

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD**

**20 July 2021**

**Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Information**

**1 HOUSING SERVICE ACTIVITY REPORT**

**This report updates Members on the activity of the Housing Service for 2020/21 including a capital plan review for an IT system implemented within the Housing Solutions team.**

**1.1 Housing Solutions Activity**

1.1.1 This section of the report covers activity within the Housing Solutions Service, which covers the areas of Homelessness and the Housing Register, for the period April 2020 – March 2021.

1.1.2 A key achievement for the service, was the efficient response to the Covid crisis with minimum disruption to the service for applicants. Despite the challenges faced, and the constant reacting to change resulting from the pandemic, particularly to Government Legislative and Policy Changes in the initial stages of the crisis, the service was able to maintain its offer to those households who approached as homeless, and for assistance with the housing register, virtually, and continue to meet the Councils statutory duties in relation to these functions.

1.1.3 As well as the continuation of the day-to-day delivery of the service, there were also the challenges of dealing with those who were rough sleeping on the streets and the call at the end of March 2020 by Dame Louise Casey to bring Everyone In. The year ended with Rough Sleepers being made a priority group for the vaccination and this involved us working with key partners with the aim of ensuring all those who we had remaining in were registered with a GP and then had access to a vaccine if they chose to have it and the mobilisation of this group to achieve this.

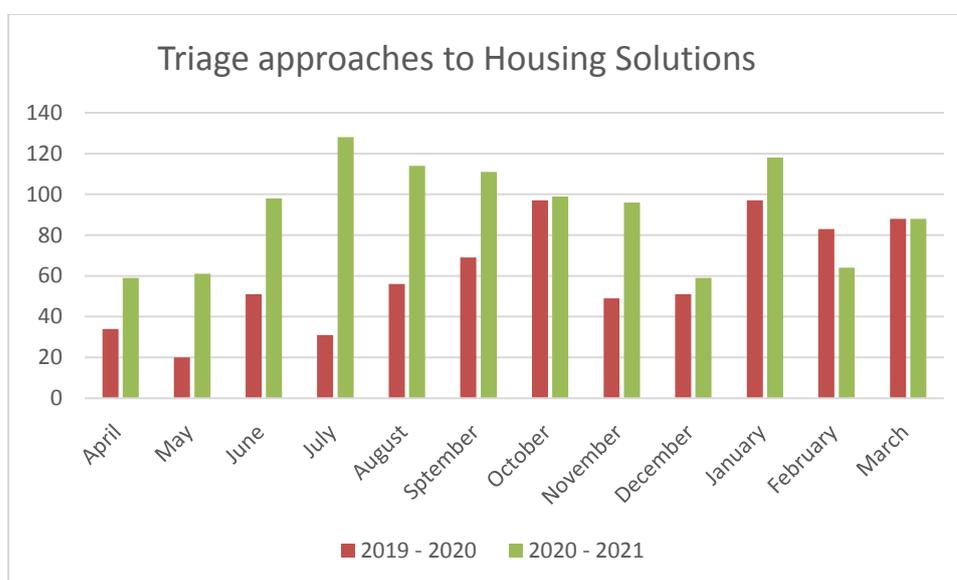
1.1.4 During the year a restructure was also completed, and the Housing Options and Support Service has been renamed the Housing Solutions Service.

**Access to the Housing Solutions Service**

1.1.5 This section looks at access to the service and first point of contact for the Homelessness element of the service.

1.1.6 Regardless of the outcomes of the approach, this section looks at the footfall into Housing Solutions. This is captured as all applicants who have a homeless issue is asked to complete our online triage form. The triage role reported as being implemented and fully embedded in the service in the last activity report for 2019 – 2020 continues to operate, and the Officers role has been remodelled to not only focus on the first point of contact, but what can also be done on approach to try and prevent or relieve homelessness. In 2019 – 2020 we had 726 approaches to the service, and in 2020 – 2021 this went up to 1095, an increase of 50%. Households triaged by month are shown in figure 1 below. Approaches for this year increased most months, the only exception being February 2021. Replicating last year, the numbers decreased most in December.

Figure 1 – Approaches to the Homeless Service



1.1.7 However, we also have a generic Housing Service email inbox, which continues to be utilised 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 October 2019 and for the last 6 months of 2019 – 2020 the service received 4716 emails. For the year 2020 – 2021 the service received 11,955 emails into this inbox over the 12-month period.

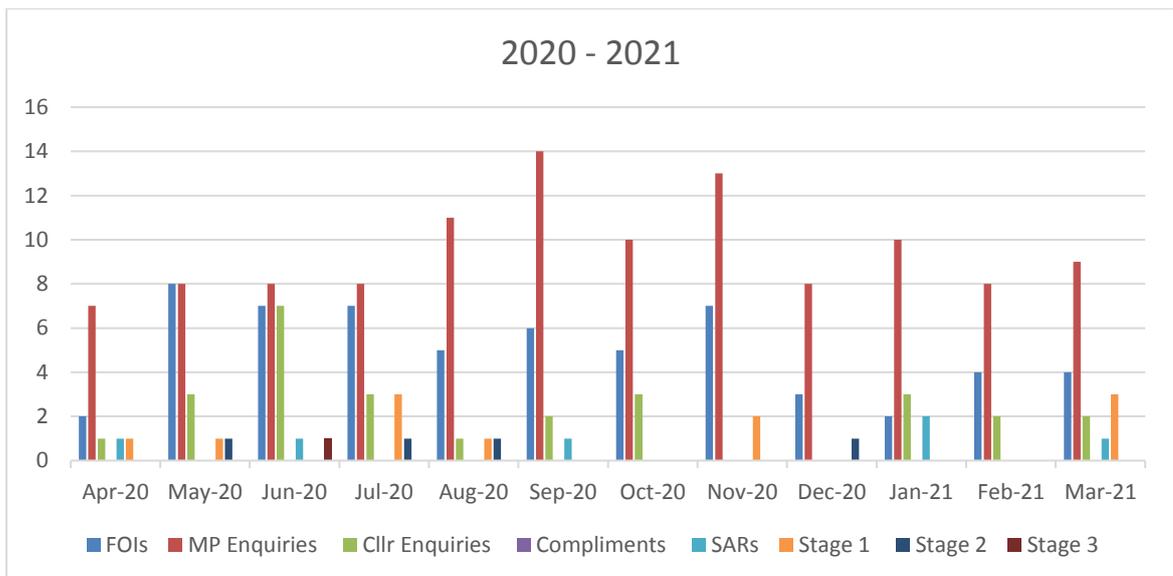
1.1.8 Being a front-line service, it is inevitable that the service receives several additional requests. This includes MP and Councillor Enquiries, Freedom of Information requests, as well as Complaints. The table below sets out how many of each were received over the year, and the previous year, into the Housing Solutions Service. Figure 2 graph shows that the service deals mainly with MP enquiries. However, despite the challenges of Covid, we received fewer Stage 1 complaints into the service this year, and the trend continues that when we receive stage 1 complaints a small number of these go on to become stage 2 and for the 2020 – 2021 we received only one stage 3 complaint, 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. Enquires did not lessen during December as per the previous year.

Table 1 – Total number of enquiries and complaints to the service

Enquiry type	2019 – 2020	2020 - 2021
FOIs	59	59
MP Enquiries	83	114
Cllr Enquiries	4	27
Compliments	1	0
SARs	3	6
Stage 1	15	11
Stage 2	4	4
Stage 3	0	1
Total	169	222

Figure 2 – Enquires by type and month



1.1.9 In addition, the service received 33 requests for reviews of Part VI applications. This is a reduction of 14 on the previous year. Of these 19 have been concluded with 5 upheld, 5 overturned and 3 others (withdrawn) and 4 being rehoused before the review was completed, 1 application was removed, and one case was closed. 14 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.

### Homeless Applications

1.1.10 1267 cases were opened during the year, compared to 1029 the previous year, which is a 23% increase. This was all case types including advice and

assistance, prevention and relief, and acceptance of the main housing duty. Of these 92 households were prevented from becoming homeless, which was a decrease on the previous year (where 129 cases were prevented) and 213 had their homelessness relieved, (an increase on the previous year from 186). This evidences that households seemed to be approaching at a later stage once the opportunities for preventing their homelessness had passed, and in part due to Everyone in, where we accommodated those who were rough sleeping, and or who might have rough slept had we not made accommodation available, and we accepted a relief duty to them. We made a s184 decision on 96 households of which 65 were accepted as homeless and we owed them the main housing duty, 4 not homeless decisions, 26 were not considered to be in priority need and 1 intentionally homeless household.

### Temporary Accommodation

1.1.11 The Council has seen a continued increase in numbers accessing Emergency and Temporary Accommodation (TA). In our last report we advised that as of 31 March 2020 there were 95 households accommodated by the Council and advised that this figure included all those who we had accommodated under our winter provision and who had their stays extended, due to the “Everyone in” announcement made by Dame Louise Casey on 27 March 2020. The continuation of this drive to move rough sleepers from the streets and to prevent new rough sleepers meant that we accommodated further households over the year under a power rather than any duty and we also continued to accommodate those who approached who we had reason to believe were eligible, homeless and had a priority need. On the 31 March 2021 we had 130 in TA and this is an increase of 35 households from the previous year.

### Rough Sleepers

1.1.12 The Council undertook its annual Rough Sleeper Estimate on the night of Tuesday 24 November 2020 into the morning of Wednesday 25 November 2020. Table 2 shows the figures for the last 4 years, including the 2020 estimate which saw numbers remain the same as the previous year.

Table 2 – Annual Rough Sleeper snapshot

Year	Number
2017	8
2018	12
2019	6
2020	6

- 1.1.13 Despite the efforts around everyone in there remains 2 very entrenched rough sleepers in the district, who, despite ongoing attempts to accommodate and an open-ended offer of accommodation should either of them wish to come in, remain on the streets. However, over the course of 2020 – 2021, the outreach service, navigators, Housing First Support Worker and the Complex Needs Care Nurse made regular outreach visits to them to check on their health and wellbeing, check them for any signs of Covid and generally offered support.
- 1.1.14 The Council triggered SWEP on 6 separate occasions during the October 2020 – March 2021 period and had this active for a total of 52 nights. Over this period the Council provided accommodation to 19 unique individuals.
- 1.1.15 In 2019 – 2020 as reported in last year’s report we accommodated 17 Rough Sleepers through the extended winter provision. 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. The council went on to accommodate an additional 38 unique households who at the start of the pandemic were either rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping with the threshold being very low. However, as the crisis went on, the requirement was put in place that any Rough Sleepers had to be verified as rough sleeping to be offered any accommodation. Verification was based on the definition of Rough Sleeping set out by MHCLG and the one that is used for the annual count.
- 1.1.16 27 of these households had been rehoused at the end of the period into differing sorts of accommodation, including supported, social housing and private rented tenancies
- 1.1.17 As reported in the last Activity Report, we had been successful in securing Year 3 Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and this allowed us to extend out Housing First Project from 3 to 7 units. By the end of the financial year all 7 units were filled, with no evictions to date and all of those who have been placed are sustaining successful tenancies.
- 1.1.18 However, we were also the lead authority for several other projects funded via RSI monies across West Kent, the supported lettings project, which is delivered via Look Ahead, Complex Needs Navigators delivered by Porchlight and we also secured funding for a Young Persons Navigator.
- 1.1.19 Tunbridge Wells included in their bid to MHCLG provision for a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator, for them and Tonbridge and Malling and we successfully recruited to this role and now share this.
- 1.1.20 The second bid which Tonbridge and Malling were part of, with Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Maidstone was for a Complex Care Needs Nurse and 2 Mental

Health Workers to work with those who are Rough Sleeping and those in temporary accommodation.

- 1.1.21 Below is a table which sets out total funding Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council has received from the RSI funding, to date from MHCLG to assist with Rough Sleeping in the district.

Table 3 – total funding from MHCLG to prevent Rough Sleeping in the district

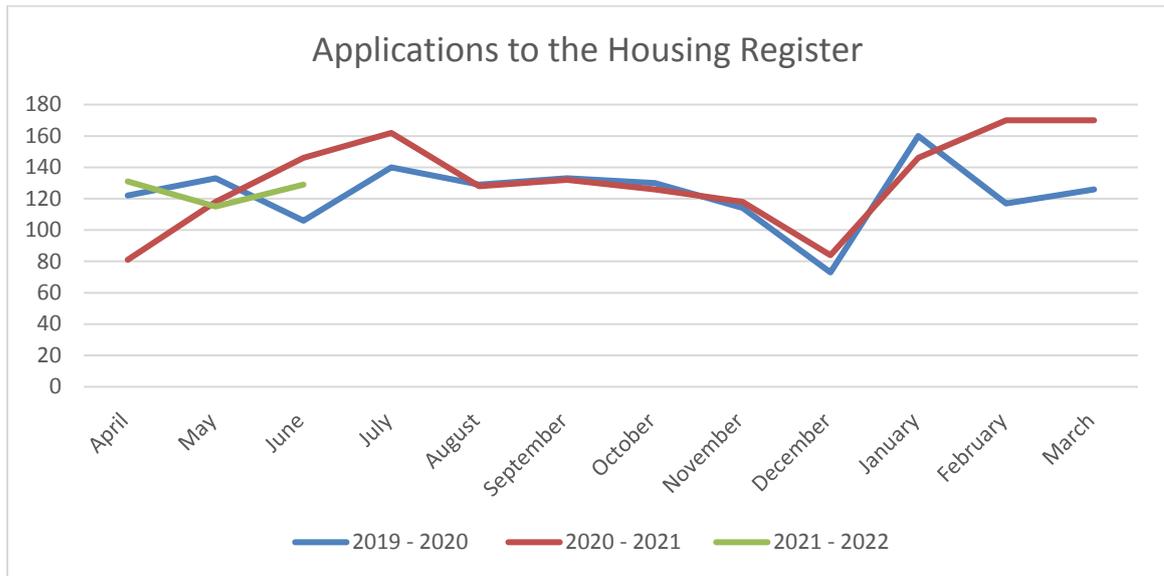
Year	Amount
Year 2	£245,901
Year 3	£164,520
Year 4	£330,500
Total for 3 years	£740,921

- 1.1.22 The RSI funded service along with the Outreach Service for Tonbridge and Malling which is contracted by Kent County Council, means that we can react quickly to any reports of Rough Sleepers, and ensure that they have the support required to move them away from the street and find settled and sustainable housing.

### **Allocations**

- 1.1.23 Applications to the Housing Register are largely online. Figure 4 shows the number of applications submitted to the housing register by month online. There was an increase in applications over the summer in 2020 from the previous year, and then similarly there was a dip around December 2020, but there has been a marked increase in applications since January 2021.

Figure 3 – Applications to the Housing Register



1.1.24 As of 31 March 2021, there were 1170 live applications on the housing register, a decrease from March 2020 when there were 1242 live applications on the housing register, and 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.

1.1.25 As of the 31 March 2020 the numbers of live applications by band were as set out in table 4

Table 4 – Applications broken down by Band

Band	Number as of 31 March 2019	Number as of 31 March 2020	Number as of 31 March 2021
Band A	34	33	23
Band B	614	639	608
Band C	340	351	364
Band D	188	197	175

1.1.26 The number of applications by month is broken down by bedroom need in table 5 below

Table 5 Applications by bedroom need

Month	1 bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4+ Bed
Apr -20	641	338	179	86
May - 20	651	339	185	86
Jun - 20	641	345	188	86
Jul - 20	634	344	184	90
Aug - 20	632	336	190	89
Sep - 20	631	335	187	89
Oct - 20	611	326	182	85
Nov - 20	607	334	186	88
Dec - 20	608	324	183	89
Jan - 21	595	319	184	89
Feb - 21	590	313	182	88
Mar - 21	584	312	184	91

1.1.27 Table 6 shows accommodation type and the number of lets for that property type for the period and compares this to the last year. It also shows average wait for a particular property type.

1.1.28 In 2019 – 2020 there were 317 homes for let and in 2020 – 2021 this reduced to 258. Average waiting times for all property types increased, meaning that people are waiting longer for an offer of social housing.

Table 6 – Lets and average waiting times

Accommodation Type	No. of Lets		Average wait	
	2019 - 2020	2020 – 2021	2019 - 2020	2020 – 2021
Sheltered accomm.	21	22	8 months	15 months
Studio general needs	1	2	10 weeks	3 years
1-bed general needs	92	86	16 months	20 months
2-bed flat or maisonette	80	71	11 months	18 months
2-bed house	53	31	19 months	21 months
3-bed flat or maisonette	3	1	12 months	17 months
3-bed house	64	43	15 months	26 months
4-bed	3	2	30 months	34 months

## Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

- 1.1.29 Following us to agreeing to an additional 2 families taking our total to 12 families in the district which had just been agreed ahead of the last activity report, the UK resettlement Scheme was put on hold due to the Covid Crisis and no families were allowed to come to the UK for most of the last year, therefore our number remained at 9 for most of the year.
- 1.1.30 However, the scheme began again at the start of the 2021 and we have since welcomed 2 new families into the district, one in January and one in February.
- 1.1.31 The first family to arrive, whose 5 years of support was due to end in April 2021 moved away from the area in early April and as such we now have 10 families in the district.
- 1.1.32 There are currently 4 families identified who are in refugee camps who are ready to come, and should any homes become available, then we will work with Kent County Council, Clarion and Tonbridge Welcomes Refugees to take us to our quota of 12.
- 1.1.33 The Council continues to support the 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.

## 1.2 Housing Improvement Team Activity

- 1.2.1 The Housing Improvement Team responded to a total of 164 service requests for the year April 2020 to March 2021. The breakdown of the service requests are shown below:

<b>Service request activity</b>	<b>Number of requests</b>
Housing conditions	97
Illegal eviction/ landlord harassment	5
Caravan site	2
Empty homes	6
Immigration	0
Rent deposit	19
HMO enquiries	15
Public health funerals	7
Hospital Discharge Scheme	11
One You	2

<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>
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- 1.2.2 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.
- 1.2.3 As a result one landlord was served Improvement Notices under s.11 and s.12 Housing Act 2004 to undertake repairs to remedy excess cold, fire, damp and mould hazards and to make improvements to reduce a category 2 hazard relating to falling on level surfaces.
- 1.2.4 An owner of an empty property was served a notice under s.29 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 requiring them to make the property secure. The owner did not comply therefore the Council carried out these works in default and recharged the owner for them.
- 1.2.5 Two new house in multiple occupation (HMO) licences were issued and one HMO licence renewed.
- 1.2.6 One caravan site licence was transferred to a new owner and nil new caravan site licences issued.
- 1.2.7 For the period April 2020 to March 2021 a total of £728,435 was spent on mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and 90 DFG cases were completed.
- 1.2.8 Those completed cases were for the following works:
- Access to bedroom – 2 cases
  - Provision of ground floor bedroom/bathroom facilities – 3 cases
  - Provision of a stair lift or through floor lift – 16 cases
  - Provision of a kitchen – 1 case
  - Provision of level access shower facilities, wet room or bathroom adaptations – 45 cases
  - Over bath shower – 1 case
  - Improving access – 18 cases
  - Provision of a hard standing – 2 case
  - Safety related works – 1 case

- Relocation – 1 case
- Other, including additional WC facilities, kitchen works and specialist baths – 16 cases.

1.2.9 There may be grants in 1.2.8 that cover more than one area of work and therefore the numbers will not add up to the total number of grants completed.

1.2.10 For the period April 2020 to March 2021 a total of £38,466 was spent on discretionary Housing Assistance and 24 cases were completed. These completed cases included:

1.2.11 Six Warm Homes Assistance cases for heating related works.

1.2.12 One Home Improvements Assistance to replace windows, doors and a boiler.

1.2.13 Seventeen Home Safety Assistance cases to undertake minor works to improve resident's safety.

### **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.

1.3.2 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.

1.3.3 In February 2021 the average realised saving for a resident on a standard variable tariff was £143 and £57 for a resident on a fixed tariff inside switch window (when any exit fee is usually not applied). As there was only one individual switcher for fixed tariff outside the 'switch window' an average realised saving figure is not available. For the 51 switchers living in our area this is a collective Carbon saving of 48 tonnes equivalent to 26 cars off the road (1.83 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>\*) or 48 return flights to New York (1.01 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>\*\*).

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

\*\* Carbon saving figure provided by iChoosr

The winners of the May Auction 2021 both supply green electricity tariffs and we are currently awaiting details of the average saving for residents.

Unfortunately, we understand from iChoosr that wholesale energy prices are at a three year high and have increased by more than a third since the February auction. The gradual increase in wholesale energy prices has resulted in many suppliers being unable to offer commercially viable fixed tariffs below the current Ofgem tariff cap.

- 1.3.4 The next registration period will open on 3 August 2021 with the auction taking place on 12 October 2021. 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 Solar Together**

- 1.4.1 Working in partnership with iChoosr, Kent County Council and most of the district, borough and unitary councils in Kent, Solar Together reached out to residents to drive engagement in the purchase of solar panels & storage through this group-buying scheme.
- 1.4.2 546 TMBC residents registered for Solar PV with a further 50 registrations for retrofit battery storage, totalling 596 registrations. 123 accepting the deal they were offered, of which 109 were for Solar PV and 14 for retrofit storage. For Solar PV this equates to a take up rate of 19.90% against the target rate of 15%.
- 1.4.3 Of 123 acceptances in the TMBC area 74% have completed on-site surveys as at 28 June 2021, which will rise to 89% once booked surveys are completed. 13 residents are yet to book an on-site survey.
- 1.4.4 22 installs have been completed and a further 15 installs have been booked in as at 28 June 2021.
- 1.4.5 30 TMBC residents have dropped out of the scheme post acceptance to date. A variety of reasons have been given, including roof not suitable for PV panels, layout of cable run, fewer PV panels possible than expected, financial reasons.
- 1.4.6 To date 251 PV panels have been installed which equates to Year 1 CO2 reduction kg 20,590 (note the number of panels installed is estimated based on the average, as the panel figures for week commencing 5 July were not available at time of writing this report).

## **1.5 Affordable Housing Delivery update**

- 1.5.1 Officers continue to work with Registered Provider partners to ensure a forward supply of affordable homes in the Borough.
- 1.5.2 The spreadsheet in **Annex 1** shows the schemes completed in 2019/20, 2020/21 and those due to come forward in 2021/22.

- 1.5.3 A new extra care housing scheme in Watlington completed in winter 2020 with Rapport Housing and Care. Meadow View Court provides 51 apartments (a mix of one and two bedrooms) for rent, purchase through Older Persons Shared Ownership (OPSO) and market sale. Apartments for rent were advertised through Choice Based Lettings for households on the Housing Register.
- 1.5.4 The Peters village development in Wouldham is continuing with Hyde and Moat both having affordable homes complete in 2020 and future phases due over the coming months.
- 1.5.5 Clarion Housing Association are developing homes on Kings Hill phase 3, with some completions in winter 2020 and more following in July 2021. The development will provide 112 affordable homes in total, for rent (a mix of social and affordable rents) and shared ownership. A Local Lettings Plan has been agreed for this development, giving highest priority to households with a local connection to the immediate area (Kings Hill, West Malling & Leybourne wards).

## **1.6 Pembury Road, Tonbridge**

- 1.6.1 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. The purchase of four adjacent town houses in Pembury Road, Tonbridge completed in March 2020 on the basis of the potential to convert and provide 12 units for TA.
- 1.6.2 Property Services have arranged project and contract management for the conversion of the four houses with Kier under the Scape framework. The project team are looking at delivery options due to supply chain cost increases and a report will go to FIP and Council in the next cycle of meetings.
- 1.6.3 In light of the increased need for TA and resources pressures relating to the COVID19 pandemic one of the houses was used for TA from July 2020 to March 2021.

## **1.7 Capital plan review for I.T system**

- 1.7.1 Attached at **Annex 2** is a capital plan post implementation review in respect of the Housing Document Management System that was originally reported into this Board and subsequently agreed at Cabinet in 2016. This was a system is required by Housing Services to manage documents and records digitally. It was an expansion of the Northgate Information@Work system already in use by Revenues and Benefits staff.

## **1.8 Legal Implications**

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

1.8.2 The Council has statutory duties relating to housing conditions and HMOs under the Housing Act 2004.

1.8.3 The Council has a statutory duty under Parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 linked to Allocation of Social Housing and Homelessness and the provision of Temporary Accommodation.

## **1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.9.1 The Housing Service have been extremely successful in obtaining funding from MHCLG for Rough Sleeper focussed work.

1.9.2 A capital plan post implementation review in respect of the Housing Document Management System is included within this report.

## **1.10 Risk Assessment**

1.10.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Claire Keeling  
Jason Wheble  
Gillian Aylett

Eleanor Hoyle  
Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health