

Maidstone Borough Council

Homelessness &
Rough Sleeper
Strategy

2019 - 2024

Breaking the cycle of homelessness

Foreword

Maidstone Borough Council has always prided itself on making housing a clear priority, as we understand the fundamental role that good housing has in contributing to lifetime opportunities.

Homelessness, in all its forms, has the potential to have a significant and negative impact on the lives of individuals and families. For these reasons, Maidstone Borough Council supported the principles that motivated Parliament to enact the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The new statute represents a major change in housing legislation and rather than waiting for April 2019 before responding to the duties Maidstone Borough Council took the decision to implement changes to our service delivery and the resources available in the preceding year. This early adoption of the new statute has provided us with valuable experience that has been put into good practice by ourselves and colleagues working alongside us in the voluntary sector.

We do not underestimate the challenge that the current housing market presents but we believe we are well placed and determined to provide our residents with the best possible solutions that helps to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

Chair of Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

1. Introduction

Maidstone Borough Council does not underestimate the importance of managing and supporting households who face Homelessness and this remains a strategic priority for the Council. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy is directed by our Strategic Plan under the banner "Homes and Communities"

Since 2002 Local Authorities have been required to publish a homelessness strategy outlining their intentions and vision for supporting those who face homelessness. In 2018 the Government published their national rough sleeping strategy which obligated local authorities to include a special focus on Rough Sleeping and this is our first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy.

The preceding years have presented many opportunities and challenges for Local Authorities housing teams which have included the continuing roll out of welfare reform, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and the ring fenced funding from the Rough Sleepers Initiative. All of these have enabled housing teams to work with a different ethos, with a priority on prevention of homelessness, but this inherently causes a natural tension due to the significant cost homelessness places on districts and their partners.

We aim to address those challenges through this document, but we cannot work in isolation so we will have a special focus on partnerships to ensure a fully rounded and holistic approach is taken to this very challenging situation.

In light of the new strategy, we undertook public consultation during the summer of 2019 and the response strongly supported our four key priorities

1. Homeless Prevention
2. Provide Accommodation
3. Support Vulnerable People and Households
4. Work specifically to target and alleviate rough sleeping within the borough

Our strategy sets out our vision for those facing homelessness, who may be rough sleeping, across our district from 2019 to 2024 and at the end of this document you will find our action plan on how we hope to achieve that. That progress of the strategy will be monitored by the Council and reported regularly to Members.

2. National Context

The Government's White Paper on housing, 'Fixing our broken housing market', in March 2018 acknowledged the scale of the problem in providing a range of housing that meets a cross-section of need. Without a cure to the imbalance in the market, the result has been a national increase in all forms of housing need, exhibiting itself in the most acute forms of housing need – homelessness and rough sleeping.

Affordability and the issue of households on low income being able to resolve their housing need is particularly challenging in London and the South East. The ratio that demonstrates the cost of housing against earnings has increased in a negative way, to the point now that for residents in Maidstone the cost of housing within the open market is 10 times the earning capability.

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has not kept pace with the market resulting in an increasingly unaffordable private rented market for households on low income who are dependent either wholly or in part for assistance with the housing costs. A direct correlation can be made between the increasing disparity between the LHA and the increase in the number of homelessness application resulting from a loss of accommodation within that sector.

It has been acknowledged that there have been unintended consequences from the various measures introduced through welfare reform. In February 2019, the Minister for the Department of Works and Pensions conceded challenges with the initial rollout of universal credit and that the difficulty in accessing money was "one of the causes" of the rise of food-banks.

In response, government has made a range of significant grants available to local housing authorities, which Maidstone Borough Council has used with good effect to tackle some of the causes of homelessness and to provide services that deliver a tangible difference in addressing the challenges of a 'broken housing market'.

3. Review of Homelessness Strategy

Since our last strategy we have undertaken a review of the homelessness, reflecting back over the preceding five years. A copy of the review can be found on the Council's website: www.maidstone.gov.uk

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, the information recorded about households who become homeless has become more detailed. This will aid the Council in how best to respond to preventing homelessness

3.1. Key findings

During the course of the current Homelessness Strategy (2014-2019) there has been a significant increase in levels of homelessness within the borough.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of homelessness decisions made	426	622	626	665	675

Evictions by family, parents and friends account for over 30% of all cases, with the ending of private rented tenancies being the next most significant cause.

Homelessness applicants are fairly evenly split between males and females although in cases when the household is a single person, this increases to around two thirds male and females feature more greatly as the lead applicant amongst households with children.

The average age of homelessness continues to decrease with applicants under the age of 34 making up the majority of cases.

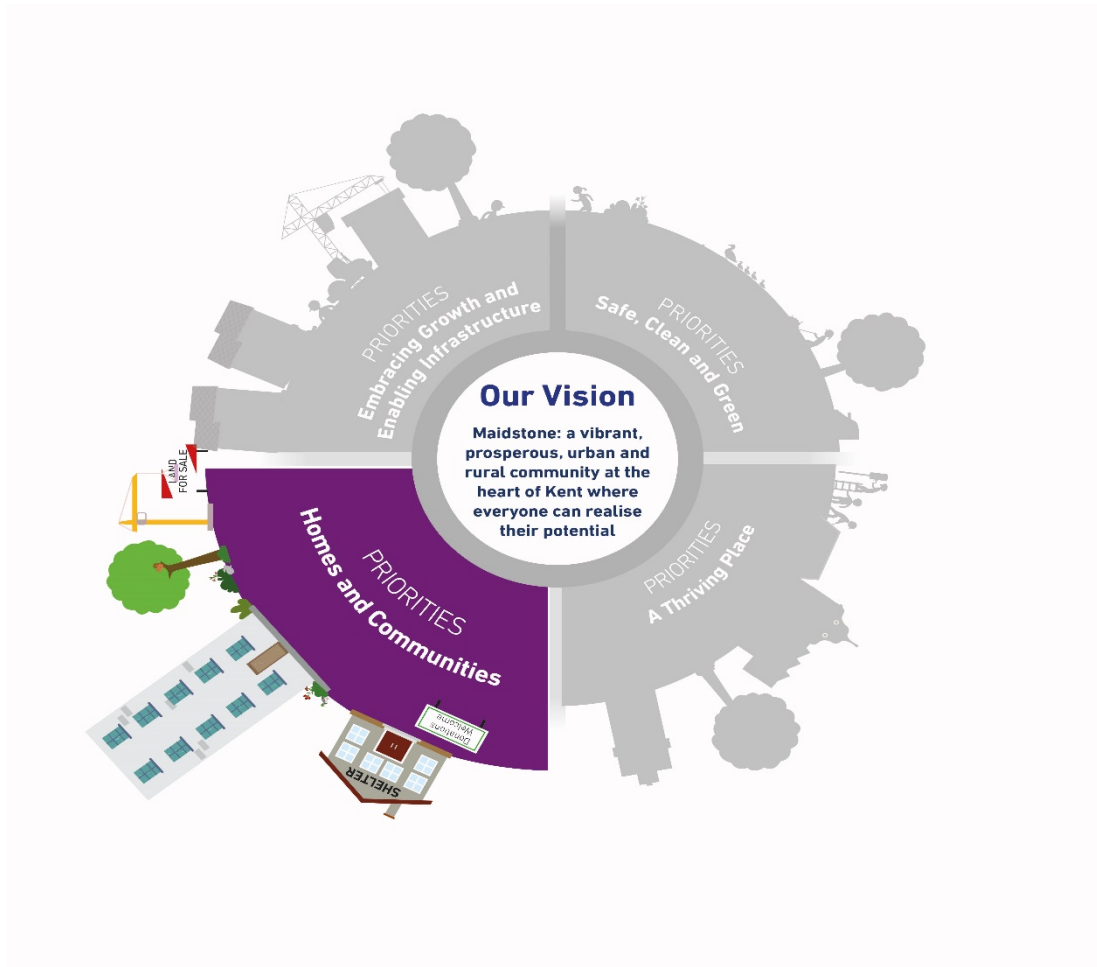
Applicants with a white ethnicity account for the vast majority of homelessness applicants although the percentage has decreased in the current year.

More than half of homelessness approaches are from single persons who have a 1 bedroom housing need. A further third of all households have a 2 bedroom need.

Previous street population estimates have indicated that there are between 35 and 50 people rough sleeping within the borough. However, with the implementation of the Rough Sleeper Initiative this has reduced considerably.

4. Priorities and Objectives

Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan 2019-2045 sets the direction for Maidstone's long-term future. Our core vision is supported by 4 priorities, one of which is Homes and Communities.



Strategic Plan 2019-2045 – Vision and Priorities

We want to have a place that people love to be and where they can afford to live. This means ensuring that there is a good balance of different types of homes, including affordable housing.

We will have safe and desirable homes that enable good health and wellbeing for our communities. We will address homelessness and rough sleeping to move people into settled accommodation. We will work with our partners to improve the quality of community services and facilities including for health care and community activities. Residents will be encouraged and supported to volunteer and play a full part in their communities.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy is one of the key strategic documents that will support and enable the Council to achieve its vision for the Borough.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy is underpinned by 4 further priority areas that will help achieve the outcomes set out in the Strategic Plan. This will be achieved through the delivery of an action plan and supported by

other key policies, including the Council's Allocation Scheme.

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Priorities

1) To Prevent Homelessness – we want to stop people from becoming homeless.

We will achieve this by...

- Use data analysis to target our interventions at residents groups at highest risk of homelessness
- Supporting residents facing eviction so that they can remain in their existing homes
- Work in partnership with the private, voluntary and public sectors so that a complete range of support and advice is accessible
- Ensuring that information on housing options is easily available
- And to ensure good practice in early intervention and prevention continues, we fully embed the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act into our service delivery.

2) To Provide Accommodation – to those experiencing or facing homelessness

We will achieve this by...

- Accessing affordable accommodation in Maidstone or as close as possible
- Working in partnership with Housing Associations to make the best use of resources
- Working with landlords to find more homes
- Regulating the private rented sector
- Leading by example and developing more housing projects through the Council's own property company and assets
- Developing a whole market solution, providing community leadership through Maidstone Property Holdings

3) To work alongside Vulnerable People - support those experiencing the crisis of homelessness to regain their independence and access the support the need.

We will achieve this by...

- Collaborating with other key partners and agencies in providing vital services.
- Supporting families, young people and vulnerable adults
- Assisting our key partners and other agencies in removing barriers to employment through training and education

4) To support Rough Sleepers away from the streets, bring a sense of hope and ensuring Maidstone's voice is heard as part of a national response to the challenges of housing shortage, instability and homelessness

We will achieve this by...

- Providing rough sleepers with an established pathway 'off the street'
 - Developing a sustainable approach to ensure the continuation of services implemented under the RSI
 - Establishing a functional and accessible private rented sector
 - Advocating changes to the welfare system
 - Pressing Government for further freedom and funding to be able to build more homes and help balance the housing market
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Priority One: Prevention

Prevention of homelessness is a key national and local priority and with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has pushed this further up the agenda for all housing authorities ensuring they are more proactive in helping those threatened with homelessness.

We have been working within the prevention agenda for some time and were an early adopter of this aspect of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Council funded the creation of a Prevention team, which helped us secure some key achievements and gather learning on how best to work with households threatened with homelessness. These included development of key partnerships, seeking to review our Allocation Scheme to explore a "Stay Put" approach and considering new ways in which to work with Intentional Homeless Households with the aim of breaking the cycle of homelessness and reducing the negative impact on the children of those households.

Those whose tenancies are coming to an end in the Private Sector are still a significant feature within Maidstone, being the second highest reason for households approaching the council for assistance, behind the primary reason of friends and family eviction.

The impact, if any, to the newly rolled out Universal Credit within Maidstone, has yet to be felt and but given the history of our caseload statistics with evictions from the private sector and friend/family we still need to continue concentrating on this aspect of our work. This level of intervention we also hope, will help stifle some of the flow into Temporary Accommodation thus reducing the cost to the Council and reduce the number of people moving through transient accommodation leading to more stability for those households.

We will:

- **Create meaningful partnerships in all sectors that deliver tangible impact through our grant schemes and influence.**
- **Implement a predictive analytics model and develop proactive services based on the findings**
- **Review the Allocations Scheme to understand whether there are benefits to incentivising "staying put"**
- **Explore new ways of assisting Intentionally Homeless families to break the cycle of homelessness**
- **Become more efficient by reducing unnecessary customer interactions and use technology to provide housing options advice**

1.1. Meaningful Partnerships

We all recognise that homelessness and breaking the cycle which lead to homelessness cannot be undertaken by one organisation or solely by just one council in isolation but has to come from partnership work across the spectrum of support. We also realise that Partnerships transcend all the priorities within this strategy but we feel that it sits most comfortably within the Preventions

strata.

Alongside this, with the new Duty to Refer, which was imbedded in the Homelessness Reduction Act being rolled out from October 2018, we are finding it increasingly necessary to transition our work functions across a differing work streams, which includes across the two tier authority structure within Kent and into Social Care.

Some partnerships have been particularly challenging, especially mental health. We are seeking to reinvigorate these with task and finished groups linked to Kent Housing Options Group and the Clinical Commissioning Groups.

The Council funds core activities within the voluntary sector in order to support our strategic aims. The sector holds a unique position of trust with specific client groups and is often better placed to work with them. Looking ahead, we will ensure that our links with the voluntary sector are able to deliver the most effective outcomes by working with those organisations that are able to demonstrate a tangible impact.

1.2 Predictive Analytics

Homeless prevention is a key ambition for Maidstone Borough Council and we are investing in the use of analytics to support us in achieving better outcomes for individuals. We are funding an initial one year project that focusses on delivering a financial exclusion predictive analytics model in homelessness, to provide greater insight to support us in identifying those most at risk of presenting as homeless and to understand the effective interventions to support us in transforming the housing advice service accordingly, so that resources are focused on points of the pathway that are most effective.

We will be working with Earnest Young and Xantura to design a financial exclusion predictive analytics model to support the delivery of the Council's homelessness prevention services. This will also incorporate developing a data expansion plan to identify additional data sets of value, working with partners to access a broader range of supporting data.

The financial exclusion predictive analytics model aims to drive earlier intervention by assessing and monitoring risk levels, specifically looking at where rent arrears is likely to escalate and contribute to risk.

Data sets from various internal partners including Housing Benefits, Council Tax, DHP's, Temporary Accommodation, will be matched and merged to create a comprehensive single view, showing a complete picture of the person and their household via a Master Data Management system.

Natural Language Generation will be used to provide a textual summary, as well as an automated case note, with easy access to this information through a single intelligent platform to provide caseworkers with a greater understanding of associated risks and challenges to inform their decision making and help process housing contacts.

The model allows for alerts to be generated where through the predictive analytics it identifies individuals who are identified as most likely risk of facing homelessness, in order for early and intervention. The capability provides the levers to help address smaller problems before they escalate, allowing us to move from constant crisis management to early intervention.

The expansion plan is to work with external partners, including KCC and the citizens advice bureau to broaden the range of data, identifying which data sets would be most valuable and engage with the relevant partners holding this data to explain the information sharing approach, agreeing the terms for sharing under a set of data sharing protocols to enable secure and appropriate sharing of data across agencies.

Through analysis of the data it should also be possible to identify where the demands on the housing advice service is coming from, providing detailed reports to help understand where to consider focussing greater resource and inform strategic decisions.

1.3 “Staying Put” Allocations Scheme

In recent years, we have used the provision within the Allocation Scheme to direct let accommodation from the Housing Register to those in Temporary Accommodation, in order to move those living in TA through more quickly and reduce the cost to the public purse. There is an argument that this has had a perverse effect by incentivising moving into Temporary Accommodation, as an applicant will get housed quicker. We have no statistical feedback to demonstrate this, but also we have no incentive to offer family/friends or private landlords to encourage individuals to stay within their home until we can accommodate the individual through the housing register or other offer at a later time.

This approach has been tested at a number of authorities most notably, LB Southwark, a HRA trailblazer, who has advocated its success. Potentially, this practice may result in the number of parent/family evictions decreasing with this incentive. However, this change would be a major policy shift from our current Allocation Scheme and further investigation is required including consulting with our housing partners before this can be adopted as a permanent change.

1.4 Intentionally Homeless

As a local housing authority we recently undertook a deep dive into the reasons why we are making Intentionally Homeless decisions of which we only had 13 from April 2018 to January 2019. We can see that they roughly fall into two groups; young men who present poor behaviour and we duty discharge those cases; and parents, who maybe be managing the family alone, with a number of children, who make poor decisions on rent and arrears payments.

There is a wider debate which needs to take place at a national level about the legislation surrounding intentionality and of those who through mistakes and bad judgement and not willfulness, should they be significantly impaired from joining the housing register or accessing any kind of social housing until they break their intentionality chain with settled accommodation?

However, we tend to find these families are the most in need, present the most challenging set of social circumstances and often perpetuate the cycle of homelessness through the generations costing the public purse a significant amount. The Kent Housing Options Group is looking into a new protocol co-produced with KCC children’s social care services to review how we work more effectively with the family group.

We also plan to support those families we know could be intentionally homeless before the decision is made into PRS including our Homefinder offer or other kinds of accommodation, offering them floating support and financial guidance to try and maintain their accommodation, which would be in the best interests of the children. This

could be in the form of specific accommodation offered on a trial basis to break the chain of intentionality and help individuals back into the social or private housing sectors.

1.5 Housing Options and Advice

The Council provides housing options information and advice to local residents, ranging from general information about local housing to advice for those threatened with homelessness. Information about employment and training schemes are also discussed, with applicants being signposted to relevant agencies or staff within the Council. Residents mainly access the housing options team by visiting the Maidstone Link or telephoning the team directly. We have found that these types of one-on-one communication are resource intensive and have high transaction costs. In many cases, individual tailored advice is not required, meaning one-to-one contact is unnecessary.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act has ensured we have become a lot more digitally focused. Currently, applicants can seek information through the website and approach for assistance using on-line forms. Once an application has been taken we can also liaise over the individuals Personal Housing Plan through digital links and this ensures up to date communication with our customers. In the future we are looking to develop this further and are working with our Transformation Colleagues to seek new ways in which to enhance the customer experience and make the process more efficient.

Priority Two: Provide Accommodation

Inevitably, there will be times when we are unable to prevent households from becoming homeless and then we have to look for alternative solutions, which can involve placing households into temporary accommodation (TA) whilst we work with the household to help them secure appropriate and suitable housing.

In line with the national and Kent-wide trends, our use of temporary accommodation has risen in the preceding years and with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, we do not anticipate this demand to decrease significantly in the short-term.

An area that is helping to provide good quality accommodation and alleviate the burden on our budget, is the purchase of our own temporary accommodation that we manage in-house; thereby reducing the amount we use nightly paid temporary accommodation providers. It is our ambition that as we alleviate homelessness over the period of this Strategy, the need for TA will reduce and the property purchased for TA can be transferred to Maidstone Property Holdings to provide more accommodation within the rented-market sector.

The district of Maidstone has a vibrant economy with a mixed market of private rent housing which has varied strata of economic rent levels, leading to mixed standards of available private accommodation. Alongside this in more recent years we have also had an increase in the amount of permitted developments undertaken from office to residential accommodation within a short distance of Maidstone town center. These sites do not contribute to any financial infrastructure costs or Section 106 input but the increase in dwellings does raise revenue through the Council Tax charge.

We have also noticed these permitted developments have attracted a number of nightly paid temporary accommodation providers who have host large scale placements from out of borough, generally from London as authorities there face their own local housing crisis. We have also noticed that these placements can bring social and economic issues into the town including domestic abuse, gang related crime and the households placed often have chronic health conditions including mental health concerns. These placements are exerting additional pressures on the local resources especially schools and medical facilities.

Maidstone has a small amount of subsidized housing (also known as social housing) stock within the borough parameters which makes up approximately 600 lettings every year from those on the housing register.

Even with the robust approach we take to resettling applicants we still find we cannot find enough suitable and affordable accommodation.

As part of its Maidstone Homefinder bond scheme, the Council also provides additional support to private sector tenants and landlords, undertaking tenancy sustainment visits with tenants to identify and address any concerns before they lead to the landlord serving notice. This has proved successful in helping to prevent evictions within the private rented sector.

We will:

- **Increase the number of temporary accommodation units within the borough and reduce the use of nightly paid accommodation.**
- **Enable the delivery of new affordable housing including social rent.**
- **Make best use of the private rented sector through the Homefinder and development of a social letting scheme.**
- **Continue to support private sector landlords and tenants to maintain their tenancies including navigating through welfare reform.**

6.1. Temporary accommodation

The Council will continue to explore options for increasing the levels of suitable temporary accommodation within the borough and in 2019 we are hoping to launch Phase 3 of the purchase and repair program, thus far we have purchased 76 units of temporary accommodation which we manage internally with maintenance support from an external agency.

The housing management team who oversee all the Temporary Accommodation are working within a supportive framework in order to maximise the positive move on of those households accommodated, thus continuing our aspiration to break the cycle of homelessness. Many we work with have complex and challenging issues and previously made poor financial decisions, on this note we have employed a financial inclusion officer who works with households to not only maximise their income but also to look at how people can reenter the work place or seek education, skills and training to enhance their life opportunities. Once moved on we will be seeking to offer a floating support service for a period of up to six months to ensure households are managing and they are stable. We hope to work closely with our Early Help colleagues in KCC to ensure we can prevent any reoccurrence of homelessness.

The combined impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act and a lack of affordable move-on accommodation within the borough, has meant that households are staying for longer in temporary accommodation which has a direct negative impact on the budget. We particularly struggle to find suitable and affordable accommodation for families who have previous rent arrears with registered providers as they will be excluded from the Housing Register.

Our aspiration is to seek alternative and innovative ways of finding accommodation for those households with have both a statutory duty to and those who have a local connection to our district.

Our accommodation team is seeking through the Homefinder Offer to encourage and support landlords enabling the delivery of more private rented affordable homes within the borough that help to ease this pressure and reduce people's length of stay in temporary accommodation.

6.2. Affordable housing (Subsidised Housing)

Having moved away from an 'open Housing Register' in line with best practice recommended by the government, the number of applicants on Maidstone's Housing Register has remained largely static at around 700 applicants.

A comparison of the average waiting time for all applicants (not just homeless) to be housed, by bedroom size, is given in the table below:

Average time to get housed				
	April 2017 to March 2018		April 2018 to Jan 2019	
1 bed	345 days	11 months	399 days	13 months
2 bed	413 days	13 months	373 days	12 months
3 bed	718 days	24 months	855 days	28 months
4 bed	880 days	29 months	531 days	17 months

A consistent stream of new build affordable housing is critical to being able to assist applicants who require subsidised housing, as it makes up around a third of all lettings each year. Maidstone has one of the best delivery records for affordable housing over the last 10 years and the Housing Service works alongside colleagues in the Planning Service to ensure the policy framework for Local Plan delivers against our housing need.

In addition, a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment will be undertaken in 2019 and the development of an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document. These will further inform how the Council will provide a range of homes targeted to meet housing need and assist in providing certainty for developers and housing providers alike in continuing to deliver much-needed new homes to the market.

Affordable housing completions by year:

2013/14 – 189

2014/15 – 163

2015/16 – 139

2016/17 – 303

2017/18 – 226

2018/19 – 180 (estimated)

6.3. Private rented sector

The private rented sector forms an increasingly important part of Maidstone's local housing market and since our previous strategy we have been making in-roads to develop relationships with private landlords.

Our Homefinder Scheme offers a number of choices to Landlords and our final offer depends on whether the rent will be kept at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) or be driven by market rate.

The three Homefinder choices we can offer:

- One off incentive payment determined by the size of the property for a minimum six month tenancy. The incentive is decided by the size of the property.
- The Council will guarantee rent to the landlord but this must be at the Local Housing Allowance level.
- One off incentive to Landlords, MBC get to use the property for two years

We have had seen some successes with the different offers but many landlords are fearful of taking homeless clients as they may be on benefits especially with Universal Credit being rolled out across Maidstone since in November 2018.

Alongside this we often are trying to place those who cannot access the housing register into the private sector and these households generally have the more complex needs and a revolving pattern of homelessness. We will be undertaking a review in the future of the Homefinder offers to ensure it is meeting the needs of both households and the Council to ensure it is value for money. We also need to seek further support from registered providers that they will take those who are not eligible on the register.

The creation of Maidstone Property Holdings (MHP) marked a significant move forward by the Council in demonstrating its commitment to take an active part in helping to fix the 'broken housing market'. MHP is intended to provide housing to meet a demand that would otherwise fall between the open market and the Housing Register. It intends to deliver a product to the private rented sector that demonstrates what well-managed and stable homes can look like in that part of the market.

6.4. Supporting Households

Through the Kent wide supported housing re-tender there has been a real shift away from the more generic floating support offered to those who have low level needs and are less complex cases. This will leave a number of households particularly vulnerable when moving on from our temporary accommodation and those at risk of failing within their tenancies due to needing some levels of support.

Our aspiration for the future is to seek a funding stream that will allow us to create a floating support service to work across the district with those both single and families to ensure we maximise the number of households sustaining their tenancies – this will be linked to our Accommodation team and create a seamless pathway of support for individuals who are struggling to maintain their accommodation.

Priority Three – Support for Vulnerable People

Many homeless households are often vulnerable and have complex needs that require additional support. Providing such support can help households to sustain their tenancies and avoid becoming homeless again.

Traditionally Maidstone funded directly or through agencies such as Homes England (formerly the HCA) access to local supported housing and support resources through the establishment of homes such as the Trinity Foyer and Lily Smith House. However, Kent County Council has in the last six months undertaken a recommissioning program which has resulted in Trinity Foyer being decommissioned within the Young Person Pathway and there is an uncertainty around the future of Lily Smith House from the Adult pathway, and significant resources for specific client groups such as former offenders.

In the future we will need to develop more support services for our district to ensure those most at risk of homelessness and other social concerns can get the support needed, this will require strong partnerships with key and lead agencies, as well as developing local solutions that are not dependent on the decisions of non-local housing authorities.

The Council will continue to lobby government for a change in funding arrangements to the existing scheme, whereby funding is provided to the upper-tier authority in two-tier areas but remains un-ring fenced. This position is in direct odds with the government's own Homelessness Code of Guidance. There is a clear expectation that the funding is used by the in order to provide services to prevent homelessness and not just to those owed a duty of care by the upper-tier authority or owed the main housing duty by the local housing authority.

We will:

- **Ensure people with mental health needs have access to suitable housing and support**
- **Support the growth of the hospital discharge program**
- **Continue to support people fleeing domestic abuse**
- **Provide specialist accommodation and support to ex-offenders**
- **Support and provide accommodation options for young people**

7.1. Mental health

From our experience working across the different teams of the Housing department staff have seen a significant increase in working with those who have mental health needs. The statistics vary but do support what our staff are seeing and feeling, with some research suggesting 80% of homeless people in England report having a mental health problem.

Our aspiration is to create links in to the clinical and social care teams who can support our drive to increase the effectiveness of provision and stop those who are unwell being seen only at crisis point. We want to develop strong partnerships which will enable those who have mental health issues to easily access the support they require at the time they require it. We will be working across the authority to ensure that our vision for mental health support is addressed at all strata of meetings including the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board.

7.2. Hospital Discharge

The hospital discharge program "Helping you Home" has been in operation since September 2017 and we have a dedicated team who support those who are medically fit to leave the hospital but may be unable due to their current accommodation being unsuitable or dilapidated, a health risk for those to return without adaptations and we are finding a significant amount of homeless patients have no where to be discharged too.

We aim to continue forging close links with the clinical hospital discharge team to ensure those who are ready to leave hospital do so with a robust accommodation plan. This will include exploring with the University of Greenwich a project to assist patients undergoing major surgical procedures.

7.3. Domestic abuse

Those fleeing Domestic Abuse and approaching the council for support is currently approximately 15% of all applicants. This is in line with the national trend but still raises significant concerns for the Council. Many of those families have a number of children and the lone parent is generally female with other significant health needs.

The Housing Team works closely with partners within the Community Safety Unit and the voluntary sector to raise awareness about domestic abuse and tackle it head on; including leading on the White Ribbon Campaign in Maidstone. We also undertake Sanctuary risk assessments to enable some victims of abuse to remain in their homes, thus resolving their potential homelessness at the prevention stage.

Our practice has been to support women into refuge spaces as this offers the safe and supportive environment that suit many survivors, but we will consider all options for those approaching for assistance, as refuge accommodation may not be suitable for some survivors. We also as standard offer placement outside of Maidstone for those with a local connection to Maidstone. Safety is paramount for those fleeing and moving away from Maidstone bring distance between the victim and perpetrator which ultimately reduces the risk.

The Council will provide assistance to people fleeing domestic abuse from outside of the borough, who are unable to stay in their local area because of concerns for their personal safety.

7.4. Ex-offenders

Housing plays a key role in reducing rates of reoffending and helping ex-offenders to reintegrate back into society. However, as mentioned previously, the funding from KCC for supported housing has been retendered and from April 2019 will be specifically withdrawn for the Offender beds. A large number of bed spaces within Maidstone will be closing which is a significant concern and this cohort do require specialist support to enhance their journey through rehabilitation.

The Adult Supported housing pathway also will not be a housing option as KCC have explicitly confirmed they will be ineligible for services. Many will not be owed a main housing duty due to being non-priority or Intentionally Homeless, so these individuals could end up rough sleeping across Maidstone which is not suitable for those whose offenses carry a level of risk to the public.

We are working within a partnership with Kent, Surry and Sussex CRC, Medway Council and Canterbury Council to commission some support provision from a specialist provider (Pathways to Independence) who will be able work with

offenders through supported accommodation and a floating support model. This will ensure those who present the highest risk in Maidstone are provided with the best possible support

Alongside this, we also were successful in bidding for some Rough Sleeper funding with three other districts, to employ navigators to support those leaving prison with no accommodation to return to. We hope both of these interventions will help to reduce the number of ex-offenders who become rough sleeping and enable individuals to become community assets breaking the cycle of homelessness.

7.5. Young People

The approach for assisting young people has been predicated on joint working with colleagues from Kent County Council Specialist Children Services and Early Help and the provision of supported accommodation e.g. Trinity Foyer and Willowbrook Place supported accommodation for young mothers. However, as mentioned previously due to the recommissioning of these services moving forward a new model is being instigated that is not solely accommodation based.

The solutions for those young people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness will be met through the newly commissioned service for those that meet Kent County Council's criteria and for the remaining applicants through the Housing Options Team. The impact of the recommissioned services will be closely monitored in order to ensure the intended outcomes are achieved and that homelessness is not increasing as an unintended consequence.

Priority Four – Rough Sleepers

Over recent years rough sleeping across Maidstone has risen rapidly, matching the national trend with our annual street counts in 2017 and 2018 recording over 40 people known to be sleeping out with 48 recorded in September 2018.

Rough sleeping impacts on both the individuals who are rough sleeping and the wider community across our district. The presence of rough sleepers within society is not an aspiration any local authority would be keen to incubate and the cost to the public purse is significant with research suggesting each rough sleeper costs the public purse £16,000 to £21,000 per annum compared to the average cost of an adult at £4600 per annum (DCLG 2015).

Rough sleepers also present many challenging issues and complexities, which include; poor physical and mental health, drug and alcohol misuse issues, lack of family and personal support, financial exclusion and often antisocial behaviour.

Through our own work in partnership with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and well-documented good practise, we know that rough sleepers require a range of coordinated and compassionate interventions including stable accommodation, health and clinical input and more generic support. Our approach has been to provide a wide ranging number of interventions to give a well rounded and holistic approach to rough sleepers to try to secure their best life chances and reduce the prevalence of rough sleeping in the district.

Through the RSI funding we have developed a number of strategies which are supporting rough sleepers away from the streets including:

- Recruitment of an Outreach Services Manager, Team Leader and a large team of outreach and in-reach workers plus an addiction specialist and specialist clinical nurse.
- An assessment center accommodation for eight rough sleepers directly moving away from the streets
- Supported housing throughout the district, which provides safe and supportive accommodation – including accommodation for women only.
- Emergency accommodation especially throughout the winter months.
- The provision of personal budgets for service users to purchase small items, especially for those moving into their own properties.
- Funding for arrears clearance and rent in advance, which helps individuals move on from temporary accommodation into longer term or social lettings.

We were also successful in bidding for Housing First funding through our own MBC Internal Business Rates Retention funding and we have entered into a partnership with Porchlight, MHS and Golding Homes to work with a number of former rough sleepers by placing them into accommodation. To date we have accommodated seven former rough sleepers into social housing. We are looking to expand on this work stream and build partnerships with other housing providers to support rough sleeper's longer term.

We will:

- **Continue to provide solutions to help people to cease rough sleeping**
- **Evaluate the Housing First project with a view to enlarging the initiative**
- **Promote better coordination between services in Maidstone, including the voluntary sector**
- **Explore ways of increasing the supply of move-on accommodation**
- **Identify ways of sustaining intervention support post RSI funding**

8. Intervention

Once the funding is confirmed from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, we will be able to deliver the Year 2 Plan that was agreed with the Ministry as part of our original RSI bid. During 2019/20 we intend to build on the excellent progress during 2018/19, to make sure that rough sleeping does not become a feature within the Town Centre or our rural centres.

8.1 Housing First

The initial progress with delivering Maidstone's Housing First project has been commendable. The partnership between Golding Homes, Porchlight and MBC has enabled clients to move from being entrenched on the street to be assisting back into the wider community. Learning from this early stage will provide confidence to expand the project to provide a solution for a greater number of people. We will be exploring with other housing providers how we can engage additional housing units in order to expand this project.

8.2 Partnerships

A range of organisations provides valuable services either throughout the year or at specific times, such as the Winter Shelter. In its community leadership role, we will work with our colleagues in the third sector in order to maximise our collective impact.

8.3 Move on accommodation

The biggest challenge to breaking the cycle of rough sleeping is being able to move the person through the support provided by the initial intervention and into the secondary stage of housing. This will need to be tailored to the individual and might take the form of a range of housing options. For example, supported accommodation, or independent housing with support provided on an outreach basis. Opening up the private rented sector is a challenge for most people who find themselves in housing need but can be particularly difficult for those having been entrenched on the streets.

8.4 Sustainable delivery

Whilst the additional funds provided through the RSI is welcome, it is expected that the grant will be time limited. It is therefore critical that we begin planning now for when the grant is no longer available. The intention is that by the time funding ceases the number of persons coming to the street will have diminished and that entrenched rough sleeping has been successfully resolved. The delivery model will evolve accordingly. What is envisaged is a rapid intervention service along the line of the 'no second night out' model. The outreach team will provide a quick response to being notified of someone

rough sleeping and bring them off the street to provide support into a better housing solution.

APPENDIX A - Action Plan

Objective 1: Prevention				
Action		Outcomes	Lead	Timescale
1.1	Continue tenancy mediation service for private sector landlords and tenants and involve third sectors and partners if suitable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fewer private sector evictions · Reductions in family evictions 	MBC Maidstone Mediation Private landlords	On-going
1.2	Provide low income households with finance and budget management advice and guidance through our Financial inclusion Officer and look to expand this in-house programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fewer rent arrears amongst private sector tenants · Fewer private sector evictions · Additional staff 	MBC Registered Providers CAB	On-going
1.3	Work in partnership with MBC communications team to educate young people within the borough about the realities of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fewer young people presenting as homeless · Expectations will be in line with options. 	MBC Schools Housing support providers	December 2020
1.4	Roll out the Predictive Analytics systems across MBC to help identify those at risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Model operational · Clear outcomes demonstrated · More partners involved 	Housing Advice Manager	April 2020
1.5	Allocation Scheme to be reviewed to include the "Staying Put" incentive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reviewed and amended 	Head of Service	Dec 2019
1.6	Develop the Intentional Homelessness Protocol with key partners and start working towards eliminating those outcomes for households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Protocol in place and implemented throughout practice. · Seek specific accommodation for IH households as trial tenancies and a route into mainstream accommodation 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	July 2020

1.7	Work with registered providers to ensure they accommodate those house hold which are the most vulnerable and may include those found to be IH.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop networking opportunities · Those most vulnerable are being accommodated 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	On-going
1.8	Development of a crash pad option for young people to give some time out from the parental home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reduction in the number of parental evictions · Increase in the number of successful reconnections to family 	Housing Advice Manager	April 2021
1.9	The creation of a drop in and hub service for people facing homelessness which is not located within the Link; to include debt advice and support, floating support and signposting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Location identified and developed. · Staff are working outside of the office to ensure maximum engagement with the community · Increase in digital inclusion 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	April 2020

Objective 2: Accommodation

Action		Outcomes	Lead	Timescale
2.1	Deliver phase three of emergency accommodation within the borough and reduce nightly paid accommodation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce use of bed and breakfast accommodation Reduce costs to the authority 	MBC	December 2019
2.2	Support the development and implementation of the affordable housing supplementary planning document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More social homes available within the borough Those most in need able to secure a social home 	MBC Registered Providers	On-going
2.3	Review the Homefinder lettings scheme to ensure value for money and delivering effective outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a scheme fit for purpose. 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	January 2021
2.4	MBC to work towards balancing the housing market through Maidstone Property Holdings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More homeless and rough sleeping households accommodated through MPH 	Head of service	On-going with quarterly reviews
2.5	Develop a MBC floating support service using new funding streams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More households are being supported through the traditional floating support model – this to be needs led and not dictated by a timeframe. 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	August 2020
2.6	Local Housing Allowance – seek to lobby the government on an uplift which reflect the local market rates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise this at more senior levels including KHG and central government forums. 	Head of Service	On-going

Objective 3: Support for Vulnerable People

Action		Outcomes	Lead	Timescale
3.1	Ensure vulnerable people have sufficient access to appropriate housing and support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Quicker, simpler referrals between housing and health services · More self-contained accommodation within the borough · People with mental health needs can access appropriate accommodation · Fewer vulnerable households are evicted 	MBC KMPT Registered Providers	April 2021
3.2	Continued support for victims of domestic abuse through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sanctuary 2. MARAC 3. One Stop Shop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fewer people fleeing domestic abuse at point of crisis · Increased resilience for individuals suffering domestic abuse · Increased homelessness prevention for victims of domestic abuse · Attendance at the OSS by Housing Advisors 	MBC One Stop Shop	On-going
3.5	Develop appropriate accommodation for ex-offenders within Maidstone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reduction in re-offending rates amongst ex-offenders · Close working relationship with Probation and support providers. · More accommodation options · Increase in individuals accessing work and training who have an offending background. 	MBC Kent Probation Kent Prison Service Kent	August 2019
3.4	Continue the development of the hospital discharge program ensuring MBC have robust relationships with all key health partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Service level agreements are developed with those partners. · Expansion into MDT's for mental health services · On-going review of outcomes achieved to review if service needs amendment. 	MBC and CCG's. MTW. Littlebrook and Priority House.	Dec 2019

3.5	Improve access to GPs and primary care services for homeless households and rough sleepers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase the numbers of households in temporary and emergency accommodation accessing primary health care services · Increase no. of rough sleepers accessing primary health care services 	MBC, CCG's and medical facilities across Maidstone	Reviewed in March 2020
3.6	Staff are well trained and have specialist knowledge on a range of support issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Staff specialisms are developed and encouraged · Regular training undertaken · Staff can work with the most complex and be empathic and supportive 	H&IM, AM and HAM	On-going but reviewed twice yearly in line with performance

Objective 4: Rough Sleepers

Action		Outcomes	Lead	Timescale
4.1	Continue the roll out of the Housing First Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More households accommodated through housing first • Seek funding to continue the programme of providing on-going support to those accommodated. 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	December 2019
4.2	Seek post 2020 funding for the outreach service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of service post April 2020 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	March 2020
4.3	Work with the various voluntary groups to ensure a coordinated approach to tackling rough sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced numbers of rough sleepers in the district • Increase in cohesive services • Multiagency approach to the most complex i.e. Blue Light 	Housing and Inclusion Manager	On-going
4.4	Explore ways of acquiring suitable move-on accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A viable pathway from the assessment centre to settled living can be achieved and sustained 	Accommodation Manager	On-going
4.5	Develop the social enterprise for rough sleepers in partnership with One Maidstone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board mobilised and shop opened. • Service users have co-produced the model and ideas with staff • Shop becomes self-operational 	Outreach Services Manager	August 2020
4.6	Seek to work with soup kitchens and other charitable services to provide a cohesive support offer to rough sleepers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings • Standard support offer to rough sleepers • Reconnection for those with no local connection 	Outreach Services Manager	March 2019