

Ashford Health & Wellbeing Board (AHWB)

AGENDA ITEM – Lead Officer Group (LOG) Report

Performance Progress Plan and Theme Setting

1. The Board will recall at its last meeting in April that the Local Performance Progress Plan was presented by Public Health on behalf of the LOG. The document provides a live information resource on Ashford's local achievements in relation to the Kent Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities and outcomes. It will be updated at key points in the year and any issues that arise will be brought to the Board's attention.
2. The LOG has set a meeting on 3rd August to review the plan using key agency data that can best inform our progress. At this meeting we will start to consider what the next year's themes for the Board should be in light of what Ashford's health profile is telling us alongside the views and experience of practitioners.
3. **The LOG is aiming to recommend to the Board at its October meeting what should be considered as its key priorities so closer and more detailed joint inspection can be programmed in over the coming year.**
4. **The LOG also wishes to recommend that the October meeting includes an update from the Voluntary Sector as a theme for the presentations.**

'Must do' Project Progress

5. Below is a summary update of the 'must do' projects from the lead partners.

a) *Community Networks* (lead CCG – Neil Fisher)

Ashford has three community networks – Ashford South, Rural and Ashford North. Each of the localities will have completed the third round of meetings by the end of July. The groups will use the opportunity to review the priorities from the original stakeholder meetings to ensure that the proposed projects meet the needs of the population. The groups have all discussed how they ensure that the wider community are part of the process.

Ashford Rural - The group discussed the proposed revision to the Intermediate Care Beds specification within West View which will support the ability for primary care to access beds as an alternative to transfer to secondary care and will support increased access to therapies. The group are in the process of exploring provision of outpatient services within the town to reduce the need for patients to travel. The group discussed the communication plan and links to communications within the locality.

Ashford North - The group wish to explore ways to promote wellbeing across all ages and are in the process of identifying the current provision across all providers. This will support the ability to identify service gaps. The group will also review provision for carers and performance against the current contracts.

Ashford South - The group are exploring how they can support children and young families through access to local services and greater integration across health and social care. The group will work with a local charity to support young families to manage their children as an alternative to visiting A/E.

b) *Farrow Court* (lead ABC – Richard Robinson)

Building work continues on site with 33 dwellings in phase 1 due for completion by late August 2015 including communal facilities. Once phase 1 is complete phases 2 and 3 will commence with anticipated completion of these in late 2016/early 2017. Detailed discussions continue with ABC, Social Services and Age UK about the arrangements for making the Day Centre at the new Farrow Court facility a centre of excellence. The discussions include aiming to deliver services seven days a week with a specific focus on dementia clients at weekends. Joint working discussions are continuing although it is likely that Age UK will want to 'bed in' to the new facility before expanding dementia services.

c) *Rough Sleeping* (lead ABC – Sharon Williams)

Porchlight have been appointed and are working with local rough sleepers. A group has been set up to coordinate action across various agencies involved. Meeting being organised with the CCG in July to pursue a joint commissioning proposal. Porchlight to compile data of relevance to future commissioning decision including outcomes from this type of intervention.

d) *Dementia Day Care* (Lead Dementia Alliance - Lisa Barclay (CCG))

The new Dementia Alliance has recently agreed 3 key areas of work in addition to looking at extending dementia day care. These include consulting local people living with dementia on what service they need, promoting the dementia helpline, and holding an awareness raising event. Further discussion on an additional dementia day centre is required but opportunities to undertake further dementia work at the new care scheme at The Warren will be pursued.

e) *Healthy Weight* - (Lead ABC - Simon Harris)

Local projects are under review and a new emphasis on this work has been agreed on a geographical basis i.e Stanhope. A new project being supported through the South Ashford Community Network has been agreed. This project called 'Aspirations Health Living Zone' includes scoping the local health offer, signposting and increasing provision as required. Key local partners engaged in project development including KCC Public Health, Ashford BC, Ashford Supporting Families and CCG. Funding secured for a pilot period of an initial six months. This pilot period includes the need for a project coordinator who should be in place by September 2015.

d) Infrastructure Working Group (Lead ABC)

Please refer to presentations for progress on the Local Plan.

A number of infrastructure projects have been discussed including the need to work in an integrated way for the Chilmington Community Hub and supporting discussions between Ivy Court Surgery and NHS England regarding development plans in Tenterden.

Update on Strategy's and Action Plans

Ashford Alcohol Plan (Lead – Public Health)

Ashford will prepare an Alcohol Action plan from the Kent Alcohol Strategy which will be delivered, with partners, through the Community Safety Partnership strategy (Substance Misuse group). The draft action plan will be shared with the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board for agreement prior to implementation.

Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan (Lead – Sharon Williams)

Ashford Homelessness Review has been completed. A draft Homelessness Strategy is being finalised and once completed it will be added to the Council's consultation portal. See attached review.



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ashford Homelessness Review

2015

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Introduction

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 it is a requirement to formulate a Homelessness Strategy by carrying out a homelessness review for the borough. The review should consider a wide population of households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, not just those who are unintentionally homeless and have a priority need. The review informs the Homelessness Strategy and should establish the extent of homelessness in the borough, assess its likely extent in the future, identify what is being done and by whom and what resources are available to prevent and tackle homelessness.

Having undertaken the review it can then be determined if current activities are adequate and appropriate to meet aims of preventing and reducing homelessness and whether any changes or additional provision are necessary..

This review uses statistical data and consultation outcomes to assess current and emerging homeless needs and trends. The review process has been guided using information from the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS)¹ developing homelessness strategies toolkit. Engagement with a range of partners has increased understanding around local pressures and how services could work together to prevent and reduce homelessness.

The Ministerial statement 'Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to the Prevention of Homelessness'² set out the 10 local challenges and these have been used as the basis for consultation and the subsequent development of the Homelessness Strategy action plan.

The 10 local challenges are:

- 1 Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
- 2 Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education and training needs.
- 3 Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.
- 4 Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative.
- 5 Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.
- 6 Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords.
- 7 Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.
- 8 Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs.

¹ <http://www.practitionersupport.org/>

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf

- 9 Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 10 Not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

Consultation

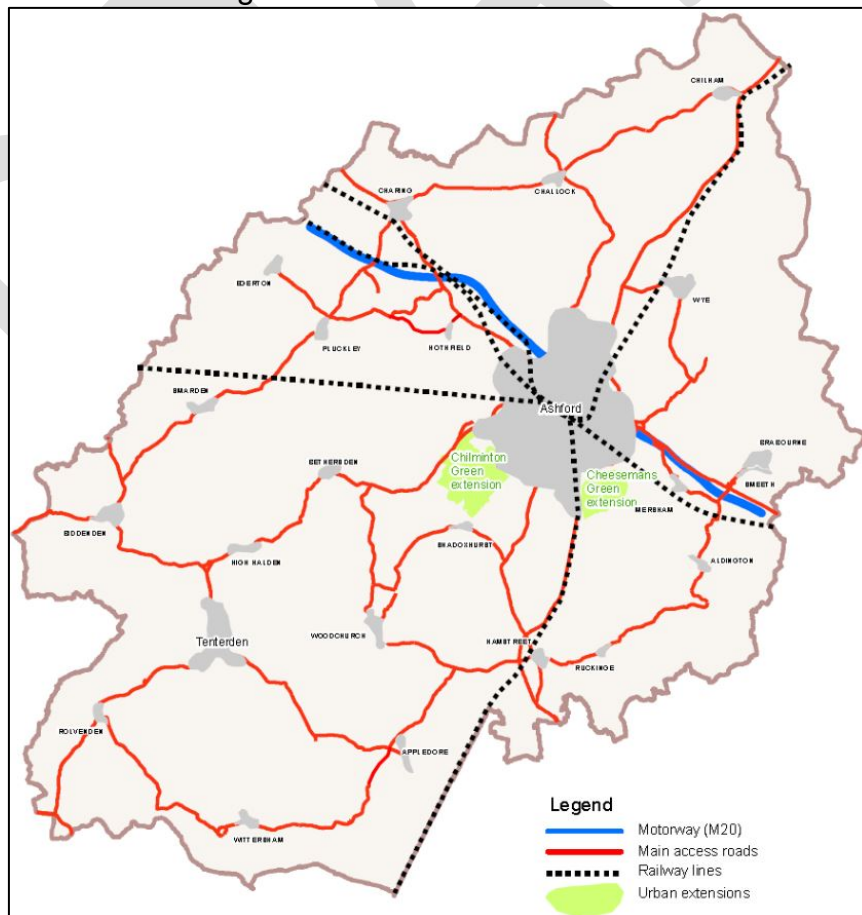
A stakeholder consultation event was held in November 2014. A range of agencies and organisations attended and a summary of the event is included from page 32. This included considering the relevance of the 10 local challenges to local circumstances and any amendments needed to reflect specific local pressures.

11 telephone interviews were undertaken in May 2015 with service users a summary of the key points is included from page 35.

General information

The borough covers an area of over 58,000 hectares with a population of 117,956 living in 47,787 households (Census 2011). There are 2 urban areas, Ashford and Tenterden, each surrounded by a large rural hinterland. As a 'growth area' the borough has planned expansion for housing, retail and commercial uses. The urban extensions of Cheesemans Green and Chilminster Green will deliver in the region of 7,000 homes over the next 20 years.

Figure1: Map of Ashford Borough



Housing costs

To buy

Approximately 68% of households in the Borough own their property, either with or without a mortgage. The table below from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)³ 2012 gives the mean house price for areas of the borough

Figure 2: Mean House Prices by Sub Area and Type (2012)

	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flats	Overall
Ashford Rural North	£431,500	£280,600	£264,300	£130,500	£350,200
Ashford Rural West	£424,400	£233,500	£160,200	£171,400	£331,600
Ashford Rural South	£426,800	£209,900	£241,200	£229,800	£332,900
Ashford Rural East	£380,200	£262,700	£192,000	-	£317,900
Ashford town	£252,700	£185,400	£156,300	£103,900	£183,000

To rent

The private rented market is currently buoyant with prices rising. A search of private rented properties⁴ (27/04/2015) within a 1 mile radius of Ashford town centre identified 120 self contained properties (1 bed to 4 bed) to rent. Of these only 6 were below the Ashford local housing allowance rate set for April 2015 but 3 of these states they are not available to people in receipt of benefits.

Figure 3: Summary of prices of private property to rent

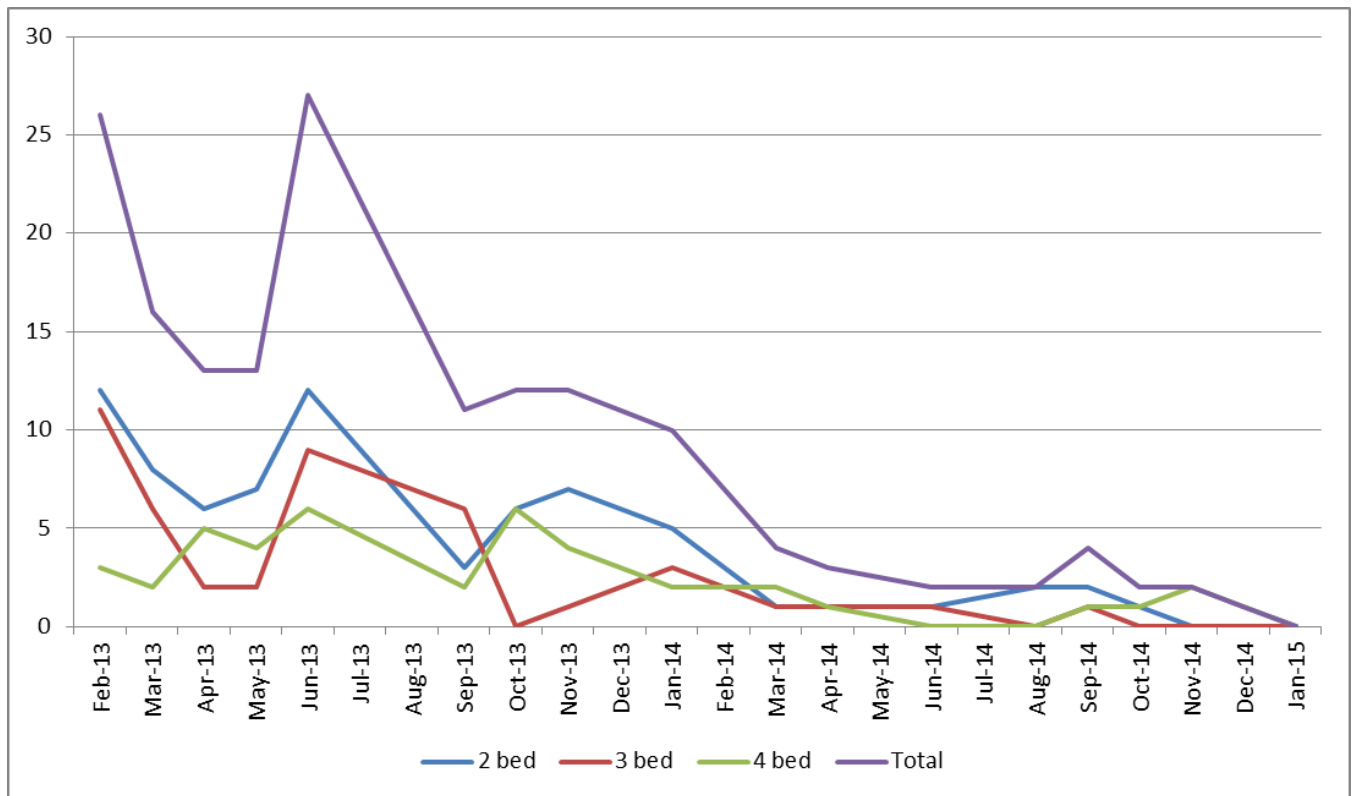
Rooms for rent in shared houses varied in cost from £295 - £550 pcm. None of the 62 rooms advertised on www.houseshare.com were below the LHA 2015 rate for shared rooms of £291.57 Many of the advertisements state available for single professional people only.

The following graph highlights that there are fluctuation in the number of private rented sector homes below the local housing allowance rate and indicates a sharp decline during 2014.

³ <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/local-plan-2030-evidence-base>

⁴ www.rightmove.co.uk

Figure 4: Number of private rented properties with rental under the local housing allowance



Incomes

The SHMA 2012 compares the incomes of full-time employed Ashford residents with those of people working in jobs located in the borough. At around £23,700 the median income of Ashford “workers” is about £3,500 lower than the median income of Ashford “residents” £27,220. The fact that the earnings of those who live in Ashford are greater than those that work there does however mean that there is some risk of those in local employment (and thus contributing to the local economy) being marginalised from the housing market as they are less able to afford local properties. Higher earnings from those commuting out of the borough are somewhat distorting property prices in relation to local wage levels.

Incomes required to afford different tenures are show in the table below. The calculations are based on 3.5 times household income for house purchase and 30% of income to be spent on housing for rented properties. The figures for house purchase are based on a 100% mortgage for the purposes of comparing the different types of housing.

Figure 5: Indicative Income Required to Purchase/Rent without Additional Subsidy

Area	Lower quartile purchase price	Lower quartile private rent	Affordable rent	Lower quartile social rent
Ashford Town	£40,900	£25,000	£20,000	£14,200
Rural North	£76,000	£27,800	£22,200	£14,200
Rural West	£82,900	£30,000	£24,000	£14,200
Rural East	£72,000	£29,000	£23,200	£14,200
Rural South	£68,000	£29,000	£23,200	£14,200

Employment and Earnings

The percentage of economically active people aged 16-64 who are unemployed stood at 5.3% in June 2014⁵, the lowest unemployment rate since October 2008. In comparison Canterbury and Shepway currently have higher unemployment rates at 6.4% and 6.9% respectively with Maidstone seeing 5.2% unemployment. The unemployment rate for the south east is 5% and nationally 6.8%.

Median weekly earnings (gross) for employees living in the borough were £506.30 in 2014. This income has fluctuated over the last 5 years as shown in Table 2

Figure 6: Median weekly earnings (gross) for residents living in the area, all full time workers

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Ashford	506.30	512.50	496.60	507.90	470.00
Canterbury	574.40	577.50	545.60	559.70	510.90
Maidstone	515.40	500.90	542.90	538.30	558.40
Shepway	481.40	500.50	474.90	491.00	480.80

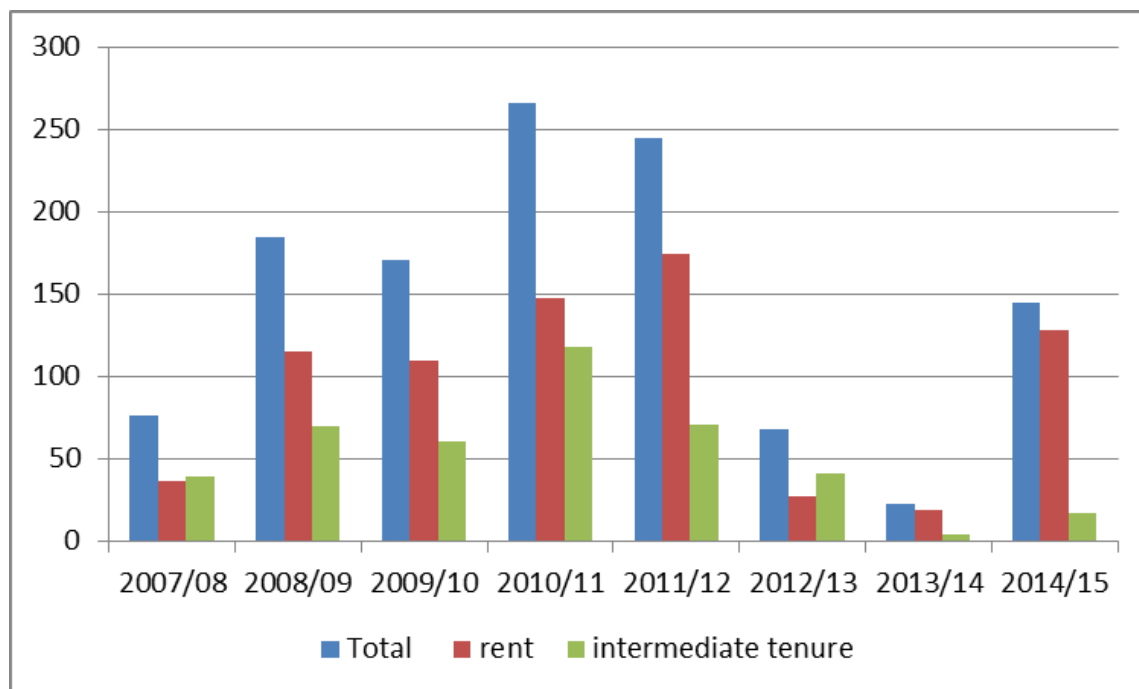
Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis

⁵ https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157311/subreports/ea_time_series/report.aspx?

Affordable housing delivery

The SHMA 2012 concludes that there is a need for 368 affordable homes to be built each year. The Chart x below illustrates that affordable housing delivery has fallen below the level needed each year.

Figure 7: Affordable housing built per year



Population

The population of the borough is predicted to continue growing from its level of 117, 956 recorded by the Census 2011.

Figure 8: Predicted population growth to 2031

Year	Population
2016	133,700
2021	149,700
2026	165,600
2031	170,100

Source: KCC District Profile version September 2014

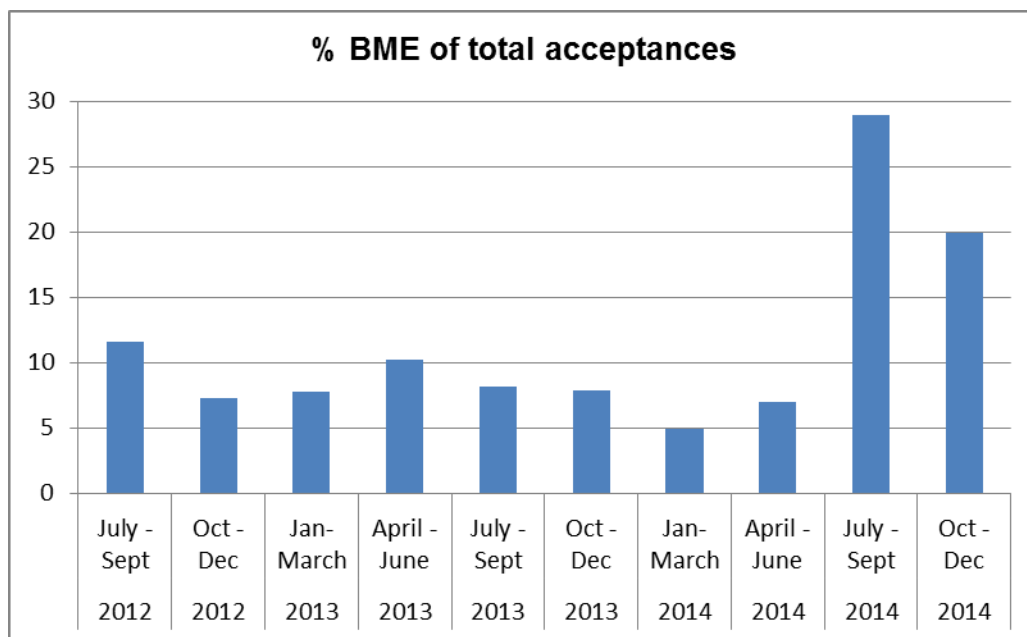
The majority of the population is white, 93.7% with 6.3% of the population formed by black and minority ethnic groups (BME)⁶. The BME population of Ashford is slightly lower than that of the south east or nationally at 13% and 18% respectively.

It is useful to compare homelessness acceptances from BME groups to identify whether homelessness is disproportionately higher or lower than the population profile. The chart

⁶ Census 2011

below shows the percentage of homeless acceptances (eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need) from applicants from a Black or minority ethnic origin. A further breakdown of acceptances by BME groups is shown in Figure 24.

Figure 8: Percentage of homelessness acceptances by BME groups of total acceptances



Source: <http://opendatacommunities.org/data/homelessness/homelessness-acceptances/ethnicity>

Deprivation

In the current indices' of deprivation (2010)⁷ Ashford has an average rank of 198 (out of 326). In 2007 Ashford ranked 227 out of 354 authorities, equivalent to a drop in one place in the average rank of local authorities. In neighbouring authorities, Maidstone shows less deprivation with a rank of 217, whilst Canterbury and Shepway have greater levels of average deprivation with a rank of 166 and 97 respectively in 2010.

In comparison with other Kent authorities Ashford ranks 8th out of 12 (with 1 being most deprived).⁸

The overall indices of multiple deprivation is made up of seven domains each weighted according to their perceived importance: Income (22.5%); Employment (22.5%); Health deprivation and disability (13.5%); Education and skills (13.5%); Barriers to housing and services (9.3%); Crime (9.3%); Living environment (9.3%).

Each domain is scored at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) and there are on average 3 -4 LSOAs per ward. Deprivation data is not available at ward level. The pattern of deprivation can vary considerable within a district. KCC has recorded the 20 most deprived LSOA's in Kent for each domain. Two Ashford LSOAs are recorded as falling within the most deprived 20 in Kent for education and skills (4th and 20th) and four LSOA's for barriers to housing and services (4th, 10th, 14th and 15th). These four LSOAs fall with the wards of Isle of Oxney, Downs North, Saxon Shore and Downs west.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2010>

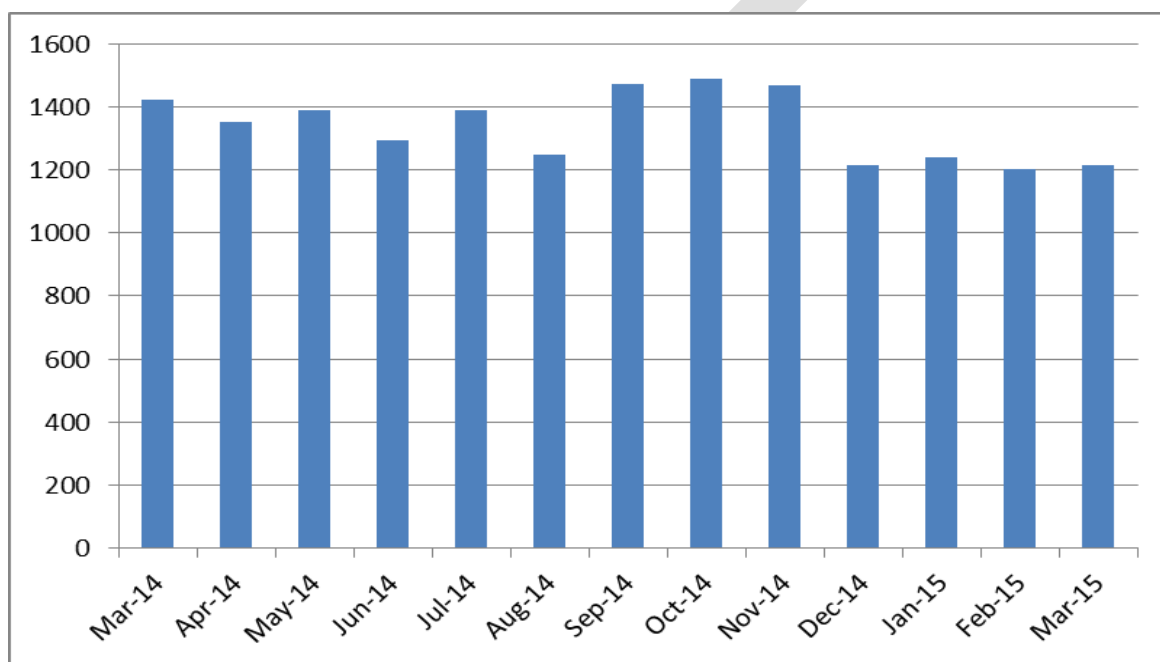
⁸ KCC indices of deprivation 2010 detailed findings

The indicators used to create the domain barriers to housing and services are; household overcrowding, homelessness, housing affordability, distances to GP surgery, food shop, primary school, post office. Housing affordability and distance to services will be of higher significance in rural areas.

Housing Register

The number of applicants on the Ashford housing register each month is shown in the graph below.

Figure 9: Number of applicants on Ashford Housing Register



Numbers on the housing register vary due to undertaking annual reviews and the number of people housed, which could decrease at anyone point due to new affordable housing becoming available.

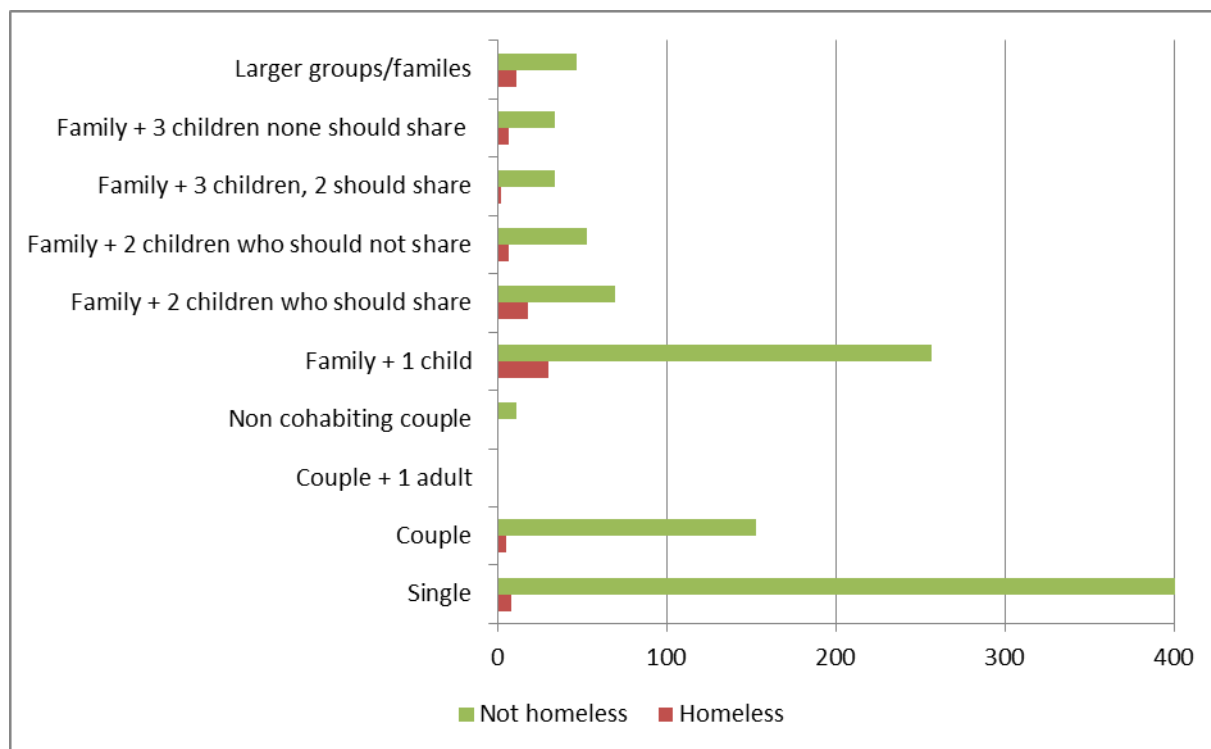
In February 2015 the greatest numbers of applicants on the housing register were single people, couples and families with 1 child, indicating a need for shared housing, 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation. Applicants on the housing register are allocated a band dependent on their assessed housing needs. Band A is for those with the most urgent housing needs. Figure 10 details each and the number of applicants that fall within each band and of those the number that are homeless.

Figure10: Housing register applicants in each band

Band	Total number of applicants	Number registered as homeless
A	39	3
B	63	0
C	1028	83
D	107	1
E	4	1

Of the applicants on the register, 88 applicants are homeless. The majority, 75 households, are families with children and larger families, requiring 2 bedroom, 3 bedroom and larger accommodation. The highest number of homeless households are accommodated in private sector leasing property (56), Bed and Breakfast (15) and in the private rented sector (12).

Figure 11: Household composition of housing register applicants, February 2015



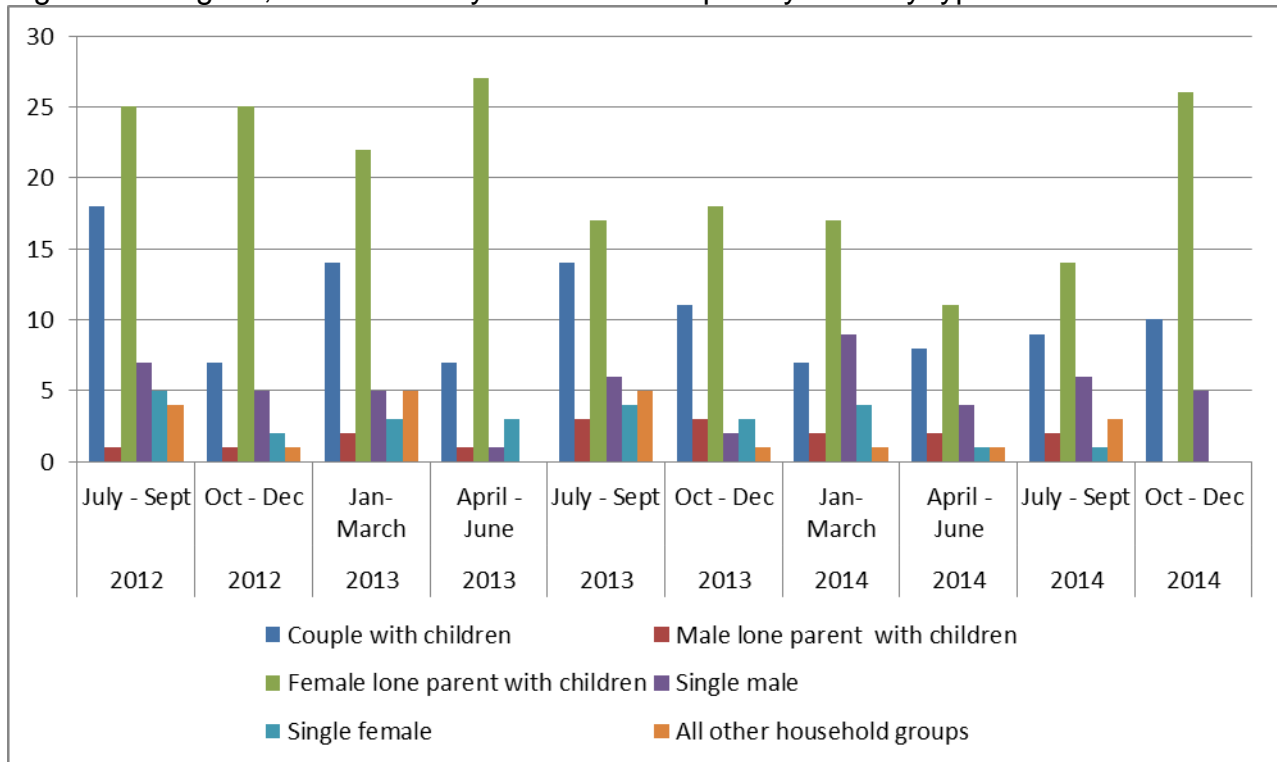
Similarly during 2013/14 there were 167 homeless acceptances. The composition of these households is predominantly with children and the highest requirement is for 2 bedroom accommodation.

Figure 12: Household composition of homeless acceptances 2013/14

Household	Number of acceptances
pregnant no other children	12
1 child	63
2 children	29
3 or more children	23
single people	40

The trend of the composition of homeless households over a period of time is shown in figure 13, confirming that majority of eligible, unintentional and priority need households are families.

Figure 13: Eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need by type of household



Source : P1e data

Empty Homes

The total number of vacant properties⁹ at 6th October 2014, was 1007 an increase from the previous years total of 997 but lower than 2012 and 2011 totals of 1163 and 1221 vacant properties respectively. Within this total the number of long term empty homes (vacant for more than 6 months) at October 2014 were 250 properties, a decrease from the previous 3 years of 307, 449 and 504.

In all social housing 34 properties were vacant at 1st April 2014. With only 1 long term empty property held by a registered provider. This is a decrease on the total of vacant social housing in 2013 of 88 where 46 properties were defined as long term vacant. These could be accounted for in sites waiting redevelopment such as Ashdown Court. Within the council's own stock there were 26 vacant properties at 1st April 2014 a decrease on the previous two years of 34 and 49 properties. Similarly a decrease in vacant properties owned by registered providers is seen with 8 properties in 2014, 54 in 2013 and 61 in 2012.

⁹ DCLG live tables 615

Court possessions

Figure 14: Number of claims and possessions over the last 3 years

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (April – Dec 14)
Mortgage claims	131	120	97	58
Mortgage possessions	37	34	37	4
Private landlord claims	45	40	53	25
Private landlord possessions	3	12	12	10
Social landlord claims	117	173	174	95
Social landlord possessions	21	22	32	10
Accelerated landlord possessions	7	17	26	17
Total possessions	68	85	107	41

Source: KCC mortgage and landlord possession statistics in Kent, at quarter 3, 2014

And <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mortgage-and-landlord-possession-statistics-october-to-december-2014>

A mortgage or landlord possession action starts when a mortgage lender or landlord completes and submits a 'claim' to the courts to repossess a property. The most common reason for repossession is arrears of mortgage or rent.

Landlords can sometimes evict tenants using 'accelerated possession'. This is quicker than a normal eviction and doesn't usually need a court hearing

The landlord can only do this if the tenants has:

- an assured shorthold tenancy or a statutory periodic tenancy
- a written tenancy agreement
- been given you the required written notice (a minimum of 2 months) in the right form
- hasn't been asked to leave before the end of a fixed-term tenancy

For accepted homeless cases the reasons for the approach have been recorded as given in Figure 15. A private landlord does not always state why the S21 has been served. There are few homelessness acceptances from social housing as anyone evicted from social tenancies tend to be found intentionally homeless. In addition the eviction panel will work to consider ways of preventing an eviction from council owned housing, whereby before an area manager applies for a warrant of eviction it is considered by the serious arrears officer and the senior housing options officer if there is any additional advice or support that could help the household to prevent their homelessness. Help can only be given where tenants are willing to engage with staff.

Figure 15: Reasons for approach for accepted homelessness cases

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (April – Sept 14)
Mortgage arrears	3	5	7	3
Private landlord arrears	0	2	1	1
Private landlords termination S21	43	54	66	22
Social landlord arrears	0	1	0	0

Homeless acceptances

Over the last 5 years the average number of homelessness acceptances has been 175 per year. The number per year is shown in figure 16 below.

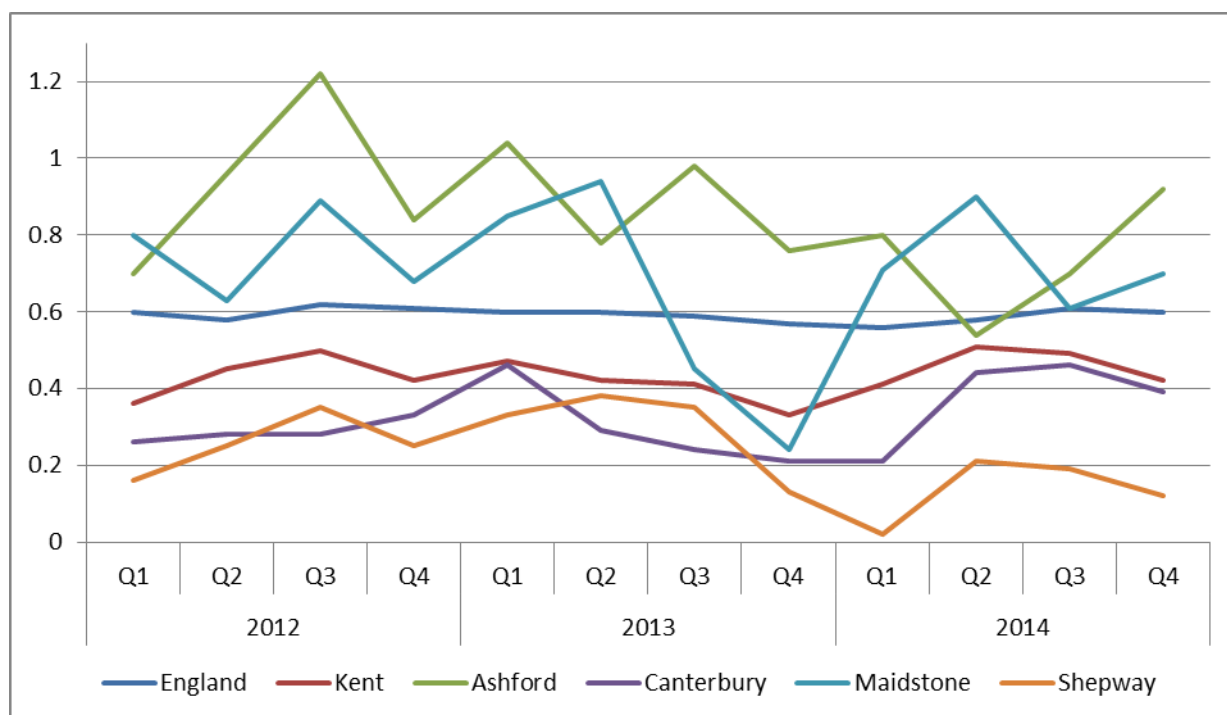
Figure 16: Numbers accepted as homeless and being in priority need



To compare with neighbouring authorities and nationally the number of acceptances per 1000 households is used. Ashford consistently has a higher number of acceptances per 1000 households than the national average except for a dip in quarter 2 of 2014.

Following an external review of the Housing Options Service, a range of measures has been implemented to improve the service. This includes a training programme for officers, the appointment of two new Landlord Liaison Officers together with conducting more robust investigations, reviewing all of our processes, restructuring the team and being more pro-active has resulted in a fall in the number of acceptances being noted. However, landlords selling properties are not considering homelessness prevention; in addition, many landlords will no longer take the Homeless Prevention Bond and with market rents higher than the LHA rate, private rented properties are largely unaffordable to anyone claiming full benefits, especially single persons.

Figure17: Homelessness acceptances per 1000 households



Source: KCC homelessness bulletin 2014 qtr4

Reasons for loss of last settled home

In Ashford there have been reductions in homelessness acceptances where parents or relatives/friends were no longer willing to accommodate and in non violent relationship breakdown over the last two years. This reduction is attributable to a review of working practices to, wherever possible, keep people at home, especially young people. Home visits are undertaken to every client at risk of homelessness so both the client and the person evicting them can be spoken with to assess the circumstances. With regard to young people there is a lead housing options officer who works closely with Social Services to conduct a joint assessment with them and the young person to decide if the young person should be a Child In Care (following the Southwark judgement in 2009).

The recent changes at KCC social services has seen the introduction of an Early Help and Prevention Service. These services are designed to respond early to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and families, who without early help would be at greater risk of developing more serious problems and having poorer outcomes. Adequate housing and prevention of homelessness is a critical factor in providing a stable environment for children and young people.

A rise in homelessness acceptances has been seen in loss of rented or tied accommodation due to a termination of an assured shorthold tenancy, violent relationship breakdown and loss of rented accommodation for other reasons.

Some landlords are now selling their properties and no longer wish to rent them out. To monitor the reasons for loss of private rented accommodation the reasons for serving a S21 notice, where known, will be recorded, although this is not a requirement.

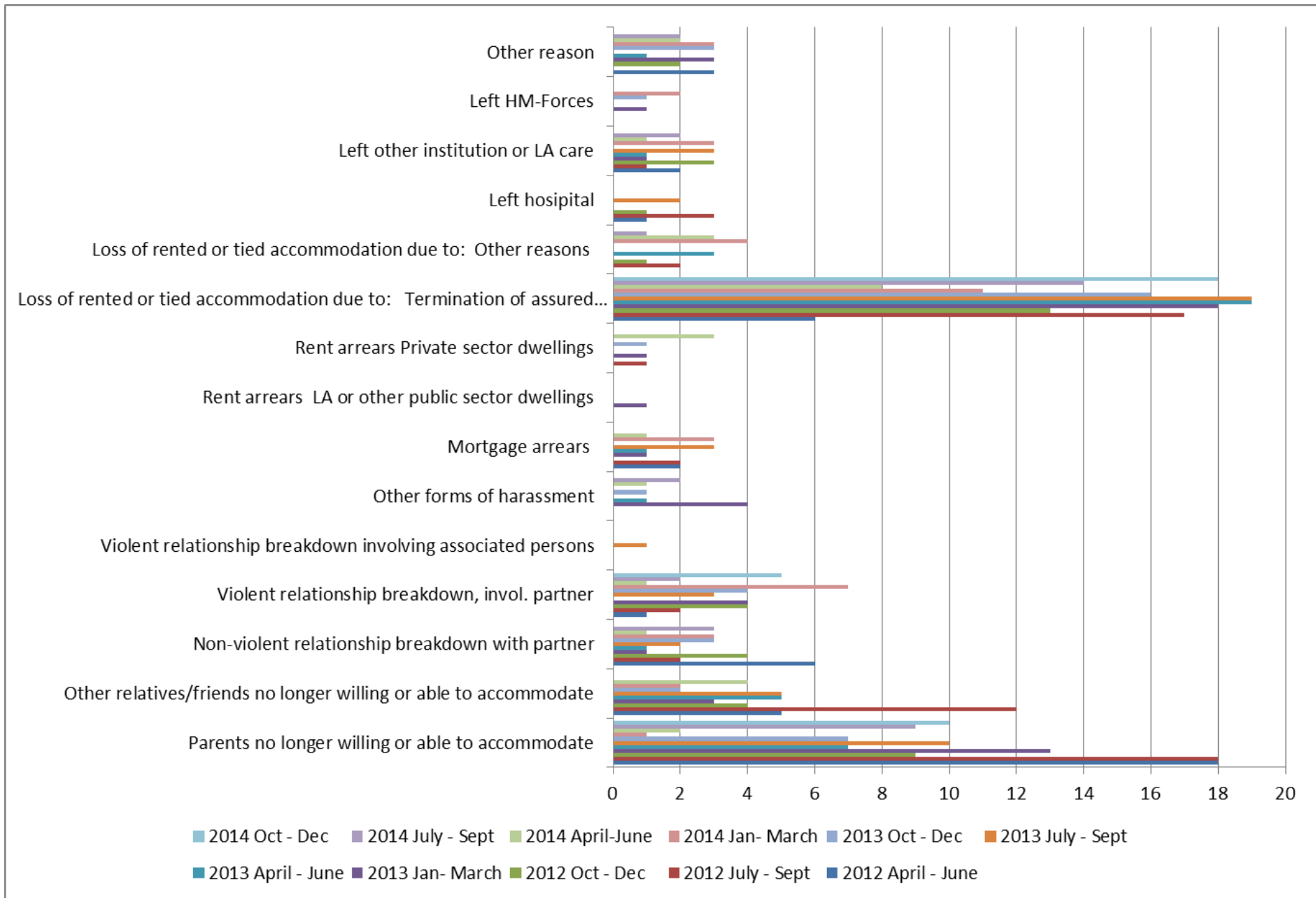
The rise in acceptances due to violent relationships could be due to having a named housing options officer as a point of contact for domestic violence, who attends MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) and co-ordinates the SAFE referrals, plus there is a one stop shop which is held every week at the Willow Centre, enabling more victims of domestic violence to come forward to seek housing advice.

There were no recorded acceptances for the following reasons

- Racially motivated violence
- Other forms of violence
- Racially motivated harassment
- Rent arrears registered social landlord/other housing association dwellings
- Required to leave National Asylum Support Service accommodation

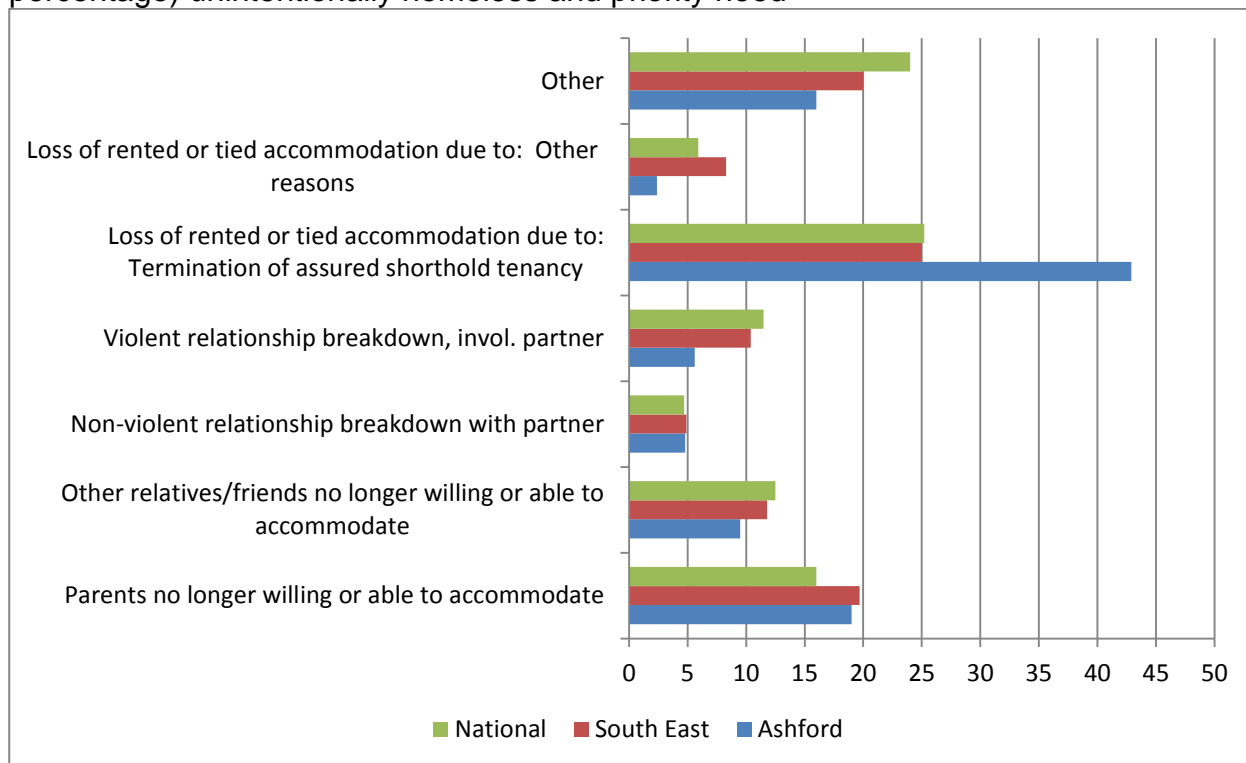
Figure 18: Reason for loss of accommodation

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Using a percentage of homeless acceptances (unintentionally and priority need) to compare local to regional and national figures for 2013/14. This highlights that the loss of rented accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy is creating higher proportion of numbers of homelessness cases locally

Figure 19: Local, national and regional comparison for homeless acceptances 2013/14 (by percentage) unintentionally homeless and priority need



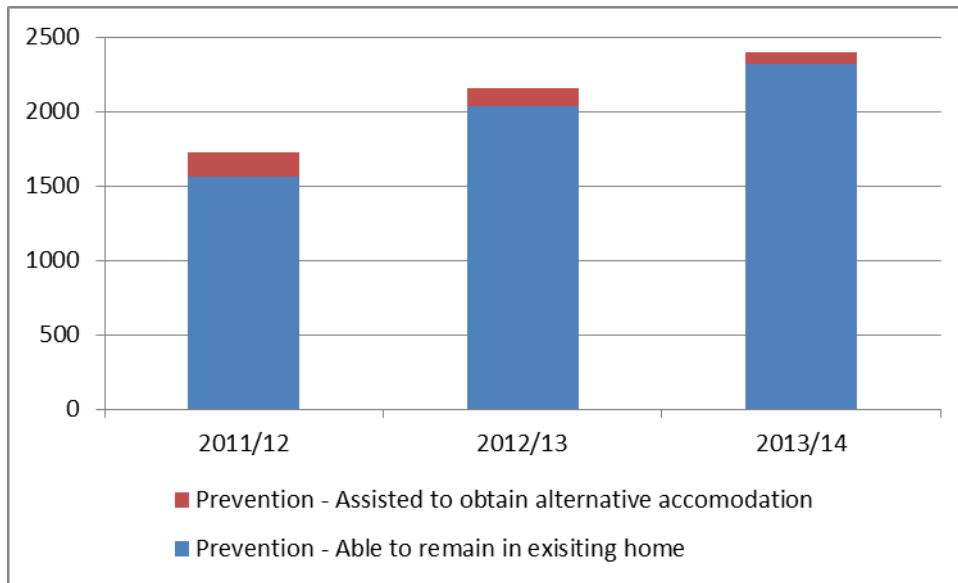
Source: From P1e via practioners support statistical compiler

Prevention and relief of homelessness

Homelessness prevention involves providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness. This is done by either assisting them to obtain alternative accommodation or enabling them to remain in their existing home. Prevention work is occasionally done in conjunction with partner agencies such as CAB, Floating Support etc.

Homelessness relief occurs when an authority has made a negative homeless decision i.e. that a household is either intentionally homeless or is non priority as defined within part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (amended 2002), but helps someone to secure alternative accommodation, even though it is under no statutory obligation to do so.

Figure 20: Prevention, number of cases where homelessness has been prevented in Ashford



Homelessness prevention is always the preferred option and a range of options will be explored to determine if the households can remain in their existing accommodation or assisted to find alternative settled accommodation.

In 2013/14 the rate per 1000 households of homelessness prevention in Ashford was 48.98. This is significantly higher than the overall rate per 1000 households for England which was 9.28.

Figure 21: Measures used to prevent homelessness by percentage of total preventions

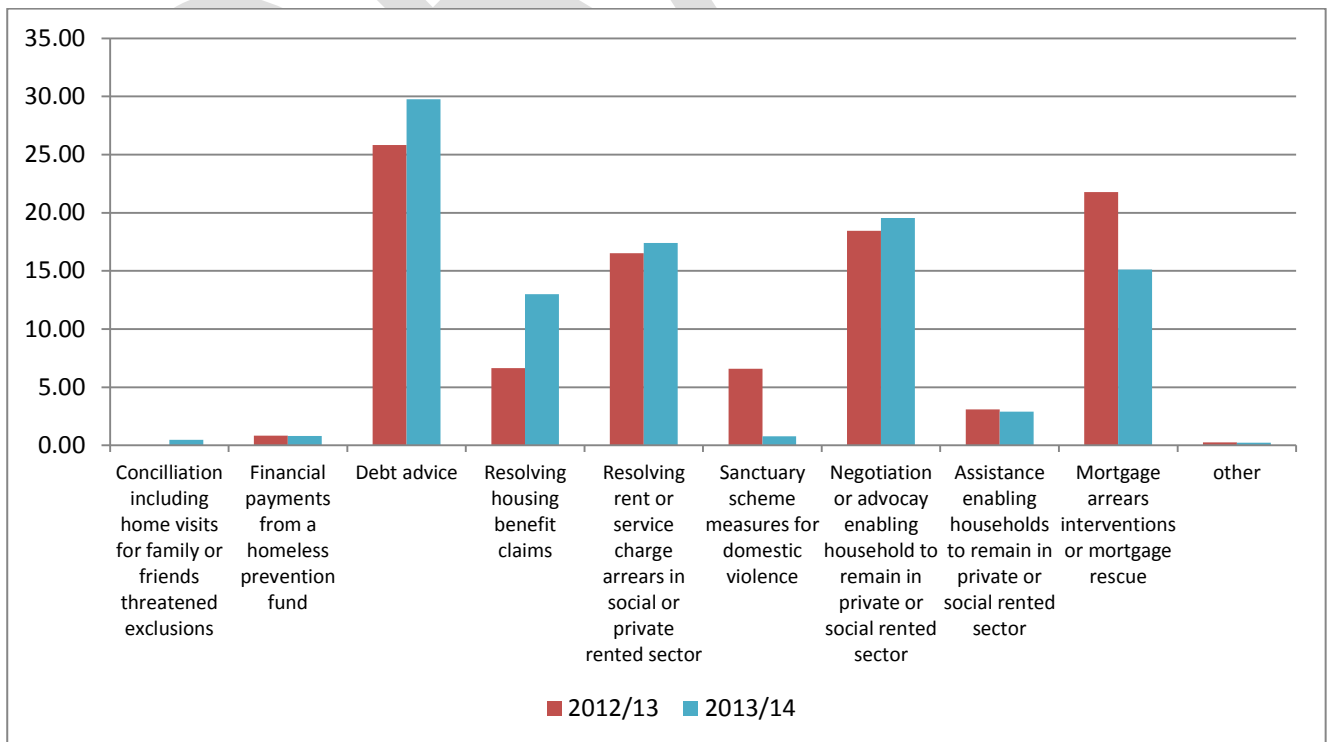


Figure 22: Number of negative decisions (not homeless, non priority, intentionally homeless)

	Not homeless	Non priority	Intentionally homeless
2012/13	105	19	19
2013/14	141	30	28

The housing option available to relieve homelessness is into the private rented sector where procuring properties is difficult. Since the recruitment of the 2 Landlord Liaison Officers you can see numbers where positive action has been successful in relieving homelessness have increased.

Figure 23: Number of cases where positive action was successful in relieving homelessness

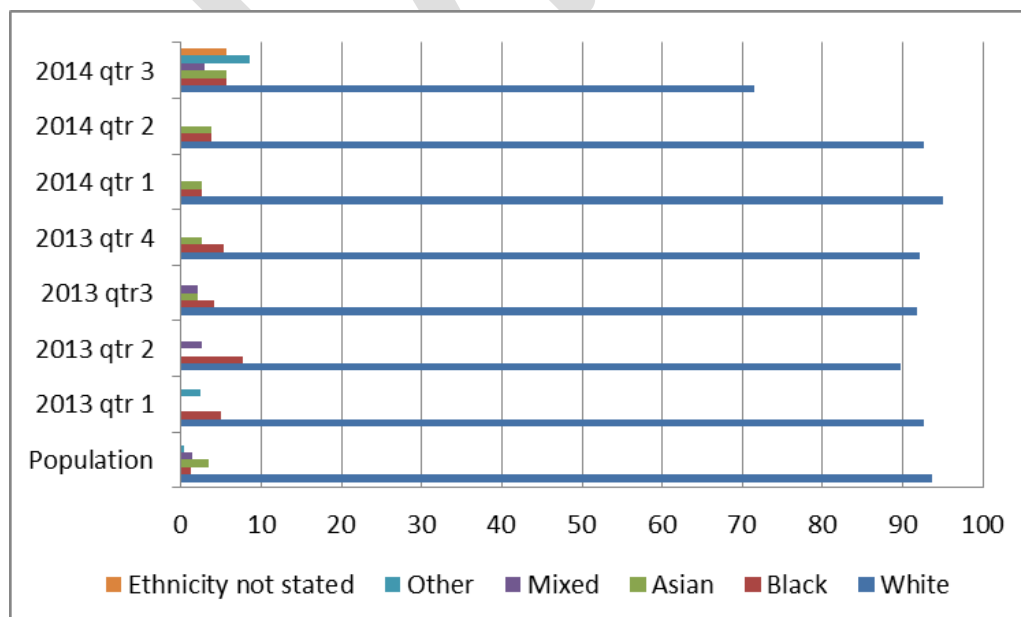
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Ashford	1	2	4

Acceptances by ethnic origin

The population of Ashford is predominately white making up 93.7% of the total population. The percentage of the Ashford population from BME groups from the 2011 census is: Black 1.2% , Asian 3.4%, Mixed 1.4%, Other 0.4.

It is important to compare ethnic minority acceptances against the population profile to determine if there is any disproportionate representation of any group.

Figure 24: Ashford: Eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need by ethnic origin as percentage of total acceptances.



Homelessness decisions

The number of homeless decisions for Ashford over the last 7 quarters up to December 2014 is shown in Figure 25.

Figure 25: Homelessness decisions

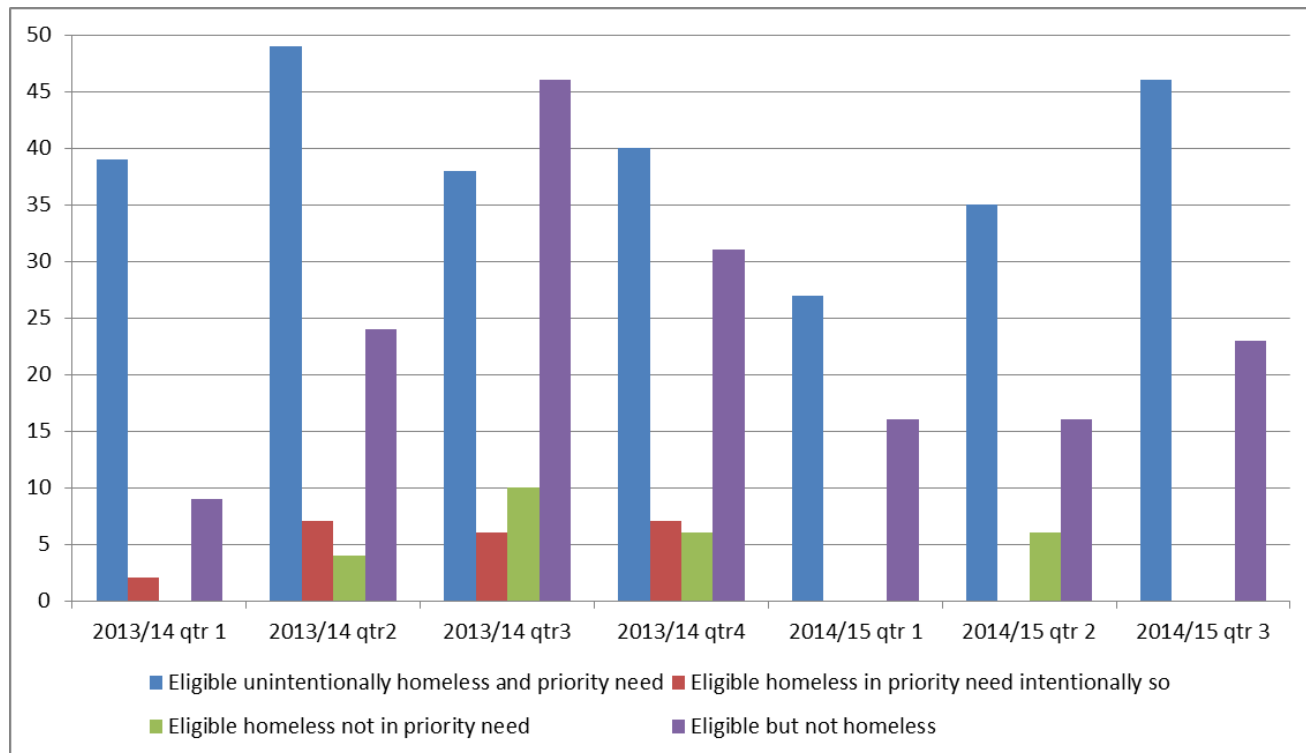
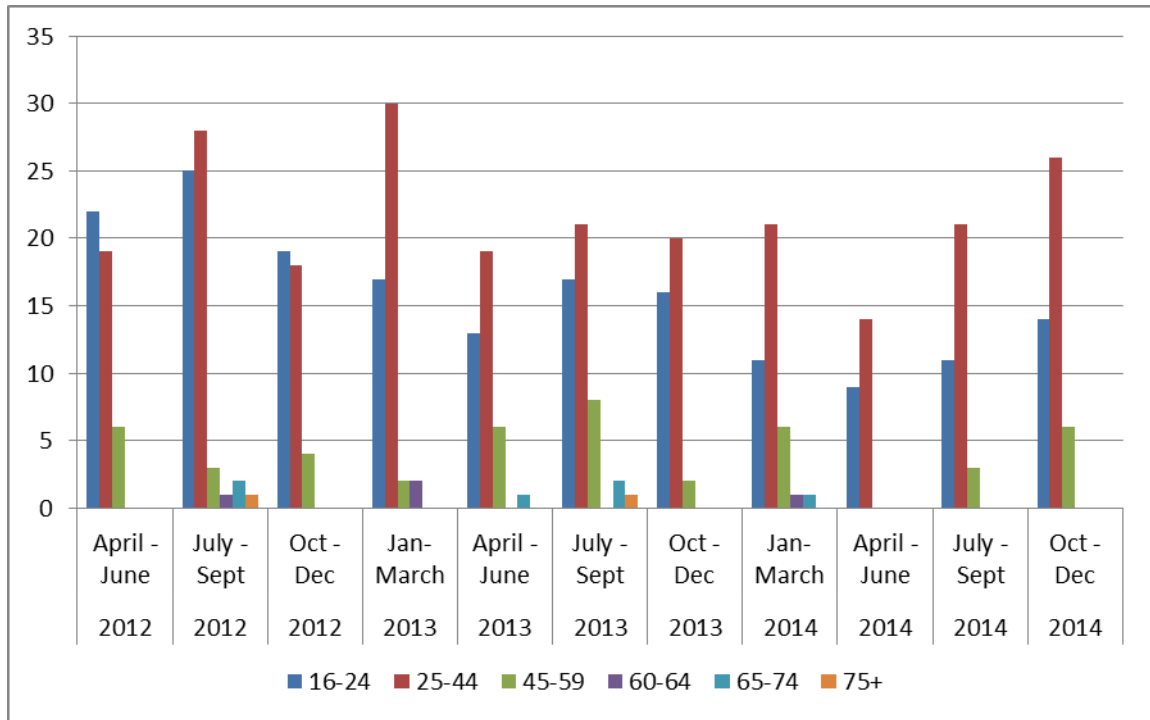


Figure 26: Comparison to the national averages for homelessness decision for the year 2013/14.

	% of all decisions Ashford 2013/14	% of all decisions England 2013/14
Eligible unintentionally homeless and priority need	52	47
Eligible homeless in priority need intentionally so	7	8
Eligible homeless not in priority need	6	19
Eligible but not homeless	35	27

Understanding the age range, in addition to the household composition, of homeless applicants will help inform what services need to be provided. As can be seen from Figure 27, the majority of homeless households fall within the age ranges 16-24 and 25 – 44.

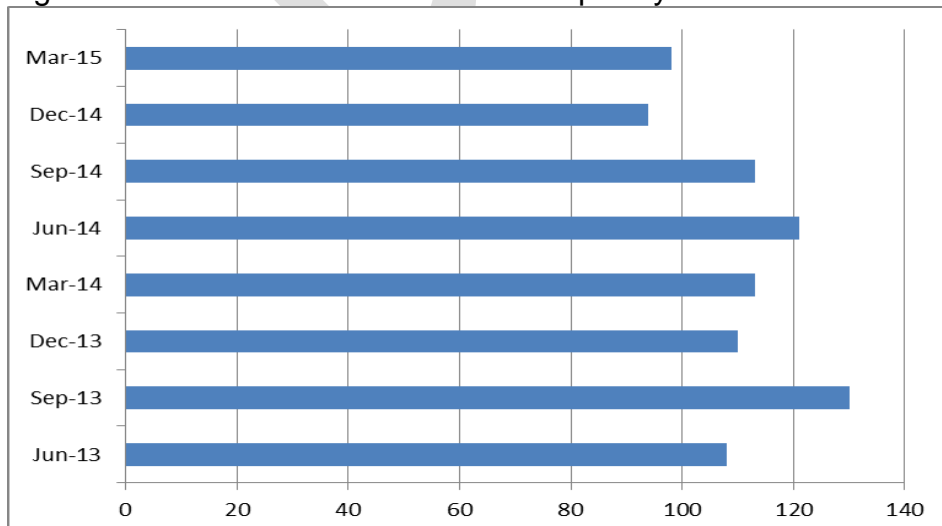
Figure 27: Ashford: eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need by age of applicant



Applicant households' accommodation (temporary accommodation)

In Ashford the total a number of households in temporary accommodation is over 100 at the end of each quarter as shown in Figure 28. Between 60 and 70 households are accommodated in private sector leased properties at any one time. Other temporary accommodation available includes Christchurch House, Bed and Breakfast and self contained properties within Ashford Borough Council's own stock.

Figure 28: Number of households in temporary accommodation



The numbers accommodated in temporary accommodation remains stable due to maintaining a constant supply of PSL properties, which provides longer term, better quality, temporary accommodation.

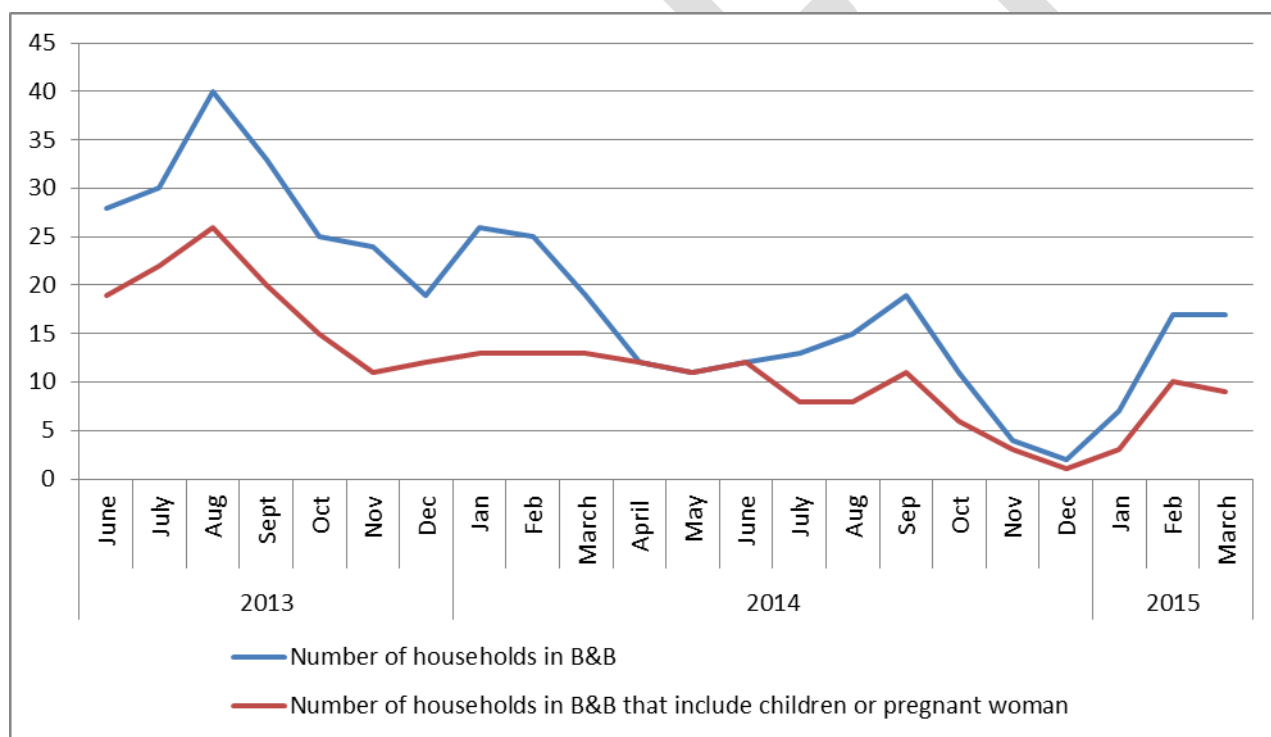
The length of time spent in temporary accommodation varies. Moving on to settled accommodation is either into social housing through bidding on Kent HomeChoice or into the private rented sector.

It is very unusual for a household to be placed out of the area, and then would only be for specific reason.

Bed & Breakfast accommodation use

The use of bed and breakfast accommodation in 2014 is declining as can be seen in Figure 29. This illustrates both the total number of households in B&B and within that total the number of households with children or a pregnant woman.

Figure 29: Households in B&B accommodation



The reduction in the numbers of households in bed and breakfast accommodation is attributable to the review and a restructuring of the housing options team and its working practices.

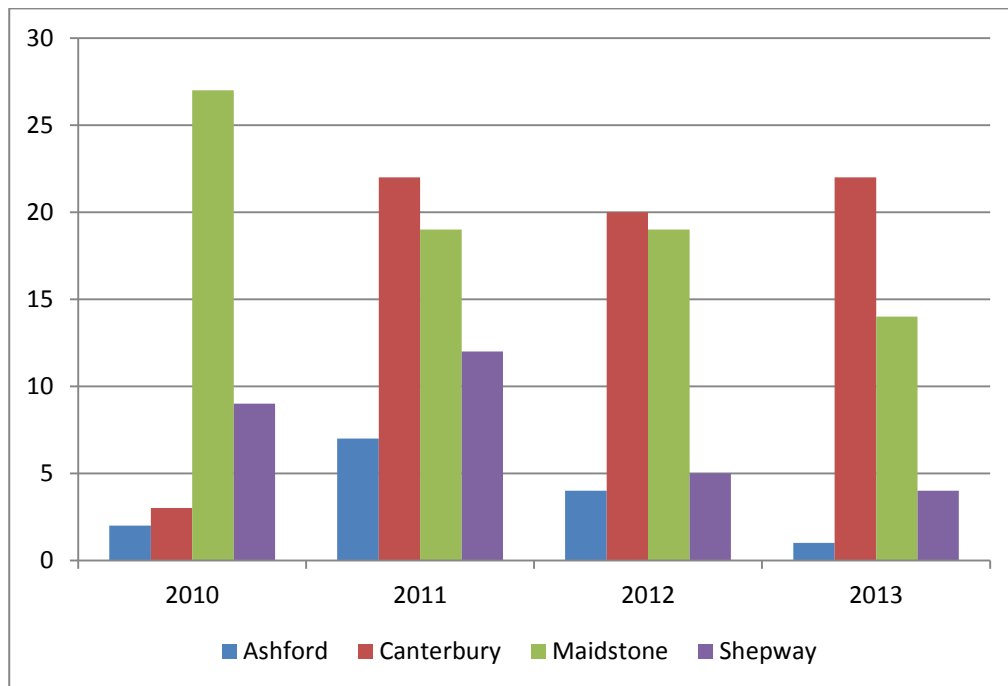
The length of time spent in bed and breakfast accommodation should be as short as is possible. Figures collected at the end of each year show a snapshot of the number of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than the six week legal limit as: 2010/11 = 9, 2011/12 = 3, 2012/13 = 6, 2013/14 = 8

Rough sleeping

The number of rough sleepers is estimated annually in each local authority area.

The figure 30 compares the number of estimated rough sleepers in neighbouring local authorities. Ashford, historically has the lowest number of rough sleepers, in the 2014 estimate this has increased to 5 rough sleepers.

Figure 30: Number of Rough Sleepers (estimate)



Ashford historically has a lower number of rough sleepers than the neighbouring authorities. Although there has been a rise to an estimated 5 rough sleepers at the count in 2014. This rise could be due to difficulties in securing accommodation in the private rented sector due to the LHA rates and the cut in housing benefit for under 35s (reduced to single room rate rather than the one room rate). In addition, funding for the Porchlight outreach service has been reduced so they are unable to offer the same level of pro-active work.

Demand on Housing Options Service

Figure 31: Approaches for housing advice

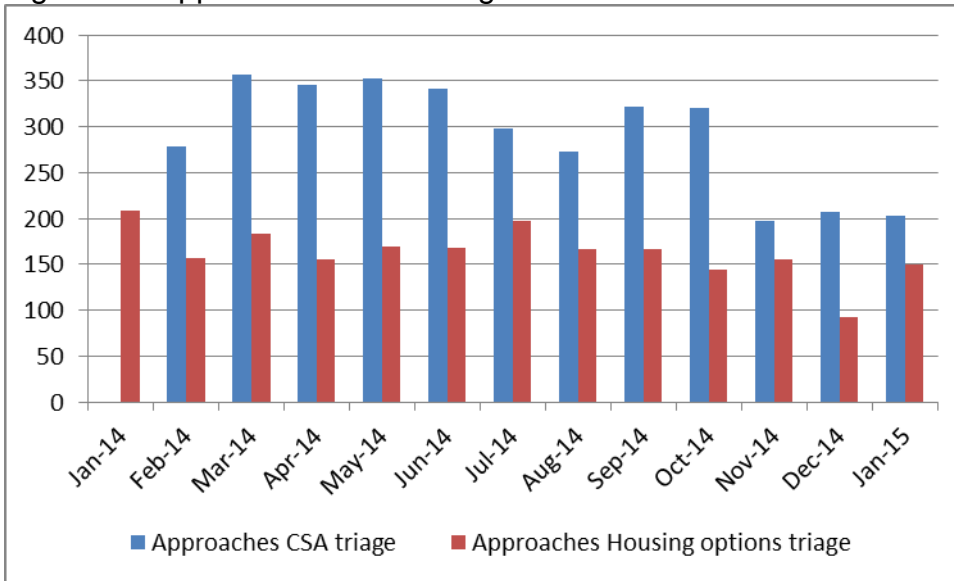
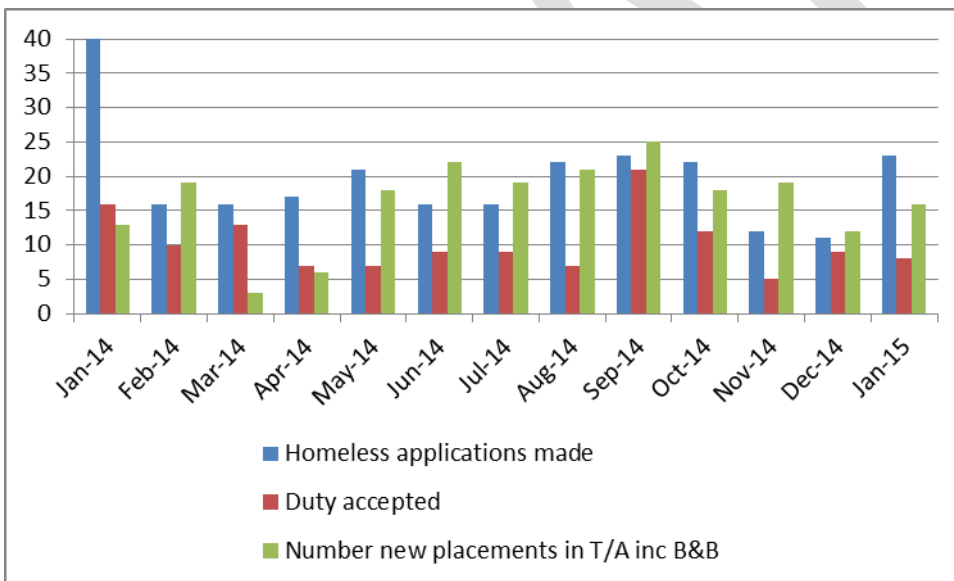


Figure 31: Number of applications and outcomes



The above charts demonstrate that whilst numbers approaching the service are high the number of applications and cases accepted shows that prevention work carried out is being effective.

Alongside statistical evidence a homelessness review also needs to consider current practice in preventing and dealing with homelessness, existing services and accommodation provision. It also seeks to identify where services may need to be strengthened or developed to have the most positive effect in preventing and reducing homelessness.

Corporate approach

Homelessness is one of 5 key priorities of the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board looks at the way the health and wellbeing of Ashford's residents is observed and measured and how to improve their health and wellbeing, through joined up commissioning across the National Health Service, social care, borough council, public health and other services that are directly related to health and wellbeing. Unsuitable housing and homelessness can have a negative impact on a person's health and wellbeing. Reducing negative housing factors can therefore contribute to easing pressures on health and social care services.

The Councils corporate plan, Focus 2013-15 does not have a specific priority to tackle homelessness but is committed to providing quality homes and places to live.

The Ashford Housing Strategy has a specific priority to:

Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

With an action to:

Implement the homelessness strategy with focus on:

Preventing homelessness wherever possible

Providing quality housing services and suitable accommodation for homeless people.

The Council's Tenancy Strategy introduced fixed term tenancies from 1st October 2012. This enables reviews of tenants' circumstances and facilitates using housing stock in the most appropriate way for those in greatest housing need. The Lettings Policy was updated in January 2015 and at an operational level the housing register is reviewed every 6 months.

The Council works collaboratively with other local authorities and agencies, often under the auspices of the Kent Housing Group and the Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing) where greater benefit is derived from a joined up approach and sharing of good practice.

The Kent Housing Group's primary aim is to encourage discussion around best practice in housing amongst Chief Housing Officers of Local Authorities and Chief Executives of Housing Associations working in Kent. The groups remit includes:

- Providing strategic leadership - shaping and setting the housing agenda;
- Building relationships and influence decisions for the benefit of Kent;
- Drawing in resources from both traditional and alternative sources.
- Working together to improve the supply and quality of affordable homes.
- Creating sustainable communities in Kent.

Along with being tasked with the delivery of the Kent Forum Housing Strategy¹⁰ This strategy recognises that each authority will have its own homelessness strategy. The strategy acknowledges the pressures and challenges of the recent economic downturn, welfare reform and increased demand for private rented properties could affect homelessness and this will be monitored.

The Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing is a strategic partnership between health, housing and social care. The JPPB provides the forum where strategic issues

¹⁰ <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/community-and-living/Regeneration/KFHS%20Refresh%20FINAL.pdf>

requiring joint working between health, housing and social care, can be raised and measures to address them, developed.

A policy for the discharge of homelessness duty into the private rented sector is in place having been developed jointly with 5 other Kent authorities and adopted by Ashford Borough Council. By working jointly it is anticipated that this will ensure a consistent approach to implementing the power across the County. This is one example of joint working across the county that is led by the Kent Housing Options Group, a sub group of KHG.

The Housing Options Team

The structure of the Housing Options Team is shown in Appendix 1. The Team was reconfigured in 2013 to provide a more streamlined service after customers were experiencing long waiting times at the Gateway and further delay for follow up appointments if necessary. A telephone triage service now operates between 9am and 4pm and an appointment made for a Housing Option Officer to return the call the same day, for more complex cases a home visit can be made within 72 hours of the initial call. Home visits are arranged to ensure time is available for officers to complete their case work. All services are geared towards prevention of homelessness. This includes clients being advised of all their housing options, an income and expenditure assessment to assess affordability together with a 'whole needs' assessment to see what other support maybe needed and can be referred or signposted to. Outside of normal hours a Housing Options Officer is on call to respond to emergencies that come via the Council's monitoring centre.

Each of the 4 housing options officers work generically with a specific responsibility for a particular client group; mental health, young people, ex-offenders and domestic abuse. This enables close working relationships to be formed with a range of agencies and personnel as well as the wider Housing Options Team to look proactively for suitable options within the private rented sector. The specific officer approach has been well received by agencies as they now have a recognised name contact to get in touch with when they are working with a client who needs housing assistance. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of "homeless tonight" cases approaching from these areas.

The Whole Needs Assessment tool enables Housing Options Officers to refer and signpost customers to other organisations that can assist with specific problems. This recognises that difficulty accessing or maintaining housing can be interrelated with other issues, such as debt, benefits, health and support. The tool is currently under review with new partner agencies being added.

Each customer has a named Housing Option Officer to liaise with and once housed an officer relevant to the tenure will continue to offer support to them whether in social housing stock or the private rented sector.

An independent review of the Housing Options Service was undertaken in 2014. This identified a number of strengths and that the team is working effectively.

Accessing suitable accommodation and helping tenants to maintain tenancies in the private rented sector is imperative to reducing and preventing homelessness. The council has landlord liaison officers who can communicate between landlord and tenants, where

there have been problems with a tenancy. These problems may include; damage to property, anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, or failure on the part of the landlord to fulfil their obligations. The landlord liaison officers will investigate and negotiate to if possible to resolve any issues to the satisfaction of both parties.

Under the private sector leasing scheme, the Council leases properties from landlords for a fixed period. This provides suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households. In March 2015 there were 60 households accommodated through the private sector leasing scheme

Also operating is the Council's social lettings agency, A Better Choice Lettings (ABC Lettings) which operates in a similar way to a high street lettings agency to broker tenancies between tenants and landlords, but with a focus to provide access to accommodation for tenants normally seen as a higher risk by high street agencies and landlords. The stark difference is that the main aim is not to make a profit from running such a service but to enable access to accommodation for those who would not normally be able to use a high street lettings agency. This tends to be a large percentage of those who present to the Council as homeless.

Protocols are used to ensure good practice is adhered to from all agencies especially when dealing with vulnerable client group. A number of protocols have been developed on a county wide basis under the guidance of the Joint Policy and Planning Board (housing) together with a reconnection policy which aims to promote equal access to supported accommodation but to enable reconnection to an area when the supported service is no longer required. The JPPB (Housing) is currently reviewing the protocols to ensure the restructure at social services is reflected, which may mean changes to existing practices.

To improve homelessness services across Kent, Ashford has with other local authorities signed up to the Gold Standard¹¹ programme, designed to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services. The challenge follows a 10 step continuous improvement approach that starts with a pledge for local authorities aspiring to 'strive for continuous improvement in front line housing services' and culminates in an application for the Gold Standard Challenge. This review has been developed with reference to the gold standard programme.

Communications

The stakeholder consultation event identified that there are misconceptions around homelessness and lack of knowledge about services that are offered and options available to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The council does not have a communication plans for homelessness and currently raises awareness of the issues through officer contact with a range of organisations and agencies. Individual agencies working with homeless people undertake their own publicity campaigns and awareness raising.

The Council's Landlord Liaison Officers promote the work they do to both high street letting agents and private landlords and emphasize that early intervention is key in preventing homelessness. They hold a Landlord's Focus Groups bi-monthly and a Landlord Forum annually. To engage with more landlords to encourage them to use the

¹¹ <http://home.practitionersupport.org/>

social lettings agency a shop front was rented in the high street, which proved successful, with at least 30 new contacts that may lead to procuring additional properties.

Accessing Housing Options Information

There are a number of ways information about housing options can be accessed by the public.

Face to face with a customer service advisor (CSA) at the Gateways in Ashford and Tenterden. CSA will provide basic advice and signposting and refer more complex cases to a housing options officer.

Personal presentations to the Ashford Gateway for the 12 months prior to the end of September 2014 show that Choice Based Lettings is the most common topic, 4135 enquiries, followed by housing advice (2659 enquiries) and then enquires relating to council stock such as repairs and maintenance, rent and mutual exchange.

Telephone advice from customer service advisor or housing services team

Online information available on the Ashford Borough Council website.

Kiosk self help stations are available at the Ashford and Tenterden Gateways and 4 children's centres. In the 12 months prior to end of September 2014, housing was the most frequently chosen option from the kiosk. (The others being employment and benefits).

Within the housing information, the housing options section is most viewed, 1124 views. Within that section information about private renting and choice based lettings are the most frequently chosen. Of the homelessness prevention topics, the most popular were those associated with affordability. 149 visitors clicked directly on the 'I am going to be made homeless' option.

Accommodation and Services

Supported accommodation in the borough is detailed in the table below.

Accommodation (existing)	Client group	Number of units	Level of support	How funded (support)
Porchlight - Simon Mead House	Single homeless (18-65 yrs)	11 Individual bedrooms, shared facilities	Low level	KCC Supporting People
Homegroup - Stonham	Young single people (16-25 yrs)	Individual bedrooms, shared facilities	Low level	KCC Supporting People
Homegroup - Emergency Accommodation (based at Stonham)	Young single people (16-18)	3 Individual bedrooms, shared facilities	Low level	Ashford Borough Council

YMCA - Brookfield Court	Young Single People (16-25)	3 x 3 individual rooms, shared facilities	Low level	Ashford Borough Council
Circa - Womens Refuge	Women fleeing domestic violence	16 self contained units	Medium Level	KCC Supporting People
Christchurch House	Homeless families	8 Individual rooms, shared facilities	No support but superintendent on site daily	Ashford Borough Council

Accommodation being built	Client group	Number of units	Level of support	How Funded
St Stephens Walk – expected completion Sept 2015	Single Homeless	11 Self contained flats	High	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
The Limes – expected completion Sept 2015	Young people (16-25 yrs)	8 Self contained flats and communal space	High	Supporting People

In addition to the above supported accommodation homeless households can be assisted to access private rented accommodation, either directly with a private landlord, or the Ashford Social Lettings agency (64 properties in Ashford on full management option March 2015). Using the Homeless Prevention Bond scheme is another way to assist households into the private rented sector.

Case Study: Christchurch House

Christchurch House in Ashford was a rundown, empty commercial property. It has been renovated and turned into a short-stay accommodation facility containing eight accommodation units (including a wheelchair-accessible unit and wheelchair-friendly kitchen facilities) along with washing facilities, a communal kitchen area, storage space and a pleasant courtyard. The property will be a temporary home to people whom the council has a homeless duty and whose homelessness cases are under review. Traditionally the majority of homeless applicants the council has a duty to house have been placed in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation. This project is expected to save the taxpayer around £75,000 per year and reduce the trauma faced by families in a B&B.

Temporary Accommodation

Temporary accommodation has been in transition since 2011 when the Government introduced LHA rates into the calculation of HB subsidy for temporary accommodation and capped the amount of subsidy payable in temporary accommodation cases. Claimants in temporary accommodation are also subject to the benefit cap. The treatment of temporary accommodation in Universal Credit is a further and final step in the journey of

transition for temporary accommodation. The Government expects LAs to provide suitable permanent accommodation for claimants who present as homeless rather than using over-expensive temporary accommodation to home such families¹².

Services and Support

A number of organisations offer a wide range of services to people which will assist with their housing situation. However it is not always known who provides what and any referral criteria. As part of improving communications greater awareness of services and support offered in the borough or can be accessed by residents would be useful.

These services include:

- Debt advice
- Tenancy training
- Benefit advice
- Employment advice
- Support for families and young people
- Support for homeless people
- Support for victims of domestic abuse

A 'Hub' has been set up in cooperation with the Department of Work and Pensions to offer wider advice to people seeking to return to work to reduce barriers to employment.

Case Study: Kent Advice Service for Single Homeless

The Kent Advice Service for Single Homeless (KASSH) is a service providing assistance to single homeless people across Kent and run by Riverside ECHG. The focus of the service is to help prevent homelessness among single men and women who are at risk of becoming homeless because they are facing eviction from a private rented property, or are sofa-surfing, or who have slept rough already. The KASSH team provide a single service offer which can include emergency accommodation, help with reconnecting to someone's family or home area or a range of other options to prevent single people becoming homeless.

Welfare Reform

A snapshot of claimants affected by the benefit cap on 16th September 2014 identified 49 households affected by the benefit cap, all are families with 3 or more children. 19 households are living in the private rented sector. These households present a higher risk of becoming homeless if they fall into rent arrears than those in council or housing association homes and finding suitable alternative accommodation for larger families is very challenging.

The roll out of Universal Credit means households who previously would have had their rent paid directly to the landlord will now have to budget and be responsible for paying their own housing costs. This will need to be monitored to identify those households who maybe at risk of falling into arrears.

¹² HB circular A9/2014

Consultation Outcomes

Stakeholder consultation – November 2014

The key points identified from the stakeholder consultation were

- Aligning policies and strategic aims.
- Prevention and early help/intervention are key.
- There are a number of projects/initiatives working in this area although some have specific criteria to be able to access them and concern about those people in housing difficulty who may not meet such criteria and potentially could become homeless.
- Awareness raising of what services are available both to professionals and public.
- Identifying first signs of homelessness to enable preventative work to commence.
- Could a directory / web based information portal help access information?
Recognised difficulties of keeping information updated. How best to link to existing 'directories' such as Live It Well website.
- Helping people to 'self-help' through signposting to services.
- Importance of frontline staff giving a consistent message. How could this be better coordinated.
- Are services the right ones to offer. Are people engaging with them, do they know how to access services. More publicity?
- With regard to private rented sector.
 - More needed to be done to improve joint working with private landlords to encourage them to make LA aware when they are looking to evict a tenants so appropriate alternative accommodation can be found.
 - Need to raise awareness of both landlords and tenants of services that can assist, such as tenancy training, landlord liaison officers.
 - Support providers could help families going into PRS, but don't receive any referrals – possibility of including information about support services in tenants packs.
 - Need to address concerns of those who would rather wait for social housing than consider PRS – ABC lettings agency offers minimum 12 months tenancy to help address concerns about security of tenure.
 - If person under notice of eviction they are placed in Band C and housing options officers work with them to find other housing options.
 - Landlord liaison officers to forge closer links with letting agents.
 - To help prevent homelessness, Gravesham BC will give higher banding if household can find alternative accommodation e.g. stay with family.

Agreed that a twice yearly meeting to monitor the progress of the homelessness strategy would be useful.

Common themes emerging were:

- Joint commitment to the prevention of homelessness at a strategic level
- Joint working across all organisations
- Early intervention is key to homelessness prevention
- Improve communication
 - Between partners
 - Increased public awareness of homelessness and causes of homelessness
 - Where to go for help – easy to understand information
- Demand for accommodation for client groups with high support needs and those who do fit into priority need criteria
- Further develop relations with private landlords to increase availability of suitable accommodation for homeless households
 - Work to breakdown misconceptions of private rented sector with tenants
 - Work with tenants to understand responsibility of renting

Gaps

The stakeholder consultation sought to identify where there are gaps in local service provision or what additional services could make a positive contribution to the prevention and reduction of homelessness.

These were grouped under the 10 local challenges set in making every contact count, although some will be effective across several challenges.

- 1 Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
 - Joined up interagency approach to staff training in housing options to ensure consistent information/advice is given.
 - Aligned priorities needed to prevent conflicting objectives – prevention to be key priority
 - Increase commitment to raising awareness of homelessness

- 2 Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, training and employment needs.
 - Need to keep information updated – whole needs assessment tool
 - Some criteria are inflexible restricting help being offered
 - Need to raise public awareness/responsibility
 - Training for partner organisations, managing expectations of what's available
 - Finding out what services are needed from service users.

- 3 Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.
 - Awareness raising for - universal credit, budgeting, anti social behaviour act, providing information to the customers including how to reach those who cannot read or are not computer literate

- Early years education on realities of homelessness, money management etc.
 - Increase joint working in voluntary sector
 - Homelessness options needed for those who are not in priority need
 - Private rented sector not affordable to people on benefits
 - Develop more 'must –do' emphasis on tenants
 - Closer liaison with housing providers when they are taking eviction action
- 4 Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative.
- Need for more supported accommodation and a hostel in Ashford
 - No winter shelter in Ashford for rough sleepers
 - Increase street pastor service
- 5 Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.
- Lack of accommodation for those with high support needs
 - Need better links with mental health teams and support for people with low level mental health problems
 - Increase landlord contacts and Involvement of landlords in the process, knowledge of floating support
 - Difficulties contacting resettlement workers
 - Avoid missed opportunities through customer/staff contact
 - Recognising and dealing with financial issues
- 6 Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords.
- Support for vulnerable tenants
 - Information sharing to sustain tenancies, awareness of potential issues and knowledge of support services available, early identification of problems and signposting to services
 - Tenancy training/packs/accreditation
 - Rent guarantee
- 7 Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction.
- Increase public awareness/understanding of homelessness
 - Improve links between private landlords and services and incentives with letting agents
 - Financial literacy/information courses
 - Mediation service to address parental eviction
 - Joint agency working , specifically for hard to reach families
 - Use of the housing register banding to encourage self help.
- 8 Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs.
- Raising public awareness
 - Influencing policy and sharing policy with other authorities

- Sharing of statistics
- Political recognition of issues

9 Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Use of early help notification at point of 'risk' of homelessness i.e. prevention
- Affordable /safe offer of accommodation / supported lodging model for 16/17 / emergency accommodation for young people with babies
- Intensive support workers
- Family mediation services, keeping families together, holistic support, educating parents (parental responsibility), conflict resolution, relationship mediations
- Education through schools, youth groups etc
- Schools identifying quickly – referring to organisation
- Problems claiming benefits
- Impact of statutory school age on family income

10 Not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

- Maintaining support through from B&B to move –on
- Annexes to current B&B, self contained.
- Lack of temporary accommodation

Service User consultation outcomes – May 2015

Key points

- Accommodation before homelessness and circumstances leading to homelessness
Five respondents were living in private rented or renting from family, four respondents were living with family including family of ex-partners, one respondent was sofa surfing and one respondent was living in the refuge, due to fleeing domestic violence.

The most frequent reason for homelessness was being given notice from private rented or property to be sold (six respondents), family/relationship breakdown was given by three respondents and one respondent had fled domestic violence and another was asked to leave due to overcrowding, from living with ex-partners family.

- Employment and training

Two respondents were in employment/training and have been able to retain that.

- Support and advice

Eight respondents were in contact with services prior to their homelessness, with a mixed response to how helpful they were in regard to housing circumstances. Further to their homelessness the majority of respondents (seven) sought advice from Council or at the Gateway, two used the Citizens Advice Bureau.

With regard to accessing self help through a directory of services, six respondents indicated they would use such a resources, if knew where and how to access the information.

In terms of future accommodation, of those who specified, seven stated they would prefer Council /Housing Association property, and one would prefer the private rented sector. Nine respondents said they have considered looking for private rented accommodation, reason for not pursuing this tenure were given as; not secure, bad experiences with landlords , difficulty using computers to search, spent a long time looking.

Five respondents continued to receive support (mental Health Services, DV services, and family support services) and there was evidence of some signposting to other services.

There was limited response to what support would be useful but money management and tenancy skills were noted being helpful, along with where to access furniture.

- Public awareness

Four respondents thought that there was some public awareness of why people become homeless and four thought there was no public awareness. There was little idea of how to increase public understanding of homelessness.

Outcomes of the Homelessness Strategy 2012.

This section of the Review looks at the achievements of the Homelessness Strategy 2012 and where actions may not been fulfilled. This will highlight areas that need further consideration going forward with the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2015.

The Homelessness Strategy 2012 has 3 priority headings.

- Ashford wide commitment to preventing homelessness wherever possible
- Quality housing services and suitable accommodation for people for whom homelessness cannot be prevented
- Settled and sustainable homes, with access to housing support if needed

By reviewing progress towards achieving these will highlight what is working well and where there may need to be changes to address current homelessness needs to inform our action plan. This is set out in the table below.

- **Ashford wide commitment to preventing homelessness wherever possible**

An up-to-date understanding of homelessness in Ashford so that we are able to direct our resources appropriately.	
Work completed /ongoing	Future work identified
Housing Option Officers now have specialist areas to enable closer working relationship with other agencies, helping to foster a come to us early approach to identify causes of homelessness and utilise prevention measures whenever possible.	Need to continue to reach organisations to increase knowledge of tools available to prevent homelessness.

<p>Ashford worked with other Kent Local Authorities to produce a policy for discharging homelessness duty in to the private rented sector.</p> <p>Data on homelessness is captured through the computer systems and used to inform future work.</p>	<p>Continue to contribute to Kent Housing Options Group meetings and develop ideas for performance monitoring and joint working</p> <p>Make better use of data to monitor trends and develop benchmarking against other Kent local authorities</p>
<p>A commitment from all agencies in Ashford to recognise homelessness triggers and to refer those at risk to appropriate services.</p>	
<p>A telephone triage service has been introduced and home visits follow where needed. Housing Option Officers work closely with landlord liaison officers to prevent homelessness.</p> <p>Regular forums with private sector landlords helps identify and address issues around access to accommodation and standards together with impact of welfare reform.</p> <p>Discretionary Housing Payment has been used to help with homelessness prevention and close working with the welfare reform officers who advise those affected by benefit reduction on how to maximise income and access employment.</p>	<p>Further work required to develop early intervention measures particularly for young people, those with mental health problems and private rented sector tenants.</p> <p>Housing Options Officers find many families they are working with they cannot refer to troubled families project as fail to meet the specific criteria to be accepted to the programme.</p> <p>Given the withdrawal for Mortgage rescue more work needed to promote the Mortgage Repossession Prevention Scheme</p>
<p>Readily available information and advice so that residents are able to meet their own housing needs as far as possible, and prevent homelessness.</p>	
<p>More information is available online, including housing register application form, change of circumstances and updating contact details. An interview and finance form is being developed to avoid duplicating work both for clients and officers in finance and housing.</p> <p>The whole needs assessment approach is being updated to ensure clients are referred to the most appropriate services for their needs, to help them maintain settled accommodation.</p> <p>With the closure of the Shelter office in Ashford, telephone advice continues to be available from them, with the Housing Legal Aid service is provided by Holden & Co.</p>	<p>Further work is needed to improve prevention of homelessness amongst young people. Particularly in light of the withdrawal of funding from the Porchlight schools programme.</p> <p>Information from the self help kiosks needs to be collected and analysis undertaken to determine who is using the facility and if better use could be made of them.</p> <p>Joint working needs to be undertaken to assist people with budgeting, opening bank accounts etc. to enable the receipt of benefits.</p>

- **Quality housing services and suitable accommodation for people for whom homelessness cannot be prevented**

Quality homelessness services and temporary accommodation suitable for people with different needs.	
<p>A supported housing scheme for young people is under construction that will contribute to preventing homelessness and, reducing the use of bed and breakfast.</p> <p>A further scheme of short term accommodation for homeless families is now operating and providing an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation</p> <p>The Kent Advice Service for Single Homeless is running alongside other prevention measures in Ashford.</p> <p>Due to a cut in funding the Porchlight out-reach service for rough sleepers has been reduced.</p>	Continued work on developing robust accommodation pathways for all client groups is required.
Clear pathways to settled housing, a better quality of life, health and wellbeing.	
<p>A regular move-on meeting is held to facilitate planned pathways for clients and to make the best use of the supported accommodation available.</p> <p>Work is ongoing to improve communication with the hospital discharge team especially for people with mental health and substance misuse problems and offenders, who are particularly vulnerable if discharged with no accommodation arranged.</p>	With organisational restructures it is necessary to keep updated with changes to personnel and roles to build relationships with key people to agree proactive, prevention measures are ongoing.

- **Settled and sustainable homes, with access to housing support if needed**

Suitable accommodation and support for people with health, care or support needs who are at risk of homelessness, or homeless.	
<p>The Council contributed the review of the Supporting People Strategy and the Kent Accommodation Strategy to ensure the commissioning of support is meeting local needs.</p> <p>Homelessness is one of the key priorities of the Ashford Health and wellbeing Board, linking the impact of homelessness to increased prevalence of ill health and difficulties accessing services.</p>	

Social and affordable housing is developed and managed effectively to meet housing needs and prevent homelessness.	
The area managers work closely with welfare reform officers to identify tenants who maybe at risk due to changes in benefit regime to assist them to retain existing accommodation or move to a more affordable home	<p>Lack of affordable housing results in fewer opportunities to develop supported housing options for vulnerable people including those at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>With fixed term tenancies a procedure with Registered Providers needs to evolve to ensure timely notification of the ending of a tenancy.</p> <p>Housing Options Officers need training to increase understanding of cultural needs of gypsy and traveller communities to offer appropriate housing advice.</p>
Improved access to suitable and good quality private rented homes, that are affordable and sustainable in the longer term.	
A range of initiatives to increase access to the private rented sector are in place: Landlords forum, accreditation scheme, social lettings agency, signposting to the Kent no use empty campaign, tenancy training	Work is needed to provide accommodation for single homeless people, developing a scheme with private sector landlords to provide shared accommodation either with the council or another agency to manage tenancies could assist those only eligible for shared room rate of housing benefit.

Case study: Welfare Reform Intervention

The Welfare Reform Officer assisted a lady who was struggling to pay her rent to source further part time work which enabled her to claim working tax credits. By meeting regularly to help understand how to budget, she now is managing 3 part time jobs and paying her rent and council tax without assistance. This type of intervention is crucial in preventing homelessness.

Appendix 1 - Housing Options Team structure

