

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 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 remains significantly high.

1.1 Housing options, Prevention and Homelessness

1.1.1 The table below illustrates the number of customers seen by the Housing Options Team since July 2014 both in person and via the telephone advice service. Members will note that the majority of our customers make contact for advice to help keep their homes or are seeking assistance to find alternative accommodation. The number of households making homeless applications increased significantly during November and December 2014. This is consistent keeping with seasonal peaks.

Month	Contact Made	Homeless Applications	Advice Only	Prevented	Relieved	Open
July 2014	63	6	50	4	0	4
Aug 2014	52	9	35	4	0	8
Sept 2014	64	7	27	1	0	33
Oct 2014	66	7	45	10	0	9
Nov 2014	51	19	31	4	0	9
Dec 2014	38	11	17	1	0	14
Jan 2015	56	6	10	4	0	42
TOTAL	505	65	215	28	0	119

1.1.2 The working definitions for the above table are as follows:

- **Contact Made** – Total number of customers approaching Options Team
- **Advice Only** – Customer able to solve their own housing problems following advice and assistance from the Options team.
- **Prevented** – Advice and assistance from the Options Team to secure accommodation to prevent customer from becoming homeless.
- **Relieved** - Advice and assistance from the Options Team allowing customer to remain in their home, from where they have been threatened with homelessness.
- **Open** – Continued advice and assistance to prevent or relieve homelessness.

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.

Date	Number in self contained Temporary Accommodation (AST)	Number in self contained Temporary Accommodation (nightly paid)	Number in traditional Bed & Breakfast	Total
31.07.14	3	10	3	16
31.08.14	3	16	4	23
30.09.14	3	16	3	22
31.10.14	3	11	2	16
30.11.14	3	9	2	14
31.12.14	3	14	2	19
31.01.15	3	16	2	21

1.2.2 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 housing options team continue to explore innovative ways to incentivise landlords from the private sector to consider working with the Council which will provide the availability of more homes to which we can discharge our duty to homeless customers.

1.2.4 In the meantime due to a lack of available private rented properties and the impact this has had on the increasing the length of stay in temporary accommodation it has proved necessary to reassess households to whom the Council has accepted

a statutory homeless duty from a Band C to a Band B priority. It is envisaged that this will reduce the length of time homeless households are being accommodated in temporary accommodation.

1.3 Rent Deposit Scheme

1.3.1 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. It is becoming increasingly challenging for customers to access the private sector particularly those on a low income as the gap between housing benefit levels and the amount of rent private landlords can achieve rises.

Month	Number of Loans approved	Bonds	Customers assisted into a private rented property without a deposit loan or bond	Total
July 2014	0	2	2	4
Aug 2014	1	1	1	3
Sept 2014	0	1	2	3
Oct 2014	1	1	2	4
Nov 2014	0	3	1	4
Dec 2014	0	0	1	1
Jan 2015	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	2	8	9	19

1.3.2 The Housing Options team continue their work to improve relationships with landlords in the private sector and support tenancies to promote our rent deposit scheme and tenancy support programme. It is hoped this work will attract other landlords who would normally engage the services of local lettings agents.

1.4 Severe Weather Procedure

1.4.1 It is acknowledged that from time to time there will be some people sleeping rough within the Borough of Tonbridge and Malling. Some rough sleepers do not sleep rough every night and will alternate between sleeping rough and staying with friends or family members before finding a more settled solution or moving out of the Borough.

1.4.2 The winter period often presents greater risks to people's health, particularly if they are old, vulnerable or have chronic medical conditions. Those sleeping rough are likely to experience a greater risk to their health and well-being during periods of severe weather. There is a humanitarian obligation on all local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets caused by severe winter weather, which currently triggers a duty to accommodation during periods of severe cold.

1.4.3 We currently offer emergency accommodation to rough sleepers when the Meteorological Office forecast that the temperature will be at zero degrees centigrade or below for a period of at least three consecutive nights. Following a

recent review of this Council's procedure, categories of severe weather conditions have been extended to include extreme wind and rain or flooding. The Council will therefore provide accommodation to rough sleepers for periods when there is a red severe weather warning is in place outside normal office hours until the next working day.

1.5 Housing Register

1.5.1 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
October 2014	115	81	1,304
November 2014	91	70	1,292
December 2014	67	63	1,291

1.5.2 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
October 2014	28 (61%)	18 (39%)	46
November 2014	25 (76%)	8 (24%)	33
December 2014	23 (59%)	16 (41%)	39

1.5.3 The Homechoice Team has recently undertaken a review of the processes involved with assessing housing register applications which has led to some changes being made in order to streamline and administer applications more efficiently. Prior to these changes applications were dealt with in stages by different officers which included logging applications, checking applications and processing them. There were a number of "hand offs" leading to inefficiencies which resulted in delays with processing applications and customers having to chase progress.

1.5.4 The new process now enables officers to complete the whole assessment in a single stage. This has resulted in the average processing time reducing to one week but rising to two weeks during our busiest periods. Previously processing

times averaged two weeks but had reached four weeks during busy periods. Customers are benefitting as they are now able to bid for properties without experiencing delays in their application being processed.

1.6 Legal Implications

1.6.1 Non arising from this report

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.7.1 None arising from this report

1.8 Risk Assessment

1.8.1 None arising from this report

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Jane Smither
Jason Wheble

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health