



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Virtual Meeting - Teams Meeting on Tuesday, 13th October, 2020 at 6.30 pm.

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The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)  
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Burgess, Campkin, Farrell, Hayward, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause,  
Ledger, Mulholland.

### Agenda

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1. **Apologies/Substitutes**  
  
To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c)
2. **Declarations of Interest** 1 - 2  
  
To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document:
  - a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)
  - b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)
  - c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests  
See Agenda Item 2 for further details
3. **Minutes of the last Meeting** 3 - 8  
  
To approve the Minutes of the last Meeting
4. **Homelessness Update** 9 - 48

This report provides the current position on homelessness following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 and the impact of Covid 19 in 20

5. **Final Report of the Digital Transformation Task Group** 49 - 72

This report concludes the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group from Digital Transformation; and makes 8 recommendations to Cabinet.

6. **Future Reviews and Reports Tracker** 73 - 74

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

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

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

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

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

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

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

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

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf)
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

**If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.**

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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held as a virtual meeting on the **8<sup>th</sup> September 2020**.

### Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Campkin, Farrell, Hayward, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland, White.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr. White attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Burgess.

### Apologies:

Cllr. Burgess, Howard-Smith.

### Also Present:

Cllrs. Feacey, Harman, Pickering, Wright.

Head of HR & Customer Services, Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

## 43 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Chilton	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as he was a Member of Unison	46

## 44 Minutes

### Resolved:

**That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020 be approved and confirmed as an accurate record.**

## 45 Recovery Plan – verbal update

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced this item, and explained that following the last meeting, Members were invited to pose questions to be answered at this Meeting. One question had been received in advance: "As working from home appears to be acceptable now, and more economically viable, are we increasing

pressure on companies supplying broadband, not only to supply to premises but also to ensure its reliability?" The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications responded that Broadband was a priority in the Recovery Plan, and the Council were now looking at what resources were needed to effectively support and enable the delivery of broadband in the Borough and Cllr. Bell was championing this. Once an Action Plan had been compiled this would be reported back to the Committee through the Recovery Plan Monitoring Report.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following question was asked:

Following the recent guidelines by Government giving the go ahead for schools and businesses to re-open, a Member asked was there an emerging view (as part of the Council's own economic recovery) to follow this route and bring Officers back into the building, supporting the eateries and shops in the Town Centre, and where possible a hybrid arrangement for Members to return to the Council at the earliest opportunity?

The Chairman responded that the return to the office needed to be balanced with the Carbon Neutral agenda. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications confirmed that a phased return to work was underway, taking into account the business need, health and wellbeing of staff, to bring Officers safely back into the building. Following on from the Chairman's comments regarding climate change, she added that there was now an opportunity to review the way the Council worked with regards to commuting and energy efficiency of the building, and to reduce the carbon footprint of the Borough, in line with the 2025 target. The Head of HR & Customer Services went on to confirm that in order to adhere with social distancing, there would be approximately 80 desks available, out of the usual 350. A return also had to take place gradually in order to ensure equipment was available and that staff weren't conveying IT viruses back, upon their reconnection to the server.

With regards to hybrid meetings, the Chairman stated that he was supportive of the idea, but reminded the Committee that the Government were not currently encouraging public meetings to take place, but they were in support of staff safely returning to the workplace. A Member responded that the Chamber was large enough to accommodate Councillors and Officers to sit at a safe distance, and it would be beneficial to have the physical representation of the Councils democracy back open and active again. Virtual meetings were beneficial for some, but he felt that the O&S Committee should lead on this and recommend that the Cabinet consider arrangements to return to Members to the Civic Centre at the earliest opportunity on a hybrid arrangement. Other Members agreed and suggested a flexible time plan be drawn up. The Pandemic had shown that there were benefits to working flexibly from home, but there was also a social benefit to returning to the workplace, and the opportunity for those members of the public wishing to come into the Civic Centre to attend meetings. The Chairman commented that he hoped over time, if virtual meetings continued, that members of the public would take the opportunity to view meetings more frequently from the comfort of their own home.

A Member raised a point about Planning Officers returning to meeting members of the public regarding planning applications, to obtain a better impression and

understanding of the application.

The subject of start times for public meetings was also discussed and the Chairman asked Members for their views. Many Members welcomed a later start time since they worked full time, and a 6.30pm start time seemed preferable. An email would be circulated to confirm this. The Chairman added that the Committee needed to be mindful that a return to the building for public meetings would impose extra work for cleaning and facilities staff, and that there was still some IT infrastructure required before hybrid meetings could take place.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**

## **46 Annual Sickness Report**

The Head of HR & Customer Services introduced the report, which provided annual information on sickness absenteeism for 2019/2020, and this year also included additional data about the corporate health of the organisation. The report showed trends and correlations that might indicate poor corporate health in specific service areas. Sickness days had decreased from 10.8 days per FTE to 9.1 days per FTE, and long term sickness that had previously caused particular concern, had also reduced. Under paragraph 28, the sentence should have read “Comparison with neighbouring councils showed that Ashford was around mid-table”, so there was no suggestion that Ashford was significantly out of step with other Local Authorities. A revised sickness policy and new attendance management policy would be considered by JCC in October. Members had previously expressed concern about the levels of staff turnover in Planning, so a longer narrative was included in this report on this service area. Overall the level of turnover was ok at 11% (9% due to resignation), compared to 15% nationally. The Head of HR & Customer Services added the caveat that some turnover was positive. Regarding employment relations, overall there was no indication that any one area had a higher level of cases, with the exception of Housing where a number of inexperienced managers had required extra support.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised:

- A Member spoke about an incident she had witnessed whereby a member of the public had been abusive towards a Customer Services Officer. She noted that stress and depression accounted for 43% of absence within this dept., and wondered what support was in place for those members of staff to protect them from abusive interactions. The Head of HR & Customer Services explained that conflict management training had been provided to staff, risk assessments were regularly undertaken, staff worked on a rota basis to ensure they were not always customer facing and the Council had the ability to ban abusive customers from entering the building. She added that typically the absence reasons for those Officers absence were not around the job

being too stressful, but were around other indicators.

- Concern was expressed over the high figures of stress and mental health absence within the report. Members wanted to know what the Council were doing to tackle this. What was being done to reduce workloads and additionally what was being done to transform operations in order to support this reduction? It was suggested that the Committee should set an expectation that the figure should have decreased by 5 – 10% within 12 months. The Head of HR and Customer Services explained that the figures represented the time taken off, not the number of staff. In comparison to national figures for mental ill health, which were 59%, Ashford was comparatively lower. In addition, a lot of mental ill health within the report could be attributed to external factors such as bereavement and relationship issues. The Council had recognised that remote working was very accommodating for some staff when tackling issues such as childcare and caring for elderly relatives, and feedback received indicated that this was helpful in providing a better work-life balance. Reduction of workload was included within the Transformation Agenda and this topic would be explored in more detail in the future.
- A Member added that a set of targets against the KPI's would be useful to demonstrate year on year progress. The Head of HR and Customer Services confirmed that a set of targets were shared within the Corporate Performance Report and she believed the target to be around 8.7 days per FTE, which was the level the Council had achieved in the previous year. The revised policies that were going to JCC in October included some prevention measures such as earlier intervention and accessing the wellbeing tools available, in a bid to reduce those figures further. Potentially the target could be revised going forward into the next financial year.
- The Head of HR and Customer Service talked about the increase of awareness and acceptance that mental ill health was a real issue and that the stigma was no longer attached. This could attribute also to the higher figures, and it was important to remember that the Council was still significantly lower than the national trend.
- The Chairman went onto speak about working from home, and reiterated that many staff seemed to prefer remote working and the flexibility it offered. Many staff that had previously never worked from home had expressed that they were now seeing the benefits. Furthermore, they were also open to the idea of carrying on this way of working into the future, albeit for some on a hybrid basis. A question was raised regarding the negative impacts of working from home and the possibility that this could also lead to stress for some employees. The head of HR and Customer Services expanded on this and said that there some staff had said they felt isolated and that remote working was not good for them. With that in mind, those staff had been prioritised to come back into the Civic Centre. The Member agreed that it was important that staff had the choice.

- With reference to the absence figures for the Planning Department and paragraph 37 of the report, a Member asked whether the Council were able to ascertain whether there was one particular event that led to the demotivation of staff and a reduction in performance within that dept. The Head of HR and Customer Service acknowledged that there had been considerable changes within that service area, and various factors had contributed to increased turnover such as promotion opportunities not being realised as part of the restructure, increased caseloads and some staff leaving to work within the private sector, and these factors had contributed towards creating a 'perfect storm' that had impacted on staffing levels. The Planning Review had been through the approval process in 2018 and so the difficulties within the dept. had gradually built over the course of two years. The current interim Head of Service was aware of the feedback that had been received as part of the Planning Advisory Service review panel, and understood the issues that needed to be addressed to embed the structure and improve the service.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**

## **47 Digital Transformation Task Group verbal update**

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee regarding the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Digital Transformation Task Group. Topics they had reviewed included the Digital Transformation Strategy, how the data had been used and the IT response to Covid over the past few months. Recommendations had been drafted and agreed by the Group, and the final report would be brought to the next O&S Meeting.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**

## **48 Future Reviews Tracker**

The Chairman advised Members to email the Policy & Scrutiny Officer or himself with any ideas or comments regarding the Tracker in between meetings.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**

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## Agenda Item No: 4

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### Homelessness In Ashford [Current Position]

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. Note the contents of this report

<b>Date of O&amp;S meeting:</b>	13 October 2020
<b>Chair of O&amp;S Committee:</b>	Cllr Noel Ovenden
<b>Relevant Portfolio(s):</b>	Cllr Bill Barrett – Portfolio Holder [Housing]
<b>Summary:</b>	This report provides the current position on homelessness following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 and the impact of Covid 19 in 2020/21
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	none
<b>Contact:</b>	<b>Ray O’Shea</b> <b>Housing Operations Manager</b> <b>Tel 01233 330808</b> <b>Raymond.O’Shea@ashford.gov.uk</b>

## Agenda Item

### Report Title : Homelessness In Ashford [Current Position]

#### Introduction & Background

1. On 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019 a report was submitted to cabinet outlining the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act [HRACT] in April 2018 and its impact on service delivery at Ashford [the previous cabinet report is appended for information at Appendix A]
2. This legislation introduced a new approach to tackling homelessness. It put in place new legal duties to intervene earlier to prevent the loss of accommodation and avoid the placement of homeless households into temporary accommodation. Changes included -
  - *To expand the provision of advice and information about homelessness with prevention and relief of homelessness as a primary focus*
  - *Extending the period of “threatened homelessness” for households from twenty eight to fifty six days and allow earlier intervention*
  - *New duties to both prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people [irrespective of their priority need or any issues of intentional homelessness]*
  - *Tailored assessments and Personalised Housing Plans [PHP], setting out actions that local authorities and clients need to take to secure alternative accommodation*
  - *Encouraging public bodies and agencies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a new legal “duty to refer”*
3. In addition, an HRACT Action Plan was implemented to directly address three key areas in a staged/incremental approach –
  - *Reducing the flow of homelessness by providing early, effective prevention at source*
  - *Controlling and reducing expenditure on the provision of emergency temporary accommodation [TA]*
  - *Ensuring that there is a supply of suitable and affordable housing for “move on” to settled accommodation*

#### HRACT Implementation

4. In Ashford, there was an increased level of applications to the Housing Options Team when the new legal duties were brought into force in April 2018. This increased activity in homeless approaches in 2018/19 indicates that there were **1871** approaches. Solid prevention work meant that **less than a fifth of all homeless approaches** in 2018/19 eventually needed placement into emergency temporary accommodation.

5. In 2019/20, this activity remained largely similar with **1846** approaches from homeless households but with less placements made into temporary accommodation [**13%**] in this period. Levels of households in temporary accommodation also fell overall from **179** in April 2018 when the act came into force to **121** in March 2020.
6. The primary cause of homelessness at Ashford arose from parental eviction from the family home, with the loss of private sector tenancies as the second most common cause. These circumstances reflect the number of placements made into temporary accommodation and is also indicative of the current demand and profile on Ashford's Housing Register over this period.

### Single Homelessness & Rough Sleepers

7. It is the case that local authorities do not have to provide accommodation for all homeless applicants, and single homeless persons who have no defined priority will not be able to access emergency accommodation. An immediate consequence was that there were levels of rough sleeping activity in Ashford. Over the years, MHCLG have worked with local authorities to best address this issue and identify solutions.
8. Ashford had recently been able to secure grant for rough sleepers from MHCLG in a co-produced Rough Sleeper Initiative bid with £257,000 late in 2019 allocated to assist rough sleepers in from the street and provide pathways to settled accommodation [appended for information at Appendix B].

### Covid 19/Lockdown

9. The immediate effect of the national emergency and associated lockdown restrictions is that it has altered the profile of homelessness in Ashford in a number of ways, most notably –
  - *The numbers of placements in temporary accommodation initially rose sharply in Q1 2020 to 149 households in June/July 2020*
  - *Lockdown restrictions in Q1 of 2020 effectively stopped “move on” to alternative settled accommodation [this included both access to private rented stock and social housing via Choice Based Lettings]*
  - *Cases who had previously been deemed not to be in “priority need” for housing were accommodated on an emergency basis*
  - *The numbers of homeless households making application fell as the public health message was reinforced*
  - *County Courts were closed and no formal evictions took place*

## Rough Sleepers

10. At short notice, following the national public emergency, government directed on **23 March 2020** that **all** rough sleepers or those threatened by rough sleeping should be brought indoors under the “*Everyone In*” initiative.
11. Ashford had already been fully engaged in assisting rough sleepers using allocated grant provided by MHCLG. Eight rough sleepers were already accommodated (with a further two that had been re-housed into settled accommodation). The remaining cases were then identified and brought indoors.
12. With solid and effective liaison with the Community Safety Unit, police and partner agencies, other identified cases could call the service “out of hours”. They were also briefed to accommodate anyone saying they are rough sleeping. MHCLG were later contacted to confirm that all known cases had been accommodated.

As a result of this initiative –

- *More Rough sleepers brought in after the MHCLG directive meant an increase in numbers in temporary accommodation*
- *16 cases were now indoors who would not have ordinarily been placed under old arrangements*
- *New prison and hospital discharge cases had become more problematic and urgent since lockdown restrictions were in place*

13. Rough Sleeper Cell meetings were convened initially at Ashford on a daily basis with a broad membership including Housing Options staff, CSU, police, mental health, social care, local churches and voluntary organisations dealing with addiction issues.
14. These briefings allowed the group to maintain and monitor the rough sleeper/single homeless group in emergency accommodation and deal with matters that might arise. For the most part, cases have remained in accommodation with very little in the way of anti-social behaviour or conduct issues.
15. It was decided in the medium term that we maintain providing accommodation for this group until there was more clarity with the anticipated period of lockdown ending, and forming plans for the recovery stage. Throughout this period Ashford were also in regular contact with MHCLG for clarity on specific topics -

- *Identifying supply/levels of self-contained accommodation to meet demand*
- *access to hotel provision for homeless households*
- *joint communications for public bodies to ensure better outcomes for rough sleepers*

## **MHCLG [Guidance]**

16. Following initial communication with Dame Louise Casey on **22 April 2020** outlining the government’s broad intentions with rough sleeping, a Rough Sleeping Task Force was formed under her direction on **2 May 2020**. They have advised that

*“the taskforce will work hand-in-hand with councils across the country on plans to ensure rough sleepers can move into long-term, safe accommodation once the immediate crisis is over – ensuring as few people as possible return to life on the streets. The taskforce will also ensure the thousands of rough sleepers now in accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need over the coming weeks while they continue to self-isolate from the virus. Over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils at the beginning of the crisis have now been offered accommodation where they can remain safe during the crisis – helping protect themselves and others from contracting the virus. This has been backed by £3.2 million in targeted funding to help councils get as many people off the streets as possible, with a further £3.2 billion additional funding for councils to help them continue to respond to the pandemic and support their communities – including their vital work helping those sleeping rough.*

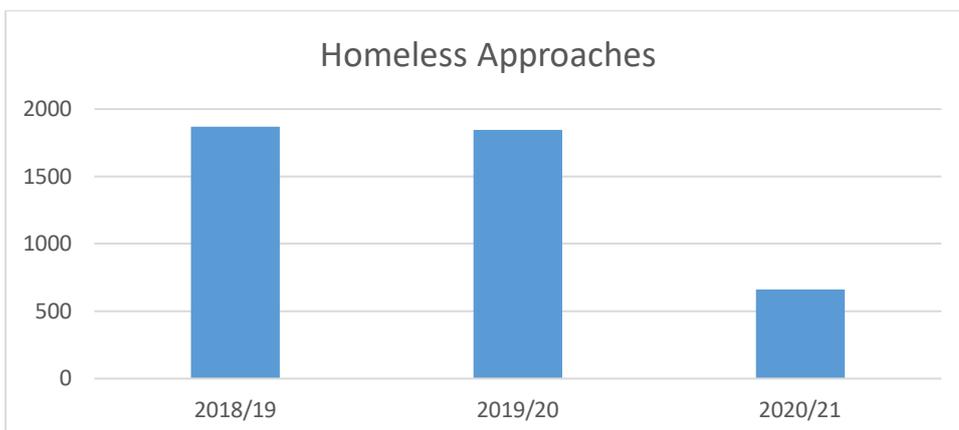
17. In addition, on **24 May 2020**, Robert Jenrick announced £433m for 6000 units of housing to assist rough sleepers in a two year programme [with 3300 planned for the first year]. MHCLG confirmed on 4 June 2020 that this might be a mix of supported housing solutions/tenure subject to the underlying needs of individual cases.
18. Further MHCLG governmental guidance was received on **28 May 2020** and an urgent meeting then convened with MHCLG on **4 June 2020** for Ashford to co-produce a submission for further assistance in respect of rough sleeping including planned “move on” accommodation and/or more settled and supported housing solutions for rough sleepers.
19. On **15 July 2020**, MHCLG released a prospectus and guidance for making application for grant in respect of the Next Steps Accommodation Provision [NSAP] for rough sleepers. There were two opportunities to bid for funding –

- a) £105m available this year for revenue and expenditure for rough sleepers in 2020/21 [claims could not be made retrospectively for expenditure incurred from March 2020 to July 2020]
- b) £161m nationally for capital and revenue projects to be completed in 2020/21 [including modular housing, street purchase and other initiatives]

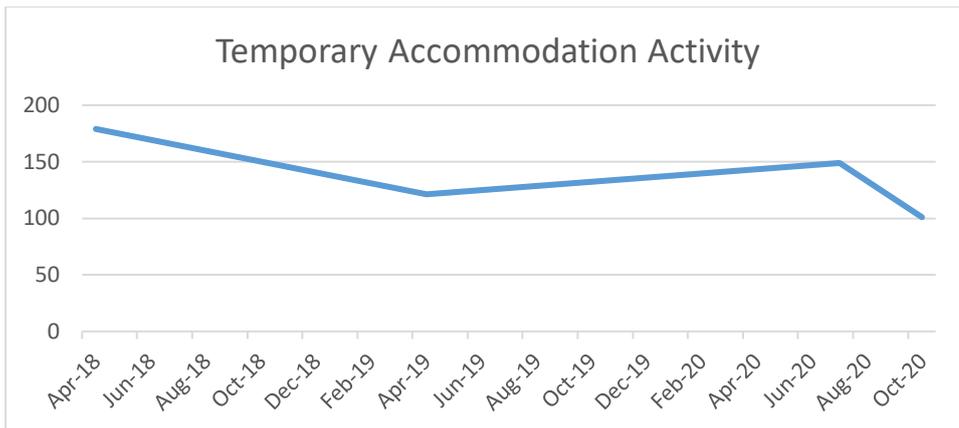
Bids were submitted on 20 August 2020 for both options and MHCLG have formally confirmed on **1 October 2020** that Ashford have been allocated **£78,304** for bid a). They have not yet finalised the allocations for bid b) but are due to do so imminently.

### Recovery Stage

- 20. In Q2 of 2020, lockdown restrictions were eased and there was more movement in the private rented sector to allow opportunities to move households on from temporary accommodation. In addition, access to social housing was reactivated and this provided options for allocations via Choice Based Lettings.
- 21. Throughout this period, the County Courts were still inactive with no homeless households presenting to Ashford as a result of formal eviction from their tenancy. From 24 September 2020, the courts have resumed operation but are subject to both large backlogs of applications and a number of new prescribed regulations requiring landlords to serve longer periods of notice to their tenants.
- 22. Therefore, the number of homeless applications being made in this period are still considerable lower that in 2019/20. From April 2020 to September 2020, **661** applications have been made by homeless households representing a 28% reduction. .



More positively, it has allowed the Housing Options Team to reduce numbers in temporary accommodation from **149** in July 2020 to **101** households as at 5 October 2020.



23. Within this reduced number of households in temporary accommodation, there have been 10 successful moves for rough sleepers. The MHCLG grant allocated for 2020/21 has allowed Ashford to put in place a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator, two Tenancy Sustainment Officers to provide support for newly accommodated rough sleepers. A Rough Sleeper Navigator has also been appointed by a partner agency [Riverside] to assist this client group in achieving successful housing outcomes.
24. MHCLG had directed that there be no “return to the streets” for the rough sleepers assisted, and stated that hostel type accommodation or shared space night shelters will not be permitted as housing solutions for rough sleepers. Consequently, the focus in the Housing Options Team will be to identify suitable accommodation with continuing wraparound support with our partners.

## Conclusion

25. Subject to the pace of recovery from Covid 19 nationally, Ashford might reasonably expect an increase in activity in homelessness in the coming six months. Key factors may include –
- *County Courts may not be able to effect the numbers of formal evictions that would normally be expected*
  - *they may be more fully operational towards February/March 2021*
  - *An anticipated rise in homeless approaches due to domestic abuse [moving further into recovery]*
  - *The broader negative economic impact to households and ability to sustain their tenancies due to redundancy, loss of employment or state aid ending*
26. Opportunities still exist presently to reduce levels of temporary accommodation further. Henwood Modular Scheme, when on line, can assist with throughput of homeless households, as can the new temporary accommodation provision at Christchurch Lodge operating at full capacity.

The street purchase programme can enable the Allocations Team to assist highly banded cases on Choice Based Lettings and use the resultant void properties for homeless households where possible.

27. Despite the distorted effect that Covid 19 may have had in respect of homelessness at Ashford, it is still felt that the principles in the Action Plan outlined at Cabinet should still apply going forward. Emphasis on early, effective prevention had proved its worth prior to Covid 19 and allowed the reduction in the use of emergency temporary accommodation. Going further into recovery, where this will lead to a position where we can identify and secure suitable, settled accommodation for homeless households this approach might reasonably be retained to deliver the best outcomes.

**Ray O'Shea**

**Housing Operations Manager**

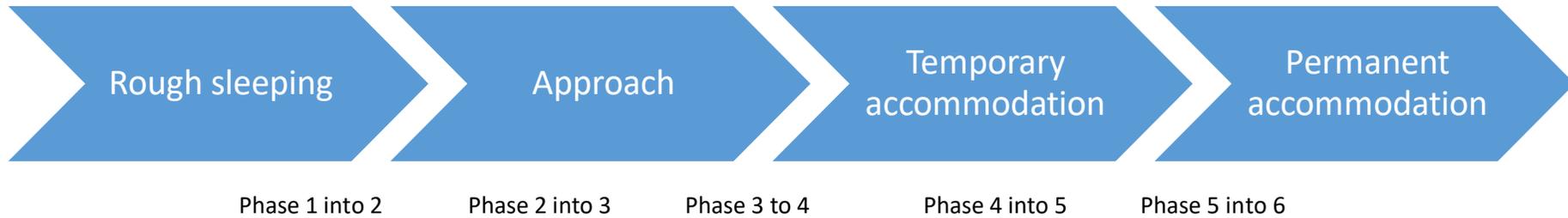
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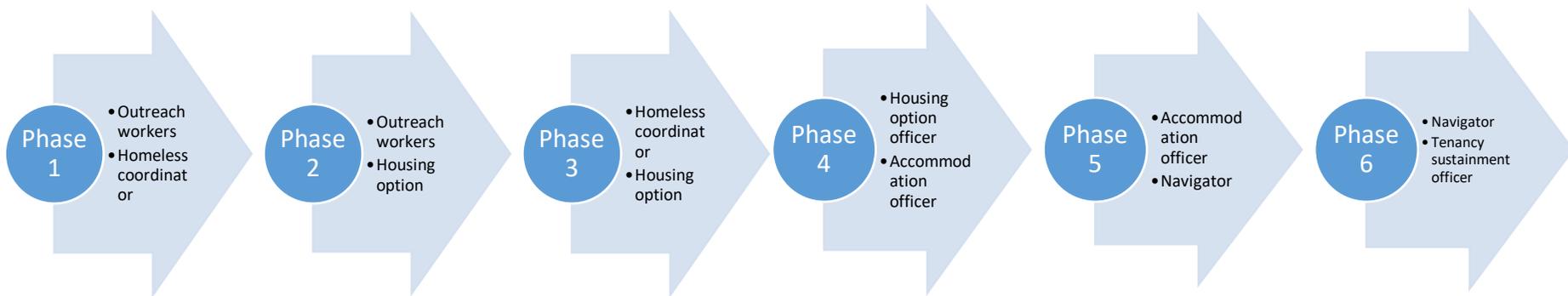
## Appendix B

### ROUGH SLEEPER INTO ACCOMMODATION TIMELINE

The outline for progressing move on options together with more specific detail is outlined below -



### Main Rough sleeper supported services timeline



These two timelines work parallel to one and another, having two Main Rough sleeper supported services working together in each phase with handover period to the new phase. With other agencies (probation, mental health, social services, drug and alcohol agencies) being brought in if and when necessary.

- Phase 1, outreach workers to complete regular walkabouts and to investigate any reports of rough sleepers, also working in conjunction with the homeless coordinator and the churches volunteers to engage with rough sleepers to start building a working relationship with the aim to foster a good understanding of the clients situation and build trust with them, homeless coordinator to feed information back to relevant bodies and organisations.
- Phase 2, outreach worker to encourage rough sleeper to start working with relevant organisations depending on support needs and working with housing options, once the application has been made the housing option officer will go through the PHP (personal housing plan)
- Phase 3, housing option officer to look at the most appropriate accommodation during this period and whether there is appropriate TA (temporary accommodation) homeless coordinator to track all current organisations involved with the client.
- Phase 4, accommodation officer to look at appropriate permanent solutions in conjunction with housing option officer and homeless coordinator.
- Phase 5, clients move into permanent accommodation with assistance from homeless coordinator and homeless navigator, this will involve sourcing furniture cooking utensils and anything else that would be appropriate for the accommodation they will be moving into, this could be a room in a shared, one-bedroom flat, or more supportive accommodation.
- Phase 6, navigator to check that all relevant supported agencies are in place at the beginning of the new tenancy and keeping track that the client is engaging, then navigator can start moving away from supporting client when appropriate. If things start to break down for client at any point of the tenancy we can put in place a sustainment officer.

**Agenda Item No:** 11  
**Report To:** Cabinet  
**Date of Meeting:** 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
**Report Title:** Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 –Implementation and Current Position  
**Report Author & Job Title:** Ray O’Shea  
Housing Operations Manager (Housing Options and Private Sector Housing)  
**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Bill Barrett  
**Portfolio Holder for:** Housing



**Summary:** The Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented on 3 April 2018. The legislation was introduced to place a greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness.

Whilst the introduction of the Act has resulted in an 11% increase in homelessness approaches to the Council, the numbers of households accepted as homeless has reduced significantly from **160** cases in 2017/18 to **71** cases in 2018/19. In addition, the number of preventions has risen in the first year of implementation from **148** in 2017/18 to **293** in 2018/19.

This report provides an overview of the current position relating to homelessness in the Borough, as well as some data on number of clients who have accessed our service. The report also reviews our experiences in relation to the new Act so far and sets out our action plan for tackling homelessness.

**Key Decision:** YES

**Significantly Affected Wards:** All

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

- I. Note the progress made since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- II. Agree the action plan set out in report to tackle homelessness and reduce numbers in temporary accommodation.
- III. That the report be referred to Overview and Scrutiny for review.

<b>Policy Overview:</b>	Housing Framework/Homelessness Strategy
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	There are financial implications on the budget for 2019/20 due to an overspend on temporary accommodation together with increased spend on prevention initiatives. Continuing focus to minimise financial spend with good prevention outcomes will aim to mitigate costs in temporary accommodation which should logically fall.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	Current legislation (Housing Act 1996, as amended)
<b>Equalities Impact Assessment</b>	See Attached at Appendix 1
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	None
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	No
<b>Background Papers:</b>	Cabinet Report dated 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2018 – Homeless Reduction Act 2017
<b>Contact:</b>	<a href="mailto:raymond.oshea@ashford.gov.uk">raymond.oshea@ashford.gov.uk</a> Tel 01233 330808

**Report Title: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017  
Implementation & Current Position**

**Introduction and Background**

1. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was implemented on 3 April 2018, enacting the biggest change in homelessness legislation in forty years. It retained current homelessness legislation but expanded it by adding additional legal housing and homelessness duties for local authorities in England.

It followed the implementation of similar legislation in Wales [April 2015], where local authorities were tasked with engaging in much earlier intervention to assist households who were threatened with homelessness.

2. Five key changes were introduced:
  - To expand the provision of advice and information about homelessness with prevention and relief of homelessness as a primary focus
  - Extending the period of “threatened homelessness” for households from twenty eight to fifty six days and allow earlier intervention
  - New duties to both prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people [irrespective of their priority need or any issues of intentional homelessness]
  - Tailored assessments and Personalised Housing Plans [PHP], setting out actions that local authorities and clients need to take to secure alternative accommodation
  - Encouraging public bodies and agencies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a new legal “duty to refer”
3. Prior to the implementation of the Act, a review of the Housing Options service was undertaken with a restructure later approved to meet changing service needs. In 2018/19, the team comprised seven Housing Options Officers (two officers on yearly fixed term contracts), one Housing Options Coordinator, one Accommodation Officer and a Housing Options Manager.
4. This report will seek to outline the current position, provide data on trends since the Act was implemented, and look to make recommendations in streamlining processes and staff structures to promote better efficiencies in service delivery.

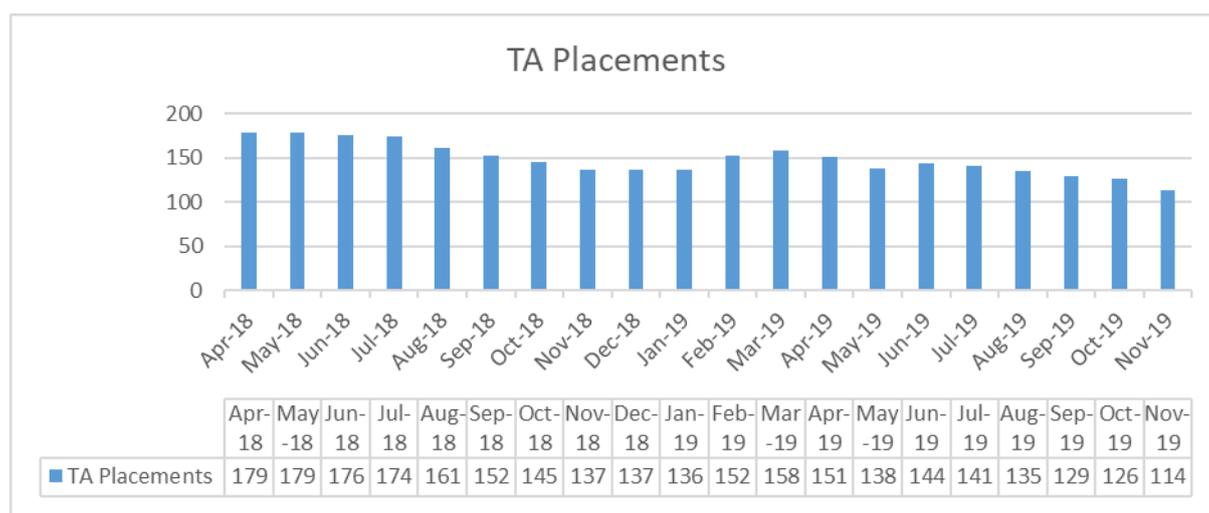
**Current Position**

5. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 [HRACT] was enacted in April 2018, with a dedicated recruitment exercise for new staff to meet new demands of the law changes.

The arrival of newly appointed staff was an incremental process and resulted in the Housing Options Team becoming fully operational with its new staff

complement in September 2018. In the main, it is acknowledged that identifying good quality staff members and practitioners to work in the new environment following HRACT implementation had proved to be quite difficult across the sector.

6. The current team have a wide range of working experience in a variety of different disciplines [including social care, supported housing and third sector/voluntary organisations]. Most positively, the diverse range of skills and experience has allowed members of the Housing Options team to adapt more readily to recent law changes.
7. Under old homelessness legislation, there were no legal duties to proactively prevent or relieve homelessness for a household threatened with the loss of their accommodation. It was anticipated that the new expanded legislation and new legal duties would logically lead to increases in the numbers of approaches made, together with the more intensive, tailored case work that would be required to meet the new duties.
8. In 2017/18, the number of approaches from households threatened with homelessness in Ashford was, on average, **124** cases on a monthly basis. Since HRACT was implemented in April 2018 this has now risen to **138** cases monthly. Throughout the year, the same level of activity has been broadly maintained and is relatively stable in 2018/19. Overall, this represents an **11%** increase in activity.
9. The picture nationally and regionally will obviously vary but Ashford has been one of the few local authorities in Kent where the numbers of households in temporary accommodation have fallen. Despite the increased number of homeless approaches that have been made in Ashford since HRACT this represents a **34 %** decrease since April 2018.



Levels of rough sleeping have risen in Kent regionally, and remain a concern in Ashford. MHCLG [the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - formerly the Department for Communities and Local

Government] have directed in their published strategy that rough sleeping be reduced by 50 % by 2022 and then eliminated by 2027.

10. The number of approaches made to Ashford, and the number of households who are actually owed a legal duty can differ for a number of reasons. After preliminary assessments have been completed, these will include households –

- Who are not at risk of homelessness
- Who are not eligible for assistance
- Who have not maintained contact to progress their application
- Who have withdrawn their application

From the remaining cases there is a focus on achieving successful outcomes for households, in order that costly, lengthy placements in emergency interim accommodation are avoided wherever that is possible.

11. On 1 October 2018, a new additional legal “Duty to Refer” was introduced for a number of specified public bodies (as per *Homelessness (Review Procedure etc.) Regulations 2018*).

Those who are subject to this new homelessness duty are (in England only) -

- Prisons
- Young Offender Institutions
- Secure Training Centres
- Secure Colleges
- Youth Offending Teams
- Probation Services (Including Community Rehabilitation Companies)
- Jobcentres In England
- Social Service Authorities (Both Adult And Children)
- Emergency Departments
- Urgent Treatment Centres
- Hospitals In Their Function Of Providing Inpatient Care
- Secretary Of State For Defence In Relation To Members Of The Regular Armed Forces

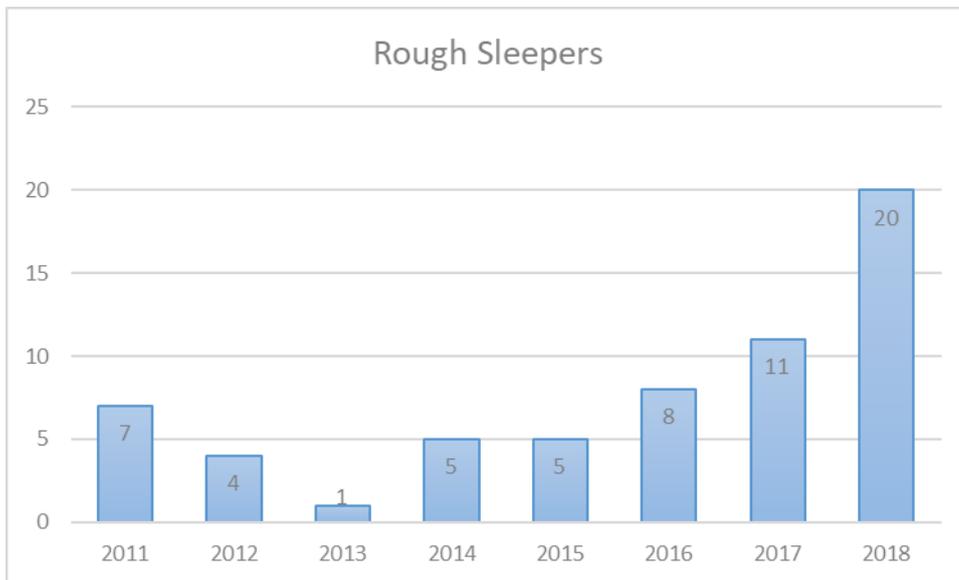
These additional referrals for households threatened by homelessness have increased the number of active cases requiring assessment by Housing Options team by an average **25 to 30** per month. Ashford Borough Council also run regular homelessness forums to maintain strong existing arrangements for partnership working and to assist in providing early notification of potential homelessness.

12. Overall, the numbers of homelessness approaches in Ashford has been stable since April 2018 [with the exception of a seasonal peak in January 2019]. The aforementioned Duty to Refer from specified public bodies [effective from 1 October 2018] did see a further small increase in numbers, but has been broadly managed within existing resources.
13. On average, officers maintain a case load of between **25 to 30** households but this can fluctuate depending on the number of approaches being made.

There has been a dramatic drop in number of homeless cases that are being accepted and provided with a full housing duty. During 2017/18 this number was **160** whereas this year in 2018/19 it had dropped to **71**.

## **Rough Sleepers**

14. An area of increased concern in Ashford is the reported number of rough sleepers. In November each year, a street count is conducted with figures reported directly to MHCLG [the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - formerly the Department for Communities and Local Government]. MHCLG's published strategy directs that rough sleeping be reduced by 50 % by 2022 and then finally eliminated by 2027.
15. Local authorities are obliged to update their Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy by Winter 2019 to reflect these new defined priorities. Latest national statistics that have been published show a 2% decrease in rough sleeping. There has, however, been a pronounced increase in rough sleeping in Kent in recent years and the graph below shows local activity for the past eight years in Ashford. Solid progress has been made in addressing the increased levels of rough sleeping in Ashford and there are excellent examples of engaging with formerly entrenched vulnerable persons with formal moves to settled housing.
16. This remains both a national and regional priority and there is real optimism that rough sleeping locally can be eliminated with the focused approach already adopted, and having made adjustments to more pro-active service delivery. The numbers of rough sleepers have fallen by more than half in Ashford, and our Housing First initiative to assist identified, entrenched rough sleepers is due to roll out imminently.
17. Ashford Borough Council chair a rough sleepers working group every month composed of partner agencies representing Kent Police, Probation, Street Pastors, Vinnies Diner, Ashford Churches Together Group, Salvation Army, Community Safety Unit and Porchlight. This group has been vital in the coordination and implementation of the Winter Night Shelter for the past four years.
18. The rough sleeper count for MHCLG showed **20** verified cases for November 2018. This represents an increase of **55%** from **11** cases identified in November 2017. The Winter Night Shelter programme in Ashford ran from November 2018 to March 2019 and had identified **22** active cases.



19. Intensive case work, together with the deployment of the new prevention and relief duties, resulted in **12** rough sleepers being assisted into alternative housing solutions. Of the remaining **10** cases, three had been temporarily accommodated pending fuller assessment, and ongoing work to engage all rough sleepers in need of housing advice and assistance continues.
20. Ashford Borough Council had previously provided Porchlight £24,000 per year for a part time outreach worker solely for Ashford. This has been the case for a number of years but with the increased rough sleeper activity emerging over the past two years, it was felt that a full time post was merited. Consideration was given to the feasibility of having the function being brought in to operate “in-house” and take more direct control of outreach work and statutory HRACT assessments.

### **Implications and Risk Assessment**

21. It was recognised nationally, and by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), that the first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act would be subject to new activity with a large number of variables given the planned changes in delivery, mind-set, new legal duties and increased administrative burdens.
22. As predicted, there has been a period of adjustment in this new environment for both staff and members of the public. It has been acknowledged that local authorities who had made good preparations in advance of HRACT have had less difficulty in adjusting to the new ethos and ways of working.
23. **Legacy Cases** - although the new legislation came into effect on 3 April 2018, homeless applications received before this date fall under old legislation and are referred to as “legacy” cases. As at 31 March 2018, the team held **300** legacy cases under the old legislation. These cases must continue to be assessed and dealt with under the old duties, and therefore “move on” accommodation is still a vital part of reducing the pressures on temporary accommodation numbers.

24. MHCLG had indicated to local authorities that there would be a transitional period where statistical activity for these homeless households could still be provided and recorded. However, in the longer term, they had advised that would not be the case. Dedicated resource/staff was tasked directly with updating records accordingly and identified households who no longer required our assistance [that is, *legacy* cases who may have secured their own accommodation or had resolved their homelessness].
25. Following this exercise, it was established that **89** households remained, all of whom were in temporary accommodation. Over the past year in 2018/19, this number has been reduced to **36** remaining housing cases which need to be moved on to into secure or more settled permanent accommodation. It is expected that remainder of the outstanding cases will be cleared by Q4 in 2019/20.
26. **KCC Housing Related Support** - it should be noted that in October 2018, Kent County Council (KCC) made significant changes to contracts for adult, children and ex-offenders in supported accommodation. In the longer term, there is a strong likelihood that this will impact county wide, with more single vulnerable people who might not meet the statutory threshold for services approaching Ashford and less accommodation/provision available for them.
27. In addition, KCC have altered criteria for those able to access floating support services. Only households that are identified as being at threat of homelessness are now eligible for the service. In effect, there will be no early intervention from this service until matters might be approaching a crisis point. This will run counter to the service aim and statutory duties under HRACT and minimises the prospects of achieving more successful prevention work and outcomes.
28. In order to meaningfully address and reduce the current levels of households in temporary accommodation, an Action Plan has been drawn up with a specific focus on identifying, procuring and delivering a supply of suitable, affordable housing to move households on to settled housing.
29. By allocating via the Housing Register in a focused, efficient manner and making best use of our available stock, we would look to halve the level of homeless households in nightly paid accommodation by half in 2021/22, and aim to eliminate the use of this form of temporary accommodation by 2023.
30. The Temporary Accommodation Action Plan will directly address three key areas as follows :
  - **Reducing the flow of homelessness by providing early, effective prevention at source**
  - **Controlling and reducing expenditure on the provision of emergency temporary accommodation [TA]**
  - **Ensuring that there is a supply of suitable and affordable housing for “move on” to settled accommodation**

## Reducing The Flow Of Homelessness

31. In order to comply with the new HRACT duties, households will need to demonstrate that they are eligible for services and legally homeless. The increased activity in homeless approaches in 2018/19 indicates that there were **1871** approaches. Maintaining vigilance at the front of the service, and having robust and rigorous levels of prevention and casework management have meant that **less than a fifth of all homeless approaches** in 2018/19 eventually needed placement into emergency temporary accommodation.
32. **Causes of homelessness** - the primary cause of homeless approaches at Ashford will have arisen from parental eviction from the family home, with the loss of private sector tenancies as the second most common cause. These circumstances are also reflected in the number of placements made into temporary accommodation, and aligns with the current demand and profile on Ashford's Housing Register.
33. Of **1871** approaches that were made in Ashford in 2018/19, **362 households [19.34 %]** were as a result of family evictions. Of these, only **94 households [5.02 %]** were ultimately placed into emergency temporary accommodation. As these households are not tenants and there is no legal requirement to evict them by means of a court order, it is often the case that little can be done to prevent their placement.
34. Of **206 households [11.01 %]** approaching due to the loss of their private rented tenancy, only **47 [2.51 %]** were placed into temporary accommodation. This is broadly indicative of solid prevention work but does acknowledge that private sector tenants will have no underlying security of tenure. Relieving pressure on the Housing Register with regard to having good levels of affordable housing supply can indirectly have a positive effect in driving down numbers of homeless approaches being made.
35. It is notable that since HRACT there is now a greater emphasis on providing advice and assistance for single persons and rough sleepers who are threatened with homelessness. This client group would also benefit from financial assistance that they had not been able to access under old legislation, but has presented a new administrative and budgetary pressure.
36. Existing structural issues and externalities could risk reversing the positive steps achieved by HRACT so far. There is considerable pressure for Government to address issues underpinning homelessness by building more social housing, restoring LHA rates in Universal Credit to ensure they truly cover the cost of rent and allow more people to afford the option of renting in the private sector.
37. It remains imperative that there is a focus on identifying, securing and providing affordable and suitable housing options for households to avoid families having to face the prospect of homelessness and temporary accommodation. Supply still remains key to this approach, in order to minimise and reduce levels of households in temporary accommodation and to provide viable housing solutions allowing families to move on after the crisis moment has passed.

## Controlling Expenditure On TA

38. **Existing TA Provision** - there are currently **115** households in temporary accommodation at Ashford which has been reduced from **179** households since HRACT came into force in April 2018.

TA Activity [%] as at 24 October 2019		
B & B	0 %	0 households/rough sleepers
Hostel	0 %	0 households
Local Authority Stock	6.84 %	8 households
Christchurch House	5.98 %	7 households
Private Sector Leased	21.37 %	25 households
Tufton House	27.35 %	35 households
Nightly Paid (Trafalgar/Paramount/Housing Network)	34.78 %	40 households
<b>Total</b>	<b>115 units</b>	

39. **Bed and Breakfast** is the most expensive form of emergency temporary accommodation is bed and breakfast which is not self-contained. Costs can also vary subject to the size of the family/household that has been accommodated. Additionally, it is not lawful to place expectant mothers or families in bed and breakfast [unless in exceptional circumstances] for longer than six weeks.
40. Typically, for a small family with two dependents, the weekly B & B charge in Ashford is **£420.00** weekly. Local authorities can only be reimbursed a fixed sum for Housing Benefit of **£116.88** weekly and this represents a net spend of **£303.12 weekly** for each household. There are currently no families in bed and breakfast.
41. **Nightly paid accommodation** is self-contained and can be a less costly form of temporary accommodation but - unlike B & B placements - is entirely lawful for households placed for extended periods of time when this is required.
42. Currently, for a small family with two dependents, the charge is approximately £36 per night but- as before - local authorities can only be reimbursed a fixed sum for Housing Benefit of **£116.88 weekly**. This type of accommodation this represents a net spend to Ashford of **£135.12 weekly** for each household. There are currently **40** households in nightly paid accommodation representing **34.78%** of all placements.
43. **Tufton House** is temporary accommodation provision which comprises **35** self-contained units directly managed by Carridon Property. They are paid £25,000 monthly to do so, converting to £174.82 weekly for each household. After receipt of the fixed sum for Housing Benefit of £116.88, the net cost per household to Ashford is **£57.94 weekly**.

44. **Private Sector Leasing [PSL]** - Ashford have operated a Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSL) whereby the Council leases properties from private sector landlords as temporary accommodation for households in housing need. Changes in central Government policy in 2010 and 2011 eroded the margin between the rental income levels and payments. A financial cap was imposed on the maximum amount of housing benefit that the Council can claim back for the cost of temporary accommodation.
45. Consideration has been given to the financial impact of the Private Sector Leased Accommodation provision as there has been a loss of **£8448 in 2018/19**. Notably, this figure does not take account of any repair issues that might arise which might potentially present further liability and costs to Ashford. PSL had been a source of temporary accommodation but over the period 2017 to date, the number of PSL properties have reduced from **57 to 25** [as at 8 November 2019].
46. A proportion of PSL properties have been recovered at the end of the lease period by the landlord. Of the remaining properties, four are being converted to our Social Lettings Agency [ABC Lettings]. Three more are being purchased by HRA with one being handed back to executors of a landlord. It is anticipated that this the number of accepted homeless households in PSL accommodation will fall to **21** units in the coming months. From these, **19** remaining “rolling” lease contracts have expired, with **4** others due to expire in 2020.
47. **Christchurch House** is high specification temporary accommodation provision owned and directly managed by Ashford Borough Council. It has eight accommodation units (including a wheelchair-accessible unit), washing facilities, communal kitchen area, storage space and courtyard. Previously, the majority of homeless applicants whom the council had a duty to house may have been placed in B&B accommodation – a costly course of action for the taxpayer, which can sometimes be a traumatic experience that takes its toll on the individuals and families affected.
48. It was initially acquired for £278,000, refurbished for £340,000 and opened in 2014, with **180** households having been placed in a short term but stable environment before a more settled solution to their housing need is identified. The rental income maximises the level of Housing Benefit that is payable and is effectively **cost neutral**. This project is truly innovative in the savings that are generated and means that the property will have effectively paid for itself in the longer term, with the council retaining a valuable asset.

#### **Future Provision Of TA**

49. From an analysis of the figures, if we can maintain increased rates of prevention of homelessness activity and supply sufficient numbers of move on settled housing for those in temporary accommodation via the use of our street purchase programme and new build programme, it is anticipated that the Council will need a baseline supply of **50** units of temporary accommodation. In view of this a number of projects are being considered to

increase the Council's own stock of good quality, cost effective temporary accommodation. Currently we have **8** units of accommodation at Christchurch House and a further **8** units under construction at Christchurch Lodge due to be completed in early February 2020. This means that a further **34** units of temporary accommodation is required.

50. **Belgic Court [New Use]** - Golding Homes had worked in partnership with Ashford BC to commission a nine unit supported housing development for young persons between 16 to 24 years of age. Golding Homes carried out the housing management function for the project and Sanctuary Supported Living provided the support element on site.
51. In October 2018, Kent County Council (KCC) made significant changes to Housing Related Support contracts for adults, children and ex-offenders in supported accommodation. This exercise impacted county wide, with more single vulnerable people not meeting the statutory threshold for services, and less supported accommodation/provision available in Ashford. In addition, KCC altered criteria for those accessing floating support services. Only households that are identified as being at threat of homelessness are now eligible for the service from 1 April 2018.
52. As a consequence, Sanctuary Supported Living advised that they were withdrawing the support element from the project and Golding Homes informed us that they may be unable to continue managing properties under these arrangements. Ashford BC were ultimately able to provide housing solutions for the displaced households but - following a series of discussions with Golding Homes – a new agreement has been reached on alternative use of Belgic Court for young parents and an enhanced housing management function.
53. It is expected that **eight households** in TA will be identified and referred to Belgic Court in November/December 2019. Housing Benefit revenue will be paid to Golding Homes at an enhanced housing management rate to allow the scheme to be financially viable. Most importantly, it will remove eight households from our existing TA placements currently in costly nightly paid accommodation.
54. **Christchurch Lodge** is an initiative that will follow the blueprint of the Christchurch House scheme. It will be developed into high quality short-stay accommodation for **eight households** to whom the council has a homeless duty or who have a case under HRACT assessment. The building at 112 Beaver Road [adjacent to Christchurch House] was purchased for £430,000 from the Church of England with £500,000 invested to convert it into eight homes, capable of accommodating 25 people. Like Christchurch House, it will have facilities like a communal kitchen, dining room and laundry room added. As before, the rental income will maximise the level of Housing Benefit that is payable and will be effectively **cost neutral**.
55. In addition to the above schemes proposals for additional schemes to bring the baseline number of units up to 50 are currently being developed and will be brought forward shortly.

## Ensuring Good Levels Of Affordable Housing Supply For “Move On”

### Growth of Social Lettings Agency [SLA] & Review

56. The SLA was set up in 2012 as a means of providing settled housing solutions for homeless households as opposed to emergency accommodation. They operate a full management function for private sector landlords on the basis that the management fee charged should be a minimum of 10% of the rental income.
57. Recent changes in housing legislation and fees have meant that the SLA option is now a favourable choice for landlords when compared to what might alternatively be offered on the high street. Typically, landlords will ideally want rental income in line with market rents but these prove to be unaffordable to homeless clients. SLA staff current have the flexibility to negotiate on landlord management fees to achieve the best outcome and secure properties at affordable rent levels. This also has the effect of avoiding households being placed in costly B&B or nightly paid accommodation.
58. It can often be the case that those placed into SLA properties will have a shortfall in rent and their benefit entitlement. This is being addressed with nominees for the scheme having thorough, detailed assessments in respect of suitability/affordability with specific regard to sustaining their tenancies in the long term. This can, on occasion, involve accessing extra financial assistance via Discretionary Housing Payments.
59. A SPACE session had previously been held with officers from legal, communications and finance invited in order to launch a review of the business plan for the social lettings agency (SLA). The full review began in April 2019 looking in full detail at future growth for the SLA with the option of expansion of the service into other parts of Kent. The review also takes account of the current market and looks to ensure that the SLA is responsive to the requirements of landlords locally.
60. When finalised, the review aims to provide better structure in the team, with opportunities to procure more properties, devise appropriate marketing materials to promote the service, and continue to contribute directly to the reduction of homeless households in TA.
61. **Private Sector Offer** - in view of the demands on the service and the rising cost of temporary accommodation and lack of supply of affordable rented accommodation, there is a need to identify other ways to make our prevention work more effective and to gain access to a wider number and range of private sector properties. The private sector landlord offer was reviewed and initially piloted for a period of six months in May 2018.
62. The Housing Options previously team ran a well-attended landlord event in June 2018, and this was followed by a similar event in May 2019 updating landlords on progress throughout the year. On both occasions, excellent feedback was provided about the service that Ashford provides and positive indications that landlords were happy to work with us.

63. The current landlord offer provides a range of options and solutions depending on the requirements of both the landlord and the household's needs. Costings are based on an "invest to save" payment measured against the alternative costs of placing households in costly temporary accommodation.
64. Flexibility also exists in the scheme to allow for alternative solutions not expressly set out in our procedures but judged in the context of a cost benefit analysis against likely B&B or nightly paid accommodation cost. Overall, the scheme has resulted in doubling the number of successful prevention outcomes for the year and has shown to offer good value for money.
65. **Modular Housing Solutions & Street Purchases** - Ashford BC have outlined in their current delivery plan, the longer term vision for addressing housing need and homelessness in the borough stating -

**Building On Solid Foundations: Delivering Affordable Homes In Ashford  
Our Delivery Plan For 2019-2023**

*We will deliver energy efficient homes and use modern methods of construction on sites of the right topography that provide relevant access – including for temporary accommodation to assist with homelessness provision. We will also investigate setting up an Ashford Living Rent to tackle genuine affordability issues within the borough*

*Continuing our on-street purchase programme to deliver homes that we can adapt for people with specific, more complex needs, or that boost our stock more quickly than building would*

66. The expanded street purchase programme would look to secure **50** properties for 2019/20 and **100** more in 2020/21, which can be used to alleviate pressure on the Housing Register for urgent transfer cases, and free up the resultant void properties for homeless households. Modular housing projects offer and efficient housing solutions and could readily be used to alleviate pressure on the numbers of homeless households in TA.

**Consultation [Team Structure]**

67. Following implementation of the Act, the team met monthly to discuss procedures and working practices. This effectively served as an opportunity to ensure that there was consistency in delivery throughout the team. On the 27 February 2019, a full consultation meeting was held with the team to find out what they felt was working well and areas that could be improved upon to take the service forward. As part of this consultation, six key areas were considered -

- Team Structure
- Management Information Systems [Locata]
- Prevention & Relief Working Arrangements
- Temporary Accommodation Reduction

- Communications
  - Training
68. Although, it was felt that the structure of the team was broadly well balanced, and strengthened with a solid coordinator role, it was acknowledged that more could be done at the “front end” to improve service delivery.
69. In essence, preliminary assessments at the first point of contact provide some low level housing advice before a Housing Options officer is assigned to a case. The recruitment exercise resulted in appointing an excellent, experienced and capable officer in this role. It is now proposed to expand the role further to be able to issue lawful decisions quickly at the initial approach stage if households are not homeless or at threat of homelessness.
70. Other identified areas for service improvements in this respect were –
- Changes to daily/weekly rota working arrangements
  - Streamlining “front end” administrative processes
  - Augmenting the coordinator role to alleviate pressures
  - Identifying and implementing enhancements to the Management Information Systems [Locata]
  - Empowering Housing Options Officers to engage more proactively on prevention initiatives
71. Communication is good within the team and regularly convened weekly meetings gauge performance and offer clarity on emerging issues. The team has requested that management could set out new priorities for the next six months ahead, to both maintain and make improvements in the good progress made so far. From September 2018, a training programme was rolled out and includes a mix of internal training, partner agencies delivering training with more formal accredited training from the Chartered Institute of Housing [CIH]. The team have acknowledged that this tailored approach has proved to be informative, relevant and has empowered them sufficiently to address existing and changing service needs.
72. There is broad agreement that service delivery could be better achieved with adjustments to the Housing Options Coordinator role and with more focus on increased levels of rough sleeping by resourcing a Single Homelessness /Rough Sleeper Coordinator in support of this.

## Finance

73. The first year of HRACT implementation and the use of the new prevention initiatives has - unsurprisingly - seen an increase in spend [£126,176 spent in 2019/19 against £71,712 in 2017/18]. This has allowed for **293** households to be assisted and avoid becoming homeless in 2018/19 by engaging in prevention work or by relieving homelessness, together with keeping family placements in bed and breakfast at negligible levels.
74. This figure for successful prevention/relief outcomes is significantly higher than **148** households assisted in 2017/18 and is to be welcomed. It has meant that notional savings in the order of approximately £200,000 have been

made based on the assumption that displaced households might have been placed in extremely costly, emergency interim accommodation.

75. Temporary accommodation remains a concern for the team. Whilst the overall number of households in TA has decreased from **179** to **114** since April 2018, there remains a severe shortage and supply of available, affordable properties for “move on”.
76. Market rents in the private rented sector continue to rise with the majority of accommodation being- on average - £120 over the Local Housing Allowance [LHA] rate per month. Households who are on low incomes or in receipt of welfare benefits will routinely struggle with affordability issues when identifying suitable accommodation and needing to move.
77. The continuing roll out of welfare reform, and recent enactment of the Tenant Fees Act 2019 appear to be impacting directly on market rents in Ashford and could widen the financial shortfall with rates of LHA even further. Recent uprating for LHA in April 2019 has resulted in a minor increase in entitlement but still looks set to be outpaced by the increased rates of market rent.

<b>Local Housing Allowance Rates [2019/20]</b>				
Shared rooms calendar month	£69.11	weekly	=	£299.48 per
One bedroom property calendar month	£126.34	weekly	=	£547.47 per
Two bedroom property calendar month	£149.79	weekly	=	£649.09 per
Three bedroom property calendar month	£178.23	weekly	=	£772.33 per
Four bedroom property calendar month	£230.34	weekly	=	£954.81 per

78. In 2018/19 and in anticipation of this emerging problem, an Accommodation Officer was appointed last year. The aim was to identify receptive landlords who would assist those homeless households on low incomes and/or in receipt of welfare benefits. This has proved to be challenging work as the objective was to negotiate rates of market rent which are affordable for this client group but, despite this, approximately **10** households have been assisted in 2018/19.
79. The Housing Options Team benefit from the work done by the Property Support Officer who is jointly funded by the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund. Their time is divided between processing Choice Based Lettings applications and managing the temporary accommodation. A robust monitoring system has been developed and has been extremely effective in reducing arrears in temporary accommodation. The collection rates for 2017/18 stood at **88%**, improving in 2018/19 to **96%**.
80. ABC Lettings, the Social Lettings Agency has been in place at Ashford since 2012, and has successfully assisted over **200** households threatened with homelessness into private rented accommodation. There is also a

collaborative partnership with Folkestone & Hythe District Council which has assisted a further **80** homeless households. It is recognised that this has had a pronounced effect on alleviating pressures on the service and has - on average - effectively prevented **25 to 30** placements of homeless households into emergency interim accommodation each year with planned moves into settled accommodation.

### **Options Considered**

81. Adopt the Action Plan to reduce levels of homeless households in temporary accommodation
82. Review and enhance the Housing Options Coordinator role
83. Embed the service with the new full time Single Homelessness Outreach/Rough Sleeper Coordinator to directly intervene and address levels of rough sleeping.

### **Supporting Recommendations**

84. The current structure - when fully staffed - will generally work well, and has made great strides in 2018/19 but it is quite finely balanced. Allowing for absences such as annual leave and sickness, gaps in the service can emerge quickly and this will heighten the risk of harming the solid prevention work that has been completed this year.
85. HRACT has produced additional workload in respect of client groups who had not historically been well served before the new legal duties were implemented. Previously, single persons who were in relatively good health had limited access to advice and assistance. They now benefit from having a prevention service that provides tailored, bespoke Personalised Housing Plans [PHP] to address their homelessness.
86. In addition to this, the steep increase in numbers of rough sleepers within our borough demonstrated an identified need for expanding the role of a Single Homelessness Outreach/Rough Sleeper Coordinator within the team. Funding that had been formerly provided to an external provider for part time outreach work for Ashford was utilised, in addition to available MHCLG grant specifically for the prevention of homelessness.
87. During the three months that the Winter Night Shelter was in operation until March 2019, one Housing Options Officer was tasked to focus solely on this client group. HRACT assessments and PHPs were provided in line with our statutory duties for clients requiring assistance, as well as welfare checks being completed at drop-in sessions.
88. It is proposed that the job description of the coordinator role ought to more fully reflect their duties in terms of their skill set and seniority. The recruitment of a full time Single Homelessness Outreach/Rough Sleeper Coordinator to replace the existing part time provision in Ashford will look to increase the level of successful outcomes for this client group.

## Conclusion

89. The Housing Options Service have had to manage significant changes in working arrangements over the past year. As well as implementing new legislation, they have adapted to a fresh mind set and ethos, including new management information systems, and bedding in new staff in an expanded team. HRACT has clearly come with its challenges, but it is felt that Ashford are positioned ahead of other Local Authorities in terms of processes, procedures and results. We recognise what is working well and understand where we may need to make changes to enhance our service further.
90. There has been a reduction in the overall number in temporary accommodation by **34 %** since April 2018 and there will be a continued focus in this area in the coming year.
91. Prevention and relief outcomes to avoid placement in emergency accommodation and/or bed and breakfast have risen to **290** in 2018/19 [from **148** in 2017/18].
92. There is proven positive benefit in minimising social harm for households who are threatened with homelessness. There will be a continued emphasis on prevention enabling families and vulnerable persons to avoid a “crisis” moment and the loss of accommodation for their household.
93. There has been a reduction of **44%** in the number of households where we are accepting the full housing duty by successfully preventing or relieving their homelessness.
94. Solid progress has been made in addressing the increased levels of rough sleeping in Ashford and there are excellent examples of engaging with formerly entrenched vulnerable persons with moves to settled housing. This remains both a national and regional priority and there is real optimism that we can eliminate rough sleeping locally with the focused approach already adopted, and making adjustments to more pro-active service delivery. The numbers of rough sleepers have fallen by more than half in Ashford in 2019, and our Housing First initiative to assist identified, entrenched rough sleepers is due to roll out imminently.
95. The implementation of the Temporary Accommodation Reduction Action Plan will aim to further prevent homelessness, minimise the use of costly emergency accommodation and encourage more supply of affordable suitable housing allowing homeless households to move on quickly.

## Portfolio Holder's Views

96. This report indicates the dedicated and coordinated work to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in Ashford. The main areas of activity reflect increased prevention work and robust assessment of applications to reduce homelessness in the first place; the provision of more cost effective options for temporary accommodation to reduce general fund expenditure on temporary housing; and a rapid increase in affordable homes to provide appropriate move on housing for households in temporary housing. As can be

seen from the report this approach is reducing the numbers in temporary accommodation and reducing the high costs of such accommodation whilst addressing the needs of homeless people in the Borough.

### **Contact and Email**

- 97. Ray O'Shea – Housing Operations Manager
- 98. [raymond.o'shea@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:raymond.o'shea@ashford.gov.uk) 01233 330808

1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:

- No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
- Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
- Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
- Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

## Public Sector Equality Duty

- The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (i.e. tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).

2. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

## Protected Characteristics

3. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership\*
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- \*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

## Due regard

4. Having ‘due regard’ is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.

5. To ‘have due regard’ means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:

- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
  - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people
  - encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low
6. How much regard is 'due' will depend on the circumstances. The greater the potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.
7. In terms of timing:
- Having 'due regard' should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change
  - Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
  - The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making

### **Case Law Principles**

8. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:
- Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the equality duty and so EIA's must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
  - Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.
  - A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
  - The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.
  - The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
  - The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
  - It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
  - A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
  - A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so

**The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on "Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making" (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [Equality Duty in decision-making](#)**

<b>Lead officer:</b>	<b>Rebecca Wilcox [2018]</b>	<b>Ray O'Shea [2019]</b>
<b>Decision maker:</b>	Cabinet	Management Team
<b>Decision:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy, project, service, contract</li> <li>• Review, change, new, stop</li> </ul>	Homeless Reduction Act 2017	Homeless Reduction Act 2017 <b>REVIEW</b>
<b>Date of decision:</b> The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	January 2018	<b>Reviewed – 2 April 2019</b>
<b>Summary of the proposed decision:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims and objectives</li> <li>• Key actions</li> <li>• Expected outcomes</li> <li>• Who will be affected and how?</li> <li>• How many people will be affected?</li> </ul>	<p>The Homeless Reduction Act will be implemented on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018.</p> <p>The aims and objectives of the Act is to have more emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. Every person that approaches for advice will be given a comprehensive personal housing plan which sets out exactly what they have to do, and what assistance the local authority will provide.</p> <p>Based on information from Wales, where the Act is already implemented, and from those Authorities piloting the Act, it is expected that the work load will double as more detailed casework needs to be conducted.</p>	<p><b>Implementation</b> The Homeless Reduction Act came into force on 3 April 2018 and the new legal duties in respect of prevention and relief of homelessness became effective for new applications from that date.</p> <p>Aims and objectives are as previously stated with emphasis on the prevention and relief of homelessness. Persons approaching under a threat of homelessness within 56 days have received initial advice and assistance followed by a tailored Personal Housing Plan [PHP] where it was required.</p> <p><b>Data [Ashford]</b> In 2017/18, the number of approaches from households threatened with homelessness in Ashford was - on average - <b>124</b> cases on a monthly basis. Since HRACT was implemented in April 2018 this has now risen to <b>138</b> cases monthly.</p> <p>Overall, the numbers of homelessness approaches in Ashford has been stable since April 2018 [with the exception of a seasonal peak in January 2019] and has been broadly managed within existing resources.</p> <p><b>Staff</b></p>

	<p>This will have a big impact on staff. We are proposing a restructure of the team and need to recruit additional members in order to meet the demand.</p> <p>There will also have an impact on the wider team, as the demand for private rented accommodation will increase as well as needing to amend our current lettings policy.</p> <p>There will also be a significant impact on our partner agencies with the increased duties.</p>	<p>Prior to the implementation of the Act, a review of the Housing Options service was undertaken. A restructure of staff was approved and the team now comprises -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five Housing Options Officers</li> <li>• Two Housing Options Officers On Yearly Fixed Term Contracts</li> <li>• One Housing Options Coordinator</li> <li>• One Accommodation Officer</li> <li>• Housing Options Manager</li> </ul> <p>The Housing Options Team became fully operational with its new staff complement in September 2018.</p> <p>There has been a dramatic drop in number of homeless cases that are being accepted and provided with a full housing duty. During 2017/18 there were <b>160</b> accepted cases as opposed to <b>71</b> cases in 2018/19.</p> <p>On average, officers maintain a case load of approximately <b>25</b> households fluctuating subject to the number of approaches being made.</p> <p><b>Partner Agencies</b> On 1 October 2018, a new legal “Duty to Refer” was introduced for a number of specified public bodies (as per <i>Homelessness (Review Procedure etc.) Regulations 2018</i>).</p> <p>Those who are subject to this new homelessness duty are (in England only) -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prisons</li> <li>➤ Young Offender Institutions</li> <li>➤ Secure Training Centres</li> <li>➤ Secure Colleges</li> <li>➤ Youth Offending Teams</li> <li>➤ Probation Services (Including Community Rehabilitation Companies)</li> <li>➤ Jobcentres In England</li> <li>➤ Social Service Authorities (Both Adult And Children)</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Emergency Departments</li> <li>➤ Urgent Treatment Centres</li> <li>➤ Hospitals In Their Function Of Providing Inpatient Care</li> <li>➤ Secretary Of State For Defence In Relation To Members Of The Regular Armed Forces</li> </ul> <p>Additional referrals for households threatened by homelessness have increased the number of cases requiring assessment by an average <b>25</b> to <b>30</b> monthly.</p>
<p><b>Information and research:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the information and research that has informed the decision.</li> <li>• Include sources and key findings.</li> </ul>	<p>Research has been conducted over the past few months looking at both the Welsh model and those Authorities piloting the scheme already.</p> <p>The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have recently issued a Code of Guidance and have made recommendations of how to implement the Act.</p> <p>In addition, we have sought the assistance from an independent consultant.</p>	<p>Data collated for the year 2018/19 indicates that there have been increased numbers of approaches by households threatened by homelessness of approximately <b>11%</b> in Ashford across all client groups.</p> <p>HCLIC quarterly statistical returns to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG - formerly DCLG] provide detailed data on homeless households who have accessed services.</p> <p>MHCLG have issued formal guidance for implementation of the Act [revised throughout the year]</p> <p>Version 1 - 3 April to 19 Jun 2018  Version 2 - 1 Nov 2018 to 5 Feb 2019  Version 3 - 20 Jun to 31 Oct 2018  Version 4 - 6 Feb to 14 April 2019</p> <p>There were also new legal duties enacted under the Homelessness (Review Procedure etc.) Regulations 2018 [with accompanying guidance] effective from 1 October 2018.</p>

<p><b>Consultation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What specific consultation has occurred on this decision?</li> <li>• What were the results of the consultation?</li> <li>• Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics?</li> </ul>	<p>Staff directly affected have had an informal discussion with the Housing Operations Manager and the Head of Housing. There have been a couple of SPACE room sessions to outline the proposal for the new structure and to discuss the expected operational procedure.</p> <p>This will take a more formal consultation period in the new year, involving the personnel department.</p>	<p>Following implementation of the Act, the team met monthly to discuss procedures and working practices. This effectively served as an opportunity to ensure that there was consistency in delivery throughout the team.</p> <p>On the 27 February 2019, a full consultation meeting was held with the team to find out what they felt was working well and areas that could be improved upon to take the service forward.</p> <p>As part of this consultation, six key areas were considered -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Team Structure</li> <li>➤ Management Information Systems [Locata]</li> <li>➤ Prevention &amp; Relief Working Arrangements</li> <li>➤ Temporary Accommodation Reduction</li> <li>➤ Communications</li> <li>➤ Training</li> </ul> <p>Although, it was felt that the structure of the team was broadly well balanced, and was strengthened with a strong coordinator role, it was acknowledged that more could be done at the “front end” to improve service delivery for customers.</p> <p>Areas were identified in client groups with protected characteristics directly relevant in the context of homeless approaches to Ashford including -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rough Sleepers</b> age, disability/mental health, race, religion/belief, gender and sexual orientation</li> <li>• <b>Survivors of Domestic Abuse/Violence</b> age, disability/mental health, race, religion/belief, gender and sexual orientation</li> <li>• <b>Older Persons</b> age, disability/mental health, race, religion/belief, gender</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics?</li> </ul>	<p>Partner agencies have been informed of the new Act, specifically the Rough Sleepers Working Group and the Supported Accommodation Move On Group.</p> <p>DCLG are intending to run a series of formal training for both Local Authority staff and partner agencies in the new year.</p> <p>Ashford Borough Council are planning to re-launch their Homelessness Forum in January 2018 to bring together all those agencies who work with people that are either homeless, or threatened with homelessness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Young Persons/Young Parents</b> age, disability/mental health, race, religion/belief, gender, sexual orientation pregnancy and maternity</li> </ul> <p>From this exercise, there are planned initiatives to address individual client groups and have dedicated provision to meet their housing needs including –</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Housing Project – to provide intermediate housing and support while settled housing solutions are identified</p> <p>Housing First – project specifically tailored for rough sleepers to access settled accommodation and received “wraparound” support and services to suction their tenancy</p> <p>Mother &amp; Baby Accommodation – following Kent County Council’s [KCC] Housing Related Support commissioning exercise, there are proposals with partner agencies to have dedicated accommodation and support for this client group</p>
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**Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.**

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

<b>Protected characteristic</b>	<b>Relevance to Decision</b> High/Medium/Low/None	<b>Impact of Decision</b> <b>Positive</b> (Major/Minor) <b>Negative</b> (Major/Minor) <b>Neutral</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> <b>Relevance to Decision</b> High/Medium/Low/None	<b>REVIEW</b> <b>Impact of Decision</b> <b>Positive</b> (Major/Minor) <b>Negative</b> (Major/Minor) <b>Neutral</b>
<b>AGE</b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
Elderly				
Middle age	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
Young adult	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
Children	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b>DISABILITY</b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
Physical				
Mental	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
Sensory	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b>GENDER RE-ASSIGNMENT</b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral

<b><u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u></b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b><u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u></b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b><u>RACE</u></b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b><u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u></b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b><u>SEX</u></b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b>Men</b>				
<b>Women</b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral
<b><u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u></b>	Low	Neutral	Low	Neutral

<b>Mitigating negative impact:</b> Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.	No negative impact
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**Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty?**

Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's *Essential Guide*, alongside fuller *PSED Technical Guidance*.

Aim	Yes / No / N/A
1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	Yes
2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Yes
3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Yes

**Conclusion:**

- Consider how due regard has been had to the equality duty, from start to finish
- There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above)
- Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified

The Homeless Reduction Act will ensure that those households that are deemed to be “Non priority” and therefore have no duty to be housed by the Local Authority, will receive a robust and more comprehensive advice and assistance service to ensure that they can secure sustainable, long term accommodation.

The DCLG are changing the way they collect statistics and therefore this will be closely monitored by the Senior Housing Options Officer, who will send the new H-Clic report through every quarter.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported?</li></ul>	<i>The council's revised policy register will assist services to meet this</i>
<b>EIA completion date:</b>	4 November 2019

**Agenda Item No:** 5



Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**[The Final Report of the Digital Transformation Task Group]**

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**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:**

1. Endorse the findings of the Task Group.
  2. Approve the recommendations of the Task Group to Cabinet.
- 

**Date of O&S meeting:** Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Chair of O&S Committee:** Cllr N Ovenden

**Relevant Portfolio(s):** HR & Customer Services  
Finance & IT

**Summary:** During budget scrutiny at the beginning of 2020, it was recommended that a task group was formed to review the digital transformation programme embarked by Ashford Borough Council.

This report concludes the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group from its review into Digital Transformation; and makes 8 recommendations to Cabinet.

**Exempt from Publication:** **NO**

**Background Papers:** **Digital Transformation Strategy, 2017-2020**

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## **Report Title: The Final Report of the Digital Transformation Task Group**

### **Foreword from the Task Group Chairman**

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group has reviewed how far digital transformation has progressed across the council's services. In an increasingly digital and online society, the digitisation of council processes has become essential to delivering services.
2. The review has highlighted that substantial progress has been made towards Ashford Borough Council's digital journey. The Digital Transformation Strategy adopted in 2017 has been implemented and its action plan has few outstanding actions. Furthermore, the review has looked at how data has been used by the council for digital transformation and the importance of having access to accurate data has been noted by the Task Group.
3. Considering the Covid-19 crisis, the need for digital transformation for effective remote working and virtual council meetings has been significant during the review and has shaped some of the recommendations made by the Task Group.

### **Introduction and Background**

4. During scrutiny of the Budget for 2020/21, the Task Group recommended to the full Overview and Scrutiny Committee that digital transformation should be included as a scrutiny review on the work programme. At the time, concerns were raised regarding the resourcing of the digital programme. An in-depth review has been conducted to ascertain how far digital transformation has progressed during recent years and what the challenges and success have been throughout this process.
5. The Task Group felt that investigating the progress of digital transformation would benefit all staff and Members by assessing ways of improving the digital aspects to remote working and virtual meetings. Also, the group saw the benefit of reviewing the digital programme prior to Full Council's adoption of the Recovery Plan in October 2020.

### **Scope of the Review**

6. The Task Group assembled 4 Members; Cllr Ovenden (Chair), Cllr. Iliffe, Cllr. Ledger and Cllr. Spain to examine the progression of the digital transformation so far and, if required, make some recommendations to the full Committee.

7. The group met initially to scope the review and establish where scrutiny could be beneficial. A scoping document was agreed which listed five key questions the Task Group wanted to address during the review.
  - What progress has been made so far with digital transformation and what are the challenges facing this process?
  - To consider how the digital progress made during Covid-19 can be built upon and further aid the council's recovery.
  - What is the council hoping to achieve with digital transformation in the next 5 years and what is the overall goal?
  - What is the roadmap setting out how the council plans to achieve its digital goals in consideration of the recovery plan, and are the goals resourced appropriately?
  - To look at best practice from other local authorities (through desktop research).
8. The group discussed the ways they could capture the progress of digital transformation. It was agreed that there would be a focus on the three-year digital transformation strategy 2017 –2020, which was coming to an end.
9. During the preparation stage of the review, the council was still responding to the Covid-19 crisis. The Task Group noted that the demands of Covid-19 would impact Officer's capacity to assist in this review, nevertheless Members felt it was important to undertake the review imminently. As the government guidelines encouraged remote working and council meetings were being conducted virtually, it was felt that a major digital shift was taking place across the council and that this had potential to kick-start future transformation. The Task Group believed that a scrutiny review could positively contribute towards the next stages of this transformation.
10. The Task Group agreed that details of the individual projects would be excluded from the review and that this topic needed to be looked at from a wider perspective. Although the group would receive information regarding the projects that have been undertaken as part of digital transformation to-date, these would not be looked at in detail so that the review was timely.
11. The subject of broadband is a part of ongoing digital transformation that the Task Group felt would not benefit from further scrutiny at this time. Also, the wider Committee received an update in March 2020 on broadband and promotion of fibre to the premises and so felt that looking at this again may duplicate work of the wider Committee.
12. The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group in conducting this review is therefore twofold – first, to review Ashford Borough Council's journey with

implementing Digital Transformation to establish what the successes are and what lessons have been learnt through implementing the Digital Strategy and those resulting from our COVID-19 response. Secondly, to provide recommendations that will be of benefit for future transformation of council processes.

## **Task Group process**

13. Following an initial meeting to discuss the scope of the review, the Task Group conducted several evidence sessions. The purpose of these meetings was to gather information about the council's digital transformation journey and establish what plans had been considered for the future of digital. The following documentation was considered as evidence:
  - A report detailing Ashford Borough's digital transformation journey to date.
  - A report to inform how the council has used data to further the digital transformation agenda.
  - A summary/debrief of the IT departments role in the Covid-19 response
14. Key officers involved with developing digital attended the meetings to provide evidence to the review. The Task Group met to discuss findings and recommendations during a final meeting of the Task Group. The Task Group would like to thank all Officers and Members who gave up their time to participate in this review.

## **Review findings**

15. The Task Group looked at written evidence over three sessions that included detail of the council's journey with digital transformation.
16. Overall, it was clear to the Task Group that the implementation of the Digital Transformation Strategy had been successful. A report was presented to the group that summarised the four key strands of digital transformation:
  - Website and Accessibility
  - Technology
  - Staff culture
  - Digital inclusion

The digital action plan highlighted to the group what actions had been completed and what was left outstanding. The Task Group noted that there were few outstanding actions, and this was continuing to being monitored by the IT & Digital Transformation Advisory Committee.

17. The Task Group were informed of the challenges that came with digitising manual processes that services were providing. There is still more work to be done to progress the staff culture strand of transformation and the encouragement of staff to embrace change. Members were pleased with the adoption of Abavus, a Digital Customer Platform, and how many manual processes had already been digitised to create more efficient services.
18. The Task Group reviewed the emerging digital programme that was expected to be delivered up until the end of 2025. A few of the projects that were noted a priority were:
  - The implementation of a new planning support system.
  - The garden waste project which looks to reengineer and simplify the current process.
  - Lifeline procurement to convert the platform from analogue to digital.
  - Progress with Automatic Parking Payments (ANPR) and starting with Elwick Place
  - The Garage Commercialisation Strategy that looks at all garage sites to improve the way we get rent in and streamline the process.
  - Review and implement the New Corporate Website by working with Visarc to review the content and the structure to deliver a new site.

**Note the implementation of the digital strategy to date and endorse the emerging digital programme to be delivered up until 2025. (Recommendation 1)**

19. The group were advised that Covid-19 had created a situation where technology and software quickly became fundamental to delivering council services and Member meetings successfully. Evidence reported to the task group included the results of a survey sent to all ABC staff regarding remote working and showed that a large proportion of staff had a positive experience with this and would like to continue with a home working arrangement post Covid-19. The Task Group felt that a similar survey aimed at Members would help find out what lessons have been learnt from digital working during Covid-19, from a Member point of view. These findings could then be used to establish what was needed going forward for Councillors as well as Officers.

**That a digital survey regarding homeworking and virtual meetings is conducted for Members, to find out what lessons have been learnt since new arrangements were introduced in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19 and what can be improved for the future. (Recommendation 2)**

20. Members acknowledged that during the main transition to remote working, the council's IT systems had coped successfully so far. Measures were introduced quickly by the council's IT Team to ensure remote working could be carried out easily. For example, new servers were purchased to support the large number of officers and Members working remotely and arrangements were made for IT equipment to be sent home where necessary. Overall, it was felt that the continuation of flexible working arrangements and virtual meetings would benefit the council's digital transformation goals.

However, Members felt that some work was required to ensure that the IT systems we have in place can sustain the delivery of council services and meetings.

**To continue to support homeworking, virtual meetings and hybrid meetings as valid ways of running council services and meetings in the future and ensure that there are adequate IT systems in place to deliver these efficiently. (Recommendation 3)**

21. The Task Group discussed how using Microsoft Teams had been central to communication with Members and Officers throughout the Covid-19 crisis. However, it was highlighted in the evidence report that there were multiple ways of displaying your availability, for example, through the Microsoft Outlook Calendar, Skype For Business and Microsoft Teams. Members felt that it would be useful to have some clear guidance over what is expected of Members and Officers regarding the display of their online/offline status. This would provide clarity about when people were working and could be contacted.

**Create a Corporate Etiquette protocol for Microsoft Teams that covers making calls, leaving messages and showing availability. (Recommendation 4)**

22. Members of the Task Group agreed that the online calendar function on mod.gov could be improved as a digital tool for Members. Issues were raised with the contents of the calendar as some future meeting dates were not being displayed.

**That the online calendar function on Mod.gov is updated regularly to inform Members of future meetings for at least the next six months. (Recommendation 5)**

23. Part of the review looked at how Ashford Borough Council has used data for digital transformation. The group were advised how having access to accurate data was key to identifying vulnerable residents in the Borough during the Covid-19 crisis. Our current system, ACORN, was used to identify groups of residents who were likely to match indicators for vulnerability to Covid-19. The Task Group discussed the use of ACORN data in the future and were advised that using the system to map out groups of residents is something that the council is currently exploring to help provide a targeted approach to delivering services.
24. The data evidence session also informed the group of the work undertaken by other local authorities to create an online public portal to display data about their local area and population. Members felt that it would be beneficial to have a central data source that drew on national and local data and delivered statistics about Ashford Borough. This could also act as an online portal that could provide access to the results of local surveys and consultations.

25. An example of a council which has successfully used data to better understand its residents to inform service delivery is Hull City Council. They have published their data and statistics about their residents online via an online 'Data Observatory'. A range of data is provided regarding housing, health and wellbeing, economy and employment and the environment. This also acts as an engagement centre which provides access to results of local surveys and consultations.

**Proceed with creating an online central database for local and national data that residents are able to access and view statistics regarding Ashford Borough. (Recommendation 6)**

26. During the final meeting of the Task Group, the group discussed the response of the IT department during the Covid-19 pandemic and specifically what lessons could be learnt. Members were presented with a summary of what did and didn't work well for the service during Covid-19 and some recommendations to resolve the issues that were identified. Members suggested that some more information could be provided to Members and Officers that included broadband and connectivity advice, for example, how to set up broadband at home effectively.

**That a fact sheet is produced for all Members and staff with advice on broadband and how to check your connectivity whilst working remotely. (Recommendation 7)**

27. The Task Group queried the number of council IT assets that were taken from the Civic Centre when staff were initially instructed to work from home. The group were informed that managers and team leaders had been asked to record what equipment was taken by staff in their own teams, and this had been successful so far. Members were concerned that an asset register was still being compiled and it was felt that this should be a priority to ensure all council owned equipment could be returned in the future.

**Prioritise completion of an IT asset register to ensure that all council owned equipment is logged and returned to the Civic Centre when appropriate. (Recommendation 8)**

## **Recommendations**

The Task Group would like to endorse the following recommendations to the full committee:

Recommendation 1: Note the implementation of the digital strategy to date and endorse the emerging digital programme to be delivered up until 2025.

Recommendation 2: That a digital survey regarding homeworking and virtual meetings is conducted for Members, to find out what lessons have been learnt since new arrangements were introduced in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19 and what

can be improved for the future.

Recommendation 3: To continue to support homeworking, virtual meetings and hybrid meetings as valid ways of running council services and meetings in the future and ensure that there are adequate IT systems in place to deliver these efficiently.

Recommendation 4: Create a Corporate Etiquette protocol for Microsoft Teams that covers making calls, leaving messages and showing availability.

Recommendation 5: That the online calendar function on Mod.gov is updated regularly to inform Members of future meetings for at least the next six months.

Recommendation 6: Proceed with creating an online central database for local and national data that residents are able to access and view statistics regarding Ashford Borough.

Recommendation 7: That a fact sheet is produced for all Members and staff with advice on broadband and how to check your connectivity whilst working remotely.

Recommendation 8: Prioritise completion of an IT asset register to ensure that all council owned equipment is logged and returned to the Civic Centre when appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

28. The Task Group have examined how far digital transformation has evolved at Ashford Borough Council as related to the scope of the review. The recommendations made will assist further digital transformation of services and enhance the digital experience for Customers, Members and Officers, and the Task Group commend them to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Contact and Email**

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<b>Priority 1 : Website</b>					<b>July 2020</b>
<b>Draft website transformation plan 2017- 2020</b>					
	<b>What we will do</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Budget required</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Update</b>
Website	<p>We will redesign our website (ashford.gov.uk):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring we follow the best practice guidance issued by GDS on digitally inclusive language</li> <li>ensure the content is written in plain English</li> <li>introduce options for web-chat, skype and other digital assistance tools</li> <li>building on the success of the Benefits video and, where possible produce video content to help people with low literacy skills</li> <li>regularly ensuring the website meets required accessibility standards using tools such as site improve etc</li> <li>refresh content regularly</li> <li>seek feedback from user testing at all stages of the process</li> <li>hold service workshops to disseminate and interpret feedback and analytics.</li> <li>ensure that our pages are mobile enabled.</li> </ul>	Web team/ IT/ Communications / Customer Services	Y  Some additional resource may be required, to assist on this project further details to follow with a project plan	July 2017 - December 2018	Website went live 3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2020
	<p>Customer accounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance the MyAshford functionality.</li> <li>Better use of email address data to communicate with our customers.</li> </ul>	Web team/ IT/ Communications / Customer Services		December 2019	My Ashford being redeveloped, plugins and widgets being tested. Issues around authentication of users

Analytics	We will use analytics and feedback to improve and inform our service design, whether those services are digital or face-to-face.	Web team/ services		Ongoing from April 2018	Ongoing

<b><u>Priority 2: Technology</u></b>					<b><u>July 2020</u></b>
<b>Draft technology transformation plan 2017- 2020</b>					
	<b>Update</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Budget required</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Update</b>
Digital Customer Service Platform	Procurement of a “Digital Customer Platform” (DCP) to help integrate new ways of working digitally and process improvements with back office systems.	IT/Customer Services/Digital team	Y Circa £100k, level to be confirmed on conclusion of procurement process	August 2017 – August 2019	Live and being used significantly
	Develop a priority list of services / process to be delivered in a Phase1 development of the DCP. Priority will be given to any service being run from a similar solution as part of any trials depending on final decision.  We will implement a digital group that will help shape the priority list for approval from the newly formed IT and Digital Transformation (ITDT) Advisory Committee.	Digital team and ITDT Committee		August 2017 – December 2017	‘Tag teams’ established and allocated to services. List developed and with ITDT end of March 2018
Collaboration	We will explore online collaboration tools that will improve cross service working.	IT/Digital team		Ongoing	Microsoft products being used

					(SharePoint) by Digital team. Other options being explored.
Communications	Complete rollout of Skype for Business (SfB) Unified communications platform across the authority and communicate the functionality and benefits to the organisation	IT/ Communications	Y £10k for replacement handsets from existing hardware budgets	April 2018	Complete – Microsoft O365 including teams has now been rolled out across whole authority
Cloud	Develop a “Cloud Strategy” to formalise our strategy for making decisions around what services and solutions will be provisioned in “the Cloud”.	IT	Y From existing software revenue budgets	March 2018	O365 Installed
Mobile and Flexible	<p>We will ensure that mobile friendly is the starting point of all system developments and new software.</p> <p>We will ensure ABC buildings (e.g. Civic Centre, Sheltered Schemes) have public/guest Wi-Fi connectivity where appropriate using the Govroam service.</p> <p>We develop a programme to rollout hardware upgrades to mobile workers that will support flexible working.</p>	IT		Ongoing	GovRoam. Phase II anticipated testing will be by ABC. Date to be determined.
Social media	We maintain a review of the functionality presented by social media accounts to	IT/Digital team		Ongoing	Will be considered at

	simplify customer log-ins to help remove barriers to use of digital channels.				appropriate opportunities.
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<b><u>Priority 3: Inclusion</u></b>				<b><u>July 2020</u></b>
<b>Draft Digital Inclusion action plan 2017- 2020</b>				
<b>What we will do</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Budget required</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Update</b>
<p>ABC will adopt a new planning policy within the local plan for all new developments to install fibre to the premises to ensure inhabitants are able to access superfast broadband within these developments in the future.</p> <p>ABC will work with Kent County Council to maximise the impact of the roll out of the BDUK project and other grant schemes to bring superfast broadband to existing residents and businesses through the delivery of fibre to the cabinet in existing residential and business areas.</p> <p>In addition, ABC will work with other telecoms providers to maximise private investment in telecommunications networks within the borough.</p>	Economic Development/Planning		Linked to Local Plan approvals	<p>1. We have been consulting with central government and are currently in the process of commissioning a consultant to compile an evidence base to justify the policy at Examination in Public in May. We will work with them to put forward a compelling argument but Ashford is the first authority in the country to do this.</p> <p>2. We have been working</p>

				<p>with KCC on the progress of BDUK and are currently looking to put together a project to apply for the LFFN (Local Full Fibre Networks) scheme.</p> <p>3. We have been working and meeting with telecoms providers to stimulate a range of provision in Ashford. We are currently working with a supplier on extending their infrastructure in the area.</p>
<p>We will explore the feasibility of creating a database of Wi-Fi hotspots across the borough so that people with connectivity barriers have options for getting on-line (e.g. pubs, cafes, shops, community centres etc.)</p> <p>We will publicise where local access points are available through Gateways/libraries etc. so that people without the</p>	<p>Communications and Digital team</p> <p>Communications</p>		<p>2019 post completion of phase II of website</p>	<p>This action removed by IT advisory board due to access to this information</p>

<p>equipment to go online know where they can get access to equipment.</p> <p>We will allow a public Wi-Fi access point in ABC buildings (e.g. Civic Centre, Sheltered Schemes) using the Govroam service.</p>	IT			from external sources
<p>We will redesign our website (ashford.gov.uk):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring we follow the best practice guidance issued by GDS on digitally inclusive language</li> <li>ensure the content is written in plain English</li> <li>introduce options for web-chat, skype and other digital assistance tools</li> <li>building on the success of the Benefits video and, where possible produce video content to help people with low literacy skills</li> <li>regularly ensuring the website meets required accessibility standards using tools such as Site Improve</li> </ul>	Web team IT Communications Customer service		Late 2018/19	Website live August 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2020
<p>We will review the conditions applied to the community grants scheme to ensure that the conditions for funding for digital projects are simple for the voluntary and community sector to navigate and access.</p>	Cultural Services		Post web project	
<p>ABC will investigate developing a volunteer programme to help individuals gain digital confidence; the intention will be that the volunteers can take these skills into their communities beyond any organised events.</p> <p>Partner organisations could be schools, the local college, community &amp; voluntary sector partners and local branches of private sector organisations who are signed up to the</p>	Digital team		Completed	Partnered with Barclays and One you to deliver a digital surgery to residents that have difficulty using IT

UK's Digital Inclusion Charter (e.g. Argos, Asda, Barclays, BT, EE, Lloyds Banking Group, Remploy, Three).				
We will signpost and publicise services and information that help with Digital skills (e.g. The tech partnership, Age UK, Housing Associations, etc.,)	Communications and Digital teams			Social media and internet comms undertaken and will be ongoing
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will remind people of the benefits of using ABC's digital services</li> <li>• remind our customers of the assistance that is available from ABC (assisted self-help customer services model)</li> <li>• signpost customers to economic and social reasons for accessing online services (e.g. genealogy, staying in contact with distance family, money comparison sites for saving money, accessing online weight loss or healthy option services)</li> <li>• link into national campaigns that support digital inclusion such as Get Online Week (2 – 8 October 2017)</li> </ul>	Communications		Ongoing	Social media and internet comms undertaken and will be ongoing
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• signpost and highlight how to spot secure sites and how not be to be caught out by fraud</li> <li>• Use our website to notify the public of any scams we are made aware of (in conjunction with Kent Police and the wider community safety partnership)</li> <li>• We will use a range of tools including social media/text/website to assure our customers that communication from the council is genuine</li> </ul>	Communications, IT and digital team		Ongoing	Social media and internet comms undertaken and will be ongoing

<b>Priority 4: Culture</b>					<b>July 2020</b>
<b>Draft Digital Staff Culture plan 2017- 2020</b>					
	<b>What we will do</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Budget required</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Update</b>
<b>Skills</b>	Skills Audit: We will conduct a skills audit of all staff to ascertain whether there are basic skills gaps that need addressing and also to identify more capable staff to share their knowledge with others.	HR	Possible training budget requirement TBD	Nov 17	Audit Completed, needs being identified and built into the 18/19 training plan
	Introduce digital champions: Having highlighted the more digitally skilled staff we will approach this group to become service digital champions that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide support to less digitally capable people (internally and externally),</li> <li>• contribute to digital projects</li> <li>• contribute to drop-in sessions designed to help build confidence with technology as well as social media and other on-line tools</li> <li>• help to develop how to guides and videos.</li> </ul>	HR/Digital Team		Jan 18	Plan developed and comms out asking for volunteers
	Introduce digital member champions: These members will lead the way and support how new technologies and				TBD, following Modern

	systems will be rolled out and used by members.	Member Services/Digital Team/IT		Gov test launch	
	<p>Recruitment: To attract and test digital capabilities of potential new recruits we will introduce greater use of digital tools in recruitment and selection, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of social media such as Twitter/Facebook/Glass Door</li> <li>• Use of on-line testing and better assessment of digital skills during recruitment.</li> <li>• Update competency based questions database to include digital competence questions</li> </ul>	HR		<p>Q4 2017/18</p> <p>April 2019</p> <p>Q1 2018/19</p>	Social media being used for recruitment.
	<p>Appraisals: We will include digital objectives in annual appraisals; these will be to develop either a digital capability or skill, to support someone else in becoming proficient, or to take part in a digital project.</p>	All managers		Q4 2017/18	Mandatory field in appraisal system now asks for digital objectives to be identified.
	<p>Service Plan: Services will be required to include at least one digital objective/project in their annual service plan.</p>	Policy team		2017/18 Service planning	Included in service plans
<b>Leadership</b>	<p>Digital channels to communicate key corporate messages: The Chief Executive and other senior managers will consider the use of video</p>	Communications		Q1 2018/19	CX using video in her internal comms

	messages and Blogs to complement face-to-face communication methods.				
	Corporate Twitter accounts for leaders: We will consider how we can support senior leaders in communicating externally through social media channels.	Communications /Digital Team		Q1 2018/19	@AshfordDigital, a closed Twitter account for staff set up
	Digital skills: It is important that the leadership of digital transformation is seen as authentic and managers will be encouraged to undertake training to use digital tools in-order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to role model</li> <li>• understand the potential benefits</li> <li>• gain insight into how easy it is to overcome challenges</li> </ul>	HR		During 2017 and 2018	Training highlighted such as Google Analytics and specific digital products has taken place over past two years
	A range of digital tools are available managers will be required to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistently apply good practice principles of using tools such as Skype, email and other online tools</li> <li>• use and promote the use of technology as a tool for efficient working</li> </ul>	All Manager/Digital Team/ IT		During 2017 and 2018	All MT using surface pros and Modern.gov for committee agendas
	Promote a customer centric approach to problem solving as well as collaborative working (using SPACE) to review services and processes.	Digital Team	Budget required for training TBD	Q1 2018/19	'Tag Teams' established which include a Customer Services officer to ensure customer is at

					the centre of process redesigns.
<b>Change management</b>	Agile working methods: Agile working enables problem solving to be achieved in a swift and iterative way, this is important in IT development projects where low-level prototyping and testing are often easier in a live environment. We will provide staff with training on how to use agile working techniques to problem solving.	Digital Team/HR	Budget required for training TBD	Q2 2018/19	Workshop attended by 4 of the 'Tag Team' on Agile, process mapping and Lean methodologies
	Customer centric service design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will develop a range of persona's that can be referred to when reviewing a service or process to encourage services to focus on the service from a customer perspective rather than the council's perspective.</li> <li>We will provide training on how user based service design.</li> </ul>	Digital Team/HR/ Communications	Budget required for training TBD	Q1 2018/19	Personas currently being developed
	We will include a field on the PID template where digital transformation and implications can be highlighted.	Policy team		Q3 2017/18	PID updated
	Corporate values:			Q3 2017/18	Values launched and comms to

	Newly articulated corporate values to be launched as part of the communications we will ensure that the link with digital services is explicit.	HR/ Communications			help embed underway
	Include standard digital operational competency in all new JDs as a tangible indicator to all existing and potential staff that digital services are intrinsic to our way of working.	HR		Q4 2017/18	JD updated
	We will carry out workshops with services to establish staff ideas on service improvements on the top areas of focus for digital transformation (build into 2019/20 service plans).	Digital team/HR		Spring/ Summer 2018	Workshops taken place to inform way forward with Digital
	Digital project communications through Root & Branch: We will ensure that the progress, successes, and learning from failures of digital projects are regularly shared through the council's on-line staff magazine.	Communications /Digital Team		From Autumn 2017	Ongoing  Examples include comms on Modern.Gov, Digital Skills, Lean workshop.
	Communications: We have a range of electronic communication methods including the intranet; we will review these to ensure they remain relevant, responsive, up to date and easy to use.	Communications /HR		Ongoing from Q4 2017/18	Ongoing  Branding for digital project established. Blogs being shared. @AshfordDigital

	<p>The staff benefit platform My Ashford Rewards has capability to become an internal communications hub that supports blogs, video content, online polling, recognition schemes and discussions we will review this capability with a view to launching an enhanced offer.</p> <p>Social media: There is an expectation that we will use social media channels to communicate with our customers. We will ensure that we include social media in all communications plans and on literature and publicity where possible include social media logos and QR codes that direct customers to the appropriate URL.</p> <p>We will also work with services to support them in developing their own social media feeds and campaigns as a communication channel.</p>				<p>a closed Twitter page for ABC staff established.</p>
	<p>Annual Staff awards: A new category that reflects the priority of digital transformation will be created to recognise and celebrate good work and outcomes.</p>	<p>HR/ Communications</p>		<p>2018 Awards</p>	<p>New category included in last two year awards</p>

# The Future Digital Programme – Priority Projects

Project Name	Project Background	Expected Finish Date
<b>Lifeline Procurement to convert the platform from analogue to digital.</b>	Procurement to convert the platform from analogue to digital.	April 2020
<b>Automatic parking payments (ANPR)</b>	Starting with Elwick Place	September 2020
<b>Virtual parking permit 'Permit SMARTI' to allow customer to create an account and pay online. No permit is displayed.</b>	Digital tickets	September 2020
<b>Lifeline online application process</b>	Digital applications	November 2020
<b>Review and implement New Corporate Website</b>	To work with Visarc to review the content and the structure to deliver a new site	November 2020
<b>Planning System</b>	Current system support is coming to an end so a new system is required	April 2021
<b>Contract Management Tool Kit</b>	Digitalize the ABC Procurement and Contract Management Toolkit; and Single Source supplier process	April 2021
<b>Update systems for procurement categories to help with contract management</b>	Procurement led project	April 2021
<b>Improving CS by reducing demand by service</b>	Look at all processes between CS and services to make improvements for our residents to access services	May 2021
<b>Garden Waste</b>	To revisit the Garden waste process looking to reengineer and simplify current process	June 2021
<b>Garage Commercialisation Strategy</b>	Looking at all garage sites , improving the way we get rent in, streamlining	March 2022
<b>Corporate Web page update</b>	Estate agent look and feel of promoting our Commercial Property Portfolio “ on the Council website	

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Report Tracker – 13 October 2020

Current Work Programme			
Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
External Contract Procurement	November 2020	Corporate Property and Projects	A presentation on the procurement process for external contracts and determine where scrutiny could be beneficial.
Corporate Performance Report	November 2020	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 2 (includes data from quarter 1)
Consultation and Engagement	Later 2020	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Involvement and engagement of the public with the consultation process for corporate issues.
Update on Vicarage Lane Project	TBC	Corporate Property and Projects	A summary of the council's current position regarding the appointment of a Project Manager for the Vicarage Lane Project.
Budget Scrutiny	December 2020	Finance and IT	The Budget Scrutiny Task Group will meet to review the draft budget for the 2021/22 municipal year.
	January 2021		
S106 Decision Making Process	Early 2021	Planning and Development	A report regarding the S106 negotiations process and how the spending of contributions is decided.

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