

## MAIDSTONE HOUSING STRATEGY 2021-2026

### INTRODUCTION

The Housing Strategy sets out the Council's strategic approach to tackling the major housing challenges facing the Borough for the next five years. It supports the Council's strategic ambition for the Borough to be ***a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential***. The Strategy will form the basis for all our work with Maidstone residents and partner organisations. It will inform the development of other important strategies and policies that link to housing, including the Local Plan.

This is an important document for the Council, recognising that housing plays a major role in the health, social, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the Borough. This Housing Strategy has been written at a time of unprecedented challenge. The full impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are not yet fully understood but further pressure on housing services is expected in the short to medium-term.

Our vision for housing is:

**All Maidstone residents have the opportunity to live in a high-quality home that is affordable and meets their needs and aspirations**

Supporting this vision are the following strategic priorities:

Priority 1: Enable the delivery of high-quality new homes that meet local housing need

Priority 2: Ensure existing homes are safe, sustainable, of good quality and support residents' health and wellbeing

Priority 3: Prevent homelessness and enable vulnerable people to access appropriate housing and support

A supporting Action Plan will be developed, updated to take into account progress against our priorities and emerging local issues, and where appropriate revised on an annual basis and in accordance with Government guidance and legislation. During the Strategy period, where evidence demonstrates a need for a review of the Strategy, in part or whole, this will be carried out in a proportionate and timely way.

### ABOUT MAIDSTONE

The borough of Maidstone is situated in the heart of Kent. It covers an area of approximately 40,000 hectares and has an approximate population of 172K, the largest population of any local authority area in Kent. At 13.3% (between 2009 and 2019), Maidstone's population growth exceeded the county, regional and national average over this time – 9.7% in Kent, 8.1% in the South East and 7.3% in the UK.

Maidstone is the County Town of Kent and approximately 75% of its population live in the urban area. A substantial rural hinterland surrounds the urban area, part of which enjoys designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty due to its high landscape and environmental quality. The Borough encompasses a small section of the metropolitan green belt (1.3%), and 27% of the Borough forms part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Borough is strategically located between the Channel Tunnel and London with direct connections to both via the M20 and M2 motorways. Maidstone town enjoys good railway connections with London, Ashford, Tonbridge and the Medway Towns.

Whilst Maidstone is relatively self-contained from a labour, housing and commercial market point of view, its location at the heart of Kent means that it shares strong economic relationships with its neighbouring areas, in particular the 'Malling' part of Tonbridge and Malling and parts of Medway and Swale. Economically active residents of Maidstone are likely commute to jobs outside of the Borough and vice versa.

The majority (71%) of housing in Maidstone is in private ownership, with 16% in the private rented sector and 13% available at affordable or social level rents.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS 2016-2020**

Over the lifetime of the previous Housing Strategy, we have:

- Enabled the delivery of 1,148 new affordable homes, both for rent and sale
- Delivered and managed 89 long-term good quality private rented homes through Maidstone Property Holdings Ltd
- Delivered 141 affordable homes through rural exception sites
- Delivered and managed 85 properties for use as temporary accommodation to support homeless households
- Successfully moved ten entrenched rough sleepers into Housing First accommodation in partnership with Golding Homes and Porchlight; and resettled a further 255 into longer term and more settled accommodation
- Brought forward three sites on brownfield land within the Town Centre at Brunswick Street, Union Street and Springfield. These sites will deliver 49 homes
- Housed 3,069 households from the Housing Register
- Developed our own supported accommodation and support service for vulnerable homeless people, who would not normally be accommodated through Part 7 of the Housing Act
- Launched the Maidstone Homelessness Prevention Forum in October 2019 as a multi-agency forum, bringing together partners to shared information and strengthen partnership working to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Provided pre-tenancy training in partnership with Golding Homes to help support private sector tenants to maintain their tenancies

- Launched a Landlord and Tenant Insurance Scheme, working in partnership with Help2Rent, to help secure private rented accommodation for households at risk of homelessness
- Reduced use of nightly paid temporary accommodation for homeless families and reduced associated costs for the Council

More detail around the progress against our action plan for the previous Housing Strategy can be found at **Annex A**.

## **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

### **National context**

#### National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development are produced, including for the delivery of affordable homes. The NPPF definition of affordable homes includes affordable housing for rent, First Homes, discounted market sales housing and other affordable routes to home ownership.

#### Housing growth

The Government has ambitious targets for new housing growth, aiming for 300,000 new homes per year by the mid-2020s. The Government's White Paper, *Fixing the Broken Housing Market*, set out their plans to reform the housing market and boost the supply of new homes in England. This included supporting local authorities in their housebuilding ambitions, improving capacity and capability to develop more good quality homes, as well as the provision of low-cost capital funding.

#### Homes England

Homes England was established by the Government in 2018 as their 'housing accelerator'. It funds new affordable homes in England through the Affordable Homes Programme. It is responsible for increasing the number of new homes that are built in England, improving existing affordable homes and bringing empty homes back into use as affordable housing and increasing the supply of public land and speeding up the rate that it can be built on.

#### Homelessness

The Government has committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it completely by 2027. In the 2020 Spending Review, the Chancellor confirmed an additional £254m funding to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. The Government has also committed £87m of capital funding in 2021/22 to support the delivery of long-term accommodation for rough sleepers and further £310m Homelessness Prevention Grant was announced.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018 placed additional duties on local authorities, including a requirement to provide advice and support to people threatened with homelessness; a duty to prevent and a duty to relieve homelessness before the main housing duty is applied.

### Environmental Impact

The environmental case for more energy efficient homes is clear with the demand for energy increasing and the cost to households set to increase significantly. Homes account for 30 per cent of the UK's total energy use, 27 per cent of UK carbon dioxide emissions and around 24 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, we each consume about 150 litres of water every day with the effect of there being the increasing likelihood of a shortage of water in many parts of the UK.

### Welfare Reform

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced a wide range of benefit reforms, a number of which have impacted on homelessness and the availability, and sustainability, of affordable housing. Key reforms include:

- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reductions, including total LHA caps and the limiting of LHA to the 30th percentile of market rents
- Benefit Cap - limiting the maximum benefits that a family can receive
- Spare Room Subsidy ('Bedroom Tax') reduces housing benefit entitlement to social housing tenants considered to be under-occupying their homes
- Shared Accommodation Rate limit applied to single young people up to the age of 35
- Introduction of Universal Credit to provide a single streamlined benefit paid to residents directly rather than to their landlords
- The removal of enhanced payments of Universal Credit, first paid during the Covid19 pandemic

### Covid-19

This Strategy was developed whilst we are still experiencing the global Covid-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, the impacts of the pandemic on the economy and housing markets are yet to be fully understood, however it is widely expected that the economy will experience a downturn, which will likely result in an increase in housing need, particularly of an affordable tenure and higher levels of homelessness.

However, with the changing patterns of work characterised by greater home working sometimes termed the 'new normal' or 'new different', it is likely that we will see new patterns of demand and potential additional inward migration from London.

### **Local context**

The Council's vision is for Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential. The

Strategic Plan, published in 2019 and updated in 2021, sets out our aspiration for Maidstone through to 2045, and how we're going to achieve it.



### *MBC Strategic Plan 2019-2045 – Vision and Priorities*

One of our 4 key priorities is 'Homes and Communities', with a particular focus on meeting all housing need by 2045; reducing rough sleeping; reducing the use of temporary accommodation and expanding the Council's role in the delivery of affordable and market rent housing.

This Housing Strategy will enable us to deliver these priorities.

## **LOCAL HOUSING NEED AND DEMAND**

In 2021 we commissioned a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to inform the review of the Local Plan, which is due for submission in early 2022. The 2021 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) introduced a new standard method for assessing local housing need and identifying a minimum annual housing need figure. This takes projected household growth and applies an upward adjustment based on affordability (average house price-to-earnings ratio).

## Population

Population growth in Maidstone has been relatively strong. In 2018, it was estimated that the population had grown by 24% from 1991 levels, in contrast with a 17% increase nationally. This is largely driven by net in-migration – particularly internal migration – i.e people moving to the Borough from other parts of the UK, although there is also an appreciable level of international migration.

Projected population growth to 2037 is anticipated to be around 28%, an increase of around 48,000 people. In terms of household types, the strongest growth is projected in couple and single person households aged over 65. However, growth in families with dependent children is also expected.

	2019	2037	Change	% Change
One-person household (aged 65 and over)	8,288	10,930	2,643	31.9%
One-person household (aged under 65)	9,989	13,390	3,401	34.0%
Couple (aged 65 and over)	10,183	16,480	6,298	61.8%
Couple (aged under 65)	10,470	9,842	-628	-6.0%
A couple and one or more other adults: No dependent children	5,617	7,048	1,430	25.5%
Household with one dependent child	10,341	15,020	4,678	45.2%
Household with two dependent children	8,625	10,672	2,047	23.7%
Household with three dependent children	2,938	3,402	464	15.8%
Other households	4,355	6,538	2,184	50.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70,805</b>	<b>93,322</b>	<b>22,517</b>	<b>31.8%</b>

*Change in Household Types 2019-37, Strategic Housing Market Assessment*

## Housing costs

Entry level housing costs to both buy and privately rent properties across the Borough are set out below. This shows higher housing cost in the rural areas of the Borough compared to the urban.

	Urban	Rural Central and North	Rural South	Borough
Lower quartile house prices	£212,000	£272,000	£265,000	£232,000
Lower quartile market rents	£655	£790	£775	£700

*Entry level house purchase and private rental costs, Strategic Housing Market Assessment*

This is also a disparity between the median market rents and the amount of Local Housing Allowance payable, ranging from around £22 a week for a 1-bedroom property to £93 a week for a 4-bedroom property.

Bedroom size	LHA rate (weekly)	Median rent (weekly)
Shared room rate	£88.85	—
1-bedroom	£149.59	£172
2-bedroom	£187.56	£219
3-bedroom	£224.38	£288
4-bedroom	£287.67	£381

LHA vs Median Market Rent, Valuation Office Agency and [home.co.uk](http://home.co.uk)

The average income level in Maidstone is £39,100 with a mean income level of £51,600. Around a quarter of households have an income of £22,600 or less. Based on their income, around 49% of households are estimated to have difficulty accessing market rent housing.

## Housing need

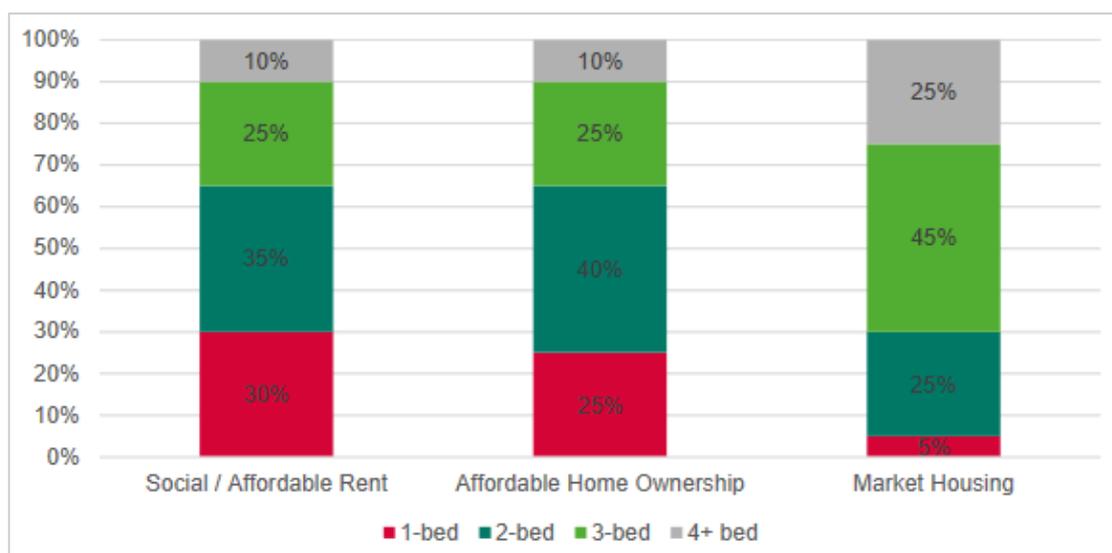
The SHMA identifies a need for an additional 1,157 homes per year, which is around 30% higher than previous calculations of housing need and reflects the Government's ambitions to deliver 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s. A proposed breakdown of this delivery by tenure is shown below.

Housing tenure	No. per annum
Rented affordable	422
Affordable home ownership	137
Market housing	598
<b>Total dwellings</b>	<b>1,157</b>

*Housing Need by Tenure, Strategic Housing Market Assessment*

Of those new homes, 36% of the total has been identified as being needed for rented affordable homes (that includes housing provided by the social rented providers at both 'affordable' and 'social' rents) and 12% for affordable home ownership. Due to the proportion of households unlikely to be able to afford a rental that can be the equivalent of up to 80% of the market, we are exploring whether it can be viable to deliver 70% of affordable rented housing at a social rent (typically around 60% of market rent) and the remainder 30% at an affordable rent (typically around 80% of market rent).

As well as the total number and tenure of new homes, the mix of properties needed is important, to ensure that different household types and sizes are catered for. The table below demonstrates homes needed by bedroom size, across the three categories of affordable/social rent, affordable home ownership and market housing.



*Mix of Homes of Different Sizes Needed, Strategic Housing Market Assessment*

The data identifies a much greater need for smaller 1 and 2-bedroom properties amongst affordable homes for rent and sale, compared to a high level of need for larger properties of 3-bedrooms or more for market housing.

The Council’s Housing Register uses ‘Bands’ to group applicants with similar characteristics. The table below is an analysis of these Bands as at August 2021, also identifies a high level of need for 1-bedroom rental properties; however, it also shows that there is a significant need for 3-bedroom homes as well.

HOUSING NEED	C - Community Contribution	H - Homeless	M - Medical	R - Reasonable Preference	Total	%
1-bed	79	88	57	114	338	44%
2-bed	54	10	21	40	125	16%
3-bed	91	25	15	104	235	30%
4-bed	27	8	5	19	59	8%
5+ bed	3	1	0	9	13	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>770</b>	

*MBC Housing Register by Bedroom Need, August 2021*

The Borough’s predicted growth in the number of older people highlights a need for the provision of more specialised accommodation, including housing with care and housing with support. This is shown below. Increasing levels of housing with care is also one of the strategic priorities of the Kent Adult Social Care and Health Accommodation Strategy.

Type of housing	Rented (2019-2039)	Market sale (2019-2039)	Total
Housing with care	371	432	803
Housing with support	105	1234	1339

*Need for Specialist Housing for Older Persons, Strategic Housing Market Assessment*

Linked to the growth in the older population, there is predicted to be a greater requirement for wheelchair accessible homes.

Current need	Projected need (2019-2037)	Total
248	676	923

*Estimated need for wheelchair user homes (2019-2037)*

There is also an identified need for an additional 1,421 care home bedspaces to 2037.

## Homelessness

The number of people seeking housing advice from the Council during 2020/21 has grown compared to the previous year, which is a reflection on the financial hardship that has been endured during the various lockdowns. However, the number of people needing to go on to make a homelessness application has reduced from the previous year.

Description	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Number homeless advice cases	1049	922	1107
Number of homeless applications	1200	1354	1169

*Homeless approaches, Maidstone Borough Council*

## Housing Register need

The Council's Housing Register shows a steady increase in the number of people approaching the Council because they have a housing need, with the volume accepted onto the Register increasing by 38% over the last 5 years.

Year	On the Housing Register	Housed
2016 to 2017	610	644
2017 to 2018	618	619
2018 to 2019	776	578
2019 to 2020	853	577
2020 to 2021	840	651

*Housing Needs and Lets, Maidstone Borough Council*

Average waiting times for larger properties (3-bedroom or more) are long and the time for people accepted onto the Housing Register to get housed for these larger properties can be around 2 years.

Bedroom need	April 2018 - March 2019	April 2019 - March 2020	April 2020 - March 2021
1-bedroom	13 months	9 months	12 months
2-bedroom	12 months	11 months	9 months
3-bedroom	28 months	22 months	24 months
4-bedroom	17 months	24 months	23 months

*Housing Register time to be housed, Maidstone Borough Council*

## KEY CHALLENGES

- Overall population growth in the borough is expected to be around 28% by 2037. Younger households are expected to grow by 20% in this period and those aged 65 and over by around 54%, with substantial increases in those aged 75 and over
- Entry level house prices are around 11.4 times earnings, presenting a barrier to home ownership
- High house prices have led to increased demand on the private rented sector, with the number of households living in privately rented homes growing by 23% between 2001 and 2018
- High demand for private rented sector homes has seen rents increase by around 20% between 2001 and 2017
- Around 49% of households are estimated to have difficulty accessing market rent housing due to the gap between income and rents
- Maidstone experiences higher levels of under-occupancy than the national average (81% vs 69%), particularly within the private sector
- 27% of the borough is situated within the Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, impacting opportunities to provide new homes for rural communities
- Continued high levels of homeless or potentially homeless households seeking housing assistance from the Council
- A 38% increase in the number of households accepted onto the Housing Register since 2016
- Average waiting times for households on the Housing Register who require larger-sized homes (3-bedrooms or more) are long, at around 2 years.

## VISION AND PRIORITIES

The Council's housing vision for Maidstone is:

***All Maidstone residents have the opportunity to live in a high-quality home that is affordable and meets their needs and aspirations***

Supporting this vision are the following strategic priorities:

- Priority 1: Enable the delivery of high-quality new homes that meet local housing need
- Priority 2: Ensure existing homes are safe, sustainable, of good quality and support residents' health and wellbeing
- Priority 3: Prevent homelessness and enable vulnerable people to access appropriate housing and support

## DELIVERING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

This strategy cannot be delivered by Maidstone Borough Council alone. To achieve our housing priorities, we need to work in collaboration with our key private and public sector partners, including Golding Homes, our stock transfer Housing Association; other local Registered Providers; Kent Housing and Development Group; Homes England; Kent County Council; Medway Council, Kent Housing Group; Kent Fire and Rescue Service; Action for Rural Communities Kent, South East Local Enterprise Partnership and MHCLG.

We will explore opportunities to work creatively with our partners to secure the best housing outcomes for the people who live the borough of Maidstone.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### **Priority 1: Enable the delivery of high-quality new homes that meet local housing need**

In our Strategic Plan, we have set an ambitious target of meeting all housing need, including affordable housing need, within the borough by 2045. We are in the process of updating our Local Plan which will translate our housing priorities into a statutory planning policy framework and to maintain a five-year land supply, enabling the continued delivery of housing to meet our objectively assessed need annual requirement.

New housing delivery not only provides opportunities for Maidstone residents to access high quality homes to rent or to buy, but also supports our local economy through job creation and the use of small businesses as part of the supply chain. Over the next five years, the need for housing developers get to grips with reducing carbon emissions and ensuring that new homes meet net zero by 2025, will support our economic ambitions around a green recovery agenda and developing local expertise in low carbon technology.

The SHMA identifies a need for 1,157 new homes per year, of which 48% should be affordable housing. This is higher than in previous years, but the Council recognises this increase as necessary to enable us to achieve our ambition of meeting all housing need by 2045. We need a continuous high level of delivery of new homes within the borough over the next five years (and beyond), with a good variety in the type, size and tenure of homes offered, including both market sale and affordable homes for rent and sale.

We welcome delivery of new housing growth through less traditional models, such as self-build and custom-build housing. We maintain a register of people interested in pursuing this and will continue to seek to identify opportunities on both small and larger-scale sites.

### **1.1 Affordable homes**

The Government is committed to expanding opportunities for people to own their own home. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires at least 10% of homes on major development sites to be for affordable home ownership. The Government recently announced that its future preferred affordable home ownership product is *First Homes*. These are homes for first time buyers, which are discounted by a minimum 30% against the market value, with the discount availability in perpetuity for future buyers.

A pilot for First Homes, funded from the Affordable Homes Programme, is due to complete in 2021. This will deliver First Homes as an alternative product to existing affordable housing requirement. An invitation to tender to be part of this pilot has been extended to developers. The Council will support bids for the delivery of First Homes in the Borough that meet our defined eligibility criteria.

Where there is an affordable housing requirement on a new site, the NPPF will from January 2022 require 25% of this to be First Homes, with the rest for either social or affordable rent.

Whilst the Council supports the need to provide affordable home ownership options, we recognise that some local residents will never be in a position to buy a home. An estimated 49% of Maidstone residents are also unable to easily access market rented housing, due to the disparity between income and rental prices. There is a strong need for new homes at both affordable and social rent levels, which cater for both the current housing demand and the projected future needs in terms of size and property type.

The Council's affordable housing requirements are set out in our *Affordable and Local Needs Housing Supplementary Planning Document*. This will be revised as part of the process to update the Local Plan and will reflect the recent national policy changes around First Homes.

The Council’s ambition for delivering housing between 2021-26 is set out in the table below:

Type	Investment	Homes delivered
Private rented sector	£37.2 million	165 homes
Affordable housing	£31.1 million	177 homes
Total	£68.3 million	339 homes

## 1.2 Private rented homes

The Council recognises that not all Maidstone residents will want or be able to buy a home. Homes to rent are a valuable component of a balanced housing market.

Maidstone, along with the rest of the UK, has seen a marked increase in the number of households living in the private rented sector. The short-term nature of private sector tenancies and in some cases poor housing standards, can make private rented accommodation seem an unattractive option. However, it fulfils a vital role for households unable to buy but who do not meet the criteria for affordable rented housing. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of private landlords exiting the sector, reducing supply and pushing up rental prices.

Through Maidstone Property Holdings, the Council are seeking to fill this gap and become a significant residential landlord in the private rented sector operating within the Borough, offering high quality, affordable private rental homes.

We will look at maximising opportunities to directly bring forward private rented properties on brownfield and/or smaller sites that may not be attractive to volume house builders.

### Case Study – Maidstone Property Holdings

The Council set up Maidstone Property Holdings (MPH) to become a significant residential landlord in the private rented sector. Maidstone Property Holdings seeks to set new standards in terms of the quality of private rented stock offered and service delivered to residents.

The purpose of MPH will be to demonstrate that market rented accommodation can provide high quality, long-term homes and service that is affordable to its target audience. This will provide an alternative solution to solving housing need and enabling a balanced housing market within the Maidstone Borough. In doing so, MPH will develop innovative models that champion quality, regenerate brownfield and smaller sites that may not be attractive to volume house builders and stimulate local economic growth through the construction and management of its assets.

As of August 2021, 89 of the planned 179 homes have been delivered and occupied, with a further 86 at the feasibility stage.

### 1.3 Rural communities

Maidstone's rural areas contain a higher proportion of large (four bedrooms or more) and detached homes than other parts of the borough, with around 30% of rural homes being 4 or more bedrooms and 50% of rural homes being detached. With median house prices in the borough at around £310K, properties such as these, which are at the top end of market, are unaffordable to many local residents. The impact is particularly high on young people who have grown up in rural communities, who find themselves priced out and forced to move away to be able to access a home they can afford. Through the provision of affordable housing in rural locations we can help local people to remain in the community where they have strong family or employment ties.

Nearly a third of the borough is situated within the Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and subject to planning constraints. However, new "local needs housing", affordable housing that meets the needs of the local community, can be delivered within AONB areas through the use of rural exception sites. The Council has delivered 141 local needs homes within rural exception sites over the period of the previous Strategy, but we recognise that there is potential for a greater level of rural exception sites development together with entry-level exception sites to come forward to help support smaller communities in the Borough.

Kent Housing Group (KHG) have reviewed and updated their *Guide to Developing Affordable Homes in Rural Communities Protocol*, which has been produced to address rural housing needs through the development of new affordable homes.

KHG has a long-standing commitment and success in supporting the delivery of affordable housing for the rural communities of Kent and Medway, this has been in partnership with a number of organisations, each of whom are passionate about protecting and invigorating our rural communities.

As well as small scale new affordable housing within existing rural communities, the development of garden communities, such as Heathlands, provide opportunities to create new rural villages or towns and deliver new rural affordable housing at scale.

### **Case Study – Heathlands Garden Community**

Maidstone Borough Council and Homes England are working in partnership to deliver a unique, attractive, and desirable new rural Kentish town located between Maidstone and Ashford. The new community will be designed sensitively to respond to its natural and distinctive setting, benefitting from a truly landscape led masterplan with design excellence, eco credentials and sustainable transport at its core.

Heathlands will provide around 5,000 new homes, of which 40% will be affordable for local people. Furthermore, Heathlands will also have a vibrant local economy at its heart, with around 16 hectares of land available for an array of businesses, that will provide one new job for each home built.

As a place, Heathlands will comprise 50% green space that will retain, protect, enhance, and connect the various existing natural assets within the site. Heathlands will be designed to meet the nationally recognised quality standard Building for Healthy Living which will demonstrate the quality of the new development.

Building design will be in accordance with Maidstone’s own “Building for Life 12” guidance and so will be of the highest quality. All the new buildings will be sensitive to their location, the existing nearby settlements, and will utilise the highest quality local materials and local design cues to ensure Heathlands has a thoroughly Kentish DNA.

To deliver Heathlands, Maidstone Borough Council and Homes England, are taking the bold and ambitious approach of acting as both land promotor and master developer, taking control of the land, with the benefit of “land value capture” to fund and deliver the extensive infrastructure package.

## **1.4 Community-led housing**

Community led housing can have a positive role to play in generating new homes in rural areas. It can take many different forms, including housing cooperatives, self-build schemes and developer-community partnerships. It can involve new-build development or the refurbishment of empty properties.

Because community led housing is developed by local people for local people, build standards and design tend to be high, providing homes that are of long-term benefit to the local area. Some landowners may also be more prepared to release land for housing when they know it will be developed sensitively and in a way that will provide a legacy for their local community.

The Council is supportive of local ambitions for community-led housing growth. A number of neighbourhood plans have been developed across the borough or are in development. We will make available expertise, advice and grant funding to help local communities draft neighbourhood plans.

## **1.5 Older people**

As a nation we are living longer. Maidstone is predicted to have an 54% increase in the number of residents aged 65 and over by 2037, with a large majority of these in

the 75+ age group. Housing this ageing population presents new challenges, with a requirement for a range of different housing options and support services to meet the differing needs of people as they age.

The majority (73%) of older people in the Borough own their own homes outright and tend to live in single person households. This contributes to the Borough's higher than national levels of under-occupation. Whilst some people will wish to remain in their own homes as they age, many households may wish to downsize to more specialist accommodation. This in turn will free up larger-sized accommodation for younger families.

The Council will work with developers, Registered Providers, care providers and Kent County Council to identify suitable sites for the development of specialised housing for older people, which caters both for those needing support and those in need of care.

### **1.6 People with disabilities**

The number of people in Maidstone expected to be living with a long-term health condition or disability (including mobility issues), is expected to rise by 39% by 2037. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment identified a projected need for 923 homes suitable for wheelchair users.

The Council recommends that new housing provision should ensure that it is flexible and able to be adapted to meet people's changing health and mobility needs. The Local Plan Review will seek to bring forward policy documents to encourage more older people's housing.

Where adaptations are needed, the Council will look to fund this through our Disabled Facilities Grant programme.

### **1.7 Gypsies and Travellers**

The Council is committed to identifying suitable sites to meet the housing need of Gypsy, Traveller and travelling communities. The Council is developing its understanding of need in term of quantum and type through updating its Gypsy & Traveller and Travelling Show People Accommodation Assessment. Once completed and approved this will help inform the need for additional public-owned sites to supplement the two existing sites owned by Maidstone Council and managed by the Kent County Council Gypsy & Traveller Team under a management agreement.

## **Priority 2: Ensure existing homes are safe, sustainable, of high quality and support residents' health and wellbeing**

### **2.1 Health inequalities**

The link between poor housing and health inequalities has been well documented. Living in low quality housing can have a significant negative impact on a person's

health and wellbeing. For example, properties which are poorly maintained may be damp and cold, leading to or exacerbating existing respiratory or cardiovascular illness. Damp and cold homes are also thought to be a significant contributor towards excess winter deaths, particularly amongst people over the age of 75.

The Covid 19 Pandemic and the emerging learning on health inequalities at the time of writing again underscores the link between poor housing and poor health outcomes.

Fuel poverty is also a contributory factor to damp and cold homes, with such households often having to choose between “heat or eat”. In 2019, it was estimated that around 7.7% of households in Maidstone were living in fuel poverty.

The Council will continue to signpost residents to access national funding programmes, such as Warm Homes to improve the heating in their homes. We are currently working towards promoting two Government incentives Local Authority Delivery scheme & Home Upgrade Grant to deliver energy efficiency measures for the worst performing properties according to EPC data.

## **2.2 Private sector conditions**

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that the properties they own do not pose a risk to the health and safety of their tenants.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (The Rating System) assesses the risk to the health and safety of occupiers posed by certain specified housing related hazards. Hazards are banded Category 1 or Category 2 depending on the seriousness of the risk. Where Category 1 hazards are identified, the Council has a legal duty to take action against the owner. If Category 2 hazards are identified, we have a discretionary power to take action. During 2020/21, the Council undertook over 340 interventions in relation to housing condition.

Housing conditions tend to be worst in the private rental sector. The Council has a key role to play in maintaining and improving housing conditions to ensure that they are safe, free from hazards and are not detrimental to tenants’ health and wellbeing. Tenants have little influence over the condition of their homes and it is right that our resources are targeted at supporting them.

The Council will continue to work with private landlords where hazards have been identified, adopting the appropriate measures from a range of available options including, informal advice, enforcement action and prosecution.

The use of accommodation in Maidstone, particularly in the Town Centre, other local housing authorities and other statutory organisations such as the Probation Service is having a notable impact on the local community, as well as on those being placed. The rapid increase in residential property as a result of offices being converted to accommodation under the Permitted Development Rights has resulted in an over-supply of small units of housing that has found little favour with the open market.

As a result, large numbers of these properties have been acquired by managing agents and provided to local housing authorities (including those in London) and other

agencies to place homeless households. The difficulties arise when the support needed to help these households to maintain their tenancies is either non-existent or is of an inadequate standard. A multiagency task force has been set up to raise awareness of these issues and take what limited steps are available to tackle the problems that arise from unsupported and the cumulative effect this is having.

### **2.3 Fire safety**

The new Fire Safety Act 2021 requires residential building owners and managers to appropriately risk assess all parts of their buildings, including the external structure and doors to common parts, to manage and reduce the risk of fire.

The Council takes fire risk very seriously. We will work with Registered Providers, private landlords, freeholders and Kent Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that residential buildings, including those owned and managed by ourselves, are compliant with all relevant fire safety legislation.

### **2.4 Energy Efficient Homes**

Nationally, controlling carbon emissions from existing homes is recognised as a particular challenge; domestic properties account for 30% of energy use and around 19% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, yet less than 7% of homes are owned by local authorities and over 80% are privately owned by either owner occupiers or private landlords.

A recent parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee Report identifies that over 10 million owner occupied homes and over three million private rented homes in England will need upgrading to a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C rating by 2035 to hit Government targets. Many of these 13 million owners are unaware that their involvement is needed and will need financial support and advice to upgrade and retrofit their homes. This challenge for local authorities, at a time of unprecedented financial and staffing pressures, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic is significant.

Our aspiration will be to support emerging central government assistance programmes that help to tackle those residents living in fuel poverty and reaching the national target of ensuring as many homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of band C by 2035. We will also where possible support schemes that offer residents group buying opportunities for the installation of domestic clean renewable energy systems.

The Council will promote regulation and enforcement of the minimum standards of energy efficiency now required nationally in the domestic private rental market. We will work in partnership with suitable providers and the Greater South Eastern Energy Hub to promote and support the delivery of government funding schemes to homeowners, tenants and landlords that target energy efficiency fabric improvements in dwellings.

## **2.5 Empty homes**

Empty homes are recognised as a wasted resource. Properties that are left unoccupied can fall into disrepair and blight local neighbourhoods. Bringing empty properties back into use can benefit individual owners, potential occupiers, businesses and the wider community.

The Council provides advice and guidance for owners of homes that have been empty for 6 months or more, to help find the best ways to bring that property back into use.

As of July 2021, there were 497 empty properties across the borough. We will continue to work with private owners and KCC's No Use Empty Initiative to help bring long-term empty properties back into use.

## **2.6 Housing Adaptations**

Enabling people to be able to live out their lives in their homes is a national and local policy objective. This can only be achieved if the home is adapted to enable a good quality of life to be enjoyed. The Council has made innovative use of the Better Care Fund to provide for a range of services to be delivered.

Working closely with Kent County Council, our ability to deliver Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs) in a more efficient and effective way has improved the experience for clients. However, we know that the current regulatory framework could be improved, and we will continue to engage with Government departments to lobby for and add to the process of reform.

In the meantime, we will continue to fund the additional Occupational Therapist post that is situated within the Council's Housing & Health Team and enabled over 440 DFGs to be delivered over the lifetime of the previous Housing Strategy.

The Helping You Home scheme provides a valuable link between those in hospital who are ready to be discharged and their homeward journey. During 2020/21 496 referrals were successfully dealt with, despite the challenge that the pandemic brought. Assistance ranged from helping homeless individuals, over 50 properties assisted with clearance, 28 Lifelines installed and providing 135 key-safes to enable care to be delivered to vulnerable households.

### **Priority 3: Prevent homelessness and enable vulnerable people to access appropriate housing and support**

The Council adopted a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy in 2019, with the aim of breaking the cycle of homelessness. The Strategy's priorities are:

- Homeless Prevention
- Provide Accommodation
- Support Vulnerable People and Households
- Work specifically to target and alleviate rough sleeping within the Borough

### 3.1 Homelessness

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018 placed new duties on local authorities to act to prevent homelessness where households are threatened with homelessness. The Council were early adopters of the prevention agenda, recognising it is better to prevent homelessness occurring than to deal with the impacts of homelessness.

Homelessness prevention remains a key ambition for the Council. As well as providing high quality advice and support and personalised housing plans for people who are potentially homeless, we are investing in the use of analytics to support us in achieving better outcomes for individuals. OneView, our financial exclusion predictive analytics model, aims to drive earlier intervention by assessing and monitoring risk levels, specifically looking at where rent arrears are likely to escalate and contribute to risk.

The Council will make best use of data analytics to help identify those most at risk of presenting as homeless and to understand the most effective early interventions.

#### **Case Study - OneView analytics model**

In partnership with EY and Xantura we pioneered a new approach to tackling homelessness by designing and implementing OneView – an innovative data and analytics tool that brings together data from different service areas to provide a more effective and secure way to identify those at risk of future homelessness.

OneView brings together our data with that of partner organisations, including Kent County Council and Golding Homes, to present a ‘single view’ of a household, enabling frontline officers to develop a holistic understanding of a household’s situation and empowering them to decide the best actions for vulnerable residents. OneView generates ‘at risk’ alerts to proactively notify frontline officers up to 6 months before a household is at risk of becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness, enabling proactive intervention before crisis.

The number of people seeking housing advice during 2020/21 was higher than the previous year, driven by the hardship created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The number of people needing to go on to make a homelessness application was lower in 2020/21 than the previous year, although 27% of households on the Housing Register as of August 2021 are either owed a homelessness prevention, relief or main housing duty. Of these, the majority (63%) are single people with an average age of 36.

These figures reflect the fact that the main reason for people being threatened with homelessness in 2020/21 was family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate them. This has consistently been the main reason for the past 3 years, but was exacerbated in 2020/21 due to the pandemic, with families nervous about hosting people who do not normally live in their home. The Council is developing an

exit strategy to help the people impacted in this way to move from temporary accommodation into more settled housing.

The moratorium on possession proceedings during most of 2020, for both the private and social housing sectors, naturally reduced the number of cases whose homelessness was due to their tenancy ending. However, this provision was temporary and the Courts are now working through the outstanding cases in order of priority. The Council anticipates and is preparing for an increase in homeless applications as this backlog is processed.

### **3.2 Rough sleeping**

Rough sleeping impacts on both the individuals who are rough sleeping and the wider community. Street homelessness has a huge detrimental impact on health and life expectancy, with homeless men and women living 31 and 38 fewer years respectively than average. Rough sleepers often present with complex and challenging needs, including poor mental health, substance misuse issues, lack of support, financial exclusion and antisocial behaviour.

Until recently, rough sleeping across Maidstone had risen rapidly, in line with national trends. Our street count in September 2018 recorded 48 rough sleepers. We have achieved huge success through our Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), funded through central Government, reducing our rough sleeping numbers down to single figures. We have removed the need for a winter shelter and a day centre – as the demand is so low.

Rough sleepers require a range of coordinated and compassionate interventions including stable accommodation, health and clinical input and more generic support. Our approach through RSI 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 rough sleeping in the district. This has included securing homes for ten entrenched rough sleepers through our Housing First partnership and securing longer-term and settled accommodation for a further 255 rough sleepers.

#### **Case Study – Housing First**

In partnership with Porchlight and Golding Homes, the Council has sought to find housing for a number of long-term rough sleepers. Housing First is a specific approach, which uses independent, stable housing as a platform to enable individuals with multiple and complex needs to begin recovery and move away from homelessness. Alongside housing, intensive, flexible and person-centred support is provided.

Housing First differs from other supported housing models, as individuals are not required to prove that they are ready for independent housing. No conditions are placed on them, other than a willingness to maintain a tenancy agreement, and Housing First is designed to provide long-term, open-ended support for their on-going needs.

The Council has successfully bid for further funding from the Rough Sleeping Initiative. We will use this to continue to fund our successful Outreach Service and secure

positive holistic outcomes for rough sleepers. We will look at developing an effective strategy to bring homelessness and social value together to end the cycle of homelessness. Particularly, how we can support people to access positive social networks including into work, education, or training.

### **3.3 Access to housing**

Sometimes we are unable to prevent households from becoming homeless and have to look for alternative solutions, which can involve placing people into temporary accommodation whilst we support them to find them a more settled place to live. In recent years, the Council has been heavily reliant on costly nightly paid accommodation, which is often unsuitable, particularly for families and has been a drain on our financial resources.

To increase the availability of good quality temporary accommodation and reduce the financial burden to the Council, over the last three years we have embarked on a programme of buying properties to use as temporary accommodation. To date we own 85 properties, including 45 houses suitable for families and 35 units of supported accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.

The Council will continue to explore options for increasing the level of suitable temporary accommodation within the Borough.

It is the Council's longer-term ambition that as we alleviate homelessness in the Borough, the need for temporary accommodation will reduce and the properties that we currently use for this can be transferred to Maidstone Property Holdings to provide more homes within the private rented sector.

Temporary accommodation is only part of the solution. The key to breaking the cycle of homelessness is to ensure a suitable flow of homes for people in temporary accommodation to move into. This can be particularly challenging where there are complex needs and/or a history of rent arrears, with the latter often a barrier to households being accepted into social housing.

Through initiatives such as our Homefinder Scheme, we are working to incentivise private sector landlords to house homeless households. Whilst we have had some successes, many private landlords are reluctant to house tenants on benefits, particularly those in receipt of Universal Credit. Our own market rent housing owned through Maidstone Property Holdings can help to bridge some of that gap.

The Council will continue to work with both private landlords and Registered Providers to secure appropriate settled homes for households living in temporary accommodation.

### **3.4 Access to support**

Many homeless households are often vulnerable and have complex needs that require additional support. Providing this support can help households to

sustain their tenancies and avoid becoming homeless again; thus, breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Traditionally Maidstone funded directly, or through agencies such as Homes England, access to local supported housing and support resources. However, due to commissioning changes at the County-level, there is now significant uncertainty around resources for key vulnerable groups including young people and ex-offenders.

The Council will continue to work with and provide direct support and/or advice to vulnerable people, with a particular focus on those being discharged from hospital, those experiencing domestic abuse and those leaving prison. We will directly invest in the provision of holistic support and accommodation services for vulnerable people, such as through our Trinity project.

#### **Case Study – Trinity**

The Council have purchased Trinity in Maidstone, previously used to provide services to young people as Trinity Foyer, and are converting it to provide a multi-use communal community space.

When complete, the building will provide vulnerable households with access to a range of support within one building. Help and advice will be available not just for those who are homeless, but also those on the edge of the job market, living in temporary accommodation or with other social support needs.

It will also provide access to accommodation for homeless households, both temporary and settled accommodation.

The Council's Outreach Team and other sections of the Housing Service will also be based there and it will have onsite management and an overnight concierge service.

The Council will continue to lobby government for a change in funding arrangements to the existing scheme (where funding is provided to the upper-tier authority in two-tier areas but remains un-ring fenced), to enable it to be used 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.

#### **Implementation and monitoring**

We will develop a clear, focused five-year action plan to ensure that we can deliver against the four strategic priorities set out in this Housing Strategy. We will monitor progress against the action plan and report this to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on an annual basis.

## Housing Strategy 2016-20 Action Plan Progress

### Priority 1: Enable and support the delivery of quality homes across the housing market to develop sustainable communities

#### Outcomes – What we plan to achieve

- a) Enable the delivery of homes as identified in the emerging Local Plan; and has an appropriate policy framework in place that delivers an appropriate mix, tenure and range of housing to meet identified need.
- b) Deliver a mix of homes of different types, tenure and size, via direct provision and in partnership with private developers, housing associations and other key partners, which meet the needs of the local population.
- c) Deliver new affordable homes that are designed to a high standard, energy efficient, accessible and respond to people’s changing needs.
- d) Maximise housing investment opportunities by seeking innovative funding and delivery options to support housing delivery within Maidstone.

#### Actions – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes

Outcomes	What we plan to do	Key Partners	Target	Comments
1b	Create a Local Housing Company to build/acquire new affordable and private homes to meet the commercial and housing	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Property and Procurement, MBC Legal & Finance Consultants, Housing	April 2018	Maidstone Property Holdings Ltd has been established. To date 89 units of accommodation have been provided across five new sites, including two significant regeneration projects at Union Street and Brunswick Street.

MBC Draft Housing Strategy – version for Maidstone

	objectives of the Council.	Developers, MBC Planning, Landowners, Homes & Communities Agency		Several houses previously held within the MBC's general fund (former parks and open spaces properties) are gradually being moved to MPH to manage.
1a/b/c/d	Ensure the emerging Local Plan provides an appropriate policy framework for affordable housing, including the production of an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Spatial Planning Policy, Housing Developers, Registered Providers, Homes & Communities Agency	April 2017	The Affordable and Local Needs Housing SPD was adopted in July 2020. Liaison between MBC's Housing Service and Planning Department is ongoing to ensure cohesion during the review of the Local Plan.
1a/b/c	Promote home ownership products e.g. Help to Buy, Starter Homes, and Shared Ownership in Maidstone.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Landowners, Housing Developers, MBC Planning	Review annually	On going
1a/b/c	Establish a register to gather evidence of demand for self and custom build within Maidstone and work with planning to identify serviced plots of land to meet this demand.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Landowners, Housing Developers, MBC Planning	May 2016	The register of interest has been implemented and is managed by the Spatial Planning Team.

1b	Monitor and respond to the changing social housing market, including: Impact of the 1% annual reduction in social rents over the next 4 years; Impact of the affordable rent regime on affordability; Impact of the Allocation Scheme to ensure social housing is being allocated effectively and fairly.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Housing Developers, Registered Providers, Homes & Communities Agency, MBC Benefits	Review annually	On going
1a/b	Enable the delivery of new affordable housing, particularly 1 and 2 bedroom homes to meet the identified need.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Planning, Housing Developers, Registered Providers	Review annually	Over 1,400 new affordable homes were delivered between April 2016 and March 2021.
1d	Explore opportunities for funding investment with a range of partners including the Local Enterprise Partnership, Homes & Communities Agency, institutional investors that will contribute towards the delivery of	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Landowners, Housing Developers, Registered Providers, Homes & Communities Agency, DCLG, LGA, LEP	Review annually	This has been explored and MBC is committed to developing and managing a portfolio of up to 200 units of accommodation to be let on secure tenancies. Maidstone Property Holding Ltd was established to provide long-term good quality private rented accommodation managed to a high standard.

	housing across the market.			
1b/c	Consider on a site by site basis joint venture and partnership models to share expertise, income, resources and risk.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Property and Procurement, MBC Legal, Registered Providers, Housing Developers, Landowners, External Contractors / Consultants, Kent Housing Group, DCLG, LEP, KCC	Review annually	A new Housing Development Team has been established within the Regeneration & Economic Development division to promote this action. This has enabled three sites to come forward on brownfield land within the Town Centre.
1a/b	Work with planning, the local and Gypsy Traveller and travelling communities to identify potential housing sites to meet identified need.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Planning, Gypsy and Traveller Community, Parish Councils, Kent County Council	Review annually	A report is expected to be provided to the Communities, Housing & Environment Committee before the end of 2021 providing a needs analysis and options for meeting this requirement.
1b/c	Bring forward Brunswick Street car park to deliver a quality housing scheme to meet housing and commercial objectives	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Property and Procurement, MBC Legal, MBC Planning, Housing Developers, External contractors/consultan	September 2018	Completed. Project handed over in May 2021 and all flats occupied by July 2021.

		ts, Registered Providers, Landowners.		
1a/b/c	Continue to support Parish Councils in delivering local needs housing where this has been proven necessary.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Parish Councils, MBC Spatial Planning Policy, Action for Communities in Rural Kent	Review annually	On going
1a/b/c/d	Contribute to the Local Government Associations Housing Commission on exploring new routes to housebuilding and seek good practice for delivery in Maidstone.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Housing Developers, MBC Planning, Landowners, Registered Providers, KCC, LGA	September 2016	See comment above re Housing Development Team.
1a/b/c	Promote the development of good quality homes that are energy efficient, meet the minimum guideline space standards and embrace the	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Housing Developers, MBC Planning, Registered Providers	Review annually.	On going

	concept of Lifetime Homes			
--	---------------------------	--	--	--

**Priority 2: Ensure that existing housing in the Maidstone Borough is safe, desirable and promotes good health and wellbeing**

**Outcomes – What we plan to achieve**

- a) To raise housing quality and standards across all tenures and improve the condition of existing homes to maximise health and wellbeing outcomes for all.
- b) To improve health outcomes for residents by reducing health inequality to ensure a healthy standard of living for all.
- c) Promote ways for residents to improve their health and wellbeing by tackling fuel poverty, energy efficiency advice and managing domestic bills.
- d) Bring empty homes back into use in order to increase the housing options available for local residents.

**Actions – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Comments</b>
2a	Improve the condition and supply of accommodation within the private rental sector by engaging with landlords to support good management and take appropriate enforcement action where necessary.	National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum, Landlords, Homeowners, MBC Housing & Health Team	Review annually	<p>We continue to work with nightly paid landlords to drive up standards. There is a TA benchmark that is set with providers and reviewed regularly.</p> <p>Work is underway with our Procurement Team to formalise the procurement and management of nightly paid providers.</p> <p>The Housing &amp; Health team actively engages with the private rented sector</p>

				<p>using housing assistance scheme, HMO licensing and where necessary enforcement actions to improve the condition and management of homes in the private sector.</p> <p>Advice provided to empty homeowners to assist returning them back into use. Housing enforcement policy updated in 2021 to reflect new regulations imposed on private landlords. We continue to support our local Landlord Forum.</p>
2a/b/c	Assist with delivery of the Health Inequalities Action Plan	<p>Maidstone Health and Well-Being Group, MBC, KCC Children’s Centres, West Kent NHS Trust – Midwives and Health visitors, West Kent CCG – Commissioners and GPs KCHT Registered Providers, Schools, Age UK, Youth Providers.</p>	Review annually	<p>The Health inequalities action plan no longer exists as a standalone document but now straddles all the priorities of the strategic plan. To support this objective the standard Committee report template includes a mandatory field for the author to consider and respond to health &amp; wellbeing matters.</p> <p>The development of collaborative working agreements have been devised to support the health intervention workstream within specific departments including housing and planning.</p>
2a	Review key strategic documents to ensure they remain relevant to today’s market, including: The Council’s	MBC Planning, MBC Housing, Registered Providers, Housing Developers, Private Landlords	September 2016 April 2016	The Housing Standards Enforcement policy was reviewed and endorsed for sign off at CHE in May 2021.

	Tenancy Strategy; Council's Housing Assistance Policy; The Council's Housing Standards Enforcement Policy.		March 2017	The Housing Assistance policy is to be refreshed in the late Autumn of 2021
2a/b/c	Address the needs of the ageing population, in particular the 85+ age group, including support needs such as adapting properties, provision of care in the home, providing specialist accommodation and care/nursing home provision.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Health team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Private Landlords, Registered Providers, KCC	Review annually	The DFG and the Helping you Home scheme work to ensure those most vulnerable with complex needs, can remain in their homes through adaptations. The Helping You Home scheme supports residents being discharged home from hospital and GP surgeries to prevent a hospital admission.  MBC fund an Occupational Therapist to work solely on the DFG programme in order to expedite the process and meet the needs of the individual.
2a	Promote the review of the Disabled Facilities Grant to provide an efficient service that assists disabled residents to remain in their home.	KCC, MBC Housing and Health Team, Registered Providers, Private Sector Landlords, Homeowners	Review annually	The Government commissioned an independent review of the DFG in 2018 The review made a series of recommendations and Government is considering the findings.
2b/c	Initiate projects such as the Roseholme Healthy Homes	MBC Housing & Inclusion Team, MBC Housing & Health	March 2017	This project was not taken forward as a standalone piece of work but has been

	Pilot, which will improve the health and well-being of residents within the Borough.	Team, Maidstone Health and well-being group, KCC, External businesses, Voluntary groups		incorporated into the Shepway Task Force terms of reference.
2b	Work with NHS Health trainers to support residents to achieve healthier lifestyle choices with issues such as Healthy eating, quitting smoking, exercise and emotional well-being.	Kent Community Health (NHS Health Trainers), MBC Housing & Health Team , GP's, Registered Providers, CAB	Review annually	<p>We have an in-house One You service which is funded through our Public Health allocation from KCC. This programme supports individuals to try and adjust to a healthier lifestyle.</p> <p>One You is a Kent wide approach to healthy lifestyle and behaviour change and within Maidstone we have a single point of access into the service via Kent Community Health Foundation Trust.</p>
2a/d	Work with owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back in to use	National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum, Landlords, Homeowners, MBC Housing & Health Team	14 every quarter. Review annually.	We continue to work with owners of long- term empty homes to return them into use. The number of properties brought back into use continues to be recorded.
2c	Promoting and delivering the affordable warmth strategy	MBC Housing & Health Team, Registered Providers, Home Owners, Landlords, Landlords Forum	Review annually	<p>The Warm Homes scheme partnership project between KCC and district councils has been promoted through our website helping residents to fund insulation measures in their homes.</p> <p>The affordable warmth strategy will require revisiting in the light of new</p>

				<p>national financial assistance schemes coming to the market.</p> <p>Recent regulatory changes (MEES) introduced in the domestic private rented sector will have an impact in the improvement/removal of low energy performance dwellings in the domestic property rental market. In 2021 the Government has introduced a new definition of fuel poverty which aligns with the national financial assistance schemes targeting houses that have the worst energy efficiency ratings occupied by residents on lower incomes.</p>
--	--	--	--	--

**Priority 3: Prevent Homelessness, Secure Provision of Appropriate Accommodation for Homeless Households and Supporting Vulnerable People**

**Outcomes – What we plan to achieve**

- a) Prevent and relieve homelessness amongst local residents who are at risk of homelessness by offering timely, expert advice that helps to prevent their homelessness.
- b) Increase the availability of suitable accommodation for homeless households via direct provision and the use of the private rented sector, to reduce temporary accommodation costs, length of stay and reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation.
- c) Support independent living and reduce risk of repeat homelessness for vulnerable residents by offering a range of housing options, advice and support to maintain or improve their health and well-being.

Actions – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Comments</b>
3a/b/c	Deliver our existing Homelessness Strategy Action Plan	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Private Landlords, Registered Providers, Voluntary Groups, CAB, KCC Social Services, Schools, Supported Housing Providers	By March 2020	<p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was updated in 2019 and is a live document until 2024. This document as four key priorities Prevention, Accommodation, Supporting Vulnerable People and Rough Sleepers. The strategy was signed off by CHE in 2020.</p> <p>The updated action plan attached is kept under review.</p>
3b	To expand on the success of Aylesbury House by investing in the acquisition/purchase of additional temporary accommodation within Maidstone to house homeless and vulnerable households.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Homes & Communities Agency, DCLG, Land owners, Property owners, Private institutional investors, Agents	December 2016	<p>This has been a significant success. We now have 85 units of TA. A mixture of houses, flats and shared sites (HMOs). This has enabled a better standard of accommodation and support to residents, with all units located within the Maidstone district boundary.</p> <p>Through our rough sleeper specific workstream we developed 35 units of supported accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. This resource provides support that operates alongside the</p>

				<p>'accommodation to support resettlement'.</p> <p>More recently MBC has purchased Trinity Place, which will be used as accommodation for rough sleepers, temporary accommodation and eventually provide secure tenancies through the Housing Register. This project will also offer education, training and employment opportunities and our aspiration is to become a community-based asset for the whole of the district, as well as those resident in Trinity Place.</p>
3c	<p>Strengthen partnership working at local, county and national level and understanding of assistance and options available to homeless and vulnerable households.</p>	<p>MBC Housing &amp; Inclusion team, KCC, DCLG, KHOG, CAB, Voluntary groups, Registered Providers</p>	<p>Review annually</p>	<p>Whilst the MBC RSI services predates the KCC commissioned Homelessness Connect service, our officers work with colleagues from partner agencies to support homeless individuals.</p> <p>Through the RSI funding we have managed, with great success, to develop our own supported accommodation and support service for vulnerable homeless people, who would not normally be accommodated through Part 7 of the Housing Act.</p> <p>Our Housing Advice Manager is currently the Chair of KHOG and this</p>

				<p>affords us the ability to have close working relationships with both district and county colleagues to mobilise protocols and working agreements. This also enables us to have a thorough understanding of new services being developed etc.</p> <p>KCC commissioners regularly attend KHOG and work collaboratively with the group with reviewing commissioning decisions.</p> <p>MBC launched the Maidstone Homelessness Prevention Forum in October 2019 as a multi-agency forum, bringing together partners to shared information and strengthen partnership working to prevent and relieve homelessness.</p>
3a	Continue to support private sector landlords and tenants to maintain their tenancies by offering pre-tenancy training.	Private Sector Landlords, Registered Providers, Tenants, MBC Housing & Inclusion team	Ongoing monthly	Pre-Tenancy training has been provided in partnership with Golding Homes. The pre-tenancy training was being delivered monthly at Maidstone House, with invites being sent by Golding Homes to households placed into temporary accommodation by MBC, before being moved in 2019 to Golding Homes' new offices

				<p>In 2018 the Golding Homes also launched online E-learning pre-tenancy training with applicants to complete as part of the offer process for housing allocations.</p> <p>The online E-learning pre-tenancy training is also offered out to applicants seeking housing assistance within their Personalised Housing Plans.</p> <p>Face-to-face pre-tenancy training was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>
3a/c	<p>Provide specialist targeted information and advice that will enable people to improve their own housing and health circumstances, prevent homelessness and make best use of resources.</p>	<p>MBC Housing &amp; Inclusion team, MBC Housing &amp; Health team, MBC Housing &amp; Enabling Team, CAB, KCC, NHS Health trainers</p>	<p>Ongoing. Review annually.</p>	<p>Information is regularly updated on our website and since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act we have switched our emphasis to preventing homelessness. This is reflected through the PHP documentation and monitored through various key performance indicators.</p> <p>Tailored advice is provided on the MBC website, under the housing pages, to specific client groups, in compliance with the HRA.</p> <p>Clients are signposted to the One You Service via Housing Advice Letters.</p>

				<p>MBC is working alongside the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) to look at health inequalities in Shepway and Park Wood to understand the inequalities that exist and how partners can work together to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents.</p> <p>Wider signposting advice given by Housing &amp; Health Officers to customers requiring assistance.</p>
3a /c	<p>Promote closer co-operation with the Revenues and Benefits and DHP Team to assist customers in difficulty that require further support to help solve their financial issues.</p>	<p>MBC Housing and Inclusion Team, Registered Providers MBC Benefits, CAB</p>	<p>December 2016</p>	<p>Regular meeting between Housing and Revenues &amp; Benefits teams were occurring until approximately 2017 when these ceased, as cooperation had improved. Discussions are taking place to consider the need for recommencing these.</p> <p>The Housing service works closely with the DHP team discussing and supporting requests; and a referral mechanism is in place to enable the Revs &amp; Bens Team to notify the Housing Service of potentially homeless households.</p> <p>The DHP team remains within the R&amp;B Team. A feasibility study is proposed to</p>

				consider where the allocation and decision making of DHP’s best resides.
3a/c	Support affected households to manage welfare reform changes to the benefit system.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Benefits, Registered Providers, CAB, Private Landlords	Ongoing. Review annually	<p>Following the extension of the Benefit Cap in November 2016, a project was undertaken to write to those households and individuals who were subject to the new cap offering advice and assistance.</p> <p>It is proposed to build on the learning from this initiative on a quarterly basis, with discussion already undertaken with Revs and Bens Team Manager and DWP.</p> <p>We have a financial inclusion and rent officer, who offers in-depth financial support to all our TA customers and those RS clients in supported housing. The Officer also leads on work of maximising income and support households to make sustainable changes to their budgets to ensure their accommodation is protected.</p> <p>Our predictive analytics programme (in partnership with EY Xantura) is funded from the Homeless Prevention Grant – tracks households from across the district who may be at risk of homelessness. This enables targeted</p>

				intervention at a very early stage to offer support and resources that can assist the household with financial and other difficulties that they may be experiencing.
3c	Ensure homeless households have access to volunteering, training and employment opportunities	Job Centre Plus, Voluntary groups, MBC Housing & Inclusion team, CAB	Ongoing. Review annually	<p>The accommodation team continues to work with residents to help with improving their quality of life via employment and training. This work is not without its challenges and has been particularly impacted by the Covid19 pandemic.</p> <p>A pilot project was trialled with the DWP in 2019 for job seeking clients, who were ready for work and with a housing issue, to be booked in for enhanced appointments with Work Coaches, however, this was discontinued due to a low take up.</p> <p>With Trinity Place becoming ready in late 2021, we expect to broaden our reach in terms of employment and training opportunities.</p>
3b	Secure shared housing for under-35s single homeless people.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Enabling team, Private Sector Landlords, Agents	December 2016	This has been completed and many of those who were accommodated via our RSI team are placed into our own shared supported accommodation. We also work closely with other providers

				<p>such as Riverside and Pathways to Independence to help young people access supported accommodation.</p> <p>During the Covid19 “Everyone In” directive, we experienced a significant increase in the number of younger, single (mainly) men who were precariously accommodated and whose housing arrangements broke down. This demonstrates there is still a challenge to finding e accommodation that is affordable for those aged under 35.</p>
3b	Expand the Homefinder incentive scheme to more landlords within Maidstone and neighbouring boroughs	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, Private Landlords, National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum, Agents	December 2016	<p>The Homefinder Scheme was developed following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Scheme was amended to introduce a new flexible cash incentive to landlords for Prevention and Relief cases. A Guaranteed Rent element of the scheme was developed, but not trialled as this was superseded by the newer iteration of the Scheme.</p> <p>The Homefinder Scheme was further developed in 2020 following MBC being awarded funding from the MHCLG PRS Access Scheme Fund, to launch a Landlord and Tenant Insurance</p>

				<p>Scheme, working in partnership with Help2Rent.</p> <p>The new Help2Rent Landlord and Tenant Insurance Scheme has enabled a move away from the Homefinder Bond, as the insurance provides a landlord with far greater protection and cover.</p> <p>The introduction of the scheme coincided with a move away from promoting cash incentives to landlords, due to concerns that the tenancies being created were not sustainable, as landlords were re-approaching at end of the AST fixed term seeking to increase their tenants rent and/or asking for additional incentive payments.</p>
3c	Work with supported housing providers to understand the potential impact of the Housing Benefit cap to supported accommodation tenants and how best to address it.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Housing & Inclusion Team, Supported Housing Providers, KCC Accommodation Solutions Team.	March 2017	The benefit cap has not impacted supported housing as it is exempt from HB regulations. Also, the one bedroom rate exemptions have been expanded so more individuals can access a greater HB award than previously.