



# Maidstone Borough Council

## Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2024 - 2029

*Breaking the cycle of homelessness*

[www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk)

# Foreword - Chair of Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) has always prided itself on making housing a clear priority and understands the fundamental role that good housing has in contributing to lifetime opportunities for so many people.

Homelessness, in all its forms, has the potential to have a significant and negative impact on the lives of individuals and families. For those reasons, Maidstone Borough Council supported the principles that motivated Parliament to enact the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).

The statute represents a major change in housing legislation and rather than waiting for April 2019 before responding to the requirements, Maidstone Borough Council took the decision to implement changes to our service delivery and the resources available in 2018. This early adoption of the new statute provided us with valuable experience that has been put into good practice by the Council and colleagues working alongside in the voluntary sector.

Whilst we do not underestimate the challenge that the current housing market presents, the Council does believe that it is well placed and determined to provide residents with the best possible solutions that help prevent homelessness wherever possible.



- Cllr Lottie Parfitt-Reid

# 1. Introduction

**Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) continues its commitment to providing a robust and effective Housing and Homelessness Service to the local community. The provision of these services is a key priority for the Council and is reflected through the Strategic Plan (under Homes and Communities banner, with the commitment to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping by 2045).**

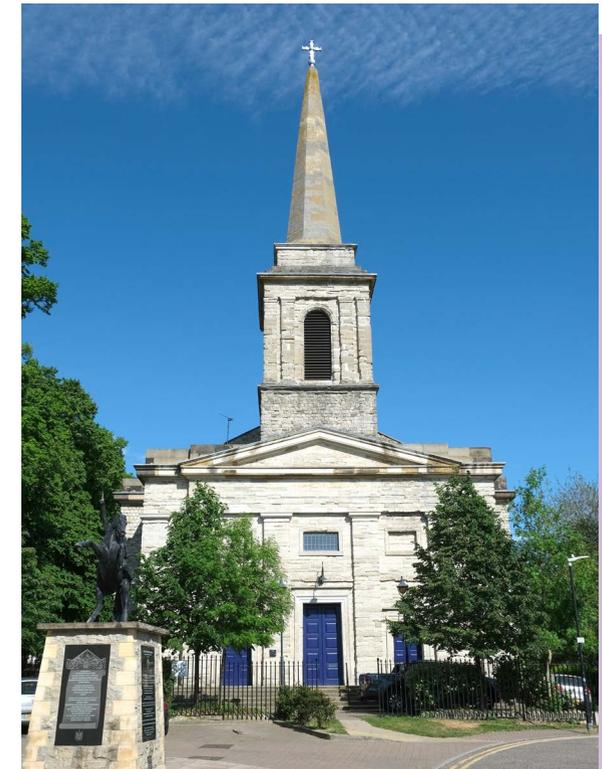
Since 2002, local authorities have been required to publish a homelessness strategy outlining their intentions and vision for supporting those who face homelessness. In 2018, the Government published a National Rough Sleeping Strategy which obligated local authorities to include a special focus on rough sleeping. This is the second MBC combined Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The preceding years have presented many challenges for the Council as a local housing authority these include the pandemic which hugely altered the way services could be delivered, and how staff worked. In addition, world events such as the war in Ukraine and the turmoil of withdrawing from Afghanistan,

along with the current cost of living crisis and associated demand for housing has caused homelessness to surge. All of these have presented extreme challenges to the MBC Housing and Homeless Teams. However, alongside the challenges we have had numerous opportunities to tailor the way we work and provide services to the local community.

Even though the recent years have been challenging, there are many areas to be celebrated for the borough of Maidstone including the acquisition and purchase of Trinity our Community Hub. A key landmark in Maidstone, Trinity offers a direct front-door service for all housing and homelessness issues; the commitment to return the Council to being a stock holding authority with the development of a 1,000 affordable homes; the continued purchase of temporary accommodation (TA) which enables the Council to provide good quality TA that is financially viable; the reduction in the street population activity including rough sleeping and the increase in support provision across the borough.

The new and emerging challenges are matters that will be addressed throughout this Strategy. However, we cannot work in isolation and we will have a special focus on partnerships to ensure a fully rounded and holistic approach is taken to this very challenging situation.



Trinity, Maidstone

## Our four key priorities:

In light of the new Strategy, MBC undertook a six week public consultation in 2023. This was in relation to the previous Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024, and the response strongly supported continuing our four key priorities:

This document sets out the MBC vision for our community over the coming five years, and how this complements the Council's Strategic Plan and Housing Strategy which was endorsed by the Council in 2023.

As part of the Conclusion of this document we aim to attach the action plan on how we will achieve these strategic objectives.

- 1 Homeless Prevention
- 2 Provide accommodation
- 3 Support vulnerable people and households
- 4 Work specifically to target and alleviate rough sleeping within the borough



The progress of the strategy will be monitored by the Council and reported regularly to the Cabinet Member responsible for Housing and Health and the relevant Policy Advisory Committee.

## 2. National Context

### To include:

- **National statistics about the increase in homelessness**
- **Latest government position on homelessness and rough sleeping**
- **National influences such as the Asylum Dispersal Programme**
- **Renters Reform Bill**

# 3. Review of Homelessness Strategy

As part of the development of the new MBC Homeless Strategy we have undertaken a review of the previous document reflecting back over five years - since 2019. This review can be found on the Council's website: [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk)

## 3.1.Key findings

During the course of the previous Homelessness Strategy (2019-2024), there have been a significant increase in the levels of homelessness across the borough. This includes the number of people approaching MBC housing advice service asking for support and guidance.

Financial Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (up to end of Jan 24)
New homeless cases approaching	2267	2288	2201	2230	2568	2915
Homeless Applications made	1200	1354	1148	1104	1287	988

There has been a large increase in the number of households accessing temporary accommodation (TA), in Maidstone; this has seen a sharp rise from 113 in March 2019, to 283 in December 2023; of these 244 are placed under a Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) S.189 or 193 duty and the remaining 39 under a discretionary power to accommodate (these households are those most at risk of rough sleeping).

Alongside the general increases in demand, Council services have felt the consequence of the Domestic Abuse Act 2020 which sought to make it easier for victims to seek housing and support. However, this has again increased the use of TA as demonstrated in the table below:

Financial Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (up to Jan 24)
DA cases in TA	33(12%)	34 (23%)	64 (29%)	83 (27%)	50 (25%)
Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	47 (18%)	34 (23%)	43 (30%)	52 (17%)	37 (19%)
End of private rented tenancy – assured shorthold tenancy	36 (14%)	11 (7%)	22 (10%)	36 (12%)	36 (18%)
Total of all placements in TA	116	79	129	171	123
<b>Total Placements</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>198</b>

As per our previous review, family and friends who are no longer able or willing to accommodate and the ending of private rented tenancies are also significant factors for households having to enter the temporary accommodation provision. However, during the pandemic we saw the end of private rented tenancy significantly reduce and the increase came from family and friends no longer willing to accommodate. This supports our own knowledge of how the market and demand changed in line with the Government's call for "Everyone In" during Covid 19. The ending of the moratorium on possession orders being granted in 2022/2023, (after the pandemic), has also seen a rise in the number of households losing their accommodation through landlords seeking 'no fault evictions.'



### 3. Review of Homelessness Strategy

The table below illustrates the breakdown of the high-level demographics of the homeless applicants since 2019. It clearly shows the large number of single and childless couples approaching MBC services requiring one bedroom accommodation. (This will form part of the Strategy in future sections.) This is reflected in the TA statistics which illustrate up to 50% of people needing a one-bedroom property.

Financial Year Total applicants	2019-20 1327	2020-21 1175	2021-22 1150	2022-23 1383
Males	639	561	556	670
Females	682	608	592	701
Singles/childless couples	853 (64%)	769 (65%)	722 (62%)	852 (61%)
Households with children	474 (34%)	406 (35%)	428 (38%)	531 (39%)

Over the last four years the diversity of those approaching MBC has increased, whilst the data confirm that the percentage of applicants of white origin has decreased from 84% to 74%. (This is not reflective of the borough of Maidstone’s ethnic breakdown with 89% of the local population from the 2021 Census who identified themselves as white.) This change indicates that the non-white populations are overrepresented in homelessness services, and we need to ensure that the Council services investigate and address any inequalities facing those from minority backgrounds.



This has also required the housing department at times, to work in an inclusion manner, ensuring cultural awareness and access language translation services.

One great success of the previous five years is the significant reduction in rough sleepers across Maidstone; in 2018 the street count was 48 and this has reduced through the years and even went down to zero in 2022. However, it did rise slightly to six in Autumn 2023 when the annual statutory street count took part.

# 3. Review of Homelessness Strategy

## Other headline findings of the Strategic Report:

- 1** The total number of households in Maidstone increased by 12.23% from 63,447 to 71,208 between 2011 to 2021 with a calculated local housing need of 1,214 homes per year. In addition, home ownership has decreased, whilst private renting has increased.
- 2** Since 2019 there has been as a steady increase in homeless approaches, which corresponds to the increase of households across the borough. However, between October 2022 - October 2023 the increase has been exponentially high at 44%. It should be noted that this is a common theme across England.
- 3** There's an increasing trend in homelessness cases where someone is a victim of domestic abuse, suggesting a strong link between personal safety and housing stability. Also, the new Domestic Abuse Legislation (which was enacted in 2021), has a very low threshold for a local housing authority (LHA) to provide temporary accommodation and support to those in need.

- 4** Household composition of those approaching the Council is dominated by three groups:
  - i) single males 28%
  - ii) single parents with dependent children (25%)
  - iii) single females (21%)This is strongly aligned with the composition of those in Temporary Accommodation.
- 5** 25% of those approaching MBC services for homeless support are unemployed and 17% are not working due to long term illness. Surprisingly those in fulltime work make up the third largest cohort at 15%. This could suggest that those working in lower paid jobs, are struggling to find affordable accommodation in Maidstone.



## 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 four 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 and supported housing.

#### Between 2023-28 we will place particular importance on:

- Continuing our holistic and innovative approach to reduce rough sleeping in Maidstone
- Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation to reduce cost, whilst working towards long-term housing solutions
- Urgently identify and deliver 1,000 affordable homes to ensure availability of good quality housing that's sustainable in both financial and ecological terms reduce health inequalities in the borough
- Improving the quality of housing through the consistent use of our statutory powers to promote good health and wellbeing

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 and complements the Strategic Plan.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy is underpinned by four further priority areas that have been continued from our 2019-2024 strategy.

During a wider consultation with a range of groups, staff, service users and stakeholders, 94 % of respondents felt these four priorities were still relevant for our borough and communities. Throughout the consultation we sought ideas and feedback and aimed to incorporate these throughout the strategy to give us the greatest chance of meeting the needs of those in our community. This Strategy aims to set out the trajectory for the next five years seeking to eliminate long term homelessness and break the cycle of homelessness in Maidstone.

## 4. Priorities and Objectives

### Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Priorities

**1 To Prevent Homelessness** - we want to stop people from becoming homeless.

#### We will achieve this by...

- Continuing and improving our data analysis One View system - exploring better ways in which to focus on specific characteristics of households more likely to be at risk of homelessness
- Early intervention and prevention support for residents at risk of losing their home offered both from the Trinity Community Hub and within the community itself
- Work in partnership with the private, voluntary and public sectors including health providers ensuring a complete range of support and advice is accessible
- Joined up working with others to ensure we respond to safeguarding and community safety issues promptly
- Explore the use of incentives in order to prevent households becoming homeless

**2 To Provide Accommodation** - to those experiencing or facing homelessness.

#### We will achieve this by...

- Offering affordable accommodation in Maidstone or as close as possible in order to discharge our statutory duties
- Developing our own 1,000 affordable homes to rent on lifetime tenancies and let through the Housing Register
- Working in partnership with housing associations to make the best use of existing resources
- Working with landlords to find more homes through different arrangements including Private Sector Leasing
- Ensuring good standards of property management and conditions within the private rented sector
- Leading by example and developing more housing projects through the Council's own property company and assets
- Ensuring 'needs specific' accommodation is provided in response to increasing demand



## 4. Priorities and Objectives

### Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Priorities

**3** To work alongside **vulnerable people** - support those experiencing the crisis of homelessness to regain their independence and access the support they need.

#### We will achieve this by...

- Offering a low threshold service to support households including families and single people
- Ensuring we maximise our funding opportunities in order to operate to continue our robust support team
- Specific work with domestic abuse survivors linked to the new Kent Domestic Abuse strategy
- Assisting key partners and other agencies in removing barriers to employment through training and education
- Ensuring our hospital discharge programme continues to develop and grow
- Looking to embed primary and mental health care into our daily operations

**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...

- Continuing our effective 'off the street' accommodation pathway for people facing rough sleeping
- Developing a sustainable approach to ensure the continuation of services implemented under the Rough Sleeper Initiative
- Continuing to advocate changes to the wider system including government policy



# 1

## Priority 1 - Prevention

The Council's motivation has always been to prevent homelessness, as this is the best outcome for the household causing less stress and anxiety and reduce the financial burden for MBC. Before the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, when it became a statutory requirement to work with prevention cases, we prioritised and understood the importance of the model with the introduction of the Prevention Officer role and the Single Homeless Case Officer in the mid 2010's.

Over time the prevention demand has grown and all the teams within the MBC housing department have touch points to prevent homelessness; whether it is the Housing Advisors carrying out their duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended); or Homeless Support Officers offering a floating support service to people in their own homes to maintain their tenancy successfully; Helping you Home Hospital Discharge Programme supporting people to return own home and not have to seek alternative accommodation; the Housing Standards Team which ensures decent housing standards are maintained in the private rented market and households don't need to approach the Council for support.

The importance of prevention was also echoed in the consultation for this new strategy in which all groups consulted felt that ranked the highest of the four priorities.

Our successful prevention outcomes over the previous five years demonstrate the importance of this. The table below shows the actual number of households which have been prevented from becoming homeless, avoiding the need for them to come into interim or TA. As well as this being the preferred outcome for the household (reduction of stress and upset), it also has a significant financial benefit for the Council with those households not needing to access temporary accommodation.



Financial Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (up to Dec 23)
Positive prevention outcomes in %	62%	74%	70%	70%	63%
Positive prevention outcomes in household numbers	249	354	341	361	264
Indicative cost saving*	£1,012,500	£1,433,700	£1,385,100	£1,466,100	£1,069,200

\* The indicative cost saving is based on 50% of those positive prevention cases converting to needing interim accommodation based on an average cost of £45 per night for a nightly paid cost for 180 days – which is the average length of stay in temporary accommodation

## Priority 1 - Prevention

In the coming life span of this Strategy, we will be seeking new ways to expand our prevention brief. This will enable us to explore dynamic and innovative ways to prevent homelessness, reducing the trauma of homelessness and cost avoidance to the Council by preventing people needing to access interim or temporary accommodation.

### We will seek to carry out the following measures to support our growth and meet the demand of preventing homelessness:

- 1 We will expand our predicative analytics model to create a broader product with the ability to capture a wider data set providing a greater reach for preventing homelessness and the need to access TA
- 2 We will explore incentives for preventing homelessness including family and friends' evictions via a financial remuneration or other mechanism, reviewing under and over occupancy and align the Discretionary Housing Payments System with the housing teams



- 3 Early intervention and prevention support for residents at risk of losing their home offered both from Trinity Community Hub, and across the community



- 4 Work in partnership with the private, voluntary and public sectors including health providers so that a complete range of support and advice is accessible and ensure those from minorities are not disproportionately affected
- 5 Joined up working with others to ensure we respond to safeguarding and community safety issues promptly
- 6 Housing Service; review the structure to ensure we are getting best value for money and the most effective service delivery

## Priority 1 - Prevention

### Predictive Analytics

During the last five years, our work on the Xantura predicative analytics model has flourished with the first iteration focussing on unmanaged debt and non-payment of essential priority items, such as Council Tax and rent. The model allows for alerts to be generated for early identification and intervention where, through the use of predictive analytics, households most at risk of facing homelessness are identified.

This process has proven the concept and to date of those MBC has engaged with, homelessness was prevented in 98% of cases. For those who approach us directly outside of early intervention, this figure is closer to 70%. For the counterfactuals who we didn't manage to engage with, 76% became homeless.

Our aspiration is to expand this alert service for those in other cohorts, such as domestic abuse, young people and care leavers, those with offending history and those who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

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.

### Incentives

In recent years, we have used the incentive provision within our resources, only to support people accessing accommodation such as the private rented market. We have not used incentives in a planned manner to prevent homelessness nor to support households expanding space within their current home (for example to increase the number of bedrooms).

We are seeking to review these kinds of incentives to see if we can utilise resources in an imaginative way to stem the flow of households into temporary accommodation over the coming months. This would reduce the stress of moving into TA for the households, and the cost burden to the Council.



### Early Intervention

Our prevention model takes various forms. One of the most effective is the early intervention with direct support to those facing homelessness. We operate an open-door policy at Trinity, whereby anyone can attend to seek housing and homeless related support without appointment to have access to various duty officers.

We also have our own Homeless Support Service, which provides a floating support offer to those who need a little extra to maintain their tenancy. This service was formerly known as the Outreach Team and is funded via the Rough Sleeper Initiative in central government. The team works with a diverse range of local people who have complex on-going support needs.

We plan to continue to provide this intense and robust support, as the cost saving is significant in cost avoidance for temporary accommodation. This team is currently funded until March 2025. However, we hope that after that time the funding stream will continue from government.

## Priority 1 - Prevention

### Partnerships

Throughout all our work, we endeavour to have robust and supportive partnerships, to ensure the most successful provision of support is provided in a holistic manner to maintain accommodation and prevent homelessness. These include a wide and diverse range of agencies offering front-line direct access to support, including:

- Primary and mental health provision from clinical providers Kent and Medway Mental Health Partnership Trust and Kent Community Health Care Partnership
- One Stop Shop – domestic abuse victims can get support from a range of support providers and legal and housing experts weekly
- Citizens Advice Bureau - offering debt advice in Trinity every week
- BEAM - access to employment and resettlement support for homeless people
- Community Larders - offering affordable foods for those most affected by the cost-of-living crisis
- Social Care Team - case panels for those shared clients

We intend to continue these partnerships and seek to develop further relationships with other agencies.

### Safeguarding and Community Safety

Since the previous strategy we have developed a new role which coordinates our one Council approach and relevant responses to Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding. This role has enabled us to develop clear policies and procedures on working in the community and with households and individuals who face these challenging circumstances.

In our experience this role, has enabled us to provide a framework to support households facing homelessness who also have other complex needs. This often means that households avoid accessing TA which is a cost saving to the Council. This role will continue for the coming years and aligns with government best-practice advice:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/adult-safeguarding-and-homelessness-experience-informed-practice>

### Housing Service

We will continue to review the resources that we have at our disposal to ensure that our Housing Advice Service and other housing teams remain the most effective at meeting the current flow and demand of homelessness. The changes in demand and needs may mean that the service needs to be nuanced to be more effective as preventing homeless.



# 2

## Priority 2 - Accommodation

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 develop local expertise in low carbon technology.

However, the demand from those facing homelessness including those we are unable to prevent from becoming homeless e.g. those fleeing from domestic abuse or the issuing of a Section 21 "no fault" eviction notice, is still significant and concerning. In these instances, we must seek alternative housing solutions, which can involve placing households into TA whilst we work to secure long term appropriate accommodation.

Since our last strategy we have faced unprecedented demand for all aspects of accommodation, including temporary, supported (with the decommissioning of KCC supported housing), and longer-term affordable housing including the private rented market. Our use of temporary accommodation has increased drastically for those we have a duty to accommodate under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), with numbers increasing by 130% from 113 households accommodated in March 2018, to the recent total of 262 in January 2024. This is not a challenge solely being faced by Maidstone, but also throughout the country with Local Housing Authorities struggling to meet this demand and the budgetary ramifications.

Even with the most robust approach we take to resettling applicants, we still struggle to find enough suitable and affordable accommodation within the borough of Maidstone. At times we may have to place people outside of the borough to meet our duties under the Housing Act. This will be considered in line with relevant case law and the statute and will be reflected in our placement policy.

An area we have continued to expand since the last strategy is the purchase and management of our own temporary accommodation stock, which now stands at approximately 110 units. This ensures as an authority we are not solely reliant on private providers of nightly paid accommodation and that our placed households are in good quality and safe units. Even with our continued programme of purchasing TA units we still cannot meet the demand for temporary accommodation and are working with third party providers. This is a major financial concern for the Council, and as such we are constantly reviewing the TA placement programme to ensure we are effectively managing it.



## Priority 2 - Accommodation

Maidstone has a small amount of subsidized housing (also known as social housing stock), within the borough which makes up approximately 600 lettings every year from those on the Housing Register. As of the 1 January 2024 the demand for social housing was at an all-time high.

Please see table below:

Date	Number on the register
1 Jan 2020	840
1 Jan 2021	949
1 Jan 2022	812
1 Jan 2023	1003
1 Jan 2024	1226

This increase has had an impact on waiting times and the ability for households to move via the register has reduced.

### We will seek to carry out the following measures to support our growth and meet the demand for accommodation by:

- 1 Continuing to grow our own portfolio of accommodation - including temporary, private, and affordable/social rented accommodation
- 2 Developing our own Private Lettings scheme - to meet the demand for housing
- 3 Reviewing our supported housing provision - ensuring this meets the need for housing for those most in need and vulnerable within the community

### Accommodation

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.

Over the coming years, we have ambitious targets to bring online 1,000 affordable and socially rented properties. We will also be seeking to increase the number of private rented stock our property company manage, and the continuous programme of purchasing temporary accommodation.

Whilst we don't anticipate the demand slowing for good quality accommodation, we will be seeking new ways and partnerships to manage those demands which could include:

- 1 Looking for an increase in specialist units for survivors of domestic abuse
- 2 Seeking to build and expand current homes, to meet the bedroom need of that household e.g. roof conversion or extensions
- 3 A modern view on higher density housing such a micro-apartments or POD type accommodation for younger single people struggling to access the housing market

We are also looking to decrease our reliance on nightly paid private TA and grow our own pool of resources with a bigger capital purchase programme underway to meet demand.

## Priority 2 - Accommodation

### Private Sector Leasing Scheme

The above scheme was approved for mobilisation in November 2023, to seek out private landlords. Through this we can offer to manage properties on behalf of landlords and will use these properties to place those with a temporary accommodation need. If this programme is successful, we would look to review and expand the offer to a wider pool of households such as those threatened with homelessness rather than just those in TA.



### Supported Housing

Supported housing is a key intervention for those most vulnerable in our community to ensure adequate housing provision and stability. Housing is a most basic need. If this is not met, the wider ramifications on the community are significant including people living on the streets, associated anti-social behaviour, greater demands on the public purse and the impact on the street scene and business community.

We also need to review the cohorts who require specialist supported housing including survivors of domestic abuse, young people leaving home or care and individuals suffering with mental health conditions.

Prior to the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding in 2018, Maidstone had 48 people sleeping and living on the streets. The impact on the community was significant and business leaders were dissatisfied by our management of those individuals. Since that time with the development of MBC teams and accommodation provision that number has significantly fallen, which can only be a benefit to both the rough sleeper and the community.



# 3

## Priority 3 - Support for Vulnerable People

Whilst housing need and homelessness underpin the core of our work and statutory requirements, it would be short-sighted to look at these in isolation, as so many households facing helplessness and rough sleeping have additional complex needs. If we provide support in a trauma informed approach, or work with partners to do so, tenancy sustainment has a much greater success and reduce the cycle of homelessness and the cost burden on the public purse.

Over the past 20 years, Kent County Council (KCC), as the upper tier Council, has funded a supporting housing scheme and a wide range of services for vulnerable cohorts via the now defunct Supporting People Grant from central government. Due to financial constraints and with the removal of government ring-fenced funding, KCC has all but ceased supported accommodation apart from the provision of Safe Accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Act 2020 which is a statutory requirement.

The decision to decommission essential supported housing services by KCC has left all district Councils in Kent, including Maidstone, with an even greater demand on housing

provision but with no additional funding from central government. This will likely mean the increase in homeless numbers across the county and the rise in rough sleeping. In the future, MBC anticipates that homeless households will cause a greater financial burden on public services including Kent County Council's own social care.

Maidstone has a long history of working in an innovative and proactive manner. Since the announcement of the decommissioning of services by KCC in 2018/9, we have been developing our own supported housing portfolio as well as commencing commissioning partner agencies to deliver required services.

In recent years we have noticed the change in complexity of those approaching MBC for housing and homeless support, many more have additional needs such as complex mental health concerns, fleeing domestic abuse and on-going required support interventions to access and retain accommodation. Even though our statutory duty falls only into the provision of housing, with the reduction of other service provision by other statutory agencies, we have felt the need to expand our remit in order to

respond with a trauma informed approach, to meet this demand and reduce the cycle of homelessness, which has a significant financial burden on the wider public purse including community safety and policing teams.

Through our Community Hub, Trinity, we have developed an effective and immediate response service for those in need, with support staff on site during opening times. Staff are well trained in trauma awareness and safeguarding to ensure the wider needs of those in our community are met.

We also have partner agencies working within Trinity providing a range of services including the Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop, Mental and Physical Health interventions and support, Community Larder, Social Care case work meeting and Citizens Advice Bureau offering debt management help.

## Priority 3 - Support for Vulnerable People

### We will seek to carry out the following measures to support our continued success of supporting those from our communities:

- 1** All MBC housing staff will be trauma informed and undertake on-going training to understand the needs and challenges of working with those presenting for support
- 2** We will continue to develop our own supported housing portfolio and include specialist services such as a specific domestic abuse project
- 3** Continue commissioning effective services to support our aspirations including provision for homeless individuals
- 4** Continue to develop and retain essential partnerships with health providers to ensure a holistic approach to those facing homelessness including the provision of mental health services

### 3.1 Trauma Informed Services

Contained within our Housing Strategy Action Plan 2023, we have made the commitment to work in a trauma informed way, whereby we seek to understand the underlying causations of behaviour which present in homeless households. We have committed to ensuring all housing staff undertake mandatory training for being trauma informed, creating an easy access 'front door' for support. This is the Trinity Community Hub with staff on site during opening hours, and the continuation of partnerships with statutory health providers that help navigate the challenges of working with this complex group.

Our development and continued improvement of this trauma informed approach will support households sustaining and managing future accommodation options.



### 3.2 Supported Housing Portfolio

Since the previous strategy we have been working hard to diversify our accommodation offer for those with support needs, we have a number of our own supported housing projects including units at Trinity. This was using the Next Steps Funding from central government providing two homes in multiple occupation for former rough sleepers, both of which can accommodate 12 people, and a female only project for those fleeing domestic abuse or require more support than being in self-contained.

Our vision for the future is to develop relations with landlords and registered providers to offer specialist units for differing cohorts of need. We are looking to provide a self-contained block of flats for those fleeing domestic abuse. Many survivors of abuse cannot access refuges for a variety of reasons including gender specific, no local beds spaces, the needs are too high for the refuge to manage but still need supported housing to help overcome the trauma of the previous relationship. Those approaching MBC for homeless advice after fleeing domestic abuse, constitutes the biggest demand for temporary accommodation with the figures fluctuating between 20-25% of all placements.

## Priority 3 - Support for Vulnerable People

### 3.3 Commissioning

Since KCC decommissioning programme commenced five years ago, we have positioned the Council into more of a commissioning role, with a number of supported housing projects being funded from our Homeless Prevention Grant and Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant. These projects are very supportive of our aim to end the cycle of homelessness in Maidstone, and work with a variety of client needs including ex-offender, young people, homeless females and those with mental health concerns. However, our grant awards are only annual so this can leave longer term commissioning challenges for both the Council and the contractor. We continue to lobby the Government on longer term grant awards, but so far it hasn't been successful but we will continue to do so.

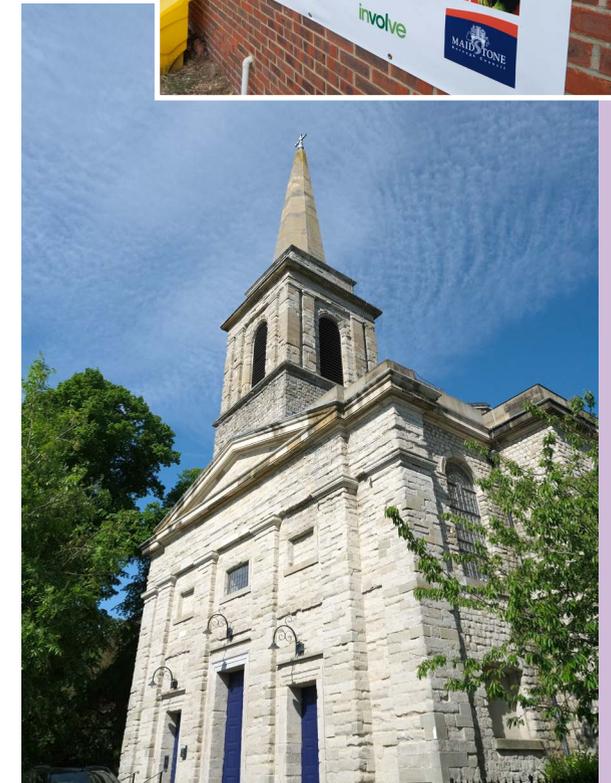
We are an active member of the Kent Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board and engage with colleagues to in commissioning services with KCC for the provision of domestic abuse services across Kent. A key objective within the Board's Partnership Strategy is the Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation, and finding ways to resolve the lack of accommodation that meets the Government's safe accommodation criteria.

### 3.4 Partnerships

Alongside providing bricks and mortar it is imperative we work in partnership to ensure that the ongoing offer of support for vulnerable people is robust and reduce the chances of tenancy failure. We have developed a number of partnerships that work well to enhance our service including:

- Physical and mental health support into people's homes by clinical specialists
- Community larders to offer food in these times of the cost-of-living crisis
- Targeted key working approach to those on the periphery of accessing treatment and not accommodated
- Helping you Home - Hospital Discharge Programme to support those at risk returning to their own home safely
- Community safety and domestic abuse - joined up approach to working with council colleagues to reduce the impact of antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse across the district

We anticipate continuing these very successful partnerships and developing more as and when needs are identified through our front door services at Trinity.



# 4

## Priority 4 - Rough Sleepers

Since the inception of our Rough Sleeper Initiative funded team in 2018, and the development of those services in the past five years, we have achieved some incredible outcomes for the hardest to reach and generally most complex individuals in our communities.

Ending Rough Sleeping was a government manifesto pledge which has ensured generous funding grants are awarded to local authorities across the country. Maidstone was one of the initial pilot programmes to be mobilised in Kent.

Since then, the funding has continued annually enabling us to develop a robust service meeting the needs of very complex and chaotic individuals who are generally marginalised from mainstream services. This can be due to their prevailing needs including mental and physical health concerns, substance abuse, no stable accommodation or support network and on-going issues with good decision making.

To demonstrate our success our annual street count numbers in Maidstone have significantly fallen since the peak in 2018 of 48, to zero in the 2022 and six in 2023. The team has worked with approximately 700 individuals since 2018 and have moved 440 into longer term accommodation.

Given our success we are concerned about the future of the funding, as the Rough Sleeper Initiative programme is planned to end in March 2025. Of course, there will be an election prior to that time, so there is uncertainty about the future of this funding stream. However, given the current market conditions and the increase of homeless cases across the country we are hopeful that no successive government would end this critical funding stream.



Due to our rough sleeper numbers reducing so significantly, the MBC Rough Sleeper Outreach team has altered its primary focus and is now working within the prevention agenda to ensure those at risk of losing their tenancy are supported to remain within their accommodation, via a floating support model. The golden thread of prevention cuts across many of the Housing Team's functions and demonstrates the importance of us supporting people to remain in their own home, before the crises of homelessness and rough sleeping which not only impacts on the individuals but also the wider community.



## Priority 4 - Rough Sleepers

**Through the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding stream, we have developed a number of strategies which have supported rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping away from the streets including:**

- Recruitment and continuation of the Homeless Support Services (previously known as the Outreach Services). This team works with households in various tenures to prevent any breakdown or loss of tenancy/accommodation
- Accommodation available at short notice throughout the year to deal with emergency situations such as Severe Weather Emergencies - which ensures those most at risk of rough sleeping can be picked up quickly and placed - similar to a "No first night out" model
- Developing our own supported housing and funding of partners to provide good quality housing for those we don't have a duty to accommodate under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
- 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
- Working in partnership with stakeholders including health to give an holistic support approach to those most in need, this includes working alongside primary care and mental health practitioners

**We will seek to carry out the following measures to support our continued success of managing the threat of rough sleeping for those in our community by:**

- 1 Developing a sustainable approach through grants and new concepts to ensure the continuation of the priority support services implemented under the Rough Sleeper Initiative
- 2 Continuing our effective 'immediate off the street' dynamic support and accommodation pathway for people facing rough sleeping or at risk of homelessness
- 3 Continuing to advocate for changes to the wider system including government policy to enable individuals to access the appropriate services and housing



## Priority 4 - Rough Sleepers

### Sustainability

Our primary focus must be on the continuation of this essential service. Over the coming 12 months until March 2025, we will be reviewing the resources available and looking at how the service delivery can be modelled to ensure maximum outcomes achieved against differing funding structures.

We also intend to step up lobbying the government seeking reassurances from the Rough Sleeper Initiative. This will be challenging given the current uncertainty around the next general election which is due this year.

Finally, we also need to review our grant streams and the base budget for the wider housing team, to see if remodelling can be undertaken to support the continuation of this service.



### Support and Accommodation Pathway

Since 2018 we have developed a dynamic and responsive support and accommodation pathway, which has culminated in a well-structured and functioning team, embedded alongside the Housing Advice service at the Trinity Community Hub. This team offers dynamic support to those most vulnerable in the community as and when they require it and includes access to emergency accommodation options.

We have also created a wide range of supported accommodation options for those facing homelessness who are at risk of rough sleeping including Trinity self-contained flats, a number of homes in multiple occupation and commissioning third parties to provide supported housing.

We intend to continue these arrangements by using our own housing stock as the demand ebbs and flows and fund these 'in-house' via the enhanced housing benefit model which enables staff to offer intensive housing management.

### System Change

Through the rough sleeper programme so far, our achievements in terms of partnership working and system change are excellent examples of multi-disciplinary teams working. At our Trinity site we host a number of partners including health colleagues, the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop. All of which work together for the benefit of our communities. This is a small example of how teams across the country should be operating and supporting each other.

These relationships also help in the management of safeguarding which is becoming an ever-increasing concern for us.



Maidstone Borough Council Housing Strategy 2024 - 2029: For further information visit: [maidstone.gov.uk](http://maidstone.gov.uk)

