

Foreword

Welcome to the Council's 2013-2016 Housing Strategy, which sets out our priorities and commitments over the next three years.

The *Local Government Act 2003* places a statutory duty on local authorities to produce effective, forward-looking housing strategies. The Council has a wide and varied strategic housing responsibility and this strategy has been developed in consultation with members of the local community and partners within the housing, health and social care sectors. It builds directly on the priorities reflected in the Council's *Sustainable Communities Strategy 2009-2012*, as well as the national, regional and sub-regional housing agenda.

The strategy highlights the housing issues facing the local community in both the short and longer term. It identifies what we are doing to tackle these issues, what has been achieved so far and our plans for the future. It also reflects the Council's wider role in promoting economic, environmental and social well being; and its adopted corporate key priority to ensure:

“A continuing supply of homes, including affordable housing to buy and rent, and prevention of homelessness”

The Council has a strong track record of effective engagement with the local community, and of joint working with partners and stakeholders. This approach forms the basis for delivering the Housing Strategy, and for achieving our vision for housing in the borough.

In these uncertain economic times the Council recognises that the cost of housing across all tenures in the borough remains unaffordable to a great many residents. We also recognise the challenge of ensuring an adequate supply of good quality affordable housing at a time of significant cuts to public spending and extensive welfare reform.

A key challenge to the delivery of new affordable housing follows the withdrawal by central government of the majority of capital grant funding through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The Housing Strategy sets out our plans to ensure that a programme of new affordable homes is maintained in the future, recognising that there are no easy solutions. Resources for housing are scarce, and promoting the needs of the borough will be fundamental to our case.

Tackling homelessness continues to be an enormous challenge. Success can only be achieved by maximising the opportunities that exist with our partners to assist those in need. The current *West Kent Homelessness Strategy* was published in 2011 and sets out how we will tackle this growing problem.

The role of the private sector is pivotal to meeting identified housing need. We will continue to work with landlords and property owners to bring empty homes back into use, raise standards, and secure good quality rented accommodation which for many households, will be the only viable option for the future.

Councillor Mrs Jill Anderson
Cabinet Member for Housing
October 2012

1. The local housing market

With a population of 120,800, the borough covers an area of 24,013 hectares and is located in west Kent, some twenty five miles south east of London.

Immediately to the east lies the County town of Maidstone, Sevenoaks lies some six miles to the west and Tunbridge Wells is located to the south close to the market town of Tonbridge. The borough does not have a single urban focus but comprises a number of diverse, contrasting settlements and neighbourhoods. It stretches north, beyond the M2 motorway, encompassing Blue Bell Hill village and parts of Walderslade on top of the North Downs. To the south of the M2 is an area of the borough known locally as the 'Medway Gap' where the River Medway cuts through the North Downs. This area includes a number of villages on the east and west banks of the River Medway which are based on a history of cement and papermaking and where significant new housing development has taken place in the form of strategic site allocations on previously developed land. The urban area immediately to the south, which has resulted from the amalgamation of a series of former villages, comprises the parishes of Leybourne, East Malling and Larkfield, Ditton and Aylesford, and looks predominantly eastwards to Maidstone for other than day-to-day services.

Most of the borough is rural in character, including large tranches of green belt and areas of outstanding natural beauty, with villages and small towns of varying size, many of which are of architectural or historic interest. The largest rural settlements are West Malling, Borough Green, Hadlow, Hildenborough and East Peckham. Kings Hill is a relatively new community on the former West Malling Airfield comprising some 3,000 homes together with shops, schools and other community and recreation facilities.

Tonbridge and Malling has traditionally enjoyed a strong and buoyant economy. Compared to other parts of Kent, there are higher levels of household income, lower unemployment, excellent levels of educational attainment, and a highly skilled resident workforce. However, there are also pockets of relative deprivation, most notably the wards of East Malling, Snodland (East and West) and Trench. In addition, commuting levels are high which makes the area vulnerable to employment shifts in the capital.

The borough faces considerable challenge in respect of its housing. House prices are among the highest in Kent and are out of reach for many first time buyers and local people on average incomes. The average house price in the borough in the first quarter of 2012 was £275,000, ranging from £145,000 in Snodland to £300,000 in Tonbridge. The very challenging current economic environment and the difficulties in obtaining an affordable mortgage mean that many potential homebuyers remain in affordable housing, thereby reducing the availability for those who have a greater need. Just fewer than 2000 households are registered for housing in the borough, and the Council receives an average of 160 new applications each month.

House-building performance in Tonbridge and Malling has historically been above levels imposed by the South East Plan, taking advantage of the strong availability of strategic and sustainable development sites. However, as we move into the future, the supply of deliverable sites for housing is likely to diminish, and the identification of new sites will be much more challenging.

There is no council housing within Tonbridge and Malling. The Council transferred its housing stock in 1991 to Tonbridge and Malling Housing Association, now Russet Homes which is part of the Circle Group. Russet is the main provider of affordable housing in the borough however

other housing associations also hold stock, with an estimated overall total in excess of 7000 homes.

A shortage of housing in the social housing sector also places pressure on the private rental market, where high rents are driven by demand from the commuter market and those who cannot access mortgage funding. This brings specific pressures to homelessness services and will continue to do so, given the increased emphasis on the private sector in providing long term housing solutions.

The Council has a legal duty to provide accommodation for households that are homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need. In the absence of suitable permanent accommodation, bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation must be made available.

Although the number of people contacting the housing options team for advice remained high at an average of 68 per month during the last six months of 2011-12, the number of formal homeless applications has decreased during the past three years by some 33%. The number of households where the Council has accepted a duty to re-house has remained steady at an average of three per month.

However, national statistics show an increase of 18% in the number of households accepted as homeless in the quarter October-December 2011 compared with the same quarter in 2010. For local authorities in the South East region, this increase was even higher at 24%. Whilst the number of households living in temporary accommodation has remained stable in Tonbridge and Malling in the past twelve months, national statistics show a 2% increase during the quarter October-December 2011 compared with the same quarter in 2010. In the South East region, this increase was higher at 15%. The numbers living in bed and breakfast accommodation has increased by 37% cent nationally over this period, with a corresponding increase in the South East of 44%.

2. Strategic context

Good quality, accessible housing is a fundamental requirement for a prosperous and thriving community but there are considerable challenges in providing the quantity and quality of housing that local people need.

Despite the considerable achievements of the past three years, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the need for all types of housing but particularly affordable accommodation will continue to increase. The continuing economic decline, significant cuts to public spending and the unprecedented level of government reform of the social housing and welfare systems provide a formidable backdrop to the Housing Strategy.

Comprehensive spending review 2010-2015

The government's spending review (October 2010) fixed spending budgets for each government department until 2012-2015. Funding for local authorities was cut by 27%, the capital budget for affordable housing was cut from £8.4 billion to £4.5 billion and the reform of the benefits system is intended to save £7 billion per year by 2012-2015. This strategy has been maintained within the government's subsequent annual budgets of both 2011 and 2012.

The Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act sets out a series of measures that will have a far-reaching and significant impact on the services that local authorities deliver. Of particular relevance to the Council's housing function are the provisions relating to:

- § *Social housing allocation reform* - gives local authorities greater freedom to set their own policies about who should qualify to go on the housing register
- § *Social housing tenure reform* - sees the traditional "tenancies for life" replaced with fixed-term "flexible" tenancies, nominally for an initial term of five years
- § *Reform of homelessness legislation* – permits local authorities to meet their homelessness duty by providing accommodation in the private rented sector
- § *The obligation to publish a Tenancy Strategy* – which must set out the matters to which partner housing associations should have regard to when formulating their own tenancy policies. The Tenancy Strategy will be reviewed at least every five years
- § *Abolition of regional spatial strategies* – which included government-imposed area specific housing targets, now seen as unnecessarily bureaucratic and undemocratic. As yet, there is no timetable for abandonment
- § *Neighbourhood planning* – allows local communities greater influence over future development in their areas via a Neighbourhood Plan, where the local community wishes to engage in these potentially complex processes in order to promote new development.

Homes and Communities Agency: 2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme

The traditional capital grant funding which has funded the majority of new affordable housing was replaced in 2011 by a new programme of homes to be let at "affordable rents" on fixed-term and lifetime tenancies of up to 80% of local market rents. Housing Associations are able to borrow against the additional rental income generated by the Affordable Rent tenancies, thereby continuing to build new affordable housing with far lower levels of grant funding from government.

The impact of this change in funding regime depends largely on whether housing associations are able to continue to build significant numbers of new homes, however in the medium term it is predicted that the average numbers constructed will fall. In Tonbridge and Malling the programme is expected to deliver in the region of a further 500 new homes, but what will happen thereafter is far from certain. Already there are calls for Government to reveal what form the funding model for affordable housing will take following the end of the 2011-2015 programme and there are fears that an “over-reliance” on borrowing against assets now, may leave housing associations unable to raise more money after 2015.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012

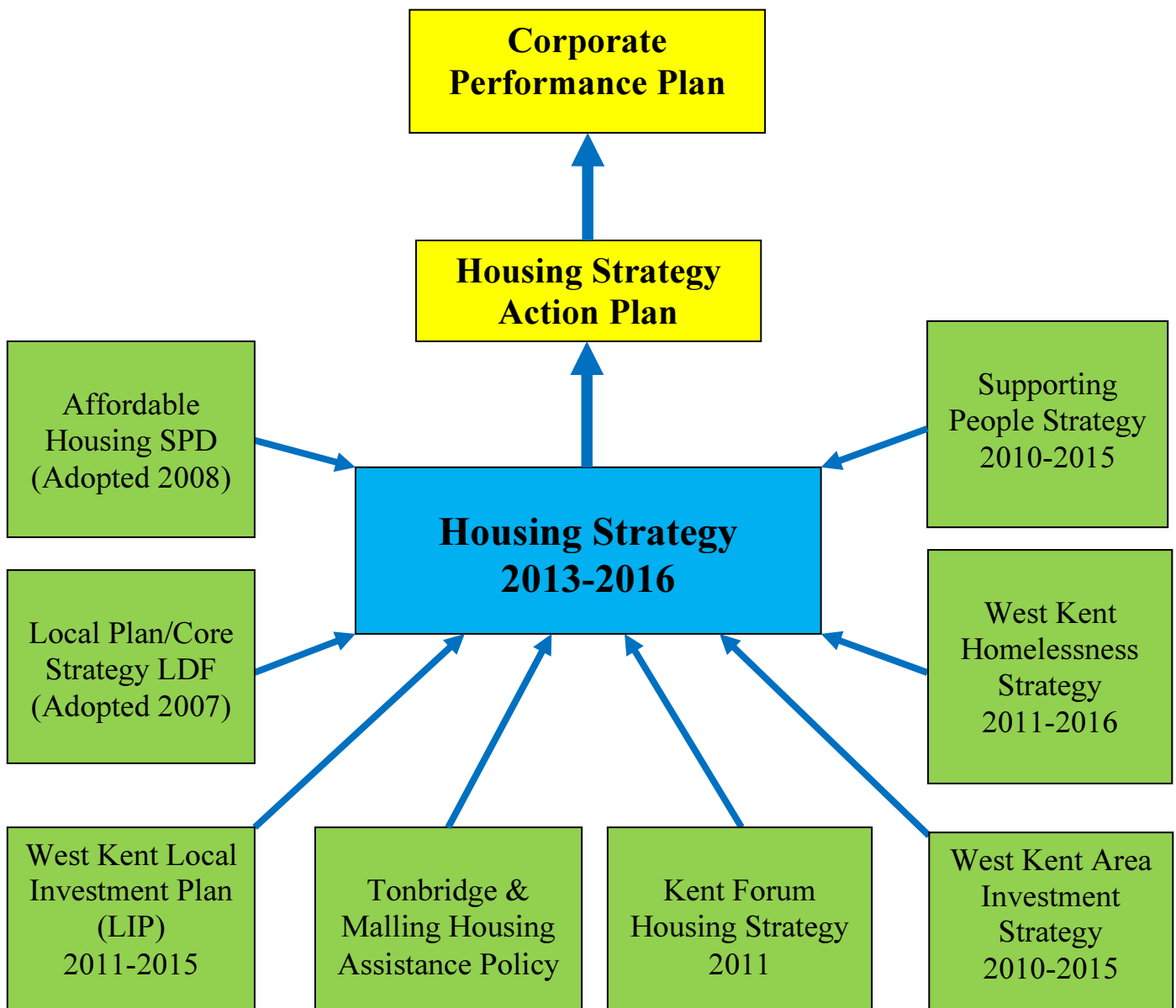
The Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent in March 2012. It introduces a wide range of reforms with a view to simplifying the benefits and tax credits systems by creating incentives to get more people into work, whilst protecting society’s most vulnerable households. The main elements of the Act are:

- § *Benefit cap* – from April 2013 a total cap on household benefits will limit the maximum amount payable to median household earnings in the UK. For couples and lone-parent households this will equate to £500 per week (26,000 per annum): and for single-person households £350 per week (£18,200 per annum)
- § *Universal Credit* – from 2013, many benefits and tax credits will be merged into a single Universal Credit, payable directly to individual householders
- § *The social sector size criteria (“Bedroom tax”)* – the third significant change that will be effective from April 2013 will see deductions of between 14-25% to the housing benefit of working age households in the social housing sector who are under-occupying their homes. This will put them on an equal footing with households in the private rented sector
- § *Non-dependent deductions* – large increases in the three-years from April 2012 in the deductions made from the housing benefit of those who have non-dependant adults (e.g. parents, grown-up children) living with them.

However, these measures are not the only aspects of welfare reform that have been introduced:

- § April 2011- Local Housing Allowance rates were capped, limiting the amount of housing benefit payable to eligible households in the private rented sector. The rates for five-bedroomed homes were scrapped altogether, and the rates from smaller properties restricted to the cheapest 30%
- § January 2012 – the *Local Housing Allowance single room rent restriction* was extended from single people up to the age of 25 to those of up to age 35. Those who rent from a private landlord are now entitled to housing benefit of no more than that which will cover the rent of a single room in a shared house
- § April 2013 – Abolition of council tax benefit (CTB) and its replacement with local “council tax reduction schemes”. Whereas CTB is funded wholly by central Government, the local schemes will only be 90% funded. It is likely that working-age claimants will see a reduction in the help they receive, although pensioner households are protected from any reduction.

3. Policy & strategy framework



The diagram above shows how the Housing Strategy links to a wider policy framework, both internal and external to the Council. The Housing Strategy brings together policy strands from the planning environment, Kent County Council functions such as Supporting People, and related agencies.

The outputs from the Housing Strategy are monitored through the Housing Strategy Action Plan, which links to the Council's Corporate Performance Plan.

4. Key achievements 2009-2012

Progress against individual objectives in the annual Housing Strategy action plans for 2009-2012 has been carefully monitored. A considerable amount was achieved during this period, with key objectives from the Housing Strategy 2009-2012 met, and in some instances exceeded. The following achievements are of particular significance:

- § Oversaw the provision of 1167 new housing completions, of which there were 295 new affordable homes to rent; and 134 new affordable homes to buy
- § 76 households became sole or part owners of existing properties in the borough through low-cost home ownership initiatives
- § With partners, secured the provision of 18 additional pitches to meet the identified housing need of our gypsy and traveller community (completion due November 2012)
- § With partner housing associations and the Homes and Communities Agency, secured via the *West Kent Local Investment Plan* funding for approximately 500 new affordable homes for the 2011-2015 period
- § With partners, delivered the borough's first nine units of accommodation-based support for young people
- § With partners, delivered seven new self-contained apartments of people with learning disabilities
- § As part of the Kent Choice Based Lettings Partnership, implemented choice-based lettings within the borough, enabling households registered for affordable housing to bid for the advertised vacancies of their choice
- § Processed in excess of 5,200 new housing applications
- § In excess of 1300 households re-housed from the housing register
- § With partners, developed and adopted the second West Kent Homelessness Strategy (2011-2015)
- § Reduced the use of bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation by a further 74% from 39 to 10 households
- § In excess of 550 homelessness preventions
- § Reduced the number of formal homelessness applications by 33%
- § 176 rent deposits/bonds/rent in advance payments granted to eligible households to secure accommodation in the private rented sector
- § 22 eligible households received some financial assistance to remain in their homes and avoid homelessness
- § Participated in the Kent-wide targeted education programme which has been delivered in several secondary schools, colleges and youth groups in the borough, primarily to prevent youth homelessness and develop awareness of tenancy issues
- § Enhanced and refined our internal procedures and telephony systems as part of our on-going commitment to tackling social housing fraud and improving customer service
- § Led and oversaw the final two years of the three-year North and West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership which resulted in the borough receiving £1.9 million to deliver decent homes and improve energy efficiency
- § Through the Housing Assistance Policy, 280 homes were made decent

- § Through the Housing Assistance Policy, over 150 tonnes of CO₂ were saved through energy efficiency installations
- § Licensed 2 new, and 5 re-licensable Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- § Completed over 350 Housing Assistance Grants
- § With a combination of funding from central Government and the Council amounting to £1.4 million, completed 282 Disabled Facilities Grants, making the home more suitable for the occupier
- § Developed and adopted an internal Empty Homes Protocol to promote a corporate approach to reducing the number of long-term empty homes in the borough
- § Returned 23 long-term empty homes in the private rented sector back in to use
- § Under the provisions of the Law of Property Act 1925, enforced the sale of one long-term empty property which was subsequently renovated and re-let
- § Supported the National Landlord Association Accreditation Scheme for landlords in the borough seeking accreditation
- § With partner housing associations, developed and adopted an Overcrowding Protocol for avoiding overcrowding when re-letting housing association accommodation
- § With Kent County Council, adopted a co-ordinated approach to tackling previous delays to Children's Occupational Therapy Assessments for disabled adaptations
- § Develop a protocol with Russet Homes to address the funding of disabled adaptations to their properties
- § With partners, provided three successful landlord forums a year to improve the working relationship with private landlords and provide valuable advice and information.

5. Key priorities 2013-2016

This Housing Strategy sets out priorities and commitments to be delivered over the next three years. It builds directly on the achievements of the last three years, recognising that the challenges for the Council's housing service have never been greater.

Many households will never be able to access affordable housing because demand will always outstrip supply. With fewer affordable homes being built, the only alternative for many families is the private rented sector, but that too is a declining resource. Recent national research has indicated that a substantial number of private landlords who currently offer rented accommodation to people on housing benefit are planning to withdraw from the sector.

Unsurprisingly, this response has been mirrored by many landlords in west Kent who have indicated that they will be far less likely to accommodate claimants of Local Housing Allowance as tenants in the future. Many landlords simply do not need to take tenants who are in receipt of benefits. They are able to draw instead from the pool of households who would, were it not for the economic downturn, be first time buyers.

With private sector rents expected to rise steeply in the next five years and a real risk that the capping of benefits will see an outward migration of families from the London Boroughs, there will be an even greater demand for what is already a very limited resource.

Despite this, the four key priorities for the Housing Strategy remain largely unchanged, and the Council is confident that they will provide a sound framework for the next three years:

- § Provision of affordable housing
- § Tackling homelessness
- § Private sector renewal and energy efficiency
- § Assisting vulnerable households.

The objectives that underpin each priority will be found in the Housing Strategy Action Plan which is published separately, and reviewed on an annual basis.

Provision of affordable housing

The Council's affordable housing development programme has been an outstanding success, delivering in excess of 400 new affordable homes to rent and to buy in the last three years. In addition, it has secured the provision of 18 additional pitches to meet the needs of the gypsy and traveller community.

However, demand for this type of housing provision continues to exceed supply. The *West Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment* (November 2008) identified an annual shortfall of 432 affordable homes, which is far in excess of programme delivery to date.

The very significant changes to the funding regime for affordable housing will exacerbate this shortfall and although the Council expects that the *2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme* will deliver more new homes in Tonbridge and Malling (circa 500 to 2015) than some other parts of Kent, this will be insufficient to meet existing and projected need. Furthermore, early indications from government are that there will be a further round of the programme post 2015.

Key objectives will include:

- § Working closely with partners to ensure the on-going delivery of the new Affordable Rent tenure
- § Working with partners to secure appropriate funding mechanisms to ensure a continuing supply of new socially rented homes and other forms of affordable housing to meet the future needs of low income households
- § By January 2013, developing and implementing a Tenancy Strategy for the borough. This is already well-progressed, with the Council leading on a countywide initiative via the Kent Housing Group to agree a set of overarching principles for the individual tenancy strategies that each local authority will develop
- § Undertaking a further Strategic Housing Market Assessment of housing need in the borough as evidence for the new Local Plan
- § Undertaking a further assessment of the housing needs of the borough's gypsy and traveller community in the context of new government policy
- § Updating the current Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document which was first adopted in 2008.

Tackling homelessness

The *West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016* sets out the Council's vision for tackling homelessness. Developed in partnership with Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, it builds on past successes and existing partnerships, without losing sight of borough-specific priorities. The detailed action plan, which sets out individual objectives for delivering the strategy, has been developed to cover the first two years of the strategy, with a review due in 2013.

Whilst the reduction in the last three years of the number of formal homelessness applications and the use of bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation is testament to the success of the preventative agenda, homelessness casework is becoming more complex. Increasingly, customers are presenting with a multitude of issues, including personal debt, benefit complications, issues around property rights, health problems and domestic abuse. No two cases are the same, and the majority require considerable officer input in order to prevent homelessness and secure the right long-term solution for the customer. As individual cases take longer to resolve, the total caseload carried by each officer expands.

The scarcity of both affordable housing and good quality private rented accommodation will be compounded to a large extent by measures within the *Welfare Reform Act 2012* which legislates for the biggest change to the welfare system for over 60 years, and also the *Localism Act 2011*. Specifically:

- § The impact of fixed-term tenancies, which will increase turnover and challenge community sustainment
- § The capacity of low-income households to meet the higher rents levied by the Affordable Rent tenancies, and the subsequent impact on the housing benefit bill (until it is wholly merged into Universal Credit)
- § The fact that only three in ten properties will be affordable for people on Local Housing Allowance, or Universal Credit, which will replace it
- § That most single people under 35 who are in receipt of Local Housing Allowance will only get enough benefit for a room in a shared house. The same will probably apply when Universal Credit replaces Local Housing Allowance

- § That householders with non-dependent adult members will have to pay more. Inevitably, some non-dependents will lose their accommodation as a result
- § Rising rent arrears (and potentially eviction levels and homelessness presentations) as a result of the simultaneous introduction of Universal Credit, the benefit cap and the “bedroom tax”
- § Increased pressure on the private rented sector as a result of the reform of the homelessness legislation
- § Pressure on the household budgets of the working-age claimants of council tax benefit (CTB), who will probably see a reduction in the help they receive towards their council tax due to the replacement of CTB with council tax reduction schemes.

Key objectives will include:

- § Reviewing the Housing Allocations Scheme in accordance with new flexibilities permitted under the *Localism Act 2011*, and government guidance published in June 2012
- § Developing and implementing proposals for responding to the reform of the homelessness legislation
- § Reinforcing our commitment to tackling social housing fraud - an average of 160 new housing applications are received on a monthly basis which require assessment against the Council’s Housing Allocation scheme. The assessment process includes the verification of applicants, with a percentage being checked against the Experian “Citizenview” system. Staff maintain a vigilant watch for potential cases of fraud, and work in close partnership with the Internal Audit and Fraud Investigation Teams and housing association partners.

Private sector renewal and energy efficiency

Some 75% of the borough’s 47,000 homes are privately owned. Although responsibility for maintaining private sector housing rests with the owner, the Council has regulatory and enforcement powers, and also a role as an enabler. It works closely with property owners, tenants, statutory and voluntary agencies and neighbouring authorities to tackle the underlying causes of poor quality private housing, reduce the number of empty homes and provide adaptations for those who have a disability.

The withdrawal of Government funding for private sector renewal has seen a reduction in resources from an annual average of £757,000 in the three years to 2011, to just less than £150,000 in 2012-13, which is the Council’s own funding. This has significantly decreased the Council’s ability to help homeowners improve their properties. As a result, it must use other powers such as works in default for example, to raise standards in the private sector and in particular to eradicate category 1 hazards under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

With many households already unable to access home ownership, the introduction of fixed-term tenancies and the provisions for homelessness and social housing allocation reform within the *Localism Act 2011*, the private rented sector will be the only option for many households. In addition, single people under the age of 35 will be looking to secure shared accommodation that is also scarce within the borough. It would not be unreasonable to expect an upturn in the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), and consequently an increase in the level of proactive work on the part of the Council to ensure that they meet minimum standards.

It goes without saying that the need to work closely with private landlords has never been greater, and it is a key strategic priority within the *West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016*. The Private Sector Housing Team has a significant part to play in developing and maintaining relationships with local landlords not only via events such as the West Kent Landlord's Forum but on a daily basis via rent deposit inspections and also through the National Landlords Association *Landlord Accreditation Scheme*.

Key objectives will include:

- § With private and public sector partners across Kent, establishing a *Green Deal Partnership* to maximise opportunities for local residents and businesses following the introduction of the Government's Green Deal in autumn 2012. The Green Deal forms part of the *Energy Act 2011* which intends to reduce carbon emissions cost effectively through large-scale improvement of the energy efficiency of residential buildings and infrastructure across the UK. It will provide loans for individual households to make homes energy efficient, with repayments being made through savings made on fuel utility costs
- § Undertaking a further assessment of the condition of private sector housing in the borough. The *Housing Act 2004* places a duty on local authorities to keep the housing conditions in their area under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken. The new assessment will inform the targeting of assistance under the Green Deal, repayable grant assistance to private property owners, and our enforcement programmes to improve conditions in the private rented sector. It will make use of data emerging from the 2011 census.
- § Maintaining close links with local private landlords, promoting the *Landlord Accreditation Scheme* and supporting the aspirations within the Kent Forum Housing Strategy to develop a private sector tenant education programme that will help tenants obtain and sustain their tenancies
- § Working with property owners to reduce the number of empty homes in the borough. Empty homes are a wasted resource, depriving people of a much needed home. The Council is part of Kent's *No Use Empty* partnership which works collaboratively to return empty homes to use
- § Building on the links between the Kent Forum Housing Strategy and the Kent Health Inequality Strategy, to develop joint working at a local level with health service professionals.

Assisting vulnerable households

It is the most vulnerable households that face the greatest challenge in securing and maintaining good quality affordable accommodation. It is important to recognise the vital role that specialist providers play in delivering a wide range of services to vulnerable households; and it is the Council's role to work closely with these providers and other statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure that clear pathways exist to enable vulnerable people to access accommodation and services that are appropriate to their needs.

Housing-related support costs are met by the Supporting People programme, which came into effect in April 2003 to deliver housing-related support services to vulnerable people through a single funding stream. Nationally, the programme is funded and monitored by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It is administered by Kent County Council in

partnership with the county's twelve district and borough Councils, Primary Care Trusts and Kent Probation.

Key objectives will include working with key partners to:

- § Deliver new accommodation-based support for people fleeing domestic abuse. According to the Home Office, one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Domestic abuse has more repeat victims than any other crime, with on average, 35 assaults taking place before a victim calls the police. There is currently insufficient refuge provision in west Kent
- § Ensure an adequate provision of suitable move-on accommodation for young people leaving accommodation-based support. The borough's first scheme for young people (completed in 2011) provides a safe and supportive environment for 16-24 year-olds for up to two years, but demand is far in excess of supply. Appropriate move-on accommodation is vital to ensure that the needs of both existing and future clients can be met
- § Deliver new accommodation-based support for people who misuse drugs and alcohol. The connection between homelessness and substance misuse is well known, and there is a significant shortfall in the provision of services to this group in west Kent
- § In addition, the Council will consider the assistance that it is able to provide through the scheme of discretionary housing payments.

6. Working with partners and stakeholders

Joint working with partners and stakeholders on housing-related matters is ongoing and the Council is represented at the following key groups and forums:

§ *Kent Housing Group*

A forum for social housing organisations in Kent with has representation from all twelve Kent local authorities, Medway Council, over sixteen housing associations and Kent County Council. The Group also has affiliated representation from the Homes and Communities Agency and when required other partner agencies. A wide range of sub-groups inform the direction of Kent Housing Group, which also include representation from the Council.

§ *Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing)*

A strategic partnership between the health, housing and social care sectors. The Board incorporates representation from all twelve Kent local authorities, Kent Supporting People, Kent and Medway Primary Care Trust, Kent County Council Families and Social Care, Kent Prisons, Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team, Kent Probation, Kent Youth Offending Services, and Catch 22 16 plus.

§ *Supporting People Commissioning Body*

Administers the Kent Supporting People Programme.

§ *Kent Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Housing Technical Group*

A forum for CIEH-qualified staff working in private sector housing that addresses technical issues and develops shared solutions and good practice.

§ *West Kent Homelessness Strategy Group*

A multi-agency group that oversees the implementation of the West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016.

§ *West Kent Landlord Forum*

Organised by the West Kent Landlords Partnership (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and the National Landlords Association) and take place three times a year to provide advice and support to local landlords and to keep them up to date with developments affecting the private rented sector.

§ *Tonbridge and Malling Local Children's Trust Board*

Responsible for delivering the ambitions of Kent Children's Trust around children, young people and families at a district level; and for ensuring that local communities are connected to the broader Children's Trust arrangements.

7. Monitoring and reviewing our performance

Progress against the delivery of priorities in the Housing Strategy is closely monitored:

- § By the Strategic Housing Advisory Board, which meets four times a year to oversee all of the housing-related business of the Council
- § Through formal and informal member briefings. Key members are briefed monthly on all matters relating to the planning, development and progress of new affordable housing. Registered provider partners also brief key and local members on forthcoming planning applications prior to their consideration by Planning Committee
- § Through the internal audit process which undertakes audit reviews of specific services and processes to ensure that they are being delivered appropriately
- § Through the annual performance appraisal framework and monthly one to one meetings
- § By Central Government, through the completion of annual and quarterly returns
- § Through the *Registered Provider Liaison Panels*, Member-led panels with senior officer representation which are convened every two years with senior staff from each of the Councils preferred Registered Provider partners.