

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

10 November 2014

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

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

#### 1 HOUSING NEEDS UPDATE

##### Summary

The Council's Housing Options team continues to promote the prevention of homelessness and address the housing needs of local residents. The number of households seeking advice and/or applying to the Housing Register for social housing has remained significantly high as a result of the economic downturn.

#### 1.1 Housing options, Prevention and Homelessness

Month	Contact Made	Homeless Applications	Advice Only	Prevented	Relieved	Open
April 2014	69	3	42	11	0	6
May 2014	74	1	56	11	0	4
June 2014	56	3	44	7	0	4
July 2014	63	6	50	4	0	4
Aug 2014	52	9	35	4	0	8
Sept 2014	64	7	27	1	0	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>59</b>

1.1.1 The table above illustrates the number of customers seen by the Housing Options Team since the start of the financial year both in person and via the telephone advice service. Members will note that the majority of our customers make contact for advice to help them keep their homes or are seeking assistance to find alternative accommodation. However, as can also be seen, the number of households making homeless applications has increased, as have the numbers that the Council has accepted a statutory homeless duty towards.

1.1.2 This increase in homeless approaches is not unique to Tonbridge & Malling. This trend has been seen across the county with all Kent authorities reporting a significant rise in applications.

1.1.3 The increase in homeless presentations has in turn led to an increase in the use of temporary accommodation as shown in table 1.2.1 below. Not only has the usage increased but the average length of stay has also risen due to a number of factors discussed in 1.2 below.

## 1.2 Numbers in Temporary Accommodation

1.2.1 The following table gives the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Number in self contained Temporary Accommodation (AST)</b>	<b>Number in self contained Temporary Accommodation (nightly paid)</b>	<b>Number in traditional Bed &amp; Breakfast</b>	<b>Total</b>
30.04.14	3	10	0	13
31.05.14	3	11	0	14
30.06.14	3	10	0	13
31.07.14	3	10	3	16
31.08.14	3	16	4	23
30.09.14	3	16	3	22

1.2.2 As mentioned above, the increase in homeless presentations has led to an increase in the number of households being accommodated pending a decision on their application.

1.2.3 The number of households remaining for longer periods can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, over the last four months the availability of suitable and affordable accommodation in the private rented sector has diminished along with the willingness landlords to accept clients referred by the Council. The issue is further compounded as landlords are able to command rent levels well in excessive of the local housing allowance rates.

1.2.4 Not only has this impacted on our ability to discharge our homeless duty in the private rented sector it has also affected the number of households we have been able to assist through our Rent/Deposit Bond Scheme and consequently having an adverse impact on our ability to prevent homelessness. Furthermore, our current Housing Allocations Scheme awards a Band C priority to households to whom we have accepted a statutory homeless duty, resulting in longer waiting times than if they were placed in a higher Band.

1.2.5 There are a number of work streams that we are currently being progressed to help reduce the use of and length of stay in temporary accommodation. We are:

- redirecting existing resources to understand the private rented sector in more detail and source properties appropriately. The Housing Options Team is working jointly with the Private Sector Housing Team to arrange visits to local Letting Agents to gain an understanding of what services would incentivise landlords to work more closely with the Council in securing accommodation;
- working with our Registered Provider Partners, in particular Circle Housing Russet Homes, to make direct offers of accommodation outside of Choice Based Lettings so that we can move some of the households on in a more timely manner into more suitable accommodation;
- having dialogue with our Registered Provider Partners to reach an agreement for a handful of existing general needs, self-contained properties to be used as emergency accommodation as an alternative to Bed & Breakfast;
- assessing the feasibility of the Council procuring accommodation on the open market for use as emergency accommodation; and
- undertaking a joint Procurement exercise with some of our neighbouring authorities to improve standards, drive down costs and increase the availability of local short term emergency accommodation. Currently we are placing some households outside of the County.

### 1.3 Rent Deposit Scheme

The table below shows the number of households who have been assisted to secure alternative accommodation in the private sector to prevent them from becoming homeless. You will note that the number of cash loans has reduced in favour of our cashless scheme. As well as being an initial saving to the Council, the cashless scheme is clearly a more affordable option for the customer, who would be expected to repay a cash loan. As well as promoting our cashless scheme to private landlords, we are also encouraging customers in receipt of housing benefit to access discretionary housing payments (DHP) to cover rent in advance payments.

Month	Number of Loans approved	Bonds	Customers assisted into a private rented property without a deposit loan or bond	Total
April 2014	1	1	0	2
May 2014	0	2	2	4
June 2014	0	1	1	2
July 2014	0	2	2	4
Aug 2014	1	1	1	3
Sept 2014	0	1	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>

## **1.4 New Accommodation Scheme for Young People**

- 1.4.1 We are delighted to inform members that the Council in partnership with Circle Housing Russet is piloting a shared accommodation scheme for single households aged between 18-25 years.
- 1.4.2 An existing three bedroomed Circle Housing Russet property in Tonbridge has been converted to a house in multiple occupation and will be available as a house share for three sharers aged between 18 and 25 years. These sharers will be applicants who have applied to the Council's housing waiting list along with those ready to move on from the Young Persons supported accommodation scheme on New Wharf Road. The scheme is targeted at those applicants who are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance, or economically active on low wages who in reality would not be able to afford to sustain a self-contained home. The sharers once selected from a short-list prepared by the Council will be issued with a licence agreement and will be given support from Circle Housing Russet's Tenancy Support Team for help to find training and employment opportunities. Initially, the rooms will be allocated outside of choice based lettings. If successful, Circle Housing Russet has already expressed an interest in extending the scheme. .

## **1.5 Housing Options Process Mapping**

- 1.5.1 We are currently reviewing the way we deliver the Housing Options Service. We are keen to understand our customer's perspective from when they first approach the service to when their housing difficulties are hopefully resolved with our assistance. We want to understand why they come to us for help and what their expectations are.
- 1.5.2 We are very interested to understand our customers' perception of how the housing register and the housing options service work together.
- 1.5.3 The aim of the process is to look in detail at what we do currently with a view to making changes that will improve the customers' journey and inform the future design and structure of the Housing Service.

## **1.6 Out of Hours**

- 1.6.1 Since the Housing Needs Team took over the responsibility for delivering an Out of Hours Service for homeless customers in the Borough on 1 April 2014, there have been 19 calls resulting in five households being placed in emergency accommodation until the next working day. The service is working well and providing continuity and consistency for customers.

## **1.7 Supporting People Update**

1.7.1 Kent County Council are in the process of reviewing the Supporting People (SP) programme in line with their wider transformation programme “Facing the Challenge”. The review has three main strands:

- Strategy & priorities;
- Services and integration; and
- Governance.

1.7.2 Services currently provided through SP have been captured under 4 main client groups:

- Young People;
- Older People;
- People with Disabilities; and
- Socially excluded groups (single homeless, homeless families, rough sleepers, offenders, victims of domestic abuse, gypsy and travellers and ex service personnel).

1.7.3 Under current proposals it has been suggested that the services provided to the first three groups will be integrated into existing County Council structures either within the Children or Adult Directorates. The rationale behind this is to avoid duplication and streamline the commissioning of services for which the County Council has a statutory responsibility.

1.7.4 There are no proposals as yet in respect of the socially excluded groups. A discussion paper will be tabled at the County Council’s Cabinet Committee on 4 December 2014 in respect of future arrangements for services that are currently provided through the Supporting People Programme.

1.7.5 Following the Committee meeting the findings will be presented to the meeting of the Supporting People Commissioning Body in January 2015.

1.7.6 At the time of writing the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Housing are preparing written representations to the County Council to influence the future of the programme in terms of both service priorities and budget allocations.

## 1.8 Housing Register

1.8.1 The table below shows the number of applicants joining and leaving the housing register, including home seekers (those applying for their first social tenancy) and transfers (existing social tenants applying for a move).

Month	New Applications Received	Applications Cancelled	Number on Housing Register
April 2014	143	96	1,122 (398 Transfers)
May 2014	107	146	1,178 (426 Transfers)
June 2014	108	95	1,231 (437 Transfers)
July 2014	108	114	1,218 (439 Transfers)
August 2014	83	73	1,245 (451 Transfers)
September 2014	110	72	1,307 (460 Transfers)
TOTAL	659	598	

1.8.2 The following table gives the breakdown of applicants who have been housed through Choice Based Lettings since the beginning of the financial year:

Month	Home seekers	Transfers	Total
April 2014	26 (53%)	23 (47%)	49
May 2014	16 (55%)	13 (45%)	29
June 2014	16 (50%)	16 (50%)	32
July 2014	32 (86%)	5 (14%)	37
August 2014	15 (56%)	12 (44%)	27
September 2014	21 (78%)	6 (22%)	27

## 1.9 Choice Based Lettings

1.9.1 Following the success of the daily bidding pilot, Swale Borough Council and Amicus Horizon have now fully implemented the new system to allocate their socially rented properties. Other partners of the Kent Choice Based Lettings partnership have been asked to consider the following three options:

- 1) a full rollout of the new system for all partners;
- 2) a partial rollout of the new system; and
- 3) keep the fortnightly bidding cycle, but allow Swale BC and Amicus Horizon to continue with daily bidding

1.9.2 An evaluation meeting was held on 18 June 2014 at which the findings of the pilot were discussed.

1.9.3 The implementation of the daily bidding system was a relatively smooth process; however those landlords not taking part in the pilot continued to advertise homes

using the bidding cycle system which created added complexity. A scheme where all properties within a council area are advertised using the same process (system) would be simpler and less prone to faults.

- 1.9.4 It was reported to the partners that the pilot has shown bidding has not been adversely affected by the new system. The number of bids per property has increased due to higher participation of our customers rather than them potentially having access to more bids.
- 1.9.5 Amicus Horizon has reported they are able to let their homes quickly and that the pilot has reduced void turnaround times. Both management and staff have expressed strong views that the new system is more effective and efficient, and has had a positive effect on workloads.
- 1.9.6 Both Swale Borough Council and Amicus Horizon have made efforts to ensure that vulnerable people get the support they need. With the daily bidding system providing efficiencies there should be more resources released to continue to support vulnerable groups. It was reported to the partners that participation levels for vulnerable people are higher using the new system, with 45.3 per cent of their registered customers participating compared to 41.7 per cent.
- 1.9.7 Implementation of the new system in this borough will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment, which is currently being worked on and a further report will be brought to this Board detailing implementation timescales.

## **1.10 Legal Implications**

1.10.1 Non 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

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