

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

23 February 2015

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the following:

- **Kent & Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership procurement framework for energy efficiency improvements;**
- **Partnership working with health;**
- **Winter Warmth funding;**
- **Collective Switching Scheme;**
- **The Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of the actions undertaken to return empty homes to active use; and**
- **The overall work undertaken by the Private Sector Housing team, which will be delivered through a presentation at the meeting.**

1.2 Kent & Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership procurement framework for energy efficiency improvements

1.2.1 The Kent & Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership (KMSEP) was formerly known as the Kent & Medway Green Deal Partnership (KMGDP). Members will recall that this partnership was established to enable Kent to maximise the amount of energy efficiency funding coming into the County particularly through Energy Company Obligation (ECO). The partnership delivers measures through a Warm Homes Scheme. Members may recall that in the Autumn Statement in December 2013 a number of key changes to ECO were identified which impacted on the level of funding available for the Kent and Medway Warm Homes scheme. These came into force in autumn 2014.

1.2.2 Following the changes the partnership agreed to retender for energy efficiency retrofitting across the county to establish a framework of providers.

- 1.2.3 The framework has now been awarded and a number of providers sit across four separate lots covering heating, general energy efficiency measures, Green Deal assessments and building surveys and renewable energy.
- 1.2.4 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council is able to draw down from this framework should the Council decide to undertake an initiative promoting energy efficiency works. There would still be a requirement for a mini-tendering process within the appropriate lot on the framework however this would be a very quick process.
- 1.2.5 In addition KMSEP have already undertaken a mini-tender process under the framework for a Kent-wide offer on heating repairs/provision and cavity wall/loft insulation so we are now able to advise residents of these options where applicable.

1.3 Partnership working with Health

- 1.3.1 Officers from the Private Sector Housing Team have recently been attending training events and meetings with health professionals across West Kent in order to promote the links between health and housing.
- 1.3.2 Specifically we have spoken to the two Falls Prevention services that operate across West Kent and the Falls Practitioner who works across Maidstone and Pembury Hospitals. The purpose of this has been to reinforce how the Private Sector Housing team may be able to assist their clients through the following aspects of our work:
- Housing Assistance to help remove/reduce major hazards including those that may lead to a fall in and around the home;
 - Enforcement in the private rented sector where major hazards are present;
 - Initiatives to make homes warmer (which can reduce falls in the home);
 - Access to the Home Improvement Agency and in particular the Handyperson service;
 - Disabled Facilities Grants; and
 - Public Health enforcement around hoarding and filthy and verminous premises.
- 1.3.3 In order to progress this we are in the process of agreeing a referral form and guidance for their staff to work to. We hope this will be the start of a positive working relationship between housing and health.

1.4 Winter Warmth Funding

1.4.1 Members may be aware of the KCC Winter Warmth initiative that operates in the winter period with the aim of reducing the number of excessive winter deaths across the county.

1.4.2 There are three main facets to the initiative:

- promotion around keeping warm in the home;
- urgent response via the Home Improvement Agency for appropriate cases where items such as blankets, suitable clothing and heaters can be provided; and
- longer term solutions such as provision of appropriate heating and heating repairs.

1.4.3 For the first time this year KCC have allocated the funding set aside for the longer term solutions to the Districts in recognition that many, including this Council, already operate Housing Assistance programmes where assistance is available for such schemes. In addition the Districts can help recycle the funding by offering grants that are repayable on sale of the property.

1.4.4 The major difference between the KCC scheme and our own Housing Assistance programme is that to be eligible for assistance under Winter Warmth the resident must have an underlying health issue and this has to be confirmed by a health professional.

1.4.5 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council will receive £9,291 this winter for residents to access heating provision/repairs with some additional funding being held centrally by KCC in the event that we need to access further funding due to high demand.

1.5 Collective Switching Scheme

1.5.1 We reported to this Board in November 2014 the Council was working with 'Energy Deal' to promote their winter collective switching campaign to residents in the Borough. Government has encouraged local councils to take on this role to develop schemes for the benefit of residents. The winter collective switching campaign ran from the 2 December 2015 to the 2 February 2015 with the energy auction taking place on the 3 February 2015 and participants receiving their energy offer from 13 February 2015.

1.5.2 Collective switching is where a third party negotiates a better energy tariff on behalf of a group of residents. Such schemes enable residents to register an interest in participating in an 'energy auction' and receiving a new energy provider offer.

- 1.5.3 Provisional figures indicate that 856 local residents have registered an interest in the collective switch from the five Kent authorities that form 'Energy Deal'. Of those, 262 Tonbridge & Malling residents have registered their interest online. A further 25 residents have been registered offline with assistance from the Council as they had no access to an email account.
- 1.5.4 A further update report will be brought to this Board once the outcome of the campaign is known. This will include for example, the energy offers available following the energy auction and the numbers taking up the offer.

1.6 Empty Homes Review

- 1.6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on the 27 January 2015, to consider and endorse the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Review Group on the issue of empty homes in the Borough as reported to Members in the November 2014 meeting of this Board. The group considered why empty homes work is important, the reason homes become empty, the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use, the Council's current approach to tackling empty homes and information on the numbers of empty homes there are in Tonbridge and Malling and the wider Kent area.
- 1.6.2 At a time when the demand and need for housing of all types continues to rise, the group recognised the importance of making the best use of existing stock. In this context bringing empty homes back into use is a valuable and important role for the Council to focus on in partnership with other agencies.
- 1.6.3 The group noted that empty homes work is a cross cutting issue and impacts on all of the Council's key corporate priorities.
- 1.6.4 The Overview and Scrutiny committee agreed for the Housing Service to take the corporate lead for empty homes to allow a more streamlined approach to progressing cases and provides for one contact for empty property owners or customers who are enquiring about empty homes. A corporate working group is established to tackle the issues of long term empty homes. This will include all Services that have a role to play in empty homes, for example Planning Enforcement, Legal, Finance, Housing and Council Tax; who will meet regularly to share information. This sharing of information will assist in "cleansing" of Council Tax data and could be used when considering any enforcement options.
- 1.6.5 The committee also agreed that we raise public awareness of empty homes through a variety of communications medium and simplifying the process of reporting empty homes. We have already made use of Twitter and Facebook to advertise "Empty Homes Week" and Housing have worked with Council Tax to include advice for empty home owners on the back of the latest Council Tax bills.

1.7 Presentation from the Private Sector Housing Team

1.7.1 The presentation by the Private Sector Housing team includes case study examples of the varied and vital work that the team undertakes. It will illustrate the partnership working required with other Council Services and external organisations, for example Social Services and Health, to achieve positive outcomes for customers.

1.8 Legal Implications

1.8.1 None arising from this report.

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.9.1 None arising from this report.

1.10 Risk Assessment

1.10.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

Nil

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