridge

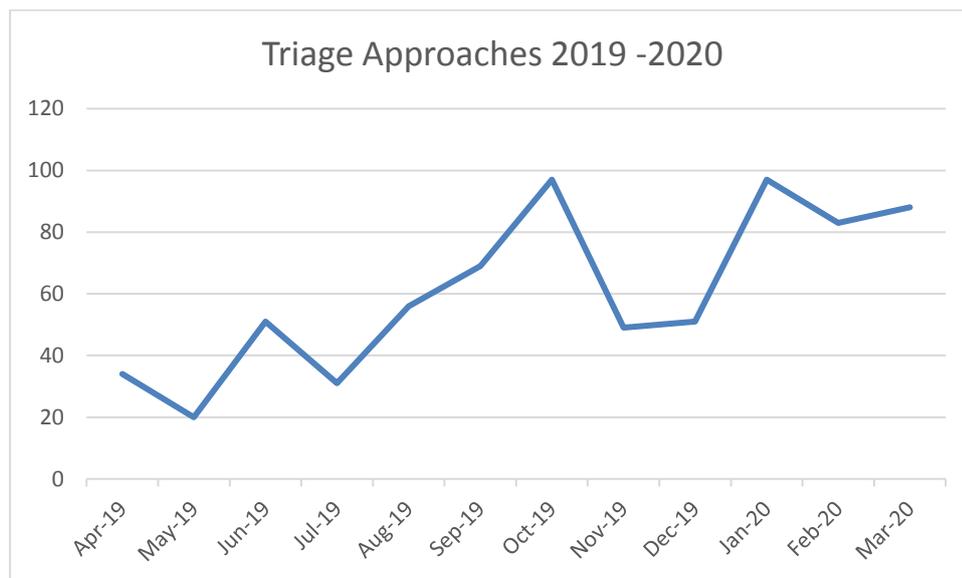
- 1.5.1 Options for the future provision of Temporary Accommodation (TA) were outlined in a Communities and Housing Advisory Board paper in November 2019, including the purchase of additional property for TA.
- 1.5.2 The purchase of 4 adjacent town houses, 145-151 Pembury Road, Tonbridge completed in March 2020, on the basis of the houses having the potential to convert and provide 12 units for TA.
- 1.5.3 Officers from Property Services and the Housing team are in the process of arranging project management for the conversion of the four houses.
- 1.5.4 In light of the increased need for TA and resources pressures relating to the COVID19 pandemic some of the houses may be used for TA on an interim basis, in their current layout as 4beds.

1.6 Housing Options and Support

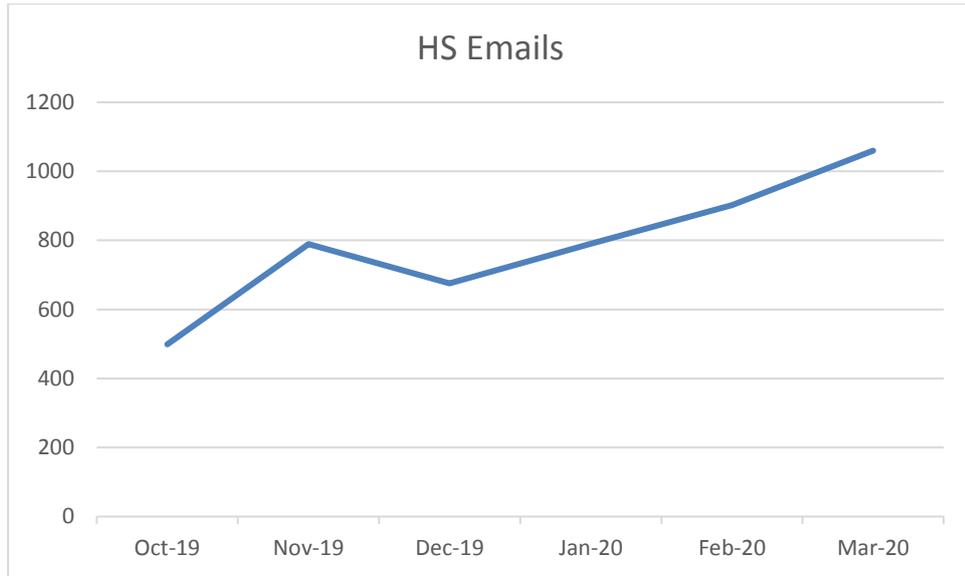
- 1.6.1 This section of the report covers activity within the Housing Options and Support Service, which covers the areas of Homelessness and the Housing Register, for the period April 2019 – March 2020.

Access to the Housing Options and Support Service

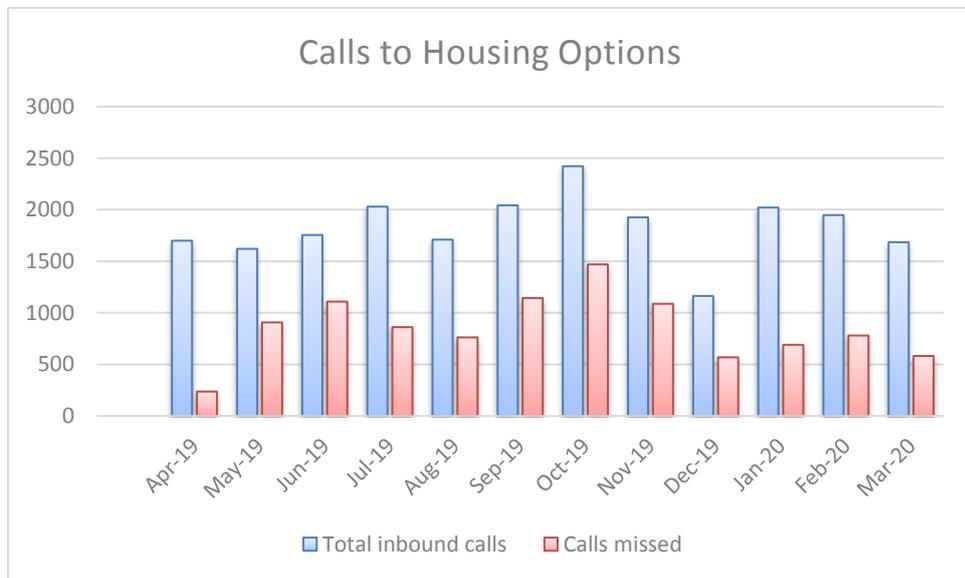
1.6.2 This first section considers access into the Housing Options and Support Service. Following on from last year's 2018 – 2019 Activity Report, we advised members that a Triage Service was being trialled. This initial point of contact service is now fully embedded and operational within the Housing Options and Support Service. Due to staffing it was implemented full time, with a dedicated officer in July 2019. All applicants who now approach the service are asked to complete an initial assessment form. If they are threatened with homelessness within the next 7 days, or are already homeless, then they will be seen on the day by a duty officer. However if they are threatened with homelessness and it is over a longer period then they will be assessed by the triage officer within 72 hours and allocated a case officer who then makes an appointment to complete a full assessment of their circumstances. Over the period 726 households were triaged, with a clear increase in households approaching once the service was being delivered full time from July. There was a sharp dip towards the end of the year, which coincided with the General Election and Christmas. Households triaged by month are shown in the graph below



1.6.3 In addition to this, to capture a complete picture of approaches to the Housing Options and Support Service, the service takes a significant amount of telephone calls and also has a generic email inbox, all of which are used by those who require housing or housing register advice. To capture this additional demand emails to the generic Housing Services inbox have been captured. This information was only captured from November 2019. However the graph clearly shows that similarly to the Triage, the numbers contacting the service decreased around the time of the General Election and Christmas, and since January 2020 has continued to increase.

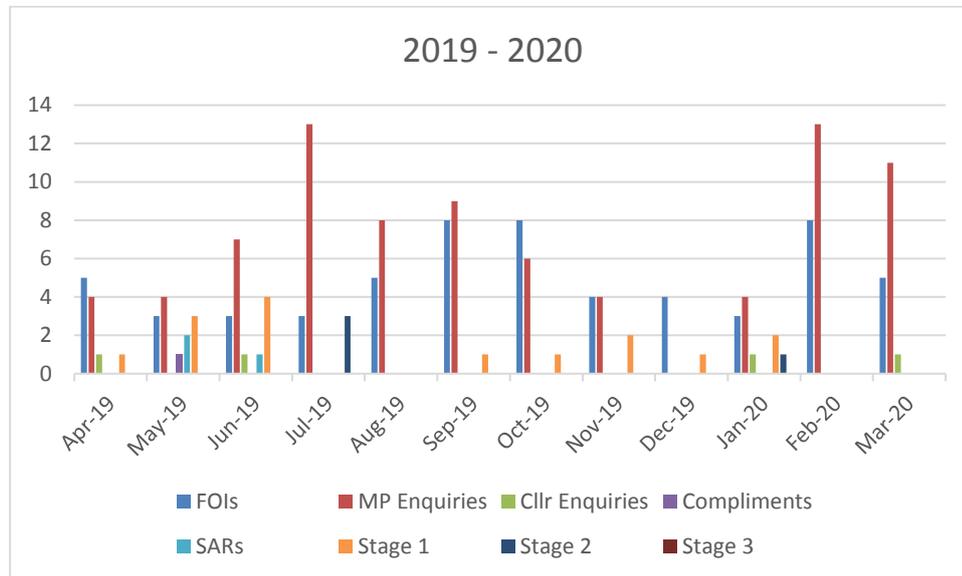


1.6.4 Similarly telephone data has been captured for the service. For the year 2019 – 2020, 22,025 attempts were made to telephone the Housing Options and Support Service. Of these 46% went unanswered, with the most common reason being that callers abandoned the call whilst waiting in the queue. Again it can be seen that the volume decreased in November and December due to the General Election and Christmas (it should be noted that the inbound calls to Housing Options for April 2019 is a full months stats, but missed calls is only partial from 24 – 30 April 2019 and therefore why this figure is lower)



1.6.5 Being a front line service, it is inevitable that the service receives a number of additional requests. This includes MP and Councillor Enquiries, Freedom of Information requests, as well as Complaints. The table below sets out how many of each were received over the year into the Housing Options and Support Service. The graph shows that the service deals mainly with MP enquiries. However it also shows that when we receive stage 1 complaints a small number of these go on to become stage 2 and for the 2019 – 2020 year we received no

stage 3 complaints, which suggests that taking the approach of speaking to those who submit complaints early on, may prevent them from going further and ultimately to the Ombudsman. Again analysing the graphs it can be seen that the number of enquiries dropped off again during November and December suggesting that the Election and Christmas had some impact on the service.



1.6.6 In addition the service received 47 requests for reviews of Part VI applications. Of these 32 have been concluded, with 15 upheld, 13 overturned and 4 others (withdrawn). 15 are still in progress as there is a backlog due to the additional demands placed on housing during the early stages of the Covid 19 Pandemic and the many changes that were ongoing. The service also had five s202 review requests of decisions made by Officers, 2 of which were upheld and 3 overturned.

Applications

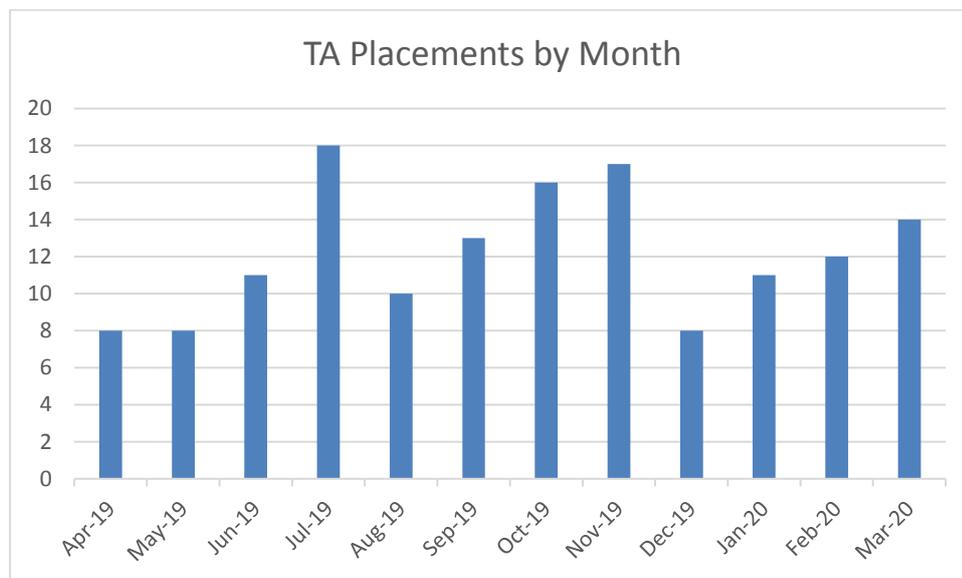
1.6.7 1029 cases were opened during the year. This was all case types including prevention and relief, and acceptance of the main housing duty. Of these 129 were prevented from becoming homeless, 186 were relief cases and we made a s184 decision on 109 households of which 66 were accepted and 57 were found to be not homeless, not in priority need or intentionally homeless. In addition as at the 31 March 2020 we had 14 cases which had reached the end of prevention and or relief and were due to have a decision made on them.

Temporary Accommodation

1.6.8 The Council has seen a continued increase in numbers accessing Emergency and Temporary Accommodation (TA). As of 31 March 2020 there were 95 households accommodated by the Council, (This is a total figure and includes those who had their stays extended due to the "Everyone in" announcement made by Dame Louise Casey on 27 March 2020 and which is discussed in more detail at 1.6.13 of this report). This is an increase from 49 in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2019.

1.6.9 As of 31 March 2020 the household who had been in with the longest number of nights stood at 526. (This applicant was a 4 bed need, and so the stay was extended due to the waits for 4 bedroom social housing)

1.6.10 The Council placed a total of 146 unique individuals during the period April 2019 - March 2020. The graph below shows numbers placed each month (This graph does not include those placed under the Councils Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) or the extended winter provision covered in 1.6.12 and 1.6.13 of this report. Again a drop in demand can be seen during December 2019.



Rough Sleepers

1.6.11 The Council undertook its annual Rough Sleeper Estimate on the night of Wednesday 13 November 2019 into the morning of Thursday 14th November 2019. The 2018 estimate had seen a rise from 8 in 2017 to 12 in 2018. This year the estimate returned to MHCLG was 6, a significant decrease.

1.6.12 The Council triggered SWEP on 14 separate occasions during the October 2019 – March 2020 period and had this active for a total of 60 nights. Over this period the Council provided accommodation to 27 unique individuals.

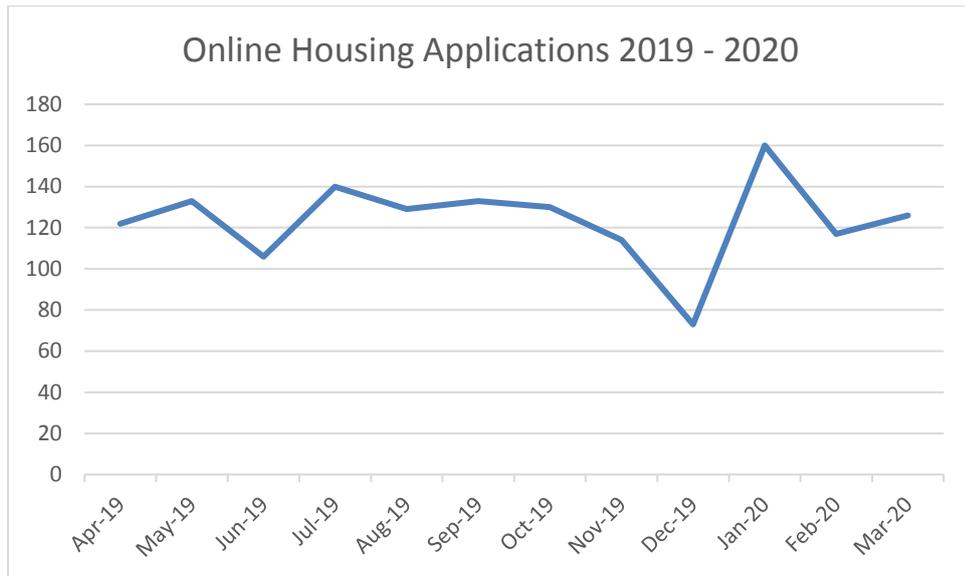
1.6.13 During the winter 201 – 2020 period, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) offered additional funding to authorities to extend their winter provision beyond SWEP to those who were Rough Sleeping, and keep those Rough Sleeping in for the whole winter period until 31 March 2020. As we had a £17,000 underspend on our Rough Sleeping initiative Year 2 Funding, ongoing discussions with our MHCLG Rough Sleeping Advisors, led to us remodelling this underspend to support this extended provision. This meant that we were able to accommodate a number of those who had SWEP

Accommodation longer term. We accommodated 17 Rough Sleepers through this extended provision, of these 17, 8 had previously had SWEP Accommodation. This provision was due to end on 31 March 2020, however due to the Covid 19 situation, Dame Louise Casey announced on 27 March 2020 that all Rough Sleepers should be placed in accommodation to help prevent them from contracting the virus. Given this announcement these placements were extended beyond this date. A copy of this email from Dame Louise Casey is attached to this report as **[Annex 2]**.

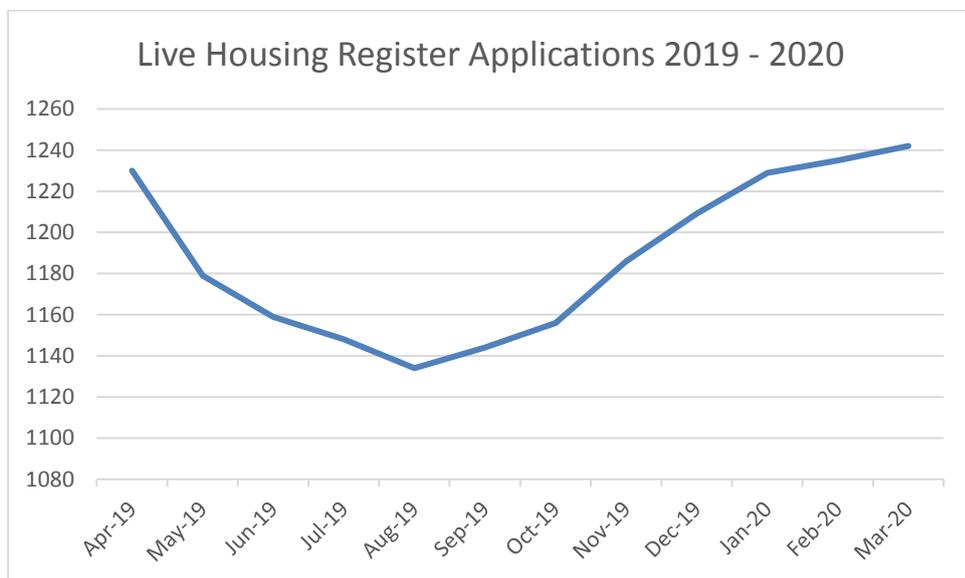
- 1.6.14 Housing First has continued and we accommodated 3 households during the year, meeting the target. Attached to this report, **[Annex 3]**, are 2 case studies provided by the Housing First Support Worker, of two of those who were placed and who were supported under Housing First.
- 1.6.15 At the end of 2019 we worked in partnership with MHCLG to co-produce a further bid for Year 3 Rough Sleeper Initiative funding which was successful and over the 2020 – 2021 financial year, this will allow us to extend the Housing First Project up to 7 units. Clarion, Look ahead and Porchlight continue to work with us on this, supported by the CSU. It will also allow us to continue the Supported Lettings project across Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge working with Look Ahead and allow us to continue working with Porchlight, through the provision of 2 Navigators who work across the districts to support those who are rough sleeping, and who have complex needs. We also secured funding to have a dedicated Young Persons Navigator as this was identified as an issue from our Rough Sleeper estimate by our MHCLG Rough Sleeper Advisor.
- 1.6.16 In addition to Tonbridge and Malling being the lead authority for these projects, we have also been part of two further Year 3 Rough Sleeper Initiative bids. The first of these was with Tunbridge Wells and we secured a Rough Sleeper Coordinator across the 2 areas. This role is for the purpose of coordinating all of these projects across the districts. The second bid was with Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Maidstone for a Nurse and 2 Mental Health Workers to work with those who are Rough Sleeping and those in temporary accommodation.
- 1.6.17 These 2 years of RSI funding together total £410,421 and allows the Council to work closely with key partners to deliver projects specifically for those who are Rough Sleeping (£245,901 year 2 RSI funding for the 2019 – 2020 Financial Year and £164,520 for year 3 RSI funding for the current financial year).

Allocations

- 1.6.18 Applications to the Housing Register are largely online. The graph over the page shows the number of applications submitted to the housing register by month online. Again there was a dip at the end of 2019 at the time of the general election and Christmas, but this was followed by a huge jump in January 2020.



1.6.19 As of 31 March 2020 there were 1242 live applications on the housing register, compared to March 2019 when there were 1222 live applications on the housing register. The following graph shows the number of housing register applications as a snapshot on the last day of each month. Up until August 2019 there was one person dedicated to processing applications, however in August 2019 Management Team approved an additional temporary staff member to support this function. It can be clearly seen that this impacted on the numbers of applications being processed. Despite this the number remains fairly constant between 1150 and 1250 live applications at any one time.



1.6.20 As of the 31 March 2020 the numbers of live applications by band were as set out in the following table

Band	Number as of 31 March 2019	Number as of 31 March 2020	Increase / Decrease
Band A	34	33	-1
Band B	614	639	+25
Band C	340	351	+11
Band D	188	197	+9

1.6.21 The number of applications by month is broken down by bedroom need in the table below

Month	1 bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4+ Bed
Apr-19	637	369	172	78
May-19	605	352	165	74
Jun-19	584	356	160	71
Jul-19	593	342	162	72
Aug-19	596	338	160	73
Sep-19	601	336	164	75
Oct-19	604	326	162	76
Nov-19	611	338	165	78
Dec-19	626	335	170	78
Jan-20	622	340	174	78
Feb-20	631	337	179	83
Mar-20	639	344	176	82

1.6.22 Over the period 01 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 there have been 316 social homes let within the district. The table below shows the accommodation type and the number of lets for that property type for the period. It also shows the shortest waiting times for those property types, the longest waiting times and the average wait for a particular property type.

Accommodation Type	No. of Lets	Shortest wait	Longest wait	Average wait
Sheltered accomm.	21	4 weeks	4 years	8 months
1-bed general needs	92	4 weeks	8 years	16 months
2-bed flat or maisonette	80	11 weeks	4 years	11 months

2-bed house	53	12 weeks	3 years	19 months
3-bed flat or maisonette	3	11 months	13 months	12 months
3-bed house	64	6 weeks	4 years	15 months
4-bed	3	14 months	4 years	30 months

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

- 1.6.23 During 2019 – 2020 we have seen an increase from the 4 families in the district reported in last year's report to 9 households settled in the district, which is one short of the 10 target set for the end of March 2020.
- 1.6.24 The family that were moving when we completed the last report have moved and settled into their new accommodation and we have also moved a further family into a new home.
- 1.6.25 There was also a large family in Sevenoaks and the older daughter had been separated from her husband in the Camps in Syria when she came to the UK with her family. At the time of leaving she was pregnant. During this year we managed to bring him to the UK and reunite them and they are now accommodated with their son, who he had not seen and who is now three and they are living in Tonbridge.
- 1.6.26 Landlords come through a variety of sources including through Tonbridge Welcomes Refugees and word of mouth. To thank the landlords, and volunteers, who are on the scheme and those who support the families, Tonbridge and Malling Council invited them all to an event held at the Castle, and KCC gave a presentation about the scheme, and this was an informal opportunity for those involved to all get together.
- 1.6.27 Kent County Council completed a Tender Exercise during the year and awarded the support contract to Clarion for the district.
- 1.6.28 The Council also administers monthly meetings with all partners involved on the scheme, KCC, Clarion and Tonbridge Welcomes Refugees and this gives partners an opportunity to get updates on families, developments on the scheme and any other relevant information.
- 1.6.29 The Council has agreed to accommodate a further 2 families in 2020 – 2021 via the new vulnerable persons scheme, which covers all areas where there may be refugees in need of a new home, not just those from Syria.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 The Council has a statutory duty to process mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant applications under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

1.7.2 The Council has a statutory duties under Part VI and Part VII of the Housing Act in relation to the allocation of housing and Homelessness.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 The funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant programme is funded through the Council's Better Care Fund allocation.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

Nil

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Jason Wheble
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Eleanor Hoyle
Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health