

Introduction

The duty to carry out a homelessness review

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 Maidstone Borough Council, as a housing authority, must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in the borough.

The homelessness review must consider:

- a. The levels, and likely future levels, of homelessness in their district;
- b. the activities which are carried out for any the following purposes (or which contribute to achieving any of them):
 - i. preventing homelessness in the housing authority's district;
 - ii. securing that accommodation is or will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless; and
 - iii. providing support for people in the district:
 - who are or may become homeless; or
 - who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again;
- c. the resources available to the housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for the activities outlined in (b) above.

The Review Process

The Council set out to consult with as many organisations as possible who are engaged with working with those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. The Council also consulted directly with service users of various homelessness services and with private sector landlords. This was carried out in several ways:

- A consultation for was sent out to partner organisations that work with the homeless and those who are at risk of becoming homeless; including Registered Social Landlords in the borough
- Requests for data were made to various Social Services departments at Kent County Council
- A survey was conducted of private sector landlords at a local meeting of the National Landlords Association
- A focus group was held before a pre-tenancy training session
- A survey was carried out on those presenting themselves as homeless at the Maidstone Gateway

The Council is grateful to all those who have contributed to this review.

The Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

The last Homelessness Strategy covered the period 2008-2013. During this period there have been significant changes to the economy, national policy context and local conditions that will affect homelessness in the borough.

The financial downturn of 2007/2008 pushed the country's economy into recession in 2008/2009 which has had a massive economic effect.

In 2010 a new coalition government was elected, which concentrated on a whole host of reforms intended to reduce public spending in order to re-balance the public sector deficit. At the same time the government announced a number of significant reforms to welfare benefits that some commentators believe may have an impact on homelessness.

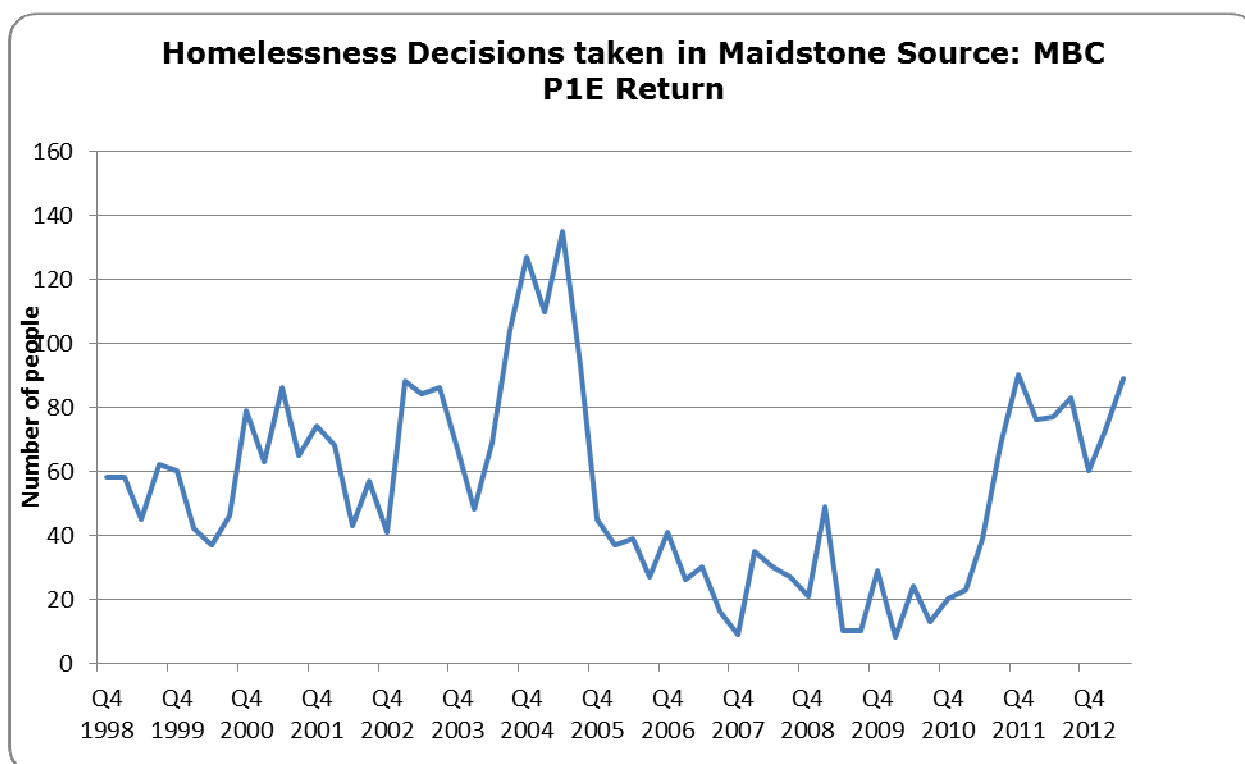
However there have also been changes locally since the 2008-2013 strategy was published. Since 2008, the council has been administered by a single party for the first sustained period since the 1980s. This has given the council a period of stability and a new strategic focus.

The council adopted a new Housing Allocations Policy effective from April 2013, in which a housing need *and* a local connection must be demonstrated before being accepted onto the housing register. The new allocations policy also emphasises the benefits of community contribution (either paid employment, voluntary work or being a carer inside the borough of Maidstone); giving those who have made a community contribution as the best opportunity to be nominated.

Levels of Homelessness in Maidstone

Levels of homelessness have tended to fluctuate according to several factors such as local circumstances (e.g. the closure of a large employer), national circumstances (e.g. the vagaries of the economy).

The government requires all local housing authorities to complete a return (known as the P1E) every quarter on homelessness activity. This includes the number of people approaching the council as homeless and this can be seen in the graph below.



For the purpose of this analysis, the last six full years of homelessness data (2007-2012) will be used, as well as the first two quarters of data for 2013.

As can be seen in the graph, people presenting themselves as homeless stayed at a relatively constant level, fluctuating between 40 and 80 people per quarter, between 1998 and 2003. There was a spike between 2003 and 2005; but subsequently there was a drop to a lower level than before from 2005 onwards. Since 2010 there has been a sharp increase of those presenting themselves as homeless. This trend has fluctuated but seems to be remaining around the 60 to 80 cases per quarter level.

Most of the data from the P1E return to central government only gathers detailed data on those who are eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (the full housing duty, as this means the local housing authority must secure accommodation for the applicant and their family). Therefore to understand the context of the data from the last five years it is important to understand the trend in not only those presenting themselves as homeless, but also those that Maidstone Borough Council is owed a duty to house under legislation.

As can be seen from the graph above, there have been two main trends in homelessness acceptances over the last five years. There was a period between 2007 and 2009 where

acceptances were at around 10 acceptances per quarter. Between mid 2009 and mid 2010 acceptances dropped off to around one a quarter. After mid 2010 the number of acceptances has increased dramatically, hitting a peak of 58 in quarter 3 of 2012.

The table below details homelessness decisions for the last six years.

| | Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need | % | Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so | % | Eligible, homeless but not in priority need | % | Not Homeless | % | Ineligible | % | Total Decisions Taken |
|------------------------|--|-------------|---|-------------|--|-------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| 2007 | 35 | 43.2 | 14 | 17.3 | 4 | 4.9 | 28 | 34.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 81 |
| 2008 | 45 | 39.8 | 17 | 15.0 | 7 | 6.2 | 43 | 38.1 | 1 | 0.1 | 113 |
| 2009 | 14 | 12.5 | 7 | 6.3 | 8 | 7.1 | 83 | 74.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 112 |
| 2010 | 13 | 20.0 | 5 | 7.7 | 6 | 9.2 | 41 | 63.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 65 |
| 2011 | 155 | 70.4 | 21 | 9.5 | 17 | 7.7 | 24 | 10.9 | 3 | 1.4 | 220 |
| 2012 | 192 | 64.9 | 24 | 8.1 | 46 | 15.4 | 30 | 10.1 | 4 | 1.4 | 296 |
| 2013 (Up to Q2) | 117 | 72.2 | 10 | 6.2 | 19 | 11.7 | 14 | 8.6 | 2 | 1.2 | 162 |

Even though the number of people presenting themselves as homeless to the council increased between 2007 and 2009, during the same time the proportion of those found not to be homeless increased year on year.

However since 2010 the number of people presenting themselves as homeless increased; as well as the number of people who were found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. At the same time, the proportions of those found not to be homeless or intentionally homeless have decreased. This is likely to be linked to the period when decisions letters were always issued for people receiving a negative decision, to enable them to request a review of the decision, but not necessarily to those for whom accommodation was secured.

Another figure to be noticed is that in 2012, the proportion of those found to be eligible, homeless but not in priority need doubled since the previous year. So far this year this proportion has dropped down to 11.7 per cent. This is a higher proportion than any other years before 2011.

So far for 2013, the proportion of those who are found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need is at the highest it has been for the period we have been examining. The numbers of people presenting themselves as homeless look as if they will be higher than any other years if the trend for first two quarters of 2013 stays the same.

It is likely that the numbers of those who present themselves as homeless, as well as the numbers of those who are accepted as MBC having a homelessness duty will remain high. This is because there is no sign that the trend of increased numbers of people presenting themselves as homeless; or the trend of increased numbers of people being found to be owed the full housing duty; will fall in the near future.

Ethnic background of those who have presented themselves as homeless

| Ethnic background of those who presented themselves as homeless and MBC made a decision between 2007 and 2013. Source: P1E return | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Ethnic Background | White | Black | Asian | Mixed | Other |
| % of those who gave an answer to the ethnic background question | 93.0 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 1.4 | 1.4 |

As can be seen in the table above, the vast majority of those who presented themselves as homeless and the council made a decision were from a White ethnic background. These figures can be compared with figures from the 2011 census to find out how closely they match with the ethnic profile of the borough as a whole. These figures can be seen in the table below.

| The ethnic composition of Maidstone Borough. Source: 2011 Census | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Ethnic Background | White | Black | Asian | Mixed | Other |
| % of residents in the borough of this ethnicity | 94.1 | 0.9 | 3.2 | 1.5 | 0.3 |

When the two figures are compared, it appears that those of White, Asian or Mixed ethnic background are underrepresented in the homelessness figures, and those of a Black or Other ethnic background are over represented. However these figures should be treated with caution, as the numbers of those presenting themselves as homeless from Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are low. For example, between 2007 and 2012 only 17 people of a Black ethnic background presented themselves as homeless.

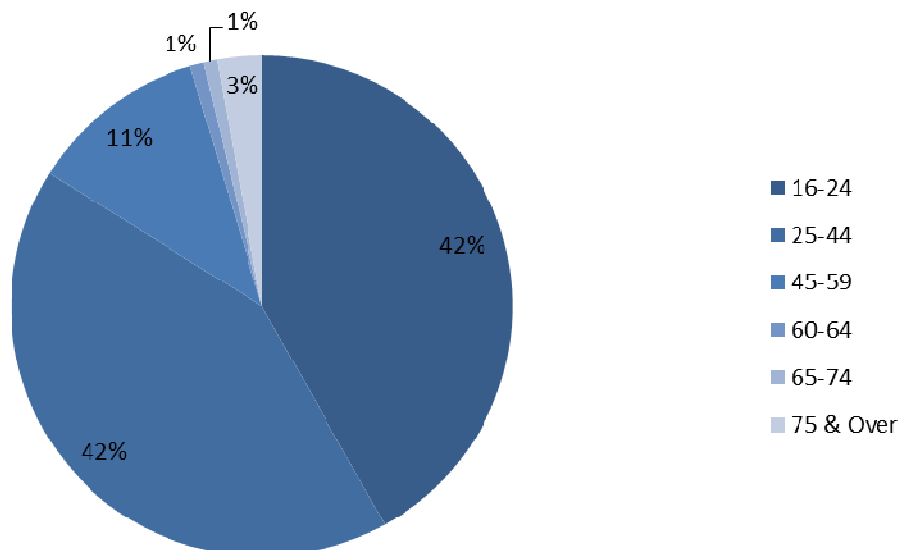
Age

The vast majority of those who are accepted by the council as eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need are aged between 16 and 44 at the time of their acceptance. A chart showing the age of those who were accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need between 2007 and 2013 can be seen below.

Within the 16-44 age group, there is an equal split between those aged 16-24 and those aged 25-44. There is a very small proportion of those accepted as homeless aged 60-74, and a slightly larger proportion of those aged 75 and over.

This demonstrates that those aged between 16 and 44 are the most likely to become homeless and be eligible for assistance from the council in the form of temporary accommodation.

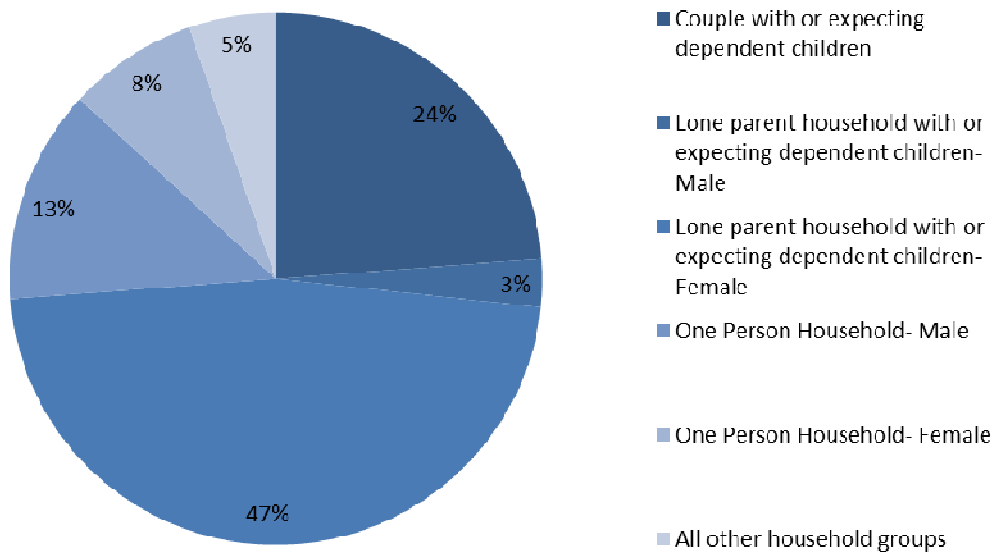
The age of those who were found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need between 2007 and 2013. Source: MBC P1E Return



Household Type

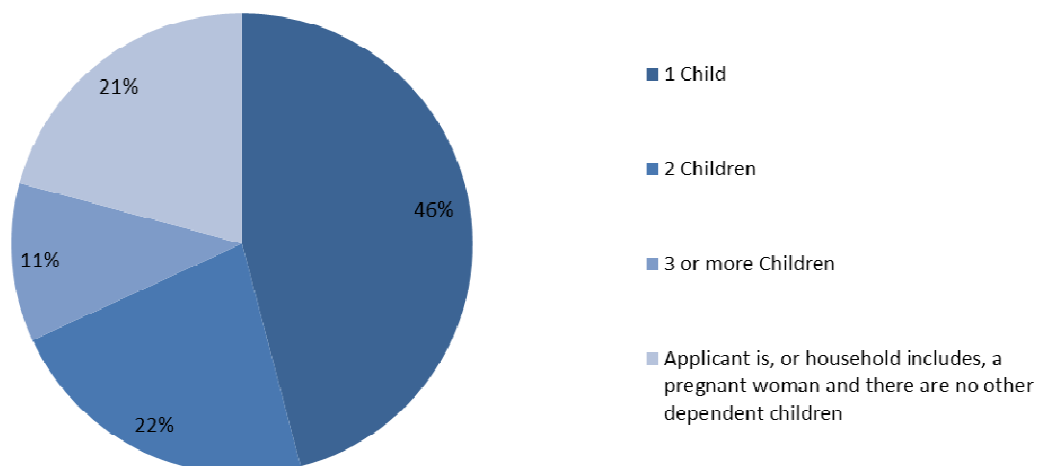
Between 2007 and 2012, out of those who were accepted by the council as eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, the most common family type was a female lone parent with or expecting dependent children (47%). The second most common family type in this group is couple with, or expecting, dependent children (24%), with single male households being the third most common family type (13%). The breakdown of family types can be seen on the chart below.

Applicant households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, by household type between 2007 and 2013. Source: MBC P1E return



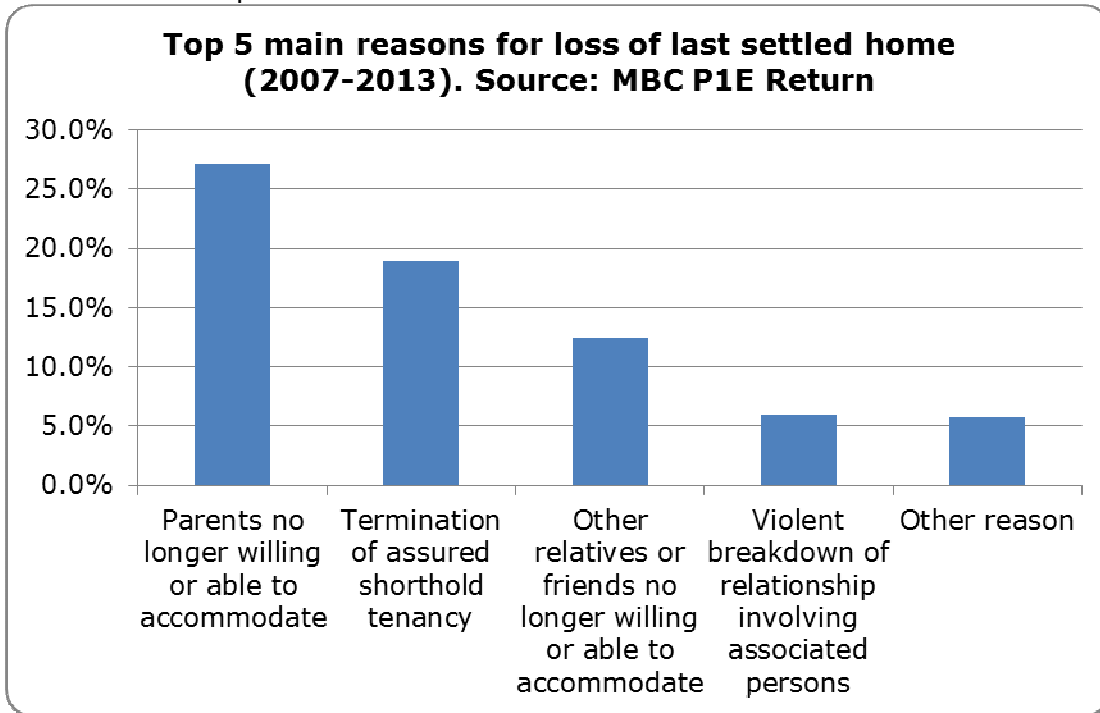
The most common number of children for households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need with dependent children in this group was one child (46%). Next, there is an almost equal split between those families with 2 children (22%) and applicants/households that include a pregnant woman and there are no other dependent children (21%). The breakdown of household size can be seen on the chart below. It is worth noting that this question ceased to be asked after Q4 of 2012.

Applicant households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need between 2007 and 2012, by household size. Source: MBC P1E Return

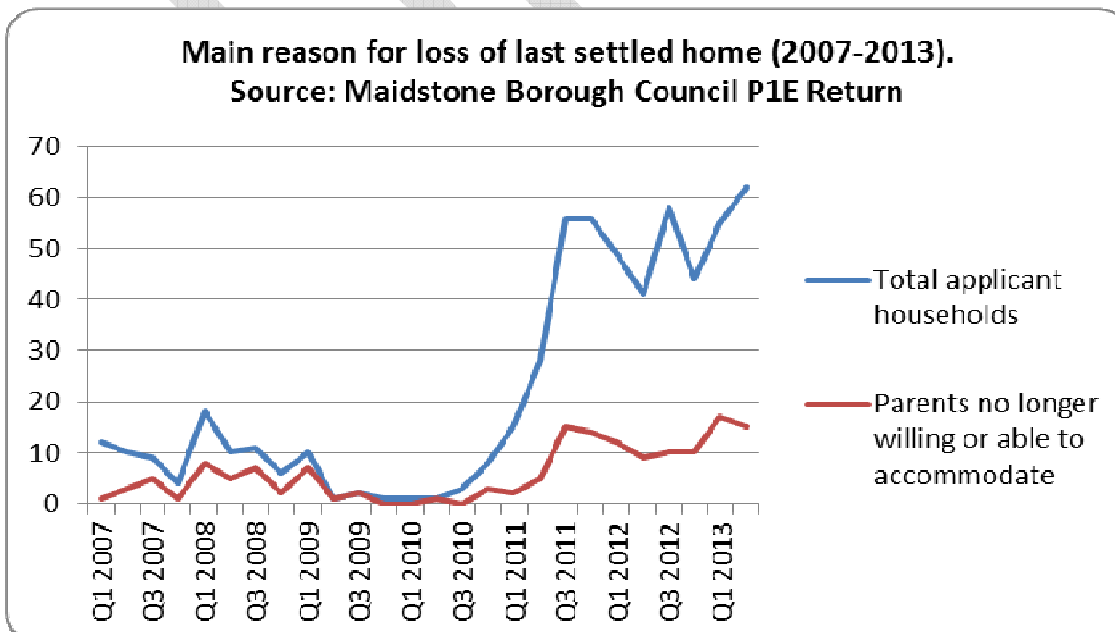


Reasons for loss of last settled home

The graph below demonstrates the top five reasons for the loss of the last settled home. Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate (27.1%) was the biggest reason for homelessness in Maidstone between 2007 and 2012. This finding, along with the fact that 42% of those accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, suggests that there are increasing numbers of young people who have been unable to leave the family home and set up their own household.



The trend between the number of cases that are found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need that had the main reason for the loss of the last settled home as parents no longer willing or able to accommodate closely mirrors the trend for overall applicant households. These two trends can be seen on the graph below.

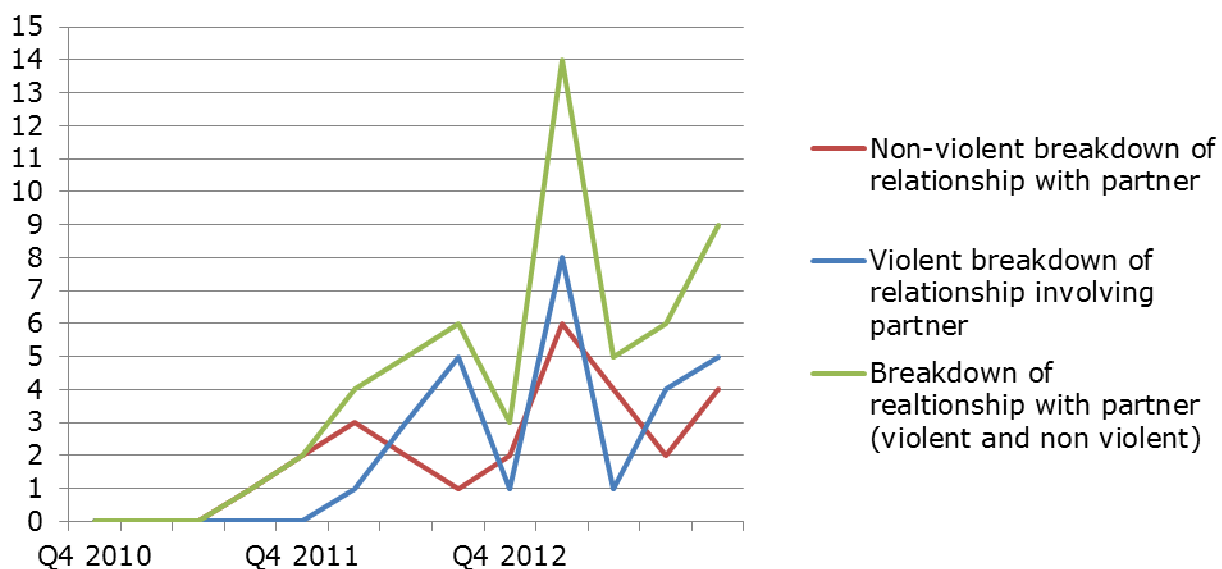


Termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (19.2%) is the second most likely reason for loss of the last settled home. However this is compared with only 2.4% of people who lost their previous settled home due to rent arrears in private sector accommodation. This suggests that people are losing their homes for reasons other than being unable to afford the rent e.g. the landlord is freeing up their stock to let to a different client group at a higher rent.

There have been very low numbers overall, and no obvious trends in the data, for people losing their last settled home because of leaving prison, hospital, other institutions or Local Authority care and leaving HM Forces.

In recent years breakdown of relationships with partners, both violent and non-violent, have been increasing as a reason for homelessness. This has been coupled with a rise in acceptance of homelessness cases overall and a general increase across most reasons for homelessness. However the increase is marked in this case as there was only an occasional case of homelessness as a result of breakdown of relationships with partners before quarter 1 of 2011.

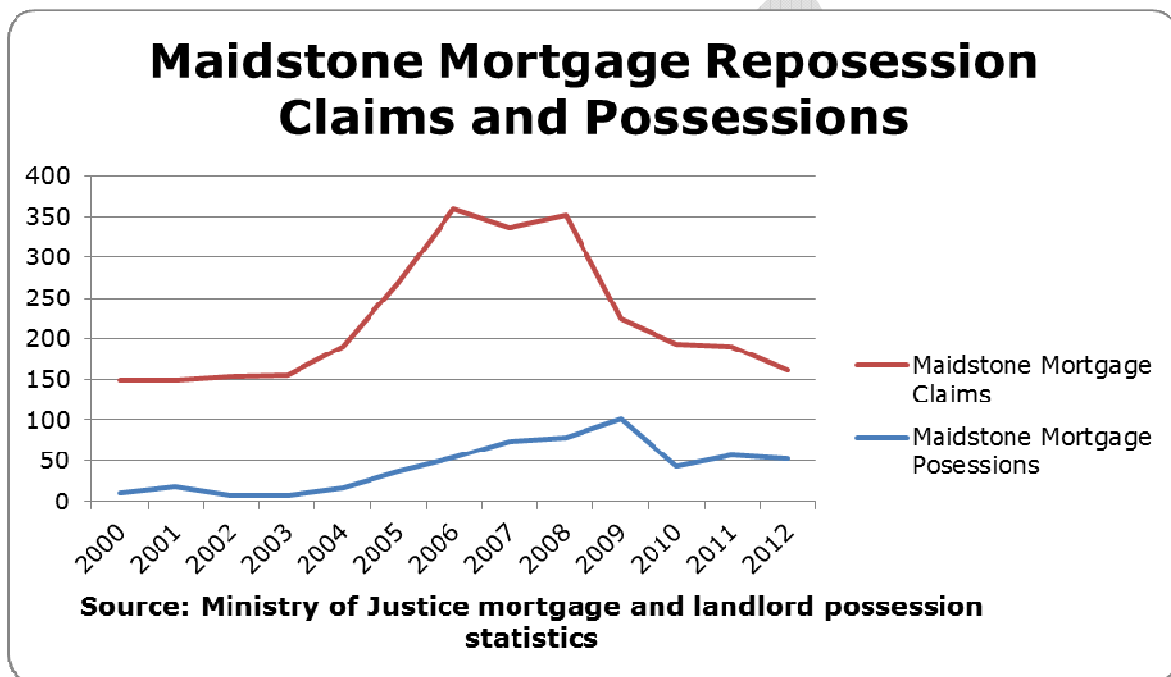
Main reason for loss of last settled home for applicant households found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need 2007-2013. Source: Maidstone Borough Council P1E return



Repossessions

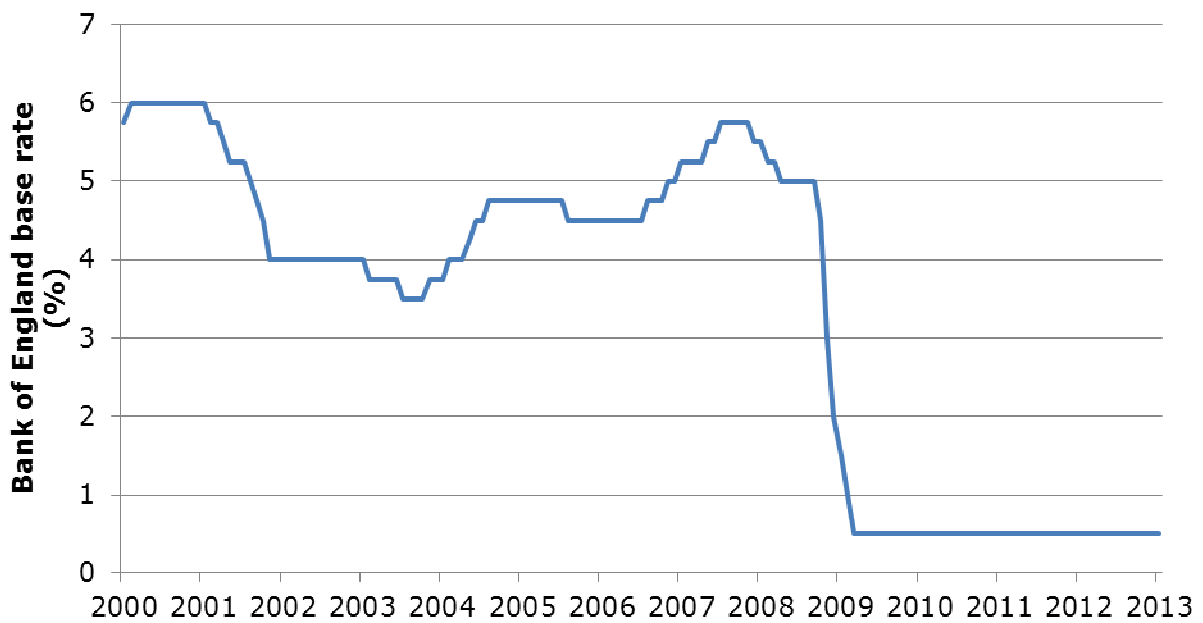
The level of repossessions, both landlord and mortgage, have increased over previous years. For both types of repossessions, there has been an increase in repossession claims in the courts since 2005. However for mortgage repossessions this number of claims has decreased dramatically since 2009, and is back at pre-2005 levels. This trend can be seen on the graph below.

Despite the level of mortgage repossession claims decreasing, the number of actual possession orders obtained has remained at a higher level than before the spike in claims for possession orders. This could suggest that mortgage companies have obtained possession orders but are waiting until the housing market improves before enforcing possession to realise the capital asset.



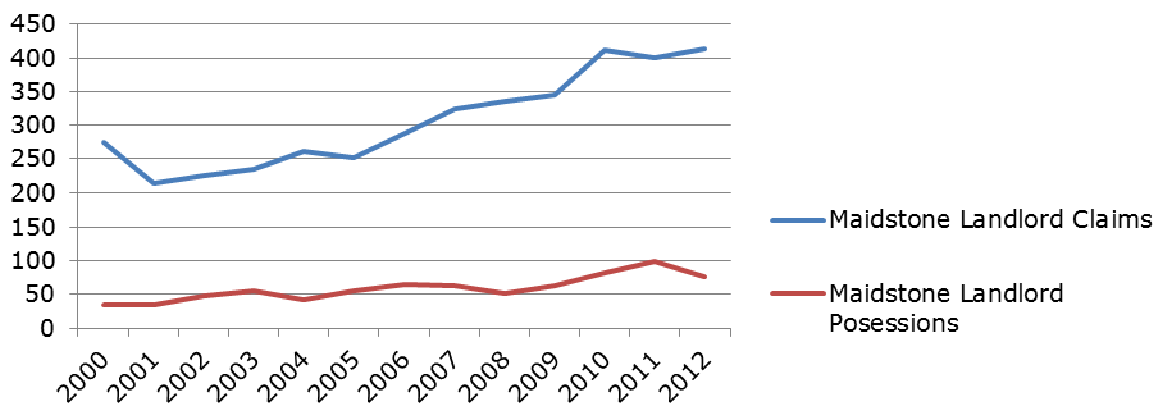
There is a slightly different trend for landlord repossessions. Although there seems to be an ever increasing number of claims for possession orders, the level of landlord possession orders obtained has not increased as drastically. However it is worth noting that possessions are seeing a trend of gradual increase. This can be seen in the graph below.

Bank of England Base Rate



The mortgage repossession statistics correlate relatively closely with the Bank of England base rate, and accordingly with the financial crisis. This is because mortgage interest rates are closely linked to the Bank of England Base Rate. As the base rate increased from a low of 3.5% in July 2003 to a high of 5.75% in July 2007, mortgage repossession claims increased accordingly. As the base rate began to fall from 5.5% in December 2007 onwards, and settled at an all time low of 0.5% in March 2009 mortgage repossession claims also fell.

Maidstone Landlord Repossession Claims and Possessions



Source: Ministry of Justice mortgage and landlord possession statistics

However, despite the number of repossession claims falling, the number of possession orders granted remains higher than the pre-2004 level.

Looking at mortgage repossessions and how closely they link with the Bank of England base rate and the state of the economy, there are two risks for owner occupiers in the short to

medium term that may result in increased levels of homelessness. The first is an increase in the bank of England Base Rate, which will increase the cost of mortgages. The second is if there is further pressure on the national and local economy resulting in residents finding it harder to continue paying their mortgage.

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

The bi-annual caravan count, carried out by the Department for Communities and local government, gives a good idea of the numbers of Gypsy and Traveller households living in caravans in the borough. The results for the last six published counts can be seen below.

| | No. of Socially Rented | No. on Private Land (with Planning Permission) | No. on Private Land (without Planning Permission) | Total |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|---|--|--------------|
| Jul 2010 | 31 | 188 | 102 | 321 |
| Jan 2011 | 32 | 205 | 104 | 341 |
| Jul 2011 | 32 | 278 | 104 | 414 |
| Jan 2012 | 38 | 293 | 48 | 379 |
| Jul 2012 | 41 | 307 | 52 | 400 |
| Jan 2013 | 38 | 336 | 48 | 422 |

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government Biannual Caravan Count

The last six counts show an upward trend in the numbers of caravans in the borough. There is also a positive trend in the proportion of those caravans that are situated on private land with planning permission and socially rented pitches. This is a positive trend when considering homelessness, as those on unauthorised private sites are more likely to be evicted and be made homeless. Therefore the larger proportion of Gypsies and Travellers living on authorised sites, the less likely they will be to become at risk of becoming homeless through eviction.

The borough's Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (GTSAA), which was carried out in 2012, estimated the housing needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The assessment estimated that the borough needed to provide the following numbers of authorised pitches in order to satisfy demand, detailed in the table below.

| Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Need | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 2011-2016 | 105 |
| 2016-2021 | 25 |

Source: Maidstone Borough Council Gypsy Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment; January 2012

As of January 2013, it is clear that there has been good progress on providing additional authorised pitches for the Gypsy and Traveller community. Since July 2011, the number of caravans sited on authorised pitches has increased by 58. Although this number does not translate exactly into the number of additional pitches provided, as multiple caravans may be sited on one pitch, it does show that progress has been made.

Homelessness Preventions

Maidstone Borough Council carries out homelessness prevention activities, carried out by the Housing Options Service. These preventions can range from giving debt advice, to sorting out housing benefit problems, to resolving problems with rent arrears. Homelessness prevention work can be carried out for any households that approach the authority for advice, regardless of whether they are statutorily homeless or not. The figures for homelessness preventions from 2008/2009 financial year onwards can be seen below. Please note these figures were only gathered from 2009 onwards.

| Year | Number of Preventions |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 2009 | 487 |
| 2010 | 550 |
| 2011 | 721 |
| 2012 | 479 |
| 2013 (to June) | 184 |

As can be seen by the figures, the number of homelessness preventions has been on the decrease and further analysis is required to determine what has caused this.

Rough Sleeping

Rough Sleeping remains the most visible and damaging manifestation of homelessness. The Department for Communities and Local Government defines Rough Sleepers as follows for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates:

'People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes").'

Figures for rough sleeping are published annually, after a count or estimate is carried out across the country in the autumn. The count (or estimate) is a snapshot of the extent of rough sleeping in an area on one night.

The methodology of gathering these statistics changed in 2010, so data from before this time cannot be compared as it would be impossible to tell whether any changes were due to the change in methodology or due to other circumstances.

The estimates for rough sleeping in Maidstone, as well as neighbouring authorities can be seen in the table below.

| Rough Sleeping estimates and counts for Maidstone and neighbouring local authorities. Source: DCLG | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|--------|---------|---------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Year | Maidstone | Medway | Ashford | Tonbridge & Malling | Tunbridge Wells | Swale |
| 2010 | 27 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 0 |
| 2011 | 19 | 12 | 7 | 4 | 13 | 2 |
| 2012 | 19 | 17 | 4 | 3 | 10 | 6 |

The estimates for rough sleeping show that although rough sleeping in Maidstone appears to have dropped since 2010, it has stayed at a steady level between 2011 and 2012.

Rough Sleeping in Maidstone appears to be higher than its neighbouring authorities. This could be linked to the number of services for single homeless people that are located in Maidstone and not found in the adjoining areas. The exception to this is Tunbridge Wells, which has a single homeless accommodation and a higher number compared to Ashford, Tonbridge & Malling and Swale. For most neighbouring authorities, numbers of rough sleepers have increased over the three years. For all neighbouring authorities, numbers of rough sleepers are higher in 2012 than in 2010.

Housing Cost and Housing Provision

The Maidstone Borough Council area has an average housing cost area compared nationally, but fares well regionally and compared to Kent. The table below shows the average house price for the South East, Kent and Maidstone in April to June 2013.

| England | South East | Kent | Maidstone |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------|
| £242,415 | £281,148 | £241,195 | £229,099 |
| Source: Land Registry | | | |

According to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which was carried out in 2010, there are particular groups of people who are more likely to find it difficult to afford 'market' (the cost of housing on the open market, either renting or buying) housing. Those particular groups, and the likely percentage of those who would be unable to afford market rent, are:

- Lone parents (67.1%)
- Single, non-pensioner (34.1%)
- Household head not in employment (31.1%)

(Source: Strategic Housing Market Assessment, 2010)

It is also worth noting that those in urban locations are more likely to not be able to afford market rent (29.0%) than those in rural locations (17.7%). Another noteworthy observation is the split between those households headed by someone employed in Maidstone Borough (22.6% of households unlikely to be able to afford market rent) compared to those households headed by someone employed outside Maidstone Borough (7.2% of households unlikely to afford market rent).

The SHMA noted that there was a consensus among registered social landlords and those dealing with homelessness that there is a shortage of accommodation in social rented housing for single households.

Maidstone Borough Council is committed to providing affordable housing to address these needs for affordable housing. The statistics for delivery of affordable homes can be seen in the table below.

| Year | Number of Affordable Homes Delivered |
|--|---|
| 2009/2010 | 399 |
| 2010/2011 | 228 |
| 2011/2012 | 284 |
| 2012/2013 | 244 |
| 2013/2014 (up to 30 th September) | 91 |
| Source: MBC | |

Supporting People Clients

The Supporting People Programme is a government programme to provide housing related support services such as homeless hostels, women's refuges and sheltered accommodation to help vulnerable people live independently. Supporting People in Kent is administered by Kent County Council on behalf of all the Kent local authorities (except Medway). A Commissioning Body made up of representatives from each district council, Probation, Health and Social Services meets to take strategic decisions about the programme delivery. A range of providers, including housing associations, charities and some local authorities, deliver the service across Kent.

As part of the consultation, the Supporting People Programme in Kent submitted data on homelessness; activities they carry out around homelessness and resources available to them in Maidstone.

All the data is either extracted from the National Data Set held by the Centre of Housing Research at St Andrews University. Providers of the service are required to make a submission to the centre on clients from the following services:

- Supported housing
- Women's refuge
- Foyer
- Teenage parent accommodation
- Direct access accommodation
- Floating support
- Outreach
- Resettlement
- Adult placement
- Supported Lodgings

The table below shows all of the clients entering into housing related support services from the Supporting People Programme in Maidstone over the previous three years; who spent the previous night in the Maidstone Borough Council area, where homelessness appeared within their needs.

| Year | Number of people |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 2010-2011 | 152 |
| 2011-2012 | 90 |
| 2012-2013 | 102 |
| Grand Total | 344 |

This shows that the number of homeless people supported by the supporting people programme has dropped by around 50% between 2010-2011 and 2012-2013. It is worth noting that no substantial changes in capacity, or approach by Supporting People during this period. Therefore this represents a genuine decrease in those who are homeless and are accessing the programme.

The gender split of clients supported by the programme is roughly a 2:1 ratio of Male: Female clients. The gender split over the last three years can be seen in the table below.

| Gender | 2010-2011 | % | 2011-2012 | % | 2012-2013 | % | Grand Total |
|--------------------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Female | 53 | 34.9 | 30 | 33.3 | 36 | 35.3 | 119 |
| Male | 99 | 65.1 | 60 | 66.6 | 66 | 64.7 | 225 |
| Grand Total | 152 | | 90 | | 102 | | 344 |

The table below shows if clients of Supporting People have been accepted as requiring services under statutory framework over the last three years.

| | 2010/2011 | % of total clients | 2011/2012 | % of total clients | 2012/2013 | % of total clients |
|--|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Mental Health (Secondary) | 15 | 9.9 | 6 | 6.7 | 4 | 3.9 |
| Care Management (Social Services) | 13 | 8.6 | 8 | 8.9 | 12 | 11.1 |
| Probation/Youth Offending Team | 19 | 12.5 | 11 | 12.2 | 10 | 9.8 |
| Drug Intervention Programme | 9 | 5.9 | 4 | 4.4 | 8 | 7.8 |

The proportion of clients with secondary mental health needs and clients requiring support from Probation or the Youth Offending Team has decreased over the last three years. At the same time, the proportion of clients with Care Management needs has increased.

The table below shows the breakdown of types of clients where homelessness appears in their support needs.

| Primary Client Group | 2010-2011 | % | 2011-2012 | % | 2012-2013 | % | Grand Total |
|---|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Single homeless with support needs | 102 | 67.1 | 59 | 65.6 | 50 | 49.0 | 211 |
| Rough Sleeper | 45 | 29.6 | 23 | 25.6 | 26 | 25.5 | 94 |
| Young people at risk | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 15.7 | 16 |
| Homeless families with support needs | 3 | 2.0 | 5 | 5.6 | 6 | 5.9 | 14 |
| Mental health problems | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2.2 | 2 | 2.0 | 4 |
| Alcohol misuse problems | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2.0 | 2 |
| Offenders/at risk of offending | 1 | 0.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| People at risk of domestic violence | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1.1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Refugees | 1 | 0.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 152 | | 90 | | 102 | | 344 |

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the supporting programme's clients are single homeless people; however this proportion has been declining over the last three years. The next largest proportion of clients for the supporting people programme were rough sleepers, however the proportion of clients for this group has also been declining over the previous three years.

A group of clients that have been increasing over the previous three years have been Homeless families with support needs.

In 2012-2013 the programme supported a large proportion of clients that were young people at risk; whereas there were no clients in this category before.

Using data gathered from their floating support service, the Supporting People Programme identified the clients who had been referred into the service in Maidstone and were living in temporary circumstances on an insecure basis. This is shown on the table below.

| Current Accommodation | 2010-2011 | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 | Grand Total |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Lodging with Parents/Relatives/Friends | 56 | 36 | 18 | 110 |
| Sofa surfing | 56 | 47 | 36 | 139 |
| Bed & Breakfast | 17 | 8 | 2 | 27 |
| Temporary | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 130 | 91 | 56 | 277 |

This shows that over the previous three years, there have been a significant number of vulnerable people living in temporary accommodation on an insecure basis who have been referred as homeless to the Supporting People programme.

Those who are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless

As part of the consultation with various agencies and organisation that work with those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, we asked a question about those who are most likely to be at risk of becoming homeless in their client groups. The following groups were identified by these organisations:

- Single unemployed men under 35
- Households with under-occupation penalties in housing benefit
- Households with interest only mortgages and no repayment vehicle
- People with mental health problems
- Housing benefit claimants who have to seek accommodation in the private sector
- Large families that are benefit claimants
- Those who are leaving prison:
 - They may not have a local connection
 - They may be told that by being in prison they are intentionally homeless
 - Those who cannot return to the area they came from due to restrictions on their licenses
 - Those with previous rent arrears
 - High risk offenders, sex offenders, those with substance misuse issues or mental health issues (or any combination of these circumstances)
- 16-18 year olds who are NEET
- Older people (55-64) with a care and/or support need who may have been hit with an under occupancy penalty or affected by welfare reform
- Armed forces leavers
- Severely overcrowded households
- Clients with mental health issues
- Young carers

Out of these groups identified as being particularly vulnerable, there was an emphasis on those with mental health problems; young, single unemployed people and those who may be affected by welfare reforms.

Significant gaps in provision

The consultation with partner organisations included a question on whether they thought there were any gaps in provision for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The following gaps in provision were suggested:

- Supporting people with mental health problems to find, secure and maintain accommodation. It is often difficult to prove priority need in these cases; and even harder to locate accommodation that will nurture rather than hinder their mental recovery
- It is hard to find permanent and emergency accommodation for single people
- There is a lack of general housing advice (i.e. advice for those who are not homeless, in priority need, and are not immediately threatened with homelessness); which impacts on other support services as they are relied on to provide generalist housing advice
- Move-on accommodation is almost completely unavailable in some areas (of Kent)
- Funding cuts mean floating support can only be provided for a short time, and housing providers will not accept nominations for housing unless this is in place
- Tenants who are arrested are unaware they can maintain Housing Benefit for 13 or 52 weeks depending on the circumstances, and therefore lose their homes unnecessarily
- Clients are not always told of any help they can get with rent deposits or rent in advance when approaching the council
- Lack of private sector accommodation available in Maidstone for single people dependent on welfare benefits
- There are no appropriate local emergency placements for young people that are not in B & B/Premier Inn
- A lack of semi-independent supportive lodging accommodation that can be accessed by 16-18 year olds who need extra support
- Homelessness among older people is overlooked. Promote models that enable independent living such as extra care, supported living and specialist housing
- Rent Deposit Schemes suffer from a lack of landlords willing to participate, leading those who sign up for such schemes into false hope. This can be helped by ensuring such schemes are available as cash
- There is a large street population in Maidstone, who are not necessarily homeless. Media attention has not adequately made the distinction between the two groups

Welfare Reforms

Since 2010, significant reforms of the welfare state have been proposed, legislated for and taken effect. These will inevitably affect the levels of homelessness in the borough. Listed below are the main welfare reforms to have taken place since 2010 that have particular relevance to homelessness.

| Benefit | Change | Date |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Housing Benefit | Capping of Local Housing Allowance rates for properties of specific sizes. Reduction of Local Housing Allowance rate from 50 th to 30 th Percentile | April 2011 (new claimants); rolling implementation over a year from January 2012 for existing claimants |
| Housing Benefit | The age threshold for the shared accommodation rate for Local Housing Allowance will be increased from 25 to 35 | January 2012 |
| Pension Credit | Rates for the savings credit part of Pension Credit reduced | April 2012 |
| Crisis Loans | The maximum rate of a crisis loan will be at 30% of the appropriate benefit personal allowance rate. Maximum for householders or people who are homeless set at 60% of appropriate benefit personal allowance. | April 2012 |
| Housing Benefit | Local Housing Allowance rates frozen ahead of April 2013 change where rates will no longer be linked to market rent | April 2012 |
| Council Tax Benefit | Council Tax Benefit to be replaced by a locally devised scheme of Council Tax Support | April 2013 |
| Housing Benefit | Size criteria will apply in the social rented sector, penalising tenants for under occupying social housing | April 2013 |
| Benefit Cap | Cap on the amount of benefits out of work households can claim. Cap set at level of average earnings of a working family | April 2013 |
| Universal Credit | The current system of working age benefits and tax credits (including housing benefit) are to be replaced by a new benefit called Universal Credit (UC). The process of moving all claimants onto UC will begin in October 2013 and be finished by October 2017. Claimants will be given one lump sum of benefits each month. | October 2013-October 2017 |
| '13 week rule' | When Universal Credit is rolled out, the '13 week protection rule' will be removed. This rule allows the full payment of rent for up to 13 weeks if a claimant loses their job or falls ill; as long as they had not claimed Housing Benefit for the previous 52 weeks and could previously pay their rent when they signed the tenancy. Instead, the lower LHA rate will be paid immediately. | October 2013-October 2017 |
| Housing Benefit | Local Housing Allowance rate linked to | April 2013 |

Consultations for the Review

As part of the review other important stakeholders were consulted to gather opinions:

- A focus group was carried out on a group of clients of Housing Options, who were homeless, before a pre-tenancy training session. The focus group focused
- A survey was carried out on Private Sector landlords at a local meeting of the National Landlord Association

The results of these consultations are outlined below.

Focus Group with Housing Options Clients

A focus group was carried out before a pre tenancy training session to consult on the views of those who were affected by homelessness. The focus of the consultation was on the barriers to accessing housing, particularly in the private rented sector. The following themes emerged from the focus group:

- Lack of suitable, affordable private housing;
- Up front costs- fees, deposits, rent in advance;
- The worry of going private, losing the house and having to go on the council list/through the homelessness process again;
- Lack of security in private rented accommodation;
- Being evicted, with landlords then not wanting to take you on as a tenant in the future;
- Lack of letting agents that list landlords willing to take those on benefits.

Those present at the focus group were then asked to think of solutions that may tackle these barriers. The following proposals emerged:

- Change perceptions of landlords;
- Introductory tenancies that give everyone a chance;
- A list of landlords that will accept tenants on benefits;
- Knowing where to get free advice;
- Negotiating directly with the landlord, helping to build a relationship with the landlord before moving in.

Consultation with Private Sector Landlords

Private Sector Landlords were strongly against the removal of direct payments of housing benefit to landlords when Universal Credit is introduced. There are fears that their tenants will spend rent money on other things and get into arrears.

There was a general negative perception of tenants in receipt of benefits, with landlords considering them a risk, rather than a safe bet.

There was a strong consensus that the council should offer to guarantee the rent of housing benefit clients and that the council should offer to repair any damage tenants on housing benefit may cause to properties when they move out.

Other suggestions that were made during the consultation that may be worth noting were:

- Help landlords to have less void periods;
- Regulate bad landlords; and
- Give incentives to landlords for improving neglected houses

Activities carried out in the borough to prevent homelessness and resources available for these activities

Maidstone Borough Council

Private Rented Sector

Maidstone Borough Council, as the local housing authority, has a responsibility to prevent homelessness in the borough. When people present themselves as homeless, and we are satisfied they are unintentionally homeless, eligible for support and in priority need Maidstone Borough Council have a duty to house them. This may include placing people into temporary accommodation whilst trying to find suitable alternative accommodation. The Localism Act 2010 allows local authorities to discharge their duty to these people by providing them with a good quality home in the private rented sector.

Kent County Council

Kent County Council is responsible for Child and Adult Social Services, including administering the supporting people programme, so has an important part to play in preventing and relieving homelessness. Kent County Council supplied completed consultation forms for each of the areas that work with those that are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.

Families and Social Care

Kent County Council Families and Social Care (FSC) is responsible for providing social care across the borough.

FSC carry out the following activities around homelessness:

- Prioritising, in collaboration with local housing authority, access to Extra Care Schemes for older people
- Administering the revenue funding for supported housing provision

The resources available for carrying out these activities are as follows:

- Care management staff and strategic commissioning staff
- Funding streams are available specifically for housing vulnerable groups
- Grant funding of voluntary groups that focus on supporting vulnerable groups who may face homelessness

West Kent Adolescent Support Team

West Kent Adolescent Support Team (AST) works closely with Maidstone Borough Council in responding to homeless 16-18 year olds.

West Kent AST carry out the following activities:

- Providing support to young people and their families to mediate, or find suitable solutions within the family/friends network
- Providing support to young people in semi-independent living to prevent placement breakdown and further homelessness
- Assessing young homeless people and determining what duty is owed under the Children Act including Section 20 accommodation to those young people identified as being a child in need
- Providing joint assessments with Maidstone Borough Council Housing Officers

The resources available to West Kent AST to carry out these activities are as follows:

- 2 Social Workers and some Social Work Assistant staff who carry out assessments and work directly with young people and their families
- Section 17 (of the Children Act- safeguarding vulnerable children) resources to provide accommodation and support
- Section 20 (of the Children Act- local authority care provision) placements

Info Zone

Info Zone is part of Kent's integrated Youth Service. Info Zone delivers information and advice to 16-24 year olds.

Info Zone carry out the following activities around homelessness:

- Providing homelessness advice from professional case workers
- Working in partnership with other agencies to support the housing situation of individuals
- Courses on life skills, including independent living skills and budgeting skills, that may help prevent homelessness
- Referral to appropriate agencies if required

Info Zone have professional caseworkers available to carry out advice work, as well as staff available to deliver their other activities.

Supporting People Programme

The supporting people programme submitted data as part of the consultation. This data can be seen in the section on Supporting People Clients. In addition to administering funding for floating support, temporary accommodation and supported accommodation the Supporting People Programme funded a rent deposit scheme delivered via the local housing authorities. This scheme is specifically for those individuals who are leaving supported accommodation who cannot afford the deposit to begin a tenancy themselves. The scheme is detailed below.

| Supporting People Rent Deposit Scheme for Maidstone | |
|--|--|
| How much Supporting People funding did your district receive for Rent Deposit Schemes? | £65,000 |
| What eligibility criteria did you apply to the use of these funds? | Applicants wanting to move in to the private rented sector direct from supported accommodation in our Borough. Applicants in supported accommodation outside of the Borough but have a local connection to Maidstone. |
| What opportunities arose as a result of having these funds? | Some Landlords / Letting Agents do not accept the Council's Bond scheme. In these situations we have been able to offer a cash payment to the Landlord on behalf of the applicant in order for them to secure the tenancy. |

Details of how the rent deposit scheme has operated for the last four years can be seen below.

| Year | Number of households assisted | Number of service users that could have accessed RDS | Total amount spent |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 2009 / 2010 | 5 | 30 | £3305 |
| 2010 / 2011 | 13 | 41 | £9208.06 |
| 2011 / 2012 | 8 | 19 | £5875.12 |
| 2012 / 2013 | 5 | 29 | £3295 |

There is £43,316.82 remaining for the Supporting People Rent Deposit Scheme

Social Landlords

Social Landlords who operate in the borough were consulted for the purpose of the review. Social Landlords are critical to the issue of homelessness in the borough because Maidstone Borough Council do not own their own housing stock, but nominate those on the housing list to available socially rented properties in the borough. Two responses were received from Social Landlords- Golding Homes and Town and Country Housing.

Golding Homes

Golding Homes is the largest Social Landlord in the borough. Golding Homes carry out the following activities:

- Signposting clients to services provided by Maidstone Borough Council and Citizens Advice Bureau
- Pre-tenancy training courses delivered alongside MBC which helps clients to secure and maintain a tenancy; either in the private rented or socially rented sector
- Golding consider 'direct lets' (lets outside the usual allocation process) to properties offered to those that are homeless and in temporary accommodation
- Tenancy Support programme which introduces people to their tenancy and provides support up to six weeks with a designated officer. For the first 12 months of tenancy regular visits are maintained to tenants; and neighbourhood advisors hold regular meetings with tenants
- 'Rentsense' system; which, manages and predicts trends in rent arrears which will enable us to identify which tenancies are at risk earlier and try to resolve rent arrears before they become an issue
- Golding Homes provide a variety of supported living accommodation; including sheltered schemes for the over 50s and Willowbrook Place teenage pregnancy unit

Golding Homes has the following resources available:

- Signposting is part of normal staff duties
- An officer is provided once a month to do pre-tenancy training
- Direct lets in specific circumstances as part of their allocations process
- Designated tenancy support officer that provides assistance at the start of a tenancy
- Eight neighbourhood advisors to monitor and maintain tenant relationships in specific areas
- 'Rentsense' software
- A team of Officers who assist those who are in arrears to maintain their tenancy
- Supported living accommodation, including sheltered accommodation, with a team of staff who manage these schemes

Town and Country Housing Group

Town and Country Housing Group carry out the following activities in the borough:

- Tenancy support
- Tenancy training
- Money support
- Community Support that signposts those with support needs such as mental health substance misuse etc.
- Benefits advice and Learning, Skills and Employment support services
- Income Management Team who intervene to prevent homelessness

- Town and Country Housing report that Maidstone Borough Council has been able to maximise the use of their social housing in the borough. Since the beginning of the 2012/2013 financial year 100% of vacancies have been re-let by MBC

Town and Country Housing Group noted that they were unable to quantify or provide precise resource allocations for the activities they carried out to prevent homelessness in their clients.

The Voluntary and Community Sector

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) has an important role to play in preventing homelessness. The VCS was consulted by sending a consultation form via the Voluntary Action Maidstone network of voluntary organisation, as well as contacting organisations we had existing links with. Through this we were able get responses from various organisations within the sector on activities carried out and resources available.

Porchlight

Porchlight are a charity supporting vulnerable homeless people in Kent, Medway and Croydon. Porchlight carry out the following activities:

- 24 hour 0800 helpline number, with dedicated staff providing a referral and advice service for all issues connected to homelessness
- Outreach and accommodation projects providing keyworker support
- Workers funded by the Crisis Private Rented Sector scheme tasked with sourcing private rented accommodation for under 35s in the private rented sector
- Delivering keyworker support, through contracts with the Supporting People Programme

HOPE Kent

HOPE Kent is a charity that was set up to provide supported accommodation for homeless ex-offenders or those at risk of offending throughout Kent. HOPE works in partnership with the Kent Probation Area of the National Probation Service.

HOPE carry out the following activities around homelessness:

- Providing accommodation to those with support needs
- Advice if required
- Floating support
- Assistance with benefits, financial planning, applying to local rent deposit schemes,
- Assistance with appeals
- Hostel and move on accommodation
- Food vouchers and other forms of direct aid to clients
- Floating support to maintain tenancies
- Liaison with outside organisations around substance misuse

To carry out these activities, the following resources are available:

- One member of staff for Maidstone, who is responsible for providing homelessness advice, assistance with maintaining tenancies, budgeting advice, helping clients with their Kent HomeChoice applications
- A project has been funded, with one part time member of staff, to enlist the services of volunteers to assist in the support process in some properties
- There is a budget open to clients that enables financial assistance with welfare and education

Crossroads Care- West Kent Young Carers Project

Crossroads Care delivers services for Carers and people with care needs. It has a particular focus on young carers. Crossroads Care has supported young carers to access assisted housing. It has no particular resources available for this activity, but it is part of the service delivered as personal support for individuals.

Citizens Advice Maidstone

Citizens Advice Maidstone is the local branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau. It provides free, confidential, impartial and independent advice on a wide range of issues affecting the people of Maidstone. This includes advice and signposting on issues around housing and homelessness. Citizens Advice Maidstone carries out the following activities around homelessness:

- Advice and advocacy for homeless people
- Debt management advice to maintain tenancies and mortgages
- Negotiations with landlords and lenders to maintain occupation of properties
- Advising and helping to prepare court papers and court applications
- Some representation and support at court to defend possession proceedings and prevent evictions
- Referrals to appropriate agencies as part of home search activities

Citizens Advice Maidstone have the following resources available:

- A legal aid solicitor
- Two specialist housing advisors; equal to one full time post
- Volunteer staff at the Maidstone Borough Council Gateway; their office at Tonbridge Road and also available by telephone
- Two welfare benefit advisors
- Two money and debt advisors
- One employment specialist advisor
- Some home visits are available if clients are not able to access help in any other way