



## Cabinet

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane,  
Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL on Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016 at 7.00 pm.

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The Members of the Cabinet are:-

Cllr Clarkson – Leader of the Council

Cllr N Bell – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Responsibility for Government Policy Interface & Democracy

Cllr Mrs Bell – Portfolio Responsibility for Public Interaction and Borough Presentation

Cllr Bennett – Portfolio Responsibility for Planning, Development and Enforcement

Cllr Mrs Blanford – Portfolio Responsibility for Culture, Leisure, Environment and Heritage

Cllr Bradford – Portfolio Responsibility for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety

Cllr Clokie – Portfolio Responsibility for Housing and Home Ownership

Cllr Galpin – Portfolio Responsibility for Town Centres Focus and Business Dynamics

Cllr Knowles – Portfolio Responsibility for Information Technology and Communications

Cllr Shorter – Portfolio Responsibility for Finance, Budget and Resource Management

**NB: Under the Council's Public Participation Scheme, members of the public can submit a petition to the Cabinet if the issue is within its terms of reference or ask a question or speak concerning any item contained on this Agenda (Procedure Rule 9 refers)**

## Agenda

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|---|--------------|
| 1. <b>Apologies</b>   |              |
| 2. <b>Declarations of Interest:-</b> To declare any interests which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document: | 1            |
| a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)  |              |
| b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)  |              |
| c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests   |              |
| See Agenda Item 2 for further details   |              |
| 3. <b>Minutes</b> – To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 8 <sup>th</sup> September 2016                             |              |
| 4. To receive any Petitions   |              |
| 5. Leader's Announcements   |              |

## **Part I – Matters Referred to the Cabinet**

None for this Meeting

## **Part II – Consideration of Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

None for this Meeting

## **Part III – Ordinary Decision Items - Key Decisions Annotated\***

- |    |  |         |
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| 6. | *Corporate Plan Update: The Corporate Delivery Programme & MTFP      | 2-61    |
| 7. | *Homelessness Review and Strategy                                    | 62-171  |
| 8. | Adoption of the Wye Neighbourhood Plan                               | 172-180 |
| 9. | Ashford College Campus: Use of Chief Executive's Delegated Authority | 181-184 |

## **Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items**

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| 10. | Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of the Meeting held on 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2016 | 185-187 |
| 11. | Schedule of Key Decisions   | 188-196 |
| 12. | Items for Future Meetings   |         |

## **Part V – Cabinet Member Reports**

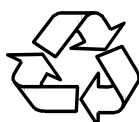
None for this Meeting

## **Part VI – Ordinary Decision Items**

None for this Meeting

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KRF/AEH  
5<sup>th</sup> October 2016



**Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)**

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct as adopted by the Council on 19 July 2012, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted). However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency reasons alone, such as:

- Membership of outside bodies that have made representations on agenda items, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: an effect on the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc; OR an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc, would both probably constitute either an OSI or in some cases a DPI].

**Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:**

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG’s Guide for Councillors, at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/240134/Openness\\_and\\_transparency\\_on\\_personal\\_interests.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/240134/Openness_and_transparency_on_personal_interests.pdf)
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, with revisions adopted on 17.10.13, and a copy can be found in the Constitution at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/part-5---codes-and-protocols>
- (c) If any Councillor has any doubt about the existence or nature of any DPI or OSI which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Corporate Director (Law and Governance) and Monitoring Officer or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democratic Services as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

## **Cabinet**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **8<sup>th</sup> September 2016**.

### **Present:**

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);

Cllr. Bell (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Clokie, Galpin, Shorter.

### **Apologies:**

Cllrs. Knowles, Michael

### **Also Present:**

Cllrs. Burgess, W Howard, Krause, Link, MacPherson, Ovenden, Pickering, Smith, Wedgbury.

Chief Executive, Corporate Director (Law and Governance), Head of HR, Communications and Technology, Head of Finance, Head of Culture, Housing Improvement Manager, Head of Environmental and Customer Services, Environmental Contracts and Operations Manager, Human Resources Manager, Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Senior Environmental Health Officer, Accountancy Manager, Senior Commercial Development Manager, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Policy and Performance Manager, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, Corporate Fraud Manager, Refugee Resettlement Co-ordinator, Communications Officer, Member Services Manager.

## **117 Declarations of Interest**

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Minute No.</b>
Clarkson	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" in respect of Agenda Item 6 as he was the Chairman and Director of the Ashford Borough Council Better Choice for Property company.	119

## **118 Minutes**

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **119 Corporate Property Performance Annual Report 2015/16**

The report set out information on the revenue performance of the Council's Corporate Property Portfolio during the previous 12 months. It also advised of the opportunities being explored to increase the profitability of the Portfolio during the coming 12 months.

The Portfolio Holder said that he welcomed the report and explained that this was the first time the report had been presented to the Cabinet. He explained that in 2014 the Council had agreed to look to generate an additional £2 million per annum by 2020 to enable the Borough Council to become grant free. In terms of the table in Appendix 1 to the report, he advised that whilst it was comprehensive it did not reflect all of the costs involved with the properties, for example capital charges/financing charges or internal recharges for staff costs. He indicated that future reports would pick up and incorporate this further information. The Portfolio Holder referred to the percentage return on investment for International House and other acquisitions and in terms of Park Mall he said he wished to emphasise that this property was acquired to aid regeneration and not for initial revenue return.

The Portfolio Holder for Town Centres Focus and Business Dynamics advised that in terms of Park Mall, the acquisition had helped generate further value in the Town Centre and would also generate increased business rates.

### **Resolved:**

- That (i) **the revenue performance of the Council's Corporate Property Portfolio during the previous 12 months as provided for in the Corporate Property Income Schedule attached at Appendix 1 to the report be noted.**
- (ii) **the options currently being explored to increase profitability during the next financial year be noted.**

## **120 Updated Enforcement Policy for Revenues and Benefits**

The report sought Cabinet's endorsement of an Updated Enforcement Policy for Revenues and Benefits taking into account changes in legislation and the introduction of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Single Fraud Investigation Service.

The Portfolio Holder emphasised the vital work undertaken by the Fraud Team and considered it was important that it offered a deterrent to those considering fraudulent activities. He advised that the Corporate Fraud Manager was due to appear in a Channel 5 documentary on 21<sup>st</sup> September about fraud and also advised that the Officer was leaving the Authority and he offered his best wishes for her future.

**Recommended:**

**That the Updated Revenues and Benefits Enforcement Policy as attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.**

## **121 Progress Report on Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme**

The report provided feedback on the progress and development of the Borough Council's involvement in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in Ashford.

The Portfolio Holder said he was pleased with the progress made to enable those Syrians who were resettled in Ashford to have a reasonable life and he said he wished to encourage home owners to make property available for the Borough Council to rent.

The Chairman referred to a recent event which hosted all Syrian Vulnerable Persons' families from all over Kent. He said the evening was enjoyed by all participants and it had been a joy to hear the little children sing at the event.

**Resolved:**

**That the success of the scheme to date be noted and the Council's commitment to continue with the scheme for the duration of the five year Government programme be reaffirmed.**

## **122 Food Safety Policy**

The report presented an updated Food Safety Policy which covered the Council's approach to discharging the statutory duty to enforce relevant food law across the Borough. The Portfolio Holder read his Portfolio Holder comment views as detailed in the report.

**Recommended:**

**That the Food Safety Policy be approved.**

## **123 Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse Policy**

The report set out a policy which included clear standards and expectations to promote employee wellbeing and to ensure that the Council mitigated against health and safety risks to the public, to service users and to employees themselves as a result of alcohol, drugs and substance misuse.

**Recommended:**

**That (i) the new Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse Policy be approved.**

- (ii) the introduction of alcohol/drug testing for employees in Safety Critical posts on health and safety grounds be approved.
- (iii) Heads of Service be given delegated authority to designate a post as Safety Critical within their Service under the Council's Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse Policy, after consultation with the relevant Corporate Director and the Director of Law and Governance and the Human Resources Manager.

## **124 Annualised Hours Policy**

The report sought approval to a new "Annualised Hours Policy" which set out clear standards and expectations for employees working an annualised hours working pattern.

The Portfolio Holder for Public Interaction and Borough Presentation advised that in terms of the Grounds Maintenance Team, this Policy would help maintain flexibility for both the employee and employer and would allow the payment of employees' salaries to be spread out on an average basis throughout the year.

### **Recommended:**

**That the new Annualised Hours Policy be approved.**

## **125 Microchipping of Dogs**

The report provided information on the new regulations requiring dogs to be microchipped in the UK and set out how the Borough Council would enact the provisions set out in the regulations.

The Chairman drew attention to the tabled papers which included an additional recommendation which would provide for deceased animals found on the public highway to be checked for a microchip and if present, every endeavour would be made to notify the owner of their sad loss.

### **Recommended:**

- That**
- (i) the policy document set out at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.
  - (ii) in addition to Appendix 1, in the event of a deceased animal (classed as a pet) being found on the public highway which forms part of the recycling, waste collection or street cleansing service, the animal be scanned for a microchip and if present, Officers make every endeavour to notify the owner of their sad loss.

## **126 Ashford Town Centre, Kingsnorth and Woodchurch Conservation Areas – Revision of Boundaries and Adoption of Appraisals**

The report sought approval for the adoption of three Conservation Area appraisals and Management Plans which related to the Conservation Areas at Ashford Town Centre, Kingsnorth and Woodchurch.

The Portfolio Holder explained that whilst the Borough Council had aspirations in terms of the Big 8 projects and the provision of modern buildings, he said that this document also showed that the Borough Council was passionate in terms of protecting the heritage of the Borough. He said that the plans had been available for inspection between November and December 2015 and this had been followed by public exhibitions.

In response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that Conservation Area plans for all other areas of the Borough would be produced in time.

### **Resolved:**

- That
- (i) the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2016 (CAMP) relating to the Ashford Town Centre be adopted and a revised boundary be designated for the Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area as shown on Map 1 attached to the report.**
  - (ii) the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2016 (CAMP) relating to Kingsnorth be adopted and a revised boundary be designated for the Kingsnorth Conservation Area as shown on Map 1 attached to the report.**
  - (iii) the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2016 (CAMP) relating to Woodchurch be adopted and a revised boundary be designated for the Woodchurch Conservation Area as shown on Map 1 attached to the report.**

## **127 Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1 2016/17**

The report provided a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 1 - 2016/17. This included information on what the Cabinet had achieved through its decision-making, key performance data and consideration of the wider Borough picture which impacted upon the Council's work.

The Portfolio Holder drew attention to the Council's new Performance Dashboard which he explained would allow more graphical information to be set out on the Council's performance enabling it to be more readily assimilated. He advised that this document was created from live data and in due course he hoped that aspects of the data would be made available for the general public to access.



**Resolved:**

**That the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan in Quarter 1 of 2016/17 be noted.**

## **128 Budget Monitoring Report – First Four Months 2016/17**

The report presented an assessment of the outturn position for the financial year based on the first four months actuals for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Collection Fund. During this period the General Fund was projected to have a balanced budget after transfers to reserves and there was a forecast service underspend of £183,000. The Housing Revenue Account was projecting an overall surplus of £1,598,000.

The Portfolio Holder drew attention to the Tabled Papers and the revised Table 1 to the report.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the Budget Monitoring position as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016 be noted and the transfers to reserves set out in paragraphs 7 – 8 of the report be approved.**
  - (ii) a loan to Brabourne Parish Council for the future planning appeal costs for the development of Hospital Field, for a maximum of £40,000, be approved subject to legal agreements.**
  - (iii) the changes to financing for the Affordable Housing Programme as set out in paragraphs 28 and 29 of the report be noted.**
  - (iv) the revised Planned Maintenance Schedule as set out in paragraph 30 of the report be noted.**

## **129 Cabinet Task Groups, Steering Groups and Boards: Terms of Reference and Membership – September 2016**

The report set out the Terms of Reference for Cabinet Member Groups which were required to be approved in accordance with the Constitution.

The Chairman explained the reasoning behind the establishment of the new Groups and to the amendments made to the Terms of Reference of existing Groups.

**Resolved:**

**That the Terms of Reference and Membership of the various Groups and Boards as set out within the report and as attached at Appendix A to the report be approved.**

## **130 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – 30<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016**

**Resolved:**

**That the notes of the meetings of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 30<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016 be approved and adopted.**

## **131 Schedule of Key Decisions To Be Taken**

**Resolved:**

**That the latest Schedule of Key Decisions as set out within the report be received and noted.**

## **132 Exclusion of the Public**

**Resolved:**

**That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, namely Grounds Maintenance Consultation Update and Review of Associated Potential Pension Costs, as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A of the Act, where in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.**

## **133 Grounds Maintenance Consultation Update and Review of Associated Potential Pension Costs**

The report sought approval for the early release of the Local Government Pension (LGPS) for Post Holder 6110 in the event that the post became redundant and the associated costs of early release of the LGPS.

**Recommended:**

- That**
- (i) the update regarding the consultation process involving the Street Scene and Open Spaces Operative (Post Holder 6110) be noted.**
  - (ii) the early release of pension costs associated with Post Holder 6110, be approved in the event that the role is made redundant and no alternative employment within the Council can be secured.**

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(KRF/AEH)  
MINS:CAXX1636

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Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Keith Fearon:  
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**Agenda Item No:** 6

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Report Title:** Corporate Plan Update:  
The Corporate Delivery Programme & The Medium Term  
Financial Plan 2017 to 2022 (MTFP)

**Report Author &  
Job Title:** Tracey Kerly, Chief Executive – together with:  
Kirsty Hogarth, Policy & Performance Manager  
Charlotte Hammersley, Programme Manager  
Ben Lockwood, Head of Finance  
Maria Seddon, Accountancy Manager

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr Clarkson, Leader of the Council  
**Portfolio Holder for:** Cllr Shorter, Finance Budget & Resource Management



**Summary:** This report, under the heading of 'Corporate Plan Update: The Corporate Delivery Programme and the MTFP', comprises the Corporate Plan update, incorporating the Delivery Programme, and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2017-2022

Part I of the report – the Corporate Plan update - gives a broad overview of the Council's priorities and takes the opportunity to update Members on other strategic initiatives.

Part II looks at the Delivery Programme, with a specific update report on the current progress of the projects within the Programme. As well as the 'Big 8' projects, it also includes other strategic projects that contribute to the Council's four priorities and its underpinning principles.

And Part III - the Medium Term Financial Plan - is a budget forecast, with underlying assumptions, covering the five-year period from 2017 to 2022 for the General Fund, which the Cabinet is asked to note. (The business plan for the Housing Revenue Account will be covered separately in a report to November's Cabinet).

Additionally, Cabinet is asked to endorse three strategies for:

- Inflation Management;
- Borrowing & Acquisitions;
- Closing-the-Gap, 2020/21

The Cabinet is also asked to note the responses in relation to the consultation on 100% Business Rates Retention; to accept the Government's four-year settlement; and to delegate authority to the Head of Finance, in conjunction with the Leader and Portfolio Holder, to agree the Council's continued participation in the Kent Business Rates pool.

<b>Key Decision:</b>	YES
<b>Significantly Affected Wards:</b>	All
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<p><b>The Cabinet is recommended to:-</b></p> <p><b><u>Part I</u></b>  <b>(i) Note the general direction towards achieving the Council’s Corporate Plan priorities;</b></p> <p><b><u>Part II</u></b>  <b>(ii) Endorse the current Delivery Programme and note the current progress of the projects within the Programme;</b></p> <p><b><u>Part III</u></b>  <b>(iii) Note the forecast and accept the underlying assumptions of the MTFP 2017-2022;</b>  <b>(iv) Endorse again the Inflation Management Strategy;</b>  <b>(v) Endorse again the Borrowing &amp; Acquisitions Strategy;</b>  <b>(vi) Endorse the Closing-the-Gap Strategy 2019/20;</b>  <b>(vii) Delegate authority to the Head of Finance, in conjunction with the Leader and Portfolio Holder, to agree the Council’s continued participation in the Kent Business Rates pool;</b>  <b>(viii) Note the consultation responses in relation to 100% Business Rates retention;</b>  <b>(ix) Accept the Government’s four-year settlement and agree to publish this report as the basis of this Council’s Efficiency Statement (as required by Government).</b></p>
<b>Policy Overview:</b>	<p>In line with the Council’s commitment to:</p> <p>(i) progress its corporate priorities, as agreed last year in the Council’s Corporate Plan 2015-2020;</p> <p>(ii) agree a budget annually and financial planning for the next five years;</p> <p>(iii) approve the update of the Council’s corporate delivery programme, which ensures appropriate resources are available for the delivery of its priority projects and the effective and efficient running of the Council.</p>
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	<p>The Corporate Plan drives resource allocations (in both financial and staffing terms); decisions are, therefore, built in to the MTFP for both finance and staffing. The Delivery Plan programmes those resources and assists with financial allocations.</p>
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	<p>There are no new legal implications raised by this suite of reports; any legal implications have to be assessed at the start of individual projects</p>
<b>[Equalities] Impact Assessment</b>	<p>Not required because these are update reports and any equalities issues have been assessed previously on specific projects</p>
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	None

**Exempt from  
Publication:**

**NO**

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**Report Title: Corporate Plan update:  
The Corporate Delivery Programme & the MTFP**

**Part I: The Corporate Plan Overview**

1. The Council's Corporate Plan (adopted October 2015) is a key strategic document for the Council, providing a link between both national and local policy and ABC's corporate priorities and objectives and ABC's services. This overview and update (via the Delivery Programme) should be considered as part of the Council's monitoring and review processes, ensuring that ABC's direction of travel remains relevant and fit-for-purpose.
2. The set of reports also includes a revised Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the next five years (2017 to 2022), which Cabinet is asked to endorse and accept, in particular as the framework for drafting the 2017/2018 budget.
3. The last Local Government Settlement government extended the offer of a four-year settlement; whilst this was made with the caveat that government could revise this in the light of exceptional circumstances, this paper forms the basis of the efficiency statement and financial plan that needs to be published to enable the council to accept such an offer.

**Introduction and Background**

4. Setting a clear direction for the Council's work is the keystone of the Council's governance framework. Periodic reviews are important to ensure that our direction remains relevant and consistent with both local and national contexts.
5. Our corporate plan was agreed last year and this is the first annual review and update process. Priorities in the Corporate Plan were agreed as:

Enterprising Ashford  
Living Ashford  
Active & Creative Ashford  
Attractive Ashford

The four priorities were further underpinned by the Council's aspiration, *to remain a well-resourced council, with effective governance, high quality services, good communications, safe surroundings, demonstrating good compliance and high standards (the underlying principles).*

6. Since the Corporate Plan's approval the Council has made important progress on all the priority areas including the underpinning principles. In respect of the latter, ABC has concentrated its focus on three areas of specific management: for performance, programme and risk. Two new systems have been purchased: the first to produce a performance 'dashboard' showing up-to-date information to facilitate monitoring and management of key performance targets, and the second to assist with programme and risk management. The

system to assist with programme and risk management is a result of the appointment (in January 2016) of a Programme Manager, specifically to ensure that all the Council's approved projects were properly resourced, monitored and progressed.

7. This has resulted in Members and Officers starting to have a much clearer picture of project resourcing, project timing (including phasing) and project financing; and the submission of the MTFP at the same time demonstrates the need for specific strategies to assist in this work, the dependencies between various strands of work and the need for appropriate sequencing of parts of that work.
8. One of the key elements of the priorities programme is to ensure that key strategic risks for the council are identified and managed. To this end, a new approach to risk was endorsed by the Audit Committee in September 2015 and seven strategic areas of risk were identified and agreed:
  - ~ Workforce skills & capacity
  - ~ Housing & infrastructure
  - ~ Key project failure
  - ~ Resource limitations
  - ~ Partnerships
  - ~ Community capacity
  - ~ Reputation

These important risk areas are considered regularly by Management Team (quarterly) and by Members (half-yearly), with mitigation proposals only being made if areas are deemed to have a high likelihood of happening and/or a substantial impact.

## **Current Position**

9. Work on 'the Big 8' projects has continued to have a specific emphasis since the approval of the Corporate Plan. The town centre remains a particular focus, with the Council's purchase of Park Mall being the start of a longer-term approach to attract occupiers/retailers to Ashford's town centre, as well as to seek inward investments by using council resources, where necessary, without detracting from the wider needs of the borough.
10. Further, Members will have seen some of the 'physical evidence' of the progress of individual projects on the ground. Ashford College's new buildings are a distinct indicator of this – and will go on to support skills development, as well as encouraging high tech companies to move to Ashford - for example a proposed digital hub within the Commercial Quarter.
11. Progress on town centre development to 'grow' the town centre and Ashford's attractiveness in terms of leisure continues with the work on Elwick Place, while planning permission has been granted for the Designer Outlet extension.
12. The focus of business space delivery in the emerging Local Plan and the availability of incubator units for entrepreneurs are all part of ABC's priority to attract investment and to encourage and enable business.



13. But that's simply on the economic development front; in terms of open space and ABC's cultural offer, as well as creating the Council's new in-house landscaping team (Aspire), (which - at the time of writing - is about to 'go live'), ABC has been focusing on providing or enabling a range of other healthy/lifestyle choice facilities such as community facilities at various locations (including Repton Park, Kestrel Park and Victoria Park).
14. Housing for the borough's elderly population has continued to improve in line with the current Corporate Plan, with initiatives such as Farrow Court and Danemore - just two examples of work in progress. And to continue to ensure that the borough's housing caters for a range of ages, tenures and need, plans are progressing on Chilmington Green and the Community Management Organisation.
15. Other resource-intensive projects have also formed an important part of the Council's work during the period of this Corporate Plan, with a boundary review (proposing to alter ward boundaries and increase the Council's Members to 47); the development and implementation of a new compliance/enforcement strategy; a proposed change in public toilet provision, with the plan for a community toilet scheme; and the development of a 'report-it' app to assist in keeping the borough clean and safe.
16. One final initiative that should be mentioned is the work with the other four East Kent district councils to explore a merger with some associated devolution. Endorsement to a 'Statement of Intent' and the preparation of a feasibility report using co-commissioned consultants was granted by the Cabinet and Council in the summer.
17. Work on the feasibility study is now taking place in each of the authorities to provide information to the two organisations (LGA and Local Partnerships) pulling together a business plan. It involves the retrieval and the analysis of information to be able to compare 'like-for-like' between the authorities to ascertain areas of potential synergy or highlight areas of difference. It is intended that a business plan will have been developed for consideration by each council by the end of this calendar year; progress is monitored regularly by the Chief Executives and Leaders.
18. These initiatives have all contributed to progress against our priorities and the improvement of the borough. However, projects and initiatives all require careful planning, programming, financing and, finally, delivery. Both the Delivery Programme (covered in Part Two) and the Medium Term Financial Plan (covered in Part Three) are essential parts of our governance framework and necessary in understanding and shaping our forward position.

## **Next Steps in Process**

For Cabinet to approve the recommendations:

**The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

### **Part I: Corporate Plan**

- (i) Note the general direction towards achieving the Council's Corporate Plan priorities;**

### **Part II: Delivery Programme**

- (ii) Endorse the current Delivery Programme and note the current progress of the projects within the Programme;**

### **Part III: Medium Term Financial Plan**

- (iii) Note the forecast and accept the underlying assumptions of the MTFP 2017-2022;**

- (iv) Endorse again the Inflation Management Strategy;**

- (v) Endorse again the Borrowing & Acquisitions Strategy;**

- (vi) Endorse the Closing-the-Gap Strategy 2019/20;**

- (vii) Delegate authority to the Head of Finance, in conjunction with the Leader and Portfolio Holder, to agree the Council's continued participation in the Kent Business Rates pool;**

- (viii) Note the consultation responses in relation to 100% Business Rates retention;**

- (ix) Accept the Government's four-year settlement and agree to publish this report as the basis of this Council's Efficiency Statement, as required by Government.**

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

19. The Leader, Councillor Clarkson, has commented as follows:

*This composite report is the natural development in the next stage of the five year Corporate Plan and articulates the major projects into a programme for delivery. While the programme sets the plan to be followed and creates a useful discipline to do that, it does not exclude other worthwhile opportunities being pursued when they arise.*

20. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Budget & Resource Management, has commented as follows:

*This suite of documents presents a very good overview of the Council's forward looking strategic planning processes.*

*Good control of resources, both financial and staffing, will ensure that the priorities agreed by Council are deliverable, while enabling windfall opportunities to be assessed and decisions to be made in a knowledgeable way, rather than 'biting off more than can be chewed'. The further refining of both the delivery programme and 2017/18 budget is ongoing and will be reported to Cabinet for approval in February 2017.*

## **Contact and Email**

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## **Part II: The Delivery Programme**

### **(a) How it works**

21. The Corporate Plan states that a 'big issue' for the borough is to keep Ashford and its projects on track. In response, a Delivery Programme (of key projects) has recently been developed to ensure that our important corporate projects identified in the Corporate Plan are appropriately resourced and their progress monitored regularly. The Delivery Programme sets out the projects the council either directly delivers or has a role in delivering to achieve the four Corporate Plan priorities and its underpinning principles.
22. The programme is financed through a combination of external funding (for example partner funding, government grants and developer contributions ), our capital and revenue reserves, and prudential borrowing in accordance with the council's Borrowing and Acquisitions Strategy.
23. Around £4.2m of revenue reserves over the plan period have been allocated to funding the Delivery Programme. Around £900,000 is currently unallocated, but committed to future projects that are deemed to meet the criteria for delivering Corporate Plan priorities.
24. New projects coming forward are required to complete a Project Initiation Document (PID). PIDS are reviewed by Management Team and Cabinet to ensure both officer and financial resources are focused on those projects that support the council's aspirations.

### **(b) Current update**

25. Individual services are currently developing their service plans for 2017/18. The service plans will help to inform the budget setting process for 2017/18 and will complement the Delivery Programme to ensure that service delivery and Delivery Programme projects within the programme are appropriately resourced.
26. Set out below (pp 10 – 25) is an update report detailing the current progress of the projects within the Delivery Programme. The projects are presented to show how they contribute to the Corporate Plan priorities. It is proposed that this project monitoring will be developed and reported on a quarterly basis to future Cabinet meetings.

### **(c) Recommendations: Part II**

27. Cabinet is asked to:

**(ii) Endorse the current Delivery Programme and note the current progress of the projects within the Delivery Programme (below – pp 10 – 25)**

# Delivery Programme (Priority 1)






Enterprising Ashford: Economic Investment and Growth



Report Author: Charlotte Hammersley

Generated on: 04 October 2016


Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
01	A28 improvement	A28 dualling/junction upgrades to be completed by Kent Highways and Transportation. ABC input on s106 funding, agreement of s278, consideration of parking restrictions in adjacent streets, input to design and consultation and facilitating land in their ownership.	01-Oct-2019		Initial meetings taking place, steering group in place, public consultation underway by Kent County Council. A contractor to be appointed October 2016. Close working to deliver. Linked to Cobbs Wood parking controls and land transfers.	KCC Highways; James Hann	Councillor G Bradford
02	Commercial Quarter office block and phase 1 parking - Big 8	80,500 square foot development incorporating office space with retail, restaurants, car parking and landscaping providing the catalyst to the Commercial Quarter and delivering numerous regeneration and economic development benefits.	31-Jul-2018		Planning committee has approved the development with legal work due for completion in October 16 with construction to commence thereafter.	Stewart Smith	Councillor G Galpin; Councillor N Shorter

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
03	International station signalling upgrade - Big 8 (Spurs)	Operational route created through Ashford International Station by the end of March 2018 for the Eurostar class 374 Velaro trains to access the Station via the Ashford Spurs.	31-Mar-2018		Feasibility Report to be finalised by Network Rail at the end of September 2016. This shows KVB as a deliverable signalling solution to be overlaid on the Ashford Spurs. Funding for the next detailed design stage (£5.627 m) in place and due to start from the beginning of October. Funding bid for £4.8 million for the delivery stage submitted as part of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Local Growth Fund Round 3 bid, with an announcement expected as part of the Autumn Statement on the 23rd November 2016. Programme on schedule to deliver the solution by Spring 2018.	Andrew Osborne	Councillor G Clarkson

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
04	Designer Outlet Expansion - Big 8	To agree a scheme for the extension of the Designer Outlet Centre with the developers; to progress the scheme to Planning Committee; to agree and issue a s106 agreement and planning permission; to progress applications to discharge planning conditions; to monitor construction on site and the s106 agreement; to agree and implement projects for the enhancement of the Town Centre using s106 monies.	01-Dec-2018		Planning permission and s106 issued September 2016; awaiting expiry of the Judicial Review period and confirmation from applicants as to whether they will implement.	Lois Jarrett	Councillor M Bennett
05	Junction 10a of the M20 - Big 8	Delivery of a new motorway junction and associated link road to the A2070 and A20 to relieve congestion at Junction 10 and help deliver growth in southern and eastern Ashford.	01-Dec-2019		Highways England has submitted the Development Consent Order for the scheme to the Planning Inspectorate and initial consultation is underway.	Simon Cole	Councillor M Bennett; Councillor G Bradford; Councillor G Clarkson



Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
06	Elwick Place leisure retail and car park development - Big 8	The purchase of a mixed use leisure development incorporating cinema, hotel, food, beverage and Car Park and retail use in Elwick Road; and to provide funding for the Development.	31-Mar-2019		The completion of the due diligence process is nearing completion. The commercial agreement with the developer is being finalised. The agreement is expected to be signed mid-October with a view to being on-site by the end of November. The build process is expected to take 18 months to complete.	Paul McKenner	Councillor G Galpin; Councillor N Shorter
07	Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre (AIMREC)	Support AIMREC in purchasing land to build a substantial international visitor attraction on the former Klondyke railway works.	29-Nov-2019		AIMREC is now a charitable trust and the land purchase and Council loan agreement is being agreed alongside the appropriate cover to mitigate any loan risk. The Business Plan including a funding strategy and key milestones for the project has been agreed.	Sarah Barber; Christina Fuller; Ben Moyle	Councillor C Bell









Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
08	Ashford College Campus - Big 8	Delivery of a new Ashford College Campus on Elwick Road, with the Phase 1 building housing the general FE and HE provision and Phase 1A housing the Engineering and Construction provision.	30-Sep-2017		Phase 1 building started on site in January 2016, with the Topping Out ceremony taking place on the 23rd September 2016. Phase 1 to be completed and open by September 2017. In July 2016 ABC agreed to extend their bridging loan from £2 million to £3 million subject to conditions for this to be converted to grant on the completion and opening of Phase 1 and 1a. Funding Agreement between ABC and the College currently being finalised. Phase 1a building delayed, with construction due to start on site in Spring 2017, and be completed Spring 2018.	Andrew Osborne	Councillor G Clarkson

## Delivery Programme (Priority 2)

### Living Ashford: Quality Housing and Homes for All



Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
09	Chilmington Green - Big 8	To agree a scheme for the development of the Chilmington site with 5, 750 dwellings and associated community and other infrastructure; to progress to Planning Committee and get Members agreement; to agree and issue a section 106 and Outline Planning Permission; to progress the discharge of planning conditions and RM approvals; to monitor on site.	27-Mar-2036		Section 106 being negotiated and due for completion Autumn 2016. Monitoring team.	Lois Jarrett	Councillor M Bennett
10	Chilmington Green Community Management Organisation (CMO)	A requirement of the Chilmington Area Action Plan and outline planning approval is the creation of an independent and ultimately resident controlled organisation to take responsibility for the long term stewardship of Chilmington community assets endowed by the developer consortium.	31-Mar-2019		ABC has created a CMO project team to support the consortium with the creation of the new organisation. Work with the consortium will fully commence once the Section 106 is complete and signed; preparatory work by ABC's team is being completed however. The new organisation will take approximately a year to create prior to first occupations.	Sally Anne Logan	Councillor M Bennett Councillor N Shorter




Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
11	Chilmington Green Quality Monitoring Team	To ensure the overall quality of the Chilmington development.	31-Mar-2019		Interviews for one of the Building Control Officer posts dedicated to the Chilmington development are currently taking place. There will be initial set up work to complete before work commences in the early part of 2017.	Tim Parrett	Councillor M Bennett
12	Farrow Court Sheltered Accommodation Redevelopment	Completion of 104 care ready apartments providing accommodation for older people, recuperative care and adults with learning disabilities; also communal facilities and community centre for older people.	01-Aug-2017		Phase 1 complete November 2015. Phase 2 due for completion August 2017.	Giles Holloway; Daniel Scarsbrook	Councillor P Clokie
13	Danemore Sheltered Accommodation Redevelopment	Delivery of 34 new care ready apartments for rent and 4 for outright sale to help enable delivery. Improved quality of older person accommodation in Tenderden.	31-Jan-2019		Target for tenants to be out of the scheme November 2016. Stage one tender to enable appointment of contractor due back 30/09/16. Work is hoped to commence December 2016.	Giles Holloway; Daniel Scarsbrook	Councillor P Clokie



Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
14	Homes and Communities Agency new build affordable homes programme 2015-18	Delivery of circa 38 new build units to various sites throughout borough in partnership with Homes and Communities Agency.	31-Mar-2019		Tenders returned and contractor now selected and within budget. Pre contract meeting week beginning 26th September with a view to handing sites over October/ November 2016.	Giles Holloway	Councillor P Clokie
15	Purchases and sales of properties	Property purchases to support housing delivery programmes using spend one for one monies. 16 properties will be purchased.	31-Mar-2019		One for one property purchase initiated. Purchase of property for Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme land assembly initiated.	Giles Holloway	Councillor P Clokie
16	Conningbrook H1	Development of Conningbrook site to facilitate a country park on the same site.	31-Oct-2016		The due diligence for the sale of land to the developer is nearing completion. It is expected to be completed by mid-October and signed by the end of October.	Steve Parish	Councillor J Blanford; Councillor N Shorter

## Delivery Programme (Priority 3)

### Active and Creative Ashford: Healthy Choices Through Physical, Cultural and Leisure Engagement

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
17	Spearpoint Pavilion	Provision of a new changing facility with showers, storage and kitchen area. Also includes refurbishment of the public tennis courts.	31-Aug-2016		The building is open and in use, with an official opening planned for 8th October.	Ben Moyle	Councillor J Blanford
18	Bridgefield Park	To produce a park with a range of exciting and innovative features such as an adventure play space with kick about areas. There could be areas of wildlife and nature conservation areas, community orchards and paths, along with a car park and facilities for local groups and individuals to utilise all year round.	01-Nov-2017		BDP Consultants has been appointed and will commence on the design phase early October. They will then complete the design works for the site and project manage the delivery of the installation of the play area and final groundworks.	Simon Harris	Councillor J Blanford

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
19	Finberry/Cheeseman's Green, community facilities including 3G pitch	Still in the early stages of build. Key community facilities for the development should include sports pitch(s), a community centre, a multi-use games area and green spaces which will sit opposite the new primary school (expected to open in 2017).	31-Mar-2021		Discussions are ongoing with the developer (Crest) and the architects on the proposed site. The triggers for the facilities are not expected to be met for a number of years.	Simon Harris	Councillor J Blanford
20	Repton Connect community facility	A new community centre and associated facilities for the community of Repton Park and surrounding area. The community building and multi-use games area will be used for sport and leisure, meetings, play and social gatherings. It will be managed by a local new Trust.	31-Jan-2018		The contractors (DCB) will commence ground works in late September. Ceremonial "sod turning" took place on 24th September. A Trust (Repton Community Centre Trust) is being set up to manage and oversee the developments of the community facilities.	Simon Harris	Councillor J Blanford
21	Kestrel Park (Brisley)	Provision of a new children's play area and commemorative memorial. Kingsnorth Parish Council is considering managing the site.	31-Mar-2017		Groundworks are two thirds complete. Installation of the play equipment will take place in early Spring 2017.	Michelle Byrne; Ann Davies	Councillor J Blanford

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
22	Victoria Park fountain refurbishment	To maximise use of Victoria Park through timely and beneficial improvements including improving the setting and presentation of the Hubert Fountain. To respond effectively to the pressure of housing growth around the Park and reduce the likely associated environmental impacts in the immediate area. Further projects will aim to create an attractive destination promoting and celebrating lost heritage features, local civic pride and the hosting of high quality events.	31-Mar-2019		In March 2016, Members adopted the Victoria Park Masterplan as a framework to support the future planning of new development, refurbishment and timely partnership working. Members also endorsed an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a development stage to scope the park's 'Fountain Zone', which was unsuccessful, but officers are considering a re-application. Member steering group set up.	Chris Dixon	Councillor J Blanford
23	Royal Military Canal cycle & foot path: stage one	Completion of the feasibility stage of the project, with a final report which summarises the options for completing a shared pathway; with clarity on funding options for the delivery phase and future maintenance.	31-Mar-2017		Chris McCreedy Consultancy has been appointed to oversee various sub-contractors and prepare a planning application. Sustrans have been appointed to talk with land owners and prepare a high level funding strategy. An ecological study has been completed.	Sarah Barber; Len Mayatt	Councillor J Blanford



# Delivery Programme (Priority 4)




Attractive Ashford: Countryside and Townscape, Tourism and Heritage

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
24	Bringing the Grounds Maintenance Contract in-house	Procurement of Grounds Maintenance Depot: TUPE transfer of staff; development of new in-house grounds maintenance service; Procurement of vehicles and equipment	31-Oct-2016		Full handover of depot from Gallagher. Official opening took place on 30th September. Staff consultation complete, TUPE transfer of staff midnight 30th September. IT systems procured and being developed, some issues being experienced, but will mitigate with paper schedules if necessary. Vehicles and equipment delivered throughout September. On-boarding training scheduled for week commencing 3rd October, service go-live 10th October.	James Laidlaw	Councillor C Bell



Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
25	Enforcement strategy and implementation	A raft of new, linked policies within a corporate policy; a new 'Report It' function on the council's website and App; stronger and more customer focused enforcement services around the Council.	31-Dec-2016		Report it App is now being soft tested and will go live in October. Enforcement policies across the council have been updated and staff from HPC and Housing are working on an agreed anti-social behaviour response policy. Progress report will be submitted to the November Cabinet meeting outlining progress; tangible improvements in many areas. Clearer performance standards should enable better monitoring of success in practice. Resourcing enforcement will be considered at the next Policy and Compliance Board on 31st October.	Richard Alderton	Councillor S Dehnel
26	Street lighting	As per Cabinet Report May 2016, Amenity lighting to be reviewed in line with changes to LED with KCC and structural testing. An invest to save project of 1 million pound to ensure ongoing maintenance and liability is kept to a minimum.	31-May-2018		Delivery options for the change over to LED being considered. Action plan being completed for implementation as of 1 November. Two year programme.	Jo Fox	Councillor G Bradford



Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
27	Community Toilet Scheme	Introduction of community toilet scheme, closure of Vicarage Lane Toilets end Dec 2016 and New Rents date to be agreed.	31-Dec-2016		Community Toilet Scheme launched and press statements issued. Signage in Town Centre and on Public Toilets, web pages live. Demolition of Vicarage Lane - planning permission being sought and appropriate notices to be published at appropriate date	Tracey Butler	Councillor C Bell






# Delivery Programme (Underpinning Principles)



**For Our Four Priorities**  
**Report Author:** Charlotte Hammersley  
**Generated on:** 04 October 2016

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
28	Electoral Review	An Electoral Review is conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and considers the number of councillors, the names, number and boundaries of wards and the number of councillors to be elected to each. The council's role is to assist in delivering the review and respond to consultations carried out by the LGBCE to ensure improved electoral equality is delivered within the borough.	22-Feb-2017		The Council agreed a proposed pattern of wards which has been submitted to the LGBCE. The LGBCE will consider the council's proposal along with other submissions it receives from local people and organisations before consulting on a draft pattern of wards between 8 November 2016 and 9 January 2017.	Charlotte Hammersley	
29	CCTV operating system upgrade	Procurement and installation of a single operating platform and the migration of existing monitoring to new system. Procurement and installation of replacement cameras for Ashford and Tenterden public spaces and back office system.	31-March-2017		Currently out to tender for single operating platform. System to be operational by end March 2017. Review of camera locations about to start.	James Hann; Alison Oates	Councillor G Bradford

Code	Title	Desired Outcome	Due Date		Latest Note	Project Lead	Portfolio Holder
30	Report it	To improve the way that members of the public are able to report incidents or issues to the council.	31-Oct-2016		Internal testing of the system is being carried out before the system goes live shortly.	Rob de Mercardo	
31	Devolution	Exploration of viability of merger/sharing services between five East Kent District Councils.	31-Mar-2019		Business case to be explored and produced by end of 2016, with information provided by District Councils and business case production assisted by Local Government Association & Local Partnerships.	Kirsty Hogarth	Councillor G Clarkson

Action Status	
	Cancelled
	Overdue; Neglected
	Unassigned; Check Progress
	Not Started; In Progress; Assigned
	Completed

## Part III: The Medium Term Financial Plan 2017-22

### Purpose of the Report

1. The Cabinet approved the new Corporate Plan for the five years 2015-20 in October 2015 which outlines the following priorities:
  - a. Enterprising Ashford
  - b. Living Ashford
  - c. Active and Creative Ashford
  - d. Attractive Ashford
2. Underpinning these priorities are the Ashford principles that strive for the council to be well resourced, with effective governance, delivering high quality services with good communication in a safe environment – all of which should demonstrate good compliance and standards.
3. An integral part of that Plan is the resource planning to ensure that resources are available and targeted to priorities. This report presents the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
4. Members are reminded that this report covers the General Fund budget; the Council also has a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and this has its own separate 30 year business plan and this will be covered in detail in a report to the November Cabinet.

### Recommendations for the Medium Term Financial Plan 2017-22 Report

5. Cabinet is asked to:
  - a. Note the forecast and accept the underlying assumptions
  - b. Endorse again:
    - i. The Inflation Management Strategy as attached in **Appendix MT4**
    - ii. The Borrowing and Acquisitions Strategy as attached in **Appendix MT5**
  - c. **Note the consultation responses in relation to 100% Business Rate Retention (Appendix MT2)**
  - d. Endorse the Closing-the-Gap 2020/21 Strategy as outlined in paragraphs 21 – 33.
  - e. Accept the Government's four year settlement and agree to publish this report as the basis of this Council's Efficiency Statement

- f. Delegate authority to the Head of Finance in conjunction with the Leader and Portfolio holder to agree the Council's continued participation in the Kent Business Rates pool.

## Background & Context

### *The Economy*

6. The Economic outlook is complicated by the outcome of the EU referendum and the uncertainty over the timing and shape of any BREXIT arrangement forming perhaps the biggest risk to the national and European economies. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement (due at the end of November) is expected to address post Brexit which has seen a new Prime Minister and Cabinet. It is now clear that there will not be an emergency budget with spending cuts as was widely expected. A commentary on the economy is attached at **Appendix MT1**; however this suggests that the impact of the referendum vote has been less severe than anticipated and that there is a general strengthening in the global economy.
7. As a result of the Brexit vote, however, the Leader immediately set up a small cross-party monitoring group to ensure that the group remains aware of market variations and any potential effects they may have on the Council's projects.
8. The current assessment is that the global economic outlook is reasonably balanced.

### *100% Business Rates Retention Consultation*

9. In July 2016 the Government launched a consultation process for the 100% retention in Business Rates Retention.<sup>1</sup> The paper seeks views regarding the implementation of 100% Business Rates Retention for local government by the end of the Parliament. A discussion paper on the review of the Baseline Need figure was also published, .
10. The Council has submitted a response to these consultation documents which was agreed with the portfolio holder and these are attached at **Appendix MT2**. The Government are expected to report the findings this autumn.
11. The main consultation looks at a number of areas around the retention of business rates including:
  - b. Devolution of responsibilities
  - c. System design
  - d. Local tax flexibility
  - e. Accountability and accounting
12. The paper does not deal with the issue of rate reliefs and the paper gives the impression that the existing system of reliefs will remain unchanged.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/413070/business\\_rates\\_review\\_final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413070/business_rates_review_final.pdf)

13. In addition to this paper government has published a second consultation that seeks views on the process for completing a new needs assessment for councils. This we effectively look at the way funding is allocated to Councils, it should be noted that this will not increase the level of funding available but change the method of distribution. The paper largely centres on the statistical method that should be used to this calculation. The Council's response to this paper is attached a **Appendix MT2**
14. Currently these consultation papers deal with general principles for business rates retention and there is no detail on the splits between tiers and the level of funding that Councils are likely to receive. However the key areas of concern for the Council are the frequency of resets for the system and whether Councils will be able to retain any growth achieved after the reset.
15. In addition to this the Council is awaiting the outcome of the revaluation of the rating list which is being undertaken by the valuation office. This will revalue every property subject to business rates in the country and has the potential to effect the yield achieved through business rates for the council which may effect the Councils funding. Government has yet to provide guidance on how the impacts of this revaluation will be managed for 2017 but they have said they should be resource neutral for councils but there is the potential that the growth achieved since the last valuation is redistributed nationally.

## The Four Year Provisional Settlement and Efficiency Statement

16. The previous Chancellor presented the four year settlement at the end of 2015 and Councils could choose whether to accept the settlement. Councils will need to produce an efficiency plan by the 14th October in order to be able to accept the settlement. The settlement is detailed in the table below and shows that the Council's Revenue Support Grant will be removed over the period and there is 'Negative RSG' being applied to the Council's tariff to further reduce funding in the final year. Government have suggested that authorities who accept the four year settlement will not have their tariffs amended with 'Negative RSG'.

**Table 1: Provisional 4 year settlement**

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m
Settlement Funding Assessment	3.90	3.30	2.98	2.85
of which:				
Revenue Support Grant	1.27	0.62	0.21	
Baseline Funding Level	2.63	2.69	2.76	2.85
Tariff/Top-Up	-15.62	-15.93	-16.40	-16.93
Tariff/Top-Up adjustment				-0.24

17. Whilst the settlement is welcome, Local Government has campaigned for a number of years, and this initiative gives more certainty to financial planning. However it must be remembered that this only covers formula grant (which is due to reduce to £0) and there are major changes to government funding for local authorities including New Homes Bonus, business rates reform, etc. that could reduce the Council's funding in future years.

18. It is unclear how a decision not to accept the four-year settlement would affect authorities; the Chancellor has suggested that authorities that accept the offer will have their funding secured and therefore by default authorities who don't will be exposed should further reductions in departmental expenditure be needed. In reality it is not clear how this would work as ABC will receive no grant by the end of the settlement; how this could be reduced further, therefore, is unclear.
19. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement will update information on how the Government are going to address the current national deficit and a paper will be prepared and circulated to Members if there is an impact on the Council's funding or activities.
20. Given that the principle of a long term settlement is welcome and this authority and the wider sector would like to move towards a system which gives long term funding to allow for better financial planning and management, it is recommended that the Council seeks to accept the offer of a four year settlement

### ***Planning a way forward – Driving efficiency***

21. In order to meet government's requirement to qualify for the four year settlement the Council must have an efficiency statement. In a letter to Authorities the secretary of state said that he did *"not intend to provide further guidance on what efficiency plans should contain – they should be locally owned and locally driven. But it is important that they show how this greater certainty can bring about opportunities for further savings. They should cover the full 4-year period and be open and transparent about the benefits this will bring to both your council and your community."*
22. It is intended that this suite of reports including the medium term financial plan becomes this statement, as it outlines the Council's aims and objectives and financial strategy to meet them.
23. It is important to remember that the Council has a busy and ambitious programme as outlined in the Corporate Plan. Therefore it is important to balance the need to resource appropriately to deliver the programme while developing a strategy to manage the budget. Below are some key areas which Management Team considers would form a suitable strategy to manage the budget.
24. The Medium Term Financial Plan does show a deficit for the first 2 years moving into surplus as the Council benefits from income coming from investments made under the Borrowing and Acquisitions strategy and benefiting from business rates growth arising from the developments planned in and around the town. It is important that the Council monitors its cost base to ensure that tax payers continue to get value for money and that resources are targeted on key priority areas.
25. This underpins the importance of the Council's strategy to grow income streams through its commercialisation strategy. The Council will also explore further opportunities to exceed its target for income contained within this MTFP and the Borrowing and Acquisitions Strategy.



26. As a key part of the budget scrutiny process, each portfolio holder is required to review and sign off their budget. This gives Cabinet Members the opportunity to review the budgets for their areas of responsibility and highlight potential areas of inefficiency and bring this to the attention of the wider cabinet and management team. This review process is intended to ensure that costs are monitored and controlled.
27. The Council supports the Stour Centre through payment of utilities, insurance and keeping responsibility for the repair and maintenance of plant and equipment. As the bulk of the subsidy is in the form of the utility costs this also forms a key driver for non pay inflation. Management Team will work with Ashford Leisure Trust to review the existing management arrangements with a view to reducing the level of subsidy paid and seek external investment.
28. Last year the Corporate Plan report included a paper on Succession Planning (Phase 2) within the council; this will look to deliver savings over the next two years.
29. It is expected there will be some growth in Business Rates over the next few years with a number of sites in the borough earmarked for development, These sites provide an opportunity to the council and the opportunity for an increase in Business Rate income, as well as a number of other benefits that come from businesses investing in the borough and contributing to the delivery of the Enterprising Ashford priority.
30. Fees and charges will have a role to play in balancing the budget. There are proposals to review pest control charges which will contribute savings, if agreed, and the LGA is lobbying government to seek for more cost recovery of planning costs from developers. In addition to this there are a number of fee charging areas that have not been reviewed for a number of years and may be able to yield further income.
31. A key element to the strategy is to review the way in which services are delivered, to improve efficiency and to improve the customer experience. Therefore the Council is reviewing ways in which it can deliver services digitally. We are already seeing the benefits of this strategy with benefits and council tax forms on line, linking to the back office system and the development of the Report-It App. The Council has a focus on enforcement and this strategy should develop long term benefits for the council in terms of efficiency through reducing demand for services as a result of the deterrent effect that the enforcement activity delivers. Members are reminded of the review of enforcement policies that have been approved by cabinet in the last 12 months and the counter fraud report that is presented to the Audit Committee annually.
32. There is also scope for further cost management as the government's devolution agenda becomes clearer and the County develops its response to that agenda. Any new ways of working will help to contribute to efficiencies and better ways of working. This work will progress over the next year with the council exploring ways of working with the other East Kent authorities and Kent County Council. However, at this stage, within the MTFP no assumptions have been made on savings arising from this work stream.
33. The Council has the lowest Council tax in Kent and is committed to remain the lowest, so has already achieved many efficiencies. The Council has an ambitious agenda and to deliver this it needs to focus resources on its

priorities; consequently the Cabinet and Management Team are committed to continuing the drive for efficiency. It is felt that the measures outlined above provide adequate scope to review the cost base of the budget whilst supporting the aspirations of the Corporate Plan

## **Key Assumptions of the MTFP**

34. Revenue Support Grant (the 'staple' of local authority funding) has been decreasing since the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010 and the four year settlement sees the level dropping to zero by 2019
35. Assumptions have been made that key grants supporting the administration of the revenues and benefits team are reduced by 60% over the next 3 Years as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit.
36. Inflation is a factor that needs to be managed carefully within any financial planning regime. The council has benefitted from the low levels of inflation over the last 3 years with lower than anticipated increases in key contracts helping to deliver savings. The forecast for inflation (produced by the Office of Budget Responsibility) has been used for this MTFP.
37. Interest rates have been forecast in line with the OBR forecasts. As a net investor the General Fund is more affected by its ability to generate returns on its cash balances rather than borrowing cheaply. Savings have been made in recent years by not borrowing to fund projects and using cash balances, however as interest rates rise the council will want to lock into low long term rates.
38. Pay – Within the model pay assumptions are linked to inflation with allowances made for incremental progression.
39. New properties – Assumptions for new properties have been based on information from the planning and visiting officer teams, looking at the number of properties under construction and taking a view on the delivery of sites with planning permission and allocated sites. These assumptions drive figures for growth in tax base, and new homes bonus receipts. This forecast is summarised in the table below.

**Table 2 : New Properties Forecast** (note: New Homes Bonus is measured Oct-Oct)

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Properties Under Construction	618				
a) Extant Permission - not started	170	368	258	300	273
b) Extant Permission - Resolution to grant	0	74	225	275	275
c) Sites allocated in Local Plans	0	202	140	360	562
<b>Total</b>	<b>788</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>1,110</b>

40. Business Rates – Increases in business rates are set by the RPI level in the preceding September. However recently government has capped increases in business rates at 2% where RPI was higher than this figure and the model assumes that this will continue for the life of the plan.
41. Council Tax – Government has so far capped the level that council tax can be increased by without a local referendum at 2% or £5 whichever is the greatest. A 2% increase would result in a £3 increase in Council Tax for a band D property. For planning purposes only the MTFP has assumed a 2% increase for each year. The decision on the level of Council Tax is taken each year by Council in February,
42. A table of assumptions is included in Appendix MT3

### **Reserves**

43. The Council's general fund reserves - as at 31 March 2016 - are shown in **Table 3** below, with a forecast for movements within the current financial year. This shows that at the start of the period of the MTFP the Council's reserves are robust and adequate. The Council has a policy of maintaining the general fund balance of at least 15% of net budget requirement which is currently around £2.3m. Reserves have been earmarked to fund a number of Corporate Projects; the corporate project plans are monitored and updated regularly.
44. During this year a single pot approach was adopted to fund the Corporate Plan projects. In effect this means that unless there is a specific need for a reserve to be spent on it will be re-allocated to the new initiatives fund and this will be monitored as part of the monitoring of the Corporate Plan. Although this removes the annual bid for the use New Homes Bonus the element of any receipt of this funding that is allocated for projects will be transferred to the Corporate Plan reserve, this funding will be used on approved Corporate Plan projects (which will be subject to a cabinet approval process) that have been vetted through the production of a Project Initiation Document which will be reviewed by Management Team and Cabinet.
45. The current Project Plan is fully funded with a number of other projects being developed and funding will be approved based on projects meeting criteria set out in the plan.

**Table 3 : Summary of Earmarked Reserves**

	Balance at 31st March 2016	2016/17 Transfers	Balance at 31st March 2017 £'000	2017/18 Transfers £'000	Estimated Balance at 31st March 2018 £'000
<i>Earmarked reserves</i>					
Corporate Plan	5,283	66	5,349	(595)	4,754
Fund future expenditure	2,426	(320)	2,106	(144)	1,962
Provision for the maintenance of assets	1,042	3	1,045	90	1,135
Reserves required by statute	298	(100)	198		198
Developer contributions	7,115		7,115		7,115
<b>Total Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>16,164</b>	<b>(351)</b>	<b>15,813</b>	<b>(649)</b>	<b>15,164</b>
<b>General Fund Balance</b>	<b>1,891</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>2,290</b>	<b>(55)</b>	<b>2,235</b>
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>18,055</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>18,103</b>	<b>(704)</b>	<b>17,399</b>

46. There is the prospect of growing reserves in the future CIL receipts, as well as income generated from the delivery of the Conningbrook project. The release of reserves included within the MTFP is therefore considered both prudent and sustainable.
47. Once the final design of the business rates retention scheme is known and the extent of any functions that are to be transferred to lower tier authorities as a result of 100% Business Rates retention reforms, the appropriate level of general fund balance will need to be reviewed to ensure that it is adequate for the risks that the council has to manage.

### ***Inflation Management Strategy***

48. ABC Members agreed a counter-inflation strategy in October 2013 but, given the continuing impact of inflation on Council expenditure while income levels are restricted to below-inflation increases, periodic reviews should be undertaken to ensure that the effects of inflation are managed. The MTFP includes seeking to generate new income streams, improved treasury management returns and council tax setting policies. All non-pay budgets have been frozen for the last three years and it is prudent to review the impact of this before extending the freeze.
49. Cabinet has already approved measures to reduce service budgets by £1.6m over three years, with 2017/18 being the third year of that programme, ensuring that costs are controlled and services are required to develop efficient ways of working. The efficiency element of the MTFP requires Management Team to maintain its focus on cost management to ensure that resources are targeted at priorities and costs are controlled.
50. The Inflation Management Strategy is attached at **Appendix MT4**, and Cabinet is asked to support the principles of the strategy.

## ***New Homes Bonus***

51. The Council receives a New Homes Bonus payment for four years (previously six years) for each new property that is built within the borough. This non ring-fenced grant can be used for both revenue and capital purposes at the Council's discretion.
52. New Homes Bonus has been the subject of a government review and we are awaiting announcements of any changes proposed as a result of the review, but with Government signalling its intention to divert resources from New Homes Bonus to Adult Social Care we can expect a significant reduction in this funding.
53. Assumptions on future levels of New Homes Bonus received are based upon the forecast numbers of new properties; currently 50% of New Homes Bonus is deployed to support base budget with the remainder allocated to reserves to support the Corporate Plan.
54. New Homes Bonus has become an important element of the Council's funding, providing some core funding but also providing a flexible funding source to support the Council's project delivery. It is therefore proposed to maintain the existing policy that New Homes Bonus is allocated to meet the following strategic allocations - with 50% supporting the base budget, 50% on supporting the Corporate Plan.

## ***Business Rates Growth***

55. Since the introduction of the new system for funding local government, business rates has become a major part of this council's funding, retaining 40% of business rates collected (although this is subject to a tariff of £15.6m leaving baseline funding of £2.63m). The scheme also allows for the retention of 50% of any growth over a set baseline position. Given that the current general fund budget assumes an income of £3.4m this suggests that the Council has already achieved £0.8m of growth.
56. Essentially there are four issues:
  - a. Was our opening forecast of business rate yield for 2015/16 reasonably accurate?
  - b. Are the appeals provisions prudent?
  - c. Performance of the pool
  - d. How should we look on future business rate growth as funding for the budget?
- a) *The 2016/17 yield forecast*
57. The first quarter's data has been analysed, it is expected that the annual yield projection will be around £415,000 higher than the billed liability; this increase in income is as a result of a reduction in the bad debts provision and not an increase in yield.
58. In the event of a sudden and large drop in business rate yield a 'risk provision reserve' has been set aside. This reserve currently stands at £1.8m, which is considered sufficient to manage a transitional period should rates income fall.

b) *The business rate appeals provision*

59. Since the start of the local retention of business rates the biggest uncertainty is the possibility the Valuation Office agrees some large Rateable Value (RV) reductions from the outstanding appeals it is currently dealing with. These are appeals to the 2010 valuation list, this has a Rateable Value of £115m and currently there are 551 appeals outstanding with a ratable value of £52m or 45% of RV currently under appeal.
60. In 2014-15 government changed the rules permitting people to backdate appeals to the start of the 2010 list; this led to a large number of appeals being lodged in the last quarter of that year and it is expected that a large proportion of these appeals are speculative and will not be successful.
61. In the last year there was a nationwide appeal submitted by NHS Trusts to claim charitable rate relief. After seeking legal advice from the LGA this has been widely rejected and as yet we await a decision from the Trusts as to whether they will appeal.
62. To support the Council in calculating this provision the Council uses the services of 'Analyse Local' - a company whose software is able to analyse the appeals list and estimate the likely losses and the Council analyses trends within its own data to assess the likelihood of a successful appeal. Broadly 28% of appeals are successful and result in some movement in RV, on average this is an 11% reduction in RV.
63. The Council had an appeals provision of £3.5m at the start of the year and with the amendments currently forecast this year the balance is likely to increase to £3.75m.

c) *Performance of the Pool*

64. From 1 April 2015 the Council joined the Kent Business Rates Pool, which contains most of the Kent Authorities and provides a mechanism to reduce the levy payable by local authorities on growth and to promote economic development. The pool will continue unless there is an application to change the membership of the pool; if this occurs and DCLG approves the application the old pool would be dissolved and a new one formed.
65. Membership of the pool will result in a reduction in the levy payable on growth, from 50% to 1.6%. The Council's share of this saving was expected to be £200,000, with a further £200,000 allocated to Economic Development whose use will be determined jointly between KCC and ABC. For 2015-16 the pool performed in line with expectations with the council achieving a gain of £198,000 from pool membership with the same level of funding allocated for economic development. KCC are currently finalising the process for agreeing the release of this money, it is anticipated that a designated officer will be delegated authority to agree proposals from District Councils. As the expenditure would not be in the budget framework, any scheme would need to be approved by Cabinet and Council.
66. For the current year there were some changes in membership of the pool with Dover DC leaving the pool and Dartford BC joining. Currently no changes in pool membership are expected for 2017/18 however one pool member is in a

safety net position and may choose to leave the pool to benefit from the national safety net scheme. Overall, members of the pool are reporting in-year performance in line with expectations; however one member has experienced some difficulties with the closure of a major employer within their Borough and is in a safety net position. The pool did foresee this eventually and had provided funds to manage these circumstances. This suggests that the pool will deliver the expected benefits of membership.

67. It is therefore recommended that authority be delegated to the Head of Finance in conjunction with the Leader and Portfolio Holder to agree any amendments to the membership of the pool. The usual DCLG deadline for pool applications is the end of October.

d) *Future year's business rate growth*

68. The strategy of investing in future business rate growth will be good for the local economy and employment levels, as well as the Council's future financial sustainability.

69. There are several prospective large commercial developments in the pipeline, with added focus from the Council, we may be able to secure these developments over the next five years, and this should be a primary focus too as the additional rates yield is an important plank of the MTFP.

### ***Developing Income Streams***

70. Last year Members re-approved the Borrowing and Acquisitions Strategy: this policy sought to use the strength of the Council's financial standing and ability to access relatively cheap funding sources to acquire assets that would generate a return and help develop a sustainable alternative to government formula grant. The policy set a target to generate an additional £750,000 of income per annum with this assumption being built into the MTFP.

71. Over the last year the Council has worked towards the delivery of this task, most notably with member approval for the Elwick Rd scheme and the continued active management of the Council's property portfolio.

72. **The Borrowing and Acquisitions Strategy** (which is also supported by a separate document - the Property Acquisition, Investment & Disposal Strategy) is attached at **Appendix MT5** and members are asked to confirm their continued support for this initiative (**Recommendation v**)

### ***The MTFP forecast***

73. The forecast detailed in the table below takes into account the items discussed above. The forecast, which is not cumulative, shows that the budget gap is manageable for the first two years of the plan and then there is a surplus generated by the income derived from the Elwick road scheme. The increasing gap in the latter years that will need to be managed is primarily driven by a return of inflation.

**Table 4 : Updated MTFP 2017-2022 (excluding HRA)**

	2017/18 £'000's	2018/19 £'000's	2019/20 £'000's	2020/21 £'000's	2021/22 £'000's
Revenue Support Grant	(615)	(213)	0	0	0
S31 Grant NNDR reliefs	(826)	(829)	(838)	(837)	(837)
Retained Business Rates	(3,744)	(4,407)	(5,189)	(6,029)	(6,121)
New Homes Bonus (50% allocated to support base budget)	(3,176)	(2,187)	(2,390)	(2,618)	(2,866)
Government Funding	(8,361)	(7,636)	(8,417)	(9,484)	(9,824)
Council Tax	(6,801)	(7,036)	(7,267)	(7,524)	(7,825)
Total Income					
Receipts (Including Specific Grants)	(48,278)	(48,222)	(48,189)	(47,786)	(47,594)
Base Budget Gross Expenditure	63,637	63,495	63,091	62,198	63,304
Budget Increases	(126)	(104)	(893)	1,106	1,581
Budget Reduction Strategy	(41)	0	0	0	0
<b>BUDGET GAP</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>(1,675)</b>	<b>(1,490)</b>	<b>(358)</b>
<b>Quantified savings proposals</b>					
Elwick Interest	(100)	(300)			
Grounds Maintenance Allocation to/from reserves	125		750	750	750
<b>Revised budget Gap</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>(925)</b>	<b>(740)</b>	<b>392</b>

74. Managing the gap will need to be handled carefully. The Corporate Plan is focused on the delivery of business and housing growth and these items are important planks to the delivery of the financial strategy. Therefore whilst cost management is going to be an important focus, this must not be at the cost of delivery of these priorities.

## Council Tax Support Scheme

75. In 2013 the government, as part of its Welfare Reform programme, localised Council Tax Benefit - converting it from a benefit to a discount whilst achieving a 10% saving in costs and protecting the elderly. This Council adopted a localised version of the standard Kent scheme, however the major preceptors have requested a review of the scheme and this Council has consulted over changes to the scheme over the summer. The consultation is now closed and recommendations for the scheme are to be submitted to cabinet later in the Autumn.

76. The major preceptors also agreed to help support the administration of the scheme with the payment of a grant to billing authorities to help meet their costs and maintain collection rates at a high level. It is expected that this will continue at a reduced level. We are also working to develop a scheme that incentivises councils for growing their tax bases.



## Handling

77. The MTFP will be used as the basis for the detailed budget build process that will be reported to Cabinet in December.
78. Management Team will continue to develop further savings proposals to contribute towards the remaining budget gap.

## Contact

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## **Appendix MT1 – Local and National Economy**

### ***National Economy***

The result of the EU referendum has created a great deal of uncertainty in the economic outlook. During the campaign there were a great number of reports suggesting that the UK economy would slide into an immediate recession with a Leave vote. However the BREXIT victory, which initially saw immediate falls in the stock market and currency, does not seem to have resulted in an immediate recession with recent data suggesting a more optimistic outlook for the economy. However much will depend on the way the process of exiting the EU is conducted and the actual timing of the process.

In measures to reassure the markets and stimulate the economy the Bank of England reduced the Official Bank Rate from 0.5% to 0.25% and increased the level of Quantitative Easing. The Council's treasury advisors, Arlingclose are expecting this rate to remain unchanged for a few years before gradually increasing.

There has been a weakening of the pound which has not recovered greatly and could form the level at which it could stay. This has helped to strengthen a number of companies which trading on Dollars or Euros. However it remains to be seen whether the fall in the pound will result in a strengthening of the Manufacturing sector.

Growth assumptions have been slowed; this could possibly signal a recession however recent forecasts by the IMF and other economic forecasters have actually taken a more bullish view on growth. However it is being argued by some that this sanguine assessment of Brexit's impact will prove to be misleading because price inflation is set to rise substantially as a result of the weaker pound, and this will erode real incomes and thereby weaken consumption.

The BREXIT vote has brought about a change in the Government with a new Prime Minister and cabinet. This has resulted in a softening of the Governments view on Austerity with statements being made over a willingness to borrow to invest in infrastructure projects to support the economy. The Autumn Statement and how the Chancellor responds to the challenge of the BREXIT vote is very much a key for the Financial Plan. Given that the Autumn Statement is not scheduled to be made until later in the Autumn the assumptions of this plan are largely based upon the policies and spending plans of the previous chancellor. However it is being forecast that the impact of BREXIT could create a £15bn hole in government finances as a result of falling revenues and increased welfare costs, the chancellors response to this will be key to understanding the resources available for local government going forward.

### ***Global Economy***

In the wider economy there are positive signs of a strengthening of the global economy. Worries about the fragility of the US economy have not been vindicated. It will probably grow by about 2pc this year, and employment is still increasing at a decent, although unspectacular, pace. US interest rates are likely to rise soon,

perhaps even later this month, although more probably in December with the pace of increases over the next two years likely to be moderate.

Previously low oil prices were thought to be a good thing for the economy, and for a number of countries they have indeed been good this time round. But the markets were worried about the adverse effects of low oil prices on oil producers, including in the United States and, of course, on a large number of countries whose prosperity is heavily dependent upon oil. In recent months, however, these worries have been, to some extent, allayed. The oil price is off the bottom and seems to have stabilised at about \$50 a barrel. Meanwhile, there are signs of stabilisation, if not quite improvement, in some of the countries that the markets have been worried about, particularly Russia.

The Eurozone's recent economic performance in the zone has not been bad. Over the past year, the Eurozone as a whole has grown by about 1.5pc however it is not without its inherent problems that continue to act as a drag to its economy. The eurozone economy has benefited greatly from the effects of low oil prices, which have increased consumer real incomes and thereby underpinned consumption. As the effects of last year's falls in oil prices drop out of the inflation rate, the rate of increase of consumer real incomes is set to fall back. Meanwhile, the Italian banking system continues to be fragile, and across Europe there is considerable anxiety about the EU's future post-Brexit.

With the concerns over the Chinese stock market that cast doubt over the global economy at the start of the year, has largely been overcome, with China growing at 7% and an improving picture in Japan and Asia.

### ***Local Economy***

The level of Job Seeker Allowance Claimants remains below 1,000. Whilst this figure may be slightly distorted by a small number of claimants on Universal Credit, this is showing that unemployment is below pre-recession levels and virtually full employment.

The Council is seeing a number of companies willing to invest in the borough with some town centre sites attracting strong interest. Many of these sites have previously been stalled and it is encouraging to see a genuine prospect of development.

The Council has been able to maintain good collection rates for both Council Tax and NNDR with in year collection rates of 98.34% and 99.49% respectively. In addition to this services have seen strong performance of income levels with both parking and planning seeing improved income levels suggesting increased numbers of visitors to the town and increases in construction activity.

These indicators suggest a strong and prosperous local economy.

## Appendix MT2 – 100% Business Rate Retention Consultation

### SELF-SUFFICIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT: 100% BUSINESS RATES RETENTION CONSULTATION

#### CONSULTATION RESPONSE – ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ashford Borough Council broadly welcomes the government's initiative to move to a system of 100% business Rates retention. The previous rates retention has increased the councils focus on business rates and the role that the council plays in growing these receipts through planning decisions, investment, marketing the borough and other economic development initiatives. The Council looks forward to the new system with greater incentives for Councils that seek to grow and develop businesses in their area.

Ashford Borough Council has a long stated ambition to be self-sufficient and not rely on Government Grant, consequently this authority has viewed the growth in business rates resulting from new developments as a key part of that strategy, having granted permission for a new town centre cinema, office block, brewery, extension of the Designer outlet and also a large warehouse development. Not only do these developments bring prosperity and jobs to the local area but the additional rates income maintains services for local people.

It is disappointing that the consultation does not include seeking view on the management and setting of the various reliefs for Business Rates. This Authority believes that you cannot have true local business rates retention without extending local discretion to reliefs.

#### ***Question 1: Which of these identified grants / responsibilities do you think are the best candidates to be funded from retained business rates?***

This council supports the view of the Technical Group, which suggests that more due diligence is needed to understand the demand profiles and predictions and the ability authorities will have to control costs before a judgement can be made on this.

It is important that consideration is given to what action authorities will be able to take to manage the cost of these new responsibilities at a time of falling business rates tax yield. Many of the proposed responsibilities to transfer are counter cyclical and therefore cause a cost pressure at a time when business rates income is falling.

As a general principle, we believe that the grants and responsibilities funded from retained business rates should be those where there is a good fit with existing local authority areas of experience and competence. So, for example Council Tax and Housing Benefit Administration Subsidies relate to functions carried out by local authorities and legitimately could be funded from retained business rates. Whereas Attendance Allowance expenditure is demand led. It is not linked in any way to business rates income and should not come to local authorities.

#### ***Question 2: Are there other grants / responsibilities that you consider should be devolved instead of or alongside those identified above?***

This Council believes that the funding grants/responsibilities do not necessarily need to be linked to business rates as this should be viewed as a way of funding local services and not necessarily have to relate to Businesses

Consideration could be given to the transfer of Skills training from the DWP; Local Authorities would be better placed to provide tailored support to this group of claimants. This Council has started to run a Job Club on behalf of the DWP and seen some success in targeting long term unemployed residents and helping them return to work.

The funding for Discretionary Housing Payments could be included within the system.

Government could consider including PFI Subsidy's into the system as these are long term, predictable funding needs.

***Question 3: Do you have any views on the range of associated budgets that could be pooled at the Combined Authority level?***

There should be a bespoke approach to this according to local needs and circumstances. Generally, we are content with the choice of budgets that have already been devolved in other areas, such as Transport, Capital, Local Growth funds.

***Question 4: Do you have views on whether some or all of the commitments in existing and future deals could be funded through retained business rates?***

The impact of this would need to be modelled and understood before this can be commented on fully. Devolution deals are negotiated with clear deliverables outlined at the time, this process is not mandatory and therefore should not divert funds from other geographical areas that have not decided to follow this route.

As a general principle it is suggested that the most important aspect of funding devolution deals is to ensure that there is adequate funding for the functions that are devolved to deliver the desired outcomes. The source of this funding is less relevant and may mean topping up business rates from elsewhere.

***Question 5: Do you agree that we should continue with the new burdens doctrine post- 2020?***

We agree with this.

***Question 6: Do you agree that we should fix reset periods for the system?***

There may be pressure from some local authorities for a flexible system, driven by changes in spending pressures they may be experiencing. However, we believe that it is more appropriate to have resets only infrequently, as this increases the incentive value for local authorities of being able to retain business rates.

It would be sensible to align the resets with business rates revaluations in order to minimise turbulence. For example, if business rates revaluations took place every three years, perhaps resets could take place every twelve years, to coincide with a triennial revaluation.

It is important to remember that one of the key purposes of Business Rates Retention is that it is to act as an incentive to Authorities to deliver growth. The reset of the system removes the benefit of the growth received from an authority. This Authority has embraced the system and pushed to achieve business rates growth to become self-funding. The regular resets will remove the incentive and jeopardies the sustainability of local services. We would therefore request government to consider whether there is a way that some or all of the growth achieved between resets retained and build into the baseline need of an authority after the rest.

***Question 7: What is the right balance in the system between rewarding growth and redistributing to meet changing need?***

We are strongly in favour of rewarding growth.

***Question 8: Having regard to the balance between rewarding growth and protecting authorities with declining resources, how would you like to see a partial reset work?***

We do not believe that partial resets are appropriate. The cost of administration and the time spent on them would outweigh any benefits. However we can see that for authorities in areas which are stagnating and may potentially move into the zone of safety net would want a more frequent resetting of the system. So we can see that a partial reset system may be the most pragmatic and fairer for all but this must not remove the long term incentive for growth.

***Question 9: Is the current system of tariffs and top-ups the right one for redistribution between local authorities?***

It is accepted that there will need to be some form of top-up for those authorities with lower business rates income. This may be achieved on a regional basis. For example, the current Kent-wide pooling arrangement works well.

However the current system is too inflexible. We would argue for maximum flexibility. There are benefits in having a system with an element of certainty but having a high tariff means local authorities don't see much from the business rates for example this Authority's share of business rates is £18.26m but have a tariff of £15.62m leaving £2.6m for local services, which defeats the point of business rates retention.

***Question 10: Should we continue to adjust retained incomes for individual local authorities to cancel out the effect of future revaluations?***

No - revaluations will reflect the success of initiatives to deliver economic growth. If growth initiatives have been successful there will be an overall increase in the rateable value of the area and authorities should see a reward for this.

***Question 11: Should Mayoral Combined Authority areas have the opportunity to be given additional powers and incentives, as set out above?***

We would support the principle of combined authorities having additional powers and incentives, but we do not think this should be linked to those with elected Mayors this governance structure is not suited to every area and so there should be some flexibility to allow areas to develop structures that suit their communities.

Any additional responsibilities would need to be adequately funded.

**Question 12: What has your experience been of the tier splits under the current 50% rates retention scheme? What changes would you want to see under 100% rates retention system?**

Headline tier splits do not represent the true situation which exists. For example, Ashford Borough Council notionally receives 40% of business rates versus Kent County Council's 9% share, but in practice it only receives around 6% of business rates income owing to the working of the tariff system and the levy on business rates growth. Nevertheless the Council still suffers 40% of the losses from bad debts and appeals.

In extending the scope of business rates retention:

- it is important that tier splits should be more transparent (for example, 40% should mean 40%)
- the 80:20 weighting in favour of lower tier authorities should be maintained because this provides a real incentive for business rates growth.
- Transferring more risk to the authorities that share the income. How will these risks be managed and understood? What will the impact be on the level of reserves necessary?

If risk and reward were shared more evenly upper tier authorities will be exposed to funding risk and volatility.

**Question 13: Do you consider that fire funding should be removed from the business rates retention scheme and what might be the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?**

Fire funding should be removed. Linking fire authority funding to other local authority funding adds unnecessary complexity to the system. It is understood that fire authorities would also prefer this approach.

Care would need to be taken to ensure that business rates income for local authorities was not unfairly top-sliced to maintain fire authorities' income.

**Question 14: What are your views on how we could further incentivise growth under a - 100% retention scheme? Are there additional incentives for growth that we should consider?**

It is important that the system allows Authorities to retain some or all of business rates growth on a permanent basis through the re-set. Otherwise this could lead to authorities timing their Economic development activities to get the greatest gain from rate retention and this would not necessarily have the best outcome for the community.

The incentives for renewable energy are quite powerful and it would be an interesting development if this approach could be extended to other targeted sectors.

Authorities could be asked to nominate areas for this relief that that are targeting there economic development initiatives at.

Recycling local business rates within an Enterprise Zone makes sense and is something which we are in very much in favour of.

***Question 15: Would it be helpful to move some of the 'riskier' hereditaments off local lists? If so, what type of hereditaments should be moved?***

Whilst most local authorities would be able to manage their own risks there are some areas that should be considered, there are a number of power stations that are due to be decommissioned which will cause some authorities difficulty when these are finally closed which may place them in a safety net position.

The desire to protect against risk must be balanced by the incentive to deliver growth, where an incentive to develop and grow these riskier sites may be necessary to overcome local resistance.

***Question 16: Would you support the idea of introducing area-level lists in Combined Authority areas? If so, what type of properties could sit on these lists, and how should income be used? Could this approach work for other authorities?***

This is something which does not affect Ashford Borough Council but there is merit to considering this although the same outcome could be achieved if a combined Authority were to operate a business rates pool which would allow the authorities to pool to manage risks in the same way.

***Question 17: At what level should risk associated with successful business rates appeals be managed? Do you have a preference for local, area level (including Combined Authority), or across all local authorities as set out in the options above?***

Risk is something which should be managed locally, as local authorities have the power to influence outcomes. The main issue with appeals has been a lack of understanding of the process to allow authorities to correctly provide for the risk and an appeals process that is slow and encourages speculative appeals. Appeals tend to sit in the system for years with nothing being done – there must be prompter resolution of appeals and we support the government in its desire to improve the system.

***Question 18: What would help your local authority better manage risks associated with successful business rates appeals?***

The process of resolving appeals is currently very opaque. More transparency and better local liaison with Valuation Office is needed. Currently Valuation Officers can make material rating decisions to resolve appeals privately and have no requirement to publish any justification of the finding. The VOA have an incentive to clear the appeal and the Agent wants to secure a reduction in rates bill whilst the authority charges with collecting these taxes has no voice at the table.

Local Authorities should have a role in the process with a right to make representations and appeal decisions,



There are too many frivolous/speculative appeals and a better filter system to deter these is needed.

The length of time an appeal can be backdated has been reduced and this will help manage these risks, with appeals coving nearly 10 years the risk to an authority was increased significantly.

The length of time to resolve appeals has also been allowed to get too long with the backlog of appeals building up in the system. This again creates uncertainty and makes it harder to quantify the risk.

***Question 19: Would pooling risk, including a pool-area safety net, be attractive to local authorities?***

Kent councils already operate a pooling system that provides a safety net for member authorities that lose business rates income. To the extent that the pool area forms a logical political and geographical unit, we would support pooling of risk however this should be a decision taken by individual authorities rather than imposed upon them.

***Question 20: What level of income protection should a system aim to provide? Should this be nationally set, or defined at area levels?***

The current level at which the safety net is triggered is a reasonable compromise to encourage authorities to grow rates but maintain services in the event of a significant fall in revenues.

***Question 21: What are your views on which authority should be able to reduce the multiplier and how the costs should be met?***

This should be the responsibility of billing authorities, which in Ashford is the Borough Council.

Borough/District councils are collection authorities and are closest to the businesses affected by this.

We would propose that all Authorities that stand to benefit from this action are made statutory consultees for the change, in a similar way that precepting authorities have to be consulted on for changes to Local Council Tax Support schemes.

***Question 22: What are your views on how decisions are taken to reduce the multiplier and the local discount powers?***

Local authorities should be given both powers and should be constrained as little as possible. The decision should be taken by full Council.

In the spirit of Localism, Authorities should have the power to increase the multiplier provided that it consults with all affected parties. This could replace the existing BIDS system

**Question 23: What are your views on increasing the multiplier after a reduction?**

There should be no constraint on increasing the multiplier after a reduction.

**Question 24: Do you have views on the above issues or on any other aspects of the power to reduce the multiplier?**

Whilst we support the principle we accept that there may need to be some constraint built into the system to ensure that there is not an unhealthy level of competition between authorities. It is suggested that there is a band of flexibility applied to the national multiplier that would allow authorities to vary their local multiplier both above and below the national benchmark.

**Question 25: What are your views on the flexibility levying authorities should have to set a rateable value threshold for the levy?**

Ashford Borough Council is not currently a levying authority. Levying authorities should be given the flexibility to protect small businesses. Where there is not a Levying Authority consideration should be given as to how this freedom could be applied as there is still a need for infrastructure in those areas.

By the same token, we ourselves would like to have the power to set a rateable value threshold, by consulting with and not seeking approval from the LEP or the levying authority.

**Question 26: What are your views on how the infrastructure levy should interact with existing BRS powers?**

Ashford Borough Council does not charge any supplements. It is important to keep the system simple, protect business ratepayers and not impose unnecessary burdens on businesses.

However consideration needs to be given to the way in which the levy would function within a system reset. The payback period for infrastructure is often over a longer period and this would be affected by a reset and needs to be managed.

**Question 27: What are your views on the process for obtaining approval for a levy from the LEP?**

This is something which we are strongly against. It is preferable for this power to remain with democratically accountable authorities, not with LEPs. The LEP that is responsible for Kent covers two very populous counties so is not particularly close to local businesses and their concerns. We would however support them being a statutory consultee for this purpose.

**Question 28: What are your views on arrangements for the duration and review of levies?**

This is something which should not be rigid. It is important that maximum flexibility is built into the arrangements.

**Question 29: What are your views on how infrastructure should be defined for the purposes of the levy?**

It is important that the definition of infrastructure should be as wide as possible.

**Question 30: What are your views on charging multiple levies, or using a single levy to fund multiple infrastructure projects?**

This council would favour a system of multiple levies, this would mean that the duration of each levy could be matched to the life of the infrastructure it supports. Each levy could then be transparently reported and accounted for to ensure that the rate payer can see that it has been spent on its intended purpose.

**Question 31: Do you have views on the above issues or on any other aspects of the power to introduce an infrastructure levy?**

It is important to protect the interests of local business ratepayers and to have a system that all parties perceive as a transparent, accountable and democratic process.

Given the potential scale and longevity of infrastructure levy payments, business ratepayers will rightly expect tight controls over the power to raise a levy, and will expect to see the benefits demonstrated clearly.

**Question 32: Do you have any views on how to increase certainty and strengthen local accountability for councils in setting their budgets?**

We recognise that there are already strong controls in place that have functioned effectively under a period of strain for local authorities. In general we would argue for a process that is transparent and simple. We would also like to see the funding arrangements fixed over the period of our Medium Term Financial Strategy, ie five years.

**Question 33: Do you have views on where the balance between national and local accountability should fall, and how best to minimise any overlaps in accountability?**

We are strongly in favour of devolution and local accountability. We feel that we are best placed to understand the needs of our local community and with flexibility of funding we can spend where the need is. We regularly consult with our Borough to ensure we are taking correct decisions for the communities impacted upon.

**Question 34: Do you have views on whether the requirement to prepare a Collection Fund Account should remain in the new system?**

It is important that the new system continues to maintain the requirement for a Collection Fund Account.

***Question 35: Do you have views on how the calculation of a balanced budget may be altered to be better aligned with the way local authorities run their business?***

The current balanced budget calculation can be somewhat misleading in relation to business rates. It should be amended so that it can be demonstrated that both Council Tax and Business Rates are used by local authorities to balance their budgets.

Government may wish to consider the effect of the risk transfer to Local Authorities (through Business Rates Retention, and new functions) and the effect that this will have on the required level of reserves to manage the risk, should the balanced budget requirement remain in its current form. Authorities are being encouraged to use reserves, at a time when the risks those reserves have to manage are increasing.

***Question 36: Do you have views on how the business rates data collection activities could be altered to collect and record information in a more timely, efficient and transparent manner?***

It is important that the data collection documents (NNDR1 and NNDR3) are retained but consistency is important and they need to be published in a timely manner.

Ashford Borough Council

23/09/2016

## **Business Rates Reform Fair Funding Review:**

### **Call for evidence on Needs and Redistribution**

#### **Consultation Response from Ashford Borough Council**

This Council has not been one of those calling for a change in the assessment of need, rather than amending formulas and moving funding between authorities it is more important to have a known quantity of funding to enable councils to plan effectively for the medium term. The more the system is changed the greater the impact will be on Councils at a time when they are trying to manage other issues, such as responding to the austerity measures that have been put in place, coping with the changing pattern of demand, and reforming service delivery and identifying new ways of working. This review will focus on how to redistribute the finite resource in another way moving funds between councils, this is an unnecessary distraction.

In addition to this the Business Rates Revaluation and the move towards 100% Rates Retention creates a great deal of funding uncertainty for local authorities and this fair funding review will only add to that uncertainty, this may have the unwanted consequence of having authorities grow reserves balances to manage this risk rather than focus on improving services and driving efficiency.

This Council has been working to become self-sufficient for a number of years looking at ways to develop income streams and growing business rates. A stable business rates platform, as we have had since the system was introduced, is important to allow the council to continue to work to deliver self sufficiency rather than focusing on how to redistribute a finite resource.

#### ***Question 1: What is your view on the balance between simple and complex funding formulae?***

If the Government is to review the funding formula a simple and transparent system is preferable.

#### ***Question 2: Are there particular services for which a more detailed formula approach is needed, and – if so – what are these services?***

The weighting between the various funding blocks is the key. We would like to remind government of the need to ensure that there is adequate funding for the provision of essential services, according there will need to be sufficient weighting the EPCS block to ensure that lower tier authorities get adequate funding.

#### ***Question 3: Should expenditure based regression continue to be used to assess councils' funding needs?***

This Council does not support the need for the review, however the use of regression is not preferable as there are arguments that this methodology compounds previous spending patterns and does not reward authorities that have a track record of delivering services efficiently.

**Question 4: What other measures besides councils' spending on services should we consider as a measure of their need to spend?**

Sparsity is a key driver for costs, it is less efficient to deliver services to a sparse rural population and this should be reflected within the formula

Flooding risk has been another area that needs to be reflected in the formula.

**Question 5: What other statistical techniques besides those mentioned above should be considered for arriving at the formulae for distributing funding?**

No response.

**Question 6: What other considerations should we keep in mind when measuring the relative need of authorities?**

Government should be transparent about the assumptions it makes on Council tax funding, the system should reward low tax authorities and not penalise them.

We would urge the government publishes any notional level of council tax that is used when calculating the level of resources. Then perhaps within the capping regime councils below that level could have more freedom to increase their tax to that figure whilst those above have less freedom.

**Question 7: What is your view on how we should take into account the growth in local taxes since 2013-14?**

If government were to include this then it would also have to reflect the level of reduction in funding the authority has received as a result of the spending reviews and the changes in demand for services as these are often factors for the growth in local taxes.

We are unsure as to how government will incorporate changes in NNDR growth as the system will be reset through the 2017 revaluation, we are awaiting guidance from government as to how this reset is to be managed.

**Question 8: Should we allow step-changes in local authorities' funding following the new needs assessment?**

No – Local authorities have seen significant cuts in recent years and are still working to manage the most recent reductions in funding. With caps on Tax increases their ability to respond to step changes in funding has been impaired.

**Question 9: If not, what are your views on how we should transition to the new distribution of funding?**

As stated above this authority is not in favour of a new distribution formula however there will need to be a phased change in funding to allow Councils to respond. This will need to be on an extended basis as they already have to respond to the last round of cuts in funding announced in the spending review.

**Question 10: What are your views on a local government finance system that assessed need and distributed funding at a larger geographical area than the current system – for example, at the Combined Authority level?**

This is one reason that this Council argues that the existing formula should remain as we are just moving resources from one council to the other rather than focusing on reforming service delivery, driving efficiency and commercialisation.

Any formula must recognise that areas can have vastly different characteristics and needs even if they are only a few miles apart. It is only right that this difference is reflected in funding.

If we were to introduce funding at larger geographical areas we would suggest that this would create a sluggish system and make it difficult for planning purposes, Authorities would need to first wait for the area settlement then decide amongst themselves how to divide up this funding. Authorities are not equipped to do this quickly or efficiently and it would cause more uncertainty in the financial planning process.

For Combined Authorities there is some merit to this suggestion but this should be negotiated on an individual basis for each combined authority when they are established.

**Question 11: How should we decide the composition of these areas if we were to introduce such a system?**

We would not support this change.

**Question 12: What other considerations would we need to keep in mind if we were to introduce such a system?**

We would not support this change.

**Question 13: What behaviours should the reformed local government finance system incentivise?**

On the face of it the suggestion to reward efficiency is sound, however building these into a system would undermine the purpose of creating a needs based system as funding would no longer reflect need but also performance.

We would remind government that there are already powerful incentives in the funding system, delivering business growth is a key driver for this authority seeking to capture growth in business rates to secure its funding. This incentive should not be harmed through the reset process.

In addition to Business rates growth there is the new homes bonus. Whilst we await government's findings of the review of this, we feel that the record growth achieved on the Council Tax Stock for 2015/16 is a sign of the strength of this incentive and we would urge government to view these figures as a sign of the strength of New Homes Bonus as an incentive and consider this before implementing the proposed measures that in our view would lessen rather than sharpen the incentive.

If this review were to progress then it should be done on a needs based objective formula and not include rewards.

**Question 14: How can we build these incentives in to the assessment of councils' funding needs?**

We would not support this change.

Ashford Borough Council

23/09/2016



## Appendix MT3 – Key Assumptions

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Pay inflation & Increments	1.300%	1.700%	2.800%	2.700%	2.700%
Contractual Inflation	2.40%	3.20%	3.20%	3.20%	3.20%
Income Inflation	1.10%	1.50%	2.60%	2.50%	2.50%
General Inflation	0.6%	1.0%	2.1%	2.0%	2.0%
Utilities Inflation	2.6%	3.0%	4.1%	4.0%	4.0%
Business Rates Growth	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Benefits Inflation	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Pension	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
Interest Rates	0.25%	0.25%	0.50%	0.75%	1.00%
20 year Gilt Rate	1.55%	1.55%	1.60%	1.70%	2.00%
New Properties	788.00	644.00	623.00	935.00	1,110.00
Council Tax Increase	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%

## Appendix MT4 - Developing a clear counter-inflation strategy and choices as counter-inflation measures

### *The role of council tax and council tax increases.*

1. All the while council tax increases are capped, they are effectively doing no more than combating inflation. It is recognised that it is not achievable or desirable in the current and medium term to seek a step change in council tax level. For planning purposes, for each year, an increase of 2% pa has been assumed.

### *Managing inflation cost pressures*

#### *a) Pay*

2. The largest single inflationary impact is £372k. Action to control the pay bill will contribute towards the effective management of inflationary pressures. This has been negotiated and agreed and is reflected within the MTFP.

#### *b) Non-pay budgets*

3. Exercising constraint requiring services to consume inflationary impacts by reducing the budget uplifts places more onus on budget managers to manage demands through greater efficiency, stronger procurement or negotiations with contractors. It would be unwise to adopt this practice for a number of years without periodic review. In line with this policy, for 2017/18 an increase of 1.6% has been assumed for non-pay (service) budgets. This is in line with the OBR forecasts
4. Those services linked to contracts are uplifted by the index used in deciding the annual contract review price.

#### *c) Efficiency and new sources of income*

5. We should use efficiency and a new income sources programme as clear counter-inflation measures. Services were tasked with developing savings proposals of 15% for the period 2015-18. Without this emphasis, there would be little choice but to cut back year-on-year. This report also outlines further areas which could be pursued to deliver further cost reductions.
6. Our **'invest to save' initiatives** have had this objective in mind, but not all investments have led to direct budget reductions as some initiatives are about improving quality of service, while improving staff productivity to mitigate the stretch on capacity.

#### *d) The role of service fees and charges*

7. The MTFP forecast assumes fees and charges will increase by 0.5% above the rate of the Consumer Prices Index (taken at the November preceding the financial year). This assumption relates only to charges where the council has the discretion to decide increases. Car park charges, however, are more sensitive and so need more judgment and therefore fee levels are considered separately.

The MTFP – over its lifetime - does not make any assumptions about car park charges changing.

8. As a counter inflation measure fees and charges must keep pace with rising costs of service provision, particularly for services where fees and charges do not cover full costs.

e) *The treasury management role and interest on investments*

9. Day-to-day treasury management plays an important role in contributing an income source to the council. Core cash for treasury management purposes varies between £20m and £30m. Interest rates and investment yields are, among other things, a reflection of financial markets' view of the path of inflation over the longer term. For this reason treasury management returns should be viewed as part of the council's counter inflation strategy

## Appendix MT5 – Borrowing and Acquisitions Strategy

Purpose: To develop and maintain a set of prudent and sensible principles for making investments and undertaking borrowing, giving sufficient flexibility to this Authority to take advantage of financial and other external markets for the benefit of the borough of Ashford.

This Strategy is designed to operate in conjunction with the Council's Property Acquisition, Investment & Disposal Strategy which was approved and adopted in January 2014.

Aim: The ultimate aim is to achieve self-sufficiency, from government grant, as an Authority – particularly in the face of ever-decreasing central funding sources.

This policy aims to maintain flexibility and responsiveness: when markets – and governments – change, the ability of this authority to respond to these changes must be maintained. This policy is a way of maintaining this flexibility.

### Funding:

#### a) How it works

- The Council can access funding for capital expenditure through the Public Works Loans Board and money markets.
- In the event that the council borrows money it must make a revenue provision for the repayment of the debt as well as financing the interest cost of the loan.
- The Council sets its own limits for the total amount it can borrow which is agreed through the Council's adopted prudential indicators (set annually in the budget report). This report seeks to establish the criteria that will be applied to a ring-fenced amount within the prudential indicators. This should aim to be at around the £100m level.
- The HRA has a statutory debt cap and therefore any further investment in HRA assets must be accommodated within the cap.

#### b) Mechanism

- It is proposed to allocate a proportion of the Council's reserves to form a 'cash backed' element of the total resources available for investment.
- The balance of funding will come through borrowing.
- A key consideration of this policy will be the loan-to-value of these investments; this benchmark will be met through the use of either the council's own resources or by seeking other funding to reduce the percentage of funding that will be secured through debt.
- The Economic Regeneration & Investment Committee will provide the authority to enter into land transactions (including at an undervalue) and contractual obligations (including the lending of money and the making of grants) up to the value of £2 million.
- Decisions on capital expenditure above £2m will be recommended to Full Council for approval.

## **The Strategy: detail**

1. The Council will borrow to fund investment in four threads:
  - Delivery of strategic priorities
  - For property and commercial investments
  - Development of cultural and community facilities
  - For investment in the Housing Revenue Account\*  
[\*Note: HRA must operate within its statutory debt cap]
2. Any investment must be accommodated within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
3. A project list will be maintained and prioritised (*specific methodology and criteria to be agreed*) to enable decisions to be taken in the round. See template below
4. A minimum of 10% of any net return on an investment will be allocated to an investment reserve (debt and cash backed) which will be used to support further investments.

Each project must have a business case (including Net Present Value and Internal Rate of Return calculations) which demonstrates it delivers an acceptable 'worth' for the Council and must have a full risk assessment.

Worth is, of course, linked to the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, and focuses upon community benefit and how it might improve the economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing of an area.

'Worth' for each project, then, will be established by Cabinet but should reflect the priorities established in paragraphs 1 to 3 above. The 'worth' of project investment should take into account the three Rs:

- Recovering the borrowing within a reasonable time frame
- Replacing income lost from grants, so that we work towards self-sufficiency
- Reputational enhancement for the Borough and the Council

Project impacts must be taken into account when appraisal takes place. These impacts are indirect positive results from projects which do not necessarily provide a direct return. The projects may actually contribute with a combination of Borough enhancements and wealth creation. These may be demonstrated through, for example, increased NNDR and Council Tax receipts and enhanced opportunities or attractiveness for inward investors or visitors.

These returns will indirectly result from an enhanced reputation for the Borough.

5. All investments will be appraised using the 25 year PWLB interest rate (or rate applicable to the life of the asset if this is lower) to allow for a long term view on financing costs.

6. Normally Loan-to-Value (see definition below) on any investment must not exceed 90%. This can be varied by Cabinet decision.
7. The Loan-to-Value on the total borrowing and investment activity must not exceed 90%. For HRA the statutory debt cap is to be applied.
8. Capital receipts from the sale of any assets must:
  - i. Be used to repay any debt secured upon it.
  - ii. Be recycled for further investment

**Agenda Item No:** 7  
**Report To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016  
**Report Title:** Homelessness Review and Strategy  
**Report Author:** Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager  
Sylvia Roberts, Senior Housing Options Officer  
**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Clokie (Housing and Home Ownership)



**Summary:**

A public consultation on the Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy ran for 12 weeks until 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016. The outcome of the consultation, together with the information contained within the Homelessness Review and previous consultation carried out has been used to inform the final Homelessness Strategy and its action plan. The Homelessness Strategy and action plan have been developed around the 10 local challenges set by government to deliver an effective and efficient approach to preventing homelessness locally.

**Key Decision:** YES

**Affected Wards:** All

**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet be asked to:-**  
**1) Agree to incorporate the findings of the recent public consultation into the review and strategy.**  
**2) Approve the Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy for adoption by full Council.**

**Policy Overview:** The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on a review of homelessness in their district

Making Every Contact Count 2012, sets out the government's approach to preventing homelessness and introduces the 10 local challenges that the draft Homelessness Strategy is formed around.

The council's Corporate Plan, 2015 - 2020 is committed to providing quality homes across the borough, catering for a range of ages, tenures and need, in well planned and attractive new places.

The Ashford Housing Framework has a specific priority to: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

<b>Financial Implications:</b>	These are set out in the resources section of the draft Homelessness Strategy.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	YES/NO (delete as appropriate)
<b>Equalities Impact Assessment</b>	YES – appendix 4 No adverse impacts identified
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	None
<b>Exemption Clauses:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	
<b>Contacts:</b>	<a href="mailto:jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk">jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk</a> – Tel: (01233) 330451 <a href="mailto:sylvia.roberts@ashford.gov.uk">sylvia.roberts@ashford.gov.uk</a> – Tel (01233) 330804



## **Report Title: Homelessness Review and Strategy**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The report presents to members the process and outcome of the recent public consultation on the Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy.
2. To provide members with the updated Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy.

### **Issue to be Decided**

3. To agree to incorporate the findings of the recent public consultation into the review and strategy.
4. To approve the Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy for adoption by the full council and subsequent publication.

### **Background**

5. The October 2015 Cabinet approved the Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy go out to public consultation and that the findings be reported back to Cabinet (minute item 166).
6. The government's statement 'Making Every Contact Count' (August 2012) advocates a joint approach from a range of local agencies to prevent homelessness from occurring and tackling the root causes of homelessness and to be responsive to emerging needs.
7. A stakeholder event held in November 2014 'kick-started' the process of developing the homelessness strategy. Using the 10 local challenges set out in Making Every Contact Count stakeholders provided a very useful insight to how these could be addressed and how organisations (public and private) could work better together. This information is contained within the Homelessness Review, together with a summary of service user interviews and was used alongside evidence gathered in the Review to inform the draft Homelessness Strategy action plan.
8. The Homelessness Review provides the background evidence, by analysing a range of data, to inform the draft Homelessness Strategy together with input from the stakeholder event and service user interviews. The most recent been consultation responses have been used to make sure the Homelessness Strategy's action plan is relevant and deliverable.

### **Consultation**

9. A full report of the outcome of the public consultation is included at appendix 1.
10. In summary:

- a) The consultation was hosted on the council's consultation portal and ran from 25th April 2016 for the recommended period of 12 weeks.
- b) The consultation was publicised through; an email to members and a range of stakeholders; an article in Ashford Voice; a notice in the tenants' newsletter 'Tell Us'; a press release and officers raising the profile of the consultation at meetings and forums they attended.
- c) 16 questionnaire based responses and 2 general comments were received
- d) Key points raised by respondents were;
- Joint/collaborative working should be more efficient and avoid duplication
  - Services for clients need to be easier to access and flexible to meet specific needs
  - More innovation to make best use of private rented sector and encourage more landlords to offer property
  - Better understanding of numbers of rough sleepers needed
  - Concerns about impact of welfare reform, particularly for under 35's
  - Affordability of homes for those on low wages and/or in rural areas
  - Need for more short stay accommodation
- e) The groups considered most at risk of homelessness were
- Victims of domestic abuse
  - People with drug and alcohol problems
  - People with mental health problems
  - Single young people
  - Young families
  - Single parents
  - Low income working families
- f) The respondents considered the highest priority should be afforded to:
- Victims of domestic abuse
  - Young families
  - Single parents
  - Low income working families
  - People with mental health problems
  - Single young people

11. Respondents ranked the 10 local challenges in order of importance as shown in the table below. 1 = most important, 10 = least important.

Challenge	Ranking
Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords	1
Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, training and employment needs	2
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	3
Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services	=4
Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partners	=4

and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support	
Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction	=4
Adopt a 'no second night out model' or an effective local alternative	=7
Not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks	=7
Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation	=7
Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients	10

12. The comments received have been used to finalise the draft Homelessness Strategy. One of the key actions is the formation of an interagency homelessness forum to drive forward the implementation of the action plan. This forum will also monitor delivery and progress towards meeting the 10 local challenges.
13. The action plan will be reviewed regularly by the forum. This will ensure that the needs of specific client groups can be considered by practitioners, gaps in services identified and how these could be addressed within the resources available.

## The Homelessness Review

14. Since the commencement of the consultation more recent data has been published. Within the Homelessness Review document, charts and tables have been updated with the most recent data available. The full Homelessness Review can be found at appendix 2.
15. The updated Homelessness Review has not identified any significant shift in trends to those presented in the Homelessness Review that was published as part of the consultation. Key findings are:
  - The main reason for homelessness continues to be loss of assured shorthold tenancy, parents no longer willing or able to accommodate and breakdown of relationships.
  - There is an upward trend in the number of applicants on the housing register and although there were 247 new affordable homes built in the borough in 15/16, an increase on the previous year, there remains a shortfall compared to the 368 affordable homes needed each year. The emphasis on starter homes and shared ownership in conjunction with relatively small numbers of private rented homes below the local housing allowance rate will further exacerbate the shortage of affordable rented homes available to homeless households.
  - Debt advice, resolving rents arrears and housing benefit claims and negotiation continue to be key aspects of preventing homelessness
  - There remain over 100 households in temporary accommodation and numbers in Bed & Breakfast have increased since the beginning of 2016.
  - Approaches for housing advice are consistently in the region of over 100 approaches per month. The triage service is effective as shown by the number of homelessness application and acceptances.
  - An internal audit, reported in 2016 concluded that homelessness applications are assessed in compliance with the Housing Act 1996 (as

amended) and that the council fulfils its obligations to provide interim and temporary accommodation.

- A review of the Housing Options Service in July 2016 has identified some areas where a more structured approach and standardisation of process could further enhance the effectiveness and consistency of the service.

## **The Draft Homelessness Strategy**

16. The updated Homelessness Review and consultation outcomes have been used to refresh the draft Homelessness Strategy which is found at appendix 3.
17. The resources aimed at prevention of homelessness are more cost effective than placing homeless households into temporary accommodation. The budget to deliver the action plan for the forthcoming year will be reviewed during the budget build process. This will include identifying where partnership can be maximised to improve efficiencies and reduce duplication. This is reflected in the homelessness strategy focus on prevention and partnership working.
18. The draft Homelessness Strategy's key aim is to tackle the causes of homelessness and to prevent homelessness occurring. Joint working with other agencies is critical to the successful delivery of the action plan, utilising the different skills and knowledge available from a range of organisations to enable those households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access support and advice themselves. Also working across sectors to encourage people into employment and training that will assist them to find and sustain a settled home.
19. The action plan sets out the steps to be taken to address the 10 local challenges that are:
  - Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
  - Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education training and employment needs
  - Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
  - Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
  - Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
  - Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
  - Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction
  - 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
  - Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation

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

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

20. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and no adverse impacts identified. Appendix 4.

## **Handling**

21. If members approve the Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy the documents will go forward to full council for adoption.
22. Once adopted the Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy will be published on the council's website. Members and stakeholders will be notified of their publication and where to access the documents.
23. The interagency homelessness forum will be tasked with updating the review and strategy on a regular basis. This will be undertaken annually or in response to any significant legislative changes to ensure the priorities and actions are addressing current and emerging local homelessness pressures.
24. Progress on achieving the 10 local challenges and reaching the gold standard for homelessness services will be reported annually, from the date of adoption, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Conclusion**

25. The Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy have been developed through the analysis of data and consultation with a wide range of organisations, commencing with a stakeholder event in November 2014.
26. Monitoring the Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy will ensure that the priorities and action plan are responding to current local circumstances. Achieving the gold standard for homelessness services based around the 10 local challenges set out in 'Making Every Contact Count' will ensure services delivered are effective, efficient and centred around prevention and tackling the causes of homelessness.

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

27. The Homelessness Review and the Strategy have been developed through widespread consultation. The focus on homelessness prevention is key and through working with other organisations will assist in reducing homelessness and the costs incurred to the individual and society. I fully support the aim for the homelessness service to attain the gold standard by addressing the 10 local challenges, set out by government in 'Making Every Contact Count'. This forms the priorities of the action plan.

28. I recommend that members agree to incorporate the outcomes of the consultation and approve the Homelessness Strategy for adoption.

**Contact:** Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager  
Sylvia Roberts, Senior Housing Options Officer

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**Outcome of consultation on the  
Ashford Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness Strategy 2016**



**ASHFORD**  
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## Introduction

The draft Ashford Homelessness Review and Strategy was published for consultation on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016 and ran for the recommended period of 12 weeks.

The consultation was hosted on the Ashford Borough Council consultation portal. Respondents were invited to respond to a questionnaire (appendix 1) either online or by returning a copy by email or post. Sixteen questionnaire based responses were received and a further two general comments were made by email.

The first part of this report notes responses to each question. The second part considers the responses and how these maybe reflected in the final Review and Strategy documents to be considered for adoption by the council.

The consultation was publicised through:

- An email to Members, KCC Members, Parish Councils and stakeholders with a link to the consultation portal
- An article in Ashford Voice
- A notice in the tenants newsletter 'Tell Us'
- A press release
- Housing officers raising the profile of the consultation at meetings and forums

## Responses to the Questionnaire

### Question 1 – Do you have any comments on the findings of the review?

Yes = 38%

No = 63%

#### Question 1 Comments:

Referrals for floating support can often take a long time before support is put in place and therefore the person needing support can often be at crisis point, meaning when they receive the much-needed intervention it is too late.

Accommodation providers need to develop what they can offer and deliver more preventative services.

When an area has too many different service providers offering a similar service, this can cause even more inconsistency between service delivery and quality, as well as confusing those who are in need of a service.

Preferred providers get inundated with referrals whilst others could at times be underutilised. All agencies allocate a lot of time to meetings. These could be made more effective if fewer service providers attended, with meetings more quality focused.

The consultation explains the need for more hostels. We agree that more supported accommodation is required, but it is also important to recognise that at times hostels can make situations worse for people accessing them.

Therefore our belief is that it is more beneficial to have much smaller properties and ensure that individuals within the property received appropriate support for their individual needs.

The review has covered many of the leading reasons for homelessness; it seems to be based on many other generic reviews without really identifying any Ashford specific factors.



We would like to see rough sleepers given a higher priority. Your statistics said there were only 5 rough sleepers in Ashford, we know this is much more. Many hide themselves away for safety and shelter. Many have given up asking for help because there is no help available for them. For this reason we will never know the true figure of rough sleepers, but we know there are more than 5. We feel that there is not enough support for rough sleepers and should be. The reason for the low numbers at the beginning of the winter shelter would be because nobody knew about it, by the end of its time all 12 beds were full, showing that there is a need for it. This is very important as basic needs are met, e.g. hygiene needs, a place of safety, a place to maintain dignity, a place to feel supported and safe. It is also important to minimise the sense of exclusion, also to reduce crime. Could Citizens Advice be included in the rough sleeper working group? We would like to do more for them. We notice that it is only a medium priority to develop the rough sleeper service. Could this be a high priority?

The drivers for the private rented sector and the landlords are the return that they will receive and the limiting of that risk on their investments. The housing crisis that exists in the South East and in Kent is set to continue for the foreseeable future which will place a greater pressure on housing and the cost to rent.

The ability of the council to think outside the box, use the general power of competence for them to discharge homeless people into the private rented sector needs to be considered. The council has many leavers and instruments to use and should consider all areas to attract landlords willing to help house people.

The use of underwriting tenants rent by the local authority, the use of rent guarantees will need to be further looked at to entice more landlords to come to the council.

Question 2 – Are there any issues around homelessness that you feel the Review has not considered?

Yes = 50%  
No = 50%

Question 2 Comments:

There appears to be no mention of the fact that from April 2017 under 21s will receive no housing benefit / UC housing allowance and that 21 - 35 year olds will only receive the equivalent of the shared house rate. Therefore placing this age group in independent accommodation will be prohibitive.

Real, practical help right now for those in need. E.g. further funding of charity endeavours such as the winter night shelter.

There was very little mention of unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) and the fluctuation of numbers of UASC coming into the country and needing support.

There was a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children needing support in 2015. Although this was a rare influx, Kent still had no infrastructure in place to deal with these numbers.

Service providers need to adapt their services to be more flexible so they can react to changes in demand - even if this isn't offering accommodation but support.

No mention of how you plan to support those fleeing domestic abuse within the action plan in your homelessness strategy.

## Question 2 Comments Contd.

I would like to have seen some discussion around those leaving prison (specifically)

There are two areas which have not been mentioned.

1. Homeless issues for immigrants particularly younger people (18 +)
2. Homeless issues affecting those people in rural areas particularly linked to the agricultural industry.

Transport can also be a contributory factor in rural areas.

The LHA rates are set so low that many people find private rentals unaffordable. Very few private landlords take people on benefits, or without a guarantor, or people with a poor credit rating, so people are not being able to find a private rental. Letting agent charges are also very high, creating a further obstacle in finding a private rental. This is obviously putting more pressure on very limited council resources, as people would not feel the need to wait for the council to house them in a homeless application if it were easier and more affordable to get a private rental. Agency charges are also a big obstacle to finding private rentals.

Each landlord is different and the way that they will operate will vary – the private rented sector is 100's of small businesses in Ashford. What works for one landlord might not work for others. Flexibility around landlord and tenants needs has to be considered.

## Question 3 – Do you agree these are the main causes of homelessness?

- Loss of rented/tied accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy
- Parents/other relatives/friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Violent breakdown of relationship, involving partner
- Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner

Yes = 94%

No = 6%

## Question 3 Comments:

Care-leavers. Prison or other secure unit leavers. Ex armed forces.

Mental health, physical health, substance misuse, leaving prison, loss of employment, harassment

Welfare reform - reduction in benefits, sanctions

Lack of management around finances and budgeting due to mental health issues and life skills.

Addiction, imprisonment

Mental health issues for all age groups

Rent arrears-problems affording high rents with low LHA ceiling, also problems with budgeting in general.

The inability of someone on a low wage to be able to afford to live in this area due to the ludicrous rent that is now seen as 'appropriate for this area' of the South East. Single people cannot pay rent when only earning a low wage. Families have not the means by which they can pay for a home in this area unless they are super rich

Question 4 – Do you agree with the common themes emerging from the Review?

- Joint commitment to prevent homelessness at a strategic level
- Joint working across all organisations
- Early intervention is key to homelessness prevention
- Improve communication (between partners, increase public awareness and where to go for help)
- Increasing demand for accommodation for client groups with high support needs and those who do not fit priority need category
- Further develop relations with private landlords to increase availability of suitable accommodation for homeless households (breakdown misconceptions of private rented sector with tenants and increase tenants understanding of responsibilities of renting)

Yes = 93%  
No = 7%

**Question 4 Comments:**

There needs to be more provision directly by the council or through charities funded by the council.

While you have the comments about joint working which cannot be disagree with, the concern from landlords is the impact on welfare reform and what actual support a landlord has from a local authority in relation to this. While the council will not be responsible, overtures to the landlord community about working with them in relation to welfare reform should be made. It would be beneficial if a concrete proposal which show a direct benefit for landlords that work with the council on homelessness

It is difficult to see what else could be covered, from our perspective in a small village in the Ashford Borough we lose our young people because there is no means for them to get homes in the village. The rich come in and buy up properties, convert their garages and out houses for holiday lets and buy houses as second homes. The council do nothing to prevent this and in fact encourage it. Planning permission for low cost housing conversions are turned down but the same properties are given permission to convert to a holiday let. This could be a village that could house some of Ashford's homeless if these properties were made available. However, this is not relevant to your strategy and so that is why it isn't a part of it and would not be seen to be so.

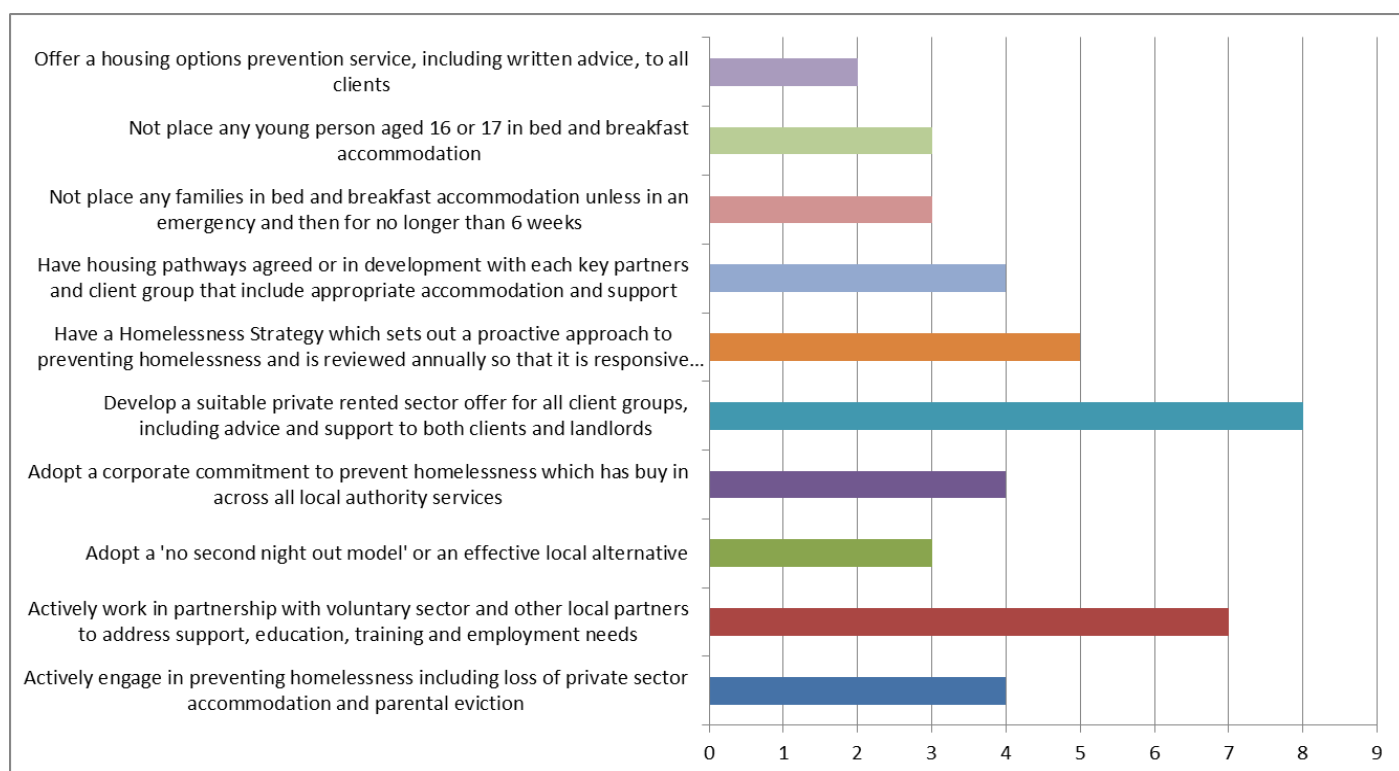
Question 5 – Of the 10 local challenges, please indicate the 3 you consider to be most important for Ashford (tick up to 3 boxes)

The table below shows the responses in order of most important

Challenge	Ranking
Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords	1

Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, training and employment needs	2
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	3
Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services	=4
Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partners and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support	=4
Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction	=4
Adopt a 'no second night out model' or an effective local alternative	=7
Not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks	=7
Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation	=7
Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients	10

The chart below shows the number of responses received for each challenge



### Question 6 – Which groups do you think are at the greatest risk of homelessness?

Respondents scored the groups with 10 being highest risk and 0 lowest risk. The same score could be used more than once.

The table shows total score for each group in order of most at risk.

Group	Total score
Victims of domestic abuse	122
People with drug and alcohol	121

problems	
People with mental health problems	117
Single young people	100
Young families	91
Single parents	90
Low income working families	90
People with learning disabilities	79
People with physical and sensory disabilities	64
Older people	64
People from black, minority and ethnic groups	58

Question 7 – Which groups do you think should be given priority in preventing homelessness?

Respondents scored the groups with 10 being highest priority and 0 lowest priority. The same score could be used more than once.

The table shows total score for each group in order of highest priority.

Group	Total score
Victims of domestic abuse	126
Young families	124
Single parents	120
Low income working families	111
People with mental health problems	105
Single young people	103
People with learning disabilities	98
People with physical and sensory disabilities	97
Older people	92
People with drug and alcohol problems	88
People from black, minority and ethnic groups	79

Question 8 – Do you think the action plan will deliver the 10 local challenges?

Yes = 75%

No = 25%

Question 8 Comments:

Prevention of homelessness will not be fully achieved unless there is more provision of affordable and accessible housing.

We need immediate action, not just a long term plan. Also, the private sector is not the answer, businesses just want to make money. Local charities such as Porchlight and Ashford Vineyard help because they care. The council should work with the charities.

The plan is well conceived and should deliver if subject to constant review

Only if there is true sign up from all agencies and adequate funding is made available. There needs to be one person coordinating the strategy.

Question 9 – Please provide any further comments you would like to make on the Homelessness Review and Strategy.

Question 9 Comments

Giving people a score out of 10 is very difficult as many people identify with more than one need. As an example a single young person may have mental health issues and substance misuse issues. A young family could have a child with a disability. All of these individuals should be supported on their individual circumstances rather than putting people into boxes.

Overall the strategy seems very strong with good plans for the future.

Porchlight would be keen to meet with Ashford Borough Council to discuss how we can work in partnership to implement the Homelessness Strategy. We would also like to learn more about ABC's localism strategy.

In my experience, Ashford Housing Services work proactively and innovatively. This is a robust strategy with a practical and deliverable action plan.

Aside from Christchurch House ABC does not own/manage any properties with more than 5 bedrooms in the entire borough dedicate for the provision of housing homeless people in the short or medium term. Yet the Homeless Review states on page 5, " There are consistently about 1400 applicants on the housing register. In March 2016 this included 105 homeless households".

Indeed the Final Review for Consultation on Homelessness states on Page 30 in a small case study on Christchurch House, and I paraphrase, "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."

Thus there is a clear correlation between housing homeless people in council owned housing stock, rather than paying private landlords/businesses to house them in the short to medium term.

With this in mind I propose ABC should as part of this strategy, aim to build within 5 years a new facility to replicate the success of Christchurch House. Preferably with 25 double sized rooms plus with the aim of the project to run as cost neutral. But with only homeless people in or from the borough of Ashford housed in it.

A very thorough document, well researched and positive in approach

Is there any chance of extending the Winter shelter to all year round, or at a minimum to include October to April? The Review stated that it intended to deal with rough sleepers with an Ashford connection only. We would like it to include ALL rough sleepers regardless, as it is inhumane to be on the streets regardless of where you come from. All rough sleepers need help. Could the SWEP be high priority?

Citizens Advice want to be involved in the interagency homelessness forum.

I think it might be useful to look at using holiday lets as emergency use particularly over the winter period when the homes are left empty. There is an abundance of empty homes in many villages around Ashford, Newenden being one, that are used only in the holiday season. It would be useful to perhaps make the planners aware when passing plans for further holiday homes that they might well wish to consider allowing these to be available

as rented accommodation for those who are in need of a home and not put up barriers for further uses.

Question 10 – If you are interested in joining the Homelessness Implementation and Monitoring group please provide your contact details.

Six respondents expressed an interest in being part of an Implementation and Monitoring Group

Question 11 – Please indicate the capacity in which you completed the questionnaire.

The results are show below

Ashford Borough Council Member	2
Individual	3
Other Organisation	4
Parish Councillor	2
Statutory Organisation	2
Voluntary Sector Organisation	3

Additional comments provided outside of the questionnaire:

Opportunity offered for housing to be part of Employment and Training Forum and conversely for the forum to be part of the homelessness implementation and monitoring group.

Public Health responded highlighting that without access to good quality affordable housing, the chances of enjoying good health and a long life are hindered. Generally, homeless people or those at risk of homelessness are less likely to access GP services, dental care and are more likely to present at A&E. Also mental health, drug and alcohol and other lifestyle issues are likely to be acute but unaddressed.

## Summary

Respondents to the consultation have highlighted that there should be greater emphasis on:

- Joint/collaborative working to be more efficient and avoid duplication, together with support for local charities delivering services for homeless people
- Services for clients to be easier to access, particularly for support services
- Be innovative around using the private rented sector, measures to encourage more landlords to offer property and education for tenants to help sustain their tenancies.
- More accurate information about number of rough sleepers
- Impact of welfare reform on under 35s
- How to best consider needs of:
  - Unaccompanied asylum seeker children
  - People fleeing domestic abuse
  - People leaving prison
  - People in rural areas

- Delivering homes that are affordable to people on low wages and/or benefits
- The provision of more short term accommodation (such as Christchurch House) and explore ways to utilise other under used property
- The groups most at risk of homelessness were considered to be:
  - Victims of domestic abuse
  - People with drug and alcohol problems
  - People with mental health problems
  - Single young people
  - Young families
  - Single parents
  - Low income working families
- The respondents considered the highest priority should be afforded to:
  - Victims of domestic abuse
  - Young families
  - Single parents
  - Low income working families
  - People with mental health problems
  - Single young people

## **Conclusion**

The action plan of the strategy sets out how the council will work towards achieving its goal of the 'gold standard' for homelessness services. By actively engaging with all those with an interest in preventing homelessness the 10 challenges will be addressed.

The strategy action to create an interagency homelessness forum will seek to improve collaborative working and improve access to services. The success of this is dependent on a range of agencies committing to proactively working together, sharing knowledge and expertise to prevent and relieve homelessness. The advice of agencies which provide services to particular client groups will be sought to ensure or information about how to access appropriate services is known and shared. The council recognises the high priority for victims of domestic abuse and will continue to work to proactively in partnership with other agencies to maintain the reduction in number of victims of domestic abuse becoming homeless.

Where another organisation has primary responsibility for a particular group, such as unaccompanied asylum seeker children, the council assists that organisation, where possible, in securing the best outcomes for the client.

The council works closely with private landlords and continues to engage with them to increase the number of privately rented homes affordable to homeless households. Preventing homelessness through improving tenancy sustainment and encouraging self help are key actions.

Developing a dedicated rough sleeper service is part of adopting a 'no second night out' approach. Strengthening our existing partnerships with organisations such as Porchlight and Ashford Vineyard will assist in reducing rough sleeping and identifying the most vulnerable client groups so specific needs can be addressed in a coordinated way. Other organisations expressing an interest in assisting with rough sleepers will be invited to join the rough sleeper working group.



The availability of affordable housing is critical to reducing homelessness. The council through the Local Plan and Housing Strategy will, wherever possible, maximise the amount of affordable housing developed in the borough and consider alternative models of delivery. The council has amended its affordable housing protocol to open up opportunities to non-registered housing providers to develop affordable housing that will address local housing needs. <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/developing-affordable-housing-eligibility-criteria>

The Strategy recognises that further short stay accommodation is needed. Options are explored, including financial viability, when possible properties are identified.

**Appendix 1**

**Ashford Homelessness Review and Strategy 2015**

**Consultation Questionnaire**

Please tick the relevant box(es) and provide any comments to the questions below

**1) Do you have any comments on the findings of the Review**

Yes  No

If yes, please explain

**2) Are there any issues around homelessness that you feel the Review has not considered**

Yes  No

If yes, please explain

3) Do you agree these are the main causes of homelessness

- Loss of rented/tied accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy
- Parents/other relatives/friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Violent breakdown of relationship, involving partner
- Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner

Yes  No

Please list any other factors that in your experience contribute to homelessness.

4) Do you agree with the common themes emerging from the review

- 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
  
- Increasing 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

Yes  No

If no, please explain

--

5) Of the 10 local challenges, please indicate the 3 you consider to be most important for Ashford. (Tick up to 3 boxes)

Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services	
Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, training and employment needs	
Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients	
Adopt a <i>No Second Night Out</i> model or an effective local alternative	
Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support	
Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords	
Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction	
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.	
Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation	
Not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks	

6) Which groups do you think are at the greatest risk of homelessness and should be given priority in preventing homelessness.

Please score the groups below with 10 being highest risk and 0 being the lowest. The same score can be used more than once.

	Risk
People with mental health problems	
People with drug and alcohol problems	
People with learning disabilities	
People with physical and sensory disabilities	
People from black, minority and ethnic groups	
Single young people	
Young families	
Single parents	
Victims of domestic violence	
Low income working families	
Older people	

**7)** Which groups do you think should be given priority in preventing homelessness.

Please score the groups below with 10 being highest priority and 0 being the lowest. The same score can be used more than once.

	Priority
People with mental health problems	
People with drug and alcohol problems	
People with learning disabilities	
People with physical and sensory disabilities	
People from black, minority and ethnic groups	
Single young people	
Young families	
Single parents	
Victims of domestic violence	
Low income working families	
Older people	

**8)** Do you think the action plan will deliver the 10 local challenges

Yes  No

If no, please explain

9) Please provide any further comments you would like to make on the Homelessness Review and Strategy

10) If you are interested in joining the Homelessness Implementation and monitoring group and to work with the Council to deliver the aims of the Strategy please provide your contact details

Name:

Organisation:

Email:

Telephone:

11) please indicate the capacity in which you completed the questionnaire

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ashford Borough Council Member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kent County Council Member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parish Councillor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Statutory Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Voluntary Sector Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual

**Please return your completed questionnaire to:**

Jennifer Shaw  
Housing Strategy Manager  
Ashford Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Tannery Lane  
Ashford  
TN23 1PL

Or by email: [jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk)

**Thank you**



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# Ashford Homelessness Review

2016



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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)<sup>1</sup> 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'<sup>2</sup> 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.
- 9 Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation.

---

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

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf)

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

## Consultation

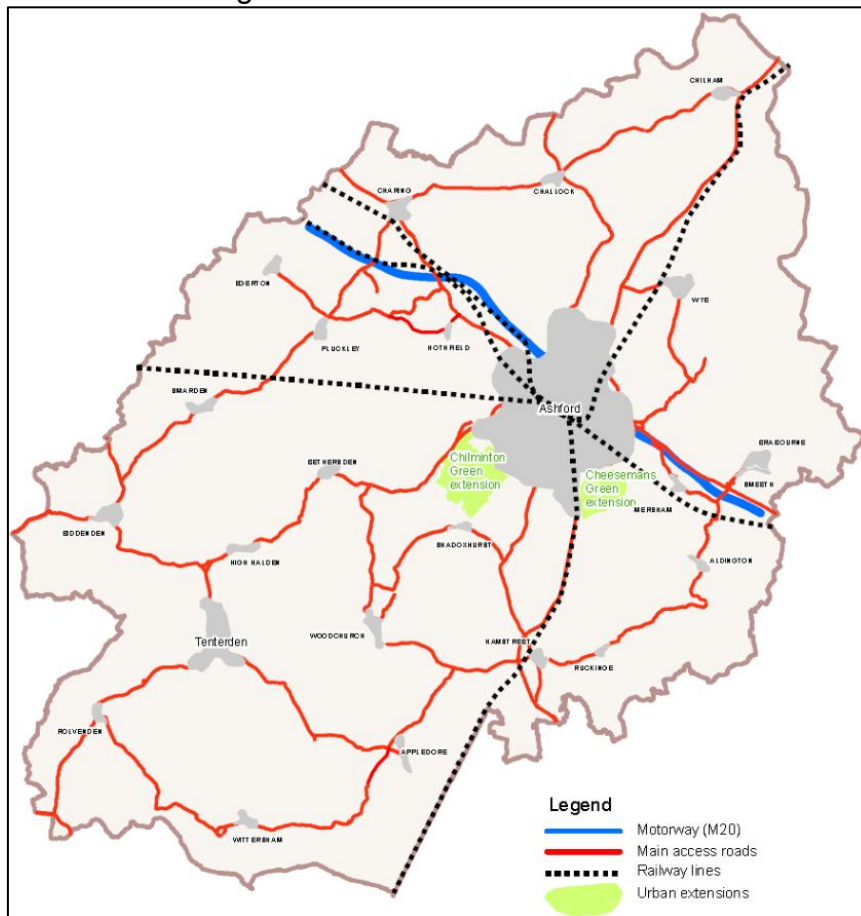
A stakeholder consultation event was held in November 2014. A range of agencies and organisations attended and a summary of the event is included from page 33. This included considering the relevance of the 10 local challenges to local circumstances and any amendments needed to reflect specific local pressures.

11 telephone interviews were undertaken in May 2015 with service users. A summary of the key points are included from page 37.

## 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 Cheesmans 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)<sup>3</sup> 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

This is updated in the table below and shows that the average selling price for each property type increased over the 12 months from December 2014 to December 2015. In the 6 months to May 2016 the increase in house prices has slowed and fallen for some types of property.

Figure 3: Mean selling prices by type

Property type	Dec 14	Dec 15	May 2016
Detached	£317,868	£351,957	£352,800
Semi	£208,867	£220,911	£229,282
Terraced	£173,987	£198,062	£197,151
Flat	£128,844	£141,577	£131,393
All	£226,236	£235,985	£221,417

Source: [www.home.co.uk](http://www.home.co.uk)

### To rent

The private rented market is currently buoyant with prices rising. A search of private rented properties<sup>4</sup> (01 03 2016) within a 1 mile radius of Ashford town centre identified 159 self contained properties (1 bed to 4 bed) to rent. Of these only 3 were below the Ashford local housing allowance rate (LHA) set for April 2015 but all of these state they are not available to people in receipt of benefits or are seeking professional people.

Figure 4: Summary of prices of private property to rent (March 2016)

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

<sup>4</sup> [www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk)

Property size	Average rent pcm (£)	Median rent pcm (£)	LHA rate 2015 (£)	No. under LHA
1 bed	620	625	517.47	0
2 bed	775	775	631.93	2
3 bed	915	900	730.00	0
4 bed	1278	1275	971.73	1

Rooms for rent in shared houses varied in cost from £300 to over £500 pcm. None of the 35 rooms advertised on [www.houseshare.com](http://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 fluctuations in the number of private rented sector homes below the local housing allowance rate and indicates a sharp decline during 2014. Since end of 2015 there has been a small increase in the number of rented properties under the LHA rate (figure 6).

Figure 5: Number of private rented properties with rental under the local housing allowance February 2013 – January 2015

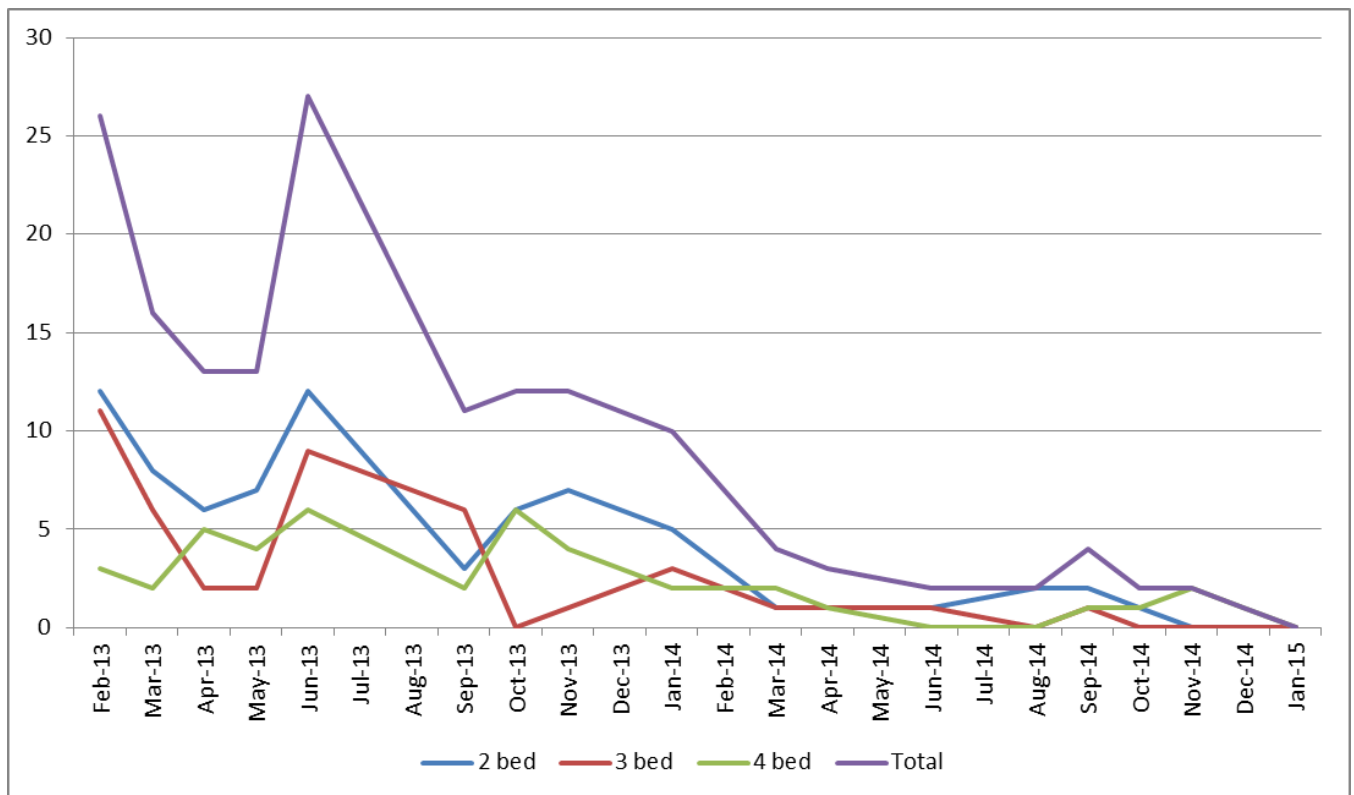


Figure 6: Number of private rented properties with rental under the local housing allowance September 2015 – February 2016

	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Total

Sept-15	1	1	1	3
Oct-15	4	0	0	4
Dec-15	3	0	1	4
Jan-16	4	0	3	7
Feb-16	5	0	8	13

## 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 shown 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 7: 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% in September 2015<sup>5</sup>, the lowest unemployment rate since mid 2009. In comparison Canterbury and Shepway currently have higher unemployment rates at 5.6% and 5.2% respectively with Maidstone seeing 5.2% unemployment. The unemployment rate for the south east is 4.3% and nationally 5.4%.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157311/subreports/ea\\_time\\_series/report.aspx?](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157311/subreports/ea_time_series/report.aspx?)

Median weekly earnings (gross) for employees living in the borough were £548.60 in 2015. This income has fluctuated over the last 5 years as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Median weekly earnings (gross) for residents living in the area, all full time workers

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Ashford	548.60	506.30	512.50	496.60	507.90
Canterbury	583.40	574.40	577.50	545.60	559.70
Maidstone	557.70	515.40	500.90	542.90	538.30
Shepway	543.80	481.40	500.50	474.90	491.00

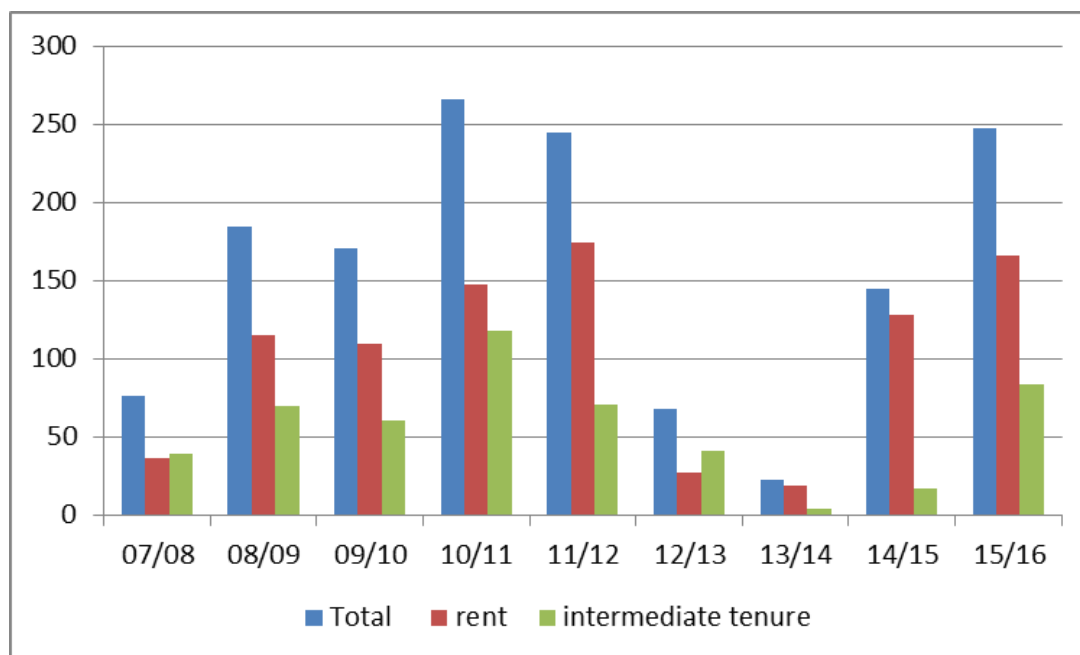
Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis and [http://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/8183/Earnings-in-Kent.pdf](http://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/8183/Earnings-in-Kent.pdf)

Work place weekly earnings in Ashford for all full time workers were £492.60, in comparison to resident earnings this is £56 per week lower.

## Affordable housing delivery

The SHMA 2012 concludes that there is a need for 368 affordable homes (i.e. affordable/social rent and shared ownership) to be built each year. Figure 9 below illustrates that affordable housing delivery has consistently fallen below the level needed each year.

Figure 9: Affordable housing built per year



The current Homes and Communities Agency funding programme<sup>6</sup> prioritises the delivery of shared ownership and rent to buy schemes. There is limited allocation of funding for the provision of rented schemes for vulnerable groups.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/shared-ownership-and-affordable-homes-programme-2016-to-2021-guidance>

## Population

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

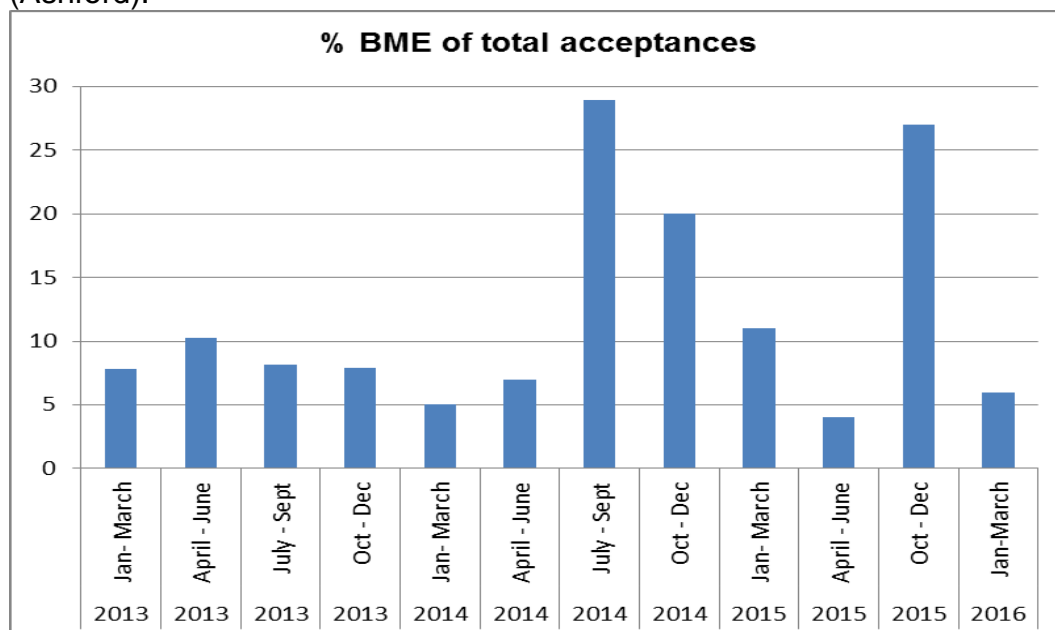
Figure 10: Predicted population growth to 2031

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)<sup>7</sup>. The BME population of Ashford is lower than that of the south east (13%) or nationally (18%). 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 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 26.

Figure 11: Percentage of homelessness acceptances by BME groups of total acceptances (Ashford).



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

## Deprivation

In the current indices' of deprivation (2015)<sup>8</sup> Ashford has an average rank of 176 (out of 326). In 2010 Ashford ranked 198. Ashford is now more deprived, in comparison to other

<sup>7</sup> Census 2011

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/7953/Indices-of-Deprivation-headline-findings.pdf](http://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/7953/Indices-of-Deprivation-headline-findings.pdf)



local authorities than in 2010. In comparison with other Kent authorities Ashford ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of 12 (with 1 being most deprived).

Ashford has 3 wards which include Lower Super Output Areas within the top 10% of most deprived Lower Super Output Areas in Kent. These are: Stanhope, Victoria and Aylesford Green.

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. In 2010 KCC 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 (4<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>) and four LSOA's for barriers to housing and services (4<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>). These four LSOAs fall with the Wards of Isle of Oxney, Downs North, Saxon Shore and Downs west.

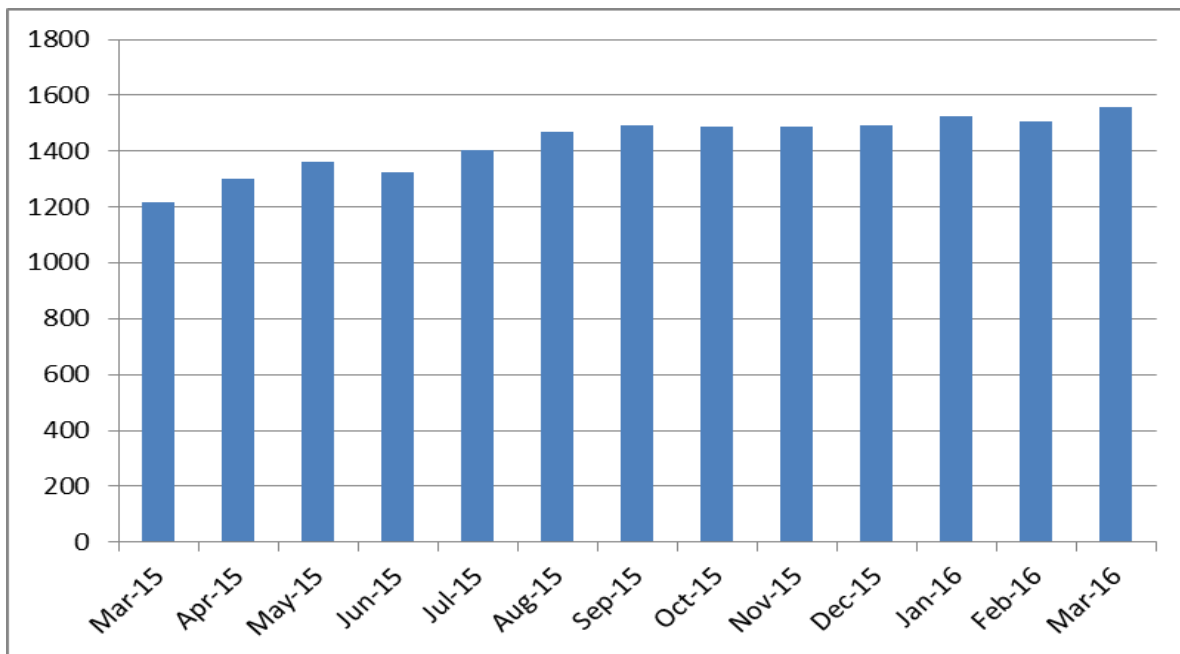
The indicators used to create the domain barriers to housing and services are; household overcrowding, homelessness, housing affordability, distances to GP surgery, food shop, primary school, post office. Housing affordability and distance to services will be of higher significance in rural areas.

Deprivation information can be used to help identify areas which could benefit from targeted interventions to reduce specific issues and inequalities.

## **Housing Register**

Numbers on the housing register vary due to undertaking annual reviews of applicants circumstances and the number of people housed, which depends on the amount of affordable housing becoming available. The number of applicants on the Ashford housing register each month is shown in figure 12.

Figure 12: Number of applicants on Ashford Housing Register



In March 2016 the greatest numbers of applicants on the housing register were single people (672), couples (187) and families with 1 child (316), 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 13 details the number of applicants that fall within each band and of those the number that are homeless.

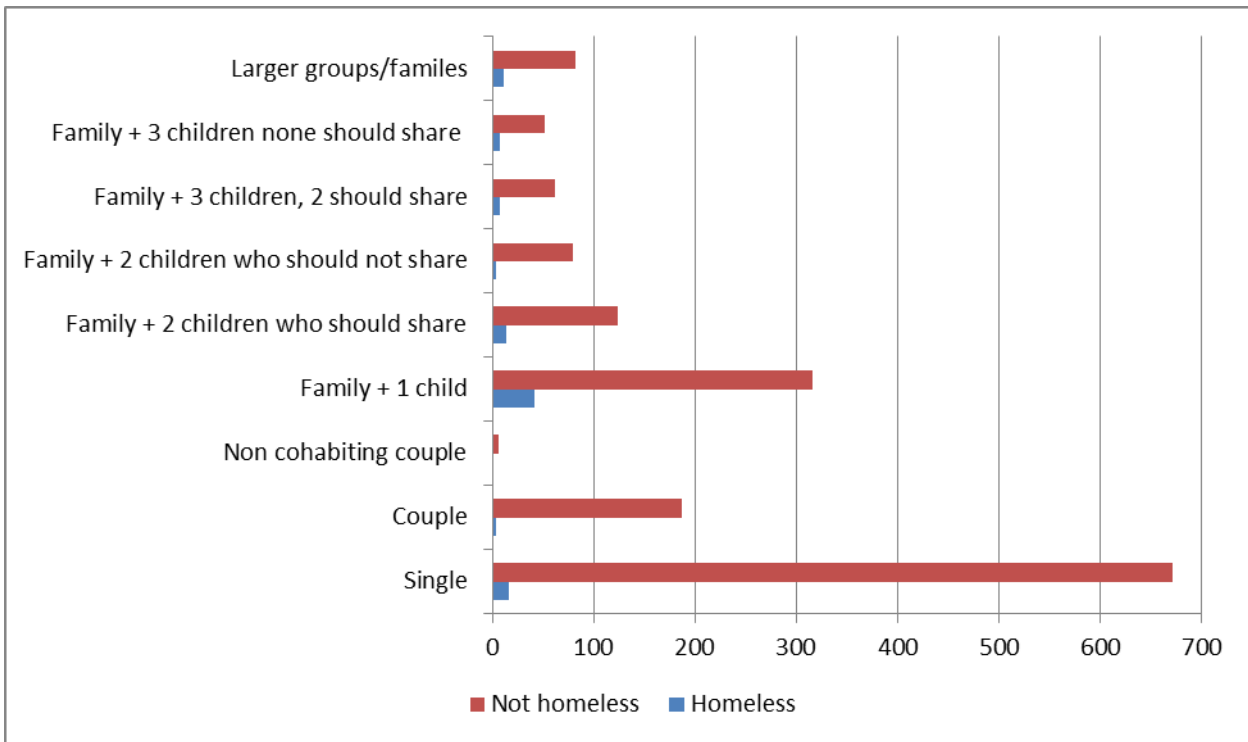
Figure13: Housing register applicants in each band (March 2016)

Band	Total number of applicants	Number registered as homeless
A	62	1
B	94	4
C	1321	99
D	106	0
E	7	1

Of the applicants on the register, 105 applicants are homeless (6.6%). 40% are families with 1 child, 17% families with 2 children and 15% single people. 76 households, are single people, couples or families with 1 child or 2 children who could share, reflecting the need for shared accommodation, 1 and 2 bed property. There are 29 larger families and groups requiring homes with 3 or more bedrooms. The highest number of homeless households are accommodated in private sector leasing property (57), Bed and Breakfast (17) and in the private rented sector (11), (March 2016).

The council's Lettings Policy aims to allocate 25% of properties to homeless applicants. The current waiting time for a band C applicant is 3 years.

Figure 14: Household composition of housing register applicants, March 2016



During 2014/15 there were 151 homeless acceptances.

In the 12 months from October 2014 to September 2015 there were 108 homeless household, (eligible unintentionally homeless and in priority need) with 1 or more dependent children. For the same period there were 20 single households.

The trend of the composition of homeless households over a period of time is shown in figure 15, confirming that majority of eligible, unintentional and priority need households are families.

Figure 15: Eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need by type of household



Source: P1e data

## Empty Homes

The total number of vacant properties<sup>9</sup> at 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015 was 1008 comparable to the previous year of 1007. This is an increase from 2013 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 2015 were 247, a decrease from the previous 4 years of 250, 307, 449 and 504.

In all social housing 60 properties were vacant at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015. With no long term empty property held by a registered provider. There are fluctuations seen in vacant social housing stock due to redevelopment projects. In 2014 there were 34 social housing properties vacant which was a decrease on the total of vacant social housing in 2013 of 88 where 46 properties were defined as long term vacant. Within the council's own stock there were 47 vacant properties at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 an increase from 26 in 2014.

## Court possessions

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.

Figure 16: Number of claims and possessions over the last 3 - 4 years

	2012	2013	2014	2015

<sup>9</sup> DCLG live tables 615

Mortgage claims	121	106	88	37
Mortgage possessions	40	30	7	0
Private landlord claims	43	45	39	27
Private landlord possessions	0	0	7	0
Social landlord claims	159	172	147	144
Social landlord possessions	23	19	9	20
Accelerated landlord claims	47	82	82	74
Accelerated landlord possessions	6	15	24	35

Source: [http://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/16020/Mortgage-and-landlord-possession-statistics.pdf](http://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/16020/Mortgage-and-landlord-possession-statistics.pdf)

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 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 17. 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 17: Reasons for approach for accepted homelessness cases

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Mortgage arrears	3	5	7	2	1
Private landlord arrears	0	2	1	6	5
Private landlords termination S21	43	54	66	47	54
Social landlord arrears	0	1	0	1	1

## Homeless acceptances

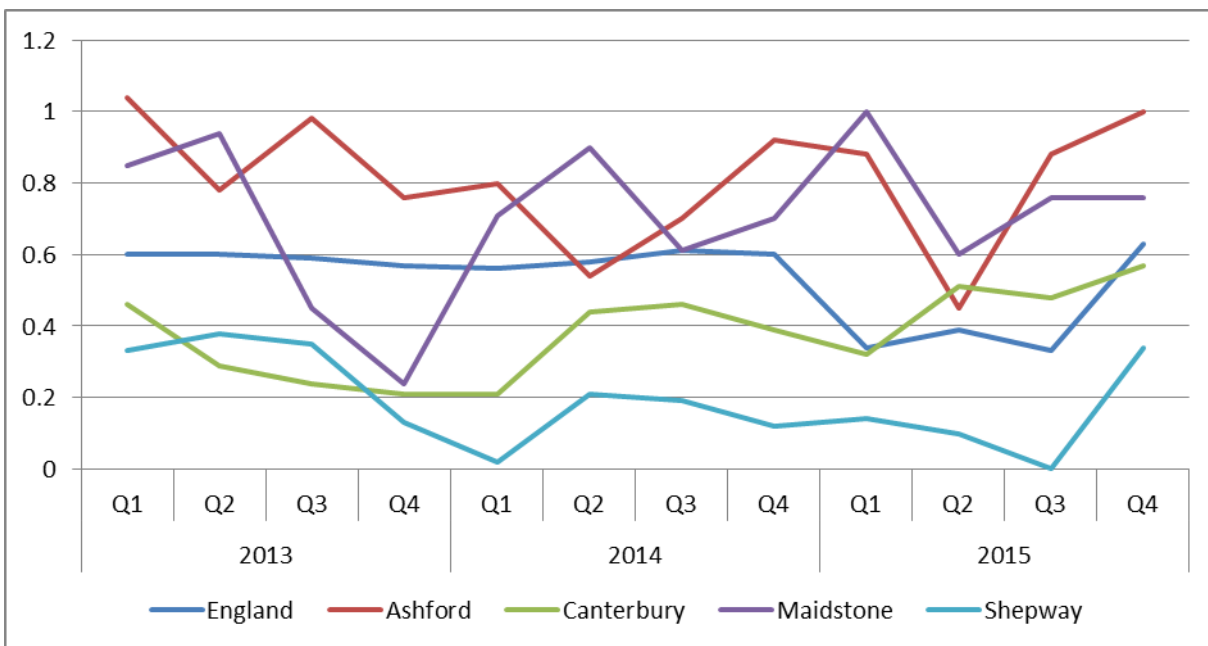
Over the last 5 years the average number of homelessness acceptances has been 164 per year. The number per year is shown in figure 18 below.

Figure 18: 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 (figure 19). Ashford consistently has a higher number of acceptances per 1000 households than the national average except for a dip in quarter 2 of 2014.

Figure 19: Homelessness acceptances per 1000 households



Source: <http://opendatacommunities.org/data/homelessness/homelessness-acceptances/noper1000hholds>

Following an external review of the Housing Options Service in 2014, a range of measures has been implemented to improve the service. This includes a training programme for officers, the appointment of two landlord liaison officers together with conducting more robust investigations, reviewing all of our processes, restructuring the team and being more pro-active. This 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 people.

## **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 looked after child (following the Southwark judgement in 2009).

The recent changes at KCC social services have 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

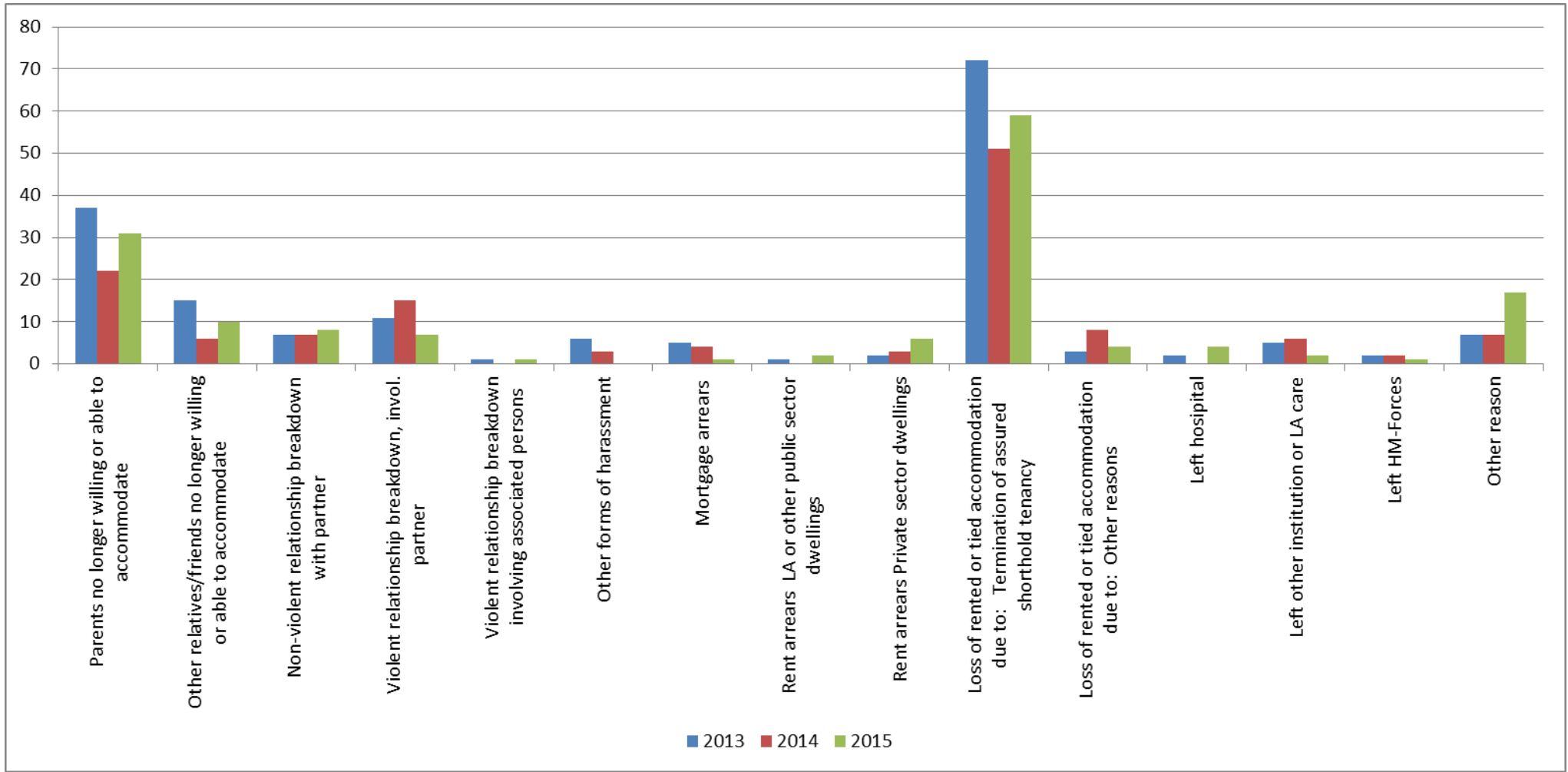
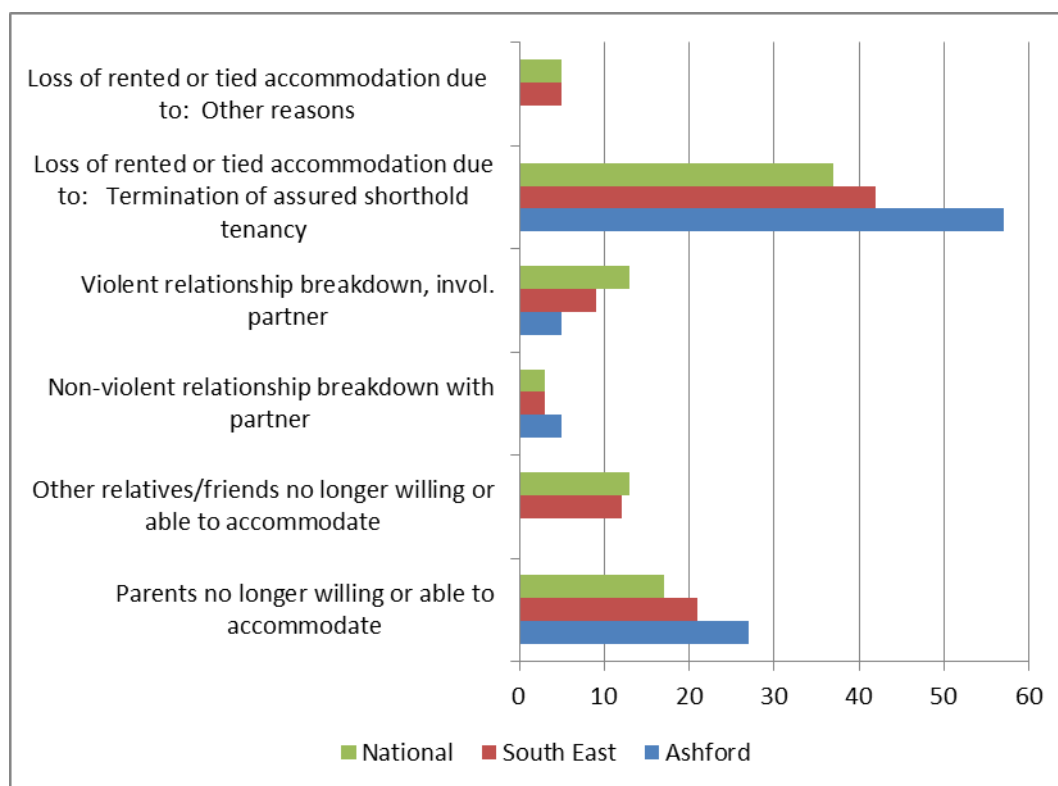


Figure 20: Reason for loss of accommodation. Yearly totals for 2013, 2014 and 2015



Using a percentage of homeless acceptances (unintentionally and priority need) to compare local to regional and national figures for 2014/15. 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 21: Local, national and regional comparison for homeless acceptances 2014/15 (by percentage) unintentionally homeless and priority need



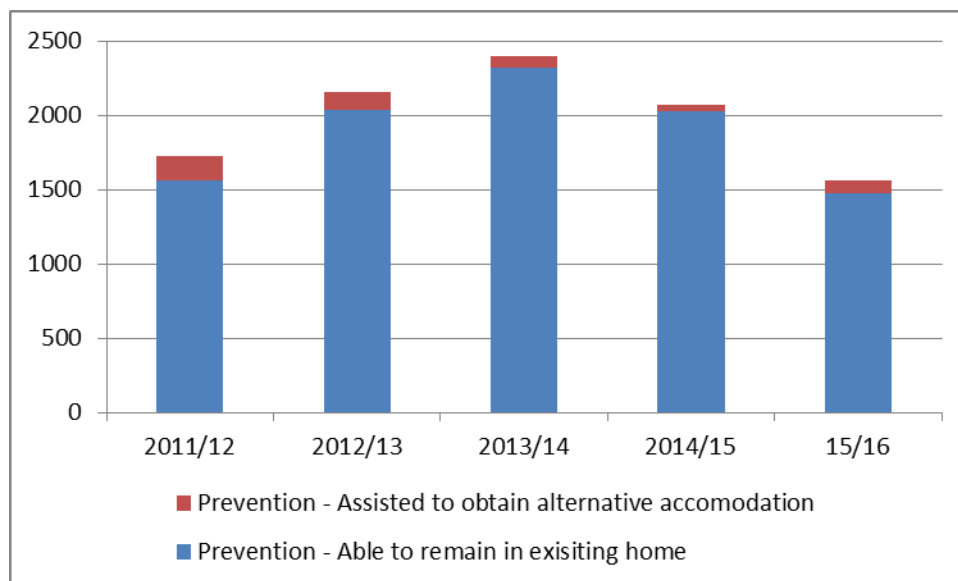
Source: From P1e via practioners support statistical compiler  
<http://home.practitionersupport.org/sc/page.aspx?la=181&p=page5&y=0&q=>

## 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 often undertaken in conjunction with partner agencies such as CAB, Floating Support etc. Clients can be referred to partner agencies offering a range of support/advice services as many factors can contribute to homelessness. The locata (HELP) system enables referrals to partner agencies. Over 3000 referrals have been made since the inception of the HELP system in 2010.

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

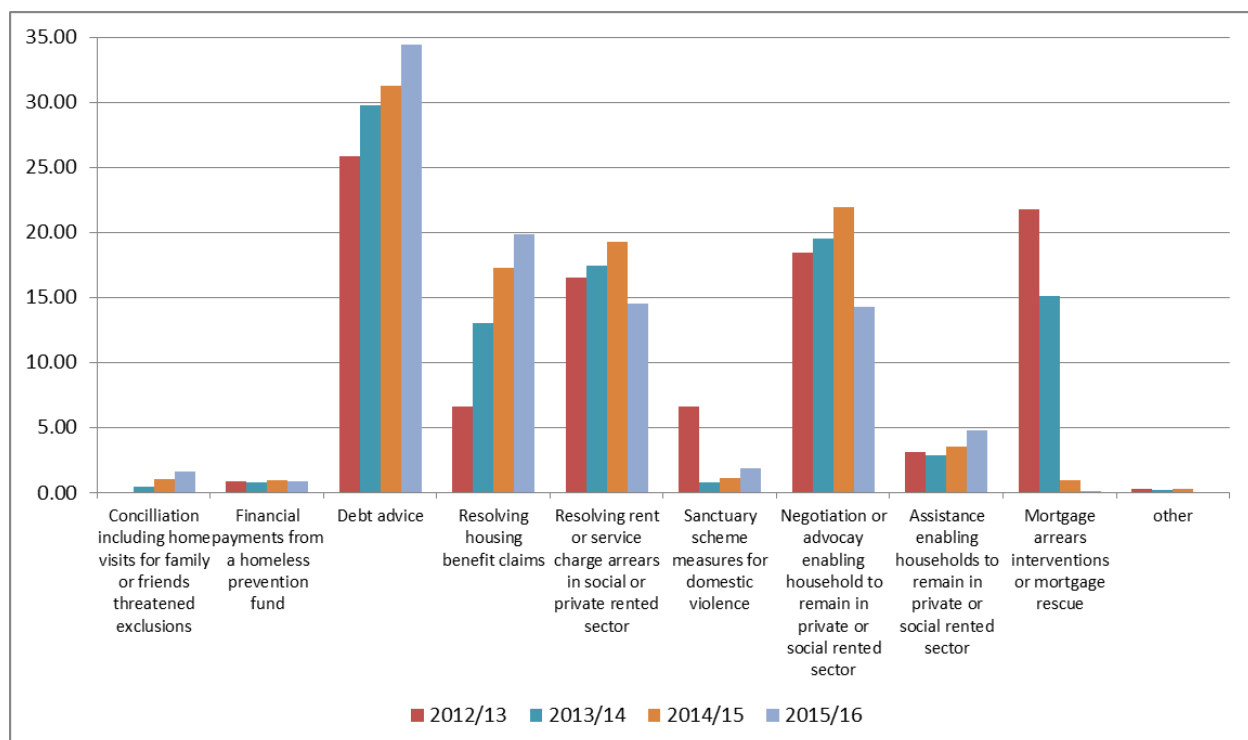


Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>  
Table 792

Homelessness prevention is always the preferred outcome 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 2015/16 the rate per 1000 households of homelessness prevention in Ashford was 30.69. This is significantly higher than the overall rate per 1000 households for England which was 9.72.

Figure 23: Measures used to prevent homelessness by percentage of total preventions



Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

Debt advice, resolving rents arrears and housing benefit claims and negotiation are key aspects of preventing homelessness

Figure 24: 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
2014/15	64	17	14
2015/16	48	12	7

The most significant housing option available to relieve homelessness is into the private rented sector where procuring properties is difficult. Since the recruitment of the two landlord liaison officers there has been an increase in the numbers where positive action has been successful in relieving homelessness.

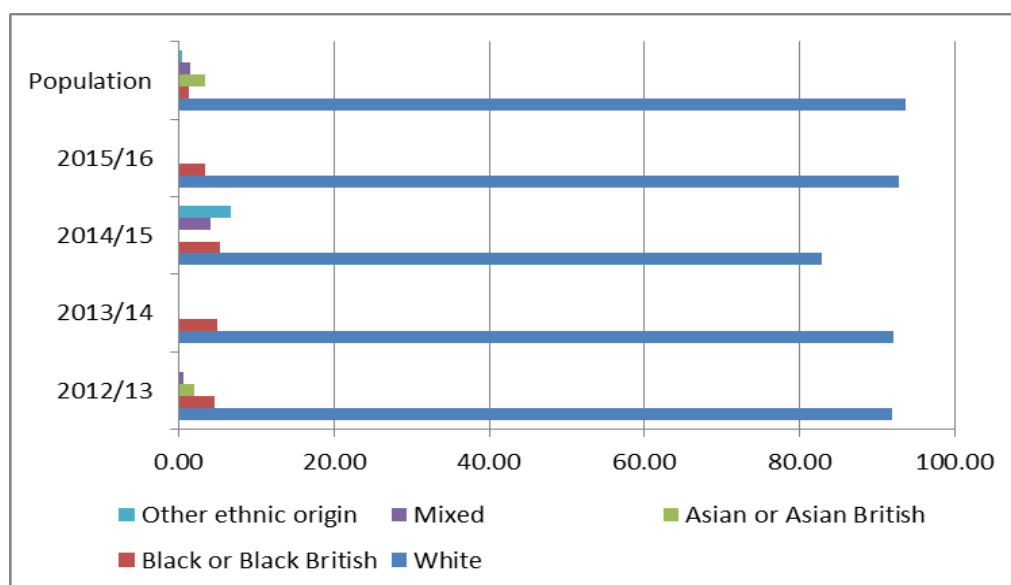
Figure 25: Number of cases where positive action was successful in relieving homelessness

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Ashford	1	2	4	1	0

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

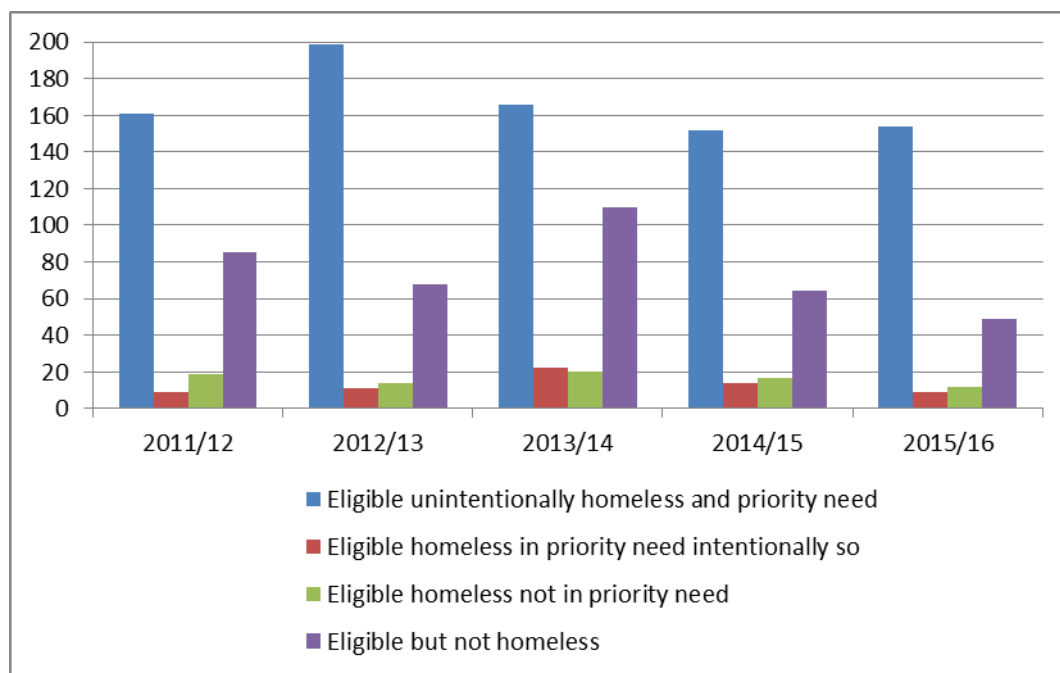


Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness> Table 784

### Homelessness decisions

The numbers of homeless decisions for Ashford over the last 5 years are shown in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Homelessness decisions



Source; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>  
Table 784

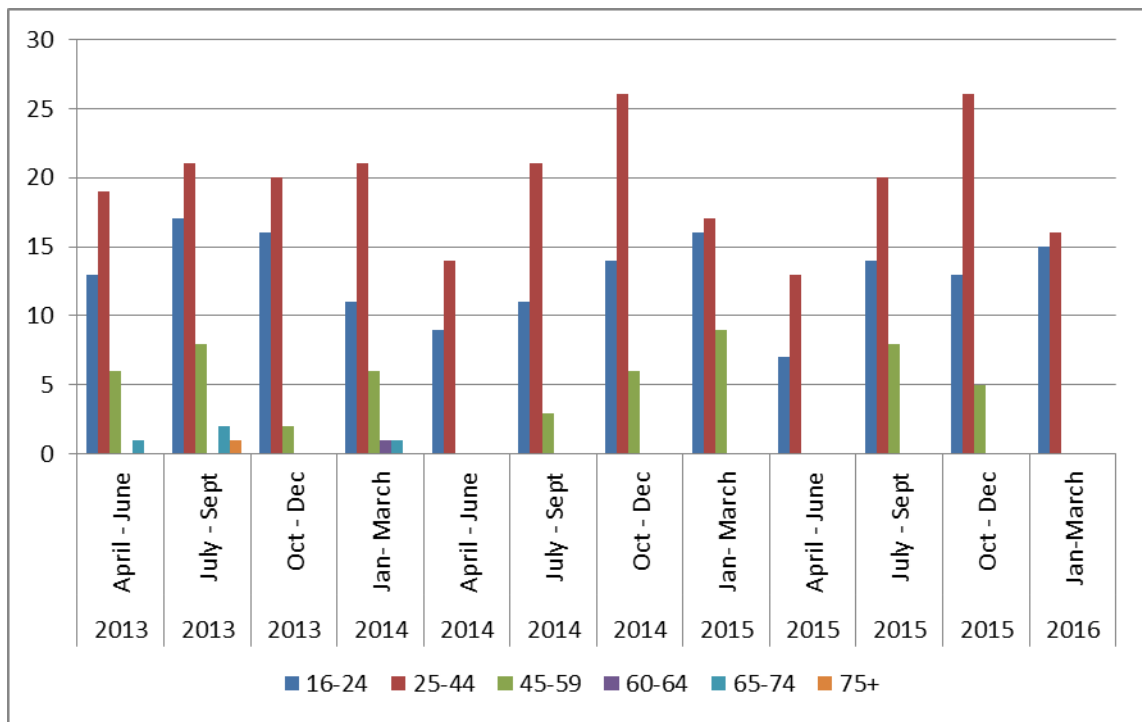
Figure 28: Comparison to the national averages for homelessness decision for the year 2014/15 and 2015/16.

	% of all decisions Ashford		% of all decisions England	
	2014/15	2015/16	2014/15	2015/16
Eligible unintentionally homeless and priority need	61.5	68.7	48.5	50.3
Eligible homeless in priority need intentionally so	5.6	4	8	8.3
Eligible homeless not in priority need	6.9	5.4	18.2	17
Eligible but not homeless	25.9	21.9	25.4	24.3

Source; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>  
Table 784

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 29, the majority of homeless households fall within the age ranges 16 - 24 and 25 – 44.

Figure 29: Ashford: eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need by age of applicant

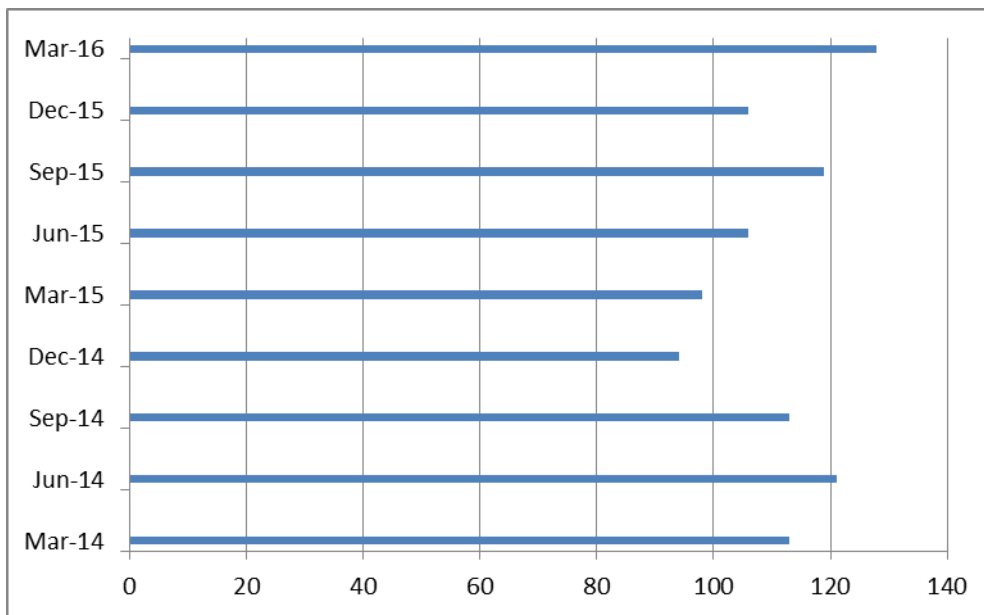


Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>  
 Detailed local authority level homelessness figures

### **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 30. 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 30: 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.

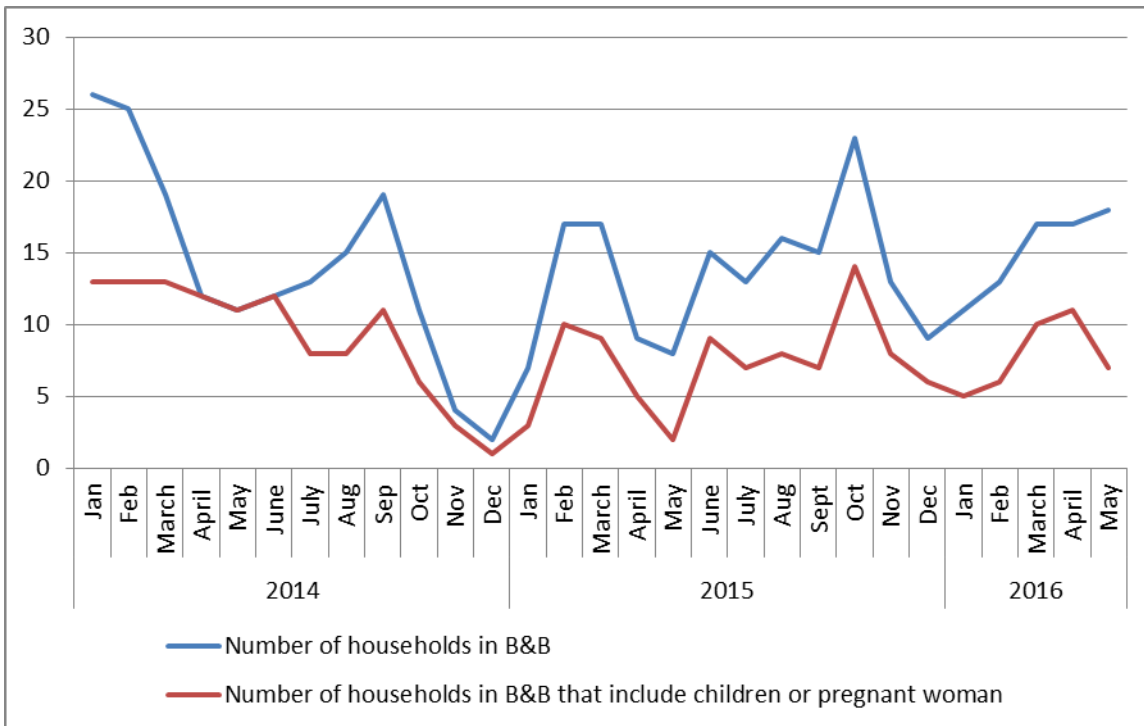
It is very unusual for a household to be placed out of the area. A household would only be offered out of area if there were no vacancies in Ashford and then only to a B&B that has been recommended by another authority.

## Bed & Breakfast accommodation use

The use of bed and breakfast accommodation in 2014 and 2015 is illustrated in Figure 31. This shows both the total number of households in B&B and within that total the number of households with children or a pregnant woman.

There can be a variety of reasons for the peaks and troughs in numbers. For instance a rise in the New Year can follow after family disputes over the Christmas holiday, young people leaving school with no work may present as homeless further to the end of the school year and summer holiday.

Figure 31: Households in B&B accommodation



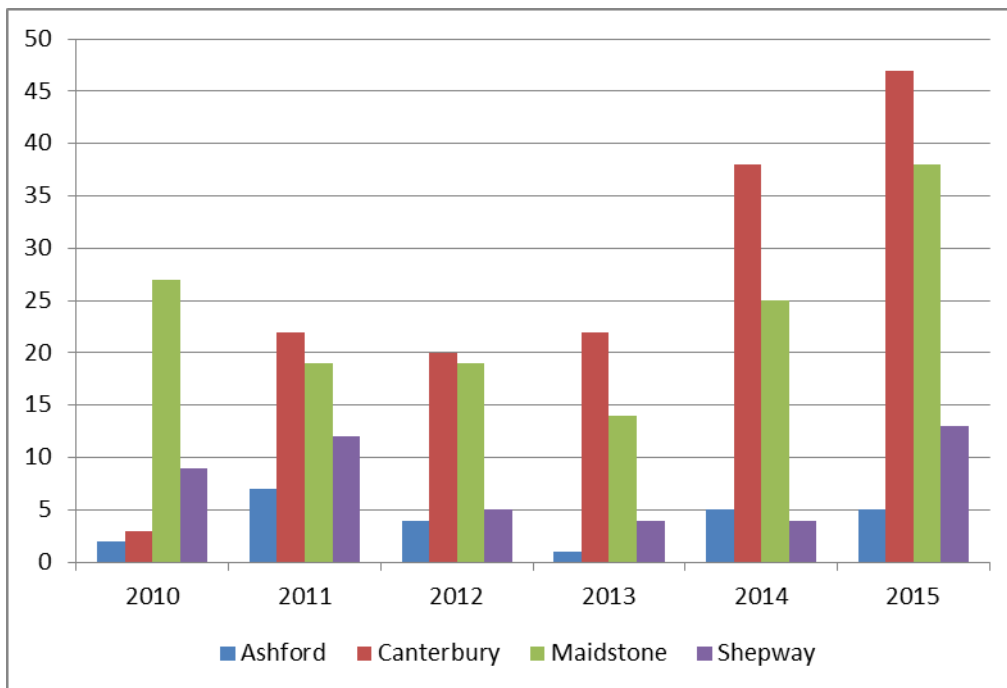
The length of time spent in bed and breakfast accommodation should be as short as is possible. Figures collected at the end of each year show a snapshot of the number of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than the six week legal limit as: 2010/11 = 9, 2011/12 = 3, 2012/13 = 6, 2013/14 = 8, 2014/15 = 1

## Rough sleeping

The number of rough sleepers is estimated annually, during November in each local authority area. This is coordinated Kent wide so the estimate takes place on the same night in each local authority area.

The figure 32 compares the number of estimated rough sleepers in neighbouring local authorities. Ashford, historically has a low number of rough sleepers.

Figure 32: Number of Rough Sleepers (estimate)



There was a rise to an estimated 5 rough sleepers at the count in 2014, which remained constant in 2015. 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 shared room rate rather than the one bedroom rate).

Ashford Churches Together, in partnership with Ashford Borough Council and Porchlight, piloted a winter night shelter for 6 weeks from February 2016. This was initially discussed in November 2015 and partners agreed to go ahead. After training, recruiting, writing policies and procedures the shelter was opened in February 2016. The scheme relied on donations, of which just over £4000 was received. Sainsbury kindly donated food that was just about to go out of date. The aim was for 7 churches to be week involved so that each one could provide accommodation for 1 night each at their locations. 6 churches agreed to participate and Ashford Baptist Church agreed to do 2 nights a week. Sleeping bags and camp beds were donated. Although uptake was slow, by the end of the pilot all 12 bed spaces were being used. Porchlight and Ashford Borough Council continued to work with the clients to secure them more settled accommodation.

## **Demand on Housing Options Service**

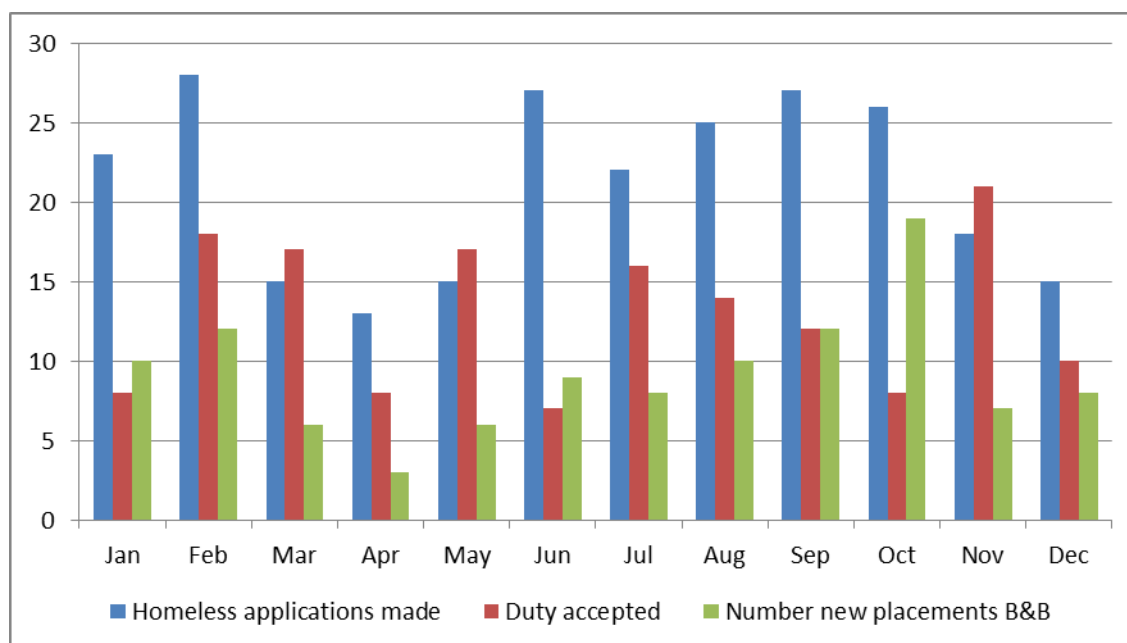
The Housing Options Service operates a triage system. A member of the public contacts a customer adviser at the council. Basic questions are asked and if it is specific housing advice, or risk of homelessness, the person is booked in the housing options calendar for a triage telephone call. A housing options officer contacts the client to see if the situation can be resolved through advice over the telephone. If not, a home visit is arranged for the following day – where ever possible – to discuss the situation in more detail.



Figure 33: Approaches for housing advice to the housing options triage during 2015 and 2016

Month (2015)	approaches	Month (2015)	approaches	Month (2016)	approaches
Jan	150	July	165	Jan	119
Feb	135	Aug	141	Feb	134
Mar	157	Sept	175	Mar	136
Apr	156	Oct	160	Apr	93
May	157	Nov	151	May	138
June	179	Dec	105	June	158
Total 2015			1831		

Figure 34: Number of applications and outcomes 2015



The above chart demonstrates that whilst numbers approaching the service are high the number of applications and cases accepted shows that the front line triage service 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.

An internal audit, (Homelessness: Temporary Accommodation by Mid Kent Audit Partnership) reported in 2016, concluded that homelessness applications are assessed in compliance with the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and that the council fulfils its obligations to provide interim and temporary accommodation.

## 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, 2015 - 2020 is committed to providing quality homes across the Borough, catering for a range of ages, tenures and need, in well planned and attractive new places.

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<sup>10</sup> was updated in August 2016 and at an operational level the housing register is reviewed every 6 months. The council's Lettings Policy aims to allocate 25% of properties to homeless applicants

The council works collaboratively with other local authorities and agencies, often under the auspices of the Kent Housing Group (KHG) 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 Strategy.<sup>11</sup> 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.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/applying-for-social-housing>

<sup>11</sup> <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/community-and-living/Regeneration/KFHS%20Refresh%20FINAL.pdf>

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 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 options 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 and to help the household help themselves. 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 named contact to liaise 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 options 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.

In November 2015 an internal audit was conducted of the homelessness and temporary accommodation service. It concluded that the service offers strong controls, which is the

highest rating in the assurance rankings and indicative of a service that is not only operating effectively but demonstrating good practice.

Most recently, in July 2016 a follow up to the 2014 Housing Options Service review was carried out and identified a number of areas to further improve the service.

Review the triage service to ensure the housing options officers' time is used most effectively for case work and home visits.

Introduce telephone interviews, as may resolve some cases without need for a home visit or provide better information to aid a home visit.

A more structured approach, including a checklist, for prevention work would improve consistency across the team and review current advice sheets.

Ensure housing options officers and landlord liaison officers are clear as to their roles and responsibilities in prevention work.

The part 7 homelessness assessment process should include standard letters and checklist to develop a consistent approach.

The landlord liaison work is good and is delivering savings. There is a need to increase the number of suitable Private rented properties available and a range on incentives needs to be considered.

Accessing suitable accommodation and helping tenants to maintain tenancies in the private rented sector is imperative to reducing and preventing homelessness. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult due to Welfare reform, specifically the Benefit Cap where households have had their income reduced. In addition, rental amounts are now significantly higher than the Local Housing Allowance meaning many properties in the private rented sector are unaffordable to families with a low income.

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 resolve any issues to the satisfaction of both parties if possible.

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 2016 there were 57 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 clients. 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 Standard<sup>12</sup> 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 (see: Consultation Outcomes, page 32) 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 Group quarterly, chaired by a local landlord. This is a small group of landlords who meet with the landlord liaison officers to discuss current issues and for officers to update on any new ideas to see if they are supported. The Landlord Forum is held annually. The purpose of these are to up date landlords on current changes on legislation and on what the council is doing. The forums have a variety of guest speakers and at the last forum a workshop to give landlords the opportunity to give feedback on our service was added which was well received. To engage with more landlords to encourage them to use the 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.

Prior to March 2016, basic housing advice could be accessed face to face with a customer service adviser at Gateways in Ashford and Tenterden. These advisers are now based at the Civic Centre and can be seen by making an appointment. More complex cases are referred to a housing options officer.

For an indication of queries that people were presenting with at the Ashford Gateway, during the 12 months prior to the end of September 2014 Choice Based Lettings was the most common topic with 4135 enquiries, followed by housing advice (2659 enquiries) and then enquires relating to council stock such as repairs and maintenance, rent and mutual exchange.

Advice is also available over the telephone and online on the Ashford Borough Council website.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://home.practitionersupport.org/>

Kiosk self help stations are available at the Civic Centre and 4 of the local children's centres. There is also one located within the local Volunteer Centre. Other locations for kiosks are being explored. 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, with information about private renting and choice based lettings being the most frequent choice.

## Accommodation and Services

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

<b>Accommodation (existing)</b>	<b>Client group</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b>Level of support</b>	<b>How funded (support)</b>
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
WKHA – Lantern House	Single Homeless	11 Self contained flats	High	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

<b>Accommodation being built</b>	<b>Client group</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b>Level of support</b>	<b>How Funded</b>
The Limes – expected completion November 2016	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. The Social Lettings Agency in Jul y 2016 had 84

properties on full management option (64 of these are in Ashford and 20 in Shepway). 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 house such families<sup>13</sup>.

#### 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.

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<sup>13</sup> HB circular A9/2014

## Welfare Reform

A snapshot of claimants affected by the benefit cap on 16<sup>th</sup> 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. Each household was interviewed jointly with the DWP and offered advice and support to assist them with the changes to their benefit.

The roll out of universal credit this 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, particularly when the lower benefit cap level of £20,000 per year (outside London) comes into force.

## 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 relieve 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 not 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 out 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 year olds/ 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 the 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 2016.

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.
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Work completed /ongoing	Future work identified
<p>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.</p> <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>Need to continue to reach organisations to increase knowledge of tools available to prevent homelessness.</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</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</p>

Legal Aid service is provided by Holden & Co.	benefits.
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- **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</p>	

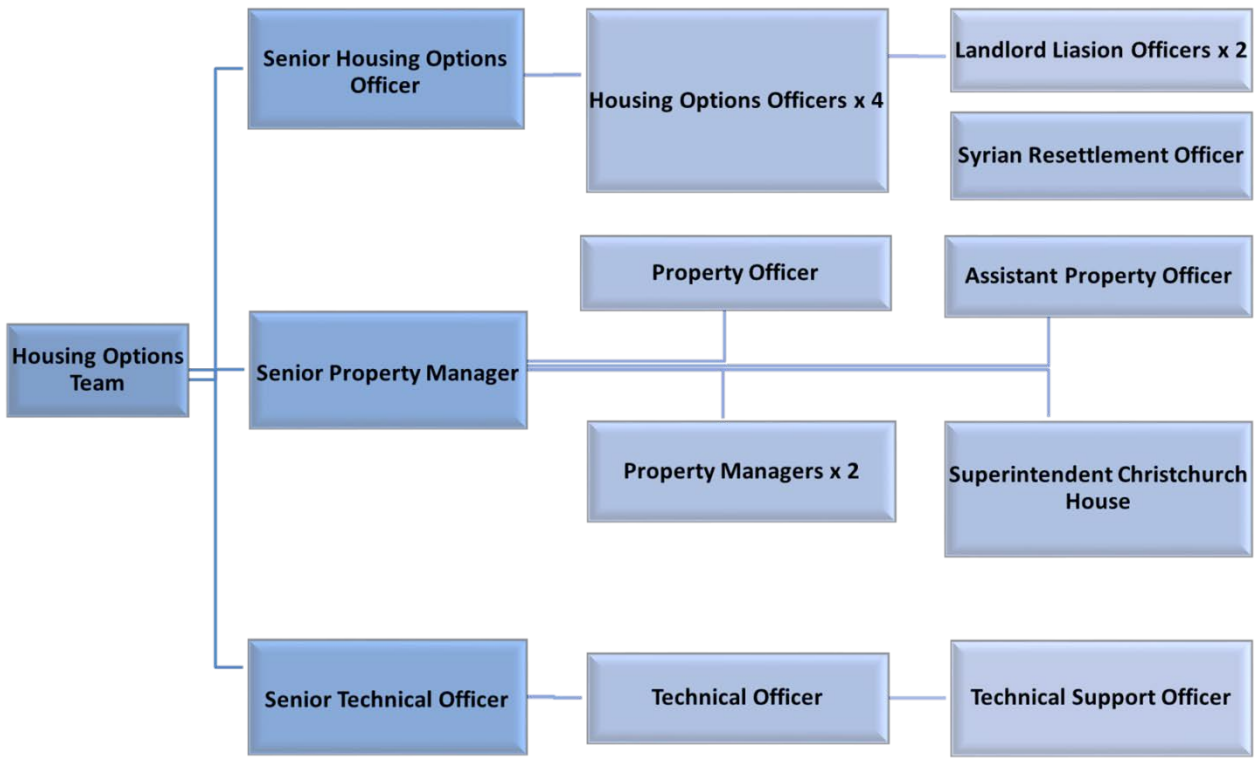
difficulties accessing services.	
Social and affordable housing is developed and managed effectively to meet housing needs and prevent homelessness.	
The area managers work closely with welfare reform officers to identify tenants who maybe at risk due to changes in benefit regime to assist them to retain 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**







# Ashford Homelessness Strategy

2016

*Final Draft*

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DRAFT

## Foreword

*By Portfolio Holder for Housing to be inserted*

### Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a requirement on local housing authorities to formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a review of homelessness in their district. A Homelessness Strategy should be published within five years of the previous strategy. The previous Ashford Homelessness Strategy was adopted by the council and published in July 2013.

The updated review (*link to website*) and refresh of the strategy will ensure that the Homelessness Strategy is current and responding to local circumstances. The strategy also reflects the government's ambition to take a locally coordinated approach to identifying and tackling root causes of disadvantage and how the prevention of and reduction in homelessness is critical to delivering that aim.

### Wider strategic context

The government introduced Social Justice: transforming lives<sup>1</sup> in March 2012. This strategy is aimed at tackling multiple disadvantage and poverty by taking a preventative and multi-agency approach with locally designed and delivered solutions, to tackle the root causes of a person's problems, and to be sustained over the long-term. The strategy recognises that it is necessary to address the wider support needs that homeless people often have, as well as the urgent issue of placing them in stable accommodation.

Subsequently, the government set out in detail its joint approach to preventing homelessness in August 2012. In 'Making Every Contact Count'<sup>2</sup> it states that that it expects each local authority to review its homelessness strategy each year and set out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness that is responsive to emerging needs.

Locally, Think Housing First<sup>3</sup> further develops the housing strand of the Kent health inequalities strategy Mind the Gap<sup>4</sup>. Think Housing First focuses on how the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/49515/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49515/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> DCLG Making Every Contact Count August 2012

<sup>3</sup>

[http://www.kmpho.nhs.uk/easysiteweb/getresource.axd?assetid=390803&type=0&servicetype=1&filename=/ThinkHousingFirstNov13\\_\(Final\).pdf](http://www.kmpho.nhs.uk/easysiteweb/getresource.axd?assetid=390803&type=0&servicetype=1&filename=/ThinkHousingFirstNov13_(Final).pdf)

housing sector can play its part in reducing health inequalities in Kent, including reducing the negative effects of homelessness on health.

The Kent and Medway Housing Strategy 2012-2015<sup>5</sup> recognises that each local housing authority has its own strategy to deal with homelessness, which supports delivery of the homelessness prevention agenda. In recent years, the impacts of the economic crisis, unemployment and low wage inflation, combined with increasing living costs, have seen homelessness services across Kent come under increasing pressure.

### **Ashford Strategic Context**

The Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board has homelessness as one of their five priorities and agreed to support a project around rough sleeping as those who are homeless have disproportionately more health problems compared to the general population. Hospital services are used more frequently and the health needs of homeless people are currently not met and access to primary care and prevention programmes need to improve.

The Ashford Housing Framework 2013-2018<sup>6</sup>, includes as a priority 'to prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness'.

The Ashford Tenancy Strategy's aim is to make best use of the existing stock of social and affordable rented housing. The tenancy strategy<sup>7</sup> was developed following common principles that were agreed Kent wide. It has introduced five-year fixed-term tenancies from 1st October 2012, instead of lifetime agreements, for new tenants.

This means that the council will be able to review each household's needs after five years, to see if their tenancy should be renewed or if the household should instead seek private sector housing.

Secure lifetime tenancies are maintained for:

- Older people over the age of 55 who are being offered accommodation designated for older people or who are unlikely to move again within social or affordable accommodation
- Households who may have an enduring vulnerability such as a long term health condition
- Existing tenants already on a secure lifetime tenancy where they are moving to alternative accommodation

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/14777/Mind-the-Gap-Building-bridges-to-better-health-for-all.pdf](http://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/14777/Mind-the-Gap-Building-bridges-to-better-health-for-all.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/community-and-living/Regeneration/KFHS%20Refresh%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/our-strategic-approach-to-housing>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/tenancy-strategy>

The council has signed up to the Kent and Medway policy for discharging statutory homelessness duty into the private rented sector. This policy has been developed by the Kent Housing Options Group (KHOG) for use by all Kent local housing authorities. It provides a policy framework that can be amended by individual local authorities to reflect local priorities if required. The policy will ensure a comprehensive and consistent needs and risk assessment is carried out for each statutory homeless household. This approach will ensure applicants' needs are appropriately met.

### **The Ashford Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2016.**

This strategy and action plan aims to ensure that we are delivering improved or improving services to anyone in the Ashford area that is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The action plan shows how we intend to meet the ten local challenges posed in Making Every Contact Count and our aspiration to meet the Gold Standard criteria<sup>8</sup>. The Gold Standard Challenge is a local authority, sector led peer review scheme designed to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services and to identifying where working collaboratively will achieve enhanced outcomes and offer value for money.

Based on the outcomes of the Homelessness Review and stakeholder consultation, actions have been developed which are most pertinent to deliver locally to have the highest positive impact on the prevention and relief of homelessness in Ashford.

#### Key points from Homelessness Review

- Incomes between £40,900 and £82,900 are required to purchase a home within the lower quartile house prices in the urban area and rural area respectively
- Nationally, the emphasis towards homeownership through the proposed introduction of Starter Homes, increased numbers of shared ownership homes, rent to buy models and the right to buy for housing association tenants have a negative effect on the availability of affordable rented and social rented homes
- Private rents are rising and only about 2% are below local housing allowance levels. Even within these landlords are targeting working households as tenants
- Delivery of new affordable homes is not keeping up with demand
- There are consistently about 1400 applicants on the housing register. In March 2016 this included 105 homeless households
- The majority of homeless households are single people and small families
- 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

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<sup>8</sup> <http://home.practitionersupport.org/>

- A number of private sector landlords are leaving the market and selling their properties. Remaining landlords have concerns about the impact of universal credit and are reluctant to take homeless households
- The majority of eligible, unintentionally homeless and priority need households fall within the age ranges 16-24 and 25 - 44
- The number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation has steadily declined since a peak in August 2013. However there have been peaks since this date but a steady increase in households in B&B in the first half of 2016
- There is a low number, 5 at the rough sleeper estimate in November 2015, of rough sleepers in the Ashford area. However the winter shelter pilot project accommodated 12 rough sleepers throughout most of its opening
- In 2015 an average of 21 homelessness applications were made each month, with an average of 13 having a duty accepted

Common themes emerging from the stakeholder consultation 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 not 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

Key points from the public consultation

Respondents to the consultation have highlighted that there should be greater emphasis on:

- Joint/collaborative working to be more efficient and avoid duplication, together with support for local charities delivering services for homeless people
- Services for clients to be easier to access, particularly for support services
- Be innovative around using the private rented sector, measures to encourage more landlords to offer property and education for tenants to help sustain their tenancies

- More accurate information about number of rough sleepers
- Impact of welfare reform, especially on under 35s
- How to best consider needs of:
  - Unaccompanied asylum seeker children
  - People fleeing domestic abuse
  - People leaving prison
  - People in rural areas
- Delivering homes that are affordable to people on low wages and/or benefits
- The provision of more short term accommodation (such as Christchurch House) and explore ways to utilise other under used property
- The groups most at risk of homelessness were considered to be:
  - Victims of domestic abuse
  - People with drug and alcohol problems
  - People with mental health problems
  - Single young people
  - Young families
  - Single parents
  - Low income working families
- The respondents considered the highest priority should be afforded to:
  - Victims of domestic abuse
  - Young families
  - Single parents
  - Low income working families
  - People with mental health problems
  - Single young people

The Homelessness Strategy Implementation and Monitoring Group will further consider the consultation outcomes and agree any changes to the action plan.

This information together with the statistical evidence gathered in the review has been used to develop the actions under each of the ten local challenges.

The ten local challenges are:

- Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education training and employment needs
- Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative



- Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction
- 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
- Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation
- Not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

#### The Action Plan

The action plan below will be further developed by a monitoring group to engender multi agency commitment to and joint ownership of its delivery. Formed from a range of stakeholders the monitoring group will also be responsible for updating and amending actions to reflect changes in homelessness locally, national policy and /or legislation to ensure prevention of homelessness remains the key focus. The group will oversee a proportionate annual review of the strategy and action plan.

Progress on achieving the actions and meeting the 10 local challenges will be reported to the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee annually

A summary of actions can be found from page 30.

## Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

### Challenge 1: Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
1.1 Adoption of Homelessness Strategy	High	ABC Senior Housing Options Officer & Housing Strategy Manager	Within existing resources	1. Consultation for 12 weeks 2. Seek Cabinet approval	May 2016 November 2016	Senior Management and Member approval obtained
1.2 Create interagency homelessness forum to raise awareness of homelessness and to improve knowledge of who does what to make best use of existing resources	High	ABC Senior Housing Options Officer & Housing Strategy Manager	Within existing resources	1. Develop terms of reference 2. Identify key agencies and keep this under review to ensure that we are engaging with the relevant agencies 3. Set up 1/4ly meetings 4. Regular newsletter to forum members	First meeting to take place May 2016 and thereafter 1/4ly	Raise awareness of homelessness strategy and engage key partners
1.3 Work towards achieving gold standard	Low	ABC Senior Housing Options Officer	Within existing resources	1. Arrange peer group assessment via Kent Housing	May 2016	To ensure that the homelessness service reflects

				Options Group 2. Achieve silver standard 3. Achieve gold standard	December 2016 December 2017	good practice and meets the 10 local challenges in Every Contact Counts
1.4 Increase interagency commitment to prevention of homelessness through Health and Wellbeing Board agenda	Medium	Health and Wellbeing Board & ABC Housing Improvement Manager	Within existing resources	1. Present draft strategy to Health and Wellbeing Board 2. Campaign for Homelessness to be a priority for the health and wellbeing board 3. Regular feedback to HWB from Homelessness Forum	June 2016 September 2016 September 2016	Health and Wellbeing partners engaged in strategy and working jointly to solve homelessness and its impacts in Ashford
1.5 Input to refresh of Kent and Medway Housing Strategy to ensure prevention of homelessness is a priority across Kent	Low	ABC Housing Strategy Manager	Within existing resources	Review Kent and Medway Strategy and provide relevant updates to reflect emerging issues and priorities	October 2016	Kent and Medway Strategy reflects key priorities impacting on homelessness in Ashford and across Kent
1.6 Identify and share	Medium	ABC Senior Housing	Limited corporate	1. Programme of training	Completed and to be reviewed	Staff well trained and confident in

opportunities for training for professionals on homelessness prevention and housing options		Options Officer	training budget. Income from offering places externally	identified through appraisal process 2. Team focus groups to refresh areas of knowledge 3. Take up of free training from NHAS 4. Organise in house training offering to external LAs at cost.	in September 2015  Monthly programme  As available and advertised  As available and advertised	their role
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Challenge 2: Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education and training needs and employment

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
2.1 Complete the review of HELP referral and tracker system identifying who does what to make best use of the resources available locally	High	ABC Senior Housing Options Officer & Assistant Property Officer	Significant time input required	1. Review existing agencies set up on HELP and identify gaps 2. Contact missing agencies and promote use of HELP system to	May 2016  June 2016	HELP referral system is updated with current partners and referral agencies and all agencies are using the system and reporting

				gain agreement to set them up and use the system		outcomes on the tracker
2.2 Work with Job Centre Plus, Revs and Bens and HUB partners to assist those affected by welfare reform problems	Medium	ABC/DWP	Housing has funded a Welfare Intervention Officer who works closely with the department and is present in the HUB.  Housing Options Team	1. Regular communication with the HUB and staff present there. 2. Monitor impacts on service to report to Members and Management Team 3. Identify and deliver appropriate advice to those affected by welfare reform to mitigate impacts	Ongoing  Link to Welfare Reform Working Group  Ongoing	Staff well informed about the welfare benefits changes and ways to mitigate the impacts. Good communication maintained.
2.3 Increase joint working with Early Help project	High	ABC Kent County Council	KCC have identified projects for early help Use of existing services	1. Identify range of services available via early help service. 2. Identify service users common to both services and consider joint planning of	April 2016	Joined up approach to responding to the threat of homelessness in cases involving children or young people

				solutions		
2.4 Work with education services to highlight realities of homelessness to young people	Medium	What Matters Forum ABC Senior Housing Options Officer	To be identified	Negotiate development of a schools training programme with education and youth groups	September 2016	

**Challenge 3: Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.**

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
3.1 Improve understanding of landlords (public and private) to liaise with housing options regarding early notification of eviction	High	ABC Landlord Liaison Officers	1. Landlord Liaison Officers x 2 2. Use of prevention fund 3. Budget for venue hire for landlord event 4. RSL Management forum	1. Review private sector landlord working group terms of reference 2. Hold regular working group meetings 3. Run private sector landlord events 4. Promote housing options to social landlords via RSL management forum	June 2016  Quarterly wef September 2015 Next event April 2016  June 2016	Open dialogue with landlords to understand reasons for evictions and ways of developing joint working arrangements to enable homeless people to secure accommodation for themselves in the private rented sector

3.2 Investigate opportunities for partnership working around welfare reform & tenancy sustainment	High	ABC/DWP	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use of HUB at International House</li> <li>2. Housing Options staff</li> <li>3. Welfare Intervention Officers</li> <li>4. Welfare Reform working group</li> <li>5. Prevention fund</li> <li>6. Tenancy training</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research potential risks of homelessness as a result of the composite picture of welfare reform changes</li> <li>2. Identify measures and schemes to minimise the impacts</li> <li>3. Highlight via Welfare Reform group</li> </ol>	Report to Welfare Reform Working Group on ongoing basis	Meaningful interventions to help those failing to manage their tenancies and finances to prevent homelessness in the short term and become self sufficient in the longer term.
3.3 Improve access to self help information/services	Medium	ABC Senior Housing Options Officer Customer Services Manager	Small budget required for IT support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review location and content of information kiosks and compare to other self help alternatives.</li> <li>2. Promote as a means of self help to access info and make housing bids etc.</li> </ol>	<p>1. May 2016</p> <p>2. June 2016</p>	Maximise opportunities for clients to help themselves without ABC intervention
3.4 Develop an early intervention and prevention first	Medium	ABC Housing Options Team	1. Use of existing forums and new multi agency	1. Identify key messages to promote,	June 2016	All agencies providing early notification of

ethos across all agencies			forum 2. Communications Plan for prevention of homelessness	through the homelessness forum, to the public and to other agencies 2. Identify and target Social Services teams, Health Visitors, GP's, support workers etc to highlight benefits of early intervention and develop good working relationships	Programme of visits wef March 2016	households threatened with homelessness to provide maximum opportunity to prevent homelessness occurring or develop a planned response.
3.5 Develop a communications plan to raise awareness of homelessness and relevant housing options	High	ABC Communications Team & Housing Options Team	Advertising budget for SLA Communications and marketing budget	Develop a plan with Comms team. Promotion via posters, leaflets, radio and newspapers and newsletters. Revisit use of twitter and facebook	June 2016  July 2016	Services well publicised to prevent homelessness
3.6 Review our incentives to assist those under threat	High	ABC	1. Landlord Liaison Officers 2. Landlord	1. Identify barriers to accessing PRS	June/July 2016	A refreshed range of options to assist those



of homelessness to resolve their own problems in the private rented sector			Working group 3. Specialist homelessness consultancy advice	for homeless households and identify options to overcome them or minimise the impact of them 2. rebadge the council 'offer' to private sector landlords and deliver to the landlord forum together with general marketing	June/July 2016	in housing need to access private rented housing and become self sufficient and able to effectively manage their affairs
3.7 Expand ABC Lettings and Property Management (The council's social lettings agency)	Medium	ABC Senior Property Manager	1. Property Managers, ABC lettings 2. Income from management fees	1. Continue to grow the numbers managed on behalf of private landlords under the social lettings agency 2. Undertake an options appraisal to identify likely staffing requirements, projected income, risks and opportunities	Ongoing  March 2016	Delivery of an effective scheme to enable the council to discharge homelessness duty to accommodate into the private rented sector.

Challenge 4: Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
4.1 Undertake annual rough sleeper estimate and monitor trend	Low	ABC Housing Options Officer	Housing Options Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the range of partners to take part in compiling the estimate.</li> <li>2. Set a date for the estimate to take place and communicate this to all partners</li> <li>3. Collect the data received from partners to compile a composite picture of rough sleepers in the area and submit to govt</li> <li>4. Trends to be monitored</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. October 2016</li> <li>2. Early November 2016 each year</li> <li>3. End of November each year.</li> </ol>	A rough sleeper estimate is compiled across all relevant agencies during Mid November each year.
4.2 Continue and develop the dedicated rough	Medium	ABC and Health and Wellbeing Board	1. Budget identified within general fund	1. Maintain Rough Sleeper working group to	Ongoing	Minimise the numbers of people sleeping

<p>sleeper service with Porchlight Homelessness charity</p>			<p>2. Bid made to CCG 3. Liaison with Health and Wellbeing Board</p>	<p>review known rough sleepers and plan responses across agencies including Police, Porchlight, Street Pastors, etc 2. Review outcomes from the Porchlight dedicated Ashford rough sleeping service and identify areas to improve advice and support to rough sleepers to find accommodation, gain employment and become self sufficient. 3. Report outcomes back to Health and Wellbeing Board</p>	<p>Review Quarterly  June 2016</p>	<p>rough outside in Ashford</p>
<p>4.3 Investigate provision of an emergency 'sit up' service for rough sleepers</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>ABC Senior Housing Options Officer</p>	<p>No financial resource identified at this stage, however funding being</p>	<p>1. Consider requirements for emergency provision for rough sleepers</p>	<p>September 2016</p>	<p>Rough sleeping minimised in Ashford and no second night out government</p>

to get them off the streets			sought to expand rough sleeper service to provide this.	with an Ashford connection only. 2. Evaluate options via the Rough Sleeper Working Group with partners.	November 2016	target met.
4.4 Implement the severe weather emergency placement (SWEP) scheme following government guidelines in extreme weather conditions	Medium	Porchlight	Via the rough sleeper Porchlight scheme	Monitor weather conditions and when the temperature drops below zero for three consecutive nights or at the council's discretion implement the SWEP arrangements to ensure that any known rough sleepers are given accommodation until the temperature rises again	Winter months annually	No known rough sleepers left sleeping outside during adverse weather conditions as set out in the government guidelines under SWEP.
4.5 Consider further Winter Shelter project	Medium	ABC Porchlight Churches together in Ashford	Donations and volunteers supported by Porchlight and ABC	1. Review 15/16 winter shelter project 2. Agree 16/17 project 3. ensure exit	1. July 2016  2. September 2016 3. September	No rough sleepers left sleeping outside during operation of project

				strategy in place for when shelter closes	2016	
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Challenge 5: Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and diverse client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
5.1 Continue move-on meetings to make efficient use of existing supported housing	Medium	1.ABC 2. Supported Housing partners	Group led by Senior Housing Options Officer and Senior Property Manager	Regular meeting to discuss move on requirements and difficult cases and identify a strategy for keeping a flow through supported housing schemes.	Ongoing monthly meetings	Good flow through supported housing and efficient management of cases.
5.2 Make use of private rented sector as part of housing pathway for various vulnerable client groups	Medium	1.ABC 2.Porchlight 2.Members of Private Sector Landlord Working Group & the rough sleepers working group 3. Floating support / support	1. A suitable landlord incentive will be required such as deposit / rent in advance 2. Support services will be required	1. Through move on working group identify the demand for move on into the PRS for vulnerable people. 2. Discuss options for	May 2016  July 2016	Better flow of clients through supported housing schemes and more efficient use of supported housing available.

		agencies 4. Supporting People team (KCC).		accommodation provision and barriers preventing this with Private Sector Landlord working group. 3. Agree an action plan to deliver use of PRS for move on for vulnerable people.	July 2016	
5.3 Review existing accommodation services for vulnerable client groups and develop joint commissioning model with Social Services	Low	1.ABC 2. Social Services 3. Joint Policy and Planning Board	Invest to save option that may be funded from savings in foster placements or B&B	Undertake a feasibility of options for joint commissioning of private sector solutions for vulnerable people especially young people	Trial commencing May 2016 to be reviewed in October 2016	An identified model produced between KCC and ABC for joint commissioning in the private rented sector to avoid costly use of B&B or fostering places.
5. 4 Negotiate use of supported unit for young persons emergency accommodation	Medium	ABC Golding Homes	Funding for high support already identified by KCC Supporting people	Discuss opportunity to provide an emergency placement option within the high support scheme for young people being developed	November 2016	High support emergency placement provided within The Limes

				at The Limes.		
5.5 Work with agencies to identify accommodation needs of people with mental health, drug and alcohol problems	Medium	ABC Mental Health Team KCC Supporting People Team	Supporting people funded schemes including floating support	1.Liaise with the supporting people team regarding assessment of housing needs of clients with mental health and / or drug and alcohol issues 2.Analyse trends of homelessness demands	In conjunction with Homelessness Forum meetings	
5.6 Continue provision of starter packs to provide basic equipment for those setting up home.	Low	ABC West Kent Homelessness Forum partners	Part funded by Housing Revenue Account for council tenancies	Expand the scheme to include other referral agents.	Ongoing	Starter packs available for those taking up a new tenancy with no bedding or equipment rather than extend stay in temporary housing.

Challenge 6: Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
6.1 Develop	Medium	1.ABC	Within existing	1.Landlord	June 2016	Tenants guide

good tenant guide		2. Private Sector Landlord Working Group	resources	working group to identify what they feel should go into the guide 2. Work with Comms team to develop a draft 3. Build into tenancy training. 4. Publish and launch via Landlord event	September 2016  October 2016  October / November 2016	produced with input from landlord working group
6.2 Review and update tenancy training for homeless households	Medium	ABC	Resources to be identified to produce training materials and certificates	1. Review content 2. Negotiate delivery at children centres where child care facilities can be provided	Completed  October 2016	Tenancy Training recognised and accepted by landlords and offered to relevant homeless households.
6.3 Increase access for landlords to support services available to help sustain tenancies	High	ABC	1. Landlord Liaison 2. Welfare Intervention Officers	1. Review effectiveness of the landlord liaison role with landlord working group and identify areas for development. 2. Feed review findings into service review	Completed      April 2016	Landlords endorsing service provided by Landlord Liaison Officers.
6.4 Develop marketing	High	ABC	Landlord Liaison Communications	Develop marketing plan	March 2016	More take up of council initiatives



strategy to attract new landlords to work with housing options			team	of councils services directed at private sector landlords following review of our private sector offer		by private sector to provide accommodation for homeless households.
6.5 Further develop and promote landlord accreditation scheme	Low	ABC Private Sector Landlords Working Group National Landlords Association	Small incentives package required	Review existing accreditation scheme and identify what would attract more landlords to join up	June 2016	Improved standards of accommodation and management practice within the private rented sector

**Challenge 7: Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction.**

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
7.1 Investigate incentives to encourage self help with housing	Medium	All	Use of existing networks and schemes	1. Discuss options for self help at the multi agency homelessness forum 2. Identify and implement the most effective measures identified 3. Build into	July 2016	A range of self help measures set up and publicised



		(NHAS) 4. Other voluntary sector schemes	advice.	<p>advice service</p> <p>2. Join forces with CAB to promote debt advice and welfare benefits advice services locally</p> <p>3. Monitor demand for debt advice and timescales for receiving specialist advice services / debt intervention work and identify gaps in service</p> <p>4. Identify other voluntary sector groups and services providing this role</p> <p>5. Consider use of 'self-help' guide to budgets</p> <p>6. Investigate credit union further with Kent Savers and use of and access to budgeting accounts</p>	<p>November 2016</p> <p>Quarterly</p>	
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7.4 Review purchase of empty homes in relation to reducing homelessness	Low	Property Company	Finance identified to purchase homes for Property Company	1. Identify opportunities for a targeted approach to purchase empty property for homelessness demand.	November 2016	Feasibility of a scheme to purchase empty properties for homeless households completed.
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Challenge 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

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
8.1 Homelessness Strategy adopted	See Action 1 1					
8.2 Utilise new multi agency homelessness group / forum to implement and drive delivery of action plan	High	ABC	Officer time	Conduct a proportionate annual refresh of the strategy and update members of the group, Council members, etc	Annually	Multi agency engagement in delivery of the action plan and in the annual refresh of the strategy annually
8.3 Adopt a continual review process to keep the data on homelessness current	High	ABC Senior Housing Options Officer & Housing Strategy Manager	Housing Options Team Homelessness Forum	1.Ensure that review data is refreshed on a 1/4ly basis 2. Report updates and	1/4ly  1/4ly	Homelessness data and information is continually refreshed so that it is current

				changes to Homelessness Forum to continually review with partners. 3. Feed into strategy refresh annually	March annually	enabling the annual update to the strategy and the action plan.
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Challenge 9: Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
9.1 Proactively seek provision of supported accommodation for young parents	Low	ABC RSL partners	Capital funding to be identified	1. Identify a specification for accommodation for young parents. 2. Identify a site and RSL to work with 3. Identify revenue funding for management costs	December 2016	Scheme feasibility completed and a project identified.
9.2 Use What Matters Forum to reach young people to educate about homelessness	Medium	ABC, What Matters Forum members	Officer time	1. Devise a programme of education to be delivered in schools and to young people in	September 2016	Delivery of education programme in schools and within appropriate

				other locations 2. Develop use of social media channels to engage with young people about homelessness		youth settings
9.3 Work in partnership with Social Services to ensure appropriate assessment and placement of 16 and 17 year olds or other young people with support needs.	High	KCC ABC Joint Policy and Planning Board	1. Specialist housing options officer 2. Social Services 3. Joint Policy and Planning Board are discussing a new Kent Wide protocol.	1. Dedicated housing options officer to specialise in young people to work closely with social services staff. 2. Adopt an agreed approach that always tries to get a young person to stay at home unless they are at risk if they do so.	Ongoing  Will follow the Implementation of the Kent wide protocol when agreed	Less young people becoming homeless.

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

Action	Priority - High, Medium, Low	Lead partner	Resources	Milestones	Timescale	Outcome
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10.1 Sustain existing accommodation through prevention of homelessness work	High	ABC KCC	Housing options officers Landlord liaison officers Welfare intervention officers Prevention fund Deposit Guarantee Scheme	Set up joint working arrangements with early help service at KCC to tackle homelessness at an early stage.	June 2016	Coordination of available services across ABC and KCC to prevent homelessness.
10.2 Consider another facility for short-stay accommodation	Medium	ABC	Potential borrowing for capital costs Staffing costs	1. Review trends for B&B and ability to move families out of B&B within 6 weeks. 2. Consider funding implications and feasibility of setting up another short stay accommodation	June 2016  June 2016	No families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks
10.3 Incentivise applicants to avoid making a homelessness claim through allocations policy	Low	ABC Property Officer (Social Lettings)	Lettings section	Identify how changes to the lettings policy may incentivise applicants not to make a homelessness claim	September 2016	Applicants find waiting on the housing register better than making a homelessness claim
10.4 Improve	Low	ABC	1.Use of	1.Ensure that	To be completed	Applicants are

<p>continuation of support services on leaving B&amp;B or other temporary accommodation</p>		<p>Supporting People funded services</p>	<p>supporting people funded services 2. Housing Options Officers</p>	<p>the whole needs assessment is completed for all those placed into B&amp;B or other temporary accommodation to identify support needs 2. Ensure that appropriate and timely referrals are made to link applicants into relevant support services 3. Ensure all offered access to tenancy training</p>	<p>at the time of interview prior to placement into TA  Within 2 working days of placement</p>	<p>linked to relevant support services</p>



## Resources

### Staffing

The housing options team consists of 19 people, 16 FTE and 1 PTE, and is divided into 3 sections:

Housing Needs Team, Property Team and Private Sector Housing.

The Housing Needs Team consists of 4 FTE Housing Options Officer and 1 FTE Senior Officer. The team work with the public to try and prevent homelessness and where this is not possible, will process a Homeless Persons Application. There are a number of tools to help with prevention including a Rent Deposit Bond and a Homeless Prevention Fund. In addition, the Needs Team also consists of 2 Landlord Liaison Officers, who work closely with partner agencies, including private landlords to try and sustain tenancies.

In July 2016, an independent consultant reviewed the service allowing us to take a step back and look at how to best use the staff and their resources to be the most time effective.

### Budget

The prevention of homelessness is more cost effective than providing emergency accommodation for a household. For the first 6 months 2016/17, we have assisted 22 households with a prevention fund payment and spent a total of £13,304.77. If all of these families had not been prevented and were placed into emergency accommodation by the Authority, the cost would have been £38,331.84. Thus a saving of £25,027.07 has been made.

	Spent 2015/2016	Budget 2016/2017
B&B accommodation	207,348.85	228,900
Prevention	37,396.18	22,000
Rent Deposit Bonds	9,153.52	15,000
Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker	30,000	30,000
Staffing costs	340,406.97	343,650

August 2014 saw the opening of Christchurch House. This is a short stay accommodation facility consisting of 8 family rooms, majority of which have ensuite facilities. There are 3 communal bathrooms, a large communal kitchen, a laundry room and outside courtyard. There are two superintendents employed part time to cover housekeeping and maintenance, as well as liaising with the tenants and their case officers. This facility has meant that fewer families have had to be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation saving the authority money.

Due to the success of Christchurch House, we are looking to replicate this with the purchase of another property. However, whilst it is recognised that this will produce savings for the Authority, there is no identified budget and we would have to look at borrowing money from the Public Works Loan Board.

## Partners

In August 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government published a policy paper titled “Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness”. The report asked Local Authorities to think about how services can be managed in a way that prevents all households, regardless of whether they are families, couples, or single people, from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness.

In Ashford, we are keen to maximise partnership working. The past year has seen some new initiatives including the employment of a Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker with Porchlight and the operation of a winter night shelter operated by the Churches Together Group, in partnership with Porchlight.

Additionally, Porchlight have introduced an emergency bedspace within their supported accommodation at Simon Mead House. This is based on the No Second Night Out initiative from central government. The Outreach Worker co-ordinates referrals for the room and will work with the person get them off the streets and to secure alternative accommodation.

Ashford Citizens Advice Bureau work closely with the housing options team and are able to assist clients that are experiencing financial difficulties to prevent their homelessness.

We are starting to work closely with the Ashford Volunteer Centre and will continue to do so to encourage our clients to give their time to a worth while cause with the hope of this leading to some form of permanent employment.

## Summary of Actions

Challenge 1: Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services

1.1 Adoption of Homelessness Strategy

1.2 Create interagency homelessness forum to raise awareness of homelessness and to improve knowledge of who does what to make best use of existing resources

1.3 Work towards achieving gold standard

1.4 Increase interagency commitment to prevention of homelessness through Health and Wellbeing Board agenda

1.5 Input to refresh of Kent and Medway Housing Strategy to ensure prevention of homelessness is a priority across Kent

1.6 Identify and share opportunities for training for professionals on homelessness prevention and housing options

Challenge 2: Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education and training needs and employment

2.1 Complete the review of HELP referral and tracker system identifying who does what to make best use of the resources available locally

2.2 Work with Job Centre Plus, Revs and Bens and HUB partners to assist those affected by welfare reform problems

2.3 Increase joint working with Early Help project

2.4 Work with education services to highlight realities of homelessness to young people

Challenge 3: Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.

3.1 Improve understanding of landlords (public and private) to liaise with housing options regarding early notification of eviction

3.2 Investigate opportunities for partnership working around welfare reform & tenancy sustainment

3.3 Improve access to self help information/services

- 3.4 Develop an early intervention and prevention first ethos across all agencies
- 3.5 Develop a communications plan to raise awareness of homelessness and relevant housing options
- 3.6 Review our incentives to assist those under threat of homelessness to resolve their own problems in the private rented sector
- 3.7 Expand ABC Lettings and Property Management (The Council's social lettings agency)

Challenge 4: Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative

- 4.1 Undertake annual rough sleeper estimate and monitor trend
- 4.2 Continue and develop the dedicated rough sleeper service with Porchlight Homelessness charity
- 4.3 Investigate provision of an emergency 'sit up' service for rough sleepers to get them off the streets
- 4.4 Implement the severe weather emergency placement (SWEP) scheme following government guidelines in extreme weather conditions

Challenge 5: Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and diverse client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.

- 5.1 Continue move- on meetings to make efficient use of existing supported housing
- 5.2 Make use of private rented sector as part of housing pathway for various vulnerable client groups
- 5.3 Review existing accommodation services and develop joint commissioning model with Social Services
- 5.4 Negotiate use of supported unit for young persons emergency accommodation
- 5.5 Work with agencies to identify accommodation needs of people with mental health, drug and alcohol problems
- 5.6 Continue provision of starter packs to provide basic equipment for those setting up home

Challenge 6: Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords

6.1 Develop good tenant guide

6.2 Review and update Tenancy Training for homeless households

6.3 Increase access for landlords to support services available to help sustain tenancies

6.4 Develop marketing strategy to attract new landlords to work with housing options

6.5 Further develop and promote landlord accreditation scheme

Challenge 7: Actively engage in preventing homelessness including loss of private sector accommodation and parental eviction.

7.1 Investigate incentives to encourage self help with housing

7.2 Proactive work with early help team to prevent parental eviction

7.3 Raise awareness of help available for debt advice/money management

7.4 Review purchase of empty homes in relation to reducing homelessness

Challenge 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

8.1 Homelessness Strategy adopted

8.2 Utilise new multi agency homelessness group / forum to implement and drive delivery of action plan

8.3 Adopt a continual review process to keep the data on homelessness current

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

9.1 Proactively seek provision of supported accommodation for young parents

9.2 Use what matters forum to reach young people to educate about homelessness

9.3 Work in partnership with Social Services to ensure appropriate assessment and placement of 16 and 17 year olds or other young people with support needs

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

10.1 Sustain existing accommodation through prevention of homelessness work

10.2 Consider another facility for short-stay accommodation

10.3 Incentivise applicants to avoid making a homelessness claim through allocations policy

10.4 Improve continuation of support services on leaving B&B or other temporary accommodation

DRAFT



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## Impact Assessment

### When is an assessment needed?

Councils must assess the impact of **proposed policies or practices** while they are being developed, with analysis available for members before a decision is made (i.e. at Cabinet).

Broadly, *policies and practices* can be understood to embrace a full range of different activities, such as Cabinet decisions which substantially change the way in which we do something, setting budgets, developing high-level strategies, and organisational practices such as internal restructuring. Assessments should especially be undertaken if the activity relates closely to an equalities group (see next page).

Importantly, this does not include reports that are 'for note' or do not propose substantial changes – assessments should only be considered when we propose to do something differently.

Assessments should also be carried out when conducting a large-scale review of **existing policies or practices** to check that they remain non-discriminatory. This does not mean filling out an assessment on every report on a subject – it is up to you to decide if the report's scope or scale warrants an assessment

1. General Information	
1.1 Name of project, policy, procedure, practice or issue being assessed	Homelessness Strategy
1.2 Service / Department	Housing / Housing Options
1.3 Head of Service	Sharon Williams
1.4 Assessment Lead Officer	Sylvia Roberts, Senior Housing Options Officer
1.5 Date of Assessment	16 August 2016
1.6 Is this assessment of an existing or a proposed project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	Updated Strategy

2. What is Being Assessed?	
2.1 What are the aims of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	The aim of the Homelessness Strategy is to set out the direction of travel though a proactive action plan to meet the Council's duty to prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough.
2.2 Who is intended to benefit from this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	The Council (member's and officers) stakeholders and residents will be able to see how the Council is and is intending to tackle homelessness and continue its prevention agenda, working collaboratively with other agencies.

2.3 Who else is involved in the provision of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue? i.e. other sections, public or private bodies	
- within Ashford BC	The policy mainly applies to the daily functions of the Housing Options Team. Other departments involved are private sector housing, revenues and benefits, legal services
- from other agencies	A range of agencies are also involved, such as KCC, charitable organisations e.g Porchlight, and individuals/business within the private sector , particularly private sector landlords.



### 3. Possible Sources of Information

In order to assess the impact of proposed decision it is important to bring together all information you have on it to, analyse them and come to conclusions on how it affects those with protected characteristics.

Information on a policy, project or procedure can come in many forms :-

- Census and other demographic information
- User satisfaction and other surveys
- Previous consultation exercises
- Performance Indicators
- Eligibility Criteria
- Service uptake data
- Complaints
- Customer Profiling
- MOSAIC data

In order to come to conclusions on impacts in section 4 you **must** have taken in to account all appropriate information, and be able to provide this if necessary in support of the judgements you make.

Also, it is not enough to have broad information on service users – to meet equalities duties this information **must** be broken down – where applicable – into the relevant protected characteristics which may be affected by this decision. For example, when considering disabled access to a new community facility, overall usage figures are not enough – an understanding of how many disabled users within this total must be demonstrated.

The protected characteristics are :-

Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage and civil partnership	Pregnancy and maternity
Race	Religion and belief	Sex	Sexual orientation	

More information on the definitions of these characteristics can be found here - <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/protected-characteristics-definitions/>

4. What judgements can we make?				
4.1 Does the evidence already available indicate that the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue may affect these groups differently? (please check the relevant box and provide evidence where possible)	Positive Impact?	Negative Impact?	No Differential Impact	If yes, can it be justified (and how)?
<b>Impact Factors:</b>				
<b>Age</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Disability</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Gender</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Marriage / Civil Partnership</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Pregnancy &amp; Maternity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Race</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Religion / Belief</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Sexual Orientation</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Other (please specify)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

5. Conclusions	
5.1 Does the decision maximise opportunities to promote equality and good inter-group relations? If "yes" please state how?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes The strategy seeks to work jointly with other agencies to increase the effectiveness of preventing homelessness by tackling the underlying causes of homelessness wherever possible. <input type="checkbox"/> No
5.2 Based on the answers to the above can we confidently say that in its present form the decision treats different groups <u>fairly</u> (bearing in mind "fairly" may mean differently) and that no further amendment is required?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<p><b>If further action is identified to ensure fair impacts please complete the Action Plan available on the intranet and attach it to this form</b></p>	

<b>6. Monitoring and Review</b>	
How will monitoring of this policy, procedure or practice be reported (where appropriate)?	Officers record a range of information for reporting internally to the head of service and housing management team Progress on the action plan will be reported annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
When is it proposed to next review the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	1 year from date of adoption unless legislative changes require an earlier review.
Any additional comments?	

**Agenda Item No:** 8

**Report To:** **CABINET**

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Report Title:** Adoption of the Wye Neighbourhood Plan

**Report Author:** Simon Cole, Head of Planning Policy & Economic Development

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Bennett, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Development



**Summary:**

At the end of last year, the Wye Neighbourhood Plan was the subject of an independent examination and, subject to a number of amendments, was considered suitable to progress to a local referendum. On 8<sup>th</sup> September, the amended and final version of the Neighbourhood Plan was the subject of a local referendum in the parish and received overwhelming backing from those who voted.

This is the first Neighbourhood Plan to reach this stage in the borough and it is now the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to formally 'make' (i.e. adopt), the Plan which will confer full Development Plan status for decision-making purposes. Formally 'making' the Neighbourhood Plan must be agreed by the Full Council so this report recommends that the Cabinet endorse the Neighbourhood Plan and ask Full Council to 'make' it.

**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** Wye

**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet be asked to:-**

- i) Recommend that Full Council 'make' the Wye Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004**

**Policy Overview:** The adoption of the Wye Neighbourhood Plan will mean that its policies shall have the same weight in decision-making as those adopted policies contained within the Borough Council's own Development Plans, e.g. the Core Strategy Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD. In the event of policy conflict, the Neighbourhood Plan, as the more recent Plan, should take precedence until the adoption of the Borough Council's emerging Local Plan to 2030.

**Financial Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment** NO

**Equalities Impact Assessment** YES

**Other Material Implications:** None

**Background Papers:** Wye Neighbourhood Plan 2015-30

**Contacts:** Simon.cole@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330642

## **Report Title: Adoption of the Wye Neighbourhood Plan**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To describe the process by which the Wye Neighbourhood Plan has been produced and to seek the Cabinet's endorsement of the Plan and its agreement to recommend that the Council 'makes' the Plan as part of the Development Plan for the borough.

### **Issue to be Decided**

2. Whether to recommend that the Council should formally 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan under Section 38A (4) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

### **Background**

3. The advent of Neighbourhood Plans as a means for local communities to draw up their own planning proposals and policies for their areas came as part of the Coalition Government's major changes to the Planning system following the 2010 General election.
4. In this borough, Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council was the first Parish Council to exercise these new rights and commenced the process for drawing up a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish in late 2012. The process has been lengthy but has involved much communication with local residents and businesses and the Neighbourhood Plan has been seen as an important way for local stakeholders to take some 'ownership' of the planning of the parish including some difficult and complex issues such as the future of the former Wye College campus in the village.
5. Throughout the process, planning policy officers from the borough council have supported the Neighbourhood Planning Group in Wye to ensure that the eventual Plan met not only the aspirations of the majority of local residents but also fulfilled the tests of compliance with national and local planning policy.
6. Following two stages of public consultation on the draft Plan, the Council appointed an independent examiner to formally consider whether the Plan met the necessary 'basic conditions' tests set down in legislation. His examination started towards the end of 2015, including a public hearing at the Julie Rose Stadium on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015. In January 2016, the Council received the examiner's report which concluded that, subject to a number of amendments, the Plan was sound and did meet the 'basic conditions' tests and therefore could progress to the final stage of the process – a local referendum on the Plan.

7. The local referendum on the Plan as amended was held in the parish on the 8<sup>th</sup> September. Of the 814 people who voted (a turnout of 43.7%), an overwhelming majority of 94.72% supported the Plan.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

8. Although the Neighbourhood Plan has been drafted by others, it is necessary to consider EIA if the Council is to adopt its policies. It is concluded that the policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan promote equality and do not prejudice any existing groups. The Plan provides a framework for development that will support all sections of the local community.

## **Other Options Considered**

9. The Council must 'make' the plan unless it is considered that that the making of the plan would breach, or would otherwise be incompatible with, any EU obligation or any human rights. In my opinion, there is no such incompatibility and therefore, the Council should progress to the formally 'make' the Plan.

## **Implications Assessment**

10. The 'making' of the Neighbourhood Plan will confer full Development Plan status on its policies. This means that for decision-making purposes, applications should be determined in accordance with its policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Neighbourhood Plan should therefore play a central role in guiding the Local Planning Authority in assessing planning applications in the parish, alongside the extant policies in the Borough Local Plan 2000, the Core Strategy and the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD.
11. As the most recently made of the relevant Plans covering development in Wye parish, the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan should take precedence where there is any conflict or inconsistency in existing policies, however such occasions should be rare given the need for the Neighbourhood Plan to be generally consistent with the borough's existing strategic planning policies.
12. The emerging Local Plan to 2030 currently has relatively little weight in decision-making, although this will increase as it passes through its formal stages to eventual adoption. As and when the new Local Plan is adopted, it may be prudent for the borough and parish councils to informally review the policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure it remains consistent with the wider strategic planning policies of the borough.

## **Handling**

13. If the Cabinet agree the recommendation, then it will be for the Full Council to approve and formally 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan so that it can become a part of the Borough Council's Development Plan for the borough.
14. In addition, the relevant regulations require the borough council to publish this decision on the council's website and a statement setting out the reasons for

making that decision. This should also be published and made available locally within the parish. The adopted version of the Neighbourhood Plan will also be made available on the Borough Council's website.

## **Conclusion**

15. Since Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council embarked on their Neighbourhood Plan, a number of other parish councils in the borough have followed their lead and are at various stages of their particular Plan's preparation. The Parish Council as a whole and the members of the Neighbourhood Planning Group in particular, deserve much credit for undertaking and persevering with the Wye Neighbourhood Plan through to its conclusion.
16. The referendum result is testimony to the efforts to engage the community throughout the process and understand their aspirations within the context provided by the Local Plan and national planning policy. I have no hesitation in recommending that the Cabinet endorse the Neighbourhood Plan and request the Full Council's to formally 'make' the Plan to form part of the Development Plan for the borough.

## **Portfolio Holder's Views (Cllr Bennett)**

17. Cllr. Bennett will comment at the Cabinet meeting.

**Contact:** Simon Cole, Head of Planning Policy & Economic Development

**Email:** [simon.cole@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:simon.cole@ashford.gov.uk)





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## Impact Assessment

### When is an assessment needed?

Councils must assess the impact of **proposed policies or practices** while they are being developed, with analysis available for members before a decision is made (i.e. at Cabinet).

Broadly, *policies and practices* can be understood to embrace a full range of different activities, such as Cabinet decisions which substantially change the way in which we do something, setting budgets, developing high-level strategies, and organisational practices such as internal restructuring. Assessments should especially be undertaken if the activity relates closely to an equalities group (see next page).

Importantly, this does not include reports that are 'for note' or do not propose substantial changes – assessments should only be considered when we propose to do something differently.

Assessments should also be carried out when conducting a large-scale review of **existing policies or practices** to check that they remain non-discriminatory. This does not mean filling out an assessment on every report on a subject – it is up to you to decide if the report's scope or scale warrants an assessment

1. General Information	
1.1 Name of project, policy, procedure, practice or issue being assessed	Wye Neighbourhood Plan 2015-30
1.2 Service / Department	Planning and Development – Planning Policy & Economic Development
1.3 Head of Service	Simon Cole
1.4 Assessment Lead Officer	Simon Cole
1.5 Date of Assessment	29 <sup>th</sup> September 2016
1.6 Is this assessment of an existing or a proposed project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	Yes – a set of planning policies

2. What is Being Assessed?	
2.1 What are the aims of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	To assist the council's decision-making process for planning applications within the Wye with Hinxhill parish area.
2.2 Who is intended to benefit from this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	All local residents and businesses within the parish area.
2.3 Who else is involved in the provision of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue? i.e. other sections, public or private bodies	Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council has prepared the Plan and it has been approved by local referendum on the 8 <sup>th</sup> September 2016.
- within Ashford BC	
- from other agencies	

### 3. Possible Sources of Information

In order to assess the impact of proposed decision it is important to bring together all information you have on it to, analyse them and come to conclusions on how it affects those with protected characteristics.

Information on a policy, project or procedure can come in many forms :-

- Census and other demographic information
- User satisfaction and other surveys
- Previous consultation exercises
- Performance Indicators
- Eligibility Criteria
- Service uptake data
- Complaints
- Customer Profiling
- MOSAIC data

In order to come to conclusions on impacts in section 4 you **must** have taken in to account all appropriate information, and be able to provide this if necessary in support of the judgements you make.

Also, it is not enough to have broad information on service users – to meet equalities duties this information **must** be broken down – where applicable – into the relevant protected characteristics which may be affected by this decision. For example, when considering disabled access to a new community facility, overall usage figures are not enough – an understanding of how many disabled users within this total must be demonstrated.

The protected characteristics are :-

Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage and civil partnership	Pregnancy and maternity
Race	Religion and belief	Sex	Sexual orientation	

More information on the definitions of these characteristics can be found here - <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/protected-characteristics-definitions/>

4. What judgements can we make?				
4.1 Does the evidence already available indicate that the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue may affect these groups differently? (please check the relevant box and provide evidence where possible)	Positive Impact?	Negative Impact?	No Differential Impact	If yes, can it be justified (and how)?
<b>Impact Factors:</b>				
<b>Age</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Disability</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Gender</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Marriage / Civil Partnership</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Pregnancy &amp; Maternity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Race</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Religion / Belief</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Sexual Orientation</b> (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Other (please specify)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x <input type="checkbox"/>	

5. Conclusions	
5.1 Does the decision maximise opportunities to promote equality and good inter-group relations? If "yes" please state how?	x <input type="checkbox"/> Yes The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to bring forward development that will benefit the parish and contribute to the ability of all groups to participate in local community activities through the delivery of new facilities. <input type="checkbox"/> No
5.2 Based on the answers to the above can we confidently say that in its present form the decision treats different groups <u>fairly</u> (bearing in mind "fairly" may mean differently) and that no further amendment is required?	x <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>If further action is identified to ensure fair impacts please complete the Action Plan available on the intranet and attach it to this form</b>	

<b>6. Monitoring and Review</b>	
How will monitoring of this policy, procedure or practice be reported (where appropriate)?	The monitoring of development outcomes will form part of the council's wider development monitoring activities. The Annual Monitoring report will be vehicle by which any specific outcomes can be noted as well as periodic reports on the delivery of infrastructure through Section 106 Agreements.
When is it proposed to next review the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	When the Neighbourhood Plan is formally reviewed – date to be decided in due course by the Parish council.
Any additional comments?	

**Agenda Item No:** 9

**Report To:** The Cabinet

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Report Title:** Ashford College Campus: Use of Chief Executive's Delegated Authority

**Report Author:** Tracey Kerly, Chief Executive

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Gerry Clarkson, Leader of the Council



**Summary:**

Following the approval by Cabinet and Full Council in July 2016 for the Loan/Grant to West Kent and Ashford College to deliver Phase 1 and 1a of the new Ashford College Campus on Elwick Road, this report informs members of the use of the Chief Executive's delegated authority on the grounds of urgency to vary the approved Heads of Terms in order to finalise the funding agreements.

**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** All Wards

**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet be asked to:- Note that the Chief Executive exercised delegated authority on the grounds of urgency (Page 203 of the Constitution, section 4.9) to vary the approved Heads of Terms in order to finalise the funding agreement with West Kent and Ashford College and the intercreditor agreement with West Kent and Ashford College and its primary lender.**

**Policy Overview:** The proposed funding will secure the release of other external funding streams, and will enable delivery of Phase 1 and 1a of the Ashford International College Campus on Elwick Road. The College is one of the Council's "Big 8" projects and is strategically important in delivering better further education provision, the regeneration of Ashford Town Centre and growth within the Borough.

This project is identified within the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-20, under Priority 1, Enterprising Ashford: Economic Investment and Growth as a key priority project.

**Financial Implications:**

The changes to the Heads of Terms for the loan and grant agreement with West Kent and Ashford College, extend by 6 months the period that the College will be paying interest on the loan before this is converted to grant if conditions are met.

The other implication is the change to the security provided for the loan/grant. The Heads of Terms specified charges on both the Tonbridge site and Elwick site and the final

agreement is for a charge just on the Elwick site, proposed on the basis of a valuation provided for the College which demonstrates that there is sufficient value in the completed Elwick site to provide sufficient security for the Council.

**Risk Assessment** YES – see report

**Equalities Impact Assessment** NO

**Exemption Clauses:** No

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## **Report Title: Ashford College Campus: Use of Chief Executive's Delegated Authority**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To report to Cabinet the use of urgent delegated authority by the Chief Executive as required by the constitution.

### **Issue to be Decided**

2. To note the changes to the Heads of Terms to facilitate the signing of the funding agreement and intercreditor agreement with West Kent and Ashford College and its primary lender.

### **Background**

3. At the Cabinet meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016 and the Full Council meeting of the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2016, the Council approved bridging loans of up to £3 million to support the delivery of the new Phase 1 and Phase 1a Ashford College Campus developments on Elwick Road, with the conversion of these loans into a grant dependent on completion of the developments and successful operation of the College Campus for one term.
4. The Council approved this loan/grant conditionally as set out in the Heads of Terms agreed with West Kent and Ashford College, and reported as an exempt appendix to the July Cabinet report.
5. Three areas of the Heads of Terms (HoTs) agreed by members have had to be varied to enable a funding agreement between the Council and West and Ashford Kent College, and an intercreditor agreement between the Council, West Kent and Ashford College and their primary lender, to be completed.
6. In light of the requirement for the variations to be agreed to enable the agreements to be completed before the next Cabinet meeting, as Chief Executive, I have exercised my delegated authority on the grounds of urgency (page 203 of the Constitution, section 4.9) to authorise these changes to the Heads of Terms.

### **Amendments to the finalised Funding Agreement and Intercreditor Agreement.**

7. The Council were requested to make three amendments to the Heads of Terms reported to members as an exempt appendix to the 14<sup>th</sup> July Cabinet report to gain agreement from West Kent and Ashford College and their lenders to finalise the funding and intercreditor agreements. These are:
  - a. A six month extension to the Repayment Date(s), from December 2017 to June 2018. This means that the conversion to grant would happen if conditions are met in June 2018 rather than December 2017, to take into account a delay to Phase 1a.

- b. A second ranking charge only over the Elwick Road site (with a £2m cap on the primary lender's charge). The HoTs envisaged a second charge over the Tonbridge and Elwick sites for the loan, and both of these as well as a floating charge over College assets for security on the grant, should the college cease operating at the site within the next 25 years. The College's primary lender (who has a primary charge over both sites) will only accept a second charge on the Elwick site, but has agreed to a £2m cap on their primary charge. Valuations for the Elwick Road site provided for the College show sufficient value in a completed Elwick Road site following the completion of Phase 1 and 1a, to provide security for the Council. The Head of Finance advises that the risk of this change to the Council is very small.
- c. The "Grant Conversion Conditions" now require 80% occupation. The HoTs stated the condition of "full" occupation of the new campus. The variance to these conditions provides some flexibility for the college operations and transition to the site, but still condition the substantial opening and occupation of the new campus before conversion to grant.

## **Other Options Considered**

8. The other option considered was to delay the signing of the agreements until the changes could be reported to Cabinet for approval. This option would have further delayed the programme of delivery for the new Ashford College Campus development, and therefore the reported approach was taken on urgency grounds.

## **Handling**

9. As Chief Executive in exercising my delegated authority, I have consulted with the Leader of the Council, Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance and Head of Finance, as required within the constitution.

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

10. "I support the changes to the Heads of Terms as set out in this report."
11. Cllr Gerry Clarkson, Leader of the Council

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# Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016.

## Present:

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);  
Cllr. Bennett (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Clokie, Galpin, Shorter.

## Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Michael, Ovenden, Smith.

## Also Present:

Cllrs. Bradford, Burgess, Hicks.

Simon Cole – Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development; Richard Alderton – Director of Development; Ian Grundy (IG) – Principal Policy Planner; Carly Pettit – Policy Planner; Daniel Carter (DC) – Principal Policy Planner; Rosie Reid - Member Services & Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

## 1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Cllr. Shorter made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Council tenant farmer.

## 2 Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016

- 2.1 The Task Group Members agreed that the Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016 were an accurate record.

## 3 Local Plan & Community Infrastructure Levy Consultation update

- 3.1 The Principal Policy Planner (IG) and the Policy Planner gave a presentation to update Members on the Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy consultation. The presentation covered:
- Representations
  - Housing numbers and strategy
  - Site allocations in Ashford
  - Site allocations in Tenterden and villages
  - Topic policies
  - Omission sites

3.2 During and after the presentation, there was some discussion as follows:

- Members considered that improved broadband provision was desirable throughout the Borough. All new development should be required to provide a broadband conduit to every house, to enable the Post Office to lay the fibre connection. Members also noted that better provision was required for existing housing, including in the remotest areas of the Borough. It was agreed that this should be given a higher priority. Other types of provision, such as satellite, could also be considered.
- Members discussed taking a more robust approach with regard to development viability. It was noted that the Council did seek the advice of viability consultants and officers strove to secure the best deal available. However, their efforts were often undermined by national planning policy on viability which placed great significance on the ability of developers to deliver sites with a reasonable profit margin.
- The principal omission site representations were presented by officers. These were a mix of previously rejected 'site submissions' and new sites. The Policy Planner explained that officers would now reconsider rejected sites and check original submissions and earlier work undertaken, as well as considering new sites and proposals. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development reminded Members that all site proposals would be considered again by the Task Group in detail over the coming months. It was possible that some larger sites would be more appropriate for consideration under the next Local Plan as the anticipated build rate might mean that they were unlikely to come forward in the Plan period.
- The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development suggested it was important to establish an overall strategy which would deliver the right number of houses, in the right areas. Such a strategy would provide guidelines and consistency for future development and be the basis for considering the omission site proposals.
- It was agreed that Ward Members should be invited to future Task Group meetings, as observers, when Local Plan proposals for their Wards were discussed. It was also considered that the relevant Parish Council's view should be available.

## **4 Five Year Housing Land Supply update**

4.1 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development gave a presentation which covered:

- The technical position for authorities unable to provide a 5 year housing land supply;
- Lessons learned from recent appeals decisions and judgements to identify any consistent messages;
- Advice from Counsel ;
- Emerging 'direction of travel'.

- 4.2 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development advised that he would update Members on this topic at each forthcoming meeting. At the next meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> September he would cover the review of the SHMA and the implications for the 5 year housing land supply, as well as the scope for potential additional allocations in the Local Plan.

## 5 Dates of Next Meetings

5.1	22 <sup>nd</sup> September	10am	Council Chamber
	27 <sup>th</sup> October	2pm	Council Chamber
	25 <sup>th</sup> November	10am	Council Chamber
	22 <sup>nd</sup> December	2pm	Council Chamber

Councillor Clarkson (Chairman)  
Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Rosie Reid:  
Telephone: 01233 330565 Email: [rosie.reid@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:rosie.reid@ashford.gov.uk)  
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: [www.ashford.gov.uk/committees](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/committees)

**Agenda Item No:** 11  
**Report To:** CABINET  
**Date:** 13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2016  
**Report Title:** SCHEDULE OF KEY DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN  
**Report Author:** Corporate Director (Law and Governance)



<b>Summary:</b>	To set out the latest Schedule of Key Decisions to be taken by the Cabinet of Ashford Borough Council.
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**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** Where appropriate, individual Wards are indicated.

**Recommendations :** **That the Cabinet receive and note the latest Schedule of Key Decisions.**

**Policy Overview:** Under The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, there is no longer a legal requirement to publish a Forward Plan of Key Decisions, however there is still a requirement to publish details of Key Decisions 28 clear days before the meeting they are to be considered at. The Council maintains a live, up to date rolling list of decision items on the Council's website, and that list will be presented to the Cabinet each month, in its current state, for Members' information.

**Financial Implications:** Nil

**Other Material Implications:** Nil

**Exemption Clauses:** Nil

**Background Papers:** None

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**CABINET  
SCHEDULE OF KEY DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN**

The following Key Decisions will be taken by Ashford Borough Council's Cabinet on the dates stated.

Ashford Borough Council's Cabinet is made up of: - Councillors Gerry Clarkson; Neil Bell; Clair Bell; Mike Bennett; Jessamy Blanford; Gareth Bradford; Paul Clokie; Graham Galpin; Callum Knowles; Neil Shorter.

*Copies of the reports and any other relevant documents that are submitted to the Cabinet in connection with a proposed decision will be available for inspection, or on screen, five clear days before the decision date at the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford and at The Town Hall, 24 High Street, Tenterden, during opening hours, or at [www.ashford.gov.uk/councillors\\_and\\_committees.aspx](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/councillors_and_committees.aspx)*

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
<b>13<sup>th</sup> October 2016</b>					
Corporate Delivery Plan/ Medium Term Financial Plan	<i>To ask Cabinet to note the MTFP forecast and accept the underlying assumptions and its underpinning strategies, in the context of the current economic situation; and to note the achievements to date of the Corporate Plan and to check its priorities continue to meet its agenda.</i>	Cllr Clarkson	Kirsty Hogarth/ Ben Lockwood	Open	26/2/16
Homelessness Strategy	<i>To update Members on the outcome of consultation and to seek approval for adoption.</i>	Cllr Clokie	Jennifer Shaw	Open	19/4/16

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
<b>10<sup>th</sup> November 2016</b>					
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Maria Seddon	Open	13/11/15
Corporate Performance Report	<i>To give Members and residents an overview of how the council is performing with a key performance ‘snapshot’.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Nicholas Clayton	Open	13/11/15
Council Tax Support Scheme		Cllr Shorter	Ben Lockwood	Open	29/9/16
Progress on Enforcement Across the Council	<i>To update members and inform the public on what steps have been taken both in specific services such as Planning and Health, Parking and Community Safety, but also corporate initiatives including new policies and customer service improvements including the ‘Report It’ system on the web site and related app.</i>	Cllrs Bennett/ Bradford/ Clokie	Richard Alderton	Open	22/8/16
Proposal for the Management of a Community Facility to Alleviate Homelessness in the Borough		Cllr Clokie	Donna Michael	Open	12/9/16

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
<b>8<sup>th</sup> December 2016</b>					
Draft Budget 2017/18	<i>To present the preliminary draft service budget and outline MTFP for the purposes of subsequent formal scrutiny by the O&amp;S Task Group and public consultation.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Paul Naylor/Ben Lockwood	Open	4/12/15
Council Tax Base	<i>To present for approval the estimated 2017/18 Council tax base calculation for the Borough and each parished area, on which the major preceptors and local Parish Councils will base their requirements.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Ben Lockwood	Open	4/12/15
Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy		Cllr Clokie	Julian Watts	Open	11/7/16
Private Sector Leasing Update		Cllr Clokie	Donna Michael	Open	12/9/16
A Review of Parking Enforcement		Cllr Bradford	Mike Cook/Jo Fox	Open	5/8/16
Royal Military Canal, Proposed Shared Pathway Progress Update.		Cllr Mrs Blanford	Len Mayatt	Open (Exempt Appendix)	29/9/16
Outcome of HRA Review		Cllr Clokie	Sharon Williams	Open	26/5/16

<b>Decision Item</b>	<b>Report Summary</b>	<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Open or Exempt</b>	<b>Added to Schedule</b>
Housing Home Ownership Opportunity – Opt to Buy	<i>To cover the detail of the scheme, the flexibility the Council can give itself in how it sets rents for the scheme and tenancies terms, how it can avoid any RTB issues, how it will borrow the necessary funding and acquire suitable properties and promote the scheme to interested parties.</i>	Cllr Clokie	Richard Robinson	Open	20/6/16
<b>12<sup>th</sup> January 2017</b>					
Revenues & Benefits Recommended Write-Offs Schedule	<i>Proposed formal write-off of debts</i>	Cllr Shorter	Peter Purcell	Open (Exempt Appendix)	16/1/15
Waste & Recycling – Costed Forward Education & Promotion Strategy	<i>Further to the report received by the Cabinet in February 2016, presentation of a costed forward education and promotion strategy, including forward recycling options and targets be approved.</i>	Cllr Mrs Bell	Julie Rogers	Open	13/2/16
Cemetery Memorial Safety Policy	<i>Report back on adoption of policy and set of operational guidelines to manage the forward process relating to the safe management of memorials in Ashford.</i>	Cllr Mrs Bell	Julie Rogers	Open	26/2/16
<b>9<sup>th</sup> February 2017</b>					
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report</i>	Cllr Shorter	Maria Seddon	Open	13/2/16



<b>Decision Item</b>	<b>Report Summary</b>	<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Open or Exempt</b>	<b>Added to Schedule</b>
Revenue Budget 2017/18	<i>To present the draft revenue budget for 2017/18 to the Cabinet for recommendation to Council.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Paul Naylor/Ben Lockwood	Open	13/2/16
Corporate Performance Report	<i>The report seeks to give members and the Borough's residents an overview of how the Council is performing. It seeks to do this in a transparent and easily-accessible manner, giving a key performance 'snapshot'.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Nicholas Clayton	Open	13/2/16
Climate Change and Sustainable Environment – Annual Progress Report	<i>This report summarises actions and initiatives undertaken throughout the authority during the last year in the complementary areas of a sustainable environment, carbon and energy reduction and responding to the threat of climate change. These had been brought together previously within the Council's Position Statement.</i>	Cllr Mrs Blanford	Paul Naylor	Open	13/2/16
Domestic Abuse Annual Report	<i>Sets out for comment the progress the Council and its partners are making on projects focusing on domestic abuse over the past 12 months since the agreement by the Council to allocate up to £50,000 per year for three years to support the work on tackling domestic abuse.</i>	Cllr Bradford	James Hann/Elizabeth Mannington	Open	13/2/16

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
<b>9<sup>th</sup> March 2017</b>					
Annual Pay Policy Statement	<i>A review of the annual Pay Policy Statement and Ashford Living Wage Allowance.</i>	Cllr Knowles	Ian Smith	Open	11/3/16
<b>6<sup>th</sup> April 2017</b>					
<b>11<sup>th</sup> May 2017</b>					
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report</i>	Cllr Shorter	Maria Seddon	Open	13/5/16
<b>8<sup>th</sup> June 2017</b>					
Final Outturn 2016/17	<i>Final budget outturn for previous financial year</i>	Cllr Shorter	Ben Lockwood	Open	10/6/16
Annual Report 2016/17	<i>The Annual Report will build upon the contents of quarterly performance monitoring, but will also include the following information – An Introduction from the Leader and Chief Executive; Facts and figures about Ashford; Timeline of key achievements in the Borough over the calendar year; Borough achievements; and a Financial Summary.</i>	Cllr Knowles	Nicholas Clayton	Open	10/6/16

<b>Decision Item</b>	<b>Report Summary</b>	<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Open or Exempt</b>	<b>Added to Schedule</b>
Section 106 Agreements – Annual Progress Report	<i>Focus on s106 contributions received in the last year, contributions secured in new agreements and projects that have been supported by s106 funding.</i>	Cllr Bennett	Lois Jarrett	Open	10/6/16
<b>13<sup>th</sup> July 2017</b>					
Revenues & Benefits Recommended Write-Offs Schedule	<i>Proposed formal write-off of debts</i>	Cllr Shorter	Peter Purcell	Open (Exempt Appendix)	18/7/16
<b>10<sup>th</sup> August 2017</b>					
Corporate Performance Report	<i>To give Members and residents an overview of how the council is performing with a key performance ‘snapshot’.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Nicholas Clayton	Open	11/8/16
Corporate Commercial Property – Annual Report	<i>To advise of the revenue performance of the Council’s corporate property portfolio during the last financial period and to advise of proposals to increase profitability in the coming financial period.</i>	Cllr Shorter	Stewart Smith	Open	11/8/16
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report</i>	Cllr Shorter	Maria Seddon	Open	28/7/15
<b>14<sup>th</sup> September 2017</b>					

***If you wish to contact a Report Author by email, unless stated otherwise, the addresses are;  
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5/10/16