

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING AND PLANNING SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

06 December 2022

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision

1 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION ACTION PLAN UPDATE

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Since January 2022, the Housing service has been implementing an action plan that was produced as part of a piece of consultancy advice relating to Temporary Accommodation. The consultancy report was presented to Members at the Communities & Housing Advisory Board in February 2022. A RAG rated action plan summary is attached to this report at **Annex 1**.

1.1.2 At the time of the consultancy report, the peak number of households in TA was 164. As at 9 November this figure stands at 97, which brings the TA level within the identified 'acceptable range' of 70-100 units.

1.2 Current position

1.2.1 Some of the key areas of work from the action plan that have contributed to this significant reduction are as follows;

- Introduction of a more rigorous monitoring and sign off framework, to support operational managers and staff in service delivery whilst other changes were being implemented.
- Recruitment of a number of fixed term additional staff, to reduce overall caseloads and to give staff the time needed to focus on their cases.
- Development of use and staffing of triage and prevention functions, which has enabled more homelessness issues to be resolved or supported at an earlier stage in the process. (75 successful preventions have been made since the introduction of dedicated resource in this area).
- Enhanced liaison with Clarion Housing, as our largest Registered Provider, to ensure best use of available stock.

1.2.2 As the action plan highlights, there are a number of other areas that continue to require focus;

- Housing Allocations Scheme implementation; as Members will be aware from previous reporting, the revised allocation scheme is currently undergoing the required statutory engagement. Following this, it will be implemented in Spring/Summer 2023, alongside the new software system for case and lettings management, Huume. The new allocations scheme has amended TMBC's policy around local connections and is designed to support people to stay in their current housing, where safe and feasible to do so, rather than present as homeless.
- TA procurement approach; numbers in TA have reduced significantly, however the unit cost of placing a household in TA remains high, primarily due to the ongoing use of nightly paid accommodation for the majority of households. The proposed TA procurement approach will be presented to Members early in 2023.
- Accessing the Private Rented Sector; Local Housing Allowance rates for the areas of the borough are increasingly struggling to keep up with private sector rents. Following on from the TA consultancy review, the Housing teams have been expanding their search areas into neighbouring boroughs and beyond and are still struggling to find properties that are not only affordable but also accessible, as many landlords are unable to take tenants on benefits due to their insurance requirements. This remains a significant issue in discharging our Housing duties.

1.2.3 The TA Strategic Monitoring group of officers has continued to meet monthly during 2022. TA property/portfolio matters are now being managed in a separate officer group due to the range of work involved. These monthly meetings TA monitoring meetings will continue until the end of the 22/23 financial year and, if TA numbers remain within the acceptable range, these meetings will move to bi-monthly. Progress against the TA consultancy targets is also the subject of regular briefing to the relevant Cabinet Members.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 The primary homelessness legislation – that is, [Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996](#) – provides the statutory under-pinning for action to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people threatened with or actually homeless.

1.3.2 In 2002, the government amended the homelessness legislation through the [Homelessness Act 2002](#) and the [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#) to:

(a) ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring a homelessness strategy for every housing authority district; and

(b) strengthen the assistance available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness by extending the priority need categories to homeless 16 and

17 year olds; care leavers aged 18, 19 and 20; people who are vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, the armed forces, prison or custody, and people who are vulnerable because they have fled their home because of violence.

1.3.3 The [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who have 'priority need'. These include:

(a) an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and

(b) a new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.

1.3.4 The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) amends Part 7 of the 1996 Act to strengthen the support available to victims of domestic abuse. The Act extends priority need to all eligible victims of domestic abuse who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse. The 2021 Act brings in a new definition of domestic abuse which housing authorities must follow to assess whether an applicant is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 Due to the changes that have led to a reduction in caseload in TA, Total Gross TA spend to end of September is £712,424 against an initial budget of £833,333. The end of year revised estimate is £1,515,000 and this is considered achievable if numbers in TA remain within the agreed accepted range of 70-100.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 The table below identifies some of the key risks associated with maintaining or improving on the number of households in TA, along with mitigating actions;

| Risk | Mitigation |
|--|--|
| Cost of living crisis; resulting in more households being in need of temporary accommodation and in nightly paid providers needing to increase their prices. | <p>Bolstering Homelessness Prevention function through training and support for officers. Also considering moving resource into prevention from solution work as/when caseloads drop further.</p> <p>Working with nightly paid providers wherever possible to understand their</p> |

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| | pressures. Consider procurement options as part of TA portfolio approach. |
| Lack of PRS opportunities | Continue to develop relationships with landlords/agents via regular contact and WK Landlord Forum Keep landlord offer under review Ensure close working between officers seeking properties and those working with households in need of alternative accommodation. |
| Additional housing pressures, through changes to schemes such as Homes for Ukraine | Work with existing support channels to help households identify secure housing in the private rented sector wherever possible. |
| Lack of updates to Local Housing Allowance rates mean that households have fewer and fewer opportunities in the private rented sector | Seek member support to lobby central government regarding uplifts to LHA rates. |

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 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.

1.7 Policy Considerations

1.7.1 Customer Contact

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 Members are requested to **NOTE** the progress made against the TA Action Plan.

Background papers:

contact: Eleanor Hoyle

Nil

Eleanor Hoyle

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health