

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING AND PLANNING SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

19 March 2024

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS UPDATE

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Council's new Housing Allocations Scheme was implemented in June 2023.
- 1.1.2 The Council gave households who were already on the housing register a specific reapplication window, during which they retained their 'list date' - this ran until 31 August 2023. For any households where we did not have email contact details, they received a hard copy letter explaining what was happening and giving them contact details to discuss their case.
- 1.1.3 The move to a new software system did cause some initial slowness in processing applications as staff gained familiarity with how it functioned. However, the staff team are now proficient in use of the system.
- 1.1.4 In the vast majority of cases being assessed, some of the required documentation was incorrect or missing. The level of requirement was set having considered good practice guidance and formed part of the Housing Allocations Scheme that Members approved.

1.2 Current position

- 1.2.1 The first stage assessment, which involves checking all documentation submitted for accuracy and completeness, is now completed on all applications with list date up to June 2023, which means that the majority of those with an existing application have been assessed. However, there are a number of cases where applicants did not link their new application to their existing one, although this was part of the requirement when reapplying. This will mean that their applications haven't yet been assessed and will be linked as they're reached in order, which is likely to be in the next few weeks.
- 1.2.2 Cases that have had their documentation confirmed are now undergoing their second stage assessment to either be given a banding on the register or receive confirmation that they do not meet the criteria. In the latter cases, they have a right to have the decision reviewed. We assess cases in date order. There may be some cases that come to our attention that requires urgent assessment out of

date order, and we consider these, but the vast majority will be assessed in date order.

1.2.3 The key statistics are as follows;

- There are currently around 921 applications submitted where applicants have told us they have completed all their actions
- 804 households who have submitted applications but who have not completed their actions and will likely be removed if that information is not supplied.
- 144 live applications on the housing register
- 1041 households have been assessed and removed for failing to supply documents or not meeting the allocations criteria.
- 67 households have submitted a pre-assessment but have not gone on to complete a full housing register application.

1.2.4 Members will note that the number of households who have already been removed is significantly higher than the number of live housing applications on the housing register. The revised assessment criteria are resulting in a much higher percentage of applicants not being eligible for our housing register. Members may recall that considerations around how to set the assessment criteria to ensure that they enabled best use of very limited social housing stock were part of the engagement sessions prior to the Housing Allocations Scheme being presented for approval. The document requirements are comparable with requirements in other Councils. The application form provides guidance information on the documentation requirements at each stage. Even with this in place documents that aren't relevant or are partially complete are being found in the majority of assessments.

1.2.5 There is additional resource in place both for the first stage assessment process (document checking) and the more detail assessment process. This includes both overtime for existing Housing staff, who have the skill set needed to quickly assess documentation, and some additional fixed term resource in the allocations team. The system does issue reminders to applicants to make sure that they have submitted the correct information – this is set by the system, which is used in housing authorities across the country.

1.2.6 If a household is accepted onto the housing register, there will still be waits for properties to become available. There is unlikely to be a significant rise in supply of affordable housing and therefore the number of lets is unlikely to go up significantly. This will mean that the previous average waiting time of 2 years is likely to remain the same. Of course, those reapplying who have an existing list date will potentially have a shorter wait, but every individual case is dependent on a suitable property becoming available.

1.2.7 Housing Allocations position and progress is monitored closely by senior officers and discussed with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Housing on a regular basis. It is proposed that monthly updates, with the data set above at 1.2.3, are sent to Members each month.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 The allocation of housing by Local Authorities is framed by Part VI of the HA 1996. The council is required to have a scheme for determining priorities and the procedures that will be followed when allocating social housing.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 The additional capacity for assessing applications is being funded from the Homelessness Reserve.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 There are review processes in place for decision making, which ensure that appropriate checks and balances.

1.6 Policy Considerations

1.6.1 Customer Contact

1.6.2 Human Resources

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 HPSSC is asked to NOTE the position on Housing Allocations and that a monthly update will be sent to Members.

Background papers:

Nil

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