

Sevenoaks District Coun

**Tonbridge and Malling Borough
Council**

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Joint Homelessness Strategy

Towards 2010

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1. Introduction

The west Kent sub region was identified in the south east regional housing strategy (SERHS) as comprising the councils of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells. The three local authorities in west Kent wish to increase the provision of affordable housing in the sub region and to improve their services to those with a range of housing needs.

Housing authorities are encouraged to take a broad view and consider the benefits of cross-boundary, sub-regional and regional co-operation when developing their homelessness strategies. The three councils have, therefore, decided to build on their established track record of partnership working to produce a joint homelessness strategy forward looking towards 2010.

It is recognised that no local authority can hope to achieve its long term aims without developing open and transparent relationships between all partners, including housing associations and the voluntary sector. All agencies need to take ownership of the strategy. Organisations through their policies may actually be adding to the homelessness problem e.g. housing associations through their rent arrears possession procedures as well as being in a position to help solve the problem through, for example the provision of affordable housing. Given the important role partners need to play in tackling homelessness, opportunities for joint working need to be fully exploited. The aim of the sub-regional strategy is to build on existing relationships and develop cross-boundary arrangements.

Homelessness is not just about sleeping rough. It is also about individuals and families living in temporary accommodation, the hidden homeless and “sofa-surfers” – people staying with family and friends often in overcrowded conditions. This can have adverse knock-on effects on health, employment and children’s education and behaviour.

Understanding the causes of homelessness is fundamental to the formulation of a strategic approach to address the main issues. Local authorities need to be pro-active in tackling the causes of homelessness rather than responding in a reactive way. This requires an understanding of the local housing market and the dynamics at play. Structural issues such as affordability are well documented but are not that easy to address.

Sub-regional and regional working

The three local authorities have an established track record of partnership working both in the sub region and across the county, through groups such as Kent Housing Group, Kent Homelessness Officers’ Group, Kent Policy Officers’ Group and the long established Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB). The west Kent JPPB merged with east Kent JPPB in May 2006 and it is hoped that this collaboration can continue subject to funding being secured from west Kent organisations to support the group.

The decision to take a cross-boundary approach to addressing the root causes of homelessness echoes the government's commitment to prevent homelessness. The government has sought to strengthen the action taken by local authorities in preventing homelessness, expanding housing options and providing access to settled homes through a number of good practice documents at the heart of which is "More than a Roof" (2002) and "Sustainable Communities: Settled homes; changing lives" (2005). This document also sets out the target of halving the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010. The Communities and Local Government¹ (CLG) strategy document outlines how the government is seeking to achieve this target and further reductions in homelessness by:

- encouraging homelessness prevention
- supporting vulnerable people
- tackling the wider causes and symptoms
- helping more people to move away from rough sleeping
- providing more settled homes

The joint homelessness strategy is not the first example of partnership working across the three authorities. Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling have worked in partnership to tackle homelessness on a number of joint projects over the years, including:-

- Supported lodgers' project for homeless 16/17 year olds
- Women's refuge for women fleeing domestic violence
- Colebrook Road hostel for non-priority need homeless clients
- Sub regional housing strategy, currently in draft
- Homelessness strategy conference, March 2006
- Private landlords' fora October 2006 and January 2007

A project team consisting of representatives from the three local authorities was tasked with producing a joint strategy, adopting a coherent approach to address the wide range of problems that can cause homelessness. This document is the result of this partnership approach.

¹ Formerly Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

2. Legislative and policy context

Local authorities have a duty to find accommodation for the homeless under part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. Under the 1996 Act, local authorities have responsibilities to those who they have reason to believe are either homeless or threatened with homelessness. A person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation in the UK, has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or has accommodation but where it would be unreasonable for him or her to continue to occupy it. A person is threatened with homelessness if he or she is likely to become homeless within 28 days.

If a local authority has reason to believe that a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness, it is required to make inquiries and decide whether it owes the applicant a duty to find accommodation for him or her. In each case local authority staff need to conduct assessment interviews to determine whether each applicant is eligible for assistance, homeless, in “priority need” and not intentionally homeless. If an applicant meets these criteria, the local authority has an immediate duty to provide temporary accommodation for him or her or for anybody who normally resides with them.

Local authorities owe a lesser duty to applicants who are not in priority need or who are intentionally homeless. In some circumstances, local authorities must help these applicants find temporary accommodation for long enough to find their own accommodation. They may also be under a duty to provide them with advice and assistance in finding their new accommodation. Information and advice about homelessness and housing options can be provided by the local authority and also external agencies. However, it is essential that the advice and assistance provided is up to date, robust and will help with the strategic aim of preventing homelessness.

Where an applicant is threatened with homelessness and meets the above criteria, local authorities have a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure that the accommodation remains available for his or her occupation.

The Homelessness Act 2002 shifted the emphasis away from crisis management to preventing homelessness. Local authorities are required to carry out a homelessness review and then draw up a homelessness strategy which should be periodically updated. These homelessness strategies should include measures to prevent homelessness, ensure that sufficient accommodation is available for the homeless, and to provide support services for people who may become homeless.

What is priority need?

The homelessness legislation categorises certain groups of households as being in “priority need”. These are:-

- households with dependent children
- pregnant women or those with whom a pregnant woman resides
- people who are vulnerable due to old age, mental illness, handicap, physical disability or other special reason
- households rendered homeless or threatened with homelessness because of a disaster such as fire or flood.

In 2002, these priority needs categories were extended under the Homelessness (Priority need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 to include:-

- 16 and 17 year olds
- care leavers under the age of 21
- people aged 21 or over who are vulnerable as a result of having looked after, accommodated or fostered
- people who are vulnerable as a result of having been a member of the armed forces
- people who are vulnerable as a result of having been in custody or detention
- people who are vulnerable as a result of leaving accommodation because of violence or threats of violence likely to be carried out.

Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006 – the need for a joint strategy with Kent County Council Adult and Children’s Services

The Code of Guidance that accompanies the homeless legislation, published by the CLG is an essential device in applying the legislation and producing the joint strategy. The Code provides local authorities with essential guidance on the duty to carry out a homelessness review and to formulate a strategy based on this review. The Code also makes it clear that housing and social services departments should jointly sign up to the homelessness strategy and that it should be taken into account by both departments when exercising their functions.

Homelessness review and strategy

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all authorities must provide a homelessness strategy which must be reviewed every five years. The strategy and review are intrinsically linked, with the key themes having arisen from the review, being used to inform the strategy. The purpose of the review is to establish the extent of homelessness in the district, assess its likely extent in the future, and identify what is currently being done, and by whom, and what

level of resources are available, to prevent and tackle homelessness. The review that informs this strategy can be found at Annex [2].

National policy context

Since the Homelessness Act 2002 came into force, the prevention of homelessness has emerged as one of the government's key housing priorities. Prevention, as opposed to taking homeless applications, has gained prominence over the last few years with government publishing a number of homelessness documents setting out how services to the homeless should be delivered. The government's overriding aim is:

- to prevent homelessness from arising;
- to improve the service provided to the client;
- to encourage clients to take up preventative options to tackle their homelessness, so that homelessness overall is reduced.

There is a raft of documents published by the CLG which seek to take the prevention agenda forward. These are set out at Annex [5].

The CLG publication "Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check", provides a self-assessment tool that has enabled the three councils to identify areas for improvement within their own services and to jointly address common priorities for action.

Regional context

In the south east region, homelessness is now falling. There was a 25% reduction in the number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need in the south east between 2004/05 and 2005/06, compared with a 22% reduction in England as a whole.

In 2005/06 the number of households in the south east accepted as homeless and in priority need was 9,320 (CLG, 2006). This amounted to 9.9% of the total of 93,980 acceptances in England, less than the region's 16% share of the total population

Sub regional context

The collective west Kent picture is not consistent with the national and regional trend of falling numbers of homelessness acceptances. In Tonbridge and Malling, this is because of the existing contractual arrangements with Russet Homes, who manage the homelessness service on the Council's behalf. With the service split between Russet Homes and the Council, a consistent prevention service has been difficult to achieve.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, however, is consistent with the national picture and has achieved year on year reductions for the last two years albeit

from a historically higher starting point in terms of numbers of acceptances in 2003/04.

Sevenoaks District Council is beating the national trend currently. With figures due shortly these will confirm substantial reductions in homelessness acceptances, due in no small way to the council's prevention and intervention strategies.

It is necessary, therefore to look behind the figures to try to identify local variations that may account for the differences. A notable consistency is that over 60% of all homeless households in the three districts contained dependent children or pregnant women. The three councils along with KCC Children's services need to collectively focus their efforts on preventing homelessness amongst families with children. A District Manager from Children's services sits on the Homelessness Strategy Group and this issue will be taken forward through that group, for example, to improve information sharing where a threat of homelessness exists.

Audit Commission – Key Lines of Enquiry

This strategy has also taken into consideration the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) covering Homelessness and Housing Needs (No.8). The areas focussed on by this KLOE are:

- Access, customer care & user focus
- Diversity
- Housing advice, homelessness prevention and options services
- Homelessness services
- Temporary accommodation for homeless households
- Value for money

3. Consultation and review

As part of the review of homelessness in west Kent it was agreed to merge the two stakeholder groups covering Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells councils and Tonbridge and Malling council to form one homelessness strategy group.

It is essential that all contributors take ownership of the strategy if it is to be effective. To help inform the role of respective agencies a homelessness conference was held in March 2006 at The Angel Centre, Tonbridge.

The event attracted speakers from the Government Office of the South East (GOSE), CLG, Shelter and the Community Legal Service. It was used to formally launch the consultation process with 79 delegates attending from a range of statutory organisations and voluntary agencies including social services, registered social landlords, advice sector, probation service and health. The event attracted media attention with coverage in the local newspapers and on local radio. The main themes explored further in interactive workshops were homelessness prevention, joint working, gaps in provision and ways to engage with hard to reach groups. Feedback from the event was very positive and highlighted the need to look at two key areas in more detail – housing options for young people and making effective use of the private rented sector.

Focus groups were held on 6 June 2006 to explore these two key themes. These workshops were facilitated by the Specialist Adviser on homelessness from the CLG with key stakeholders participating to identify actions to take forward in the new strategy.

Review and research – data collection

Stakeholders have been actively encouraged to provide data relevant to their areas of operation to inform the strategy. They have also been actively involved in the review of the emerging strategy through regular meetings. Questionnaires were sent out to 165 organisations identified as having some involvement with homelessness. A low response rate was achieved across the three local authority areas which highlighted a key area for further action around improving the detail and way in which organisations record information. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Annex [9].

Service User Involvement

The importance of meaningful dialogue with service users has been a priority through the development of this strategy. The three local authorities have been pro-active in engaging with service users on various aspects of service delivery to the homeless, for example, satisfaction with temporary accommodation. In order to involve service users in the west Kent strategy, a

focus group was arranged specifically to engage and facilitate ways for them to feed into the strategy process.

An event was held at Colebrook Road hostel in July 2006 with 7 clients, both past and present, attending to discuss their experiences of homelessness. Constructive dialogue focused on the good and bad points from a user's perspective and the improvements they would like to see, however large or small e.g. the wording of letters etc. The feedback from this event has been translated into improvement actions in the action plan wherever possible. All of the service users gave a commitment to remain involved as critical friends in the evolving strategy. The draft strategy was circulated to these service users and their feedback has provided an important and different perspective.

Self Assessment Health Checks – adopting best practice

A number of self-assessment toolkits have been developed to drive forward improvement in the way local authorities and their partners deliver services to the homeless. This strategy document takes account of good practice guidance by including appropriate actions in the Action Plan.

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs)

Local authorities are required to constantly review and evaluate their performance through a range of measures including best value performance indicators and other submissions to government. The BVPIs for 2006/07 and 2007/08 are set out in Annex [6].

Local authorities can use this data to compare their own performance and to tease out good practice from across the country.

Consulting on the draft strategy

The draft strategy was presented as a consultation paper with questions for stakeholders to consider throughout the document. The questions have been summarised in Annex [3] for ease of reference. A summary of the responses can be found in the Consultation Response Document - Annex [4].

The Project Team would like to thank everyone who contributed to the formulation of the Strategy.

This Strategy does not aspire to address each and every cause of homelessness as these are many and varied. Instead, the Project Team have concentrated on the main causes of homelessness and groups at risk of homelessness in west Kent. The Strategy focuses on where the councils and our partners can make a difference by changing policies and practices, and by showcasing examples of good practice. The consultation response has confirmed that the Strategy has identified the correct priorities and target groups. Feedback has been positive with stakeholders welcoming the emphasis being given to tackling the issue of youth homelessness. A number

of organisations have highlighted rough sleeping as an issue that needs to be properly acknowledged and addressed. This will mean engaging with voluntary agencies and encouraging them to work in partnership with us to ensure that those people who do not want to approach us direct have a means of accessing advice and assistance through advocates etc.

The three authorities have made every effort to include statistical information on all aspects of homelessness in west Kent. The Review document contains the statistical data that supports the reasoning behind the Strategy.

A copy of this strategy can be found on the councils' websites (www.tmbc.gov.uk; www.sevenoaks.gov.uk; www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk).

4. Target homeless household groups

While there are many different client groups at risk of homelessness identified through the review, the group felt it should not seek to address the specific needs of every client group in detail, but instead should focus on the areas where the need is greatest.

The review shows that the following groups are the most represented in the homelessness statistics:

- **Lone parents**
- **Young people, particularly 16/17 year olds**
- **Victims of domestic abuse**
- **Clients with mental health issues**

These are the groups that homeless prevention activities need to focus on primarily, across west Kent. The specific issues relating to the main client groups at risk of homelessness are outlined below.

LONE PARENTS

Homelessness amongst lone parents accounts for the largest proportion of cases being accepted under the homelessness legislation in the three authorities as the table below highlights:

Acceptances of lone parents 2005/06

	No. of acceptances of lone parents	% of acceptances
Sevenoaks	110	60%
Tonbridge and Malling	108	58%
Tunbridge Wells	76	54%

Reasons for homelessness amongst lone parents broadly reflect the main causes of homelessness, with parental eviction being the primary cause. This client group are often unable to resolve their own situation due to financial constraints.

What we have achieved so far

Family mediation - Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Tonbridge and Malling and Sevenoaks District Council work in partnership with Bridge Trust to provide a mediation service. Tonbridge and Malling also work with Maidstone Mediation Scheme.

Home visit procedure - in Tonbridge and Malling, a home visit procedure has been implemented to try to prevent homelessness as a result of parental/family exclusion. Tunbridge Wells have introduced a procedure to carry out home visits to 16/17 year olds who have been asked to leave parents', friends' or relatives' homes. Sevenoaks aims to undertake home visits where appropriate and do so in the majority of cases.

What we need to do

- Aim to carry out home visits to all cases where homelessness is threatened as a result of parental evictions, where appropriate, with the emphasis on homeless prevention
- Develop closer links with, and increase number of successful referrals to family mediation services

YOUNG PEOPLE

Throughout the review of homelessness and consultation for the Homelessness Strategy the issues of homelessness for this client group have often dominated. This has also been the case in other housing forums and consultation on housing strategies for each local housing authority.

Accommodation for young people, particularly 16/17 year olds is limited in the three local authority areas. Supported accommodation is available in Tunbridge Wells which accepts homeless households from the age of 16 years including a YMCA hostel with 13 self contained flats and Christian Alliance Housing Association with shared facility accommodation for women; including a few units for young parents. However, these are not specialist 16/17 accommodation schemes and it is essential that a balance of age groups is achieved for management purposes. Each scheme also has a long waiting list. Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling do not have any such schemes for young people. There is also a need for longer term supported accommodation for teenage mothers.

For young people who are accommodated by each of the councils or other housing providers, it is essential that they are provided with the right sort of support in order to sustain their accommodation. Therefore the local housing authorities must work with the support of the Kent Supporting People team to secure sufficient and specialist floating support services e.g. support for teenage parents.

The three councils welcomed the government's announcement in November 2006 that it wanted to bring to an end the use of bed and breakfast for 16/17 year olds. However, no further funding has been made available to assist local authorities in reducing its usage.

Bed and breakfast is often the only accommodation option in an emergency and the three councils will need to consider ways to tackle this issue and the resulting longer term accommodation need.

What we have achieved so far

Research into young people's housing needs

- Sevenoaks produced a Young People's Housing Strategy in June 2007.
- Tonbridge and Malling completed a research project into young people's housing needs to inform this strategy and the Housing Strategy 2005-08 update.
- Tunbridge Wells commissioned a full review of young people's housing services and developed a Young People's Housing Strategy as a sub-strategy to the main housing strategy. This was adopted in April 2007.

Schools project - all three local housing authorities are involved in developing a Kent-wide schools project to prevent homelessness in young people aimed at Years 9-11. Tonbridge and Malling already have a proactive programme of schools workshops in local secondary schools aimed at homelessness prevention.

Family mediation - all three councils work with the Bridge Trust to provide family mediation. Tonbridge and Malling also use Maidstone Mediation Scheme. These schemes assist 16/17 year olds either to remain at or return home. Where this is not possible it can help to improve relationships between the young person and their family which improves the young person's chances of tenancy sustainment with the family's support.

Supported lodgers' scheme - developed between the three local authorities, the Bridge Trust and Rainer 16+. This scheme provides a homeless young person with accommodation in a family environment by placing them with a host family who provide support to the young person pending a move into more independent accommodation. Whilst not the answer for all homeless 16/17 year olds it can assist those who do not have the life skills to sustain their own tenancy. The scheme has been piloted in west Kent and the feasibility of this support intensive model needs to be reviewed based on actual placement costs.

Floating support – Sevenoaks District Council fund West Kent Housing Association (WKHA) to provide six units of floating support for 16/17 year olds where they are housed in WKHA stock.

Acceptances of Young People during 2005/06

	No. of acceptances of 16/17 year olds	% of acceptances	No. of acceptances of people formerly in care aged 18 – 20 years	% of acceptances
Sevenoaks	20*	11%	2	1%
Tonbridge and Malling	1	0.5%	0	0%
Tunbridge Wells	9	6%	0	0%

* Sevenoaks have been very proactive in this area and have reduced their acceptances for the first three quarters of 2006/07 to 3.

What we need to do

- Emergency accommodation - alternative accommodation options need exploring, such as 'crash pad' or 'night stop' facilities in partnership with other statutory and voluntary sector partners
- Longer term supported accommodation – explore provision of foyer or similar hostel for young people, specifically 16/17 year olds in west Kent, with shared nomination rights across the three authorities
- Longer term supported accommodation for teenage mothers, with shared nomination rights across the three authorities
- Housing-related support – secure sufficient specialist floating support for young people through Supporting People services

HOUSEHOLDS AT RISK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Homelessness as a result of a violent relationship breakdown accounts for an average of 10% of homelessness acceptances across the three authorities.

Tunbridge Wells experienced the highest level of domestic abuse cases in 2005/06 across west Kent, with Tonbridge and Malling next highest and Sevenoaks lowest of the three, as the table below highlights. This can be compared against the national average of 13%.

	No. of acceptances due to violent relationship breakdown	% of acceptances
Sevenoaks	9	5%
Tonbridge and Malling	20	11%
Tunbridge Wells	21	15%

The higher number of cases seen by Tunbridge Wells might be attributed to the fact that a women's refuge is situated in the borough, whereas Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and Malling who share access to the refuge, do not have a refuge within their borough boundaries.

Floating support for women at risk of domestic violence in west Kent is provided by West Kent Housing Association and there are a total of 30 units of support available, funded by Supporting People.

In addition, the Women's Domestic Violence Support Service and Freedom programme also provide advice, support, risk reduction and peer support for this client group in Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells. Sevenoaks has instigated robust investigation procedures for domestic violence in association with other agencies. Sevenoaks liaises with support groups and refuges.

Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 225 on domestic abuse sets out a range of 11 tests all local authorities should meet in order to demonstrate the requisite level of advice and options available to victims of domestic abuse. These criteria, along with each authority's progress are set out at Annex [8]. Where gaps in provision are identified, actions will be included to address these in partnership with other agencies and departments working with this client group.

There is also a need for reciprocal arrangements to be made available to clients at risk of domestic abuse, to enable them to move between districts and boroughs where they are at risk of abuse in their current home and options such as the Sanctuary/Safe Haven Project are not appropriate.

Statistics available for this client group suggest the issue is largely confined to white British female victims in heterosexual relationships where the perpetrator is the male partner or ex-partner. However, in accordance with the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Guidance, authorities should ensure those from different minority groups can access services should they require it. The three authorities need to be mindful that the support needs of other client groups, such as men experiencing domestic violence or those from minority ethnic groups, may be different.

What we have achieved so far

Women's refuge – Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells councils jointly commissioned a Women's Refuge offering 6 bed spaces for women and children fleeing domestic violence. In 2005/06, 29 families were provided with safe, emergency accommodation at the refuge before moving on to a permanent home.

Sanctuary scheme – This scheme enables clients at risk of domestic violence to remain in their home safely, through provision of additional safety measures in the home, for example, locks on windows and doors, gated security to the outside of a property, fire hammers, fire blankets and emergency lighting. Tonbridge and Malling have operated a Sanctuary scheme for residents of the borough since February 2005, called 'Safe Haven'. Sevenoaks have offered a Sanctuary scheme since 2006. Kent Police have now rolled out the Sanctuary scheme across Kent which benefits all Kent authorities.

Floating support - Access to 30 units of support provided by West Kent Housing Association. This is a new service to the area following a review of support priorities for west Kent.

What we need to do

- Set up reciprocal arrangements between Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks councils to assist victims of domestic abuse to move between boundaries where necessary without needing to apply as homeless
- Identify common areas for improvement within the requirements of BV225 and seek to jointly address areas of weakness
- Ensure staff regularly receive training on domestic violence and associated legal remedies
- Carry out an analysis of the need for support services for men at risk of domestic abuse, minority ethnic groups and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community
- Raise the profile of domestic violence across our communities to uncover what is largely a hidden issue
- Make the best use of the floating support service on offer

CLIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

People with mental health problems can find it difficult to both access accommodation and to retain their home.

The Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust have 405 mental health service users on their enhanced caseloads in Tonbridge and Malling, 127 in Sevenoaks and 260 in Tunbridge Wells as at 1 February 2007. A recent analysis of these clients identified 27 people who are in need of supported accommodation in Tonbridge and 24 in the Malling area. A similar review is required in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells to establish the level of accommodation need from this client group.

Statistics on households accepted as homeless by the local authorities show that 6 clients with mental health issues were accepted as being homeless and in priority need in Tonbridge and Malling in 2005/06. In Sevenoaks, 18 clients with mental health issues were accepted and 15 in Tunbridge Wells.

There are a total of 16 clients with mental health issues currently on the Joint Assessment Referral Procedure (JARP) waiting list for accommodation in Tonbridge and Malling. See page [19] for more information on the JARP/JARS.

	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge and Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Clients on enhanced caseloads ²	127	405	260
Clients identified as having a supported housing need ³	Not available	51	Not available
No. of local authority homeless acceptances	18	6	15
No. of clients on local authority JARS/JARP waiting lists	TBA	16	15

Sevenoaks District Council has five mental health schemes, some of which are operated in partnership with Richmond Fellowship, MIND, and West Kent Housing Association. One scheme is shared with Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Councils. The schemes operate in the most part across a range of mild and moderate mental health issues.

The need to address the lack of supported accommodation has been recognised across the three authorities and is a priority for action. Tonbridge and Malling are currently working with the Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, KCC, Supporting People and our RSL partners to facilitate provision of more supported accommodation for clients with mental health needs. Work will also be undertaken with our RSL partners to look for additional opportunities to address this unmet need.

² Clients of the Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust

³ Identified by the Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust

A further concern for the three authorities is addressing the needs of clients with dual diagnoses, i.e. clients with a mental health and substance misuse issue and clients diagnosed with a personality disorder.

What we have achieved so far

Mental health protocols – Kent-wide protocols in place to improve working arrangements between local authority housing departments, Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) and in-patient units. The protocols provide an early warning and referral system for clients who are about to be discharged from hospital or are at risk of homelessness as identified by the CMHT. The protocol has improved working relationships considerably so that currently agencies discuss cases before they reach crisis point and seek to prevent homelessness.

Identifying a need for supported housing – robust evidence has been obtained on the level of need for supported accommodation for this client group and a commitment made by the stakeholders involved to meet the unmet need in Tonbridge (see below).

Floating support – Supporting People fund 30 units of floating support for clients with mental health issues in west Kent. The support provider is the Richmond Fellowship.

JARP/JARS referrals – the table below shows the number of clients with a mental health issue who have been accepted and rehoused through the JARP/JARS in Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.

	Tonbridge and Malling			Tunbridge Wells			Sevenoaks		
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2004/05	2005/06*	2006/07
Acceptances	1	5	8	26	20	16	Not Recorded	11	17
Rehoused (Supported)	0	2	2	8	12	6	Not Recorded	7	7
Rehoused (General Needs)	5	7	2	2	6	4	Not Recorded	3	7

*figures for last three quarters only

OTHER CLIENT GROUPS

The three authorities recognise there are other client groups at risk of homelessness, for example single, non-priority clients; ex offenders; those with substance misuse issues; dual diagnoses; and gypsy and travellers.

In some cases, however, only anecdotal evidence exists to support a need for these groups. There is a need to establish a common mechanism for

monitoring the levels of homelessness amongst these and other groups. Consideration of each of these groups is made below.

NON-PRIORITY HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

The household make-up of this group can include single people, couples and families with non-dependent children and who are not vulnerable in terms of the homeless legislation. However the majority of those who are homeless and end up sleeping rough or 'sofa surfing' (staying with various family or friends when they can) are single people. They might also have drug or alcohol problems have suffered a relationship breakdown or been unable to find affordable accommodation.

Although there is no duty on a local housing authority to accommodate these households, they do have a duty to provide them with advice and assistance. All three local housing authorities will go through their housing options, which could include securing short-term hostel accommodation with assistance to move on from that accommodation into accommodation through the housing register. If they have a local connection with the district or borough they are often entitled to assistance with deposits and / or rent in advance to help them to secure private rented accommodation.

Whilst some are assisted by the local housing authority, many of our stakeholders feel there are a number of issues which prevent homeless households from approaching us:

- They do not know that we offer advice and assistance
- Some people do not want to give their personal details and circumstances to a statutory authority
- They do not have a local connection are so are not eligible for certain schemes
- Drug and alcohol problems
- They do not know how to deal with housing matters when they have so many other personal problems

It should also be noted there are homeless households who may be considered vulnerable under the homeless legislation, but who have not approached the local housing authority. Their vulnerability would be assessed by the local authority, taking into consideration any assessments by support services, particularly social services and the health authority.

What we have achieved so far

Colebrook Road hostel – temporary hostel accommodation for single non-priority clients, developed as a shared resource between Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells councils.

Severe weather provision for rough sleepers – emergency cold weather provision for a short period for clients found to be rough sleeping in Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling.

What we need to do

- Develop common monitoring system to record robust data on homelessness in west Kent.
- Ensure housing advice is accessible to rough sleepers and other non-priority groups
- Produce a joint re-connection policy where non-priority groups do not have a local connection to the councils, to put them in touch with support services in the area where they have a connection

EX OFFENDERS

While numbers of approaches from this client group are small in Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling and Sevenoaks, dealing with the specific problems faced by ex-offenders when trying to access housing has been highlighted.

What we have achieved so far

Empty properties initiative – the Kent Joint Planning Policy Board (JPPB) of which the three authorities are members, has raised this issue as a county-wide concern and a sub-group has been set up to tackle the housing issues of ex-offenders. This sub-group will attempt to break the cycle of repeat crime and is looking at a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness, including involving ex-offenders in the refurbishment of empty properties to be used to house ex-offenders and other single homeless clients. Sevenoaks are actively participating in this initiative. Tonbridge and Malling do not have a significant number of empty properties or any that would be suitable for the initiative.

Prison discharge protocol – the JPPB is also working up a protocol to improve homeless prevention activities and discharge arrangements, based on the HARP model, in partnership with probation, the prison service and NOMS.

Tumim House, Maidstone – supported short-term hostel accommodation for ex-offenders with drug/alcohol issues which opened in December 2005. Tumim House has nine bed spaces, four of which are available for clients with local connections to Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling, referred by the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT). Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells councils have set up a move-on agreement with Tumim House to ensure all clients with a connection to the borough are assisted to move back to the area.

Floating support – a new supporting people contract w.e.f April 2007, West Kent Housing Association are contracted to deliver up to 20 units of support in the west Kent area.

What we need to do

- Progress the prison discharge protocol and empty property initiative in partnership with the JPPB, probation, prison service and NOMS.

CLIENTS WITH ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES

People with a dependency on drugs or alcohol are more likely to become homeless than those who do not struggle with these issues. In addition, housing providers find them problematic to house because of the perception of the difficulties they may bring with them, for example, anti-social behaviour or inability to manage their tenancy.

There is little provision of supported accommodation suitable for local people recovering from alcohol or substance misuse, other than Tumim House for ex-offenders. General needs hostel accommodation, e.g. Colebrook Road, will in some instances accept clients with alcohol or substance misuse, where support is in place and the client is considered suitable for the scheme.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council works closely with the Kenwood Trust with move-on arrangements in place for their local supported projects.

Support for this group is available through the DAAT, KCA Drug and Alcohol Services and Supporting People. In west Kent, the Kenwood Trust is contracted to provide up to 30 units of floating support.

GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

Gypsies and Travellers are at risk of homelessness where there is a shortage of suitable sites and accommodation options for them. Whilst none of the local authorities have a way to record specific approaches from this client group, there are households who make homeless approaches. The Gypsy and Traveller Unit at Kent County Council do not have data to indicate levels of homelessness, but do report they have received approaches from household groups, which include young people, teenage parents and families with dependent children.

The reasons for homelessness can be that they are fleeing violence, relationship breakdown, overcrowding or the loss of the site on which their caravan was parked e.g. unauthorised encampments.

Generally speaking, homelessness approaches from this client group are from gypsy and traveller households who are seeking housing options and assistance with accommodation usually provided by a local housing authority. However, it is likely that a number of gypsy and traveller households who

become homeless do not approach the local housing authority as they would rather find a suitable site on which to park a caravan.

A recent study of Gypsy and Traveller's housing needs commissioned by Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling, Ashford and Maidstone councils revealed the level of site provision in the boroughs and degree of housing / site requirements for the coming years. This study did not look specifically at current or future homelessness amongst this group. However, it could be assumed that where housing needs are acute and unmet, this could lead to homelessness. The survey results are currently being reviewed by SEERA as part of the process of planning for gypsy/traveller needs in the South East Plan.

The survey suggests six households per annum may be seeking a move to permanent accommodation across the whole survey area (Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Ashford and Maidstone). Meeting a proportionate amount of this need in Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling depends on Gypsy and Traveller families applying to go on the housing register and securing a sufficient level of points for an offer of accommodation to be made. It will be important, therefore, to make sure appropriate information is made widely available to households seeking to access social housing.

Sevenoaks District Council with Dartford, Gravesham and Swale Borough Councils commissioned a similar survey which has recently been completed. It has not yet been approved or adopted by Members so results are not yet known. Early indications are there will be a high number of extra plots required to accommodate Gypsy and Traveller needs in the district.

Sevenoaks District Council has the largest number of public plots in the county (54) as well as significant private provision. The Council owns and manages its own Gypsy/Traveller site (12 plots) and has two KCC-owned sites in the district (42 plots).

Sevenoaks District Council is unique in that it has a dedicated Traveller Liaison Officer who works proactively to reduce unauthorised encampments, manages the Council owned site, monitors private sites and provides advice to the Gypsy and Traveller community. This proactive approach has resulted in a reduction in unauthorised encampments over the last few years. The Head of Housing also sits on the KCC County wide Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Group and the GOSE/SEERA Gypsy and Traveller Group.

What we have achieved so far

Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Surveys_-Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils commissioned a survey in 2005 with two other local authorities and the results of that survey are due to be published at around the same time as this document. Sevenoaks District Council also had a separate survey and it is anticipated the results will be out late 2007.

What we need to do

- Explore any actions relating to homelessness required in the recommendations of the survey results.

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC (BME) GROUPS

The 2001 census identified minority ethnic populations of 2.5% for Tunbridge Wells, 1.7% for Tonbridge & Malling and 1.3% for Sevenoaks.

Whilst the minority ethnic population was low in all three districts, access to housing, including local housing authority services may be difficult for some groups where English is not their first language. It is, therefore, important that the councils provide good translation and interpretation services and ensure marketing of housing services is targeted at community groups.

Households applying as homeless during 2005/06

(N.B. - Includes all applications made not just accepted cases)

	White British	Minority Ethnic Groups	Not Stated	Total Applications
Sevenoaks	292 (84%)	27 (8%)	27 (8%)	346
Tonbridge and Malling	294 (97%)	10 (3%)	0	304
Tunbridge Wells	250 (88%)	30 (11%)	5 (1%)	285

The figures indicate that there is not one significant origin of minority ethnic applicants. They are divided fairly equally among all of the groups.

While these figures are low, actions taken through the homelessness strategy must ensure that the interests of the black and minority ethnic (BME) population are not ignored.

What we have achieved so far

BME Strategy – Tunbridge Wells have committed to identify the needs of minority ethnic groups and to develop a strategy by September 2007. A Race Equality Plan has recently been completed. Sevenoaks District Council has recently reviewed its BME housing strategy.

Race Equality Scheme and Diversity Policy - adopted by Tonbridge and Malling which highlights how the housing and homelessness services can help to promote and achieve race equality. All applications to the Council under the homeless legislation are subject to the ethnicity monitoring processes which are reported through the P1e returns to government. Sevenoaks District Council's Race Equality Scheme and Diversity Policy has recently been adopted by members.

What we need to do

Tunbridge Wells – at present there is not enough known about the needs of minority ethnic groups but through the Tunbridge Wells Housing Strategy (Action 2.3) these will be identified and any homelessness issues addressed in the development of the BME Strategy

5. The main causes of homelessness

Local authorities measure the causes of homelessness by the primary reason the household has become homeless but there are often a variety of contributing factors. The three main causes identified through statistical monitoring are:-

Family breakdown

The most common cause of homelessness in 2005/06 was parental eviction of adult children accounting for 37% of homeless acceptances in Sevenoaks and 41% in Tonbridge & Malling. Tunbridge Wells had a lower proportion of acceptances as a result of parental eviction with only 16%, but a higher number of acceptances due to 'other special reason'.

	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge and Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Parental eviction	37%	41%	16%
Eviction by other relatives or friends	21%	9%	17%
Total	58%	50%	33%

When including 'eviction by other relatives or friends', the figures increase to 50% of all acceptances in Tonbridge and Malling; 58% in Sevenoaks and 33% in Tunbridge Wells (including 'parental eviction' figures). The factors affecting the difference in these figures across west Kent should be explored further to inform how our services are delivered and ensure prevention activities are consistent and targeted appropriately.

End of an assured shorthold tenancy

The second most common reason for homelessness in west Kent in 2005/06 was termination of an assured shorthold tenancy, with figures consistent across the authorities at around 15%. Further work is required to look behind the reasons for this and prevention work targeted to landlords and tenants.

Good practice suggests most landlords do not want to evict their tenants unless there is a good reason because of the costs and inconvenience involved.

Domestic violence

Homelessness as a result of a violent relationship breakdown was the next highest contributory factor in the three authorities (see previous section). One reason for the higher number of incidences in Tunbridge Wells may be due to having a women's refuge in the borough. However, further research is needed to establish the number of domestic violence cases reported to the police in all three local authority areas, and compare these to the level of acceptances.

In many cases, however, there are a range of factors that can lead or contribute to homelessness, for example, redundancy, debt, bankruptcy, offending, drug or alcohol issues and relationship breakdown.

This is commonly seen in single young people where a cycle of homelessness can occur for example, as a result of an offence linked to substance misuse, leading to family breakdown. It can also be seen in family situations, for example where redundancy or illness causes financial difficulties, debt and bankruptcy which can result in repossession of the home.

6. Key Priorities

The strategy has drawn on the evidence contained in the review, consultation with stakeholders and service users, and guidance and good practice, and aims to:

- **Prevent homelessness** wherever possible
- Ensure people have **access to affordable accommodation**, are **supported** to do so and **have support** to sustain their tenancies
- Improve the availability of **good quality accommodation in the private rented sector**
- Improve and sustain **effective partnerships** across the public, private and voluntary sectors to tackle homelessness

These aims have been translated into the following priorities, in consultation with our stakeholders, which provide the framework for this strategy and ensure homelessness is tackled across the three local authorities.

- **Priority One: Provision of housing options and advice**
- **Priority Two: Supporting people to access and maintain accommodation**

- **Priority Three: Improve access to private sector housing stock**
- **Priority Four: Effective partnership working**

The next section and action plan give the detail on how we will deliver in these areas.

7. Addressing the key priorities

Priority 1: Provision of housing options and advice

The essential element to tackling homelessness is through timely housing advice through the 'housing options' approach. This represents a cultural shift from processing homelessness, to preventing it, where all applicants approaching the Council for assistance participate in an options interview to assess their particular circumstances and prevent homelessness. Options interviews should discuss safeguarding the applicant's current accommodation or secure an accommodation solution where this is not possible. Where it is likely that the applicant is likely to be eligible, threatened with homelessness and in priority need, a two-stage process may be operated, so that if options fail, safeguards are in place under the homeless legislation.

Home visits

Eviction by parents, relatives or friends accounted for approximately half of all acceptances in west Kent. The ethos of homeless prevention emphasises the need for home visits which can act as a vital prevention tool to reduce homelessness. Timely provision of housing advice and a range of housing options including mediation can enable the household to make a planned move or reconcile the situation.

Staff structures and good practice

The prevention agenda also impacts upon the organisation of the local authority's homelessness function. There has been a shift from processing to preventing homelessness, which requires different skills and knowledge to traditional homelessness work. There is a greater need for negotiation, problem solving and in some cases, marketing skills, to successfully take forward initiatives with key stakeholders, e.g. private landlords and the voluntary sector.

The structure of local authority homelessness teams is also changing; more staff are being directed to housing advice and prevention, as opposed to taking homeless applications.

At Sevenoaks District Council the Social Housing Team has 4.5 housing advisers with a Service Manager who offer appointments for housing advice.

Advice and information is offered on a range of issues, including prevention, housing register, homeless applications, tenancy rights, finding accommodation in the private sector, help with the loan and rent deposit guarantee schemes and advice with landlord and tenant problems.

Tonbridge and Malling have a contract with Russet Homes to carry out the homelessness service on behalf of the Council. Russet Homes employ two housing advisers (one seconded to the Council) and an assistant housing adviser to prevent and process homeless applications. The Council benefits from one housing adviser to provide a homeless prevention and options service. However, this structure and the contractual arrangements with Russet Homes are currently being reviewed.

Tunbridge Wells have retained the homelessness function in-house. There are currently two full-time and one part-time homeless officer who process homeless applications and two housing advisers, who prevent homelessness, assist with housing options and provide general housing advice and assistance.

All three local authorities provide funding to their local Citizen's Advice Bureaux to provide advice on a range of issues, including housing, debt and possession proceedings. Sevenoaks District Council also has a service level agreement with the three CABs in the district to specifically provide detailed debt counselling and mortgage advice. Additionally, there is a service level agreement with Shelter to provide advice and support to avoid eviction through the Dartford County Court.

Where not already in place, the west Kent authorities need to ensure that staffing structures and skills sets match the need to prevent homelessness as opposed to processing it.

Targeting services

To prevent homelessness successfully, services must be targeted to the client groups most at risk of homelessness and the main causes of homelessness locally. These have been highlighted in earlier sections. It is vital that the true 'front line' is established, i.e. where a household might go for advice before approaching the local authority, and services are targeted to those agencies. For example, local GPs may be alerted to a family breakdown months before homelessness occurs, when a client requests medical assistance for stress or depressive symptoms. Because family breakdown is the biggest cause of homelessness in west Kent, targeting this issue is of primary importance. Similarly, with a significant number of households losing an assured shorthold tenancy, the authorities might consider jointly commissioning a resource to tackle this, for example, a tenancy sustainment post.

What we have achieved so far

Homelessness prevented in 2005/06 – As a new performance indicator in 2005/06, the number of cases prevented from becoming homeless has largely

been estimated against the strict guidance issued to the authorities. Sevenoaks estimate 79 cases were prevented in 2005/06; Tonbridge and Malling prevented approximately 30 cases and Tunbridge Wells prevented 24 households from becoming homeless. Mid-year figures for 2006/07 indicate that a significant improvement has been made in homeless prevention this year.

Home visit procedures – good practice has been adopted in developing a draft procedure for home visits in Tonbridge and Malling. The procedure aims to establish the underlying reasons for the threatened eviction and seeks to put in place a range of alternative housing options to prevent homelessness. Tonbridge and Malling are seeking to roll out the procedure for all cases involving a relative or friend eviction. In Sevenoaks, home visits are carried out when appropriate, and telephone and written advice is available. In Tunbridge Wells, a home visit procedure has also been introduced.

Joint training – through the Kent Homelessness Officers group, regular training on housing options and homeless prevention takes place across Kent. For example, joint training sessions open to all Kent authorities have been held at Tonbridge and Malling on assessing medical vulnerability under the homeless legislation and prevention of homelessness due to mortgage repossession. Sevenoaks District Council is currently reviewing its training needs and will continue to work actively in partnership with local authorities across the South East and Kent via the Homelessness Officers group.

Housing advice information – a number of ‘fact sheets’ have been developed in Tonbridge and Malling that offer guidance and advice to clients who are threatened with or actually homeless. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council also has a range of leaflets on housing options and advice which are regularly updated. Sevenoaks District Council are currently undertaking the production of an informative style “options” pamphlet which will include advice on housing, homelessness, private rented accommodation, shared ownership and the housing register.

What we need to do

- Ensure all cases involving parental, relative or friend eviction receive a housing options home visit
- Review staffing structures where appropriate to ensure resources are targeted at prevention, rather than processing homelessness
- Produce standard housing options procedures, checklist and information for clients seeking housing advice across west Kent
- Establish the true ‘front line’ targeting housing advice outreach, promotional material and agency training to these areas

Priority 2: Supporting people to access and maintain accommodation

ACCESSING SOCIAL HOUSING

The statutory framework surrounding local housing authorities' legal obligation towards certain groups is enshrined in part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Section 167 of the Act (as amended by s.16 of the Homelessness Act 2002) defines certain groups that should be given 'reasonable preference' for an allocation of housing. Authorities' allocations policies set out how social housing will be allocated, giving 'reasonable preference' to these client groups. The three west Kent authorities currently work under a points based allocations system, awarding points for varying factors of housing need.

Housing associations are also required to co-operate with local authorities under the same Act, where their assistance is requested in discharging a housing duty to an applicant. Housing associations are also regulated by the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code that requires them to work with local authorities in ensuring those with a priority for an allocation of housing, can be accommodated.

In recent years, there has been a sea change in affordable housing provision with many local authorities, including Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells, transferring their housing stock to housing associations. Now, more than ever, there is a need for the three authorities and their housing association partners, to work more closely together to improve the discharge of legal duties to households accepted as homeless.

Recent guidance issued by CLG such as "Effective Co-operation in Tackling Homelessness: Nomination Agreements and Exclusions" (2004) sets out the government's suggested approach for ensuring the needs of homeless households can be met through local housing associations.

CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

The government's five year plan for housing, "Homes for All" sets out its commitment to establish choice based lettings (CBL) in all local authorities by 2010. CLG wish to see schemes develop on a cross borough basis, involving partnerships between local authorities, registered social landlords (RSLs) and the private sector. The aim is to achieve the greatest choice and flexibility for clients seeking accommodation.

What is choice based lettings?

CBL allows people to apply for vacancies in social housing stock through advertisements usually in the local press, council offices and websites. The system is considered more transparent and less bureaucratic, allowing applicants to see the properties available and to apply for accommodation to which they are matched. The successful applicant is usually the person with the highest priority for the property applied for. Feedback is provided to enable applicants to gauge their chances of a successful bid and of the possible waiting time for a property.

Kent Choice Based Lettings Partnership

In order to meet the government's target of introducing CBL in all local authority areas by 2010, a consortium of local authorities and RSLs in Kent successfully bid for CLG funding to implement CBL. This group formed the Kent CBL Partnership. The initial partnership has grown to incorporate all Kent local authorities and all RSLs working in Kent, to a total of 27 partners. Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells are part of the consortium established to introduce CBL across Kent.

Drawing on the pilot CBL projects that took place in 2001/02, best practice and recent case law, the Kent CBL scheme seeks to encapsulate the following principles:-

- A common banding system for assessing and prioritising housing need will be agreed where local authorities are looking to update their allocations policies. Local differences may be incorporated, subject to legal scrutiny.
- It is assumed all local authority and RSL lettings in the region will be subject to choice, although there will be clearly defined circumstances where a landlord can exclude a property from the scheme.
- Traditional nominations agreements with RSLs may be replaced with an expectation that vacant properties will be included in the CBL scheme.
- A percentage of lettings will be available to promote mobility between different local authority areas. This will be monitored closely to ensure equity between areas.
- The bidding and advertising process will be managed by a contracted service provider who will develop and manage ICT links with landlords and local authorities.
- In each bidding/lettings cycle, usually fortnightly, each landlord will upload details of properties available for letting to the service provider. The provider will translate this data into advertising media, e.g. website and free sheets, for applicants to bid against using telephone, coupon, SMS and email.
- The provider will process bids made for each property and provide the landlord with a shortlist based on the priority level of the bidders.
- Feedback will be available to service users on the outcome of previous adverts to enable them to judge their prospects of rehousing.

In advance of CBL rolling out across Kent, the three west Kent councils are considering areas of joint working where commonalities exist to ensure consistency across the three boroughs, for example, through a common banding system.

What we need to do

- Identify funds to buy into the scheme and cover its annual running costs
- Review allocations policies and consider a common banding system across west Kent authorities
- Ensure west Kent authorities continue to be strongly represented at CBL project board
- Retain local priorities while promoting choice
- Ensure vulnerable groups have access to the scheme by raising awareness of CBL amongst statutory and voluntary sector partners of how they can support their clients to access it

NOMINATION AGREEMENTS

A nomination agreement is a fundamental tool in ensuring a local authority has access to vacancies in RSL stock for clients in housing need. The Housing Corporation's normal expectation of RSLs is for at least 50% of net vacancies to be set aside for local authority nominees. Higher entitlements may be appropriate, depending on local circumstances, e.g. pressure of homelessness, and should be negotiated accordingly.

As stock transfer local authorities, we are reliant on our RSL partners to meet the housing needs of residents. However, RSLs can refuse to allocate accommodation to certain applicants where they are not eligible under their allocations scheme - for example, where former tenant arrears exist, and this causes problems for local authorities in discharging their statutory duties. It is essential, therefore that RSLs follow good practice guidance in arrears management and only opt to evict a tenant as a last resort.

What we have done so far

- Sevenoaks and WKHA have recently reviewed the housing register which now includes enhanced points for local connection. Sevenoaks District Housing Register (SDHR) managed by West Kent Housing Association (WKHA) has 100% nomination rights of all available lettings with 35% of lettings targeted for SDC homelessness cases. Sevenoaks are currently

looking at producing a formal nomination agreement with all its RSL partners.

- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council has agreed a standard nomination agreement and local lettings policy for all new developments to ensure it receives 100% of initial lets and 75% of subsequent lets from its RSL partners.
- Tunbridge Wells has nomination agreements on all new developments providing 100% nomination rights on initial lettings and 75% on lets thereafter.

What we need to do

- Set up standard nominations agreements where not in place, to ensure a reasonable proportion of RSL lettings are made available to the local authorities
- Agree local lettings policies on all relevant new developments
- Explore funding for permanent supported housing arrangements for those who need it

SUPPORTED HOUSING PROJECTS AND MOVE-ON

For many single homeless people, hostel and supported accommodation is their only housing option. There is a wide variety of hostels, shared houses and flats, and other accommodation projects for homeless people. However, most hostels and housing projects for homeless people only provide temporary accommodation.

Many have staff that provide resettlement advice and assistance with finding accommodation to move on to. Direct access hostels and night shelters provide accommodation for people without a bed for the night, however, there is no direct access accommodation in west Kent. Homeless people can usually refer themselves, and despite often being full, there tend to be relatively frequent vacancies. Second stage, non-direct access hostels and housing projects usually have waiting lists and often require referrals from homelessness agencies.

In addition to providing accommodation, many hostels have staff who offer support to residents, recognising that many homeless people have support needs as well as being in housing need. Support can vary from simple information and advice on benefits or other such matters, to more in-depth help with independent living skills, emotional support and assistance with finding move-on accommodation. Some hostels provide specialist support for residents with alcohol, drug, health or mental health problems. Some high care schemes provide help for people with complex support or health care needs.

Because of the number of different types of hostels, few vacancies in some areas and the need in many cases for an agency referral, good housing advice for homeless people is very important. Specialist housing advice services are provided by housing advice centres, citizen's advice bureaux, day centres and outreach teams. The three local authorities are members of the West Kent Legal Services Partnership which is a network of accredited legal services and advice providers.

Some hostels have a number of local authority and housing association nominations for residents moving on. Some provide their own move-on accommodation for residents, once they are ready to live more independently. This type of move-on accommodation often consists of shared flats and houses, and levels of support offered to residents tend to be lower than in first stage hostels.

All three local authorities are currently working with their RSL partners and local charities to ensure people are placed in the right accommodation on moving out of supported units and into general needs stock unless other suitable accommodation is available.

All three councils support the expansion of move-on accommodation subject to budgetary constraints but will endeavour over the period of this document to find innovative solutions for this type of accommodation, which will be permanent, and where possible include appropriate support. The councils' objectives are to assess current levels of access to appropriate move-on accommodation and support, understand the nature and extent of any backlog in the current system and assess projected future demand for move-on accommodation and support.

Additionally, each member of this sub region is in close contact with and has regular meetings with the providers of supported accommodation and the countywide Supporting People team in an effort to review procedures and processes to ensure that clients with local connections are given the opportunity to move into general needs accommodation when they are ready to do so.

What we need to do

- Produce move-on agreements for new and existing supported housing schemes
- Explore ways of increasing the availability of move-on accommodation including making better use of the private sector

JOINT ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL PROCEDURES (JARP/JARS)

The three local authorities operate joint assessment referral procedures whereby service users have their housing and support needs jointly assessed by a multi-agency panel with a view to a suitable accommodation and support package being agreed. The panel is made up of various representatives e.g. Adult Services, KCC Supporting People, housing providers, support providers probation, community mental health teams etc.

The joint assessment process enables a thorough assessment of a household's needs, including support needs. The assessment can then be used to inform decisions on intervention to enable a household to remain in their own home, placements in temporary accommodation and options for the provision of more settled accommodation including managed move on arrangements. The meetings also provide a useful forum for agencies to come together to consider the needs of the various client groups. Statistics collated on referral activity provide a useful source of data and serve to highlight gaps in provision.

For more information on the JARP in Tonbridge and Malling, contact Nicola Bowen on 01732 876214; in Tunbridge Wells, contact Jacqui Gower on 01892 554138; in Sevenoaks, contact Graham Fearon on 01732 227431.

FLOATING SUPPORT

It is recognised that the provision of support is an essential part of homelessness prevention. Timely and appropriate support can make all the difference to homelessness outcomes in terms of prevention and tenancy sustainment to avoid repeat homelessness. It is essential, therefore, for local housing authorities to ensure efficient and effective use of all support resources including supported housing accommodation. This requires processes to be responsive to the needs of service users e.g. through targeted allocation of floating support services and streamlined move on arrangements. It is also essential to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet needs. Local authorities need to take an active role in the commissioning of new projects and services through the local Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group which makes decisions on the use of Supporting People funding.

Homelessness cannot be tackled or prevented, solely through the provision of accommodation. Some households will require a range of support services, which may include housing-related support to help them sustain their accommodation, as well as personal support relating to factors such as relationship breakdown, domestic violence, mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, debt and unemployment.

Support can help to prevent people who are at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless at all. In other cases, where people have experienced homelessness and been placed in temporary accommodation, the provision of

support may be essential to ensure that they are able to continue to enjoy a reasonable quality of life and access the range of services they need to rebuild their lives. The provision of support can also be important in helping formerly homeless households to sustain settled housing and prevent homelessness from recurring.

Securing provision of support services

It is necessary to consider all the current activities in the area which contribute to the provision of support for households who are or may become homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again and the resources available.

Households who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness have diverse needs. One size does not fit all so a range of services will be required. Services can be delivered through:

- floating support services – delivered in the client's home. Support is generally time-limited and low intensity
- short and medium term housing with support – accommodation based support such as supported housing schemes, direct access hostels and supported lodgings
- long-stay housing services – ongoing support to those who are unable to live independently in the community.

A key objective of the strategy is to ensure that sufficient accommodation and support services are and will be available for people who are or may become homeless. Inability to access floating support and supported housing can result in clients becoming homeless or finding themselves in inappropriate temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast hotels for extended periods. This can make it difficult for clients to maintain their informal support networks and community links and to maintain contact with health service professionals.

What we need to do

- Explore opportunities for a west Kent tenancy sustainment officer
- Monitor tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector
- Ensure existing support services are effective and targeted to where they are needed most
- Ensure vulnerable households are supported to enable them to access accommodation
- Ensure all applicants seeking housing or homelessness assistance receive support where required.
- Lobby Supporting People team for ring-fenced floating support for young people and increase in provision for clients with mental health issues
- Lobby for changes in Housing Benefit rules regarding lodgers and family members

Priority 3: Improve access to private sector housing stock

Partnership working with private landlords

The good working relationship that exists between the three councils and local landlords has proven invaluable in helping clients to access the local private rental market and meet the demand for accommodation. A west Kent Landlords' Forum has been established to maintain contact with landlords and to ensure the effective dissemination of information such as on the tenancy deposit protection arrangements – to find out more about the forum contact Linda Hibbs on 01732 876209 or Hazel Skinner on 01732 876199 or Steven Richardson on 01732 227393.

All three housing authorities have housing advisors, housing options officers or specialist private rented sector staff, who work with private landlords and households in housing need to secure accommodation within this sector. Many private landlords 'buy to let', which means a tenant, could remain in the same home for a number of years. The three local authorities have all developed various schemes to assist households to access the private rented market e.g. help with deposits and rent in advance, usually required to take on a private rented tenancy. Sevenoaks DC, Tonbridge & Malling BC and Tunbridge Wells BC offer their various schemes to all homeless households not just those in priority need (*see "What we have done so far" page 40*).

Private rented accommodation has also been used to accommodate homeless households in priority need whilst they await more settled accommodation.

There are a number of common difficulties in making use of this resource, some of which are particularly relevant to the three local authority areas:

- Finding accommodation which is affordable to people on low incomes and within benefit levels
- Landlords' reluctance to take people on benefits
- Lack of security provided by short fixed term tenancies
- Clients under 18 years old being unable to hold a tenancy
- Single room rent restriction for households under 25 years
- Landlord and tenant disputes leading to eviction of the tenant(s)

Whilst some of the difficulties may be insurmountable without a legislative change, the local housing authorities could make some improvements in the local area. For staff providing housing options their aim is encourage landlords to take households in receipt of housing benefit, explain the rent in advance and deposit schemes and to promote the advantages of having good tenants for longer fixed terms. Housing staff will also work with individual households in finding suitable, affordable accommodation in the private sector and where necessary to assist in negotiating terms with the private landlord.

Many landlord and tenant disputes are due to problems with housing benefit claims. Again the housing departments need to work with housing benefit departments to see what is causing housing benefit delays, whether a tenant needs to provide a new claim or further information or whether discretionary housing payments should be sought.

Whatever the difficulty in keeping or securing private rented accommodation, the housing departments need to look at ways to overcome these difficulties and to make more effective use of this under utilised housing resource.

What we have done so far

- Joint private landlord fora held 11 October 2006 and January 31 2007
- Rent deposit scheme in place in Tonbridge and Malling available to all client groups experiencing homelessness or threatened with homelessness including non-priority households and across boundary lets. Cash deposit of up to one month's rent given as interest free loan, or bond available. In exceptional priority cases, agent's fees, rent in advance and guarantor will be provided.

Sevenoaks provides a "Rent in Advance" scheme and a "bond deposit" scheme to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and have a local connection to help them into private rented accommodation. The Council also allows people to rent across boundary.

Rent deposit loan scheme is available in Tunbridge Wells for all client groups including non-priority households. Clients can take out an interest free loan of up to one month's rent as a deposit and six weeks rent in

advance. Alternatively for those who cannot repay a loan there is a deposit guarantee scheme which means the local authority guarantee payment to the landlord if the tenant causes any damage not covered by insurance

- Work ongoing to introduce a joint Landlord Accreditation scheme across west Kent.
- Empty property grants available to private landlords in Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells as an incentive to bring homes back into use for households nominated by the local authority.

Sevenoaks District Council offers an empty property package called “Granting Homes” scheme to help owners bring their empty properties back into use. This includes the offer of a discretionary grant and the Council’s “rent in advance” and “deposit bond scheme”. The property is offered to a homeless family for 3-5 years and managed by West Kent Housing Association. In addition, the Empty Property Officer can provide advice and guidance to empty property owners and also to people looking to buy an empty property.

What we need to do

- Encourage more private landlords to accept clients referred by the Councils or in receipt of housing benefit
- Explore ways to facilitate ‘tenancy in trust’ for 16/17 year olds
- Lobby government on single room rent restriction
- Set up an introductory service to match prospective tenants with private landlords and increase the range of services and incentives offered to landlords who accept clients referred by the Councils
- Review rent deposit schemes to ensure they meet the needs of landlords and tenants and reflect legislative changes brought in by the Housing Act 2004

Priority 4: Effective partnership working

The three councils have a proven track record of partnership working, which is highlighted in the introduction to this strategy. However, there is still scope to improve on current performance in this area. An established stakeholder group representative of a range of organisations has been involved in the development of the homelessness strategy and will continue to be actively involved in monitoring progress against the action plan.

The benefits of joint working were explored in one of the workshops during the west Kent homelessness strategy conference held in March 2006. It was felt

that there are some well established joint working arrangements but there is scope to gain added value for example through better information sharing.

It was recognised that the individual groups perform their functions well but there is a need for more joined up working to identify gaps and ensure consistency. There also needs to be greater recognition of the role played by voluntary and charitable organisations in helping the homeless. The group also identified the scope for statutory and voluntary agencies in west Kent to come together to lobby as one powerful west Kent voice. The actions identified by this group have been added to the action plan.

There is considerable scope to build on existing working relationships and exploit opportunities for joint working. The individual local authorities have their own arrangements for the provision of mediation services, rent deposit schemes, landlord and tenant relations etc. but there is scope to develop west Kent arrangements with the attendant benefits this brings through economies of scale.

The statutory homelessness provisions apply across the country but the local connection requirement brings the acceptance and discharge of duty back to a borough responsibility. It can be seen, however that the regional housing strategy and the move towards choice based lettings by 2010 will introduce a cross boundary dynamic to the equation. The west Kent homelessness strategy provides a framework to put some of the cross boundary mechanisms in place, for example in the case of homelessness through domestic violence. The ability for neighbouring boroughs to agree reciprocal arrangements rather than take homeless applications would contribute to the homelessness prevention targets whilst preserving security of tenure for the victims. This arrangement could be rolled out across Kent through the Kent Homelessness Officers' Group and Kent Housing Group.

What we have done so far

- West Kent Community Legal Services Partnership (WKCLSP) formed to promote information on the referral network of legal services and advice providers in west Kent.
- West Kent Local Strategic Partnership formed of agencies across the public, private and voluntary sectors to take forward strategic improvements in areas such as housing, economic development and transport.
- Several protocols have been set up by the JPPB to encourage joint working in homeless prevention with the following:
 - Housing and KCC Children, Families and Education for intentionally homeless families and 16/17 year olds
 - Housing and KCC Adult services for clients with mental health issues

- Tonbridge and Malling instrumental in producing a working protocol with Kent Youth Offending Team to tackle 16/17 year old homeless ex-offenders. This is appended to the above protocol for 16/17 year olds.
- JPPB sub group, led by Tunbridge Wells is looking at rolling out a county-wide programme of homeless prevention workshops in secondary schools, based on a format developed by Tonbridge and Malling
- Established multi-agency JARP and JARS panels in all three authorities to jointly assess clients with a housing and support need.

What we need to do

- Hold regular stakeholder meetings to monitor the progress of the Joint Homelessness Strategy
- Regularly review membership of the group to ensure all relevant agencies are represented
- Ensure other agencies' strategies, policies and practices are minimising the risk of homelessness occurring
- Continue to ensure services are accessible to all service users and their involvement is sought in service improvements

Action plan – where we go from here

Priority One: Provision of housing options and advice								
No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
1.	Prevent homelessness	<p>Ensure all applicants receive housing options and advice to prevent homelessness, including rough sleepers and non-priority groups</p> <p>Produce a reconnection policy where non-priority groups do not have a local connection to the Council they applied to, to ensure they are supported in the area they have a connection to</p>	Year on year decrease in homelessness acceptances to meet 2010 target.	<p>Reduce numbers of homelessness acceptances by 50% by 2010 from baseline year of acceptances in 2005/06:</p> <p>(TMBC=186 SDC=181 TWBC=141)</p> <p>Adopt policy during 2008/09</p>	<p>Existing budgets / CLG Homelessness Grant 2006/07 and 2007/08: SDC £45,000 TMBC £40,000 TWBC £62,000</p> <p>Existing</p>	<p>Housing Needs Managers</p> <p>JPPB Partnership Manager</p>	All	CLG Good practice on homelessness prevention / Funding requirements for CLG Homelessness Grant / local housing strategies / emerging sub-regional housing strategy / Regional Housing Strategy

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
2.	Prevent homelessness as a result of parental eviction	Produce home visit procedure note	Procedure note produced by September 2007	Conduct home visits as a result of parental eviction (where appropriate) to prevent homelessness.	Existing	Housing Advisers Housing Needs Managers	GPs, Health Visitors, CDRPs, Social Services, Sure Start	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
3.	Prevent homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds	Produce home visit procedure note Evaluate current mediation services and ensure effective service in place	Procedure note produced by September 2007	Conduct home visits as a result of parental eviction (where appropriate) to prevent homelessness. Maximise opportunities for referring cases to mediation services where appropriate	Existing Existing	Housing Advisers Housing Advisers Housing Needs Managers Kent Homelessness Group	District Councils, Bridge Trust, Maidstone Mediation, GPs, Health Visitors, CDRPs, Social Services, Sure Start, Education, Connexions, CABs, YOS	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
3. (cont)	Prevent homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds (continued)	<p>Re-visit Supported Lodgings scheme and consider options available.</p> <p>Explore funding for programme of schools workshops across West Kent Councils to prevent homelessness amongst young people based on existing programme run by TMBC</p> <p>Explore scope for specialist housing advice service and advocacy for young people</p>	<p>Scheme cost appraisal to be conducted in partnership with Rainer 16 + and the Bridge Trust by September 2007.</p> <p>School workshops programme established by April 2008</p> <p>Explored funding opportunities to run 'Theatre Active' workshops in west Kent schools by April 2008</p> <p>Meeting held with Connexions and other relevant agencies to consider options by March 2008.</p>	Year-on-year reduction in homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds to 2010	<p>Existing</p> <p>Possible KIEP funding</p>	<p>Housing Needs Managers</p> <p>Kent Homelessness Group</p>	<p>District Councils, Bridge Trust, Maidstone Mediation, GPs, Health Visitors, CDRPs, Social Services, Sure Start, Education, Connexions, CABs, YOS</p>	<p>KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice</p>

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
3. (cont)	Prevent homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds (continued)	Explore feasibility of specialist housing benefit advisor for young people Encourage advice providers to record incidences of young people presenting for advice	Liaise with respective HB Managers by April 2008 to consider the issues and options. Develop common monitoring form and seek adoption by providers by April 2008.	Year-on-year reduction in homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds to 2010	Explore funding Existing	Housing Needs Managers Housing Needs Managers	District Councils, Bridge Trust, Maidstone Mediation, GPs, Health Visitors, CDRPs, Social Services, Sure Start, Education, Connexions, CABs, YOS	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
4.	Prevent homelessness amongst those at risk of domestic violence	<p>Ensure LSVT RSLs and other key RSLs in West Kent have a clause in their tenancy agreements to take possession action against perpetrators of domestic violence</p> <p>Develop protocols with RSLs on how cases of threatened homelessness involving tenants who are victims of domestic violence should be dealt with, including sub-regional reciprocal arrangements</p> <p>Identify common areas for improvement within BVPI 225 and seek to address areas of weakness</p> <p>Analyse the need for support services for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community and BME groups at risk of domestic violence</p>	<p>Liaised with all RSL partners during 2007/08 and seek amendment to tenancy agreements as appropriate.</p> <p>Held meeting with RSL partners during 2007/08 to take forward.</p> <p>Cross borough meeting held to consider performance against requirements under the BVPI, by April 2008</p> <p>Liaised with police DV unit and other agencies to better understand the support needs of the groups by March 2008.</p>	Homelessness prevented amongst those at risk of domestic violence by September 2009	Existing	Housing Needs Managers / Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships / RSLs	District Councils, RSLs, Police	CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / BVPI 225

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
5.	Prevent homelessness amongst ex-offenders	Liaise with Maidstone BC over their scheme to assist ex-offenders through empty homes initiatives.	Cross borough meeting held with Maidstone BC by April 2008.	(tbc)	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Prison service, Probation, NOMS	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
6.	Provide clear information on people's housing options to prevent homelessness	<p>Adopt standard housing options interview procedures and checklist for housing advisers</p> <p>Produce an options checklist for clients</p> <p>Produce a procedure manual to cover housing advice, homelessness prevention and housing register services, ensuring quality assurance and monitoring</p> <p>Set joint service standards in conjunction with stakeholders and service users</p> <p>Produce standard and up-to-date factsheets and booklets on housing options and prevention across the three Councils, available in other languages and formats as appropriate, such as Braille and large print</p>	<p>By September 2007</p> <p>By December 2007</p> <p>By end of March 2008</p> <p>By end of March 2008</p> <p>Where booklets/factsheets in place – ongoing update. Where booklets/factsheet to be produced – by March 2008</p>	Accurate advice and information booklets/fact sheets provided and handed out by March 2008	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	All stakeholders and service users	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
7.	Ensure those involved in the prevention of homelessness are appropriately trained.	Arrange joint training events across West Kent , including: diversity awareness; race equality; disability equality; and customer services training	Assessed training needs by July 2008.	Joint training events held	Existing	Housing Needs Manager	Kent Homelessness Group	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
8.	Target prevention at the true 'front line' agencies who might be the first point of contact for those at risk of homelessness	Identify relevant agencies across West Kent and provide them with information on prevention services, including advice for rough sleepers Attend external agency team meetings to promote homeless prevention services	Relevant agencies identified by April 2008 and information provided. Commence from March 2008	Housing Services prevention agenda promoted to all front line agencies by April 2008	Existing Existing	Housing Needs Managers	GPs, Health Visitors, CDRPs, Social Services, Sure Start	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
9.	Produce a 'spend to save' policy and identify the most cost effective homeless prevention tools	Analyse costs to each Council of taking a homeless application compared with the cost of a homelessness prevention case, including: staff costs, travel, floating support, B&B, storage, etc Produce a policy on how 'spend to save' will be used to prevent homelessness	Joint analysis carried out by January 2007 Policy developed by end of December 2007	Spend to save policy in place by December 2007	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	District Council finance departments, Supporting People Team, Invicta Telecare	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
10.	Ensure that comprehensive welfare rights and benefits and debt counselling are easily available in the area	Explore funding opportunities for West Kent debt counselling service.	Liaised with Legal Services Commission/CLG/National Lottery and any others to determine potential funding sources, by April 2008	(tbc)	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	CABs, Job Centre, Connexions	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
11.	Prevent homelessness as a result of eviction or abandonment from RSL accommodation	Analyse tenancy management data from all local RSLs on tenancy terminations and enforcement activity to inform and target homeless prevention priorities	All RSLs contacted for details of evictions and abandonment during 2006/07 by September/October 2007. RSLs to implement any agreed revisions to procedures by July 2008	Reduction in RSL tenants becoming homeless by March 2010	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	RSLs	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

Priority Two: Supporting people to access and maintain accommodation

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
12.	Provide more affordable accommodation to those with a supported housing need	<p>Explore opportunities for developing Night stop and Crash Pad facilities for use as emergency accommodation.</p> <p>Identify new build opportunities to provide housing and support for young people at risk.</p> <p>Seek to prioritise the development of accommodation based supported housing for people with mental health issues in Tonbridge.</p> <p>Aim to secure small self-contained units for young people through S106 agreements</p>	<p>Liaise with beacon and homelessness regional champions to determine the scope for developing such schemes in West Kent by April 2008</p> <p>To be progressed in advance of bid round autumn 2007.</p> <p>Subject to affordable housing development opportunities arising in the area.</p> <p>Worked in partnership with RSLs and developers to secure units</p>	To increase the level of provision of supported housing in West Kent by 2010	<p>Housing Corporation</p> <p>Kent Supporting People</p>	<p>Housing Needs Managers</p> <p>Housing Enabling Officers</p>	<p>Voluntary sector – Bridge Trust, YMCA</p> <p>RSLs, voluntary sector</p> <p>District Councils, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, Supporting People Team, RSLs</p>	CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
13.	Improve access to permanent affordable housing	<p>Work with RSL partners to reduce the number of households placed in temporary accommodation/B&B</p> <p>Reviewing allocations policies to ensure reasonable preference is provided to those in housing need.</p> <p>Explore ways to facilitate 'tenancy in trust' and guarantors for 16/17 year olds</p>	<p>No's of homeless households in temporary accommodation reduced annually.</p> <p>Reviewed policies by April 2008</p> <p>Sought legal advise and liaised with RSL partners by April 2008</p>	Halve the use of temporary accommodation by 2010 in line with BVPI 203	<p>CLG grant - Kent CBL Partnership £100,000 + existing</p> <p>Existing</p>	<p>Housing Needs Managers / CBL Project Manager</p> <p>Housing Needs Managers</p>	All Kent District Councils	Sustainable Communities; settled homes changing lives /
14.	Develop standard nomination and move-on agreements with housing providers including RSLs, supported housing providers and voluntary organisations	<p>Produce standard nominations agreements and local lettings policies (where appropriate) for all new developments and historic developments where no agreement in place</p> <p>Roll out move-on agreements for accommodation providers not already signed up</p>	<p>Liaised with RSL partners and produce standard agreements.</p> <p>Complete roll out during 2008/09</p>	To have standard nominations agreements, local lettings policies (where appropriate) and move-on agreements in place by March April 2009	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	District Council Legal teams, all RSLs, supported housing providers, voluntary sector providers	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
15.	Explore options for a tenancy sustainment service, either jointly or individually for each District Council	<p>Work towards developing a tenancy sustainment service for West Kent</p> <p>Explore provision of compulsory life skills training for young people as part of homelessness assessment process and before tenancy granted</p>	<p>Develop project brief and person specification by April 2008 and seek to identify potential funding sources.</p> <p>Determine position with Supporting People and Connexions by April 2008</p>	To identify the need for a tenancy sustainment service and explore funding opportunities by March 2010	To be determined	Housing Needs Managers	Supporting People Team, Support providers, YWCA, YMCA	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
16.	Ensure existing support services are monitored to measure their effectiveness and support is targeted where it is most needed	Liaise with Kent Supporting People team to ensure support providers are being effective in helping to sustain peoples' tenancies.	Outcome analysis from SP reviews to be provided by Kent Supporting People team to the districts to allow monitoring to take place. April 2008	To have a system in place by March 2010 to ensure that existing support services are effective and support is targeted where it is most needed	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Supporting People Team, Invicta Telecare, RSLs	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
17.	Monitor tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector	Seek to better understand the reasons for the loss of ASTs by carrying out a review.	Developed checklist of reasons for loss of AST (eg. because of HB shortfall), by December 2007.	To have a system in place to monitor tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector by March 2008	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Private landlords, letting agents Housing Benefits	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
18.	Ensure that vulnerable households are supported to access accommodation through the Kent Choice-based Lettings (CBL) scheme (subject to its implementation)	Work with the Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB) and all agencies supporting vulnerable households to implement the vulnerable persons strategy for the Kent CBL scheme.	Vulnerable persons strategy completed in line with CBL project plan	To ensure that vulnerable households are supported to access accommodation through the Kent Choice-based Lettings (CBL) scheme from implementation of CBL scheme	CLG grant – Kent CBL Partnership £100,000 plus existing	CBL Project Manager	JPPB Partnership Manager, District Councils, Social Services, voluntary sector, Supporting People	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice / ODPM Sustainable Communities: Settled homes, changing lives
19.	Ensure that all households accessing housing options and homelessness services receive appropriate and timely support	<p>Agree 'fast-track' service for clients at imminent risk of homelessness with Supporting People Team</p> <p>Agree ring-fenced pool of support for young people at risk of homelessness, particularly 16/17 year olds</p> <p>Monitor information on the vulnerability and disability of service users to ensure they are able to access appropriate advice and support</p>	By March 2009	To ensure that all households accessing housing options and homelessness services receive appropriate and timely support	Supporting People budget £32m across Kent 2007/08	Housing Needs Managers	Supporting People Team, Invicta Telecare, Housing Advisers, Social Services, health, Job Centre Plus	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice / Service user consultation

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
20.	Ensure that all households accessing housing options and homelessness services receive appropriate and timely support (continued)	Maintain regular contact with homeless households placed into temporary accommodation through floating support		To ensure that all households accessing housing options and homelessness services receive appropriate and timely support	Supporting People budget £32m across Kent 2007/08	Housing Needs Managers	Supporting People Team, Invicta Telecare, Housing Advisers, Social Services, health, Job Centre Plus	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice / Service user consultation
21.	Keep housing register applicants fully informed of their position on the housing register and provide an easily accessible indication of the likelihood and timeframe of them being rehoused	Review standard letters sent with all new registrations to ensure realistic advice and information is given Conduct annual/bi-annual reviews of all applicants on the housing register	By April 2008 System of annual/bi-annual reviews introduced by all three District Councils by April 2008	To ensure that housing register applicants are fully informed of their position on the housing register and have an understanding of the likelihood and timeframe of them being rehoused	Existing	RSL allocations managers (SDC and TMBC) Housing Needs Manager (TWBC)[District Councils, RSLs	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

Priority Three: Improve access to the private rented sector

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
22.	Develop an understanding of the ownership structure of private rented housing across the sub region, including the buy-to-let market	<p>Liaise with Housing Benefit Services for list of largest landlords/letting agents receiving Housing Benefit (other than RSLs)</p> <p>Contact all landlords and letting agents in receipt of Housing Benefit on this list and set up bi-annual liaison meetings</p> <p>Contact all letting agents to request number of private rented sector properties on their books</p>	<p>Information obtained and analysis of sub region completed by April 2008.</p> <p>By December 2007</p> <p>By December 2007</p>	To develop an understanding of the ownership structure of private rented housing across the sub region by July 2008	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Private landlords, lettings agents, Housing Benefit Services, Private Sector Housing teams	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
23.	Encourage greater acceptance of clients referred from the Councils to private landlords/letting agents	Contact all letting agents across the sub-region and request a meeting to discuss the benefits of accepting Housing Benefit clients, the Councils' rent deposit schemes, tenancy support, introductory service and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	By March 2008	Increase the number of clients referred from the Councils housed by private landlords/letting agents year-on-year	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Private landlords, lettings agents, Housing Benefits, National Federation of Residential Landlords (NFRL)	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
24.	Set up an introductory service to match prospective tenants with private tenancies	Formalise work already undertaken on a small scale with private landlords willing to engage with the Councils, into an introductory service for landlords	By March 2008	Increase the number of clients referred from the Councils housed by private landlords/ letting agents year-on-year	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Private landlords, lettings agents, Housing Benefit Services, NFRL	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
25.	Review existing rent deposit / bond schemes in light of tenancy deposit legislation and expand to provide a range of additional incentives for private landlords	<p>Carry out review of existing policies to reflect the legislative changes, considering implications for the Councils</p> <p>Introduce 'guarantor' scheme as additional protection for landlords, using existing 'bond' schemes</p> <p>Visit all lettings agents in the sub-region to promote the rent deposit schemes and any changes made as a result of the legislation</p> <p>Provide named officer for landlords accepting clients through rent deposit schemes to contact in the event of any tenancy-related issue</p>	<p>By March 2008</p> <p>By June 2008</p> <p>Visits started from December 2007 – ongoing</p> <p>September 2007</p>	Increase the number of clients referred from the Councils housed by private landlords/ letting agents year-on-year	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Private landlords, lettings agents, Housing Benefit Services, NFRL	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice / Housing Act 2004

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
25. (cont)	Review existing rent deposit / bond schemes in light of tenancy deposit legislation and expand to provide a range of additional incentives for private landlords (continued)	Explore ways of offering additional incentives to landlords, to help secure 12 month fixed term tenancies on 20% of rent deposits given	By March 2008	Increase the number of clients referred from the Councils housed by private landlords/ letting agents year-on-year	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Private landlords, lettings agents, Housing Benefit Services, NFRL	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice / Housing Act 2004
26.	Promote the private rented sector as a tenure of choice amongst those accessing housing options services	Explore ways to offer rent deposit as a grant, instead of loan Offer additional incentives such as payment of letting agents' fees and guarantor Offer facilities for clients to seek and select accommodation in the private rented sector through internet access in Council offices with support from housing advisers to liaise with landlords to secure the accommodation	By March 2008	Increase the number of clients referred from the Councils housed by private landlords/ letting agents year-on-year	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	District Council Customer Services teams and Finance teams, Private landlords, lettings agents, Housing Benefit Services, NFRL	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

Priority Four: Effective partnership working								
No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
27.	Ensure services are equally accessible to minority ethnic communities and that any specific needs are taken into account in the planning and delivery of services	Consult with ethnic minority groups when planning the future delivery of the service, e.g. engage with the Gypsy and traveller community through KCC Gypsy & Traveller Unit Put in place joint racial equality strategies with the West Kent LSVT RSLs	By March 2010	Services equally accessible to minority ethnic communities	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	KCC, RSLs, faith and community groups, service users	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
28.	Promote diversity issues e.g. awareness of issues affecting the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community	Review policies and procedures in line with good practice to ensure equal access for clients accessing housing services	By March 2008	Increased awareness of diversity issues	Existing	Housing Needs Managers		KLOE / CLG Diversity Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
29.	Ensure robust evidence of need is collated from all partners to plan for future service delivery and support any case made for additional provision	Develop a common monitoring system through the Joint Homelessness Strategy partnership to record levels of homelessness amongst different client groups across the three District Council areas	By January 2008	Improved evidence of need	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	KCC, CABs, Bridge Trust, RSLs, Supporting People Team, other voluntary sector partners	Shelter good practice guides / KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
30.	Determine the demand and supply case for sheltered housing and provision for frail elderly	Commission a West Kent research project	Meeting held with key agencies to progress review by March 2008	Older Persons Accommodation Review	tbc	Housing Needs Managers	District Councils, KCC & PCT	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck
31.	Ensure other agencies' strategies, policies and practices seek to minimise the risk of homelessness occurring	Carry out an impact assessment on key policy and practice Assess whether key partners' strategies and priorities have been influenced by the prevention agenda and improve links to prevention	Liaised with partner agencies and identified relevant policies and practices by March 2009.	Reduced homelessness resulting from other agencies' strategies, policies and practices	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	KCC, Probation, NOMS, Prison service, YOT, Health, DAATs etc	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
32.	Involve service users in service delivery and formation of new policy and strategy	Arrange further service user involvement events to consult on the West Kent Homelessness Strategy Ensure service users involved are representative of the community and racial equality issues are taken into account Produce a customer satisfaction survey for use within housing options services across West Kent	By September 2007 By September 2007 By September 2007	Increased awareness amongst of and influence of service users on Homelessness Strategy and	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Service users, voluntary sector partners, supported housing providers, Supporting People Team	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice / CRE good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
33.	Identify potential homelessness through internal and external partners	Produce a common referral form to refer clients at risk of homelessness into each District Council's housing options teams	By September 2008	Improved recording and referral of potential homelessness to increase prevention	Existing	Housing Needs Managers	Internal – Planning, Environmental Health Services. External – KCC, Probation, NOMS, Prison service, YOT, Health, DAATs etc	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
34.	Develop protocols to liaise with partner agencies to prevent homelessness and the use of B&B accommodation	Develop protocols in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital discharge • Release from prison and ex-offenders / those on licence and supervised by probation • Local courts for those on remand or who received a short sentence • Domestic violence reciprocal arrangements • Learning disability 	By September 2009	Improved homelessness prevention and minimise use of B&B accommodation / build upon existing protocols in place for 16/17s, mental health hospital discharge and intentionally homeless families	Existing	Housing Needs Managers / Housing Needs Officers	Health, KCC, Probation, NOMS, Prison service area office, YOT, LSVT RSLs, other RSLs	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice

No.	Objective	Actions	Milestones	Target	Resources	Lead responsibility	Other agencies involved	National / local policy
35.	Ensure that the standard of temporary accommodation meets the requirements of the Housing Health and Safety Rating system (HHSRS)	Set up agreements with other Kent local authorities to ensure that B&B / temporary accommodation is inspected regularly by the authority where the accommodation is located and any concerns are fed back to all local authorities through the Kent Homelessness Group	By September 2008	Ensure that B&B / temporary accommodation is of the required standard	Existing	Housing Needs Managers / Housing Needs Officers	All Kent local authorities including Environmental Health Services	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice
36.	Ensure that where emergency accommodation is required, vulnerable households are appropriately placed	Set up common monitoring arrangements similar to 'BABIE' across Kent and East Sussex to share information on current placements in emergency accommodation	By September 2009	Ensure that B&B / temporary accommodation used for vulnerable households is of the required standard	Existing	Housing Needs Managers / Housing Needs Officers	All Kent local authorities in partnership with East Sussex local authorities	KLOE / CLG Homelessness Prevention Healthcheck / CLG Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice