



Maidstone Borough Council

Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013



Draft v6.0
Full Council
25 February 2009

Acknowledgements

Our Homelessness Prevention Strategy has been developed in the spirit of true partnership with a wide range of organisations and individuals¹. We wish to record our thanks to all our partners and stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Strategy. We remain committed to this involvement through our multi-agency Housing Sounding Board and the Maidstone Street Homelessness Working Group.



¹ See Appendices 4 and 5

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1. Forward

1.1 Welcome to the Council's second Homelessness Strategy which builds upon the successes achieved since our first strategy was published in 2003. It is the culmination of detailed research and ongoing consultation on homelessness, and sets out the vision and direction both for the Council and our partners from the statutory and voluntary sectors for tackling homelessness over the coming years.

1.2 The Strategy has been developed whilst the effects of the 'credit crunch' and the economic slowdown are becoming more apparent: the resulting increase in unemployment with mortgages more difficult to obtain and the forecast increase in mortgage arrears and house repossession actions has already resulted in an increase in homelessness prevention cases rising from an average of 21 per month in 2007/8, to around 28 per month so far in 2008/9. Our partners also report an increased demand for their advice and guidance services and we will monitor our workload carefully and ensure that resources are directed to those areas of highest need.

With its announcement in September of a package of measures worth £1bill to assist homeowners faced with repossession and other housing difficulties, the Government has clearly signalled its intention to provide support in the short term for borrowers facing difficulties and to protect homeowners at risk of repossession. The Council has been nominated for 'Fast Track' status which will enable us to influence the way the scheme operates within Kent. It is anticipated that the various measures will commence in the New Year 2009.

1.3 This council has always given a very high priority to addressing housing needs and has achieved a consistently high investment in social housing grant to maximise the supply of permanent housing. We embraced the government's target of halving the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010 and achieved this challenging target some two and a half years ahead of the national target, in summer 2007. Other significant achievements include:

- The successful introduction of rent deposit and rent loan schemes;
- The recruitment of a jointly funded post of Domestic Violence Prevention Officer between Maidstone and Ashford Borough Councils;
- Implementation of a private sector leasing scheme in partnership with Avenue Lettings;
- The development of Lily Smith House, a supported housing scheme for single people, together with a day centre;
- The opening in December 2005 of Tumim House - a nine-bedded supported short-term hostel offering accommodation for ex-offenders with drug/alcohol issues;
- Establishment of a mediation service to prevent homelessness;

- The establishment of a private sector landlords forum;
- Successfully lobbied the CLG, resulting in a significant increase in our Homelessness Grant for 2007/08 and 2008/09 when other authorities' grants were reduced or remained the same.

1.4 It therefore gives us great pleasure to introduce this Homelessness Strategy setting out the Borough's priorities and plans for the way it will tackle homelessness in the borough up to 2013.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Petford".

David Petford
Chief Executive



Councillor Malcolm Greer
Cabinet Member for Regeneration

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Maidstone is the County Town of Kent with a large rural hinterland. The mid-2006 population projections show that Maidstone has a population of 142,800 people - equivalent to ten per cent of the Kent population - in about 60,000 households. It has the second largest population of any district Council area in the county, the largest being Canterbury. In 2006 we were awarded Growth Point Status that will increase the housing supply and provide additional infrastructure investment.
- 2.2 In 2003 the Audit Commission inspected Maidstone's performance as a Local Authority. The Commission's assessment, which included a review of what Maidstone Borough Council did to 'Balance Local Housing Markets, concluded that the service provided by the Council was 'Excellent'. Since then, annual audit letters and other inspections have confirmed that judgement. In terms of overall improvement, the authority was rated 39th out of 388 English local authorities for improvements to services over a three-year period and **first in terms of improvements to housing.**
- 2.3 The Housing Strategy 2005-09 is our primary strategy document, and it sets out our aims under four themes. Following a review of our progress in 2007, the Council decided to continue to focus on the four housing priorities during the remaining two years of the Strategy. They are (in priority order):
- Increasing the supply of New Affordable Homes.
 - Tackling Homelessness.
 - Improving Existing Homes.
 - Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Households
- 2.4 Maidstone Borough Council is one of many public sector bodies serving the borough's residents. As the 'community leader' the Council's role is to work with, and lead, other bodies to ensure that the needs of the borough's citizens are met. Homelessness has moved up the Government's agenda, and the effective management and prevention of homelessness is central to their vision for sustainable communities. The Government expects Homelessness Strategies for 2008-on to be far more robust than the initial submissions made in 2003.
- 2.5 It is now widely acknowledged that homelessness is a complex, emergent outcome of the interaction of structural factors (such as employment markets and housing supply) and individual risk factors (such as relationship breakdown, addiction, and mental illness). As a result of our in-depth consideration of homelessness – its causes and effective actions to prevent or reduce its impact – we have mapped the actions and services to tackle homelessness under four key strategic aims: **Advice & Options, Accommodation, Support and Effective Partnership Working.**
- 2.6 The uncertainties around the present economic downturn and the Government's announcement of measures to assist homeowners will pose further challenges for us and our partners: **this document aims to provide a robust and resilient framework for community action to meet these challenges.**



3. Introduction and Background

3.1 Welcome to the Maidstone Borough Council Homelessness Strategy 2008-13. This is Maidstone's second Homelessness Strategy following the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002.

3.2 The Government has put the **prevention of homelessness** at the heart of its national policy, and it is central to this strategy. As the causes and effects of homelessness have become better understood, it has been proved that it is better, as far as possible, to avoid the many economic and social costs experienced by homeless families, individuals and local communities caused by homelessness.

3.3 The Government has sought to strengthen the range of actions open to local government to prevent homelessness through both legislation and a number of good practice documents², and aims to drive down the numbers sleeping rough still further³. The Audit Commission, too, has published good practice guidelines⁴, in addition to its local authority housing inspection work. The introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) from 2009 onwards will test the cohesiveness not only of our plans but of all our partners' approaches to tackling homelessness wherever it arises in the Borough.

3.4 Homelessness is not solely about sleeping rough: it is also about individuals and families living in temporary accommodation, hidden households within larger households, and 'sofa-surfers' (people staying with family and friends). Such accommodation can have severe knock-on effects on health, education, child behaviour and employment. Having a full and rounded understanding of homelessness is essential in formulating an effective approach to tackling the underlying causes of homelessness and, in turn, to the formulation of a comprehensive strategy and operational plans to tackle the main issues.

3.5 We recognise that no local authority working alone can hope to achieve its strategic aims without fostering open and constructive relationships between all stakeholders in the Registered Social Landlord (RSL)⁵, non-statutory and voluntary sectors. All our partners need to take ownership of this strategy and to work together to ensure that their own strategic aims are broadly aligned to ours: e.g. that housing associations do not (perhaps unwittingly) add to homelessness through their rent arrears or anti-social behaviour policies. Given the important role that partners need to play in tackling homelessness, opportunities for joint working need to be fully exploited and the fourth key theme of this strategy – **effective partnership working** – gives voice to this.

² "More than a Roof" (2002), "Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives" (2005)

³ Rough Sleeping 10 Years On: From the streets to independent living and opportunity - Discussion paper (2008)

⁴ Homelessness: Responding to the new agenda (2003)

⁵ Commonly referred to as Housing Associations

- 3.6 Council's need to be pro-active in tackling the causes of homelessness rather than responding in a reactive way. This requires that the authorities' strategic housing role is fully exercised and continually developed so resulting in a deep understanding of the local housing market and the dynamics at play.
- 3.7 Our first homelessness strategy was published in 2003. It was reviewed in 2005, not only to ensure that we were on track regarding our principles of preventing homelessness whenever possible and working collaboratively with other agencies, but also to take account of the large scale housing stock transfer to Maidstone Housing Trust in February 2004. (www.maidstonehousing.org.uk)
- 3.8 This strategy is a result of detailed research and consultation during summer 2008 to build a comprehensive picture of homelessness in the borough encompassing the changes locally and nationally that have occurred following the publication of our first homelessness strategy in 2003. It is intended to be used as both a key strategic document for the Council and our partners, and as a reference document for our partners and other stakeholders who provide or make use of homelessness services locally.
- 3.9 This Homelessness Strategy incorporates actions to ensure that the Council is complying with the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 by:
- i. Preventing homelessness in the Borough;
 - ii. Ensuring that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the Borough who are or may become homeless;
 - iii. Securing adequate provision of support for people in the Borough who are or who may become homeless, or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- 3.10 *Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)*
- We have carried out an interim EQIA, which showed that black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are over represented on the housing register. We will be conducting detailed research to explore the reasons for this, and will feed the findings into the new Housing Strategy to be developed during 2009.
- 3.11 This is a five year strategy which will build on the successes achieved since 2003: we feel that a five year strategy, *regularly reviewed*, is appropriate despite changing local, regional and national circumstances. It sets out a detailed action plan(s) involving ourselves and our statutory, voluntary and community sector partners to prevent homelessness and provide accommodation and support services for the next five years.

All data contained in this Strategy was correct at the time of publication.



4. Legislative and Policy Context

4.1 Homelessness – a definition:

4.1.1 Homelessness is defined in different ways by policy-makers, service-providers, academic researchers, the media and the public. This inconsistency produces varying estimates of the scale of the problem. The legal definition of homelessness for England and Wales can be found in the 1996 Housing Act. A person is homeless if:

- There is no accommodation that they are entitled to occupy; or
- They have accommodation but it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy this accommodation.

This legal definition of homelessness is aimed towards a person's entitlement or right to a home, rather than the particular circumstances in which they are living. No particular category of homelessness is automatically excluded by the legal definition. The legal definition of homelessness is constructed in broad terms, with the two most important conditions, namely "reasonable to occupy" and "licence to occupy", both being matters subject to investigation by the Council, and open to challenge by homeless applicants. However, this legal definition is generally accepted in the homelessness sector.

4.1.2 There are other ways of considering homelessness. Issues concerning the definition of homelessness include:

- Is there a difference between defining "homeless people" and defining "homelessness"?
- Should we include other dimensions besides housing in the definition of homelessness e.g. employment, family networks, old age and dependency issues?
- How should the time factor in the definition of the homeless population be handled?⁶

Some researchers argue that homelessness and refugeeism can be closely related, whilst others say that homelessness can be more of a state of mind, if not actual. What is clear is that whilst social factors (such as family background, mental health, substance dependency etc.) need to be taken into account when working with homeless clients, these factors cannot be included when defining homelessness. However, it is probably the case that in the UK there are **populations or groups** which are more at risk of homelessness than others due to e.g. poverty, worklessness, social exclusion, poor health, low skill levels.

4.1.3 *Homelessness and older people:* There is no guidance or consensus as to what age people become vulnerable and in priority need. The UK Coalition on Older Homelessness defines older homeless people as those over the age of fifty to reflect the fact that homeless people are likely to age prematurely and experience the same frailties and vulnerabilities of the rest

⁶ All local authorities are required to monitor repeat homelessness through statutory quarterly P1E returns.

of the older population at a younger age. The elderly are included as a Priority Group (see para 4.2.2 below), but the DoE's *Homelessness Code of Guidance* (1994, Sec 6.9, p.24) advises local authorities to look not just at whether people are old, but at the extent to which their age has made it hard for them to fend for themselves. Voluntary organisations working with the elderly often report that whilst a client may have a home to occupy, the unsuitability of that home leads to social isolation and effective 'imprisonment'.

4.1.4 In Kent, it is recognised that more households from the following groups access homeless support services compared with other households:

- Young people and young people leaving care
- People with learning disabilities
- Offenders, or those at risk of offending
- Teenage parents
- Rough sleepers

4.2 Homelessness legislation and Local Authorities' responsibilities

4.2.1 *The Housing Act 1996:*

Local authorities have a duty to provide advice and find accommodation for the homeless under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. A person is considered homeless if:

- they have no home in the UK or anywhere else in the world;
- they have no home where they can live together with their immediate family;
- they can only stay where they are on a very temporary basis;
- they don't have permission to live where they are;
- they have been locked out of home and are not allowed back;
- they can't live at home because of violence or threats of violence which are likely to be carried out against them or someone else in their household ;
- it isn't reasonable for them to stay in their home for any reason (for example, if their home is in very poor condition);
- they can't afford to stay where they are;
- they live in a vehicle or boat and have nowhere to site/moor it.

4.2.2 The 1996 Act introduced the concept of priority groups i.e. certain groups of households as being 'priority need'. These are:

- Households with dependent children.
- Pregnant women, or those with whom a pregnant woman resides.
- People who are vulnerable due to old age, mental illness, handicap, physical disability or other special reason.
- Households who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness because of a disaster e.g. fire or flood.

4.2.3 A person is threatened with homeless if he or she is likely to become homeless within 28 days. If a local authority has reason to believe that a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness, it is required to make inquiries and decide whether it owes the applicant a duty to find accommodation. In making their decision, the local authority has to satisfy itself that the applicant:

- Is eligible for assistance;
- Is homeless;
- Is in priority need;
- Is not intentionally homeless.

If an applicant meets these criteria, the local authority has an immediate duty to find temporary accommodation for them and for anybody who normally resides with them. If an applicant is not in priority need or is intentionally homeless, then the local authority owes a lesser duty e.g. help to find temporary accommodation for long enough to find their own more permanent accommodation. In all cases a local authority may provide information and advice about homelessness.

4.2.4 *The Homelessness Act 2002*

The Homeless Act 2002 moved the homeless agenda on by shifting the emphasis away from reactive crisis management to pro-active homelessness prevention. The Act required local authorities to formulate and publish homelessness strategies, based on a review of local circumstances. More importantly, the 2002 Act introduced further priority groups, including:

16 and 17 year olds;

Care-leavers under the age of 21;

People aged 21 or over who are vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered;

People who are vulnerable as a result of having been a member of the armed forces, in custody or because of violence (threatened or actual).

4.3 National policy context

4.3.1 *The Strategic Housing Role:*

Over the past 15 years, central government legislation and guidance has encouraged local authorities to take a more strategic approach to the provision of housing. This requires close collaboration across the whole range of housing and related activities, in particular across housing and planning, to deliver better place-shaping through a wider understanding of the relationship between housing, planning and the economy. Local authorities are required to establish the direction of housing services in a locality to:

- Ensure a more intelligent approach to planning for housing across all tenures;

- Ensure better alignment and co-ordination of housing strategies, LDFs⁷ and sustainable community strategies;
- Ensure the delivery of seamless housing services to users through partnership;
- Ensure that connections are made across different housing activities to deliver efficiency savings;
- Ensure resident and community involvement
- Contribute to wider community leadership and well-being objectives.

Thus, our remit is far wider than just 'housing'. The 2002 Homelessness Act confirmed the prevention of homelessness as the government's key housing priority. To support this aim, the government has published a raft of documents⁸ which seek to take the prevention agenda forward. **Homeless prevention, as opposed to taking homeless applications, is the prime aim of this strategy.**

4.3.2 National Targets

The Government has set the following national targets to monitor local authorities' delivery of the homelessness agenda:

- A commitment to end, by 2010, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their duties to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds;
- End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children, except in an emergency, and then for no longer than six weeks;
- Halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation nationally to 50,000 by 2010;
- Reduce the levels of rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002 (achieved), and to reduce to as close to zero as possible.

Whilst in Maidstone all the above have been achieved locally, there still remains much work in the areas of raising **housing awareness, options advice and tenancy support.**

4.4 Regional policy context

4.4.1 *South East Regional Housing Strategy 2006-08*

The review of the Regional Housing Strategy was carried out by the South East England Regional Housing Board in 2007 covering the years 2008/09 to 2010/11. The Strategy aims to maintain a good quality of life for South East citizens and makes the case to Government for investment in infrastructure, including the need for affordable housing to address homelessness. Across the region, homeless acceptances fell 32% in 2006, and a further

⁷ Local Development Frameworks - A Local Development Framework is a folder or suite of local development documents that outlines how planning will be managed in Maidstone.

⁸ Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check 2006, Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities 2003 & 2006, Homelessness Prevention: A guide to Good Practice 2006, et al. See also Appendix 10

22% in 2007 to some 1,600, with a corresponding fall in the number of households in temporary accommodation.

4.5 Sub-regional policy context

4.5.1 *Kent Local Area Agreement (LAA2)*

LAA2 are three year agreements that set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central Government, represented by GOSE, and a local area, represented by the local authority and other key partners through the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). The Kent LAA2 was signed-off in April 2008 and will run until 2011. Although tackling homelessness is not specifically included, one of its key themes is 'High Quality Homes', with the sub-aims of:

- Creating sustainable communities/promoting social and physical regeneration
- Delivering sustainable homes incorporating high quality design
- Increasing the supply of housing of all types and tenures
- Improving access to high quality housing for all

4.5.2 *Kent Supporting People 5 Year Plan*

Supporting People (SP) is a grant programme which enables the provision of housing-related support services to help vulnerable people maintain or improve their ability to live independently by delivering high quality and strategically planned support services which are cost effective and reliable, and which complement existing care services. The programme began in 2003 and brought together funding streams from a wide variety of sources including health, probation, housing benefit and social services into one central pot. In Kent the county council is responsible for administering just over £32 million for Supporting People services. The programme is much more than a county council activity – it is a working partnership, made up of representatives from the Kent Primary Care Trusts, Kent Probation, the 12 district and borough councils, and the support agencies who provide and rely upon housing-related support for vulnerable people. Supporting People generally works with three different broad types of need:

- people in receipt of care with support, for whom housing related support underpins health and social care services;
- people living independently with support only, for whom a small amount of support makes a critical difference in being able to remain independent and
- people experiencing or at risk of social exclusion, for whom housing related support plays an essential part in preventing or dealing with a crisis situation and restoring independence in a sustainable way.

An aim of the 5 Year Plan is 'preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness'. A review of short-term accommodation was completed in 2007, whilst a review of long-term accommodation will be completed at the end of 2008. A need for **more move-on accommodation** has been identified across Kent, with particular needs relating to homeless people with mental health and substance misuse and ex-offenders.

Since its launch in 2003 Supporting People has been paid as a ring-fenced fund for councils, to be spent according to specific rules. However, from 2009/10, Supporting People will be allocated to councils as a non-ring fenced named grant, paid separately to, but with the same financial flexibility as, Area Based Grants. This removal of the ring fence provides us with the opportunity to work with KCC and other partners to develop new and innovative ways to support vulnerable people in a range of different situations. However, the financing change also poses risks since it is possible that SP grant could go through the LAA funding mechanism with the consequent risk of funding then going into other services unconnected with Supporting People (see Section 14, Risk Analysis).

4.5.3 *Housing Needs Survey and Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)*

Obtaining and maintaining a thorough understanding of the local housing market and housing market interventions on homeless/potentially homeless households is vital both to strategy development and service delivery. The main tool for delivering such a deep strategic understanding is the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The last Housing Needs Survey was completed in 2005 and will be updated to meet current planning guidance. The Council is working with a neighbouring local authority to deliver a sub-regional SHMA by Spring 2009.

4.5.4 *Choice Based Lettings*

The Council is part of the Kent-wide Choice Based Lettings Consortium. Choice based lettings (CBL) is being introduced across Kent so enabling all Council and housing association homes for rent or low cost sale to be advertised in a similar manner to that of private homes. This is a fundamental change in the way in which social housing is let and gives people an active role in choosing where they want to live. The scheme is being introduced in phases, and is programmed to start in Maidstone in March 2009. Early indications from areas where CBL is operating are that whilst it has helped with 'move-on' accommodation for some client groups, it may tend to disadvantage those applicants with poor language skills, or none/restricted access to the internet.

4.6 Maidstone Borough Council

4.6.1 *Maidstone's Sustainable Community Strategy*

The Maidstone Local Strategic Partnership (*Maidstone Matters*) is developing a Sustainable Community Strategy that will serve as an up-to-date shared vision for the borough that will link to other strategies. The *Vision for Kent* is the county-level community strategy built around eight themes:

- Economic success;
- Opportunities for all;
- Learning for everyone;
- Improved healthcare and well-being;
- Environmental excellence;
- Stronger and safer communities;
- Enjoying life;
- Keeping Kent moving;
- High quality homes.

4.6.3 Maidstone Borough Council Strategic Plan 2008-10

While the Council's political leadership has changed since the Homelessness Strategy was reviewed in 2005, each administration has adhered to the *20/20 Vision* (with some subsequent minor amendments and clarifications to ensure it remains up to date). The Strategic Plan, a three-year rolling document, is updated each year to ensure that it remains relevant. It spells out the Council's priorities and the objectives we have set to deliver them.

4.6.4 Housing Strategy 2005-09 and Housing Strategy Review 2007

Following the local elections in May 2007, and the subsequent formation of a new administration, the Council's housing strategy was reviewed in 2007 to ensure that it remained 'fit for purpose', particularly given the development of many national and regional policy initiatives. The review of the Housing Strategy re-confirmed the four original themes:

- Increasing the supply of New Affordable Homes.
- Tackling Homelessness.
- Improving Existing Homes.
- Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Households

The Housing Strategy Review 2007 is available at: www.maidzone.gov.uk

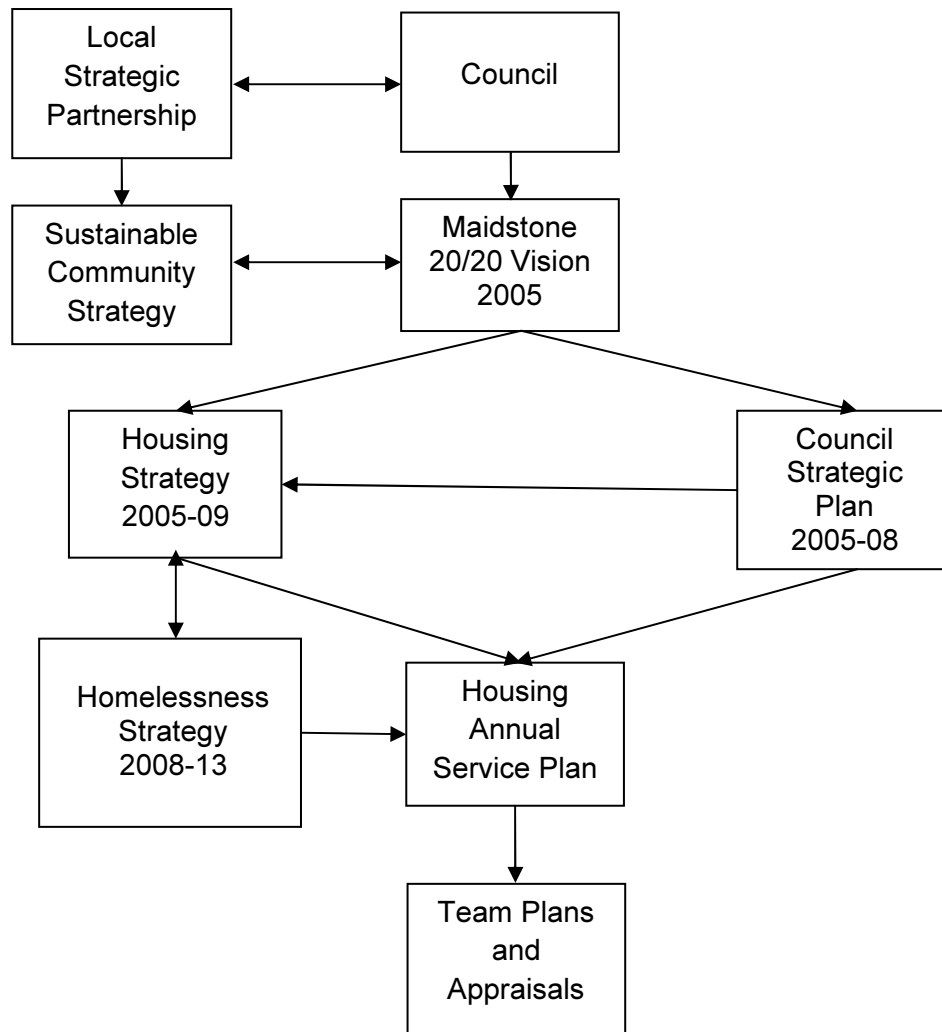
4.6.5 Housing Service Plan 2008-11

The Housing Department annual service plan was launched in April 2008. It sets out in detail how the department will work towards the common goal of "quality, decent homes that people can afford". The Service Plan is targeted at all housing staff, elected Members, and internal and external stakeholders as an accessible, live document which actively guides day-to-day work planning and budget monitoring. The Housing Options structure chart is at Appendix 1.

4.7 How Maidstone's strategies and plans link up

4.7.1 The Homelessness Strategy does not exist in isolation, but is linked to a number of existing strategies and plans that make up the Council's Policy Framework. The key starting point for all the council's policies is the Community Strategy agreed by all our partners. Our 20/20 Vision and the Strategic Plan set out in detail how the Borough will work towards achieving the aims and aspirations shared by our partners.

4.7.2 The key principles from both Community and Corporate Plans are reflected in each of the strategies and plans agreed by the Council. The diagram overleaf sets out the Council's Policy and Performance Framework:



The development of Maidstone's Sustainable Community Plan and Local Action Plan (to support the Kent LAA2) will, in turn, align stakeholders' policy development and performance management systems.

4.8 Demographic Trends: According to demographic data provided by KCC, the following major population changes will occur in Maidstone by 2021:

Total population will increase by 6,600 over the 20 yrs to 2021 to 145,700, increasing at an annual rate of 0.5%;

The 0-15 age-group is forecast to decrease 600 (2.2%);

The 16-24 age-group is forecast to decrease 400 (2.9%);

The 25-44 age-group is forecast to decrease to 6,100 (15.3%). This age group and the 16-24 cohort are the main economically active and household forming and moving groups;

The 45-64 age-group shows an increase in numbers of 3,300 (9%);

The two most significant rises are in the 65-79 and 80+ age-groups which are forecast to rise 8,400 (44.4%) and 2,100 (65.6%) respectively.

- 4.9 House prices: According to data published by Hometrack Ltd., the average price for all properties in the Borough (as at 30 September 2008) was £251,800. The table below compares the average house price increase in the borough in the years 2000-08 across four main property types:

Property type	2000 Land Registry Av Price	2004 Land Registry Av Price	Sept 2008 Av Price	% price increase 2000-08
Terraced	£92,395	£160,800	£177,200	91.8%
Semi-detached	£118,926	£200,408	£234,800	97.4%
Detached	£205,989	£321,334	£417,200	102.5%
Flats & maisonettes	£75,480	£131,725	£136,900	81.3%
All properties	£132,099	£204,327	£251,800	90.6%

Source: Hometrack Ltd

Despite much publicised house price falls of some 14% nationally, the market in Maidstone has been holding reasonably well with average house prices actually increasing year on year (September 2007-08) by 4.3%. However, that overall rise hides many price falls, particularly of terraced houses (-6%) and flats (-7%). The most expensive flats have fallen in price by over 15% since September 2007, and the price premium charged by developers on newly built flats has fallen from +33% to -14%.

- 4.10 Affordability: The table below gives the income thresholds required to purchase based on 95% mortgage and 3 times gross income for the six Maidstone sub-areas⁹:

Area	Income thresholds (£)		
	1 bed flat	2 bed flat	2 bed terrace
Sub-Area 1	29,600	39,600	43,500
Sub-Area 2	31,700	No data	30,100
Sub-Area 3	No data	36,400	49,600
Sub-Area 4	29,800	45,100	49,300
Sub-Area 5	33,600	38,000	47,200
Sub-Area 6	30,100	38,800	49,100

Source: Hometrack Ltd

⁹ See Appendix 10 for explanation of sub-areas.

The table below gives the distribution of gross annual household incomes:

Annual income	% of households	UK comparison
Below £10,000	13.2%	21.6%
£10,001 - £20,000	22.4%	42.3%
£20,001 - £27,500	13.8%	
£27,501 - £32,500	10.7%	36.1%
£32,501 - £40,000	10.4%	
£40,001 - £50,000	9.3%	
£50,001 - £60,000	7.6%	
£60,001 - £75,000	6.2%	
£75,001 - £100,000	3.4%	
Above £100,000	3.0%	

Source: Hometrack Ltd

The data indicates an affordability problem arising from the relationship between local incomes and the supply of 'entry level' housing stock, since some 50% of Maidstone households earn under the threshold to purchase even the cheapest property.

4.11 House building starts and completions:

The table below shows the house building starts and completions in Maidstone borough 2007/08 across the private and RSL sectors :

Quarter	Private Enterprise		RSL's		Totals
	Starts	Completions	Starts	Completions	
1	116	9	0	0	125
2	227	50	14	56	347
3	8	7	197	88	300
4	15	29	100	55	199
Totals	366	95	311	199	294
Totals	461		510		971

Source: P2 statutory returns

These figures suggest that private house building starts in the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2007/08 fell by 1,300% as a result of the economic downturn.

4.12 Forecasting future levels of homelessness

Whilst homeless presentations remain mostly constant throughout the year – with a slight rise during the Christmas/New Year period – there are a number of pressures that are likely to impact on the housing and advice service. These include:

- Population growth and household growth in line with Maidstone's growth point status and the changing demographics of an ageing population (see above);

- Decanting due to Maidstone Housing Trust's redevelopment/regeneration schemes, including the conversion and refurbishment of bed-sits at Lenham and Barming to provide high quality self-contained flats. However, several older developments are not suitable for conversion, and residents in these properties will be moved to other homes with better facilities. The Trust intends to dispose of the land from the outdated homes and develop new housing for older people;
- The effects of the 'credit crunch' and economic slowdown, the resulting increase in unemployment with mortgages more difficult to obtain, both for first time buyers and for existing mortgage holders, and forecast increase in mortgage arrears and house repossession actions (See Appendix 8 for summary of recent Government assistance for the housing market);
- The slowdown of private sector building, and the subsequent loss of s106 affordable housing gain, together with the lead-time delay in local authority capacity building to increase the rate of affordable house completions;
- The contraction of the private rented sector as landlords are unable to service more expensive loans;
- The long-term future of the CLG homelessness grant which funds our rent deposit scheme and other tenancy sustainment activities;
- Supporting People funding in the longer term;
- Pressure from the increasing prison population – Maidstone having a high number of prisons and the County's only probation hostel;
- Complexity of the client base: This is likely to be a major factor as support and other services are stretched across agencies to meet the needs of vulnerable families and people with special needs such as alcohol, mental health, learning disability, young people and ex-offenders;
- Diversity: The impact of immigration and changing ethnic mix has had only a limited impact on services to date but this can be expected to change over the next few years and appropriate responses need to be developed;
- Recruitment and retention of staff: The need to recruit and retain experienced and effective staff remains an issue across agencies and the high cost of housing locally has a bearing upon this;
- Pressures on the ability of the Council to continue to fund the affordable housing capital programme due to interest rate changes or lower than forecast capital receipts.

The implementation and delivery of this strategy will depend upon the effectiveness of the partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sector and through listening to and involving service users. Homelessness is a cross cutting issue and new partners need to come on board and recognize the importance of tackling homelessness in conjunction with wider social issues such as anti-social behaviour, addiction, crime, poverty and social exclusion. The way forward will require an effective strategic framework that focuses on delivery of successful outcomes across services, combined with robust risk analysis – see Section 14.



5. Homelessness Strategy 2003-08 - Achievements

5.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 required all local authorities to publish strategies to tackle homelessness in their areas. Maidstone's Homelessness Strategy was published in spring 2003, and was reviewed in 2005 to ensure it remained relevant through to 2008.

5.2 In 2005 the Housing Options Team (HOT) radically challenged how it approached housing advice and homelessness prevention. The Team

looked at best practice elsewhere in the country and made use of the CLG's Specialist Advisors to reshape and refocus the service. By embracing a new prevention ethos and making better use of the housing register, the HOT has made significant progress.

5.3 Over the three years 2004-06 to 2007-08 the number of homeless acceptances reduced from 173 to 43, and since December 2004 the number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation fell from 149 to 55 by March 2008, so meeting our 2010 target of halving the number of households placed in temporary accommodation some 2½ years early. A comparison of the number of households in priority need and accepted as homeless per 1,000 households in 2007-08 across each local authority in Kent, the South-East region and England (Appendix 2) shows how successful our prevention approach has been. Our homeless acceptance rate per 1,000 households of 0.7 is one third of the Kent average (2.2) and less than half that of the south-east average (1.6).

5.4 Since 2003 the range of homeless advice and preventative services offered has increased markedly. Significant developments have included:

- Implementation of a private sector leasing scheme in partnership with Avenue Lettings;
- Successful introduction of rent deposit and rent loan schemes;
- Establishment of a mediation service to prevent homelessness;
- The recruitment of a jointly funded post of Domestic Violence Prevention Officer between Maidstone and Ashford Borough Councils;
- The establishment of a private sector landlords forum;
- The recruitment of a Tenancy Support Officer;
- The development of a supported housing scheme for single people, together with a day centre;
- Street Homeless Working Group:- We have set up a street homeless working group as a sub-group of the Housing Sounding Board specifically to work with Police, Probation, Supporting People and other groups to identify needs;

- Ex-offenders: There are a large number of prisons in Kent, and in Maidstone in particular. We have set-up an Ex-offenders Working Group as a sub-group of the Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB), and projects undertaken include:

Empty properties initiative the sub-group will attempt to break the cycle of repeat crime and is looking at a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness, including involving ex-offenders in the refurbishment of empty properties to be used to house ex offenders and other single homeless clients.

Prison discharge protocol – Launched in July 2008, this protocol is aimed at improving homeless prevention activities and discharge arrangements, based on the HARP14 model, in partnership with probation, the prison service and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

Tumim House, Maidstone – opened in December 2005, Tumim House is a nine-bedded supported short-term hostel offering accommodation for ex-offenders with drug/alcohol issues. Tumim House accepts referrals from the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT).



Photo: Tumim House

5.5 Other achievements during the period 2005-2008 include:

Some 606 households have been prevented from becoming homeless by assistance from our Housing Options Team and Citizens Advice Bureau;

993 households have been successfully housed from the housing register;

135 households have been assisted through the Rent Deposit Bond Scheme;

Successful lobbying of the CLG, which resulted in a significant increase in our Homelessness Grant for 2007/08 and 2008/09, when other authorities' grants were reduced or remained the same.



Photo: Lily Smith House

7. Homelessness in Maidstone

7.1 Homeless applications, acceptances and homelessness prevention

The table below shows the numbers of households applying to the Council as homeless, the number accepted as homeless and the number of households placed in temporary accommodation (TA). We aim to prevent homelessness occurring wherever possible through housing advice and not to be the 'gatekeepers' of routes into social housing.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Apr - Sept 08/09
Homeless applications	312	133	90	57
Homeless acceptances	173	53	43	21
Households placed in temporary accommodation per quarter	103	77	55	35

Source: P1E quarterly statutory return

Our performance in preventing homelessness is measured through a national performance indicator which counts all households which have been prevented from becoming homeless through casework and other related intervention by the local authority. In order to provide a comparison between areas, it is shown as the number of households prevented from becoming homeless per 1,000 households. In 2007/8 we prevented 249 households from becoming homeless, or 4 per 1,000 households (number of households in the Borough as at 31/3/08 = 62,826). Our target for 2008/9 is 4, and for future years it is 5. The table below shows our performance for the three years 2005/6 to 2007/8 compared to Kent councils, English Districts and All-England councils. (see also Appendix 6)

Households prevented from becoming homeless per 1,000 households (BVPI 213)

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Maidstone Borough Council	4	3	4
Kent councils average (excl KCC)	3	3	4
English District Councils average	5	5	6
All England councils average	4	5	6

Source: Audit Commission

7.2 Causes of homelessness

The table below set out the four main causes of homelessness in Maidstone, analysed from casework (using the Academy computer system), and survey work.

Source	1 st cause	2 nd cause	3 rd cause	4 th cause
Academy housing computer system	Parental eviction	Relative eviction	End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)	Domestic Violence

Maidstone Borough Council Service User Questionnaire	Equal 1 st = Dispute with family & End of AST tenancy	N/A	Dispute with partner	Leaving institution (prison)
Kent Single Homeless Persons Survey 2007	Dispute with family	Leaving institution (prison)	Dispute with partner	Eviction due to rent arrears

Also shown for comparison are the leading causes of homelessness in four neighbouring local authorities:

Council	1st cause	2nd cause	3rd cause	4th cause
Ashford Borough Council	Parental eviction	End of AST	Eviction by family or friends	Non-violent relationship breakdown
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council	Parental eviction	End of AST	Domestic Violence	<i>Not stated</i>
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	Parental eviction/ eviction by family/friends	End of AST	Domestic Violence	<i>Not stated</i>
Sevenoaks District Council	Parental eviction	End of AST	Domestic Violence	<i>Not stated</i>

Source: Kent Single Homeless Persons Survey

Maidstone is similar to our neighbouring local authorities, in that the most common reason for homelessness is due to parental eviction. Unlike our neighbours however, the second most cited cause is relative eviction, followed by ending of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) and, fourthly, domestic violence. In our neighbouring boroughs it is the ending of an AST, followed by domestic violence that figure next to parental eviction. What is clear is that across West Kent the causes of homelessness are basically very similar.

7.4 Consultation with service providers and service users

7.4.1 *Service provider consultation*

A wide range of direct service providers and stakeholders responded to a questionnaire on homelessness services during the period June-September 2008. Overall, service providers were highly supportive of the Council's prevention approach and were keen to input not only their local knowledge of homelessness in Maidstone, but also many ideas as to how services could be developed. In summary, service providers commented that:

- General information – the locality can never have too much information to raise and maintain awareness of housing and homelessness issues;
- Keep leaflets and web site up to date;
- Advice – tailored for each client;
- Advice – Non-regulated financial advice – more staff trained to give it;
- Advice – skills & training;
- Advice – outreach to schools;
- Shortage of move on accommodation;
- Perhaps do need to review the need/demand for direct access hostel accommodation.

7.4.2 Service user consultation

Summary of results:

- 37% were sleeping in a hostel, and 34% were rough sleeping. Most street sleepers expected to remain on the street;
- Some 34% had been homeless for 1-5 years, whilst nearly 19% had been homeless for 6-10 years;
- Over 80% of respondents were aged 26-59, 92% were white British and 82% were male;
- Over 90% were planning to stay in the Maidstone area;
- The most common reasons for becoming homeless were family/partner dispute and end of tenancy (see above);
- Most had approached the Council for help at some time, and most expressed reasonable satisfaction with the service received;
- There was a high prevalence of substance misuse, with many respondents admitting to multiple addiction problems;
- 62% of respondents had personal experience of prison.

7.4.3 Kent Single Homeless Persons Survey 2007

Kent Single Homeless Persons Survey – This survey took place Kent-wide between December 2006 and April 2007. Some 731 single homeless persons were surveyed via over 40 organisations. The key findings are:

- Single homelessness is experienced by mainly white males aged between 26-39, who have been homeless for between 1 - 5 years;
- The two principal causes of homelessness were cited as family disputes and leaving prison;
- Many single homeless present dual and multiple problems e.g. mental health, drug & alcohol addiction;

7.5 The Urban/Rural aspect of homelessness

The Borough of Maidstone, whilst it incorporates Kent's county town at its centre, has a substantial rural hinterland stretching from the North Downs across to the Weald. At a national level, although the numbers are smaller, statutory homeless figures have been rising at a faster rate in rural rather than urban areas. Poverty, social exclusion, higher property prices and lower wages combine to increase individuals' vulnerability to homelessness in rural areas. The locations where people sleep rough in rural areas are often hidden and thus their presence may be missed by statutory and voluntary agencies.

7.6 Why is homelessness to be avoided?

Homelessness is bad for health, particularly children's health. In 2004, the housing charity Shelter published a study called **Sick and Tired** which looked at the effects of homelessness. Shelter found that:

- 58% of households said that their health had suffered because of living in temporary accommodation.

- Almost all of the households felt that their children's health had suffered through living in temporary accommodation.
- 63% of people suffering from depression said this had become worse since they had moved into temporary accommodation.

Other studies show that homelessness is bad for your child's education. Kids in temporary accommodation move around a lot: this means they have to keep changing schools, leaving their friends, teachers and courses. It can be hard to find a school place in the new area, and can take them time to settle down once they are in the new school. Absenteeism and truancy are higher for children from homeless families.

7.7 Why Prevention is Key:

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in its area and to develop a strategy for tackling it. In meeting their duties under this part of the Act, local authorities must consider homelessness in its broadest sense and not just limit their activities to people who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The changes are therefore aimed at promoting a more strategic and pro-active approach to managing homelessness. To this end, the Act also requires Social Service departments to work with housing authorities to prevent homelessness. Thus the Act provides an opportunity to redirect homelessness services away from crisis intervention towards prevention and focus on increasing support services to help people maintain their homes.

7.8 Bringing it all together – Strategy structure

In developing this new strategy and action plan we have taken into account the following:

National Government Targets for Homelessness Prevention;

- Reduce levels of homelessness against the four main identified causes
- Reduce levels of repeat homelessness
- Reduce the inappropriate use of temporary accommodation
- End the use of B&B for families
- Halve the total number of households in temporary accommodation between 2005 and 2010.
- Ending the use of B&B for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010
- Sustaining reductions in rough sleeping

The evidence and guidance on best practice nationally, together with lessons from research and the evaluation of the original strategies;

Our knowledge of the Borough and our own experience of what worked, and what did not, since 2003;

The views of people that have faced homelessness;

The views of our partners and other stakeholders;

A view of the potential future trends and risks that the strategy may need to address.

As a result of our review of homelessness in Maidstone we have mapped the actions and services to tackle homelessness under four key strategic aims:

- **Housing Advice & Options,**
- **Accommodation,**
- **Support, and**
- **Effective partnership working.**

Each of the four strategic aims is discussed more fully in the following sections.

7.9 Equalities and Diversity

An Interim Equalities Impact Assessment of the Homelessness Strategy has been carried out. As a result the new Strategy places more emphasis upon diversity, equality and accessibility especially for black and minority ethnic (BME) groups:

- The BME population has been steadily rising since the 1981 Census;
- BME groups are over represented on the Housing Register;
- The arrival of migrant workers from Eastern Europe may increase demands on the service if/when they gain the right to remain in this country.

7.10 This strategy does not detail all the services that are available or deal with every client group that may face homelessness at some stage. Instead, it focuses upon the main areas that need addressing or require action. It does not seek to imitate or replace other strategies that affect the housing and support needs of vulnerable people and families but seeks to compliment them and where appropriate set common targets. The importance of performance management in the delivery of the strategy is set out in Section 13 - Monitoring and Delivering the Strategy.



8. Preventing Homelessness - Housing Advice and Options

8.1 The Council adopted the 'Housing Options' model of housing advice and homelessness prevention in 2005. **The model is pro-active and based on the belief that early intervention and the provision of targeted services to those threatened with homelessness can substantially reduce the need to accept a household as homeless.** This approach has dramatically changed in the way in

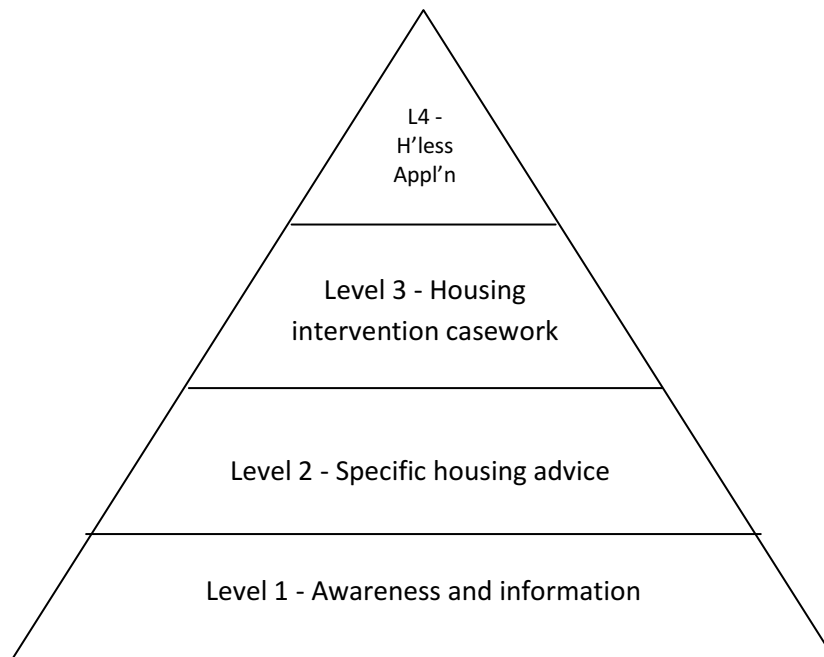
which we deliver services to those facing homelessness.

8.2 Even though there is a general awareness that housing is expensive locally, most people think they will never be faced with homelessness. In addition, there is often a general misapprehension that there is widespread availability of Council and housing association rented homes, of sufficient size and in convenient locations, for those who become homeless. Indeed, despite the Council transferring its housing stock to Maidstone Housing Trust in February 2004, many MHT tenants still think the Council are their landlords. Thus, there is a need to raise awareness of local housing issues to a wider audience and to demonstrate how scarce a social commodity affordable housing is.

8.3 In this Strategy we wish to build upon our existing housing advice service to extend both the audience and range of advice given. There are four stages, or levels, to this approach:

- Increasing awareness and information about housing and the risk of homelessness among the general public (Level 1);
- Providing general or specific housing advice for those with housing needs to prevent homelessness (Level 2);
- Offering a range of housing options, tenancy and other direct support and intervention for those facing homelessness (Level 3);
- Providing a (statutory) safety net for those who do become homeless (Level 4).

Levels of homelessness information, advice and options



8.4 Where do people go for housing advice now? Our consultation found that:

- 29.4% sought advice from the Council
- 28.4% from family and friends
- 19.6% from Hostel
- 5.9% from another local authority
- 4.9% from Citizens Advice Bureau
- 11.8% from GPs, care workers and other professionals

8.5 When respondents were asked about the usefulness of the advice received, the results showed that 25% found advice from the Day Centre of most help, whilst another 20% found advice from the Hostel of most help. Some 17% of respondents found advice from friends and family most helpful, but an equal percentage found advice from friends the least helpful. Although we have expanded our housing advice services to prevent homelessness wherever possible, there is still a lack of specialist advice and advocacy for older people and there is a need to outreach to older people who may be vulnerable to homelessness.

8.6 *Court Desk Service*

The Government has recently invested £10,000 into Court-based services provided at Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone County Courts. Although MHT already provide this for their tenants, our aim is to provide an advice service that is free, independent, and confidential at mortgage repossession and suspension of warrant hearings for those with no representation. We will also provide an advice service to clients, in “face to face” interviews and by telephone, in mortgage and rent arrears cases. The scheme is currently being set up and will commence operation from mid-December 2009.

8.7 *Money Advice*

Financial worries and debt are major factors that lead to homelessness and other personal problems. Personal insolvency rates in the UK have reached an all-time high. In the year to 31 December 2006, there were a record 69,421 bankruptcies and 53,313 Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs), a common alternative to bankruptcy¹⁰. In September 2008, the average price for all properties in Maidstone was £251,800: that for a terraced house stood at £177,200; a rise of 10% over the previous 4 years. With high levels of debt and average house prices in the area, any rise in interest rates may result in financial difficulties and homelessness for many households.

The Citizens Advice Bureau advise that low income groups are 3 times more likely than the general population to be in arrears with rent, mortgage, council tax or utilities. Without money management skills and an awareness of the financial help that is available to low income households, more households could face a precarious housing situation. The risk of debt causing homelessness is increasing. Whilst recent changes in the rules on personal insolvency make it easier for people to declare themselves bankrupt, this may restrict their future housing options and increase their risk of homelessness. The easy availability of credit and companies that will offer loans to lower income households has been recognised as an issue by the Council and work is being undertaken in Kent to try to set up a Credit Union, although at least one exists in Medway. This should offer its members an alternative means of borrowing at lower interest rates. This is not a quick fix as it is likely to take some time to establish and reach those in need, and it is not a substitute for money advice or the need to improve financial management skills – ‘financial literacy’ - within the community.

8.8 *Early warning of homelessness*

There is also a need to look out more carefully for early warnings of the risk of homelessness on housing applications or in our existing casework. Some households have an inter-generational history of homelessness with a clear expectation that this is the route into social housing and it is not unusual for a number of siblings from the same family each becoming homeless as they reach 16 plus and form new relationships etc. Such families are often well known to agencies and the risk of homelessness of members of the household may be recognised well in advance, however we usually don't get involved until there is a “crisis”.

Repeat homelessness among families with dependent children has been at a nil rate in Maidstone for some two years. It is however very common among single people and particularly young people or those with chaotic lifestyles, such cases rarely appear in official statistics. We need to explore more innovative ways of working with young people avoid the crises and “revolving door” cycle of homelessness.

8.9 *Seeking extra resources*

It is also important to maximise any other resources potentially available that may assist with homelessness prevention. The most significant development is the opening, in January

¹⁰ The Insolvency Service

2009, of the Maidstone Gateway which will host many of our partner agencies. The Gateway will allow truly one-stop holistic advice to be given to those people facing housing difficulties. Another resource is other Council staff across the organisation. We believe it is possible to develop the capacity of council staff in other work areas to identify the signs that there is a risk of homelessness and refer people to the Housing Advice Centre and/or offer basic advice/signposting to other services. This is also true of other statutory and voluntary services, in particular housing associations and supported housing providers. Although they work closely with the Council they may lack understanding of housing advice and homelessness prevention issues and may not intervene early enough when problems arise or refer tenants for housing or money advice prior to taking possession action.

8.10 *Government help to homeowners (see also Appendix 8)*

In September the Government announced a package of measures worth £1bn to assist homeowners faced with repossession and other housing difficulties. Further details of the scheme have been released, and seminars and training events have been organised. The Council has been nominated for 'Fast Track' status which will enable us to influence the way the scheme operates within Kent. It is anticipated that the various measures will commence in the New Year 2009.

Action Plan 1 – Housing Advice and Options

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timescale
Produce information leaflets on housing options to the general public, potential service users, their families and friends	Housing Options Manager Private Sector Housing Manager	Voluntary partners	Year 1
Ensure all leaflets are fully accessible for customers at the Gateway, libraries, partners, web-site	Housing Options Manager Systems Support Officer Housing Options Team Leader Private Sector Housing Manager	Contact Centre Manager Other Gateway managers	Year 1
Undertake a user survey that includes questions on the effectiveness of communications.	Housing Policy Officer Systems Support Officer	Contact Centre Manager Other Gateway managers	Year 1
Update website information on housing options particularly in relation to those with complex needs	Housing Policy Officer Systems Support Officer	Supporting People KCC Adult Services Community Mental Health Teams DAAT	Year 1 & on-going
Undertake a Schools Outreach programme to Year 11 pupils in two schools	Housing Options Manager Housing Options Team Leader Housing Allocations Team Leader	KCC Education School Governors Press & PR Manager	Year 1 and on-going
Produce an information leaflet on accessing private rented accommodation	Housing Options Manager Tenancy Support Officer	Avenues Private Sector Leasing	Year 1
Host a Housing Sounding Board stakeholder event annually	Housing Policy Officer Housing Options Manager	Press & PR Manager Housing Sounding Board	Years 1-5
Agree a protocol with Maidstone Housing Trust to ensure their tenants receive an appropriate housing options appraisal	Housing Options Manager Housing Options Team Leader	MHT	Year 2

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timescale
Develop a web-based directory of services which service users can self-access to the services they need, including the Gateway	Housing Policy Officer Systems Support Officer	Contact Centre Manager Other Gateway managers Voluntary partners	Year 2
Use of local free and paid for newspapers and other suitable media for regular information stories	Housing Options Manager	Press & PR Manager	Year 2
Deliver an agreed programme of benefits training to Housing Options Officers	Housing Options Manager Benefits Manager	MBC Benefits	Year 2
Deliver training to health professionals on homeless prevention	Housing Options Manager	West Kent PCT	Year 2
Review the Council's front-end housing advice service to ensure effectiveness of delivery through the new Gateway	Housing Options Manager Housing Policy Officer	Contact Centre Manager Other gateway managers	Year 2
Develop a protocol to prevent homeless discharges from hospital in accordance with the national discharge guidelines from Homelessness Link	Housing Options Manager Housing Policy Officer	West Kent PCT Supporting People	Year 2
Review the effectiveness of the mediation scheme in preventing homelessness	Housing Options Manager Housing Policy Officer	Maidstone Mediation	Year 2



9. Preventing Homelessness - Accommodation

9.1 Social Housing

Maidstone transferred its housing stock to Maidstone Housing Trust (MHT) in February 2004. Under the terms of the transfer, the Council receives 75% of vacant MHT properties to nominate households from the Housing register into, with the remaining 25% of vacancies available to MHTs own transfer list. We receive notification of around 300 MHT void properties per year, and also secure 100% nomination rights of the socially rented component of newly completed affordable housing schemes. The table below shows the total number of households housed from the Housing Register since 2005/6:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008 Apr-Sept year to date
318	331	344	192

As well as MHT, over 25 other RSLs operate within the Borough, managing between them around 1,500 properties. Including MHT properties, there are a total of 7,618 socially rented dwellings in the Borough, and when shared ownership and Homebuy properties are included there are some 8,200 affordable houses in the borough, with a further 680¹¹ managed by other public sector bodies. Choice based lettings (CBL) is being introduced across Kent so enabling all Council and housing association homes for rent or low cost sale to be advertised in a similar manner to that of private homes. The scheme is being introduced in phases, and is programmed to start in Maidstone in March 2009.

9.2 Private Rented Sector

9.2.1 Rent Deposit Bond Scheme

The Council's rent deposit scheme has been a huge success in preventing homelessness in the Borough, building links with private landlords and increasing access to this sector, particularly for family housing. The scheme has attracted a wide range of private landlords to provide tenancies for people on low incomes. Some 169 tenancies have been enabled since the scheme began in 2005. Access to good quality private rented accommodation remains a key part of our strategy. All deposits and loans are tracked, repaid and recycled, where possible, to increase the finance available to other households. Future improvements to the scheme include:

- Offering more choice to clients by securing rent deposits outside the Maidstone area, without affecting the client's priority on the housing register.
- An offer of a deposit can be made to clients at risk of potential homelessness and not just those actually threatened with homelessness within 28 days (the statutory

¹¹ Source: HSSA 2008 Statutory Return

definition). In practice it means financial help can be offered in advance of a client becoming homeless and can often enable the client(s) to 'buy more time' where they are currently living, particularly if they are staying with families or friends.

- Helping landlords find tenants
- Offering potential incentives to landlords to encourage increased nominations
- Giving more support to landlords
- Using RDBS monies to pay off small rent arrears, or to enable an AST to be extended

9.2.2 *Landlord Liaison*

There is considerable scope to continue to develop and improve relationships with landlords. Private landlords need to be encouraged to make early contact with Housing Advice Centre staff to action any problems and prevent any possible tenancy terminations.

Housing Advice Services continues to promote the private rented sector to clients through its Housing Options approach and clients have been much more willing to see private rented accommodation as a realistic housing option in the short and medium term. Unfortunately there is still a negative feeling about the use of private rented accommodation from a minority of statutory and voluntary agencies, which mistakenly perceive private rented accommodation as unsuitable and unaffordable. Whilst clearly private rents are much higher than social housing rents, Local Housing Allowance¹² (LHA) rates are reasonable and properties can be found within these rental levels.

Given the high number of low income housing applicants who are entitled to full LHA and Council Tax Benefit, private rented accommodation is affordable for many households. It is also possible to negotiate lower rental levels with private landlords who are keen to minimize void periods and maximize rental income. This we have already done with a local provider of bed and breakfast accommodation who has offered the Council very preferential rates in return for 'first nomination' status.

We will seek the development of larger social rented and shared ownership homes to accommodate larger families. An increased supply of homes with three or more bedrooms will accommodate larger families who may be living in overcrowded conditions, and will also provide family sized homes for people on modest incomes who provide essential public sector services within the borough. We will also provide affordable more retirement accommodation for sale to older people who wish to downsize from their family sized home.

9.2.3 *Homelessness caused by housing unfitness*

As at April 2008, Maidstone's total housing stock was 63,054¹³, of which 54,756 (87%) are private sector dwellings, and of that some 10% are privately rented. As at 2003, of the total stock some 2,000 dwellings (4%) were unfit, and of those 500 were privately rented¹⁴. In

¹² Formerly known as Housing Benefit

¹³ Source: HSSA 2008 Statutory Return

¹⁴ Source: Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2003

2006 the unfitness standard was replaced by the Decent Homes Standard which used a safety rating system to assess and score potential hazards. Under this standard, some 1,900 (4%) of dwellings have Category 1 hazards, with private rented homes again figuring largely in the results¹⁵.

The Housing Options team work closely with the Private Sector Housing team (PSH). If any risk factors caused by poor housing conditions which may make the property unreasonable to occupy are reported (either through casework with the client, or as a result of a complaint by the tenant) the PSH team will inspect the property and negotiate with the landlord to improve the property through grant aid. Such action keeps the tenant in the property and ensures that the property remains within the private rented sector.

9.2.4 Pre Tenancy Training for clients

In order to further increase the chances of clients maintaining successful tenancies, a further step in the 'prevention process' is to offer tenancy training to younger clients and those who have never held a private rented tenancy, up to two months before they take up their new tenancy. Such an initiative could possibly be piloted with MHT.



Photo: Sandling Park

9.3 Provision of New Affordable Homes

9.3.1 The Housing Needs Survey 2005 identified a shortfall of 962 affordable homes per annum. The Housing Strategy 2005 – 09 acknowledges that the Council cannot meet this level of demand in its entirety. Even if the all the new development

was given over to 100% affordable housing, this need could not be met¹⁶. Maidstone is not unique in the South-east region in having identified high housing need. The council introduced new planning policies¹⁷ for housing and seeks to maximise new affordable housing through planning gain. The policy seeks 40% affordable housing on all privately developed housing sites capable of accommodating 15 homes or more, with the affordable housing composed of 60% social housing and 40% intermediate housing¹⁸.

The Housing Needs Survey (2005) identified a lack of affordable low cost housing in many rural settlements. To tackle this problem, a practical guide to planning and providing affordable housing in rural areas was launched in March 2005, followed by a (Housing

¹⁵ Private Sector Stock Update on Decent Homes 2005

¹⁶ Between 2004 and 2008 some 3,638 new homes of all tenures were built, an average of 909 per year.

¹⁷ Affordable Housing Local Development Document

¹⁸ See also Maidstone Borough Council Housing Strategy Review 2007 for further details of house building targets up to 2026

Strategy) Rural Housing Supplement in December 2005. The Rural Housing Supplement aims to develop suitable partnerships with a range of organisations to:

- Identify land that can be allocated for rural schemes through the LDF process;
- Lobby for resources;
- Conduct detailed Parish Housing Needs Surveys;
- Promote cross-boundary working.

There have been a total of 10 surveys since 2005. They aim to ascertain whether there are any shortfalls in affordable housing provision within rural parishes. In order to make these schemes become a reality the Council will work with housing partners to bid for external funding and where this cannot be achieved to identify resources within its capital programme.

9.3.2 What has been achieved so far?

The actual affordable housing completions over four years, together with 2008/9 forecast and targets for the following two years are tabled below:

Year	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9 Forecast	2009/10 Target	2010/11 Target
Totals	206	96	149	241	229 ¹⁹	150	150

The funding for our affordable house building programme comes from two main sources – the Councils own resources and the Housing Corporation (now the Homes and Communities Agency).

Maidstone Borough capital programme

Year	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9 budget	2009/10 budget	2010/11 budget
£p	1,043,350	1,684,116	573,210	4,072,105	3,540,000	5,200,000	3,000,000

Housing Corporation Grant Allocations:

Bid-round Period	2004-06	2006-08	2008-11	Total 2004-11
Total Grant Allocation £p	£3,860,654	£11,137,318	£14,561,127	£29,559,099

Whilst we have been successful in delivering 1 and 2 bed flatted accommodation as part of the redevelopment of industrial areas along the river, there is now a need to secure the provision of more family sized 2 and 3 bedroom houses.

9.4 Maidstone Housing Benefit Service

9.4.1 The Housing Benefits Service is crucial to preventing homelessness. An efficient and effective Housing Benefits (HB) service has a vital part to play in preventing homelessness,

¹⁹ This is our worst case estimate - see Section 14 - Risk Analysis

conversely a poor benefits service can generate homelessness. It is also crucial in increasing direct lets by private landlords: where Housing Benefits respond quickly to claims, there is usually a sustained supply of good quality rental accommodation accessible for tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. The Councils benefits service is the top performing English council in terms of its claims processing, and contributes widely to tenancy sustainment through processing claims rapidly and thereby reducing the likelihood of rent arrears building up.

PI Ref	PI Description	2005/06 Actual	2006/07 Actual	2007/08 Actual	2008/09 Target	2009/10 Target
BV78a	Average time for processing new benefit claims (days)	17.5	12.8	10.5	11	10.5
Bv78b	Average time for processing notifications of changes of circumstances (days)	4.9	4.4	4.3	4.1	3.9

Source: Audit Commission

9.4.2 Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

The Department of Work and Pensions allocate a sum of money to each local authority to allow councils to help families and individuals find homes or remain in their home – without causing financial hardship. DHP is an invaluable source of support for families and single people who need accommodation in areas where rents are high, or where it is considered that Rent Officer Service local reference rents may not reflect the true market rents for that particular area. Each local authority receives a share of a national cash limited Government Contribution towards their DHP expenditure. Local authorities may exceed their contribution if they wish, but there is an upper expenditure limit of two and a half times their contribution. Any unspent portion of their contribution must be returned to DWP. It is a matter of record that most English authorities do not spend their entitlement of DHP, but Maidstone is a top performing council in this area and manages to spend all its grant.

9.4.3 Local Housing Allowance

LHA was rolled out nationally in April 2008. Experience highlights that the majority of landlords are willing to assist households in receipt of benefits where they have confidence that they will receive rent payments on a timely basis. Landlords familiar with receiving Housing Benefit direct on behalf of their tenants were initially very nervous when LHA was introduced, as this provides a flat rate amount according to property size and location (the broad market rent) and a fixed amount is payable direct to the tenant, even if the tenant would prefer that payments were given to the landlord. However, there is scope for paying LHA to the landlord directly if the tenant is vulnerable or if they fall behind with rent payments.

Housing Advice Services liaised closely with Housing Benefit services in respect of implementation of LHA to ensure landlord confidence in the service was maintained. However, due to the national delivery model of the LHA there are some practical issues that could arise locally. One area of concern is that the LHA payment schedule does not fit neatly with the normal payment schedule of the private rented sector i.e. LHA 'rent' is paid fortnightly in arrears whereas private rents are due calendar monthly in advance. This

means that the tenant may need to secure additional rent in advance to avoid falling into arrears from the start of the tenancy. Furthermore, this type of payment schedule can also cause confusion to both landlord and tenant and can make it easy for tenants to miss payments or to assume that two LHA rent payments equal a calendar month's rent. Similarly, if for any reason there is a delay in starting LHA payments some tenants can fall into arrears early and these can quickly escalate.

Action Plan 2– Accommodation

Action	Key Partners	Lead	Timescale
Ensure all CLG targets relating to use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for households with dependent children/pregnant women, young and vulnerable persons, use of TA and repeat homelessness are met	MHT RSLs Avenues PSL	Housing Options Manager Housing Options Team Leader	On going
Monitor CORE registered RSL returns to maximise the proportion of lets and re-les made to council nominated households	RSLs	Housing Options Manager Housing Options Team Leader	On going
Development and Enabling – Deliver the Council’s affordable housing targets	RSLs Homes & Communities Agency GOSE & DCLG	Housing Enabling Officer	On going
Implement the Government’s package of mortgage assistance measures	RSLs Homes & Communities Agency GOSE & DCLG	Chief Housing Officer Housing Options Manager	Jan 2009 and on going
Implement the Choice Based Letting Scheme in partnership with Kent Authorities	All Kent LAs RSLs	Chief Housing Officer Housing Options Manager	Year 1
Review our Allocations Policy to ensure compliance within the Kent-Wide Choice Based Letting Scheme	All Kent LAs RSLs	Housing Options Manager	Year 1
Review the options available to work closer with private sector landlords to accept longer term tenancies	Landlords Forum MBC Legal Services	Housing Options Manager Tenancy Support Officer	Year 1
Ensure the Notify/Contact Point Scheme is fully operational	KCC Adult Services West Kent PCT	Housing Options Team Leader	Year 1
Review the functions and membership of the JARP Group	Equalities Impact Assessment	Housing Options Team Leader	Year 1

Action	Key Partners	Lead	Timescale
Develop a Nomination Panel for extra care elderly persons accommodation	KCC Adult Services Housing 21 Care	Senior Nominations Officer	Year 1
Investigate the adoption of the Kent-Wide Move-On Protocol for short term supported accommodation	JPPB & KHG RSLs & Support providers	Housing Options Manager	Year 1-2
Develop a protocol to prevent homeless discharges from hospital	West Kent PCT Supporting people	Housing Options Manager	Year 2
Review the council's Housing Register form to ensure appropriate BME and support information is asked	Equalities Impact Assessment	Senior Nominations Officer	Year 2
Agree and set an annual target for properties freed up by schemes offering social housing tenants an incentive to move to a smaller property	MHT RSLs	Housing Options Manager	Year 2
In partnership with MHT, agree and implement a mechanism to ensure that MHT tenants have access to Low Cost Ownership	MHT	Housing Options Manager	Year 1-2
Identify and secure suitable accommodation to provide supported accommodation for teenage pregnancy hostel	Supporting People RSLs	Housing Enabling officer	Year 1-2
Review the standard of long-term mental health accommodation units and identify and secure alternatives to meet client support needs	Supporting People RSLs	Housing Enabling officer	Year 1-2
Agree and implement a mechanism to ensure that homeless applicants/ homeless prevention cases can access to Low Cost Ownership	RSLs	Housing Options Manager Housing Enabling officer	Year 3
Design and implement tenancy training to younger clients and those who have never held a private rented tenancy	RSLs MHT	Housing Options Manager	Year 3



10. Preventing Homelessness - Support and Social Exclusion

10.1 Ensuring that support is available for people who are at risk of homelessness is an important part of Maidstone's strategy of homeless prevention. As part of the homelessness review we have mapped available support services and the organisations which provide them. Closer working links have been established between many of them and the council since 2003, and these are still being developed.

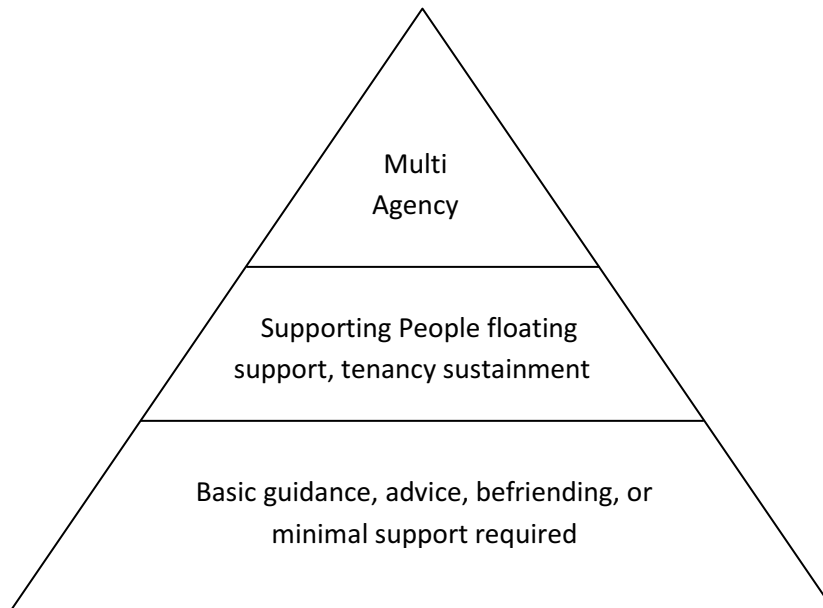
10.2 Although our first Homelessness Strategy was very successful, one of the most challenging areas we sought to address was reducing homelessness among people with special needs and/or challenging behaviour who face social exclusion. This remains a difficult area to address as such clients are often hard to engage with and they may need a range of responses and support from a number of agencies with differing priorities and objectives. The types of households that present such challenges to the agencies involved include:

- Young people and care leavers;
- Offenders including those who are prolific offenders as well as those who may have a history of violent or dangerous offences including sexual abuse;
- Those with drug and alcohol problems;
- People with mental health problems particularly those with complex needs and personality disorders that are not responsive to treatment.

10.3 It is also not unusual to find people who present with a combination of some or all the above issues. These client groups are often highly volatile or unpredictable and may present serious risks to staff and others in the community. The Council's Community Safety Strategy seeks to address this issue and a pro-active stance is taken locally to address such concerns. There is an inherent conflict and tension in balancing the housing needs of people who will undoubtedly exhibit anti-social behaviour toward their neighbours and the general community where they live and the safety and security of the communities where they may be housed. There are always likely to be difficult decisions to make in such instances and no easy solution is likely in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless it is a challenge we need to address. There are also concerns about meeting the needs of vulnerable groups who themselves may be at risk of bullying, exploitation and violence from others.

10.4 We are also facing new issues such as people who may present as homeless who are from abroad, such as EU nationals particularly from the eastern European countries. We already have seen a number of cases of people sleeping rough and living in very inadequate housing locally.

10.5 Social exclusion may also be experienced by those in poverty or socially deprived. Maidstone is a fairly affluent area and scores lowly on most indices of need although there are significant pockets of relative deprivation. Those on low incomes and benefits may also have other needs such as those highlighted above and this makes their risk of homelessness even greater. The effectiveness of any prevention strategy is irrevocably linked to the availability of other support services provided by the statutory and voluntary sector. There are a number of tiers of support provided through various agencies locally from low level support services that offer general befriending, advice and guidance, to specialist supported housing services and multi agency care and support packages, as the diagram below shows.



Maidstone is proud of its record of providing supported accommodation and currently hosts a large proportion of the county's specialist accommodation. The vast majority of this accommodation receives its revenue funding through the Supporting People route, whose grant conditions require open access. This has led to difficulties in terms of finding move-on accommodation for residents of specialist schemes who are ready for settled housing. The Council is working with neighbouring authorities and the Supporting People Team to agree a 'Reconnection Policy' to share the burden of finding settled housing and to prevent specialist schemes from 'silting up'.

Maidstone Housing Trust (MHT) is currently reviewing their sheltered accommodation. The Trust owns and manages fifteen Sheltered Housing schemes in the Maidstone district. Following a pilot project, the Trust will be converting and refurbishing bed-sits at Lenham House, Lenham, and Harbledown House, Barming, to provide high quality self-contained flats. However, several older developments are not suitable for conversion, and residents in these properties will be moved to other homes with better facilities. The Trust intends to dispose of the land from the outdated homes and develop new housing for older people. Given the projected demographic changes in Maidstone, the Council will be using its strategic role working with stakeholders and partners to ensure an adequate supply of the right type of specialist and supported accommodation into the future. Appendix 9 is a list of all supported housing in the Maidstone Borough area, including MHT, RSL and charity/ almshouse accommodation.

10.6 Approaches for challenging client groups

10.6.1 *Young People*



The numbers of young people seeking advice and information about housing options is growing. Although protocols are now in place with Children's Services for assessments and referrals to housing authorities for care leavers and 16 and 17 year olds, these do not guarantee that their support requirements will be met. Care leavers are entitled to support post 18 until they reach 21 (or 25 if they have a learning disability) but this is generally low-level support other than in a crisis. Young people under 18 if not "looked after" may not qualify for any social services support unless they are assessed as a "child in need" and even then such services can be very limited.

There are also a number of issues in respect to young people in respect to transition from children's to adult services. Some young people receive support particularly in terms of special education but once they turn 18 and leave school or college they no longer meet the criteria for assistance through adult services. These young people are quite vulnerable but frequently fall between agencies if they need support. There is considerable evidence that young people find it difficult to sustain the various accommodation options available including living in designated supported housing schemes. The risk of "revolving door" homelessness is therefore high with certain young people becoming labelled as "too difficult", further reducing their housing options.

Lifestyle issues that are common among young people also pose a challenge to agencies seeking to support them. Recreational drug use is common, as is alcohol use. Peer pressure and the desire to conform is often a more significant driver of young people's behaviour than the risk of homelessness. Such behaviour can also increase the risks of getting into debt, offending, teenage pregnancy, and becoming victims of violence and other abuse. Those young people that have been in care are at even greater risk. Better monitoring of the needs of such young people is required to identify areas where services could be developed or targeted.

10.6.2 *Ex-Offenders*

There are a large number of prisons in Kent and in Maidstone in particular. The risk of homelessness amongst offenders and ex-offenders is high – in our user survey some 42% had personal experience of prison, and 15% of respondents cited leaving prison as the main reason for becoming homeless. Housing options for offenders tend to be more limited than for some other single homeless people, particularly for those who are prolific offenders. Many commit crime to fuel drug misuse, whilst others have a history of violent or dangerous offences including sexual abuse. Multi agency partnerships including the Borough Crime and Disorder Partnership (CDRP) – a Theme Group of the Local Strategic Partnership - and the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) are responsible for delivery of relevant aspects of

the CDRP and drugs strategies locally. We have set-up an Ex-offenders Working Group as a sub-group of the Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB): projects undertaken have included the empty properties initiative and the Prison Discharge Protocol.

10.6.3 Maidstone MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements)

MAPPA are a set of arrangements to manage the risk posed by the most serious sexual and violent offenders. They bring together the police, probation and prison services in Kent into what is known as the MAPPA responsible authority. The purposes of MAPPA are:

- to ensure more comprehensive risk assessments, taking advantage of co-ordinated information sharing across the agencies; and
- to direct the available resources to best protect the public.

A number of agencies are under a duty to co-operate with the responsible authority. These include: children’s services, adult social services, health trusts and authorities, youth offending teams, local housing authorities and certain registered social landlords, Jobcentre Plus, and electronic monitoring providers. As at March 2008 across Kent there were 1,487 such offenders, with 199 based in Mid-Kent.

MAPPA operates by identifying eligible offenders, assessing the nature and level of harm they pose and implementing a risk management plan to protect the public. There are three levels of management, which are based upon the level of multi-agency co-operation required to implement the risk management plan effectively. Higher risk cases tend to be managed at the higher levels and offenders will be moved up and down levels as appropriate as tabled below:

MAPPA offender categories	MAPPA management levels
<p>Category 1 – Registered Sexual Offenders (1,030);</p> <p>Category 2 – violent offenders sentenced to imprisonment/detention for 12 months or more, or detained under hospital orders. This category also includes a small number of sexual offenders who do not qualify for registration and offenders disqualified from working with children (342);</p> <p>Category 3 – offenders who do not qualify under categories 1 or 2 but who currently pose a risk of serious harm and there is a link between the offending and the risk posed (115).</p>	<p>Level 1 – ordinary agency management arrangements are sufficient (863);</p> <p>Level 2 – regular multi-agency meetings are required (576);</p> <p>Level 3 – as Level 2 but the case demands that multi-agency co-operation and oversight at a senior level is required, together with the authority to commit exceptional resources, perhaps at short notice, to strengthen the risk management plan (48).</p>

10.6.4 ClearSprings – Bail and Home Detention Curfew accommodation

This supported accommodation was first introduced in June 2007 and allows courts to bail defendants who are currently unable to provide a bail address or who could not be bailed without support. Services users are those low risk offenders who would be released from court if they had an address to go to that the court or prison feels would be appropriate and sustainable, and they remain in the property until their case is resolved or until their licence has expired. The aim of the scheme is to reduce the potentially damaging effects of serving bail in prison on housing and employment. Maidstone has been identified as having a local need for accommodation for local offenders and one 3-bedded unit is currently in use. www.clearsprings.co.uk/

10.6.5 Post-Release Support

Effective resettlement post release is also essential. Whilst the Borough has an ex-offenders hostel – Link House - located here, there is a lack of designated housing related support for offenders across Kent. It is recognised that more work is required to improve liaison with prisons to coordinate accommodation for offenders leaving prison and for those who have accommodation but may be at risk of losing it if they go to prison. The main difficulty in developing services is that prisons do not serve the local community and most offenders that are likely to return to Maidstone are in prisons elsewhere. Therefore this type of initiative should be explored jointly with the National Offender Management Service and with other organisations such as the St Giles Trust, which support offenders in prison.

10.6.6 Substance Misuse

Drug and alcohol use continues to be a significant underlying cause of homelessness. Research indicates that nationally one in three drug users are homeless. This research also indicated that:

- Relatively few clients were on local housing registers or that treatment /service providers were not aware if they were.
- Of the main supported housing providers that accommodate single people who are homeless or have complex needs, few schemes will accept people who are still using drugs or alcohol whether they are in treatment services or not.
- There is a greater level of provision for those addressing alcohol issues than drugs.

10.6.7 Mental Health and Complex needs

Mental health is a common factor among those who become homeless and mental ill-health can increase the risk of homelessness. The need for specialist support in this area is recognised by mental health service providers and Supporting People. Existing supported housing services for this client group provide effective services and have been flexible in adapting to the needs of service users. Local partnership relationships are very good – enabled by the Mental Health Protocol and Mental Health Forum - and Outreach Services are very effective locally but the range of housing options available for those with complex needs are limited due to their behaviour and risk to others.

10.6.8 Rough Sleepers



Rough sleepers may be represented across all the above needs groups and pose common or more complex challenges. The Maidstone Day Centre (MDC) provides a support and advice service, as well as hot meals, toilets, showers and a laundry service. It is open from 08.30 to 13.30 and can accommodate up to 40 people, although the average is around 25 per day. Many of their clients have been into and out of the homeless 'system' and are unable to maintain tenancies. Even so, since 2006 MDC have assisted some 60 people into permanent accommodation.

The Street Homeless Working Group²⁰ (a sub-group of the Housing Sounding Board) specifically works with Police, Probation, Supporting People and other groups to identify needs. In response to stakeholders concerns, we lobbied for additional resources, which resulted in Supporting People commissioning Porchlight²¹ (formerly East Kent Cyrenians) to provide outreach services to street homeless people across Kent. The service started in Maidstone in June 2008 and complements the work of both the Lily Smith House hostel and the Maidstone Day Centre. Porchlight workers contact street homeless and work with them to address their problems. They are currently working with around 13 people, with a further 3 on the waiting list. The need to access short term as well as longer-term beds is also important as rough sleepers compete for beds in the hostels and the night shelter with other homeless people.

10.7 Other Tenancy Sustainment and Floating Housing Support Services

10.7.1 Floating Housing Support

There are a variety of housing tenancy and other related support services for single and vulnerable people provided by Maidstone Housing Trust, Supporting People, and various voluntary agencies within the Borough. These make an important contribution to homeless prevention by offering practical and flexible support tailored to individual need.

10.7.2 Single Persons Hostels and Supported Housing Services

The town centre hostels and other supported housing projects remain one of the key resources to reduce single homelessness. These services provide short term (i.e. for up to 2 years) accommodation for over 50 single people within the Borough. They are also able to offer service users (to varying degrees):

- Support with substance misuse problems;

²⁰ The role and terms of reference of this group will be reviewed – see Action Plan 3

²¹ Porchlight also provide supporting housing and support to those 'near' to rough sleeping i.e. 'sofa surfers'

- Support with mental health and general health problems;
- Support with learning disabilities
- Help with accessing training and pre-employment skills;
- Assistance with developing the skills to live independently; and
- Help to move on to more independent accommodation

The local supported housing and voluntary sector are very supportive of the aims of the strategy and most work well with Council officers. To date informal joint working has been very effective however there are increasing pressures on Supported Housing providers as the Supporting People funding regime has led to greater scrutiny of their services and downward pressure on their budgets.

10.8 Addressing other issues leading to homelessness

10.8.1 Domestic Abuse - Ashford & Maidstone Joint Domestic Violence (DV) Service

Relationship breakdown as a result of domestic abuse remains an ongoing issue and is the most common cause of homelessness. Maidstone has a joint DV service with Ashford Borough Council, and shares a DV Strategy, procedures and staff resources. The Ashford and Maidstone Joint Domestic Violence Strategy is currently being reviewed to take into account changes in national law e.g. arranged marriages and the specialist DV courts approach.

Responses to domestic abuse include outreach services and sanctuary schemes as well as refuges which provide other options and help. We share a Domestic Violence Co-ordinator post with Ashford Borough Council who is able to refer clients to the women's refuge or to arrange other measures such as changing locks or fitting up an internal refuge – or sanctuary - in the family home. The Sanctuary Project is a victim-centred initiative, which provides additional security measures to the homes of domestic abuse clients. The project aims to make it possible for clients to remain in their homes and feel safe, thereby preventing homelessness. The scheme is only used where the perpetrator of abuse is no longer living at the client's home and where it is considered by both client and the Police that they and their family would be safe to remain there²². Every Sanctuary Project is tailored to accommodate the needs and circumstances of the individuals involved. The security recommendations could include replacing a bedroom door with a solid door that opens outwards, this would provide a 'sanctuary' in which people can call and wait for the arrival of the Police. However, it might not be necessary to provide a safe room and a number of other security measures might be provided, for example changing window and door locks. The cost is currently met through the CLG grant. Although there are sufficient funds to provide this service if it is extended further or demand increases future funding streams may need to be found in the longer term.

10.8.2 Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC) and Specialist DV Courts

Maidstone has pioneered both MARACs and specialist DV courts. The MARAC model of intervention involves risk assessment in all reported cases of domestic abuse to identify

²² Through the recently established Maidstone Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC)

those at highest risk so that a multi-agency approach may be taken. Evidence suggests that this reduces recidivism even among those most at risk. The goal of these conferences is to provide a forum for sharing information and taking action to reduce future harm to very high-risk victims of domestic abuse and their children. From a practitioner's viewpoint MARACs show that such approaches achieve many key objectives, including information-sharing between agencies, contributing to victims' safety, building relationships between agencies across a much broader range, and also begins to develop much stronger relationships between the voluntary and statutory sector.

The Specialist Court Programme aims to provide victims of domestic violence with better support and care in specially equipped courts. Although there has been an increase in DV convictions from 46% in 2003 to 56% in 2005, cases tried in specialist courts have a much higher success rate - 71%. Specialist courts offer facilities such as dedicated prosecutors, police and magistrates, fast tracking of cases (so limiting the likelihood of further incidences), and separate entrances, exits and waiting areas so that victims do not come into contact with their attackers.

10.9 Racial Abuse and Harassment

There is however a potential contradiction or tension between dealing with perpetrators of abuse and harassment and the prevention of homelessness. Understandably social landlords want to use sanctions against anti-social tenants and this includes the use of eviction where necessary, even though this may be a last resort. Where eviction is used it is likely to be difficult to find alternative accommodation for the perpetrator(s) and their family and a cycle of repeat homelessness could be the result.

Action Plan 3 – Support and Social Exclusion

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timescale
Where a support need has been identified, every customer is referred to the appropriate Supporting People or Kent Outreach Service	Housing Options Team Leader	Supporting People Support providers	Year 1
Review the role and terms of reference of the Street Homeless Working Group	Housing Options Manager Housing Policy Officer	Existing Group members Cabinet Member	Year 1
Review a representative sample of tenancy failures that have failed despite receiving support	Housing Policy Officer Housing Options Team Leader Tenancy Support Officer	Supporting People Support providers	Year 1
Assess the feasibility of setting measurable targets for improved access to employment and training	Housing Options Manager	KCC Education RSLs DWP Job Centre Plus	Year 2
Introduce a formal support needs assessment for all vulnerable groups who approach the council for assistance where there is a threat of homelessness	Housing Options Manager Housing Options Team Leader	Contact Centre Gateway partners	Year 2
Undertake a review of recently discharged ex-service personnel in the Borough and the housing options available	Housing Policy Officer Housing Options Team Leader Tenancy Support Officer	Army Resettlement	Year 2
Carry out a skills audit of customers who approach for housing advice where there is a threat of homelessness	Housing Options Manager	Job Centre Plus	Year 3
Develop and introduce a local work experience programme for people accepted as homeless or as homeless prevention by the council	Housing Options Manager	Maidstone Voluntary Services Job Centre Plus Corporate Personnel	Year 3

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timescale
Develop and introduce local training schemes for those accepted as homeless or as homeless prevention by the council	Housing Options Manager	Maidstone Voluntary Services Job Centre Plus Connexions Learning & Skills Council	Year 3
Work with support providers to minimise the number of households who become homeless despite receiving support	Housing Options Manager	Supporting People Support providers	Year 3
Identify gaps in support provision and provide additional floating support where appropriate, subject to Supporting People Commissioning Body funding	Housing Options Manager	Supporting People Support providers	Year 4-5



11. Preventing Homelessness - Effective Partnership Working

11.1 The effective prevention of homelessness is only possible where it is identified by all key partner agencies as a strategic priority. Homelessness prevention has clear links with national, regional, sub regional, countywide and local strategies. Key strategies where clear links are required include:

- Regional Housing Strategy
- Supporting People 5 Year Plan
- Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy
- Drugs and Alcohol Strategy
- Children and Young People Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Equalities Schemes

11.2 In July 2004, the Audit Commission, ranked Maidstone Borough Council as an Excellent council (on the scale: Excellent/Good/Fair/Weak/Poor) and likely to improve. According to the Audit Commission, 'the Council works well with partners to develop policies and deliver initiatives which would be beyond its own capacity'. Locally, there are some key partnerships in which housing participates at a strategic level. Particularly important in this respect are the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Joint Policy Planning Board (JPPB), a partnership formed to establish close relationships with statutory bodies, including local councils, Police and the PCT. In addition, the Council works closely with selected Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) who can help deliver a range of housing solutions in the borough. Housing Associations are able to access capital funds through the Housing Corporation and supplement the Council's capital investment (regardless of whether provided by the Borough or the Housing Corporation) with private borrowing for investment. In this way the Council can use its capital investment in new affordable homes to "lever in" significantly larger sums for investment through the Corporation's bidding process.

11.3 *The Local Strategic Partnership*

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is responsible for the delivery of the Community Plan, which includes meeting the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and increasing affordable housing. A particular benefit of the LSP is the range of representation from the statutory, voluntary and business community that may offer a broader perspective than has

been considered to date. The LSP offers a framework that could further develop homelessness prevention initiatives and cross-authority partnership working. The 2006 Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" proposes that LSP's have a key role to play in delivering a Sustainable Community Strategy. The white paper proposed to bring together local partners to address issues such as community safety, health and community cohesion by aligning services provided by a number of agencies. The vehicle for delivering this is the Local Area Agreement (LAA), with Kent CC as the lead authority. The Kent LAA started in April 2008 and will run for three years. It contains joint targets for a number of areas of work, including tackling domestic abuse and substance misuse, but it does not include homelessness (although nationally there are some examples of LAA's that do). Given the interrelationship between homelessness and issues of this type there is scope for considering the merit of including homelessness within the LAA. It may be that the most appropriate time for this will be at the first refresh of the LAA, scheduled for early/mid 2009. Care does however need to be taken to ensure that local priorities that are specific to Maidstone are not lost within any County-wide framework. The LAA may offer more potential for developing a performance management framework with joint strategic targets that cut across agencies. In this context, the joint commissioning and/or integration of relevant processes and services could be considered.

11.4 As well as local partnerships, the Council participates in a range of cross-boundary initiatives for example:

- the Kent PFI, co-ordinated by KCC and granted PFI Credits by ODPM which will procure additional extra-care sheltered housing in the participating districts;
- the Kent Rural Housing Partnership, set up to enable borough and district Councils across Kent to work closely with Rural Housing Providers, and access Housing Corporation funding;
- Kent Homeless Officers Group and the Maidstone Street Homeless Group – quarterly meetings of local authority housing professionals, voluntary sector and social services/supporting people commissioning officers;
- the Housing Needs Survey commissioned jointly with Ashford BC, and reported early in 2005;
- Housing Market Assessment shortly to be commissioned between Ashford and Maidstone Borough Councils;
- Maidstone Mental Health Forum is an open meeting held six times a year for representatives of local groups and individuals interested in mental health both as providers and users of services. The Forum shares information about services and developments and mental health issues in general.

Action Plan 4 – Effective Partnership Working

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timescale
Work with our major RSL partners operating in Maidstone to improvement joint working in preventing homelessness	Enabling Officer/ Housing Options Manager	All RSLs operating in Maidstone	Year 1/Ongoing
Assist in the development and implementation of a Kent-wide Domestic Violence Strategy	Housing Options Manager Domestic Violence Co-ordinator Ashford Borough Council	Police, Probation, Prison Service, CDRP, DV Forum MARAC	Year 1
Assist in the annual West Kent rough sleepers count	Housing Policy Officer	Porchlight CLG Local voluntary groups	Year 1
Ensure our partners monitor the take up of housing services by all equality groups	Housing Policy Officer	All RSLs operating in Maidstone	Year 1
Undertake research which examines why BME groups are over represented on the Housing Register	Housing Policy Officer	Overview & Scrutiny Housing Sounding Board Consultants tba	Year 1
Undertake a strategic analysis of he needs of elderly people (including BME)	Housing Policy Officer	Overview & Scrutiny Housing Sounding Board Consultants tba	Year 1
Commission an independent review of our Housing Advice Service	Housing Policy Officer	Overview & Scrutiny Housing Sounding Board Consultants tba	Year 1
Ensure consistency of referrals to Supporting People	Housing Options Manager	Supporting People	Year 1
Ensure consistent monitoring of referral and outcomes under existing agreed protocols	Housing Options Manager	All partners with active protocols	Year 1
Agree and set targets for council funded voluntary housing providers for homeless prevention to ensure continuing value for money	Social Inclusion Manager/ Housing Options Manager	Maidstone CAB Maidstone Mediation	Year 2

Action	Lead	Key Partners	Timescale
Deliver training for partners in homeless prevention, housing options advice and application administration in conjunction with existing homeless protocols	Housing Options Manager	All partners as appropriate MBC Corporate Training KCC Adult Social Care Voluntary partners	Year 2
Agree with RSLs operating in Maidstone a reporting mechanism to record the details of tenants who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness	Housing Policy Officer	All RSLs with stock greater than 50 units in Maidstone	Year 2
Review the local operation of the Kent-wide ex-offenders protocol	Chief Housing Officer/ Housing Options Manager	Police Probation, Prison Service CDRP MARAC JPPB	Year 2
Review Supporting People contracts to ensure they are sufficiently focussed on preventing homelessness	Housing Options Manager	Supporting People Service providers	Year 2/3



12. Customer Charter – Housing Options Service Standards

12.1 **What you can expect from us:**

Maidstone Borough Council aims to provide an excellent housing service, and has a legal duty to provide everyone with accurate housing advice, no matter what his or her circumstances.

In person at the Gateway Service Centre

We will offer an appointment to see a Housing Options Advisor, which will be within three working days.

We will introduce ourselves by name and conduct your interview in private.

We will be polite, courteous and professional at all times.

Communication response

We aim to answer telephone enquiries within 5 rings.

We aim to reply to all letters within 7 working days, in plain English. We will make contact in other languages, large print, Braille, audiotape or other methods if you require it.

We aim to reply to emails within 2 working days, in plain English.

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness, an appointment will be made within 3 working days or immediately in emergency situations.

We will complete our enquiries and make a decision about your application within 33 working days. You will be advised in writing within 3 days of the decision being made.

You will be advised of any right to appeal.

You may contact us for information on the progress of your application.

All information you provide will be treated in absolute confidence and only used in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy. (A copy of the policy is available upon request).

Our performance

We work to continually improve the services we offer; and will consult with our customers to ensure you receive the best service possible.

We will treat all our customers equally regardless of age, gender, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, race, colour and religious beliefs, ethnic or national origin.

Our complaints procedure

As a Council we try to get things right the first time. However, if you are unhappy with any aspect of the service you have received please let us know so we can try to resolve the matter.

If you are still unhappy with the service you received you can make an official complaint. You can do this by telephone, in person, in writing or by using the 'Comment, Compliment or Complain' web form.

12.2 **What we expect from you**

We expect you to treat staff politely with the same courtesy you expect to receive. Threatening or offensive language or behaviour is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

13. Implementing and Monitoring the Strategy

- 13.1 The Housing Department operates within a Council-wide performance management system – described by the Audit Commission as ‘robust, challenging and systematic’. The Council, in common with all local authorities, is required to show that it is delivering cost-efficient, customer-focused services, which are continually improving.
- 13.2 The Council’s performance management system is structured around effective political and managerial leadership, a clear vision, action centred service planning, regular performance reporting and constructive challenge. At the team and individual level ‘Reach the Summit’ is the Council’s performance management system. The system sets clear targets for each ‘business unit’ and highlights their performance in the most important service delivery areas. The system is designed to raise awareness of performance management, encourage innovation and improve communication and staff morale.
- 13.3 Performance is reported using four types of performance indicators, each of which contribute to forming a rounded view of performance:
- Statutory National Indicators (NIs);
 - Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) which measure progress on the Key Measures of Success;
 - Local Performance Indicators (LPI’s);
 - Reach the Summit Performance Indicators (RTS).
- 13.4 The Homelessness Strategy will be monitored and developed throughout its duration. Monitoring will be by various internal mechanisms both at Officer and Member levels – see table below – to enable the Strategy to remain relevant and effective:

Stakeholder	Composition	Frequency of meeting
Management Team	Chief Officers	Weekly
Cabinet Portfolio Holder	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Corporate cycle
Cabinet	Leader + Executive Members	Corporate cycle
Full Council	Members of Maidstone Borough Council	Corporate cycle
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Members of Maidstone Borough Council Officers and others to give evidence as required	Corporate cycle
Local Strategic Partnership	Representatives from across voluntary and statutory sectors	Quarterly

Housing Sounding Board	Local housing stakeholders	Quarterly
Joint Commissioning Forum	RSL development partners, Council planning and housing services	Quarterly
RSL Liaison Group	RSLs managing stock within Borough	Bi-annually

13.5 The financial resources available to implement the Strategy are outlined at Appendix 3, whilst Appendix 6 is a list of our current Key Performance Indicators, showing our performance for the past two years and our targets for this year and the next two years.

13.6 Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry

This strategy takes into consideration the Audit Commission’s Housing Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) in particular KLOE No. 8 - Homelessness and Housing Need. The service areas focussed on by this KLOE are:

- Access, customer care and user focus
- Diversity
- Housing advice, homelessness prevention and housing options
- Services to the homeless
- Temporary accommodation
- Value for Money

14. Risk Analysis

14.1 Tackling Homelessness - Advice

- 14.1.1 The Council must be vigilant in monitoring and understanding developing trends within housing demand that could lead to an increase in homelessness. We will also need to consider how we will maintain and develop those services currently funded through the CLG's Homelessness Grant should future funding not be available or is reduced.
- 14.1.2 The need to recruit and retain a core of experienced housing advice officers is crucial to expanding the range and depth of advice offered to households facing housing problems. Given the relatively small size of the team, absences can have a detrimental effect on service provision. Consideration may be given to expanding the pool of officers able to give Level 1 type housing advice and this, combined with closer working with our partners, will give us the flexibility needed in the current worsening economic climate.
- 14.1.3 The opening of the new Gateway will offer much improved customer facilities and a more 'joined-up' approach to solving housing problems. The possible disruptive effects of moving services to the Gateway (i.e. technical or staffing, etc.), will need to be managed to ensure a seamless transfer.

14.2 Tackling Homelessness - Accommodation

- 14.2.1 The risks to the delivery of affordable housing schemes are assessed through a quarterly Affordable Housing Delivery Risk Assessment. Officers monitor the progress of those schemes with a high red rating, and endeavour to identify any additional schemes which could help to contribute towards our overall target of some 200 affordable homes per year.
- 14.2.2 Each scheme is given a risk rating (indicated by the housing association) which are based on the Housing Corporation's assessment criteria, and takes into account the current progress and deliverability of the scheme, and whether there are any identified risks which could delay the completion of the scheme, or incur increased costs.

LOW = No risk of delay to the scheme and costs fixed.

MEDIUM 2 = Risk of delay to the scheme no greater than 3 months and/or a risk of increased costs equivalent to over 10% of scheme costs.

MEDIUM 1 = Risk of delay to the scheme that would result in a delay of more than 3 months and/or a risk of increased costs equivalent to over 10% of scheme costs.

HIGH = Risk of changes to the scheme that would result in a delay of more than six months and/or a risk of increased costs equivalent to more than 20% of scheme costs.

To further guard against uncertainty, and to maintain flexibility, the Housing Section categorises the affordable housing schemes coming forward into A and B lists. Those schemes considered most deliverable e.g. in terms of planning consent, a partner RSL,

grant requirement confirmed, are placed in the A List. The B List comprises schemes not fully worked up e.g. with only outline planning permission granted. In addition, a process of Regular Market Engagement with the Housing Corporation (to be replaced by the Homes and Communities Agency) alerts the Corporation as to which schemes are likely to come forward for in-year bids within their investment regime.

14.2.2 The transfer of our housing stock in February 2004 enabled significant investment in the stock, including the regeneration of two areas – Coombe Road and Parkwood. The need to decant existing tenants has had a significant impact on the number of vacancies that the Council received for applicants on the Housing Register. The Housing Service has worked hard to minimise the impact of the regeneration programme, and continued vigilance on this issue is required over the next 18 months. The Council has continued to review the Deed of Nominations Agreement with MHT. Officers have agreed to identify ways to improve access to housing for both Housing Register and Transfer List Applicants.

14.2.3 Whilst the fears expressed in the 2005 Housing Strategy concerning uncertainty about the strength of the regional and local housing market proved unfounded at the time, there is now a noticeable slowing of house price increases, particularly in the new-build flatted sector. The possibility of a slump or downturn is now forecast to be very real and it will have an impact in the Borough. Experience suggests it could result in: more repossessions, increased instance of negative equity, a reduction in private investment in repairs and maintenance leading to increased unfitness, and an increase in empty homes. Any significant economic or housing market downturn will be monitored and this Strategy and the Borough's Housing Strategy may need to be revised accordingly.

14.2.4 *Other identified affordable housing delivery risks:*

Given that the majority of new housing development is restricted to brown-field sites, the majority of the brown-field sites have either costs associated with contamination that render planning gain for affordable housing unviable or the developments are of a size below the threshold requiring consideration for affordable housing. This could seriously undermine the potential to deliver new affordable to meet future housing need because the land will not be available or financially viable.

Environmental issues may also adversely affect our ability to deliver new affordable housing if not managed carefully. For example, future water supply, waste disposal and sustainable employment in the South East.

The Housing Service and Planning Service will need to work closely together to ensure that the land that becomes available for development is able to yield the maximum affordable housing. The reorganisation of council functions to take place in the early part of 2009 will place housing, planning policy and development control under one Strategic Director. In addition, the imaginative use of s106 agreements and the funds set aside for new affordable housing in the Budget Strategy will be critical in enabling this objective to become reality.

14.3 Supporting the needs of vulnerable households

- 14.3.1 The major risk to future special needs projects surrounds revenue funding. The national budget for the Supporting People regime far exceeded that anticipated by Government Departments. In looking at ways in which the budget can be rationalised it is important to ensure that services that provide essential care to vulnerable groups remain viable.
- 14.3.2 In addition, with the start of the second Kent Local Area Agreement (Kent LAA2) in April 2008, whereby funding from many different streams is channelled into a single pot, it is possible that SP grant could go through the LAA funding mechanism with the consequent risk of funding then going into other services unconnected with Supporting People.
- 14.3.3 The Council needs to fully engage in the debate concerning the future allocations of existing support providers and how new schemes to fill gaps in services can be brought forward. To this end the Council must ensure that it has robust data available on the trends and needs of households with special needs in order to take an informed part in the debate.

15. Encouraging Best Practice

15.1 Since the first Homelessness Strategy was launched in 2003, the Housing Service has made significant changes to the way it plans and delivers services. We no longer have a reactive approach, but instead seek to actively influence all aspects of housing to increase housing supply and prevent homelessness. Because of this, the service has developed a reputation – within the County and sub-regionally – for cost effective, flexible and innovative housing solutions.

15.2 As well as playing an active role in various county and regional fora e.g. Kent Housing Group, Kent Homeless Officers Group, Maidstone Housing Care and Support Group, Large Scale Voluntary Transfer Benchmarking Club, the department seeks to further best practice:

15.3 *Stakeholders Homeless Open Morning 12 September 2007:*

This event was entirely organised and hosted by housing options staff. It was attended by over 50 people from some 20 stakeholder groups and organisations. The objectives of the open morning were:

- To increase awareness and understanding of the local authority strategic housing role, and its implications for housing advice, homelessness and routes into social housing;
- To increase awareness and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Maidstone Housing Options Service (HOS);
- To increase awareness and understanding of the benefits, features and rationale behind the homelessness prevention and options agenda for clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- To ensure primary and secondary stakeholders have the opportunity to provide feedback.

The target audience for the event were statutory and voluntary sector partners, advocates, clients, KCC Social Services, Education, Supporting People staff, MBC elected Members, Probation Service, Mental Health Trust, with the aim of communicating the following key operational issues:

- Housing Needs within Maidstone
- Housing Options Team – service improvements/future changes
- Encouraging stakeholder involvement
- Information concerning managerial points of contact
- Rent In Advance/Rent deposit bond scheme
- Services for survivors of Domestic Violence – Sanctuary/Place of Safety Scheme
- Importance of home visits: preventing homelessness, maintaining tenancies, environmental health, child and adult protection, benefits verification, fraud prevention and detection, information relating to alternative housing options.

A post event questionnaire was administered and the results showed that stakeholders welcomed the opportunity to find out about the work of the section and were in favour of holding a similar event annually.

15.4 The Council's awareness of homelessness issues across the county of Kent is maintained through the membership of the Kent Homeless Officers Group This officer group, currently Chaired by Maidstone, seeks to work together across Kent to embed professional practice, to enhance good working relationships, and to demonstrate a clear commitment to improving the quality of the service provided for homeless applicants. HOT shares its good practice and innovation and a number of authorities have visited us to see how the service has changed.

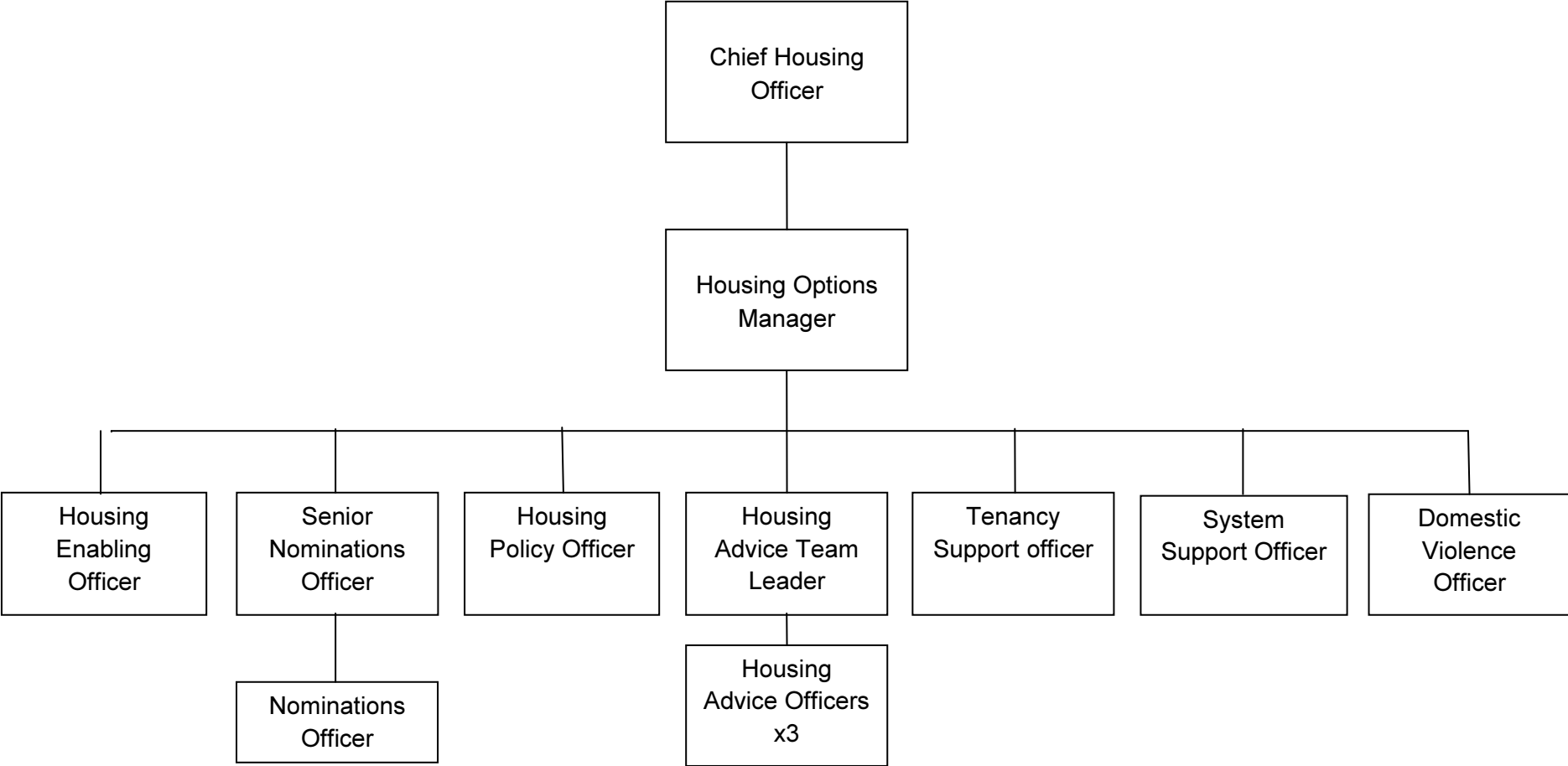
15.5 *Housing Options and Prevention process and Academy computer system:*

The following council's have made enquiries and visited the Council to study our Options and Prevention process and the Academy Housing computer system:

- Ashford Borough Council
- Aylesbury Vale District Council
- Chelmsford Borough Council
- Dartford Borough Council
- London Borough of Lewisham
- Slough Borough Council
- Swale Borough Council

Housing Options Organisation Chart

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Numbers Accepted as being homeless and in priority need

County and Local Authority area	Number of households (2004 mid-year estimate) (thousand)	Ethnic Origin					Total	No. per 1,000 h/holds
		White	African Caribbean	Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi	Other Ethnic Origin	Ethnic Origin Not Known		
ENGLAND	21,063	45,500	6,910	3,870	3,410	3,520	63,170	3.0
SOUTH EAST	3,373	4,740	230	200	170	200	5,510	1.6
Ashford	44	106	6	2	2	1	117	2.7
Canterbury	59	50	3	1	2	1	57	1.0
Dartford	36	179	10	12	5	2	208	5.7
Dover	46	82	1	0	0	0	83	1.8
Gravesham	39	133	6	7	8	3	157	4.0
Maidstone	58	36	0	1	3	1	41	0.7
Sevenoaks	45	96	3	1	2	0	102	2.2
Shepway	43	79	0	0	2	0	81	1.9
Swale	52	41	1	0	2	0	44	0.9
Thanet	57	109	1	2	0	0	112	2.0
Tonbridge and Malling	45	169	0	4	0	0	173	3.9
Tunbridge Wells	43	77	2	4	0	2	85	2.0
Kent (KCC area)	566	1,157	33	34	26	10	1,260	2.2

Homelessness and Housing Advice Budget

Appendix 3

Housing Advice and Options	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Housing Options Advisors	240,980	240,980	240,980
Housing Register & Nominations	146,250	146,250	146,250
Homelessness			
Bed & Breakfast charges	117,200	117,200	117,200
Avenues Leasing Scheme	171,000	171,000	171,000
Offset by:			
Bed & Breakfast income	59,870	59,870	59,870
Avenues Leasing Scheme income	178,840	178,840	178,840
Rent Deposit Bond/Loan Scheme	25,400	25,400	25,400
Domestic Violence Sanctuary Scheme	5,000	5,000	5,000
Domestic Violence Service	12,140	12,140	12,140

Housing Sounding Board Invitees

Action with Communities in Rural Kent
Age Concern
Bearstead Justice & Peace Group
Carr Gomm
Church in Society
Citizens Advice Bureau
CRUSE
English Churches Housing Group
GOSE
Home Start
Info-Zone
KCC Social Services – Supporting People & Adult Services
Kent Community Housing Trust
Kent County Constabulary
Kent Family Mediation Service
Kenward Trust
Maidstone & Malling Domestic Violence Forum
Maidstone Area Volunteer Bureau
Maidstone Christian Care
Maidstone Day Centre
Maidstone Housing Trust
Maidstone Mediation Scheme
Maidstone NHS and Social Care Trust
MCCH Society Ltd
Mid Kent Shelter for Women and Children
Salvation Army Housing Association
Sanctuary Housing
Shelter
Southern Housing Group
Stonham / Homegroup
The Housing Corporation
The Richmond Fellowship

Maidstone Street Homeless Group Membership

Drug Action Team
Kent Police
Lily Smith House
Maidstone Borough Council
MCCH Society
Maidstone Day Centre
Maidstone Housing Trust
Probation Service
Stonham / Homegroup
Supporting People

List of Organisations Consulted

Kenward Trust
Trinity Foyer
MCCH Society
Stonham (Homegroup)
Maidstone Day Centre
Citizens Advice Bureaux
Age Concern
KCC Supporting People
InfoZone
Porchlight
Women's Support Group
Tumim House
Richmond Fellowship
Community Mental Health Team
Joint Assessment Referral Panel
Housing Sounding Board
Maidstone Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Appendix 6

National and local Performance Indicators								
PI Ref	Description	Performance			District Top Quartile	Targets		
		Actual 2005/06	Actual 2006/07	Actual 2007/08		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
HSG 2	Average numbers of households per quarter, which include dependent children or pregnant women and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need, in Bed & Breakfast accommodation	8	7.5	7	N/A	7.5	8	7.5
HSG 3	Average length of stay of households, which include dependent children or pregnant women and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need, in Bed & Breakfast accommodation (weeks) (Was BV183a)	3.53	3.19	2.06	1.12	4-6 weeks	4-6 weeks	4-6 weeks
BV213	The number of households prevented from becoming homeless through housing advice (number per 1,000 households – 62,147 households as at 31/3/07)	4	3	4	5	5	4	5
DCLG	Halve the total number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 from a baseline of 149	103	77	55	N/A	65	70	65
KHG 3	The number of households accepted as homeless	173	53	41	N/A	75	90	75
KHG 4	The number of households applying as homeless	312	133	90	N/A	200	180	150
NI 32	Repeat incidences of Domestic Violence	New PI			N/A	Targets to be set		
LPI 18	The number of people housed from the Housing Register	318	331	344	N/A	350	300	300
Hsg Strategy Priority 2	Number of households assisted through the Rent Deposit Bond Scheme	24	39	72	N/A	50	40	45
Hsg Strategy Priority 4	The number of vulnerable households enabled into social housing through the JARP process	15	5	11	N/A	15	15	20

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A Housing Strategy for People with a Learning Disability, prepared for Kent County Council Housing Implementation Group of the Learning Disability Partnership Board, 2003

Annual report of CORE data, Maidstone area, summary statistics April 2007 – March 2008

Ashford Borough Council Homelessness Strategy 2008-2012

Centrepoint Youth Homelessness Index: An estimate of youth homelessness for England, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, 2004

Clean break: Integrated housing and care pathways for homeless drug users, Homeless Link, 2007

Cutting Crime: A new partnership 2008 – 2011, Home Office

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Demonstrate your contribution: Homelessness and the new National Indicators, London Housing Foundation, 2008

Delivering Housing and Regeneration: Communities England and the future of social housing regulation - Consultation, CLG, 2007

Defining Homelessness – Maryse Marpsat and others

Ends and means: the future roles of social housing in England (the Hills Review) 2007

Every Child Matters: Issues for young people leaving care

Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, CLG, 2007

Expanding Choice, Addressing Need: Addressing Housing Need through the Enhanced Housing Options Approach, CLG, 2008

Framework for planning and commissioning of services related to health needs of people who are homeless or living in temporary or other insecure accommodation, CLG, 2007

Homeowners Support Package 'A Fair Housing Market for All', CLG, Home Office, DWP, September 2008

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, CLG, 2006

Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice, CLG, 2006

Homelessness Prevention Systems Diagnostic, Audit Commission, 2007

Homelessness strategies: a good practice handbook, DTLR, 2002

Homelessness Strategies – preparing for the 2008 deadline, HQN (SEN) briefing paper prepared by Sheila Spencer, 2007

Homelessness Toolkit, Homelessness Action Team, Feb 2008

Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable – the housing green paper, 2007

In work, better off: next steps to full employment, (welfare reform green paper), 2007

Joint Homelessness Strategy 'Towards 2010' Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Joseph Rowntree Foundation – 'Youth Homeless in the UK, A Decade of Progress?'

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Kent Homelessness Officers Group, Working Protocol, March 2007

Kent Multi-Agency Parenting Support Service, Policy and Procedures

Kent teenage pregnancy strategy, 2001 – 2011

Local authorities' Homelessness Strategies: Evaluation and Good Practice, HQN, ODPM 2004

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Maidstone Borough Council Homelessness Strategy 2003-2006, reviewed 2005

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Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health check, 2006

Regional Housing Strategy Review: Draft for Consultation, February 2007, South East Regional Housing Board

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Setting your homelessness strategy in the broader national policy and strategic context, HQN (SEN) briefing paper prepared by Sheila Spencer, 2007

Settled housing solutions in the private rented sector, CLG, 2005

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Strategic review of short-term accommodation based supported housing in Kent, Kent - Supporting People Team, 2007

Statutory Homelessness in England: The experience of families and 16-17 year olds, Homelessness Research Summary no. 7, 2008, DCLG

Sustainable Communities: Settled homes; changed lives: A strategy for tackling homelessness, ODPM, 2005

Tackling Homelessness: The Housing Corporation Strategy, Housing Corporation, 2006

Tackling Homelessness: Housing Associations and Local Authorities working in partnership, Housing Corporation,

Tackling Overcrowding in England: An Action Plan, CLG, 2007

Tackling social exclusion, 2004

Kent Agreement 2 (2008) – emerging themes

The Kent Supporting People Strategy 2005 – 2010

The new performance framework for local authorities and local authority partnerships: single set of national indicators, CLG, Oct 2007

Transforming Services: A report on a strategic review of Kent's supporting people funded services for older people (version 2), Riseborough Research and Consulting 2006

Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, HM Government, 2006

Government Support to Homeowners

The Governments recently (September 2008) announced measures to support homeowners and first time buyers are summarised below. They include:

Help for first time buyers:

- Offering 10,000 more first time buyers currently frozen out of the mortgage market the chance to get onto the property ladder through a new shared equity scheme in a new partnership with housing developer.
- A one-year Stamp Duty holiday for all houses costing up to £175,000 meaning that around 50 per cent of all house purchases will be exempt.

Help for home owners in difficulty:

- Supporting thousands of vulnerable homeowners facing repossession to remain in their home through a new mortgage rescue scheme.
- Reforming the Support for Mortgage Interest scheme to increase help for some of the most vulnerable homeowners on very low, or no, incomes. The principle changes are to reduce the period before support starts from 39 weeks to 13 weeks, and to increase the value of property on which support will be available from £100,000 to £175,000.

Support for social rented homes:

- Bringing forward £400 million of government spending to deliver up to 5,500 new social rented homes, at good price over the next eighteen months while the private sector market remains weak.

Support for house builders and those working in the sector:

- Building on the £66 million that has already been allocated, confirming that a total of at least £200 million will be available to buy unsold property from house builders principally for use as social rented housing
- Supporting the industry to manage the new HomeBuy Direct scheme itself, with additional government support to help people into homes and house builders to sell homes
- Establishing a clearing house to support those currently training in the sector and maintain long-term capacity.

Strengthening mortgage finance markets:

- The Chancellor has asked Sir James Crosby to complete his assessment of the options outlined in his July interim review by the end of October.

Appendix 9

Supported Housing in Maidstone as at 03/10/08

District	ServiceProviderName	ServiceName	Existing QAF Grade	Number Of Units	
Maidstone	Stonham Housing Association	Trinity Foyer	C	59	
		Tumim House	Not Graded	9	
		Swan House	B	6	
	English Churches Housing Group	Lily Smith House	C	42	
		HOPE (Kent) Limited	HOPE Maidstone	Not Graded	4
	In Touch Support Ltd	Maidstone Staying Put	Not Graded	150	
	Kenward Trust	Chrysalis Apartment	Not Graded	2	
	Maidstone Housing Trust	2 Star Floating Support	C	145	
		3 Star Floating Support with dispersed alarms	C	428	
		4 Star - Semi-sheltered	A	458	
		5 Star Sheltered Accommodation	A	390	
		Enhanced Support	C	141	
		Floating Support - Older People Mental Health	B	4	
		Generic FS	B	96	
		Older People Floating Support (KCC)	C	11	
		MCCH Society Ltd	Heron Road	Not Graded	2
			Willington Street	Not Graded	3
	Birnam Square		Not Graded	4	
	Chervilles		Not Graded	3	
	Cornwallis Road		Not Graded	3	
	Hillary Road		Not Graded	3	
	Kingfisher Meadow		Not Graded	2	
	Tonbridge Road		Not Graded	3	
	O'Shea		O'Shea Services	B	45
	Peace Cottages Charity - Hunton		Peace Cottages - Hunton	C	4
	Refuge	Mid Kent Refuge	Not Graded	5	
	Stonham Housing Association	Bower Place	C	6	
		Link House	C	14	
	Symbol U.K.Limited	Woodlands Farm	C	7	
	West Kent Housing Association	Intensive Floating Support	A	6	
		WKHA MH Scheme	A	6	
Maidstone Total				2061	

Glossary of Terms

Affordable housing	Subsidised non-market housing provided to those whose needs are not met by the market. Affordable housing is a general term for social-rented housing and intermediate housing (shared ownership products and intermediate rent that is rent above social rented but below market rents).
Best Value	A system to ensure that councils provide the best possible services and the best value for money.
Choice Based Lettings (CBL)	A system to provide a greater choice of home. A list of available properties is circulated fortnightly, to those on the housing register.
Code for Sustainable Homes	A national standard for the sustainable design and construction of new homes. It is a voluntary star rating system that shows the sustainability of a new home as a complete package
Communities and Local Government (CLG)	Central government department with responsibility for housing, planning and local government
Community Strategy	A strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their areas, achieving sustainable communities and is reached by a process of community planning.
Decent Homes Standard	Communities and Local Government standard which states that a home must be warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities in order to be classed as 'decent'.
Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	A grant from the Council to provide specialist adaptations for disabled people
East Kent Cyrenians – now known as Porchlight	An independent registered charity that provides outreach and resettlement services for street homeless people; supported accommodation for single homeless people; tenancy support for people at risk of homelessness, and a service user support and training service with substance users, their families and carers
Empty Homes	The Government is concerned to ensure that problematic empty properties i.e. those that are not subject to a transactional process – are brought back into occupation. Properties that are empty for less than six months (and are therefore likely to be for sale or recently sold) are categorised separately for statistical purposes from longer-term empty homes that are more likely to be problematic.
Enabling Role	The council's role of assessing housing need and facilitating the development of homes to meet housing needs by working with a variety of other agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors.
Energy Efficiency	Energy efficiency is about reducing energy consumption by improvements to a property and/or by making lifestyle changes.
English Partnerships	The national regeneration agency, helping the Government to support high quality sustainable growth in England. Due to merge with the Housing Corporation to become the New Homes Agency.
Floating Support	A service that is delivered to a family or individual that is not tied to accommodation. Floating support services provide service users with a support package that is based upon their assessed needs and as independence increases, the level of support is reduced until it "floats away".

Government Office of the South East (GOSE)	Representatives of central government in the regions, bringing together the work of the government departments.
Home Improvement Agency	A not for profit agency offering help and advice on home improvements, repairs and adaptations to older, vulnerable and disabled people.
Housing Corporation	Government organisation that funds and regulates Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations). It administers the National Affordable Housing Programme.
Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB)	Established across Kent representing all the local authorities, Social Services and Health Authority to prioritise, monitor and review the provision of supported housing.
Kent Annual Plan	Publishing an Annual Plan (Best Value Performance Plan) is a statutory requirement for all local authorities. The Kent Annual Plan brings all Kent County Council's activities together in a single document and sets out, 'Performance in the previous financial year', 'objectives and targets for the following year', 'how KCC will transform the organisation and manage resources, 'KCC's Contracts Statement'.
Kent County Council (KCC)	Is responsible for providing a wide range of services including roads, schools, social services, libraries, adult education centres, trading standards and some planning matters.
Kent Health & Affordable Warmth Strategy	Strategy to reduce and tackle ill health and excess winter deaths caused by fuel poverty across the county
Local Area Agreement	Local Area Agreements are voluntary agreements between upper-tier local authorities and government lasting 3 years. They set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area (the local authority and Local Strategic Partnership) and other key partners at the local level.
Local Development Framework	The local development framework documents are set out in the form of a portfolio, which collectively deliver the spatial planning strategy for the local planning authority's area.
Local Strategic Partnership	Local Strategic Partnerships are a way of bringing together people, public sector organisations and businesses to work to improve the local quality of life. The LSP also works to develop the Sustainable Community Strategy.
Mediation Service	Mediation is a process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable resolution.
Private Finance Initiative (PFI)	Government scheme through which large refurbishment projects can be financed.
Primary Care Trust (PCT)	Part of the Health Authority with responsibility for primary care and general practitioner services. The Eastern and Coastal PCT covers the Ashford area.
Private Sector Landlord	A landlord renting a home at market prices.
Right to Buy	Government policy that allows tenants of local authorities to purchase their home at discounts according to the length of their tenancy from the council.
Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	Technical name for a body registered with the Housing Corporation. Most Housing Associations are RSLs.

Sanctuary Schemes	Schemes that aim to make it possible for victims of domestic violence and of hate crime to remain in their home and to feel safe.
Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)	A measurement on a scale of 1 to 100, which indicates the energy efficiency of a property. The higher the rating the more energy efficient the property.
Section 106 Agreements	Legal agreements between a planning authority and a developer, or undertakings offered unilaterally by a developer, that ensure that certain extra works related to a development are undertaken. In relation to affordable housing planning obligations can be used to prescribe the nature of a development by requiring the inclusion of a given proportion of affordable housing.
Strategic Housing Market Assessment	An assessment to assist Local Authorities in developing a good understanding of how the local housing market operates by assessing housing need and demand.
South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)	The Regional Development Agency for the South East. Responsible for sustainable economic development and regeneration.
South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA)	The Regional Assembly is the representative voice of the region. It comprises 112 members, including elected councilors nominated by the region's local authorities.
Supporting Independence Programme	A programme to co-ordinate and focus the work of the public, private and voluntary sectors to assist in reducing dependency and promoting independence and well-being for the people of Kent
Supporting People	Government programme to fund care and support services for people with special needs to enable them to live independently in the community.
Supported Housing	Housing providing for people with special needs providing a more intensive and supportive housing service than that provided by ordinary housing services.
Sustainable Development	Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Further Information:

If you would like further information about Maidstone Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy please contact:

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