

For General Release

REPORT TO:	CABINET 16 December 2013
AGENDA ITEM:	10
SUBJECT:	Proposed change of use of Tonbridge House retirement housing scheme to generals needs temporary accommodation for homeless families with children
LEAD OFFICER:	Hannah Miller, Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director Adult Services Health and Housing
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Dudley Mead, Deputy Leader (Statutory) (Capital Budget and Asset Management) and Cabinet Member for Housing
WARDS:	South Norwood
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT Delivering high quality public services Improving value for money Achieving better outcomes for children and young people Improving health and well being	

FINANCIAL IMPACT An initial investment would be required through the housing revenue account capital programme; this will be more than offset through the savings that accrue to the General Fund Implementation of the preferred option (option 2) by March 2014 would deliver savings to the Council. A cost savings summary which details a range of scenarios and assumptions is provided as appendix 1 . Based on these, a minimum saving of £1k could accrue to the General Fund in 2013/14 followed by an annual saving of £55k in 2014/15, rising to £138k in 2015/16 and each year thereafter. A cost of £140k will be incurred in respect of an initial investment and it would be appropriate to meet this cost through the housing revenue account; this will be more than offset by the longer term savings.
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KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO. 1242 This is a key decision as defined in the council's constitution. The decision may be implemented from 1300 hours on the 5 th working day after it is made, unless the decision is referred to the Scrutiny & Strategic Overview Committee by the requisite number of Councillors.
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The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1.1 Consider the responses to the consultation on the proposal to change the use of Tonbridge House retirement housing block to general needs temporary accommodation for homeless families with children, together with officer's comments on these as detailed in the report and appendices.
- 1.2 Consider the equality impact assessment relating to this proposal at **Appendix 2 (e-copy)**.
- 1.3 Agree that Tonbridge House retirement housing scheme be converted to general needs housing for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households in priority need (Option 2 for consultation purposes), and to note that existing tenants will be given the choice of remaining in the scheme or moving to alternative suitable accommodation(with support provided).
- 1.4 Subject to the above, agree:
 - 1.4.1 Implementation of the activities and processes from March 2014 to realise the effects of change of use to general needs temporary accommodation as soon as possible.
 - 1.4.2 Implement the actions proposed at **Appendix 8** to mitigate the concerns raised by existing tenants.
 - 1.4.3 Priority to be given to tenants from Tonbridge House wishing to relocate on the allocation of vacant properties in the neighbouring block Sevenoaks.
 - 1.4.4 Commit an average sum of £4k per household to cover the costs associated with resettling the existing tenants who choose to move to alternative accommodation on the basis of the Re-housing Policy and Procedure at **Appendix 4**.
 - 1.4.5 That the Executive Director for Adult Health and Housing in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory), Capital Budget and Asset Management and Cabinet Member for Housing, be delegated authority to agree any further steps necessary for the implementation of the Option 2.
 - 1.4.6 That the Executive Director for Adult Health and Housing in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory) be delegated authority to agree any future retirement housing scheme to be converted to general needs temporary accommodation for homeless households.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides an overview of the results of the consultation on the proposed change of use of Tonbridge House retirement housing scheme to general needs temporary accommodation for homeless families with children. The proposal presents a series of recommendations including a recommended option as a way forward.
- 2.2 Demand from statutory homeless households has been rising at a significant rate, and the council is experiencing increasing difficulty in meeting its statutory duties towards homeless households in priority need.
- 2.3 One particular manifestation of these growing needs is increasing reliance on non-self-contained bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children, clearly not a suitable type of housing for anything but very short periods. As well as developing a programme of measures to increase access to self-contained private sector housing, the council is also seeking to make the most effective use of its own housing stock. There is an imbalance between the supply of retirement housing and that of general needs housing; the average wait for retirement housing ranges from one month to just under two years as opposed to between eight months and 11 years for a one-bedroom general needs property, this waiting time being greater again for family-sized home. At the same time, some retirement housing schemes are unpopular with housing applicants and therefore difficult to let. Whilst acknowledging the importance of retirement housing in meeting the needs of older people, a modest level of conversion to general needs housing will help to rebalance the stock and better manage the increasing homelessness problem, and ensure that the council can fulfil its statutory obligations.
- 2.4 Consultation with residents at Tonbridge House retirement scheme started on Wednesday 2 October 2013 and ended on Friday 1 November 2013 and the full results from the survey are provided at **Appendix 5**.
- 2.5 A record of the issues raised and comments made at the public meeting on 2 October 2013 is provided at **Appendix 7**. A summary of the results is provided in section 4.4.
- 2.6 The survey results indicate a significant preference to maintain the status quo, with 76% of respondents indicating that they fully disagree with the proposed change of use to Tonbridge House. Only 19% partially agreed and another 5% neither agree nor disagree.
- 2.7 However, the rationale for the proposal - contributing to a reduction in the reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation and helping to limit the length of time that families must stay in bed and breakfast - is very compelling. Tonbridge House would provide a safe alternative to bed and breakfast hotels by providing self-contained flats which meet the Decent Home Standard and which will be suitable for stays of longer than a few days or weeks.

- 2.8 Of 38 properties at Tonbridge House, one is vacant and two tenants have indicated that they would like to relocate if the use of the block were to change. Additional vacancies would arise due to natural turnover.
- 2.9 A full Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken in respect of the recommended option and with reference to the results and issues raised (**Appendix 2**). The EqIA does indicate negative impacts however, as detailed in Section 3 of the EqIA, there are measures that would be taken to eliminate or mitigate those impacts.
- 2.10 To summarise, three measures would help to mitigate the negative impact on the existing tenants making the option to convert the scheme a much more palatable choice.
- The first is that each tenant will be able to choose for her/himself whether to remain or whether to request alternative housing.
 - The second is a programme of measures which will on the one hand remove or reduce the possible problems at the scheme (such as anti-social behaviour or access for the existing tenants to communal facilities) and, on the other, ensure support, including a financial package for people who move elsewhere.
 - The third measure is that when placing families at Tonbridge House, greater sensitivity will be applied in the selection of families to ensure that any problems are not exacerbated.
- 2.11 A cost savings summary is provided at **Appendix 1** and sets out a range of scenarios and assumptions. Based on these factors, a minimum saving of £1k could accrue to the General Fund in 2013/14 followed by a saving of £55k in 2014/15, rising to £138k in 2015/16 and each year thereafter. The summary illustrates that although there will be a cost implication, this will be more than offset by longer term savings. Given the nature of the costs which are directly related to council tenants and properties, it is appropriate that these are met from the housing revenue account.
- 2.12 Therefore, it is recommended that option 2 be progressed.

3. DETAIL

Background to the proposal

- 3.1 The council is currently experiencing a serious homelessness problem as a result of an increase in demand at the same time as a reduction in housing supply available to the council. A range of factors has contributed to this. The economic downturn has meant that many households are struggling to manage financially and finding the private sector increasingly unaffordable. An increase in the London population, not matched by the growth in the housing stock, has served to force up house prices and private rents as a result of supply and demand imbalances. Private landlords now have more options open to them and the attractiveness of letting to low income or benefit-dependent households (whether directly or via schemes run by the council or housing associations) has diminished, partly because there are more better-off households now looking to

rent, and partly because of changes to the housing benefit system (limiting eligible rents to 30% of the local housing allowance rates, the benefit cap and the impending introduction of direct payments to tenants being the main ones). The social housing stock in Croydon is, as a proportion of the total stock, fairly small compared with other London boroughs. As a result, the council relies heavily on private rented housing for accommodation for homeless households and so is suffering disproportionately from the buoyancy in this sector and the falling interest amongst private landlords of letting to our nominees.

- 3.2 As a result, increasing numbers of homeless families are being housed in bed and breakfast hotels. This position is not sustainable. Accommodation with shared facilities is not suitable for families with or expecting children for anything but very short periods. Local authorities can only place families in B&B hotels for a maximum of six weeks according to the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003. Exceeding this period means that the council is at risk of legal challenge by way of judicial reviews. And there are also financial implications: the average daily cost per family is £10.11 not all of which is covered by housing benefit so the council has to make up the shortfall. A range of measures to increase housing options for homeless families has resulted in zero families in shared B&B for more than 6 weeks in September 2013. However, there remain pressures of demand and it is expected that these will continue for the foreseeable future. Whilst not exceeding the six-week limit, 114 homeless households are nevertheless living for socially unacceptable periods in shared accommodation experiencing cramped conditions unsuitable for children; and, overall, 2210 families are placed in temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 At the same time, because the expectations and aspirations of many older people have changed and because there are many initiatives now which make it easier for people to stay put in their own homes, some retirement housing blocks have become difficult to let as evidenced by the number of people flats are offered before someone accepts. Where people have expressed an interest in retirement housing, the main requirement is for ground floor housing, in a quiet neighbourhood close to shops; high-rise schemes in particular do not therefore meet people's preferences. The average wait for retirement housing between April 2013 and September 2013 was 5 months as opposed to between 10 months for a 1 bedroom general needs property. For family housing, the wait can be even longer.
- 3.4 Amongst the measures looked at to help alleviate the housing shortage for homeless families, therefore, was the proposal to convert a retirement scheme to general needs accommodation. An appraisal of 11 retirement schemes (all high-rise blocks) was undertaken in order to identify the most suitable scheme which would have the least impact on existing and future older tenants. A range of factors was considered: the number of units in each scheme, the availability of alternative accommodation nearby, the number of adapted properties, age profile of existing tenants and the dependency levels of scheme residents. From a final shortlist of four blocks, Tonbridge House was considered to be the third most suitable after Gillett Road and Garnet Road. Although Garnet Road ranked second in the shortlist, it is not considered to be suitable for a change of use because it is the twin block of Gillett Road. The use of Gillett Road has now changed to general needs temporary housing, any vacancies at Garnet Road have been ring fenced so that tenants at Gillett Road who wish to relocate have

the option of moving only a short distance into the neighbouring block to minimize disruption.

- 3.5 In light of the above, and taking into account the outcome of the consultation which did not highlight any major risk to the health and safety of residents at Tonbridge House the same mitigating actions that were approved for Gillett Road to be changed to general needs temporary accommodation by Cabinet are being recommended if the change of use is agreed. For example, measures to deal with concerns of anti-social behavior should it be implemented once families with children move into the block.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation with residents at Tonbridge House retirement housing scheme started on Wednesday 2 October 2013 and ended on Friday 1 November 2013 and the full results of the questionnaire survey are provided at **Appendix 5**.
- 4.2 The purpose of the consultation was to seek the views of the residents of Tonbridge House on the proposal and options presented and fulfil the Council's obligation under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 which applies to secure tenancies. Under this legislation, landlords are obliged to make arrangements to carry out consultation with tenants on matters of housing management.

4.3 Consultation approach

The following methods were used to consult with the tenants:

- The consultation was publicised by sending letters with an accompanying flyer to all of the existing tenants at Tonbridge House inviting them and their families and/or carers to attend one of two briefing sessions. Both meetings took place on 2 October 2013 and were facilitated by the DASHH Resident Involvement Team.
- A questionnaire was developed to provide a standard format through which the tenants could submit their views.
- A full consultation pack was posted directly to all tenants at Tonbridge House. These documents are provided as **Appendix 9 and 10**.
- Face to face – to ensure that as many tenants at Tonbridge House block participated, three visits were made to the block on different days and times. Tenants were informed in advance of when officers would be visiting. Where there was no response, slips were left encouraging people to get in touch if they needed help or further guidance on how to complete the questionnaire.
- The consultation began on Wednesday 2 October and ended on Friday 1 November 2013.

4.3.1 Level of response

At the time of the consultation 37 households were in occupation and 22 (58%) returned the questionnaire. However, not all respondents answered all of the questions and therefore there are variations in the total number of responses in the survey findings.

4.3.2 Consultation results

A record of the issues raised and comments made at the two meetings held on 2 October 2013 is attached as **Appendix 7** and the full results of the questionnaire survey are attached as **Appendix 5**. Only one letter was received in response to the consultation and this is included in Appendix 5. What follows here is a summary of the key points emerging from the survey questionnaire and letter.

4.3.3 Survey Respondents

- 14% of respondents were aged 55-64. 41% were 65 – 74, 41% were 75 - 84 and 4% was over the age of 85.
- 61% of respondents who answered the ethnicity question described themselves as being from one of the BME groups. 39% described themselves as white.
- 67% of respondents said that their activities were limited a lot due to health problems or disability.

4.3.4 Survey options and impacts

The following three options were presented and respondents were asked their views including the level of impact:

- Option 1: Keep Tonbridge House and all other retirement housing schemes as retirement housing (in other words do nothing)
- Option 2: Change the use of Tonbridge House retirement housing scheme to general needs housing
- Option 3: Retain Tonbridge House as retirement housing but change the use of another retirement housing block to general needs housing

4.4 Summary of responses to the options presented

Option 1

19 out of 22 respondents put forward their views. Virtually all of the comments were in support of keeping Tonbridge and other retirement housing as is (unchanged). Only one respondent said that they didn't mind.

Option 2

- 76% of respondents fully disagree that the use of Tonbridge should be changed. 19% partially agreed and another 5% neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposed change.
- 90% of respondents said that they would prefer to stay; the other 10% of respondents said that they would prefer to move to alternative accommodation.
- 79% of respondents who answered the question said that having families with children living in the block whilst they (the older residents) were still living there would have a negative impact on them. 21% of respondents said that it would have no impact.

Option 3

- 80% said that none of the retirement blocks should have its use changed.
- 7% of respondents said that they didn't know which of the other retirement housing blocks should have its use changed to general needs temporary accommodation.

4.4.1 As part of their questionnaire responses, respondents highlighted a number of reasons for their views about the proposal and options presented to them and these have been broken down into 11 themes which are listed below:

- Facilities and services: laundry, common room, car park, garage and potential damage to these facilities (6 comments).
- Anti-social behaviour: noise nuisance and unknown visitors to the block (12 comments).
- Personal health: perceived effect on the respondent's health, potential effect on existing illnesses (4 comments).
- Personal safety: fear and anxiety, concerns about intimidation and personal safety.
- Hazards: Building not being suitable for children (7 comments)
- The building: one bedroom flats and overcrowding (2 comments)
- Life style differences: incompatibility of younger and older residents (11 comments)
- Illegal activity: drugs on premises, drug use, theft.
- Maintenance: maintenance of building, cleaning and tidiness of the block
- General upheaval: moving away from Tonbridge House to alternative accommodation, loss of support network, cost of moving (17 comments)
- Local facilities: proximity to local shops, proximity to transport, near to buses and bus stops, GP surgery and religious temple (1 comment)

The actual comments made by respondents by question can be found in **Appendix 5**. The responses by theme are provided as **Appendix 6**.

4.5 Tenant concerns and mitigating actions

4.5.1 The survey results indicate a significant preference to maintain the status quo and it is acknowledged that the existing tenants have a range of valid concerns and anxieties, and that the impact on them could well be a negative one. However from the consultation process no major risks were highlighted and the negative impact must be weighed against the very positive impact which Option 2 would have on homeless families with or expecting children who would benefit from more suitable and better quality housing. Based on the feedback from the tenants, it is considered that a number of measures could be introduced which would help to reduce or remove the problems anticipated thereby mitigating or even negating the adverse impact.

4.5.2 The main reasons for objection appear to concern various forms of anti-social behaviour, the incompatibility of younger and older residents living in the same block, the perceived disruption of moving to alternative accommodation, and concern about access to the existing facilities and services.

4.5.3 These measures would help to mitigate the negative impact on the existing tenants making the option to convert a much more palatable choice. A programme of methods which will on the one hand remove or reduce the possible problems at the scheme (such as anti-social behaviour or access for the existing tenants to communal facilities) and, on the other, ensure support, including a financial package for people who move elsewhere

- Individual consultation meetings will be arranged to establish and understand individuals needs
- Each tenant will be able to choose for her/himself whether to remain or whether to request alternative housing.
- Where possible, we involve family and/or carers in the relocation process from consultation to relocation
- A sensitive approach to managing the relocation of tenants is required to safeguard the health and wellbeing of all tenants.
- On site advice surgery as necessary to provide accessible support and visibility of project team
- When placing of families at Tonbridge House, greater sensitivity will be applied in the selection of families to ensure that any problems are not exacerbated.
- Restricting access to excessing facilities i.e. laundry and common room to excessing tenants.

4.5.4 Should the decision be made to change the use of Tonbridge House, existing tenants would be given the option to relocate to alternative accommodation (previous refurbishment projects where older people were successfully re-settled in alternative suitable accommodation provide a good model). A number of tenants have indicated that they would like to move to alternative accommodation if the use of the block is to be changed. Where they choose to do so, additional help and financial assistance will be provided in accordance with the procedure and policy at **Appendix 4**.

4.5.5 Responses and proposed mitigating measures are attached at **Appendix 8** as well as in section 3 of the equality impact assessment (**Appendix 2 - e-copy**).

5 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

1 Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations

	Current year	Medium Term Financial Strategy – 3 year forecast		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Revenue Budget available				
Expenditure	11,257	11,257	11,257	11,257
Income	(7,810)	(7,810)	(7,810)	(7,810)
Effect of decision from report				
Expenditure				
<i>Savings from change of use</i>	(1)	(55)	(138)	(138)
Remaining budget	<u>3,446</u>	<u>3,392</u>	<u>3,309</u>	<u>3,309</u>

The table above details the impact on the General Fund budgets. The relocation grants of £4k per tenant will be funded by the HRA.

2 The effect of the decision

Certain groups are highly represented amongst the tenants at Tonbridge House. Obviously the scheme caters specifically to older people, and 81% of the tenants are aged 65 and over. Because of this, a high proportion of people also have disabilities or age-related frailty. Men outnumber women in the scheme in the ratio of 2:1. BME tenants make up 44% of the total. The proposals will have a number of negative impacts on the tenants which may be the more difficult for people to cope with because of their age and disabilities. These include the possibility, whether real or perceived, of anti-social behaviour and conflicts arising from lifestyle differences should people wish to remain in the scheme. Should they opt to move elsewhere, the general upheaval may be all the greater when people are vulnerable. This report considers a number of measures which would help to remove or mitigate the negative impacts for example CCTV and different options for access to the laundry facilities, as well as support and financial assistance with moving to another home. Given the declining interest in schemes such as Tonbridge House amongst older housing applicants, it is not felt that the proposal would have a significant, if any, impact on future generations of older people.

Some groups will benefit from the proposal. Tonbridge House will offer better quality housing than shared bed & breakfast hotels, in particular for families with children. The groups most represented amongst these households are children/young people, women (a high proportion are single parent families headed by women) and people from BME communities. The use of Tonbridge House on a temporary basis will arguably provide a lasting impact on these groups for the duration of its use for homeless households.

Implementation of preferred option (option 2) by March 2014 would deliver savings to the Council. A cost savings summary is provided as **appendix 1** and covers a range of scenarios and assumptions. Based on these, a minimum saving of £1k could accrue to the General Fund in 2013/14 followed by an annual saving of £55k in 2014/15, rising to £138k in 2015/16 and each year thereafter.

It has been assumed that in each year a certain number of vacancies will arise due to a number of factors i.e. Tenants choose to move, due to natural turnover and/or due to tenants deciding to move once the status of the block has changed and families begin to move in.

An estimated cost of £140k will be incurred in respect of relocation grants to the existing households (an average of £4k) and these will be funded by the HRA. This estimate is based on the actual cost of resettling tenants to facilitate works at Kuala Gardens retirement housing scheme.

If option 2 was chosen, each homeless household housed at Tonbridge House for 180 days (6 months) would result in an average saving to the Council of £1,820. This is based on the current average cost to the Council of £10.11 per day per household.

3 Risks

The following risks have been identified in terms of the recommendations in this report:

- The estimated number of voids at Tonbridge House, do not materialise within the required timeframe.
- Suitable void properties, which would meet the needs and preferences of tenants wishing to move out, do not become available
- The mitigating measures do not quell the causes of friction resulting from mixing different household types or do not deal with the fears felt on the part of the older residents
- Discontent due to disparity in the support charges paid by tenants in general needs accommodation or their own homes compared with retirement housing.
- Should the risks above materialize, there would be negative publicity and media coverage with an adverse impact on the reputation of the council.

4 Options

These are detailed and reviewed in sections 4.3.4 to 4.4.1 above.

5 Future savings/efficiencies

Option 2 would deliver an average saving to the Council's general fund of £1,820 per household. This is based on each household being in occupation for a period of 6 months and an average loss to the Council of £10.11 per day per household.

A minimum saving of £1k could accrue to the General Fund in 2013/14 followed by a saving of £55k in 2014/15, rising to £138k in 2015/16 and each year thereafter. The cost savings summary provided as **appendix 1** covers a range of scenarios and assumptions used to arrive at the savings predicted.

(Approved by: Paul Heynes, Head of Finance – DASHH, Chief Executives Department on behalf of the Director of Finance)

6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1. The Council Solicitor comments that the Local Government Act 1999 which sets out the duty of Best Value means local authorities must show that their services have been influenced by residents' views, and provide the best possible value.
- 6.2 Case law has also emphasised the duty to consult properly, the key elements of which can be summarised as:
- Consult when proposals are at the formative stage;
 - Reasons for proposed changes should be given;
 - Options should be given including the option to do nothing;
 - Sufficient time should be given;
 - Full information should be given, not partial.
- 6.3 In respect of the Council's public sector equalities duty under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 (**Appendix 3**), and when considering the proposals in this report, the Cabinet must have 'due regard' to the protected characteristics and the specific needs of those within these groups that may arise. Insofar as this decision may affect large numbers of vulnerable people, many of whom have one or more of the protected characteristics, the 'due regard' necessary is very high.
- 6.4 While the Council is entitled to take into account the pressure on resources it is also important to ensure that the outcomes of the consultation, the EqlAs and its statutory equalities duties (Appendix 3) are fully considered in reaching the decision as to the future of the block.

6.5 There are also particular requirements where the service in question may affect those with a disability. As a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, the obligation under s.129 (3)(b) to take steps to meet those needs that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

- This duty must be 'exercised in substance with rigour and an open mind' and goes beyond mere reference to, or a general awareness of, the decision makers to the existence of the duty.
- Those with a disability who may form part of the particular group of service users being consulted, should be consulted not only as part of the group as a whole but in a way that shows due regard to the need to take account of their disabilities, even where that may require more favourable treatment than other persons.

6.6 Relevant Human Rights issues are considered below.

(Approved by: Gabriel MacGregor, Head of Corporate Law on behalf of the Council Solicitor & Monitoring Officer)

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

7.1 There are no immediate HR issues that arise from the recommendations of this report.

(Approved by: Michael Pichamuthu on behalf of the Director of Workforce)

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 Many residents at Tonbridge House are elderly with approximately 81% over 65 and 44% are from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. In addition, men outnumber women 2:1 where a proportion of these residents are disabled or have an aged-related frailty. Feedback from the consultation found that there is a perception amongst residents that the proposed changes will have a negative effect on their quality of life. These include possible inter-generational issues as well as anti-social behaviour and conflicts arising from lifestyle differences should residents want to remain in the scheme. If the proposed option recommended in this report is agreed by Cabinet activities will be put in place to help residents especially those who feel vulnerable. These include extra CCTV and different options for access to the laundry facilities, as well as support and financial assistance with moving to another home. Given the declining interest in schemes such as Tonbridge House amongst older housing applicants, it is unlikely the proposal would have a significant, if any, impact on future generations of older people.

8.2.1 The selection process of blocks sought to mitigate the impact on disabled tenants by examining a range of criteria. An initial list of 11 blocks were identified all which were high rise blocks. Sevenoaks House is the least popular of the 11 blocks originally shortlisted, the availability of other retirement housing schemes is lower than in the area surrounding Gillett and Garnet

Road. Hence it was ranked below these two blocks. Gillett Road was ranked above Garnet Road due to the higher number of adapted showers fitted a part of the kitchen and bathroom programme.

- 8.2.2 Some groups will benefit from the proposal. Tonbridge House will offer better quality housing than shared bed & breakfast hotels, in particular for families with children. The groups most represented amongst these households are children/young people, women (a high proportion are single parent families headed by women) and people from BME communities. The use of Tonbridge House on a temporary basis will arguably provide a lasting impact on these groups for the duration of its use for homeless households.

Appendix 2 (e-copy) is an Equalities Impact Assessment on the recommended option.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 9.1 There is no direct environmental impact arising from the recommendations in this report.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 10.1 There is no direct crime and disorder impact arising from the recommendations in this report.

11. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

- 11.1 In relation to the proposal the most relevant Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights are Article 8 (Right to respect for private and family life and home) and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination).
- 11.2 In relation to Article 8 the consultation and mitigating actions proposed should ensure that the impact of any changes does not infringe their rights.

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

- 12.1 Demand from statutory homeless households is at critical levels and the provision plan suggests increasing difficulty in meeting the duty to homeless applicants with families. Changing the use of Tonbridge House will provide a supply of cost effective Council owned general needs temporary accommodation and reduce its reliance on unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 12.2 The council is currently experiencing a serious homelessness problem as a result of an increase in demand at the same time as a reduction in housing supply available to the council. A range of factors has contributed to this. The economic downturn has meant that many households are struggling to manage financially and finding the private sector increasingly unaffordable. An increase

in the London population, not matched by the growth in the housing stock, has served to force up house prices and private rents as a result of supply and demand imbalances. Private landlords now have more options open to them and the attractiveness of letting to low income or benefit-dependent households (whether directly or via schemes run by the council or housing associations) has diminished, partly because there are more better-off households now looking to rent, and partly because of changes to the housing benefit system (limiting eligible rents to 30% of the local housing allowance rates, the benefit cap and the impending introduction of direct payments to tenants being the main ones). The social housing stock in Croydon is, as a proportion of the total stock, fairly small compared with other London boroughs. As a result, the council relies heavily on private rented housing for accommodation for homeless households and so is suffering disproportionately from the buoyancy in this sector and the falling interest amongst private landlords of letting to our nominees.

13. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

13.1 These are detailed within paragraph 4.3.4 to 4.4.1 of this report.

CONTACT OFFICER: Leonard Asamoah, Head of housing solutions ext.62384

Appendices

Appendix 1: Cost savings summary **attached**

Appendix 2: Equality Analysis – **an e-copy is provided in the Cabinet agenda on the Council website**

Appendices 3-10 printed separately

Appendix 3: Extract from the Equality Act 2010

Appendix 4: Rehousing Policy & Procedure

Appendix 5: Findings of Tonbridge House Consultation Survey

Appendix 6: Tenant comments by theme

Appendix 7: Notes of Tonbridge House consultation event

Appendix 8: Concerns/issues raised by tenants

Appendix 9: Tenant Questionnaire

Appendix 10: Proposal concerning the future of Tonbridge House

Background Documents: none