

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 24th October 2017

Report Title: Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-2018

Report Author & Job Title: Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager

Portfolio Holder Cllr Gerald White
Portfolio Holder for: Housing

Summary:

This year the report reviews the Housing Framework from adoption in July 2013 to end of March 2017. The purpose of this is to provide an overview of what has been achieved, any areas where actions have not been progressed together with some commentary on the changes and challenges that have arisen since the Housing Framework was adopted. The Annual Report will then become part of the evidence to inform a new housing strategy. Finally the report will outline the proposed structure for the Housing Strategy going forward.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Committee is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the Annual Report and agree its publication on the Ashford Borough Council website**

Policy Overview: Housing Framework 2013-18 sets the overarching priorities for the Housing Service.

Financial Implications: None

Legal Implications None

Equalities Impact Assessment Not required because this is a review of an existing strategy and an EIA was undertaken for the Housing Framework 2013-18

Other Material Implications: None

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Housing Framework 2013 – 2018

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

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Report Title: Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-2018

Introduction and Background

1. Following adoption of the Housing Framework in July 2013, an annual report has been presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This set out yearly progress against the action plan.
2. This year the review updates the action plan from adoption to the end of March 2017. The purpose of this is to provide an overview of achievements, highlight areas where actions may not have been progressed and comment on the changes and challenges that have arisen since the adoption of the Framework.
3. This review will become part of the evidence base to inform the development of a new housing strategy in the coming months.

Summary of Annual Report 2017

4. The full annual report of the Housing Framework 2013-2018 can be found at Appendix 1.
5. The five priorities of the Housing Framework were each underpinned by a number of actions designed to achieve the aim of each of the five priorities. There is an overall rate of 76% of successfully completed actions.

The table below shows the percentage of actions successfully completed for each of the 5 priorities.

Priority	Percentage completed
1. Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas	90%
2. Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures	43%
3. Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people	80%
4. Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement	71%
5. Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness	100%

6. Key achievements arising from the actions of each priority are as follows:

Priority 1: Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas

- 577 additional affordable homes provided
- Property Company formed, with 21 homes in its portfolio for private rent
- 128 assisted moves completed, reducing under occupancy in council homes
- 360 mutual exchanges approved, assisting people to 'swap' homes
- Void period in council homes reduced year on year to current level of 17 days
- 30 housing fraud cases successfully investigated
- Over £1million of Right to Buy receipts reinvested in affordable housing

Priority 2: Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures

- Continued investment in energy efficiency of council homes
- BRE Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database commissioned to help target poor condition in private sector
- 'Delivering Affordable Warmth - a fuel poverty strategy for Kent' adopted by the council in March 2017.
- Seven properties in the private rented sector had heating systems renewed as part of the landlord accreditation scheme

Priority 3: Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people

- Nine private landlords are part of the accredited landlords scheme
- Social Lettings Agency has increase the number of properties on full management option to 82 and manages properties on behalf of the Property Company
- 1,052 adaptations have been carried out for council tenants to a value of £1,478,576.
- 186 disabled facilities grants have been completed in the private sector with a total spend of £1,827,829
- 160 additional units of self contained supported accommodation together with spaces for communal activities and support staff have been delivered
- In Council's sheltered housing scheme remodelling programme, Farrow Court phase 1 completed and Danemore started on site

Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement

- Joint working with other organisations has brought forward a number of neighbourhood initiatives, such as Project Purple with Ashford Oaks Primary School
- The Ashford Tenants Panel had been reviewed and an important aspect of their new role is being the 'designated person' in the complaints procedure

- A monthly e-newsletter 'Tell-Us' for tenants was launched in February 2015
- Home contents insurance scheme negotiated and promoted to tenants
- A new Charging Policy was approved in October 2014 for the introduction of pitch fees and fees for inspecting licenced park home sites

Priority 5: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

- A homelessness review was undertaken and revised Homelessness Strategy adopted in October 2016
- Early intervention and prevention work has reduced the number of 'homeless tonight' presentations
- Welfare reform has and will continue to present a number of challenges. Housing Options Officers, Area Managers and the Welfare Reform Officers work with tenants to prevent rent arrears in both the social and private housing sectors
- Christchurch House short stay accommodation purchased and refurbished providing an alternative to Bed and Breakfast for 8 homeless households

7. Since the adoption of the Housing Framework a number of changes have occurred and continue to be put in place.
- a) Ongoing implementation of welfare reform including:
 - Introduction of the social size criteria (bedroom tax)
 - Further reduction of the benefit cap
 - Reduction in Housing Association and Local Authority rents by 1% for 4 years, from 2016 (supported housing from 2017/18)
 - Freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates for 4 years (from April 2016)
 - Social rents entered into after April 2016, eligible for Housing Benefit, will be subject to the Local Housing Allowance from April 2018.
 - Under 35 years old entitlement reduced to shared room rate of local housing allowance
 - Freeze on working age benefits (tax credits) for 4 years (from April 2016)
 - Support for children through tax credits and universal credit limited to 2 children
 - Removal of the entitlement to Housing Benefit & Housing Support within Universal Credit for those aged 18 – 21 (from March 2018)
 - b) Mortgage rescue scheme closed to new applicants, March 2014. Changes to support for mortgage interest payments reducing the assistance available
 - c) Increase in the maximum discount available for the right to buy (up to 70% or £78,600) and a reduction in the qualifying period to 3 years
 - d) The Housing and Planning Act 2016:
 - Extended the right to buy to Housing Association tenants (subject to a pilot)

- Introduced concept of starter homes – subsequently amended in the Housing White Paper to require 10% of affordable housing to be affordable home ownership products
 - Introduced the sale of higher value council homes
 - Mandatory use of fixed term tenancies for local authorities
- e) The Housing White Paper 2017:
- Encourages local authorities to consider a range of models/mechanisms to deliver affordable housing
 - Measures to improve the private rented sector
- f) Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, increased the ability to tackle and deal with anti social behaviour
- g) The Better Care Fund requires the pooling of health and social care budgets to provide an integrated system to improve the health and wellbeing of local populations. Where prevention and person-centred care becomes the norm. There is growing recognition of the important contribution of housing to the integration agenda.
- h) Within the private sector the Mobile Homes Act and regulations, the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm regulations and aspects of the Housing and Planning Act bring in legislation to improve conditions in the private sector and tackle rogue landlords.
8. The Housing Service works proactively to manage changes brought in new legislation. As part of this a wholesale review of the service was undertaken in 2016. This resulted in a restructure of the service to ensure it remains as efficient and effective as possible in delivery of services.

Equalities Impact Assessment

9. Not required as this is review of the Housing Framework for which an EIA was undertaken during its development.

Next Steps in Process

10. Further to agreement of the committee, the full Annual Report (appendix 1) will be published on the Council's website.
11. The report will become part of the evidence base to inform the development of the next Housing Strategy going forward from 2018.
12. Housing has a wide ranging positive influence in many areas, in addition to providing good quality accommodation, such as the economy, health, and the environment. It is proposed to set out a Housing Statement and then develop a number of specific strategies to achieve the overall vision.
13. This approach will enable more focused and targeted strategies to evolve which should provide for greater engagement with partners and stakeholders with an interest in each strategic area.

14. The proposed structure is illustrated on page 32 of the Annual Report attached at appendix 1.

Conclusion

15. Since adoption of the Housing Framework in 2013 many changes have taken place. The Housing Service has adapted to accommodate these changes and fulfil its statutory duties.
16. The forthcoming Housing Statement and sub strategies will seek to continue to deliver an efficient and effective housing service within the constraints of the resources available.

Portfolio Holder's Views

17. Within the last few years many changes have been seen across the housing sector. Throughout this the Service has continually assessed its processes and practices to ensure delivery is as effective and efficient as possible within the resources available. I commend the service for achieving 76% of the actions set in the Housing Framework during a time of unprecedented change in the sector acknowledging that there is still more to be done.
(Cllr Gerald White)

Contact and Email

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APPENDIX 1



Housing Framework 2013-2018

Annual Report 2017

Jennifer Shaw
Housing Strategy Manager

Introduction

The Housing Framework 2013-18 is now due for review. This year the Annual Report will look back over the whole lifetime of the Housing Framework to March 2017. This will assist in setting the context for developing a new Strategy going forward; noting our achievements and assessing where we are in what has been an ever changing and challenging environment across all spheres of housing delivery and management.

Most notably the ongoing implementation of welfare reform, the Housing and Planning Act 2016, the Housing White Paper 2017, the introduction of the Better Care Fund and looking ahead the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Adopted in July 2013, The Housing Framework's five priorities are:

1. Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas
2. Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures
3. Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people
4. Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement
5. Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

The Housing Framework 2013-18 document is available at:

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

Successful delivery of the action plan involves a number of partners and many projects have been achieved by joint working with a range of other organisations both in the statutory and voluntary sectors. Overall 76% of the actions have been achieved. The table below summarises the status of each action as either:

Achieved ✓, Ongoing ◇, Missed ✗

Priority 1: Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas

Action	Status
a) Wherever possible maximise the number of section106 sites achieving 30 or 35 per cent affordable housing in urban and rural areas respectively	✓
b) Deliver a minimum of 59 new homes through the local authority new build programme	✓
c) Create a local housing and regeneration company	✓
d) Housing company to develop private and affordable housing to an initial value of £10 million to meet local needs	✗
e) Make best use of existing stock including ensuring appropriate accommodation used to meet housing needs, reduce under occupation and meet void targets, continue tenancy fraud investigations	✓
f) Support Housing Association led developments to create mixed communities in urban and rural areas	✓
g) Develop innovative ways to improve delivery of local needs housing, including a cross subsidy approach and land purchase options	✓
h) Utilise receipts from the right to buy to develop more affordable homes	✓
i) Support self - build homes	✓
j) Identify and return to use long term empty properties	✓

(90% achieved ✓)

Priority 2: Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures

Action	Status
a) Develop and implement a private sector housing strategy	✗
b) Promote uptake of energy efficiency measures across all tenures	◊
c) Work to reduce fuel poverty across all tenures	✗
d) Continue trial to insulate hard to heat homes in ABC stock and roll out main programme in 2015	✓
e) promote uptake of renewable energy measures	✓
f) Undertake private sector stock condition survey	✗
g) Maximise resources by linking with other agencies	✓

(43% achieved ✓)

Priority 3: Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people

Action	Status
a) Increase availability of well managed private rented homes	✓
b) Continue to increase the number of homes within the Ashford Better Choice social lettings agency portfolio	✓
c) Identify and develop bespoke properties for disabled families through local authority new build programme	✓
d) Provide disabled adaptations for ABC tenants	✓
e) Work with partners to identify and increase range of supported housing for vulnerable people to meet local needs (including ex service personnel), seek alternative ways to generate revenue funding	✓
f) Manage the Disabled Facilities Grant budget to maximise assistance provided	✓
g) Remodel and improve council-owned sheltered housing accommodation	✓
h) Provide increased provision of gypsy and traveller sites	◇
i) Develop Older Persons Framework	✗
j) Increase the number of well planned and managed shared houses (HMOs)	✓

(80% achieved ✓)

Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement

Action	Status
a) Encourage housing providers to be actively involved in good housing management	✓
b) Regenerate Brookfield Road and Bybrook areas	◇
c) Review sheltered housing service	✓
d) Joint working with agencies to deliver neighbourhood improvements	✓
e) Address poor standards in private sector, including park homes and investigate options for self funded improvements e.g. equity release	◇
f) Maintain decent homes standard in council-owned stock	✓
g) Increase tenant involvement and responsibility through tenant panel and tenant scrutiny	✓

(71% achieved ✓)

Priority 5: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

Action	Status
a) Implement the homelessness strategy focus on: Preventing homelessness wherever possible, providing quality housing services and suitable accommodation for homeless people, homes with support, settled and sustainable homes	✓
b) Raise awareness of the implications of welfare reform to tenants	✓
c) Identify tenants who will lose benefit and advise of choices to manage reduced income	✓
d) Monitor external influences, identify pressures on meeting housing needs and respond to minimise any negative effects	✓

(100% achieved ✓)

Housing Framework 2013-2018 - Review of Action Plan (From adoption in July 2013 to end of March 2017)

The following section provides commentary on each action from the adoption of the Housing Framework to end of March 2017.

Priority 1:

IMPROVE THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO MEET LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS IN ASHFORD BOROUGH'S URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

Key Points

- 577 additional affordable homes provided (average of 157/year – need = 368/year)
- Property Company formed, procuring open market rental properties
- 128 assisted moves, reducing under occupancy in council homes
- 360 mutual exchanges approved, assisting people to 'swap' homes
- Void period in council homes reduced year on year to 17 days
- 30 housing fraud cases successfully investigated

Action	Review	
<p>a) Wherever possible maximise the number of section 106 sites achieving 30 or 35 per cent affordable housing in urban and rural areas respectively</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>Housing Services has liaised closely with the planning department to negotiate the maximum amount of affordable housing on each qualifying site. However this may sometimes be below the policy target due to site viability which can reduce the onsite delivery or force a commuted sum to be taken in lieu.</p> <p>From July 2013 to March 2017, 280 units of affordable housing were delivered on developer led sites, including 67 extra care units as the affordable housing quota for the 'Bluebells' development. 3 sites were granted planning permission prior to the current core strategy policy and therefore are required to deliver 20% affordable housing (Repton Park, Park Farm and Cheesemans Green - Finberry)</p> <p>On large sites delivered in phases, the agreed percentage of affordable housing will be for the total number of affordable homes across the entire site so within each phase the percentage of affordable homes may vary.</p> <p>In addition some Registered Providers (Housing Associations) have built out 100% affordable housing schemes and this has added a further 79 affordable homes including 21 built on rural exception sites for local needs.</p> <p>Supported housing also contributes to the overall total of affordable housing delivered in the borough. 126 supported housing units were delivered; 8 for young people, 11 for homeless people and 107 for older people (including 33 as part of the Farrow Court redevelopment by the Council).</p>	
<p>Observations:</p> <p>Housing continues to liaise closely with planning policy and development control to ensure the maximum amount of affordable housing is delivered onsite wherever possible.</p> <p>Going forward the draft local plan policy will not yield sufficient affordable housing (particularly affordable /social rented) to meet demand, through developer led, allocated sites.</p> <p>Uncertainly over revenue funding for supported housing has serious implications for the delivery of supported housing schemes. The council will need to consider how further affordable housing can be delivered in addition to that coming forward through s106 agreements.</p>		
<p>b) Deliver a minimum of 59 new homes through the local</p>	<p>The council has provided a total of 133 affordable homes through, the purchase of empty homes, the buy back of former council homes, the purchase of 21 homes as part of a s106 site (Poppyfields), the provision of 8 units of temporary accommodation at Christchurch House and 33 new flats for older people as part of the Farrow</p>	

<p>authority new build programme</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>Court remodelling scheme (71 shortly to be completed in phase 2), alongside the building of 38 new homes for affordable rent.</p>
<p>Observations:</p> <p>A further 63 homes are in the pipeline to be completed under the council's new build programme, including the re-provision of Danemore sheltered housing scheme, that will include 4 bungalows for outright sale.</p> <p>Housing service was recognised as 'Housing Business Ready' from the Housing Finance Initiative</p> <p>Further programme from 2018 – 2024 approved at July 2017 Cabinet could deliver 190 homes</p> <p>An increase in the HRA debt cap could allow for greater flexibility to explore land purchase/joint ventures etc. to increase affordable housing delivery further.</p>	
<p>c) Create a local housing and regeneration company</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>The property company, A Better Choice for Property Limited was formed in April 2014.</p>
<p>Observations: The property company is commercially driven and homes are let at market rents.</p>	
<p>d) Housing company to develop private and affordable housing to an initial value of £10 million to meet local needs</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✗</p>	<p>The property company currently has 21 properties within its portfolio with a value of approximately £3.6m at end of March 2017.</p>

Observations: Increased house prices challenge the procurement of new property in to the company. Value of portfolio had not reached target set in Housing Framework at end of March 2017. The Property Company remit is now to deliver a private rented portfolio of property.

e) Make best use of existing stock including ensuring appropriate accommodation used to meet housing needs, reduce under occupation and meet void targets, continue tenancy fraud investigations

Status: 

A number of options are used to ensure the Council's housing stock is occupied appropriately: assisted moves, mutual exchanges, reducing voids, introduction of fixed term tenancies and tackling tenancy fraud. 128 assisted moves were facilitated between July 2013 and March 2017. This scheme incentivises people aged over 50 to move to a smaller property and therefore free-up family sized homes.

Mutual exchanges enable tenants of council and housing association homes to 'swap' homes where agreed. A total of 360 exchanges have taken place. (13/14 = 104, 14/15 = 98, 15/16 = 90, 16/17 = 68) The ability to mutually exchange assisted some tenants to move where they were under occupying in their accommodation and would have faced a cut to their housing benefit due to the introduction of the social size criteria.

Consistently managed processes, performance measurement and reporting has seen the void period for council owned homes has decrease over the last four years from an average of 21 days to 17 days.

The housing service works closely with the corporate fraud team and has achieved 30 successful cases since July 2013 where property was gained or someone removed from housing list/homeless (housing duty discharged). This included 18 properties gained; using the nationally attributed saving figure of £18,000 per property would show ABC saving £324,000.

The introduction of fixed term tenancies enables the council to assess a households circumstances when their tenancy comes up for renewal. There are a range of options available to the council as set out in the tenancy policy to ensure the home is still appropriate for the tenants needs and if they should move to other affordable housing or be assisted to find accommodation in the private sector. The first fixed term tenancies in council owned homes are due for review in September 2017.

Observations:

Assisted moves for under occupancy are restricted to those tenants over 50 and moving within ABCs own stock.

A strategy, policy and procedure setting out the approach and criteria for reviewing fixed term tenancies was approved by Cabinet in September 2017.

Close working with the corporate fraud team is continuing and introduced a more stringent verification of Right to Buy applications from May 2017.	
f) Support Housing Association led developments to create mixed communities in urban and rural areas	
Status: 	<p>Lettings plans are used to ensure homes are let to wherever possible contribute to creating sustainable communities. In agreement with our Housing Association partners an overarching lettings plan was introduced in December 2015.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To allocate to those in housing need. · To create a local thriving community. · To inhibit the problems of anti-social behaviour (ASB) reported, relating to the rented properties. · To inhibit potential breaches of tenancy. · To ensure land covenants are complied with · To encourage tenancy sustainment. <p>In rural areas, wherever possible the council will prioritise applicants with a housing need and a local connection for 100% of first lets and 50% thereafter.</p> <p>Link to lettings policy http://www.ashford.gov.uk/applying-for-social-housing</p> <p>The council will work with HAs to develop mixed tenure sites where the HA is able to purchase and build out the whole of a site rather than just procuring the affordable housing element from a developer.</p>
<p>Observations:</p> <p>Housing provides input to planning applications to influence integrated development of all tenures</p> <p>Housing management forum provides an opportunity for joint working to develop and implemented initiatives to create cohesive communities such as joint activities and fun days for local residents</p>	
g) Develop innovative ways to improve delivery of local needs housing, including a cross subsidy approach and land purchase options	
	<p>The council continues to support the Rural Housing Enabler service to provide independent and impartial advice to Parish Councils wishing to develop local needs housing. The Rural Housing Enabler is currently assisting a parish to look into the feasibility of forming a community land trust (CLT) to bring forward housing in their village.</p> <p>In addition the council will consider the cross subsidy of exception site affordable housing with market homes where financial viability is an issue and a local needs scheme could not otherwise progress. This approach</p>

<p>Status: ✓</p>	<p>has been formalised in the draft local plan, in line with the NPPF, requirements. A small local needs scheme in Warehorne, awaiting planning decision is for 4 homes and one open market plot for custom build.</p>															
<p>Observations: In the last couple of years there has been a slow down in local needs schemes in development and parishes wishing to undertake local housing needs surveys. The Community Land Trust model seems to gaining interest.</p>																
<p>h) Utilise receipts from the right to buy to develop more affordable homes</p> <p>Status: ✓</p>	<p>From July 2013 to end of February 2017 the number of council homes sold through the Right to Buy totalled 135.</p> <p>The Capital programme has been supported by council sales in the following way:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="510 643 1227 879"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>1-4-1</th> <th>HRA Other Capital Receipts</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>13/14</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>14/15</td> <td>918,850</td> <td>315,584</td> </tr> <tr> <td>15/16</td> <td>982,101</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>16/17</td> <td>56,350</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In May 2012 the authority was invited to sign an agreement to re-invest Right to Buy receipts in affordable housing, known as 'One for One Replacement'. The agreement was signed on 20 June and the Council started to retain receipts from 1 October 2012. These receipts need to be used within three years for the provision of additional affordable housing through purchase and development of housing. If they are not used they need to be returned to the Secretary of State plus an interest charge of 4% above base.</p> <p>In order to ensure 'One for One' money is utilised and not handed back to Government, with interest, the Affordable Homes Programme has incorporated the spend of these monies. This currently includes the purchase of existing street properties, the redevelopment of Danemore in Tenterden and The Poplars in South Ashford. One for One funding can account for up to 30% of the build cost per affordable unit, with the remainder funded by the HRA. Use of 'One for One' money is more favourable than using HCA funding, as HCA funding contributes less than 30%.</p>		1-4-1	HRA Other Capital Receipts	13/14	0	0	14/15	918,850	315,584	15/16	982,101	0	16/17	56,350	0
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13/14	0	0														
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<p>Observations: Continual monitoring of the use of 1-4-1 monies and the timeframe for their spend ensures they are used to best effect and invested locally in the provision of new affordable homes and not returned to central government.</p>	
<p>i) Support self - build homes</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 requires all local authorities, to keep a register of individuals who are seeking to acquire serviced plots of land in the borough on which to build their own homes. Housing and planning colleagues worked together to develop the self-build register.</p> <p>At the end of March 2017, there were 57 entries on the self-build register. This information will be used to determine where it may be possible to identify plots suitable for self-build projects. The legislation requires the Council to issue sufficient planning permission to accommodate the number of people registered within 3 years of a certain timeframe (base period). Within the first base period (to October 2016) there are 15 entries.</p>
<p>Observations: It is possible that if there are insufficient planning permissions then because it's a 'right' to build, plots will have to be provided on council land. Policy HOU6 of the draft Local Plan secures a provision on major development sites for serviced plots and planning are also to set up a separate register of SCB plots to see if applicants can be matched to plots.</p>	
<p>j) Identify and return to use long term empty properties</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>With total funding from the Homes and Communities Agency of £693,060 the council purchased 30 empty properties which were returned to use as affordable rented homes and became part of the council housing stock.</p> <p>Private sector housing team implemented its first Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) resulting in a long term empty property being brought back in to use. Other officer interventions have encouraged owners to bring 2 homes back into use.</p>
<p>Observations: Currently no further government funding for empty homes Identifying and working with owners of empty homes is resource intensive and the PSH team does not have sufficient resources to take a proactive approach.</p>	

Priority 2:

IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF HOMES AND ADDRESS FUEL POVERTY IN ALL TENURES

Key points:

- Continued investment in energy efficiency of council homes
- BRE Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database commissioned to help target poor condition in private sector
- 'Delivering Affordable Warmth - a fuel poverty strategy for Kent' adopted by the council in March 2017.
- Seven properties in the private rented sector had heating systems renewed as part of the landlord accreditation scheme

Action	Review
a) Develop and implement a private sector housing strategy Status: 	A separate private sector housing strategy has not been developed. The Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Prosecution Policy has been refreshed and adopted in June 2016 The Private Sector Renewal Policy has also been updated and included the introduction of relocation grants to disabled applicants as part of our disabled facility grant policy. This was approved in March 2017. .
Observations: The small size of the PSH team means they are mainly a reactive service concentrating on dealing with hazards and complaints and managing the disabled facilities grants programme. A private sector housing strategy will be developed under the remit of the new housing strategy.	
b) Promote uptake of energy efficiency measures across all tenures Status: 	Across the council's own homes an ongoing programme of measures to improve the energy efficiency of homes continues through the upgrading of boilers, installing more efficient heating systems, increasing insulation and utilising renewable energy sources. From April 2013 to March 2017 the council has invested £675,893.94 in loft, cavity wall and external wall insulation.

	<p>As part of improving the energy efficiency of council homes in 2016/17, 176 'A' rated boilers were installed and ErP (Energy Related Products regulations) compliant electric storage heaters were installed in 18 off gas properties.</p> <p>In the private sector the landlord accreditation scheme provides financial assistance to landlords joining the scheme to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. The heating systems in 7 private rented properties have been improved making them more economical for tenants to heat and improving the thermal comfort.</p>
<p>Observations: With changes to building regulations, new build properties now usually meet the energy efficiency requirements through a fabric first approach. The council does not provide any funding for energy efficiency measures in the private sector (other than via the landlord accreditation scheme) but will signpost residents to any schemes available at that time.</p>	
<p>c) Work to reduce fuel poverty across all tenures</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ❌</p>	<p>The fuel poverty indicator for Ashford remains below that for Kent. The council adopted 'Delivering Affordable Warmth - a fuel poverty strategy for Kent' in March 2017.</p> <p>Residents are signposting to national schemes, where appropriate, such as the winter warmth grant and the public health winter warmth programme.</p> <p>The Winter Warm Scheme, which has been funded by KCC has benefited 9 homes</p>
<p>Observations: The implementation of actions from the Kent Affordable Warmth Strategy will be considered and the BRE Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database can be used to target interventions to address fuel poverty if resources are available.</p>	
<p>d) Continue trial to insulate hard to heat homes in ABC stock and roll out main programme in 2015</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✅</p>	<p>The pilot programme to use an external insulated render system on four Airey houses in 2013 has resulted in much improved thermal efficiency of the homes and positive tenant feedback. The assessment of the pilot enabled improvements to be made to how the system is installed and since the original four homes in the pilot were completed a further 32 hard to heat homes have been insulated.</p>

<p>Observations: External wall insulation (EWI) has concentrated on the Airey Houses and there are a further 40 to complete with 19 of those to commence work on EWI during 2017/18. On completion of the Airey Houses, consideration will be given to revisit other non-traditionally built dwellings. Although possibly having received the benefit of an EWI system (at some stage in the past) they may need upgrade.</p>	
<p>e) Promote uptake of renewable energy measures</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	
<p>In council homes there have been renewal energy measures installed in 4 existing properties between July 2013 and March 2017. These were photovoltaic systems, 3 are on sheltered schemes for the communal areas. These measures will reduce energy bills.</p> <p>On new build properties renewable energy measures will be installed wherever feasible. Of the 34 homes completed between July 2013 and March 2017, 21 houses and bungalows have solar photovoltaic panels and on the 4 flats at Hawthorn House giving a total of 25 homes benefiting from PV.</p> <p>The sheltered schemes at Farrow Court also has a PV array on the roof and PV will also be installed at the remodelled sheltered scheme at Danemore</p> <p>In the private sector households are signposted to any national initiatives running at time of enquiry.</p>	
<p>Observations: For new build homes the changes to building regulations means that the latest round of housing to be delivered (2017-2018) will be meeting current building regulations which sets out a fabric first approach. The building itself has to achieve high thermal efficiency and meet permeability tests before any renewables are considered. Once a high efficiency boiler is installed within this fabric, regulations are satisfied, which reduces the need for renewables in all except rural areas where there is no gas.</p> <p>In existing council homes renewable energy is considered where there is benefit to be derived from an installation.</p>	
<p>f) Undertake private sector stock condition survey</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✗</p>	
<p>A private sector stock condition survey has not been undertaken due to the cost involved in carrying out the survey and the limited resources available to implement any findings. However a more cost effective survey carried out by BRE an Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database was commissioned.</p>	

<p>Observations: The costs of a stock condition survey have to be balanced against the capacity to implement improvements where disrepairs/hazards are identified. Given the limited resources in the PSH team the BRE data was a more cost effective method to identify areas for further investigation and action.</p> <p>The BRE data will be interrogated in a variety of ways and we are currently gathering information from the data to identify licensed HMOs and to help identify potential HMOs which will come under the new licensing regime later this year. The detailed housing stock information provided in this report will enable a targeted intervention approach to improving housing and will be used to inform a future Private Sector Housing Strategy.</p>	
<p>g) Maximise resources by linking with other agencies</p> <p><i>Status:</i> </p>	<p>Opportunities for joint working to make best use of resources have been taken forward as shown in the examples below</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hub at DWP Homelessness advice service with Porchlight Winter Shelter with local churches and organisations Community Safety Unit Community fun days <p>In a more strategic context the Housing Service is represented at</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing) Kent Housing Group Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board Ashford/Canterbury Dementia Action Alliance
<p>Observations: Opportunities for joint working have been sought and implemented wherever possible. Strategically, working across Kent has been used to respond to national consultations, lobby government and develop joint working practices.</p>	

Priority 3:

INCREASE AVAILABILITY AND CHOICE OF ACCOMMODATION INCLUDING FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Key points:

- Nine private landlords are part of the accredited landlords scheme
- Social Lettings Agency has increase the number of properties on full management option to 82 and manages properties on behalf of the Property Company
- 1,052 adaptations have been carried out for council tenants to a value of £1,478,576.
- 186 disabled facilities grants have been completed in the private sector with a total spend of £1,827,829
- 160 additional units of self-contained supported accommodation together with spaces for communal activities and support staff have been delivered
- In the council’s sheltered housing scheme remodelling programme, Farrow Court phase 1 completed and Danemore started on site

Action	Review
<p>a) Increase availability of well managed private rented homes</p> <p><i>Status:</i> </p>	<p>The council makes grants are available to accredited landlords up to a maximum of £2000 to improve the energy efficiency of private rented homes. There are currently 9 accredited landlords. The heating systems in 7 private rented properties have been improved through a grant linked to being an accredited landlord. Another property has a grant approved with the works to be undertaken.</p> <p>The council will also assist with grants provided the landlord passes their property to ABC lettings to manage. The Landlord Working Group hold regular short focused meetings with a small number of landlords to consider specific issues. The group is chaired by a landlord.</p> <p>The primary objectives of the Group are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To bring to the attention of the council matters which are of importance to local private sector landlords and managing agents • To be a route through which local private sector landlords and managing agents can raise relevant issues for discussion • To be a consultative body for policy changes proposed by the council that could affect the private rented sector • To act as a problem-solving forum for issues facing landlords and the council • To take the lead in determining the nature and content of the council’s Landlord Events

	<p>Items covered in recent meetings include the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and article 4 directions, gaining feedback on new initiatives such as the tenant overview (a mini reference to the landlords when they wish to use our tenant find service and can pick from up to three tenants to let to), reviewing the information provided within tenancy training, promotion of Social Lettings Agency and how to incentivise landlords to rent to applicants from the housing register.</p> <p>The landlord forum are run once or twice a year in conjunction with the National Landlords Association. External speakers are invited to cover a variety of topics, along with updates from council officers. Previous Forums over the last 3 years have covered the introduction of Universal Credit, LHA rates and Kent Savers with input from the DWP and the Valuation Office. Electrical compliance for landlords and Kent Fire Brigade attended to update on new regulations relating to smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. Information on the Home Office Right to Rent scheme was presented by the Kent and Sussex Immigration, Compliance and Enforcement Team alongside regular updates on the council's social lettings agency and its wider offer to private sector landlords.</p> <p>The private sector team and landlord liaison officers work also includes dealing with serious hazards through to encouraging landlords and tenants to maintain the property in reasonable state of repair to provide, healthy, safe and secure accommodation.</p>
<p>Observations: Landlords may need more incentives to make properties available as with demand for private sector rented properties increasing they can gain a higher rent from letting privately. The difference between LHA rate and private rents is increasing reducing the number of properties available to those whose incomes are supported by benefit payments to help pay their rent.</p>	
<p>b) Continue to increase the number of homes within the Ashford Better Choice social lettings agency portfolio</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>In July 2013 there were 31 properties in the Social Lettings Agency (SLA) under full management option, this has increased steadily year on year with 82 properties under full management option in July 2016.</p> <p>In July 2014 the council worked with neighbouring Shepway District Council and now offers the benefits of the SLA to landlords across both districts, with 29 in Shepway under the management of the SLA. In addition the SLA manage 18 properties procured by the council's Property Company.</p>

<p>Observations: As above, within demand high in the private sector landlords need additional incentives to make their properties available through the Social Lettings Agency despite the guarantee of rent and management from using the SLA full management option.</p>	
<p>c) Identify and develop bespoke properties for disabled families through local authority new build programme</p> <p>Status: </p>	<p>Through the Council's building programme 4 homes have been built to wheelchair standards including 1 home designed specifically for a large family with a severely disabled child. The remodelled sheltered scheme at Farrow Court is fully wheelchair accessible and designed to be dementia friendly throughout.</p> <p>At Christchurch House (councils short stay accommodation) there is a wheelchair accessible unit together with wheelchair friendly kitchen facilities.</p>
<p>Observations: Bespoke homes can be difficult to bring forward effectively as the household can be demanding in their requirements wishing to have features over and above what are OT recommended/feasible and are under no obligation to take the home once it is completed.</p>	
<p>d) Provide disabled adaptations for ABC tenants</p> <p>Status: </p>	<p>Between July 2013 and February 2017, 1,052 adaptations have been carried out for council tenants to a value of £1,478,576. Adaptions will vary for each tenant with some requiring minor work such as grab rails or a level access where as others may require major works such as stair lifts or wet rooms.</p> <p>In July 2014, a prioritisation policy was introduced to better manage the adaptations process and provide greater transparency to residents regarding waiting times. All tenants requiring major works (estimated to cost over £1,000) complete a questionnaire. Points are awarded dependent on the level of need and the difficulty encountered with their present home. Additional points are awarded based on length of time on the waiting list (one point per month waiting). Those with the highest points are given priority. The adaptations budget has increased each year since 2012, to reduce waiting times and ensure tenants do not wait longer than a year for major works. In certain circumstances, to ensure best value, some works will be refused, most specifically where there is significant under-occupation of a council home. Instead, such tenants will be supported to move to more appropriate accommodation.</p>
<p>Observations:</p>	

Homes which become available where there is an existing adaption will be advertised with priority given to those who require such facilities to make best use of works that have been put in place wherever possible.

e) Work with partners to identify and increase range of supported housing for vulnerable people to meet local needs (including ex service personnel), seek alternative ways to generate revenue funding

Status: ✓

Supported housing plays a vital part in helping people who for whatever reason struggle to live independently. This maybe for a short period to assist them to regain their independence following a crisis or in the longer term when they have an enduring condition or frailty.

Over the period of the Housing Framework, 3 extra care schemes for older people and 2 supported housing schemes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness have been developed, providing 160 units of self-contained accommodation together with spaces for communal activities and support staff.

Chamberlain Manor, developed by Housing and Care 21, an extra care scheme of 67 units (rented and shared ownership). This scheme fulfilled the affordable housing quota of a mixed development site.

Quarry House, is the first extra care scheme to be built on a rural exception site to serve a number of neighbouring parishes. Located in Aldington, the council made land in its ownership available at nominal rent to Housing and Care 21. The scheme has 33 flats with a mix of 1 and 2 beds for rent and shared ownership.

The Spires is a 41 unit extra care scheme developed through the Kent PFI initiative 'Excellent Homes for All'. The council contributed the site of its sheltered scheme, Little Hill, near Tenterden to the project and has nomination rights to the scheme for 30 years. The scheme is owned and managed by West Kent Housing Association.

Lantern House also developed under the PFI has 11 flats for people who are homeless. The accommodation is used to support people into independent living.

Belgic Court is an 8 unit development specifically for young people with support needs and includes one wheelchair unit. The council sold a play area, which was being inappropriately used, at a fair price to Golding Homes. The receipt from the land was reinvested locally to create a new play area in a more appropriate location in consultation with the residents. The support service is provided by Sanctuary Supported Living, funded by Kent County Council.

	<p>The Syrian Refugee Resettlement Project has seen a number of individuals and organisations come forward to assist in a variety of ways, that haven't previously worked with the council.</p>
<p>Observations: Uncertainty about future of revenue funding with introduction of LHA cap and unknowns about how the top up will work have caused providers to step back until there is some clarity. Supported housing is a valuable resource in helping people live as independently as possible either within the scheme, i.e. for older people, or to provide a pathway to securing other accommodation in the future.</p> <p>The Syrian Resettlement Refugee Project has built some excellent working relations with landlords, individuals and organisations to provide a range of services to help the families settle into their new communities. Could be an opportunity to utilise this good will for other client groups.</p>	
<p>f) Manage the Disabled Facilities Grant budget to maximise assistance provided</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>From July 2013 to February 2017 the council has approved 186 disabled facilities grants with a total spend of 1,827,829. Working with the Occupational Therapy team and the Home Improvement Agency the measures installed are specific to each household's needs. The government grant has risen from £395,503 in 2014/15 to £594,375 in 2016/17 and the council contributes an additional £90,000 a year.</p> <p>In March 2017 the council approved the use of Relocation Grants to be set at a maximum of £7,000 per case as an alternative to a disabled facilities grant, where it provides a more appropriate solution for a disabled applicant.</p>
<p>Observations: The disabled facilities grant is now administered through the Better Care Fund. A recent piece of work by Kent Housing Group, KCC and NHS has been carried out to consider a countywide review towards a more integrated model for DFGs and a more joined up approach to improve outcomes for health, social care and housing.</p>	
<p>g) Remodel and improve council-owned sheltered housing accommodation</p>	<p>The first scheme in the programme, Farrow Court, has seen the first phase of 33 flats and the communal spaces completed with existing residents now settled into their new flats. The second phase is well underway and on completion will provide 104 flats including 12 for people with learning disabilities and an 8 unit</p>

<p>Status: ✓</p>	<p>recuperative care facility. The scheme was awarded Best Major Residential Project in the Kent Design and Development Awards 2016.</p> <p>Further to the successful bid for funding to the Care and Support Specialised Housing fund for Farrow Court, a further bid was made under phase two of the fund to support the redevelopment of Danemore in Tenterden. This bid was also successful, securing £1.9m. Planning permission was granted in September 2016 and a start on site made in February 2017.</p>
<p>Observations: Danemore is due for completion Summer 2018. Other sheltered schemes to be assessed to see what is best / cost effective option dependent on the resources available to the council.</p>	
<p>h) Provide increased provision of gypsy and traveller sites</p> <p>Ongoing ◊</p>	<p>The number of plots on the council owned site at Chilimington remain constant. The site is managed by the council and officers work with the community and the police to ensure the site is safe and take any necessary action if there is any anti-social behaviour or breaches of the conditions of tenancy on the site.</p> <p>New post boxes were fitted for each plot but have unfortunately suffered from vandalism. The electric smart meters were all installed in 2014. Two new plots were made, following a fire on two empty plots.</p> <p>Further provision will come forward through adhoc applications through the planning system and allocated sites for gypsy and travellers within the local plan.</p>
<p>Observations: Further sites for gypsy's and travellers will come forward through allocation in the local plan. Housing Service continues to manage the Chilmington site owned by the council</p>	
<p>i) Develop Older Persons Framework</p> <p>Status: ✗</p>	<p>A specific framework /strategy for older people in the borough has not been progressed. The council has contributed to the Kent County Council Accommodation Strategy that contains a district profile for each client group and with mapping of existing and future provision required. The council uses this strategy as part of its information gathering to inform the development of accommodation for vulnerable residents.</p>

<p>Observations: A range of accommodation is required, across all tenures, to give older people choice and to assist them to live independently for as long as possible. This maybe within their own home with adaptations or by moving to a more manageable accommodation with or without support.</p>	
<p>j) Increase the number of well planned and managed shared houses (HMOs)</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>As of 6 April 2006 certain types of HMO, regarded as being higher risk, have had to be licensed by the local authority. These properties consist of three storeys or more, have five or more occupants, living as two or more households, with some degree of sharing of facilities. A licence runs for 5 years. At end of March 2017 there were 71 licenced HMOs.</p> <p>The council produced a standards book for landlords of HMOs providing them with information on what is expected so that the property is maintained and managed in a proper manner so that tenants are able to live in safe conditions.</p> <p>The borough has a number of article 4 directions in place related to HMOs and any new HMOs in areas covered by an article 4 would require planning permission.</p>
<p>Observations: Changes to be introduced to the HMO licencing regime will see more HMO's requiring a licence. This will increase the work load of the private sector housing team. With single people under the age of 35 only able to claim the shared room rate of housing benefit, many will be looking to find affordable shared accommodation.</p>	

Priority 4:

INCREASE RESIDENT SATISFACTION WITH HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS AND INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

Key points:

- Joint working with other organisations has brought forward a number of neighbourhood initiatives, such as Project Purple with Ashford Oaks Primary School.
- The Ashford Tenants Panel had been reviewed and an important aspect of their new role is being the 'designated person' in the complaints procedure.
- A monthly e-newsletter 'Tell-Us' for tenants was launched in February 2015
- Home contents insurance scheme negotiated and promoted to tenants
- A new Charging Policy was approved in October 2014 for the introduction of pitch fees and fees for inspecting licenced park homes sites.

Action	Review
a) Encourage housing providers to be actively involved in good housing management <i>Status:</i> ✓	<p>The council continues to facilitate a forum to bring together all providers of social housing in the borough to share good practice and encourage joint working for the benefit of all tenants and the wider community. As a result the forum has enabled a much closer working relationship between the council and housing providers in Ashford in a number of areas including lettings polices to ensure balanced communities. The attendance of a representative from the council's tenants forum at these meetings gives a tenant's perspective of the joint working being carried out.</p> <p>The annual garden completion encourages council tenants to take a pride in their gardens and maintain them to high standards.</p> <p>There is housing representation at the community safety unit so any issues of concern can be dealt with swiftly through a multi-agency approach if necessary.</p> <p>'Clean sweeps' are undertaken, whereby on a specified date a number of agencies work across a specific area to deal with issues such as fly tipping, abandoned vehicles etc. and take any necessary enforcement</p>

	<p>action as may be identified on the day. These initiatives demonstrate partners working together to improve the local environment, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour alongside improving public safety.</p> <p>Rent collection rates remain high, March 2017 = 99.66%.</p> <p>In response to finding that many tenants did not hold home contents insurance a scheme was negotiated and promoted to tenants to encourage them to take out insurance for their home contents in 2015. All Area Managers continue to actively promote the insurance scheme with new and existing tenants.</p> <p>The introduction of a tenants' incentive scheme was considered. At present this is limited to withholding/postponing planned kitchen and bathroom refurbishments where a tenant is in rent arrears.</p>
<p>Observations:</p> <p>The introduction of Universal Credit and the benefit cap present further challenges to maintain a high rent collection rate. The council is using a holistic approach to prepare as best as possible for the full digital rollout of Universal Credit in March 2018.</p> <p>Community initiatives such as the garden competition encourage tenants to take pride in their surroundings. The value of such initiatives should be evaluated to make sure they are engaging with as many tenants as possible.</p> <p>The tenants incentive scheme can be problematic to the planned maintenance programme if a refurbishment is postponed due to rent arrears. When the tenants agrees a rent payment plan the refurbishment team could have moved out of the area so it is costly to return for one property. This potentially has implications for maintaining 100% decent homes standard.</p>	
<p>b) Regenerate Brookfield Road and Bybrook areas</p> <p>Ongoing </p>	<p>4 properties have been built in Brookfield Road and 3 in Beaver Road, this has improved the street scene and removed areas of anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>At Bybrook plans to redevelop the area did not go ahead as they proved to be too costly.</p>
<p>Observations:</p>	

<p>Future plans include potentially purchasing flats and shops at Court Wurtin to regenerate the area. Plans are being developed to demolish The Poplars and create a satellite scheme to Farrow Court for more independent older people and service personnel. There is an opportunity for the potential development of flats and improved green space at Halstow Way</p>	
<p>c) Review sheltered housing service</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>The sheltered housing service was reviewed and new arrangements for scheme managers put in place during 2013/14.</p> <p>All the scheme managers completed dementia friends training to raise awareness of the illness and how they can support residents who have dementia to live well.</p>
<p>Observations: Residents of the council run sheltered schemes place great value on the support given by the scheme managers</p>	
<p>d) Joint working with agencies to deliver neighbourhood improvements</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>A number of small projects have been undertaken throughout the lifetime of the housing framework to improve local areas. These have been initiated by the local community and the community has been involved in the actual works, such as pond improvement works, upgrading play areas, improving drying areas, litter picks, dog chipping etc., which helps to increase the sense of ownership by residents within an area.</p> <p>A fun day run in Newtown in 2016 was very successful. It was planned after finding out what residents would be interested in knowing about. After the event a noticeable reduction in bulk rubbish and dog fouling has been seen. The area manager was presented with a community champion award in recognition of his work both on this event and wider work with the community.</p> <p>Project Purple launched on 30 September 2014 with over 60 year 5 pupils from Ashford Oaks Primary School in South Ashford embarking on this exciting project. Each child gives 10 hours of their time to help in their community. The first project is turning an area of rather neglected land by Crownfield Road, South Ashford into a useful space to benefit the whole area. The project is supported by parents, the police, Hang 10 and the council.</p> <p>Neighbourhood inspections were reviewed and a system introduced to rank areas as some areas need more frequent inspections than others. Officers and residents were initially joined by the local PSCO to help identify and tackle any anti-social behaviour, however more recently the PSCOs have not attended.</p>

	<p>In sheltered schemes residents hold a range of activities and often widen these out to other members of the local community, such as the craft skills group at Gerlach House. The extended lounge at Luckley House is put to good use through a diverse range of activities from dancing to bingo.</p>
<p>Observations: Community projects have delivered positive outcomes, however lower levels of funding may reduce these initiatives in future. The development of a tenant participation strategy will need to take account of any financial constraints and consider how possible smaller amounts of seed funding/alternative credit schemes can be used to initiate community events/projects.</p>	
<p>e) Address poor standards in private sector, including park homes and investigate options for self-funded improvements e.g. equity release</p> <p>Ongoing </p>	<p>The private sector housing team respond to requests about disrepair and take action as necessary, depending on the severity of the hazard and the vulnerability of the occupier.</p> <p>Further to the introduction of the Mobile Homes Act 2013, a report for a new licensing regime and greater powers for monitoring and enforcement of licence conditions and how this provides an opportunity to improve the service offered to residents was considered by Cabinet in September 2014. A new Charging Policy was approved in October 2014. Residents of Park Homes were informed of the introduction of pitch fees and fees for inspecting licenced sites.</p>
<p>Observations: The Private Sector Housing Team reacts to enquiries and complaints from owner occupiers, private sector landlords and tenants. The team will take action to rectify any problems and where necessary use the relevant legislation to bring legal action where an issue is not being resolved satisfactorily. There is little spare capacity within the team to take a proactive approach to identifying homes in poor condition and working with the owners to make good.</p> <p>Equity release has not been progressed and is most likely to be a Kent wide project led by the Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing)</p>	
<p>f) Maintain decent homes standard in council-owned stock</p>	<p>All council homes meet the decent homes standard and have an up to date gas safety check.</p>

<p>Status: ✓</p>	
<p>Observations: ABC stock remained at 100% decent homes standard at end of March 2017, excluding properties subject to the Ashford Promise criteria. The Ashford Promise criteria means that some tenants may have their planned kitchen and/or bathroom replacement withheld if they are in rent arrears. The compliance with decent homes standard is assessed on the programme of maintenance that is based upon expected component lifetimes and inspections prior to the commencement of work.</p>	
<p>g) Increase tenant involvement and responsibility through tenant panel and tenant scrutiny</p> <p>Status: ✓</p>	<p>The tenant panel has been reviewed and now has a greater focus on scrutinising council services and taking a more active role in how their homes are managed. An important aspect of their new role is being the 'designated person' in the complaints procedure. Members of the tenants panel are offered training to increase their confidence in the work they are undertaking.</p> <p>A new monthly e-newsletter 'Tell-Us' was launched in February 2015 which invites tenants' views on specific areas of work.</p> <p>The tenants' magazine 'Housing News', moved from a paper publication to a digital format as part of making savings across the housing department.</p>
<p>Observations: As part of the housing service restructure the post of Tenant Participation Officer was deleted and this area of work will be taken forward by the Area Managers. The Tenant Participation Strategy is in development to be adopted by end of 2017. First phase is to have clear understanding of what is important to tenants and how they wish to engage /be consulted. A review of how the council communicates with tenants will help focus efforts on media that is most effective in reaching the most tenants without excluding those who may not have access to digital /social media options</p>	

Priority 5:

PREVENT AND REDUCE HOMELESSNESS AND INCREASE ACCESS TO SETTLED ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS AND THOSE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

Key points:

- A homelessness review was undertaken and revised Homelessness Strategy adopted in October 2016
- Early Intervention and prevention work has reduced the number of 'homeless tonight' presentations
- Welfare reform has and will continue to present a number of challenges to ensure tenants can afford their rent in both the social and private housing sectors

Action	Review
a) Implement the homelessness strategy focus on: Preventing homelessness wherever possible providing quality housing services and suitable accommodation for homeless people homes with support, settled and sustainable homes <i>Status:</i> 	A review of homelessness was undertaken during 2015/16. The review informed the development of a new Homelessness Strategy that was adopted by the council in October 2016. This included an evaluation of the Action Plan from the 2012 Homelessness Strategy to identify achievements and gaps. The Homelessness Review and Strategy can be accessed at www.ashford.gov.uk/housing/housing-news/our-strategic-approach-to-housing Key points concluded that the Housing Options Team is working effectively with services geared towards prevention of homelessness. Housing options officers have a specific client group and this named contact approach has helped reduce the number of homeless tonight presentations. Pressures come from insufficient numbers of affordable homes, loss of private sector tenancies due to landlords no longer wishing to rent their property and a reducing number of private sector landlords willing to provide tenancies to homeless households. The Social Lettings Agency continues to increase the number of properties under its management.
Observations:	

<p>Implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will need to be assessed and the Homelessness Strategy refreshed in light of any changes required as a consequence of new legislation.</p> <p>Delivery of affordable homes through developer led schemes will not be sufficient to meet need. More short term temporary accommodation is needed. With under 35 year olds only entitled to shared room rate of local housing allowance, shared housing will be required to provide affordable accommodation to those young people who cannot remain at home and are on a low income, to prevent homelessness.</p>	
<p>b) Raise awareness of the implications of welfare reform to tenants</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>In general, awareness of welfare reform is raised through the use of the council’s website and newsletters. Area Managers, Housing Options Officers and Landlord Liaison Officers all identify, advise and signpost households they are in contact with who are affected by changes to benefit, with the aim of helping them to adjust to the changes, budget appropriately, find employment and be able to maintain their accommodation.</p>
<p>Observations: This is an ongoing task of awareness raising to tenants affected by welfare reform.</p>	
<p>c) Identify tenants who will lose benefit and advise of choices to manage reduced income</p> <p><i>Status:</i> ✓</p>	<p>Area Managers contacted all ABC tenants who would be affected by the social size criteria (bedroom tax) and advised them of their options including in how to mutually exchange to a more suitable sized property.</p> <p>Landlord Liaison Officers and the Housing Options Officers provide advice and signposting to tenants in the private sector.</p> <p>Two Welfare Reform Officers continue to support households affected by changes to benefits and the introduction of Universal Credit to make sure as far as possible that households are aware of any reductions, are claiming what they are entitled to and supported where possible to find employment.</p>
<p>Observations: The campaign by the Area Managers to help those affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ to understand the implications and if possible to downsize was successful in preventing a rise in rent arrears.</p>	

The roll out of universal credit in March 2018 will need to be planned for and tenants advised of how changes will affect them and helped to budget etc. as they will be responsible for paying their rent	
Other benefit changes will see incomes reduced for some households, potential for further negative impact on rent arrears	
d) Monitor external influences, identify pressures on meeting housing needs and respond to minimise any negative effects <i>Status:</i> ✓	The Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the Housing White Paper 2017 both have major influence on the delivery of affordable housing. Housing Services has worked closely with Planning colleagues to respond to the consultations associated with both of these. In other areas policy has been amended, such as to take account of changes to lifetime and fixed term tenancies. Other external factors and what is being done to mitigate the effects, such as reduction in private rented housing have been covered under other actions
Observations: The recently enacted Homelessness Reduction Act will be scrutinised to assess how best to implement the new legislation.	

Summary of legislative changes and challenges

Since the adopting the Housing Framework a number of changes have occurred and continue to be put in place.

Ongoing implementation of welfare reform including

Introduction of the social size criteria (bedroom tax)

Further reduction of the benefit cap (£20,000 for families, £13,400 for single claimants) November 2016

Reduction in Housing Association and Local Authority rents by 1% for 4 years, from 2016 (supported housing from 2017/18)

Freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates for 4 years (from April 2016)

Rents entered into after April 2016, eligible for Housing Benefit, will be subject to the Local Housing Allowance from April 2018 - under 35 years old entitlement reduced to shared room rate of local housing allowance

Freeze on working age benefits (tax credits) for 4 years (from April 2016)

Support for children through Tax Credits and Universal Credit limited to 2 children

Removal of the entitlement to Housing Benefit & Housing Support within Universal Credit for those aged 18 – 21 (from March 2018)

Rent reduction by 1% for social housing tenants for 4 years from April 2016

Mortgage rescue scheme closed to new applicants, March 2014.

Changes to support for mortgage interest payments reducing the assistance available

Increase in the maximum discount available for the right to buy (up to 70% or £78,600) and a reduction in the qualifying period to 3 years

The Housing and Planning Act 2016

Extended the right to buy to Housing Association tenants (subject to a pilot)

Introduced concept of starter homes – subsequently amended in the Housing White Paper to require 10% of affordable housing to be affordable home ownership products

Introduced the sale of higher value council homes

Mandatory use of fixed term tenancies for local authorities

The Housing White Paper 2017

Encourages local authorities to consider a range of models/mechanisms to deliver affordable housing

Measures to improve the private rented sector

Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, increased the ability to tackle and deal with anti-social behaviour

The Better Care Fund requires the pooling of health and social care budgets to provide an integrated system to improve the health and wellbeing of local populations, prevention, person-centred care becomes the norm. There is growing recognition of the important contribution of housing to integration.

Within the private sector the Mobile Homes Act and regulations, the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm regulations and aspects of the Housing and Planning Act brings in legislation to improve conditions in the private sector and tackle rogue landlords.

Developing a new Housing Strategy

This review of the Housing Framework 2013-18 will, together with other evidence collected, be part of the process to inform the direction of a new Housing Strategy.

With the Housing Strategy needing to cover such a wide remit it is envisaged that going forward a brief Housing Statement will be developed. This will outline the agreed priorities and how these will contribute to achieving the aims of the Corporate Plan. Underneath this overarching statement will sit a suite of strategies, some existing and some new which will set out the detail for each of their specific areas. By adopting this approach it is hoped to reduce duplication between a Housing Strategy and the strategies that often sit below. Also this should help us to engage with people and organisations who have particular interests to ensure local issues are being identified and addressed within each of the subject specific strategies.

The diagram below gives an indication of the proposed arrangement for the Housing Statement and the suite of strategies that could emanate from it.

