

Agenda Item No: 7
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 13th October 2016
Report Title: Homelessness Review and Strategy
Report Author: Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager
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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 15th 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

Financial Implications:	These are set out in the resources section of the draft Homelessness Strategy.
Risk Assessment	YES/NO (delete as appropriate)
Equalities Impact Assessment	YES – appendix 4 No adverse impacts identified
Other Material Implications:	None
Exemption Clauses:	None
Background Papers:	
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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.

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



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Introduction

The draft Ashford Homelessness Review and Strategy was published for consultation on the 25th 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.

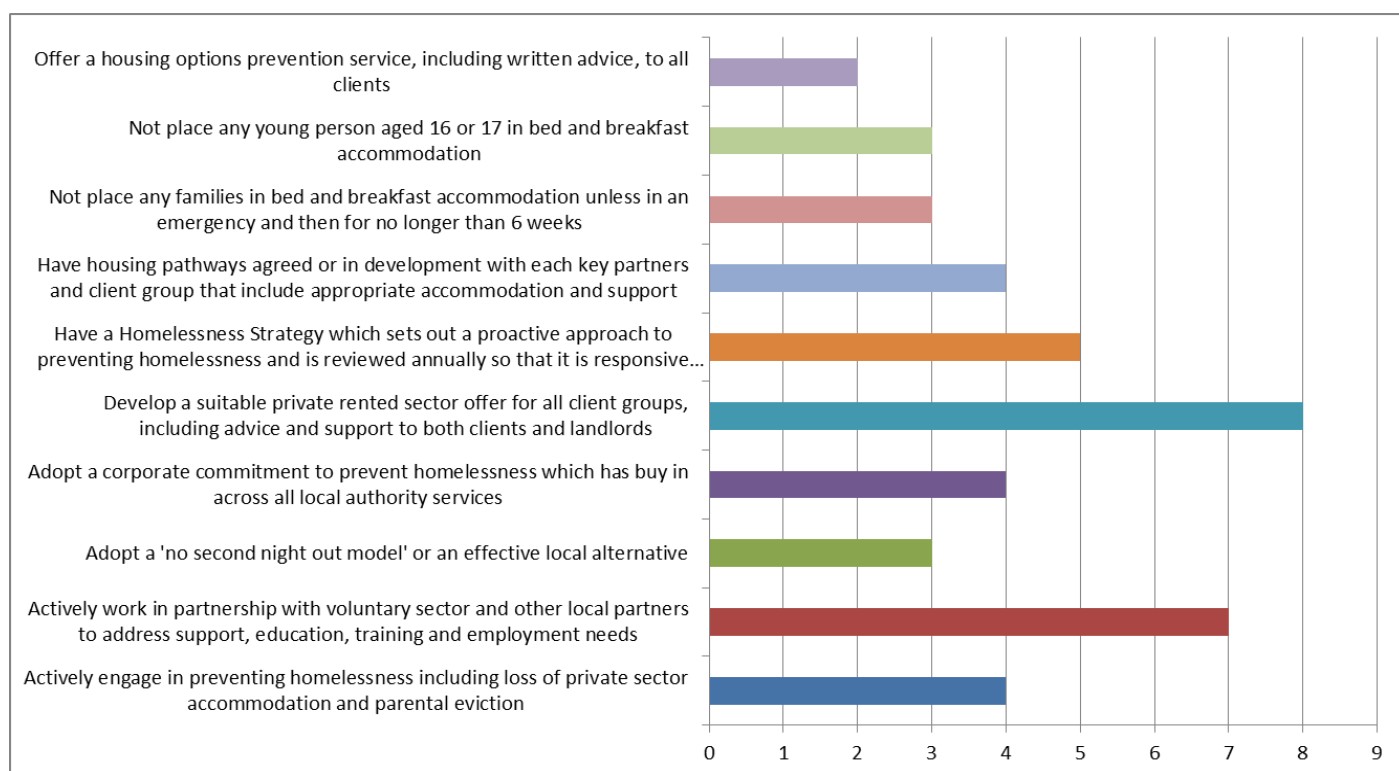
Question 5 – Of the 10 local challenges, please indicate the 3 you consider to be most important for Ashford (tick up to 3 boxes)

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

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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

Thank you



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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)¹ developing homelessness strategies toolkit. Engagement with a range of partners has increased understanding around local pressures and how services could work together to prevent and reduce homelessness.

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

The 10 local challenges are:

- 1 Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
- 2 Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education and training needs.
- 3 Offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.
- 4 Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative.
- 5 Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.
- 6 Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords.
- 7 Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.
- 8 Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs.
- 9 Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation.

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

² 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

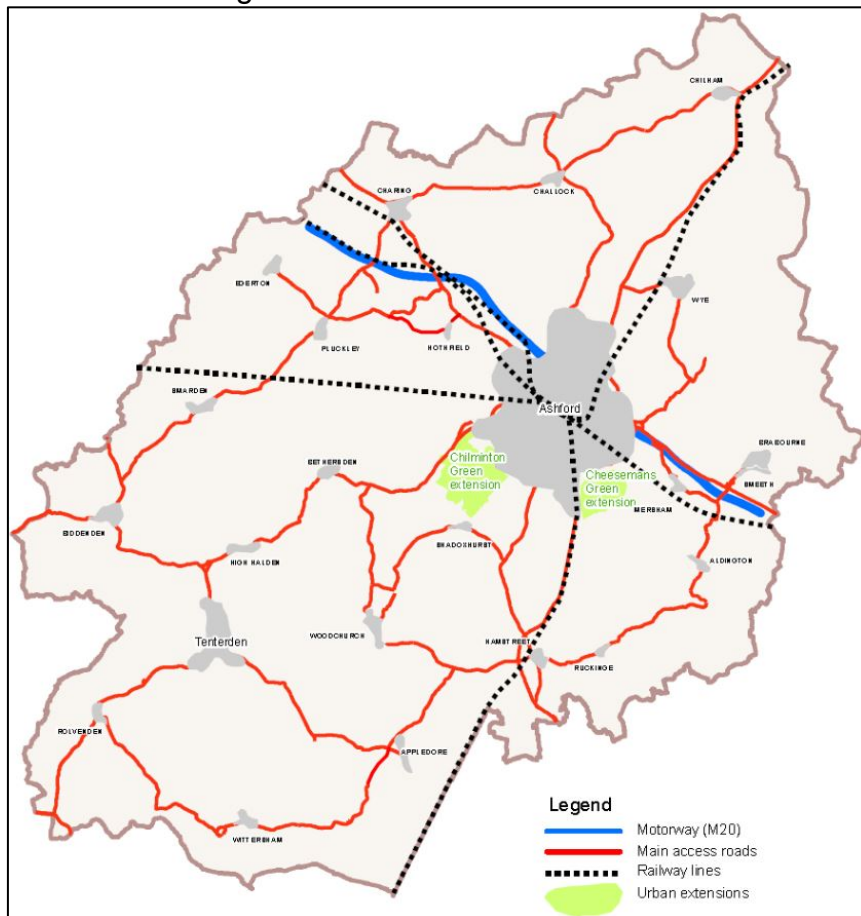
A stakeholder consultation event was held in November 2014. A range of agencies and organisations attended and a summary of the event is included from page 33. This included considering the relevance of the 10 local challenges to local circumstances and any amendments needed to reflect specific local 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 Chilmington Green will deliver in the region of 7,000 homes over the next 20 years.

Figure1: Map of Ashford Borough



Housing costs

To buy

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

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

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

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

To rent

The private rented market is currently buoyant with prices rising. A search of private rented properties⁴ (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)

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

⁴ 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 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

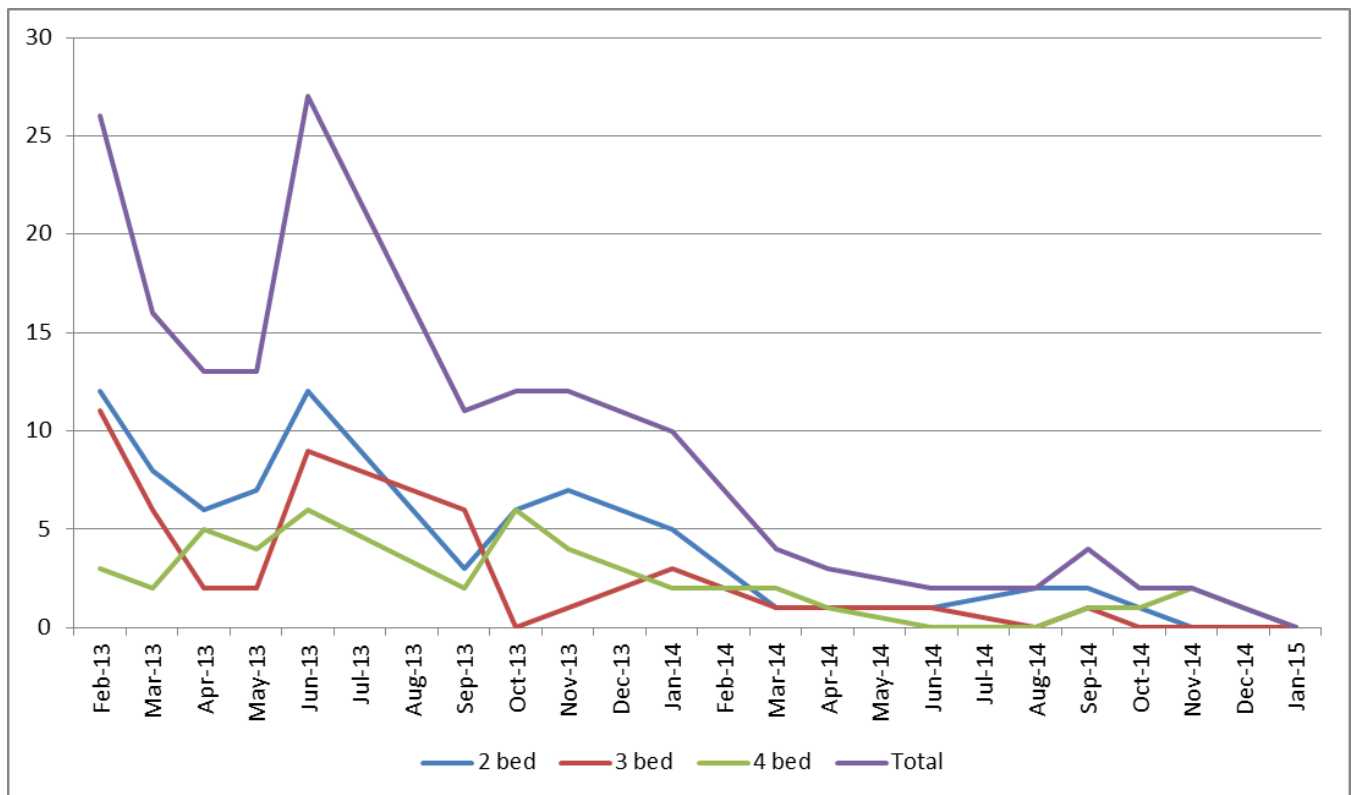


Figure 6: Number of private rented properties with rental under the local housing allowance September 2015 – February 2016

	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 2015⁵, 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%.

⁵ 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

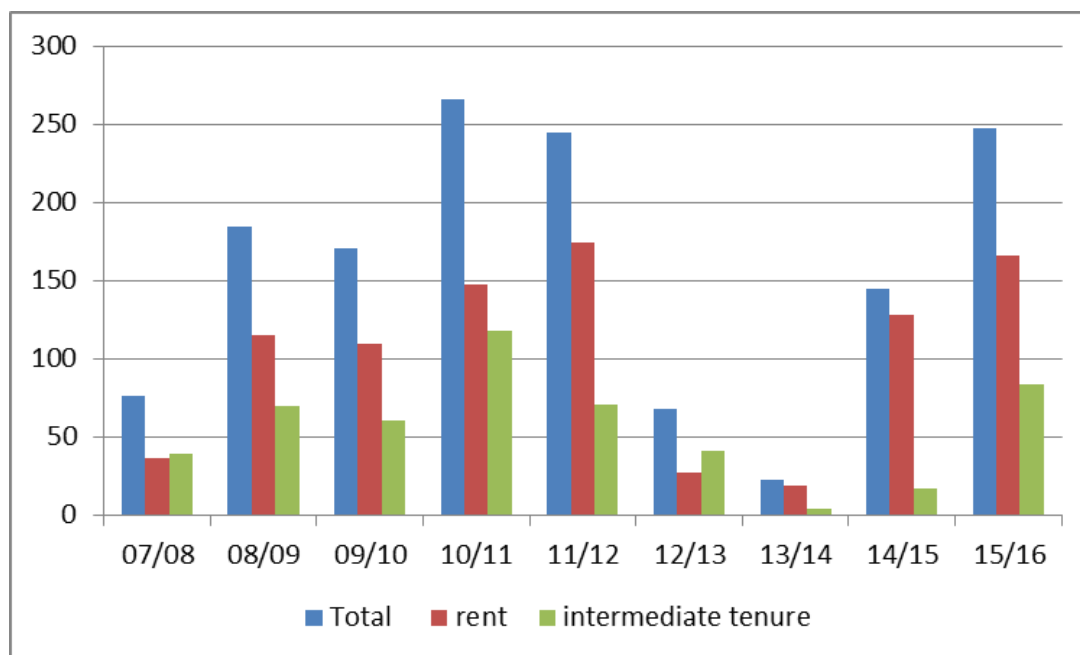
Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - resident analysis and http://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/8183/Earnings-in-Kent.pdf

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 programme⁶ 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.

⁶ <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.

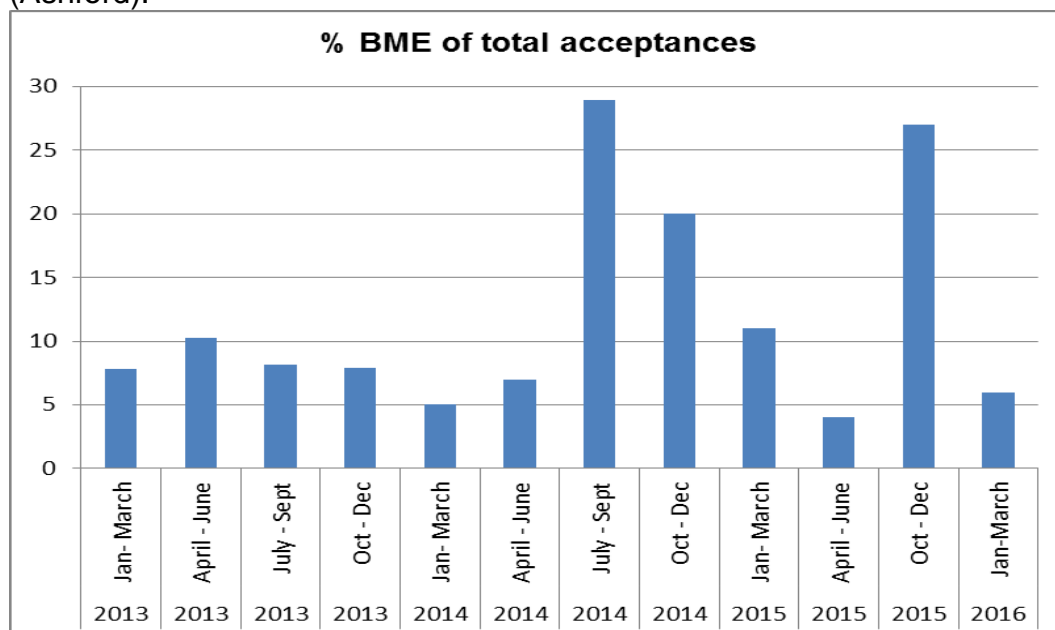
Figure 10: Predicted population growth to 2031

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)⁷. 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)⁸ Ashford has an average rank of 176 (out of 326). In 2010 Ashford ranked 198. Ashford is now more deprived, in comparison to other

⁷ Census 2011

⁸ 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 7th 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 (4th and 20th) and four LSOA's for barriers to housing and services (4th, 10th, 14th and 15th). These four LSOAs fall with the Wards of Isle of Oxney, Downs North, Saxon Shore and Downs west.

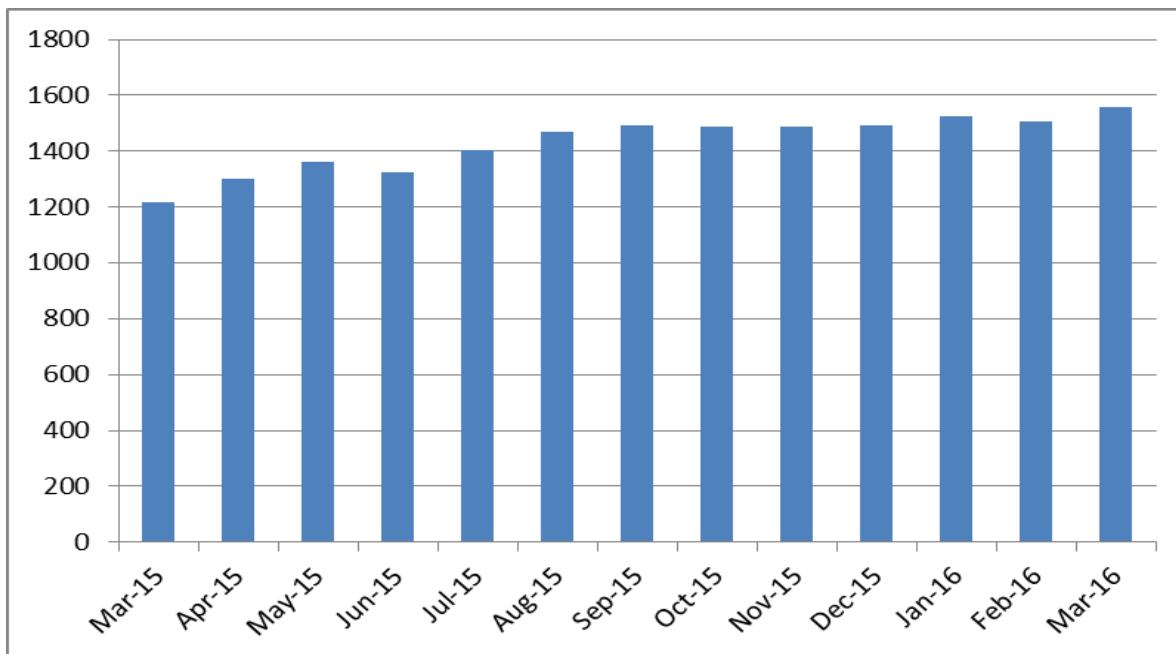
The indicators used to create the domain barriers to housing and services are; household overcrowding, homelessness, housing affordability, distances to GP surgery, food shop, primary school, post office. Housing affordability and distance to services will be of higher significance in rural areas.

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.

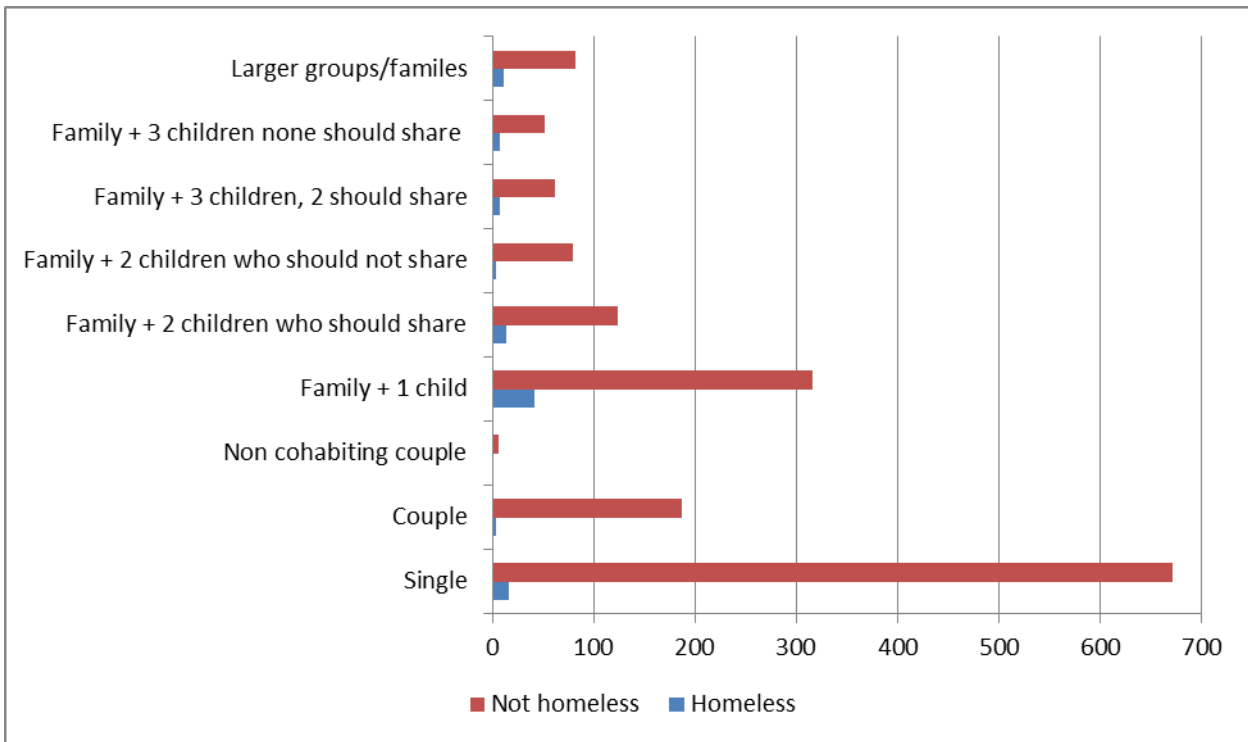
Figure13: Housing register applicants in each band (March 2016)

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 properties⁹ at 5th 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 1st 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 1st 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

⁹ 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

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

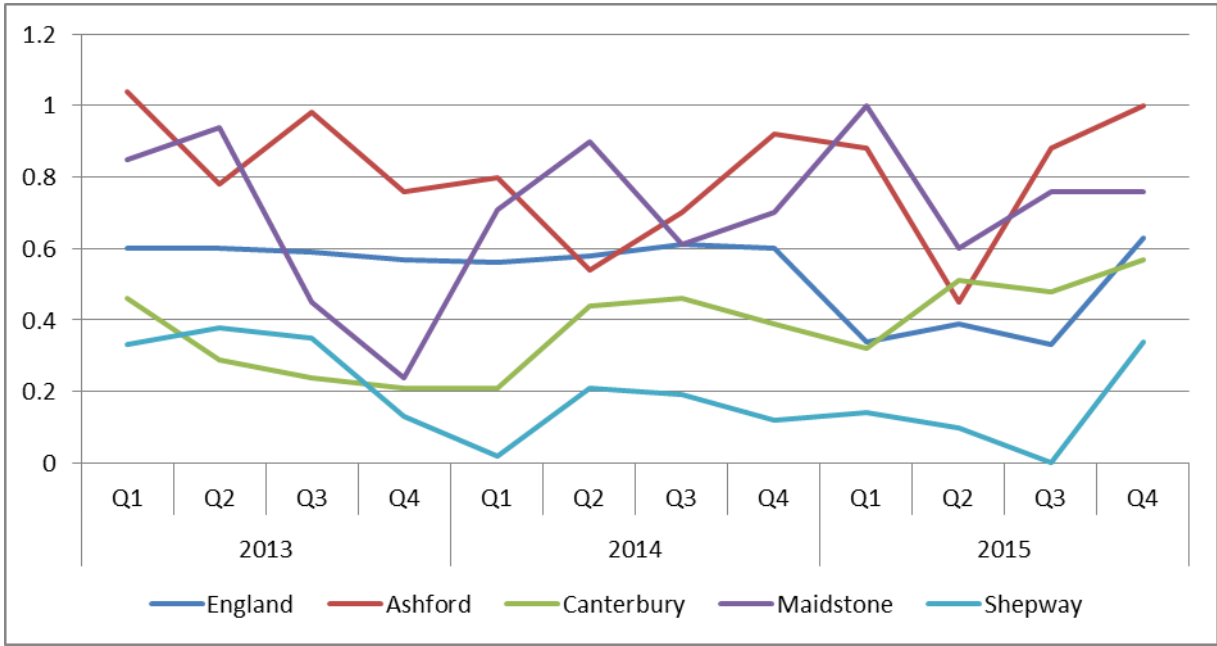
Over the last 5 years the average number of homelessness acceptances has been 164 per year. The number per year is shown in figure 18 below.

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

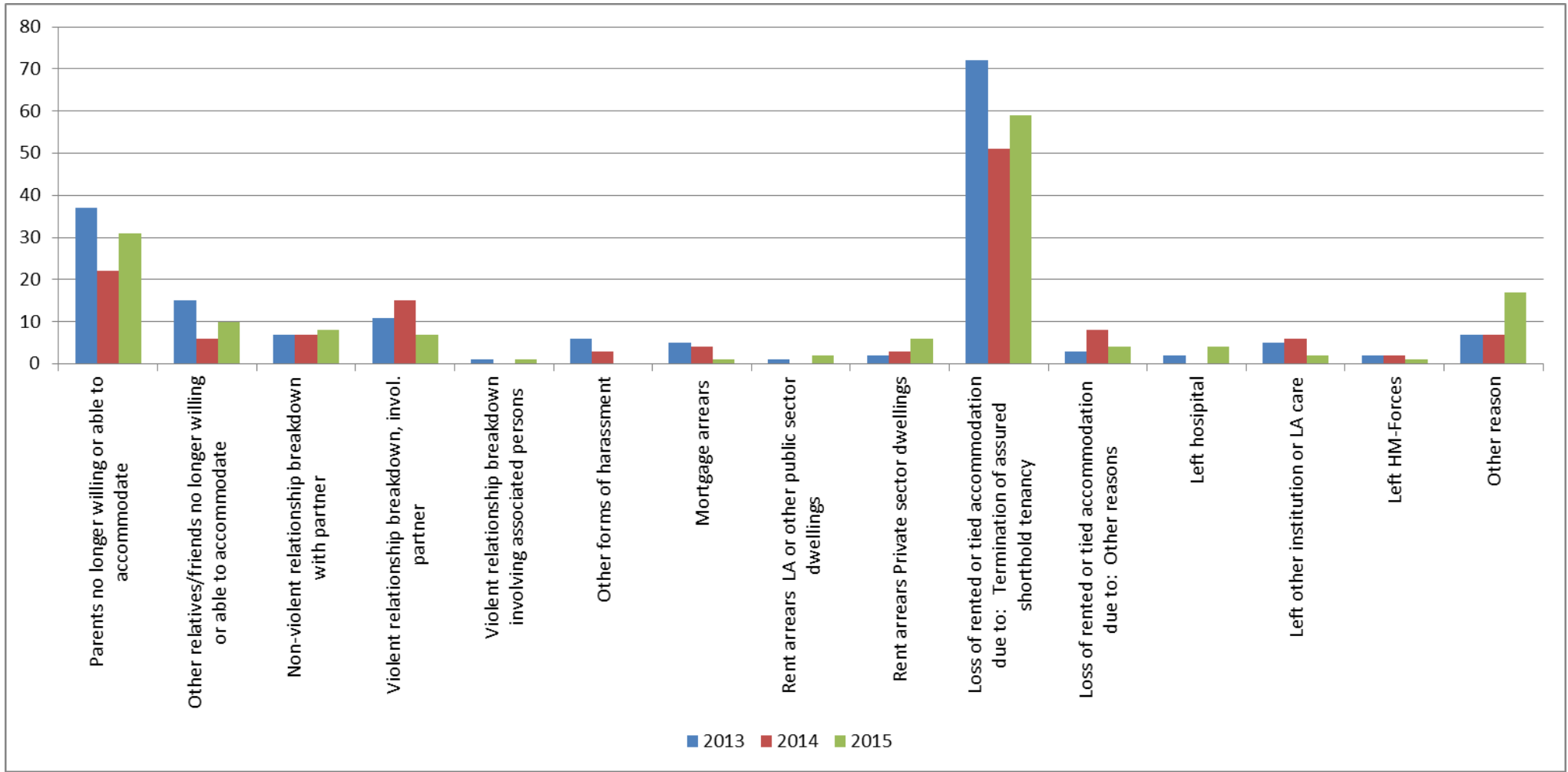
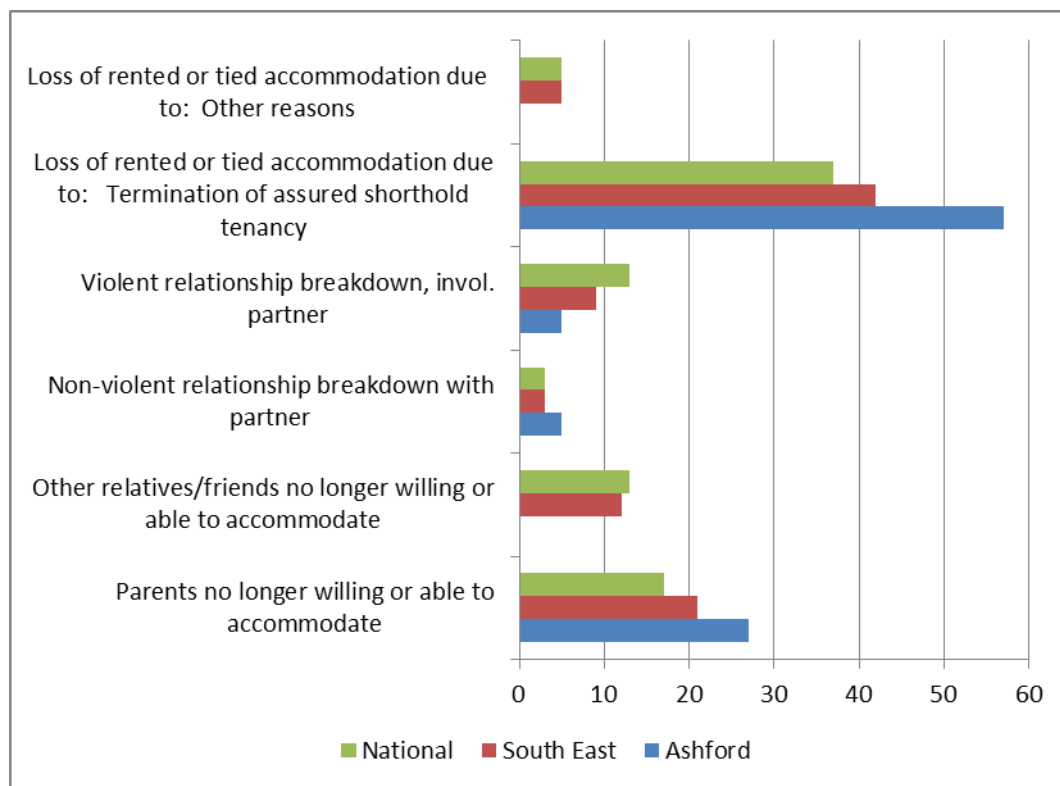


Figure 20: Reason for loss of accommodation. Yearly totals for 2013, 2014 and 2015

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



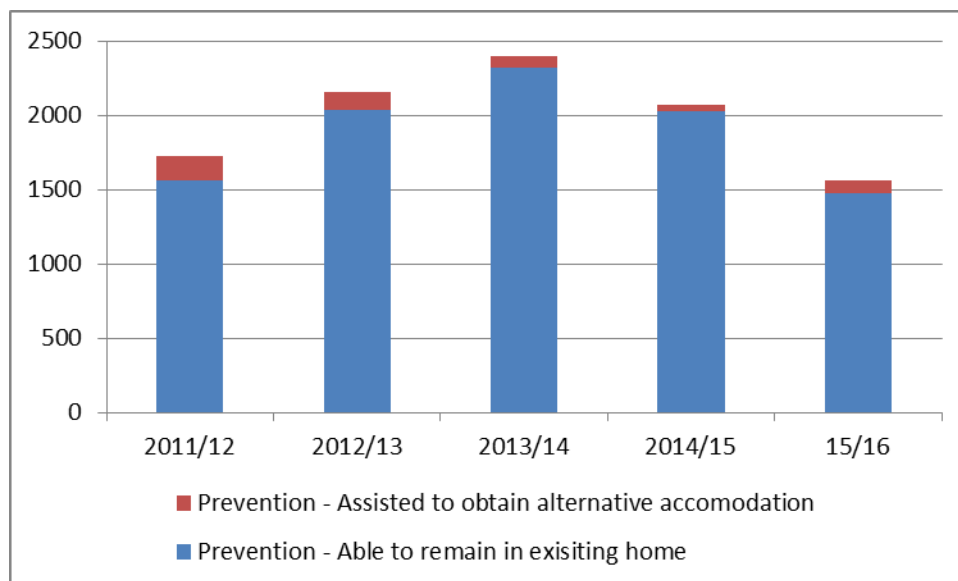
Source: From P1e via practioners support statistical compiler
<http://home.practitionersupport.org/sc/page.aspx?la=181&p=page5&y=0&q=>

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

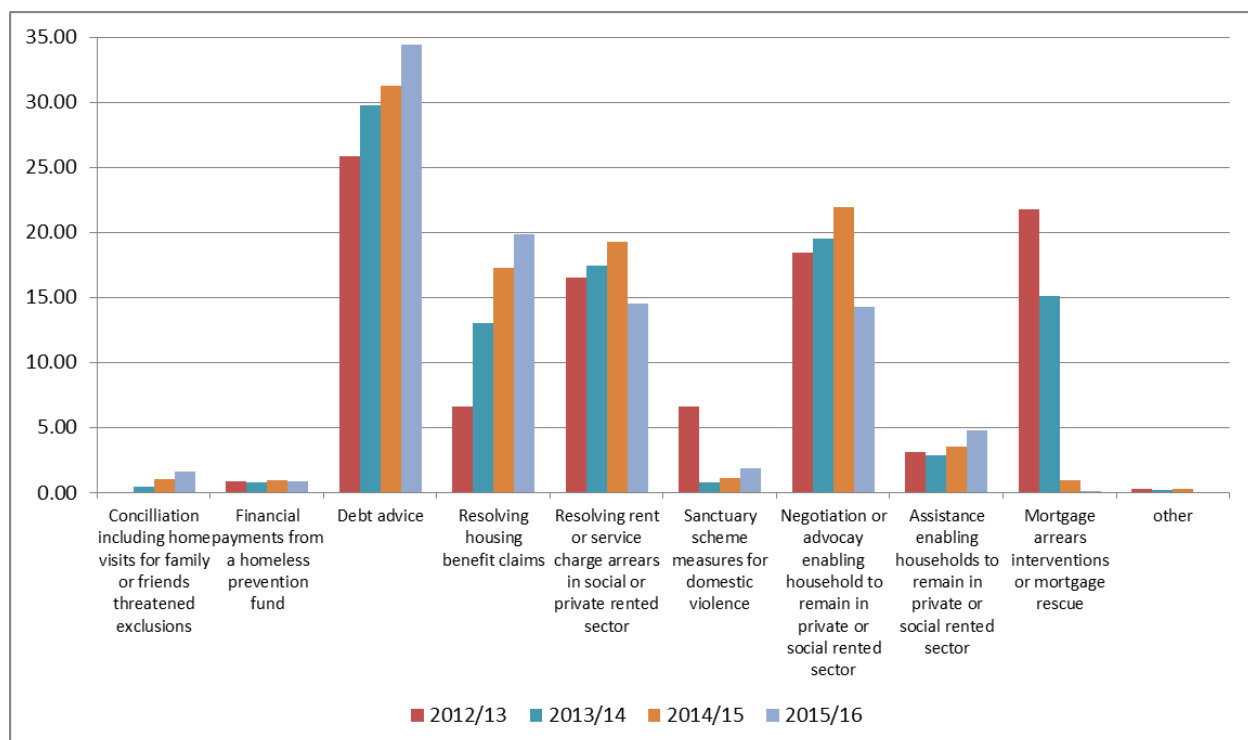


Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>
Table 792

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.

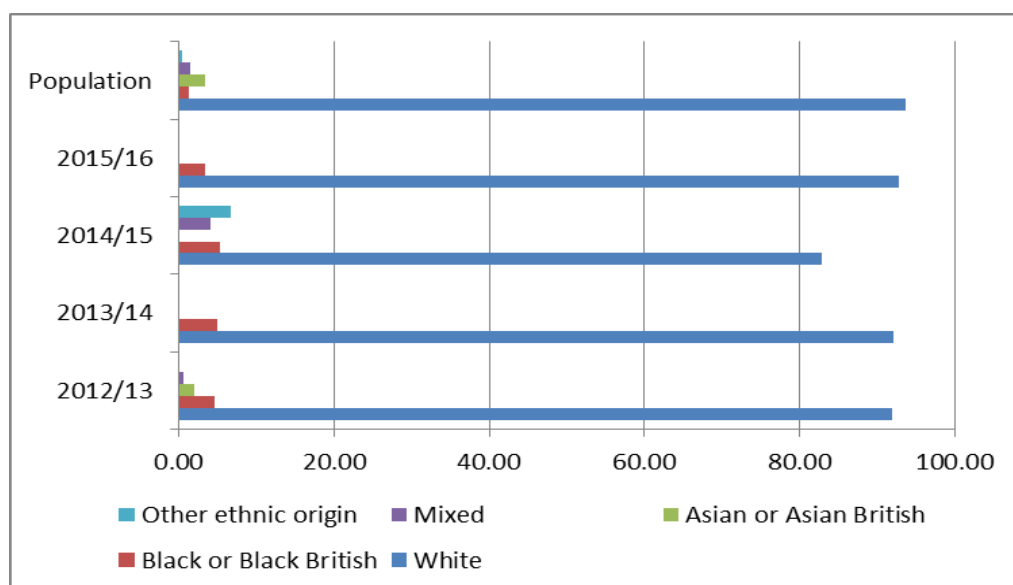
Figure 25: Number of cases where positive action was successful in relieving homelessness

	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.

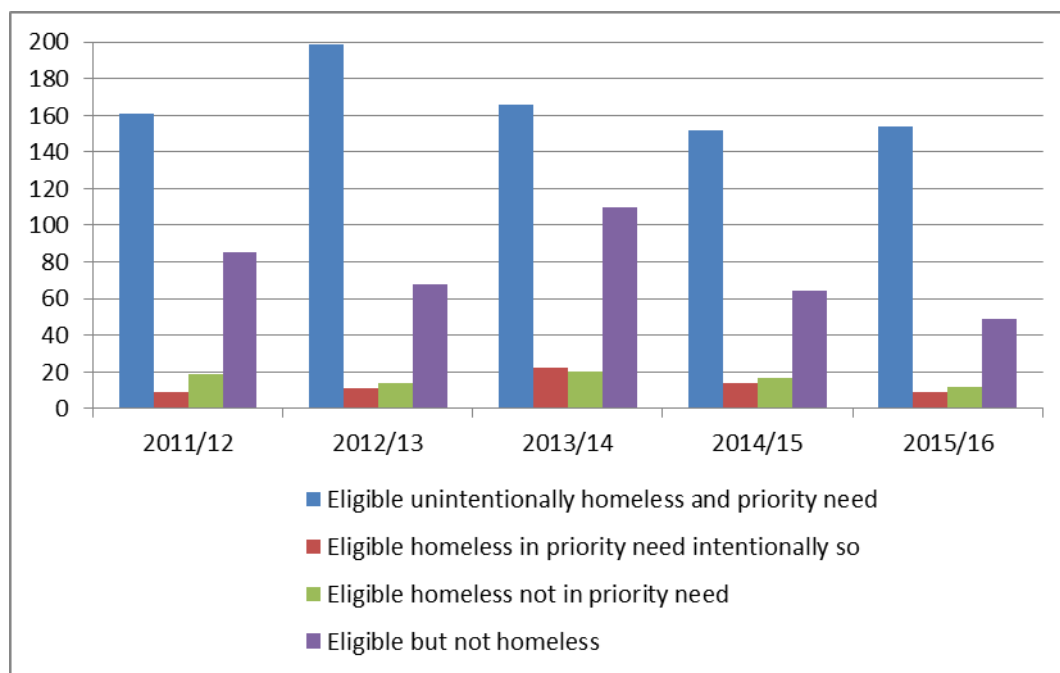


Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness> Table 784

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

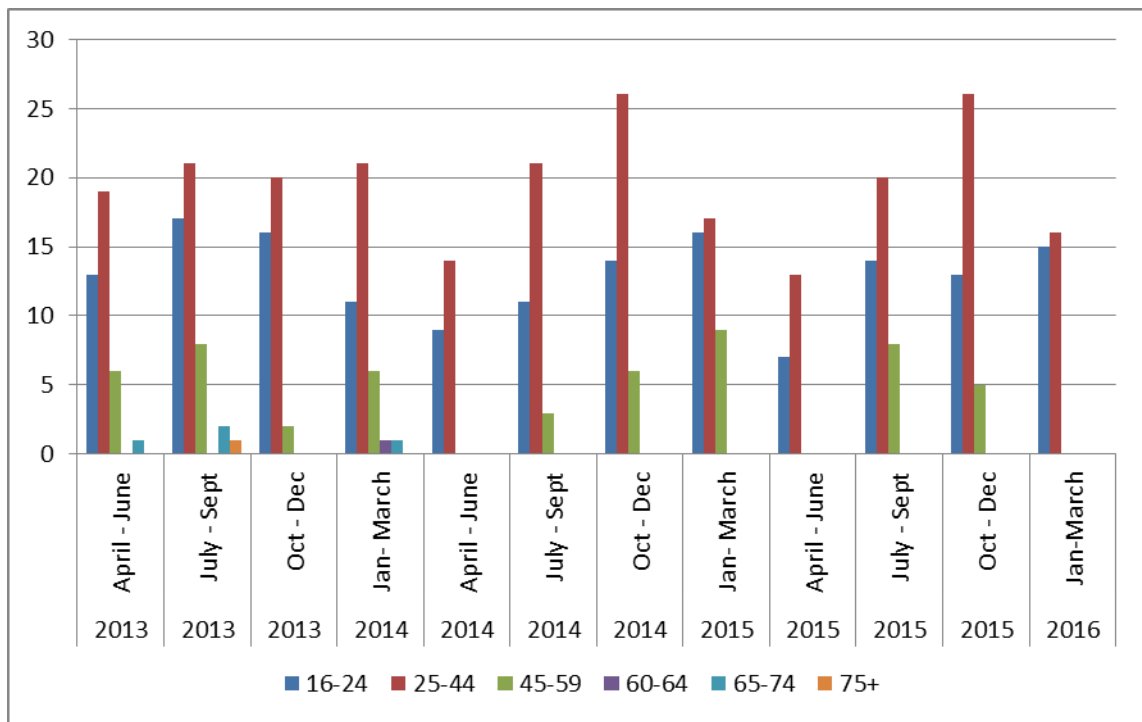
Figure 28: Comparison to the national averages for homelessness decision for the year 2014/15 and 2015/16.

	% 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

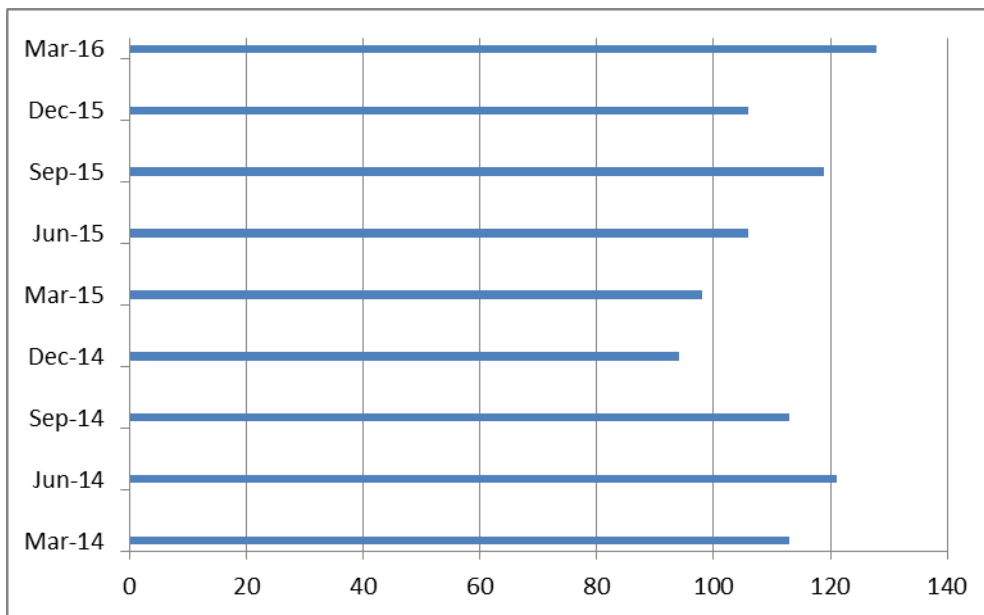


Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>
Detailed local authority level homelessness figures

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.

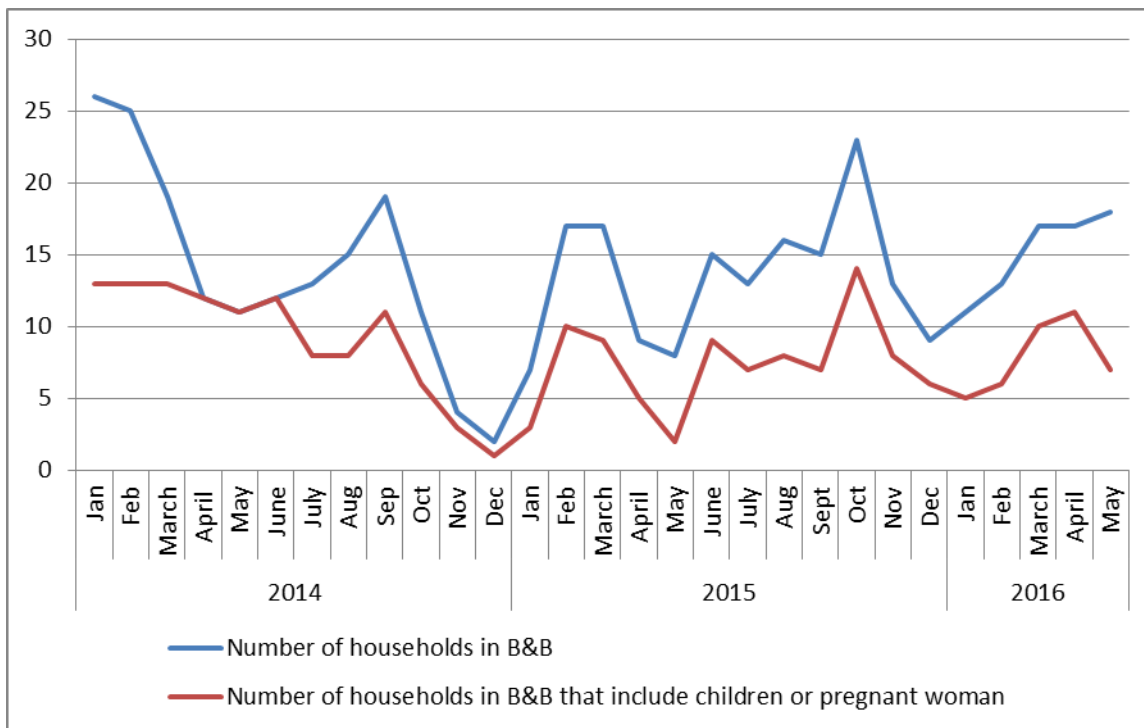
It is very unusual for a household to be placed out of the area. A household would only be offered out of area if there were no vacancies in Ashford and then only to a B&B that has been recommended by another authority.

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



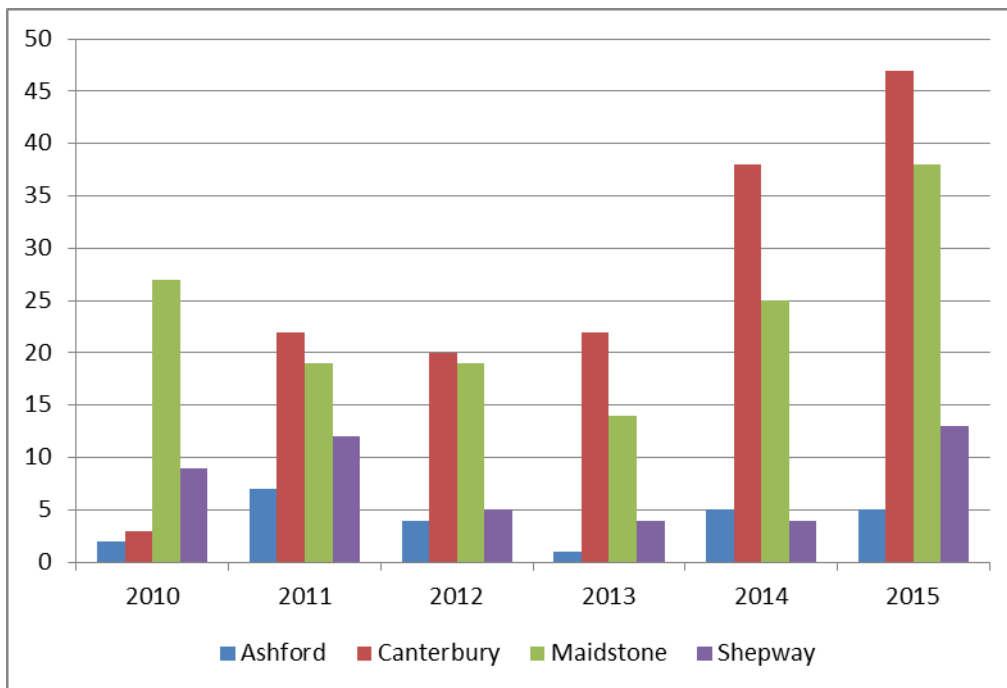
The length of time spent in bed and breakfast accommodation should be as short as is possible. Figures collected at the end of each year show a snapshot of the number of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than the six week legal limit as: 2010/11 = 9, 2011/12 = 3, 2012/13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

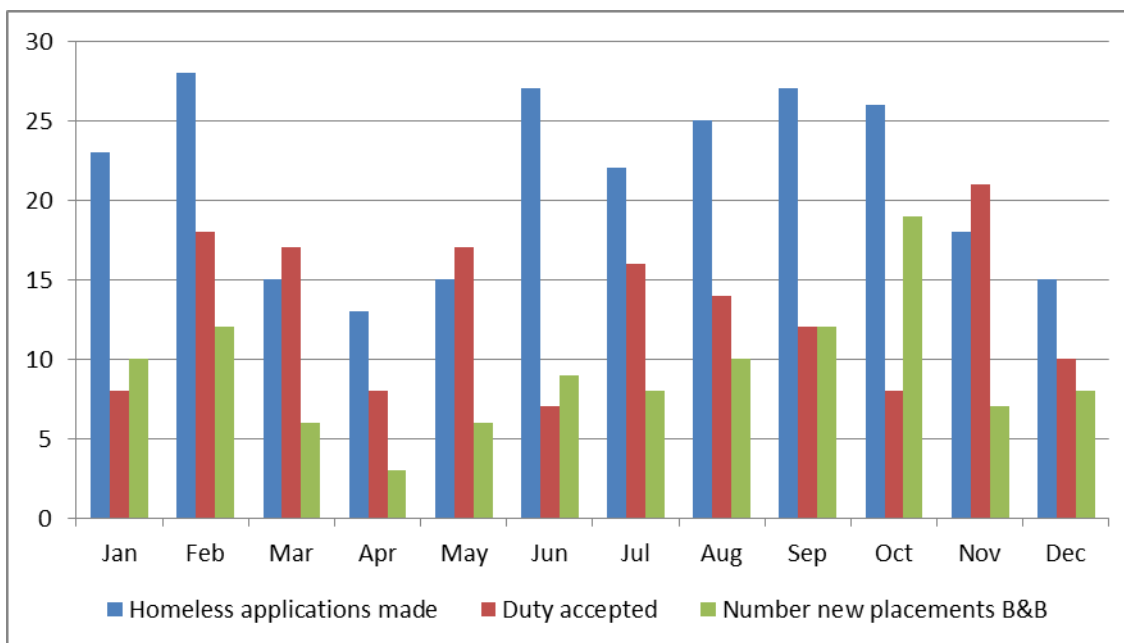
Demand on Housing Options Service

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 Policy¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.

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

¹¹ <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 Standard¹² 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.

¹² <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.

Accommodation (existing)	Client group	Number of units	Level of support	How funded (support)
Porchlight - Simon Mead House	Single homeless (18-65 yrs)	11 Individual bedrooms, shared facilities	Low level	KCC Supporting People
Homegroup - Stonham	Young single people (16-25 yrs)	Individual bedrooms, shared facilities	Low level	KCC Supporting People
Homegroup - Emergency Accommodation (based at Stonham)	Young single people (16-18)	3 Individual bedrooms, shared facilities	Low level	Ashford Borough Council
YMCA - Brookfield Court	Young Single People (16-25)	3 x 3 individual rooms, shared facilities	Low level	Ashford Borough Council
Circa - Womens Refuge	Women fleeing domestic violence	16 self contained units	Medium Level	KCC Supporting People
Christchurch House	Homeless families	8 Individual rooms, shared facilities	No support but superintendent on site daily	Ashford Borough Council
WKHA – Lantern House	Single Homeless	11 Self contained flats	High	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

Accommodation being built	Client group	Number of units	Level of support	How Funded
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 families¹³.

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.

¹³ HB circular A9/2014

Welfare Reform

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

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 outreach 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**

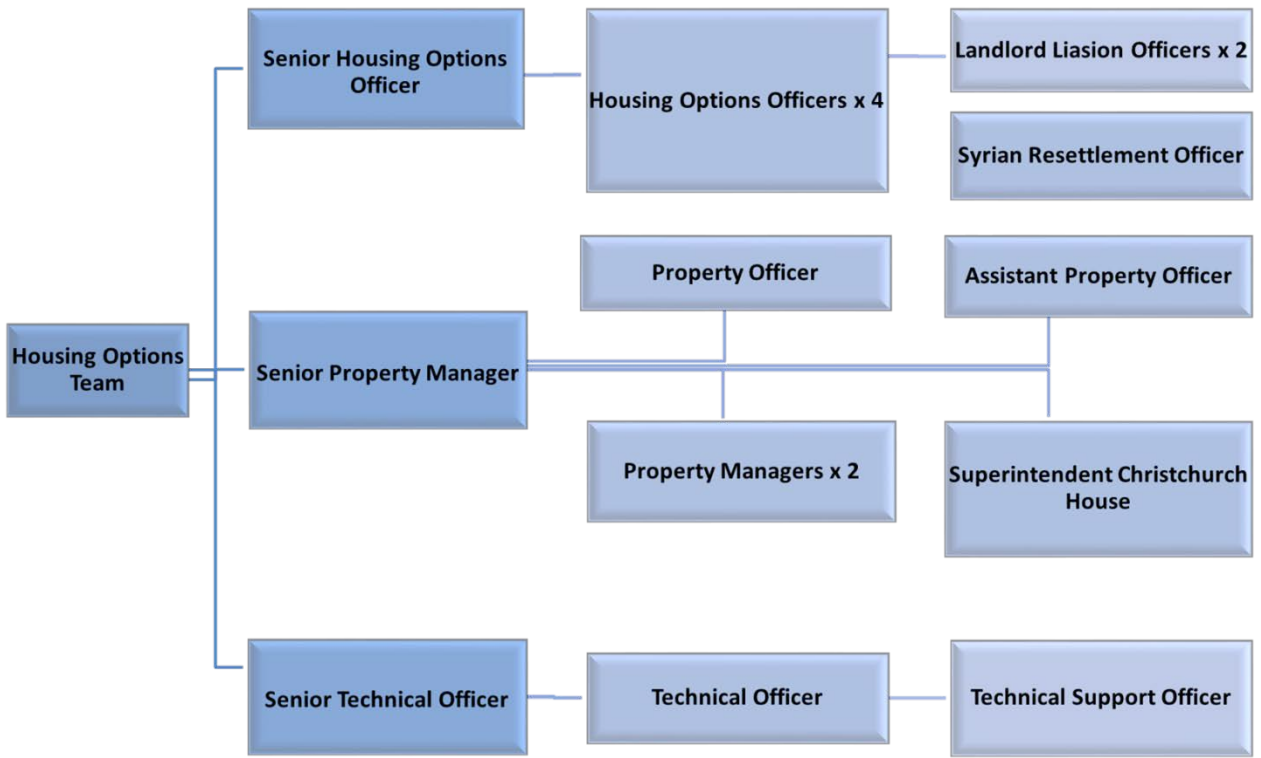
Suitable accommodation and support for people with health, care or support needs who are at risk of homelessness, or homeless.	
<p>The council contributed the review of the Supporting People Strategy and the Kent Accommodation Strategy to ensure the commissioning of support is meeting local needs.</p> <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 lives¹ 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'² 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 First³ further develops the housing strand of the Kent health inequalities strategy Mind the Gap⁴. Think Housing First focuses on how the

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49515/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf

² DCLG Making Every Contact Count August 2012

³

[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 2012-2015⁵ 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 2013-2018⁶, 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 strategy⁷ 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

⁴ http://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/14777/Mind-the-Gap-Building-bridges-to-better-health-for-all.pdf

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

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

⁷ <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 criteria⁸. 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

⁸ <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"> 1. Use of HUB at International House 2. Housing Options staff 3. Welfare Intervention Officers 4. Welfare Reform working group 5. Prevention fund 6. Tenancy training 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research potential risks of homelessness as a result of the composite picture of welfare reform changes 2. Identify measures and schemes to minimise the impacts 3. Highlight via Welfare Reform group 	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"> 1. Review location and content of information kiosks and compare to other self help alternatives. 2. Promote as a means of self help to access info and make housing bids etc. 	<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

<p>of homelessness to resolve their own problems in the private rented sector</p>			<p>Working group 3. Specialist homelessness consultancy advice</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>June/July 2016</p>	<p>in housing need to access private rented housing and become self sufficient and able to effectively manage their affairs</p>
<p>3.7 Expand ABC Lettings and Property Management (The council's social lettings agency)</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>ABC Senior Property Manager</p>	<p>1. Property Managers, ABC lettings 2. Income from management fees</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Ongoing March 2016</p>	<p>Delivery of an effective scheme to enable the council to discharge homelessness duty to accommodate into the private rented sector.</p>

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"> 1. Identify the range of partners to take part in compiling the estimate. 2. Set a date for the estimate to take place and communicate this to all partners 3. Collect the data received from partners to compile a composite picture of rough sleepers in the area and submit to govt 4. Trends to be monitored 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. October 2016 2. Early November 2016 each year 3. End of November each year. 	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

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

		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.	advice service 2. Join forces with CAB to promote debt advice and welfare benefits advice services locally 3. Monitor demand for debt advice and timescales for receiving specialist advice services / debt intervention work and identify gaps in service 4. Identify other voluntary sector groups and services providing this role 5. Consider use of 'self-help' guide to budgets 6. Investigate credit union further with Kent Savers and use of and access to budgeting accounts	November 2016 Quarterly	
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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&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&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



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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)?
Impact Factors:				
Age (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Disability (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Gender (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Gender Reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Marriage / Civil Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Race (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Religion / Belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Sexual Orientation (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Other (please specify)	<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>If further action is identified to ensure fair impacts please complete the Action Plan available on the intranet and attach it to this form</p>	

6. Monitoring and Review	
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?	