

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

25 May 2021

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

1.1 Current position

1.1.1 Members last received an update on Temporary Accommodation figures as part of a report to this Advisory Board on 10 November 2020, recommending the adoption of a Temporary Accommodation Policy. The information below provides an update on some key statistics relating to Temporary Accommodation.

1.1.2 The table below details the number of households in TA at the end of the last 3 financial years. Members will note the significant increase in households and an up to date position will also be provided at the meeting.

Household type	31 Mar '19	31 Mar '20	31 Mar '21	
Accommodated under a Power	0	15	30	Not a statutory duty but a response to a government requirement under Rough Sleeper guidance including 'Everybody In' programme and other programmes including Cold Weather Funding.
Relief Duty	29	53	70	s.188 duty; relief from homelessness, 56 days whilst duty is assessed. Occupants on licence. Rent still needs to be paid, T&M meet shortfall. Operate a 3 strikes (on same issue) policy
Main Duty	18	25	30	s.193 duty; main housing duty accepted. Occupants on licence. Rent still needs to be paid, T&M meets shortfall.
TOTAL	47	93	130	

N.B. This will always be a point in time snapshot list as households move on from TA and new placements made. The Housing Solutions Service keeps detailed information on all TA households and the work with them on move on options.

- 1.1.3 When a household approaches the Housing service as potentially homeless, they are asked to complete a triage form to enable the team to assess their case efficiently. This practice was partially introduced in 2018/2019 and utilised consistently from May 2019, hence the non-standard years in the table below. The table below details how many forms the service has dealt with over the past 3 years. Members will note the significant increase in approaches over this time period, which has a direct impact on the level of households in TA, as these are households who may not be able to retain their current accommodation and to whom we may owe a housing duty.

Time period	Number of forms	Average per month
1 Apr 2018 – 30 Apr 2019	135	10
1 May 2019 – 31 Mar 2020	697	63
1 Apr 2020 – 31 Mar 2021	974	81

- 1.1.4 At the same time as a significant rise in demand, the number of available affordable rented properties in the borough, advertised through the Kent wide Home Choice system, has been decreasing. This is likely due to lack of movement in the sector during COVID. This may therefore be a short to medium term issue.

Time period	Number of properties	Average per month
1 Apr 2018 – 31 Mar 2019	480	40
1 Apr 2019 – 31 Mar 2020	309	25
1 Apr 2020 – 31 Mar 2021	256	21

1.2 TA during COVID-19

- 1.2.1 At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, MHCLG launched the 'Everybody In' programme to support Local Authorities in accommodating rough sleepers throughout the pandemic in self-contained accommodation to mitigate the public health risks. This programme has since been replaced with subsequent funding programmes designed to secure longer term accommodation for this cohort of households and to see a permanent and significant reduction in rough sleeping. A number of these households have now moved on from TA, but there are some waiting for suitable move on accommodation to be secured.
- 1.2.2 Some of the longer term potential impacts of the pandemic on TA provision include the extension of the furlough scheme until September 2021, which may

mean that households are able to maintain their accommodation for a longer time period and the impacts of their work situation aren't fully known until later and also the backlog in court processes and the stays on evictions, which will mean that the lag time between issues arising and households potentially being in a position to need our support may be much longer than usual.

1.3 Homelessness Prevention Agenda

- 1.3.1 The prevention agenda is now central to government policy and programmes relating to housing. The term relates not only to the basic tenet of working to ensure that no one is without a home but also the goal of ensuring that there are sufficient, long term and sustainable housing solutions for everyone. Part of this is an aim to reduce both the numbers of households in TA, which by its very nature is not settled housing, and reducing the amount of time that households spend in TA. At present, one of our key opportunities to prevent homelessness in this way is through discharge of duties into the private rented sector.
- 1.3.2 Members previously approved a pilot Landlord Incentive Scheme in November 2020. This scheme was based on incentivising landlords to rent to tenants who were seeking housing via the Council, so therefore may be in receipt of benefits. There are financial introductory incentives and rent guarantees for the early stages of a tenancy to allow time for the tenant to embed into the arrangement. The scheme details are attached to this report as **Annex 1**. To date, we have had 11 enquiries to the Housing Team for the scheme and 1 successful letting. The scheme has been funded from the Discretionary Housing Payments budget and the Homelessness Reduction Initiatives budget.
- 1.3.3 The current low take up is considered likely to be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is due to the fact that any such scheme requires landlords having empty properties to let and given the restrictions over movement and court proceedings over the past 18 months, the usual level of turnover in properties has been significantly reduced.
- 1.3.4 Members are asked to endorse the extension of this pilot for a further 6 months to allow officers to continue to work with landlords as COVID restrictions reduce and to collect more data on our current pilot offer before proposing a permanent Landlord Incentive Scheme to Members with a view to this being included in budget proposals for the 2022/23 financial year.

1.4 Managing Demand for TA

- 1.4.1 Officers have been working closely with our largest RP partner, Clarion, to ensure that we make best use of their available housing stock. An arrangement has been in place for some time to utilise a small number of units for TA and during the pandemic, due to a very small supply of properties, the team established a 'Property Panel' where each available property was assessed to ensure it was utilised to strike a balance between the competing demands of general letting to those on the housing waiting list, the need for temporary accommodation and the

use of units for specific schemes such as Housing First. This approach proved very successful and remains in place for more complex properties (such as large units or sheltered properties) but has been replaced with a general agreement with Clarion that every second 2 bedroom property will be discussed between officers before being let to assess the suitability for use as TA.

- 1.4.2 As per previous updates to Members, a TA procurement exercise is being undertaken to manage the cost and supply of privately provided units. It is hoped that this approach of a longer term arrangement will provide TMBC and private providers with cost certainty. The tender exercise will be undertaken in May/June 2021.
- 1.4.3 The project to convert 4 houses on Pembury Road into 12 units of TA has now been submitted for planning approval. The Cabinet Member and ward Members have been briefed and letters sent to neighbouring properties to update them. Stage 4 (detailed) design work will now be undertaken by Kier; this stage includes confirming prices with their supply chain and providing additional cost certainty. It is envisaged that this next stage of financial information will be available to officers in time to report to Full Council on 13 July regarding final budget position and delivery timetable, which is likely to be 16-20 weeks after the Council decision, with some potential reductions for sectional completion of the scheme (i.e. some units may become available ahead of final completion). However, due to the committee schedule, there will not be an opportunity to report the detailed budget and programme position to an advisory board prior to the Council meeting. Therefore, the Cabinet Members for Housing and Finance, Innovation & Property and the Chairs of this Advisory Board and the Finance, Property and Innovation Advisory Board will be consulted ahead of the report being published for Council to ensure appropriate Member engagement in the process.
- 1.4.4 In general, the opportunity to own and manage TA directly represents potential ongoing revenue savings. This is not an absolute rule as there are many factors including maintenance and staffing costs, LHA rates and the source of the capital for the purchase. However, there are potential purchase opportunities ranging from individual properties to groups of units that may be suitable for TA and officers are recommending that a process is put in place to allow those to be considered on the basis of some agreed criteria and for officers to be able to make some initial progress with the offer process outwith the formal Member approval process. This second point is due to the fact that the property market often moves at a pace that is not matched by the Council's approval processes. A proposed procedure note is attached at **Annex 2** of this report for Member's consideration. Officers are intending to develop this further following Member comments and present a final procedure for approval to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board in due course. Members should note that at present, no specific budget has been identified for this area of work. There may be opportunities to utilise development contributions or the Council's own funds but these would be presented to Members as needed.

1.5 Improving supply of settled housing options

- 1.5.1 Whilst we are working hard to ensure we can meet our statutory requirements to accommodate households, we are also working closely with partners including RPs to ensure a good supply chain of settled affordable accommodation options for residents. This work includes regular meetings with RP partners to ensure good communication between operational teams, discussions on nomination agreements, early notification of completion of new build properties so that Local Lettings Plans can be put in place and discussions about potential development opportunities.
- 1.5.2 It is also important that we have appropriate policies in place to manage affordable housing delivery, supported by robust data. An Affordable Housing Delivery Statement will be presented to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board this summer to provide guidance on how officers will work with applicants to ensure suitable affordable housing supply. This work will be supported by a Housing Needs survey and supporting research, which will be undertaken in the coming months, that has agreed funding from the Housing Strategy budget.

1.6 Legal Implications

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.7.1 The 21/22 budget position for TA is laid out below.

Spend on Suppliers	£1,500,000
Receipt from Housing benefits & service recharges	-£797,250
Bad Debt Provision	£25,000
Rent from own Properties	-£120,400
Maintenance of own buildings (all "2" costs in budget book)	£30,000
Floating support for Union St (included in professional fees)	£22,500
Net Expenditure exc Gov Grants	£659,850

Notes: 1. there are other costs associated with TA that appear in the Housing Benefits budget. 2. The position on Pembury Road units becoming available will decrease the income from 'rent from own properties' in the current year. 3. Subject to Members' agreement on use of Homelessness Prevention Grant, some of the available funding will be utilised to offset TA costs.

- 1.7.2 In the Medium Term Financial Strategy, there is an assumption that the Council's net spend on TA will return to pre-COVID levels over a period of 4 financial years, starting from the 2022/23 financial year. In those years, additional provision has been made in the MTFs to seek to meet the additional costs of TA. The projects laid out in this report are the first stage of managing that required budget

reduction. However, it is important to note that homelessness prevention activity will be key in reducing the need for TA and therefore costs to the Council, as reducing unit costs can only go so far.

- 1.7.3 The proposed extension of the pilot Landlord Incentive falls within the Council's budgetary framework, as there are established budgets for Discretionary Housing Payments and Homelessness Reduction Initiatives budget. There is also potential to utilise the Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding for any rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.9 Policy Considerations

- 1.9.1 Customer Contact

- 1.9.2 Procurement

1.10 Recommendations

Members are asked to;

- 1.10.1 **APPROVE** the extension of the pilot Landlord Incentive Scheme for an additional 6 months;
- 1.10.2 **NOTE** the progress on the Pembury Road TA project and **ENDORSE** the proposed Member engagement approach; and
- 1.10.3 **ENDORSE** the proposed approach to future TA related property opportunities and **NOTE** that, if endorsed, these proposals will form part of a wider report to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board in due course.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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