

West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016

Sevenoaks District Council
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Tonbridge Wells Borough Council



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1. FOREWORD

Welcome to the second West Kent Homelessness Strategy.

The three West Kent authorities of Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks have a strong track record in joint working together and with other agencies and service users over many years to tackle homelessness across West Kent.

A considerable amount has been achieved since the development of the first West Kent Homelessness Strategy in 2007. However, this strategy has been developed at a time of unprecedented change. Public spending has been significantly cut, and the Government is in the process of radically overhauling the social housing system, much of which will, subject to the passage of the *Localism Bill*, be implemented from April 2012. We have no doubt that this will add to the pressures on services for people who are facing homelessness at a time when resources are at an all-time low.

It is undoubtedly a challenging time to be developing a homelessness strategy, but we remain confident that the broad strategic priorities that the strategy is based on will provide a sound framework for the next five years. Progress against these priorities will be closely monitored, and an earlier review will be undertaken if it is considered necessary. The detailed Action Plan, which sets out individual objectives for delivering the strategy, has been developed to cover the first two years of the strategy only, and it will be reviewed from 2013.

This strategy will strengthen the sub-regional approach that has underpinned many of our achievements to date. It will build on past successes and existing partnerships, without losing sight of district/borough-specific priorities.

It has been developed in consultation with partners, stakeholders and service users, and it reflects the broader strategic priorities that have been identified within national, regional and sub-regional housing policy.

Councillor Jean Atkinson
Portfolio Holder for Housing
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Councillor Cllr John Cunningham
Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Rural Communities
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Councillor -----
Portfolio Holder for Balanced Communities
Sevenoaks District Council

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. This Homelessness Strategy for West Kent sets out the vision of the three West Kent authorities – Sevenoaks DC, Tonbridge & Malling BC and Tunbridge Wells BC – for tackling homelessness over the period 2011-2016.
- 2.2. The strategy is set against the backdrop of unprecedented change. Public spending is being cut, major changes to welfare benefits (in particular Housing Benefit) are planned, permanent social housing tenancies for new tenants are ending while changes to the allocation of social housing and the homelessness legislation are also on the table. The implications of these changes are not yet fully understood but there is a wide consensus that they will increase pressure on homelessness services, at a time when resources are facing cuts.
- 2.3. West Kent is a relatively affluent area, characterised by a buoyant economy, high levels of owner occupation and high house prices. A shortage of housing in the social rented sector places pressure on the private rental market, where high rents are driven by demand from the buy-to-let and commuter market. This brings specific challenges to homelessness services and will continue to do so, given the increased emphasis on the private sector in providing long term housing solutions. Accommodation for homeless people is in short supply and demand always exceeds supply.
- 2.4. Despite these challenges, homeless prevention has been very effective in West Kent over recent years, with homeless applications and acceptances falling year-on-year since 2005 (in 2009/10, 126 householders were accepted as homeless across West Kent). However, there are clear signs that this trend is now reversing and applications and acceptances are on the rise. Many more people, however, are not captured in the official statistics because they are classed as non-priority homeless and, as such, are at risk of rough sleeping or sofa surfing.
- 2.5. Patterns and causes of homelessness across West Kent stubbornly persist. Homelessness disproportionately impacts on young people and around 4 in 5 homeless households contain children. Most often, these young people and families have been evicted by their parents or family or have suffered from relationships breaking down.
- 2.6. The authorities have developed very effective prevention techniques though approaches and emphases vary between the three. Mediation with family members (often to keep young people at home) has proved effective, as have rent in advance and deposit schemes which have been used successfully across all three authorities to enable applicants to access the private rented sector. Prevention techniques are going beyond the issue of homelessness and are increasingly tackling the underlying causes, with advice on benefits, employment and training.
- 2.7. Partnership working is alive and well in West Kent with a range of public sector bodies, housing associations and voluntary agencies working together to tackle homelessness. The Supporting People programme is also central to prevention, funding a range of accommodation-based and floating support services across the region. These partnerships will become even more important in the future, with pressure on services and resources acting as a catalyst for radical new ideas about how – and by whom – services could best be delivered in future.
- 2.8. This strategy has been developed in consultation with these partners and with service users and the key themes emerging from the consultation have shaped the strategy. They included a desire for more commonality in how the three authorities

work; an appetite for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice; and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information. The importance of effective partnership working was also strongly underlined. Service users wanted good quality, realistic advice and information, which they felt would empower them to make better choices and control their situation and help accessing good quality private housing.

2.9. Our overall vision for homelessness is to ***"proactively support and empower people to plan their own futures so that homelessness within West Kent is significantly reduced"***.

2.10. In order to deliver this vision, we have identified five strategic priorities. These are:

1. **Maximising homelessness prevention through an enhanced housing options service** - with proposed changes to benefits, reduced investment and an uncertain economy, homelessness services will be put under real pressure. To meet this challenge, we will ensure that existing processes, protocols and techniques work well, that any barriers are removed and invest in increasing skills and expertise within the Housing Options Teams. We will also seek to manage customer expectations with good quality, clear and accessible advice and information, using new media and creative ways to reach the 'front line' of homelessness.
2. **Maximising resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective** – with local authority and Supporting People funding facing significant reductions, we will think – and act - radically about how services can be delivered more cost effectively in the future. Building on our history of joint working, we will identify opportunities to share staff and expertise and develop shared processes and procedures that learn from the best.
3. **Working effectively with private sector landlords** – the private sector is already central to successful prevention and will become even more so in the future, despite the reluctance of private landlords to accept tenants who may be vulnerable or on benefits. We will improve links with landlords, understanding their priorities and barriers and develop an 'offer' that works. This will include robust rent in advance and deposit schemes, landlord 'accreditation' and tenancy sustainment packages.
4. **Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness** – we will build on the already strong partnerships that exist to help us make the best use of limited resources. By drawing together information that already exists, we will 'map' homelessness services and resources, facilitating a conversation with partners about the best way to deliver a joined-up service across West Kent, reviewing how these partnerships work in practice and whether there is scope for services to be delivered in different ways, by different organisations. We will also review the operation of the Homelessness Strategy Group, providing clear accountability and opportunities for better sharing of resources, expertise and good practice.
5. **Meeting the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness** – homelessness affects a wide – and widening - range of people. Our focus will be on understanding and meeting the needs of the diverse range of groups impacted by homelessness including young people, people experiencing domestic abuse, vulnerable people and those with complex needs, people with disabilities, gypsies and travellers, older people and offenders. Partnerships are key here and we will robustly enforce existing protocols to ensure that they work for the benefit of clients. Information is also key and we will find new, effective and appropriate ways of providing information.

PART ONE: THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1. This Homelessness Strategy for West Kent sets out the vision of the three West Kent authorities – Sevenoaks DC, Tonbridge & Malling BC and Tunbridge Wells BC – for tackling homelessness over the period 2011-2016. The strategy has been developed within the context of national and local priorities and identifies five strategic objectives that will drive forward the homelessness agenda in the coming years.
- 3.2. The 2002 Homelessness Act placed a duty on local authorities to develop a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this every five years. The previous West Kent Homelessness Strategy, published in 2007 and covering the period to 2010 (with an updated Action Plan to 2011), made an important contribution to tackling homelessness in West Kent. The strategy built on the housing options model, maximising homeless prevention opportunities and contributed to an increase in homeless preventions, a reduction in the number of homeless acceptances and a significant reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.
- 3.3. Despite the real achievements made, challenges remain. The main causes of homelessness remain the same: family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate young people; violent breakdown of relationships; while private rented accommodation is not easy to access in this relatively affluent area. This new strategy seeks to build on the achievements made, address the (significant) new challenges which have emerged during 2010 and establish the strategic objectives that will continue to prevent homelessness across West Kent over the next five years.
- 3.4. It is an exciting - if challenging - time to be developing a homelessness strategy. We are in a time of unprecedented change with the new Coalition Government reducing public spending in order to cut the deficit, proposing major changes to welfare benefits (in particular Housing Benefit) and ending permanent social housing tenancies for new tenants. Changes to the allocation of social housing and to the homelessness legislation are also on the table¹. At the time of writing, it is still unclear how (and, in some cases, whether) these proposals will be implemented but there is a consensus that they will have a significant impact on homelessness and homelessness services. At the same time, the economic outlook is uncertain and local authorities are facing unprecedented cuts in funding and services – both factors likely to add to the pressures on homeless and support services.
- 3.5. In the light of this, it is worth remembering that homelessness prevention saves £5,300 per case per year compared to the cost of helping someone who is already homeless². The savings are both short term (the costs of temporary accommodation and B&B) and long term (the human and societal costs of homelessness in terms of pressures on health and social services, crime and on children's life chances).

¹ Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing, CLG, November 2010

² Research by Heriot Watt University (2007) found that the costs per person of successful mediation are around 9 times less expensive than providing alternate settled accommodation; home visits 3.5 times less expensive; advice on housing options 9 times less expensive; rent deposit schemes 8.5 times less; rent bond scheme 37 times less; Sanctuary schemes save 5.5 times the costs of providing accommodation under the main homelessness duty.

3.6. Homelessness is about much more than statistics, strategic objectives and resource implications. It is about real people and their lives. To illustrate the impact that homelessness can have – and the difference that homelessness services can make – we have included some of the stories and experiences we have come across in developing this strategy. These illustrate the successes that have been achieved as well as the challenges that remain going forward.

4. HOW WE PRODUCED THE STRATEGY

- 4.1. In order to develop this strategy, a Project Team was established consisting of senior staff within the Housing Departments of the three authorities. This Project Team met regularly from September 2010 to January 2011 (see Appendix 1 for membership).
- 4.2. In addition to the Project Team, a workshop was held in November 2011 with all staff working within the Housing Options Teams of the three authorities. This gave valuable 'practitioner' input into the strategy and facilitated the sharing of good practice between the three authorities.
- 4.3. Stakeholders were also key to developing the strategy. The Homelessness Working Group, which had played a key role in developing the previous Action Plan, was reformed into the Homelessness Strategy Group and then involved through three consultation events. 44 partner organisations were invited to the first, a half day event in July 2010, which included talks from organisations working with homeless people in West Kent and discussion groups around five key themes. The second, a half day event in December 2010, attracted 21 delegates included a presentation on the findings of the Homelessness Review and discussion groups to agree and hone the key priorities and actions. The third, held in January 2011, considered the draft strategy document. (See Appendix 2 for notes of these events).
- 4.4. Service user engagement was undertaken through detailed telephone interviews with twelve service users who had been involved with homelessness services in West Kent during 2010. A summary of this consultation appears at Appendix 3.
- 4.5. The Project Team would like to thank everyone who participated in the consultation events and who contributed to the formulation of the strategy.
- 4.6. A review of best practice in homelessness from elsewhere was undertaken through a document review; internet and telephone research; publications including "Homeless Prevention: a guide to best practice (2006); "Homeless Strategies: a good practice handbook" (ODPM 2006); and "Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies: evaluation and good practice" (ODPM, 2004); and a review of 'trailblazer' local authorities.
- 4.7. Data underpinning the strategy was produced from an analysis of the local authorities P1E returns, the statutory quarterly returns made to the DCLG. Data on the housing market was taken from the 2008 Strategic Housing Market Assessment produced by David Couttie Associates. Other data was provided by the local authorities themselves.

5. THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

5.1. The national policy context

5.2. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to:

- provide free advice and information about homelessness and preventing homelessness to everyone in their district
- assist eligible individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and in priority need.

5.3. A chart summarising the duties on local authorities in respect of homelessness is included at Appendix 4.

5.4. With the 2002 Homelessness Act, the Government made homelessness prevention a priority through providing increased funding to tackle homelessness, setting challenging targets for prevention and placing requirements on the local councils to produce Homelessness Strategies. These strategies were to be informed by a review of performance, current service provision and estimated future need. The Act stated that the focus of these strategies was to be on prevention measures, as well as emphasising the importance of offering advice to all people in housing need.

5.5. The government later identified a number of targets in relation to homelessness. These include:

- to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 by 50% (against December 2004 figures)
- to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless 16/17 year olds by 2010
- to end rough sleeping by 2012/13

5.6. National strategies and guidance that have helped shaped this Homelessness Strategy include:

- "Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives" (2005): Homelessness Prevention, reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010, from 2010 B&B no longer suitable for 16/17 year olds
- "Sustainable Communities: Homes For All" (2005): Choice Based Lettings schemes in all local authorities in England by 2010
- "Tackling Homelessness" (2006): recognises the role of RSLs in preventing homelessness through partnership working, sustainable communities, allocation and management policies and better use of existing stock
- "No One Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping" (Nov 2008): aimed to end rough sleeping in UK for more than one night by 2012
- "Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing": Consultation document (Nov 2010)

5.7. These strategies had some success and homelessness and rough sleeping has fallen nationally over the last five years.

- 5.8. With the new Coalition Government, however, priorities are shifting. Welfare reform is a major plank of the new Government's agenda, with plans to devolve decision making to the local level and reducing overall welfare spending in particular the burgeoning Housing Benefit bill. As a result, there is an unprecedented amount of change underway that is likely to impact on homelessness over the coming years, both in terms of the resources available to tackle it and demands placed on services. At the time of writing, it is unclear exactly how these changes will impact, either individually or in the round³ but there does seem to be a consensus that services will come under considerable pressure in the medium term while the hoped-for behavioural changes materialise.
- 5.9. A summary of proposed changes to benefits and Local Housing Allowance that will potentially impact on homelessness and homelessness prevention is shown below.

Table 1: Proposed Changes to benefits and Local Housing Allowance

- **reducing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** from 50% of the Broad Market Rental Area (BRMA) to 30% from October 2011. This will impact on many households renting in the private sector, reducing their LHA payments by between £8-25 per week for up to 2,000 households in West Kent
- uprating and increasing the **non-dependent rate** from April 2011 is likely to place pressure on households with adult children still living at home who cannot contribute towards household expenses
- **capping the Local Housing Allowance** is likely to make applicants for private sector letting less attractive to landlords
- **capping the total benefits** to a household at no more than the national average wage is likely to impact larger families
- **limiting payments for people under 35** to the shared room rate (up from 25), making it harder to place young single people in private rented housing
- **limiting Housing Benefit entitlements** for working age people in social housing sector to reflect family size could increase arrears
- **uprating LHA in line with Consumer Price Index (CPI)** instead of Retail Price Index (RPI) will impact on the availability of private sector homes for rent
- **the move towards a Universal Credit** is likely to end Housing Benefit payments direct to landlords, making benefit claimants potentially less attractive as tenants.
- **the replacement for council tax benefit** in 2013 will see less funding available - a consultation exercise is due to start soon.
- administration of **social fund payments** will be transferred to the local level and will play an important role in homelessness prevention, as will the increased **Discretionary Housing Payment** allocations to LAs.

³ The Select Committee on Work and Pensions concluded that "It is difficult to judge at the moment to what extent Housing Benefit claimants will change their behaviour as a result of these proposals. The Government hopes that people will be able to find cheaper accommodation in cheaper areas and that private landlords will be willing to reduce their rents to Local Housing Allowance claimants, so that the new levels will not result in an increase in homelessness" (Report on changes to housing benefit announced in the June 2010 Budget).

5.10. In addition, there are other major changes on the horizon including:

- **Public spending cuts** - in October 2010, the Chancellor set out savings of £81bn to be made from public spending over the next 5 years. Funding for local authorities is being reduced by 26% over the next two years and the West Kent councils are already planning or in some cases, have already implemented, cost cutting measures in their detailed budgets for 2011/12. These include staffing reductions (particularly at managerial level), reducing discretionary funding and planning shared services across authorities (both sub-regionally and with other Kent authorities). The Homelessness Grant which supports local authorities in homelessness prevention, was however increased for 2011/12.
- **Changes to the homelessness duty** – the Government are planning to introduce legislation to enable local authorities to fully discharge their duty to secure accommodation by arranging an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector, without requiring the applicant's agreement. Where applicants become homeless again within two years, the duty will be retained by the original authority.
- **Changes to housing allocations** – changes are planned that will give local authorities flexibility in managing their waiting list. Sevenoaks DC have pre-empted this move, carrying out a review of their Housing Waiting List in 2008 which reduced the list significantly. Tonbridge & Malling BC also reviewed their waiting list in 2008 and continue to do so on an on-going basis
- **Reducing capital funding for new affordable housing** - capital funding for new affordable housing is to be replaced by a new, yet-to-be developed model of below-market rents supported by revenue subsidy. The impact of this change depends largely on whether housing associations are able to build significant numbers of new homes under this new financial regime but, in the medium term, it is predicted that the supply of new affordable homes will fall.
- **Changes to planning** - with the abolition of centrally-determined targets for new homes (both private and affordable), the existing Regional Spatial Strategies no longer apply (although this is, at the time of writing, subject to legal challenge), replaced by locally-determined plans. This is likely to lead to some uncertainty in the market and a possible hiatus in new house building in the short to medium term.
- **New forms of tenure** - 'tenancies for life' for new social housing tenants may be replaced by fixed term (2, 5 or 10 year) 'flexible tenancies', renewable depending on household circumstances. Details are yet to be finalised but impacts may include reduced turnover in social housing, reduced demand for new social housing tenancies (not least because rents on new build and possibly relets will increase to 80% of market rents) and challenges to community sustainment. On the other hand, the narrower gap between social and market rents may, as the Government hopes, start to change perceptions about the acceptability of the private sector as a long term housing solution.
- **Supporting People funding** - the Programme is required to make savings of £7 million by 2012/13. It will adopt a strategic approach to reducing expenditure, which balances the priorities identified within the current five year strategy, particularly in relation to young people at risk. Whilst contracts for district/borough based floating support services have not been renewed, such support will still be available on a west Kent and countywide basis and other existing housing related support services will have their contracts extended to the end of 2011/12.

5.11. The uncertainty surrounding these changes on the provision of, and demand for, homelessness services mean that the authorities will need to monitor the situation carefully to ensure that the strategy remains abreast of potential impacts.

5.12. The regional policy context

5.13. The prevention of homelessness is a key priority in The South East Regional Housing Strategy (March 2008) and, although the South East Region is being disbanded by the new Coalition Government, the three aims of the current strategy remain relevant, specifically:

- increasing the supply of new affordable housing
- housing-related support to enable vulnerable households to maintain tenancies
- better use of existing accommodation in both public and private sectors.

5.14. The Kent Forum Housing Strategy (Better Homes: localism, aspiration and choice), launched in May 2011, sets out future priorities as:

- local housing and planning authorities deciding their own housing numbers, based on local people's need and ambitions for growth
- coastal and urban communities revitalised and rural areas thrive and prosper
- homes provided that meet the needs and aspirations of all residents
- people to have the opportunity to choose to live in a high quality home, in the place they want to live
- by creating balanced communities, supporting people, to fulfil their potential and live the best life they can
- using innovative and flexible approaches to finance and regulation to encourage managed growth that makes a lasting and positive impact
- by listening to what people want, providing homes and communities that people can be proud to live in.

5.15. Other relevant regional strategies include:

- Kent Supporting People Five-Year Strategy 2010-2015
- Kent Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011
- Strategy for improving the mental health and wellbeing of people in Kent & Medway (2010)
- Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Strategy (2010)

5.16. The sub-regional and local contexts

5.17. The West Kent authorities have a long and successful history of joint working at regional, sub-regional and local levels (See Table 2). This trend is likely to accelerate as funding and political imperatives encourage the further development of shared services, both between the three authorities themselves but also with neighbouring authorities. For example, Tonbridge & Malling BC have recently established a shared Housing Options Team Manager with Gravesham BC.

5.18. Other examples of where the three West Kent authorities have successfully worked together over recent years include:

- Colebrook Road, a hostel for single homeless based in Tunbridge Wells
- Tunbridge Wells Women's Refuge
- A combined Severe Weather placement scheme
- A young person's accommodation based service (in partnership with the Supporting People Programme which revenue funds the service)

- West Kent Private Landlords Forum
- Homeless Strategy Conferences
- The Local Investment Partnership (also includes Maidstone)
- Piloting a supported lodging scheme

5.19. Finally, each of the authorities has their own housing strategies, all of which make homeless prevention a priority.

TABLE 2: Regional And Sub-Regional Partnership Groups

Joint Policy and Planning Board - a strategic partnership between health, housing, probation, social care and Supporting People. Its main responsibilities are to promote inter-agency working, and to ensure that district housing strategies inform, and are influenced by, the work of partner organisations and other inter-agency plans. The close links between housing and health are well recognised and a key objective for the Board is to improve the health care arrangements for homeless people. This is being taken forward in the Board's 2008 action plan.

Kent Housing Group - a Kent-wide group with membership drawn from the local authority and RSL sectors, as well as the Supporting People Team, Kent Adult Social Service and GOSE. Sub-groups include:

- **Kent Housing Options Group** - this group meets to share good practice and develop new initiatives to tackle homelessness. It is currently developing a schools education programme to raise the awareness of homelessness amongst children in schools.
- **Housing Strategy and Enabling sub-group** - a group that meets to share knowledge and good practice across the county
- **Kent Private Sector Housing sub-group**

West Kent Landlords Forum – meet three times a year to provide advice and support to local landlords and keep them up to date with developments affecting the private rented sector.

West Kent Partnership – a joint Local Strategic Partnership that monitors the Leaders' Programme

Homelessness Liaison Meeting – a group of local authority officers and agencies working on homelessness that meet quarterly at Colebrook Road hostel

Gypsy & Traveller Working Group – a Kent-wide group comprising members and officers that works with Kent CC to ensure the needs of Gypsy and traveller communities are met

Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership (KEEP) – helps Kent residents save money through energy saving improvements in their homes

Kent Children's Trust Board – a county-wide body responsible for overseeing strategic direction on young people and families, into which **Local Children's Trust Boards** feed

Supporting People - a Kent-wide strategic partnership between Kent County Council, Health, Housing and Probation, administered by Kent CC on behalf of the partners. Based on evidenced need, the Programme commissions and performance manages housing related support to vulnerable people. Decisions are taken by the Commissioning Board, attended by representatives of the partners including districts and boroughs.

Kent and Medway Leaders Forum – a strategic Forum that agreed the Kent Forum Housing Strategy and monitors its implementation

5.20. The West Kent economy and housing market

- 5.21. Situated in the heart of South East England and to the south east of London, the West Kent sub-region consists of the three authorities of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells. The authorities are situated in one of the UK's most affluent counties with close proximity to London, a dynamic economy, proximity to the international airport of Gatwick, the Channel port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and frequent rail connections to London. Despite this, there are pockets of deprivation in each of the three districts.
- 5.22. The West Kent economy is strong, with lower unemployment and higher incomes than the regional average, indicating a strong pattern of commuting into London. Having said that, 2009 saw the number of unemployment benefit claimants almost double in West Kent⁴ as the recession bit.
- 5.23. The population of West Kent in 2006 was estimated at 332,000 and projected to rise to 341,900 by 2026. The age profile is expected to shift as the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age and people aged 65+ are expected to make up 25% of the population by 2026.
- 5.24. Average house prices in West Kent are significantly higher than the regional average and have risen faster than elsewhere: in Sevenoaks between 2003 and 2008, prices rose by 44%. In 2008, the Land Registry indicated average prices of £401,400 in Sevenoaks, £272,800 in Tonbridge & Malling and £311,800 in Tunbridge Wells. Despite the recession since then, prices have remained relatively buoyant. High property prices mean that owner occupation is out of reach for many households. In 2010, a household would need an income of £40,800/year and a 20% deposit to buy a home – perhaps the reason why the average age of first time buyers in the region is now 37. Demands on the private and social rented sectors are therefore high.
- 5.25. In 2007, West Kent had a total housing stock of 140,800 dwellings, made up of a higher-than-average proportion of owner occupiers and a lower-than-average proportion of social and privately rented homes.

	Owner occupied	Social rented	Private rented
Sevenoaks	35,500 (75.5%)	6,200 (14.0%)	3,000 (6.8%)
Tonbridge & Malling	32,000 (74.8%)	6,900 (16.2%)	2,600 (6.0%)
Tunbridge Wells	30,200 (70.8%)	6,700 (15.8%)	4,500 (10.6%)
National average	13,920,000 (68.1%)	1,238,000 (19.3%)	2,037,000 (10.0%)

- 5.26. Social and private renting declined as a proportion of the stock from 1991-2001⁵ and, while private renting may have increased over the last decade due to the emerging buy-to-let market, the volatility in the housing market over recent years make it difficult to predict how this sector will change in future. Anecdotal evidence is that many landlords are selling properties as prices have bounced back since 2009.

⁴ Kent and Medway Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2010 (DTZ)

⁵ Census 2001

5.27. Looking at the future demand for housing, the SHMA identified significant demand for new homes in West Kent. From 2006 to 2026, there will be an estimated shortfall of 3,353 homes each year in the private sector and 1,368 homes in the affordable rented sector. This significant shortfall illustrates that the discharge of duty cannot be met through social housing alone. It is also worth assessing housing need by looking at the number of applicants on each housing register and those accepted as homeless and comparing that to the number of affordable homes delivered during that year.

Table 4: Need for affordable housing		
	Affordable need p.a.	Affordable need shortfall p.a. (not met from relets)
Sevenoaks	948	646
Tonbridge & Malling	731	432
Tunbridge Wells	728	290
Total	2,407	1,368

5.28. Turnover levels in social housing are low at around 4-5% while right-to-buy sales are now minimal. In 2008, levels of under-occupation (defined as two or more 'spare' bedrooms) in the social rented sector was estimated at 650 (10%) in Sevenoaks, 1,225 (18%) in Tonbridge & Malling and 715 (11%) in Tunbridge Wells⁶. Levels of under-occupation exceed over-crowding by a significant margin.

5.29. In 2007, rents in the private sector were more than double those in the social rented sector. Based on rent of 25% of gross income, these rents would require an income (without any financial assistance) of between £33,600 (Tunbridge Wells) and £37,200 (Sevenoaks).

Table 5: Average monthly rent West Kent			
	Average monthly RSL rent (all sizes)	Average monthly private rent (2 bed)	Average monthly "entry level" private rent (2BF)
Sevenoaks	£325	£920	£800
Tonbridge & Malling	£334	£840	£750
Tunbridge Wells	£361	£800	£700

5.30. Turning to housing need, in 2010, a total of 5, 847 people were on the Housing Register at 31 December 2010.

Table 6: Applicants on housing register				
	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	West Kent
1- Bed	710	1136	1148	2,994
2 - bed	330	716	607	1,653
3 - bed	222	281	403	906
4+ bed	56	101	164	321
Total	1,318	2,234	2,232	5,874

⁶ Housing Survey Data, from Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2008 (David Coultie Associates)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **West Kent is a relatively affluent area, characterised by a buoyant economy, high levels of owner occupation and high houses prices**
- **there is considerable pressure on the social rented sector**
- **high rents in the private rented market are driven by the buy-to-let market and commuter demand**
- **this brings specific challenges to homelessness services in the area**

6. HOMELESSNESS IN WEST KENT

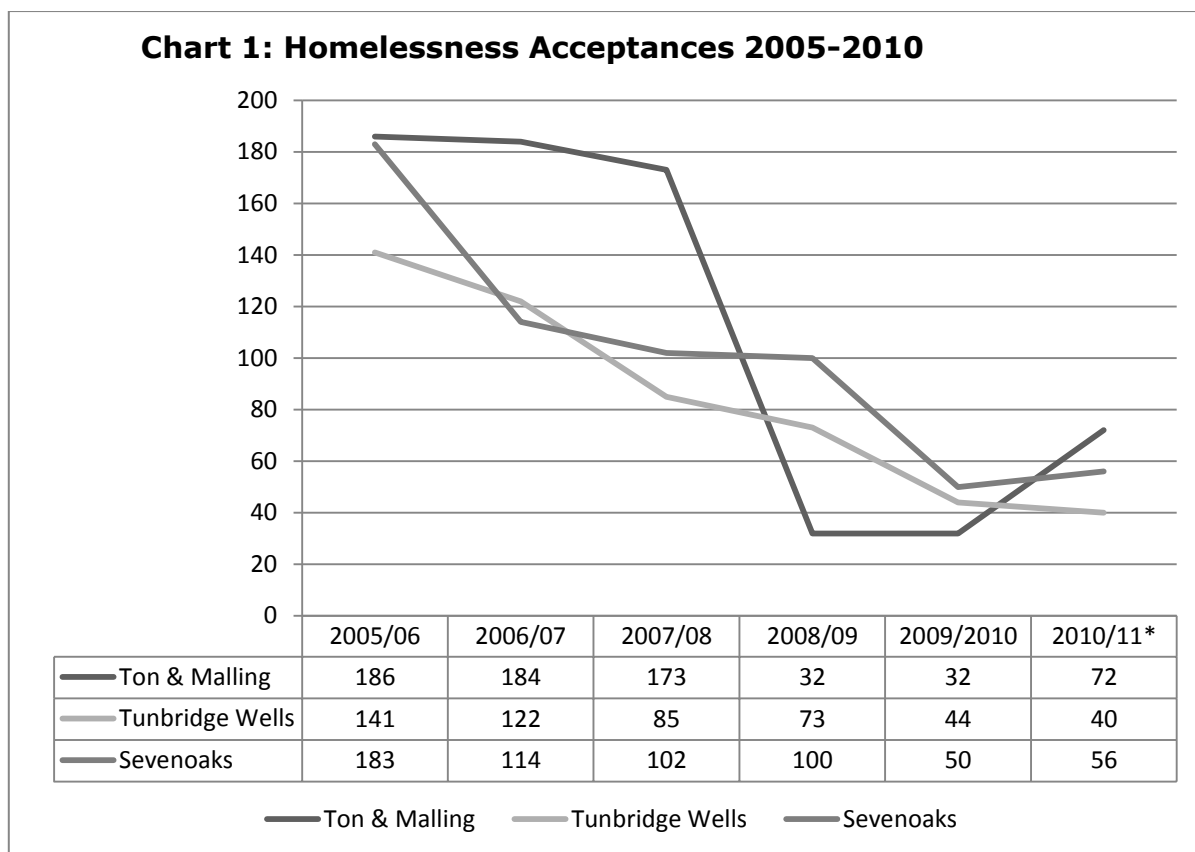
6.1. Key Findings, Data And Trends 2005-2010

- 6.2. Local Authorities are required to collate statistics every quarter on approaches made to them by homeless applicants. These statistics are referred to as the P1E returns and, as they cover all aspects of homelessness, they provide a useful insight to the levels and nature of homelessness within the area. The data used here is based on the P1E returns for the three districts from 2005/6 to September 2010. The figures for 2010/11 have been extrapolated from the half year position.
- 6.3. Where the pattern or trends are similar across West Kent, the graphs included in the strategy show total or collective figures. Where the picture is significantly different between the authorities, individual figures are given. Appendix 5 details the trends in each individual local authority.
- 6.4. There has been a significant fall in the number of homelessness applications across West Kent over the past five years (see Table 7).

Table7: Homelessness Applications 2005-2010						
Year	Ton & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Total West Kent	Kent CC area	National
2005/06	304	283	346	933	3204	213290
2006/07	240	240	181	661	2102	159350
2007/08	224	162	131	517	2164	130850
2008/09	67	130	123	320	1778	112900
2009/2010	98	86	73	257	1393	89120
2010/11*	160	54	64	278	n/a	n/a
reduction 2005-2010	-68%	-70%	-79%	-72%	-57%	-58%

** figures extrapolated from Q1/2 totals*

- 6.5. Having peaked in 2003/4 at 1,165, applications have fallen by an average of 72% to 257 in 2009/10 – more than the county or national average. This is due to the increasing emphasis on the prevention of homelessness through the Housing Options model and, in particular, to the success of rent deposit/guarantee schemes.
- 6.6. However, as Chart 1 shows, this picture is starting to change. Applications in Tonbridge & Malling saw a sharp increase in early 2010/11 and, while those in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks remain relatively stable, there are signs that they might rise in the future. All three districts have experienced a sharp increase in demand for housing advice services in late 2010/11 and early 2011/12.



* figures extrapolated from Q1/2 totals

6.7. National figures from the DCLG paint a similar picture. Acceptances in Quarter 3 2010/11 were 14 per cent higher than the same quarter last year and, while there has been a decrease in temporary accommodation, there has been an increase in the use of bed & breakfast nationally. Looking at the South East, homeless acceptances in the South East were 17% higher than the previous quarter and 30% higher than the same quarter last year.

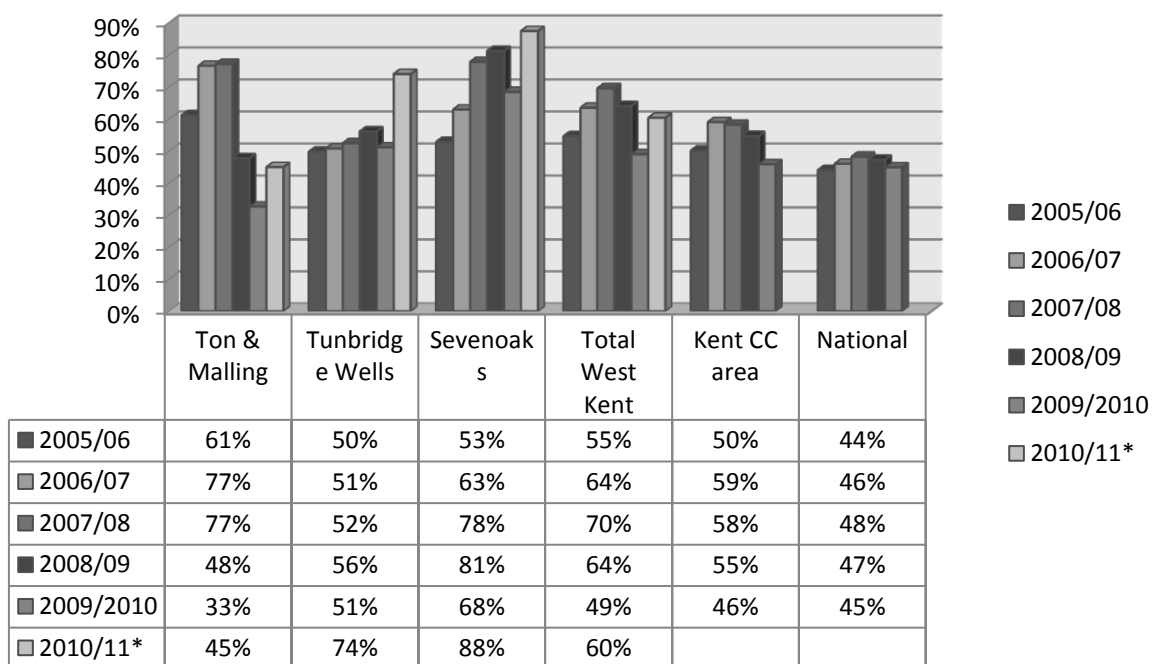
6.8. From 2005 to 2010, the number of homeless acceptances across West Kent has also been falling, by an average of 75% to 126 in March 2010 (Table 8). However, acceptances for 2010/11 are projected to more than double in Tonbridge & Malling and increase by 15% in Sevenoaks.

Table 8: Homelessness Acceptances 2005-2010						
Year	Ton & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Total West Kent	Kent CC area	National
2005/06	186	141	183	510	1607	93980
2006/07	184	122	114	420	1241	73360
2007/08	173	85	102	360	1260	63170
2008/09	32	73	100	205	973	53430
2009/2010	32	44	50	126	639	40020
2010/11*	72	40	56	168	n/a	n/a
% reduction 2005-2010	-83%	-69%	-73%	-75%	-60%	-57%

* figures extrapolated from Q1/2 totals

6.9. Looking at how many homeless applicants are accepted as homeless, the picture is quite different across the three districts (Chart 2), revealing some interesting differences in practice. In Tonbridge & Malling only a third of applicants were accepted in 2009/10; in Tunbridge Wells the ratio stood consistently at around 50% over the period; while in Sevenoaks, the proportion of acceptances is around 3 in 4. While all three local authorities have robust approaches to prevention, it would appear that applications are treated as more of a 'safety net' in Sevenoaks. There is also a link with how Housing Registers are managed with, in the past, more applicants being accepted as homeless as a means of achieving higher priority on the Housing Register.

Chart 2: Homelessness acceptances as % of applications 2005-2010



*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.10. All three authorities have noted an increase in the number of vulnerable people being accepted as homeless and in the complexity of their needs. Such people are both more at risk of becoming homeless and their situations are often harder to resolve, either due to the shortage of suitable accommodation and problems they may have sustaining tenancies. The Housing Options Teams co-ordinate what can be intensive interventions with these clients, working closely with Social Services, partner agencies and Floating Support (funded by the Kent Supporting People Programme through services for rough sleepers and outreach, and specialist and generic floating support).

6.11. Non priority homeless

6.12. This data, however, provides only a partial picture of homelessness, driven as it is by legislation and definitions of priority need. It does not count what are called the "hidden homeless", people to whom local authorities do not owe a statutory duty (mainly young single people or couples or families with non-dependent children) and who are at risk of sleeping rough or 'sofa surfing'.

6.13. Although local authorities do have a duty to provide non-priority homeless people with advice and assistance (and can refer them to short-term hostels or provide them with a deposit/rent in advance), many bypass councils (and therefore the 'official' figures) and approach other agencies or housing providers directly. This might be because they are already in contact with those agencies, because they perceive as slim their chances of making a successful homeless application or for convenience, as agencies are often located in town centres.

Case Study

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council recently worked jointly with the Kent-based homelessness charity Porchlight, to help a couple in their forties who had been sleeping rough for a number of years. They had alcohol problems and were struggling to manage after the tent they were sheltering in got damaged. As they weren't in priority need under the homelessness legislation, they weren't entitled to emergency accommodation, except when the weather was very cold and the Council's Severe Weather Policy came into force. They were, however, entitled to advice and assistance to help them find somewhere to live.

One of the barriers this household faced in obtaining social rented housing was the fact that they couldn't prove a 'local connection', as they didn't have a permanent address. As they were well known by several homelessness charities in the local area, their Housing Options Adviser made contact with one of these and requested a letter confirming that they had had regular visits from the couple for at least the last six months. Obtaining proof of a local connection enabled them to be in a much stronger position on the housing register. The Housing Options Adviser then organised a meeting with the couple and their Porchlight outreach worker, plus another member of Porchlight's staff who specialises in finding private rentals for people who have been homeless.

At this meeting the couple's situation was discussed in more detail. It was acknowledged that it might be difficulties in landlords accepting them as tenants due to their alcohol issues, so the adviser asked some of the charities who had worked with them to provide character references. They also contacted the housing association who had provided their last settled home – as this tenancy had gone well they were also happy to provide a good reference. Porchlight identified a landlord and Tunbridge Wells BC provided a rent-in –advance loan.

Their Porchlight worker is continuing to support them during the first few months of their tenancy, to help them make the transition from sleeping rough and sustain their tenancy.

6.14. A large number of vulnerable non-priority homeless people are supported by the Supporting People Programme. Whilst there are no aggregated statistics on these groups some estimates can be made based on data collected through the Programme. According to client records 2009-10, of the 1,069 new clients identified as 'single homeless' accessed services across Kent providers recorded 166 as having been accepted as 'statutorily homeless and owed a duty'. However 572 were classed by providers as homeless but had not been accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a duty (but were nevertheless offered housing advice and assistance). Many of these people have multiple needs such as alcohol, drug and/or mental health problems.

6.15. The Supporting People team is currently collating referral data to short term accommodation-based supported housing. In July-December 2010, a total of (excluding multiple referrals) 1,948 individuals were referred to such accommodation across Kent, many of whom many were single homeless people identified under a range of client group headings:

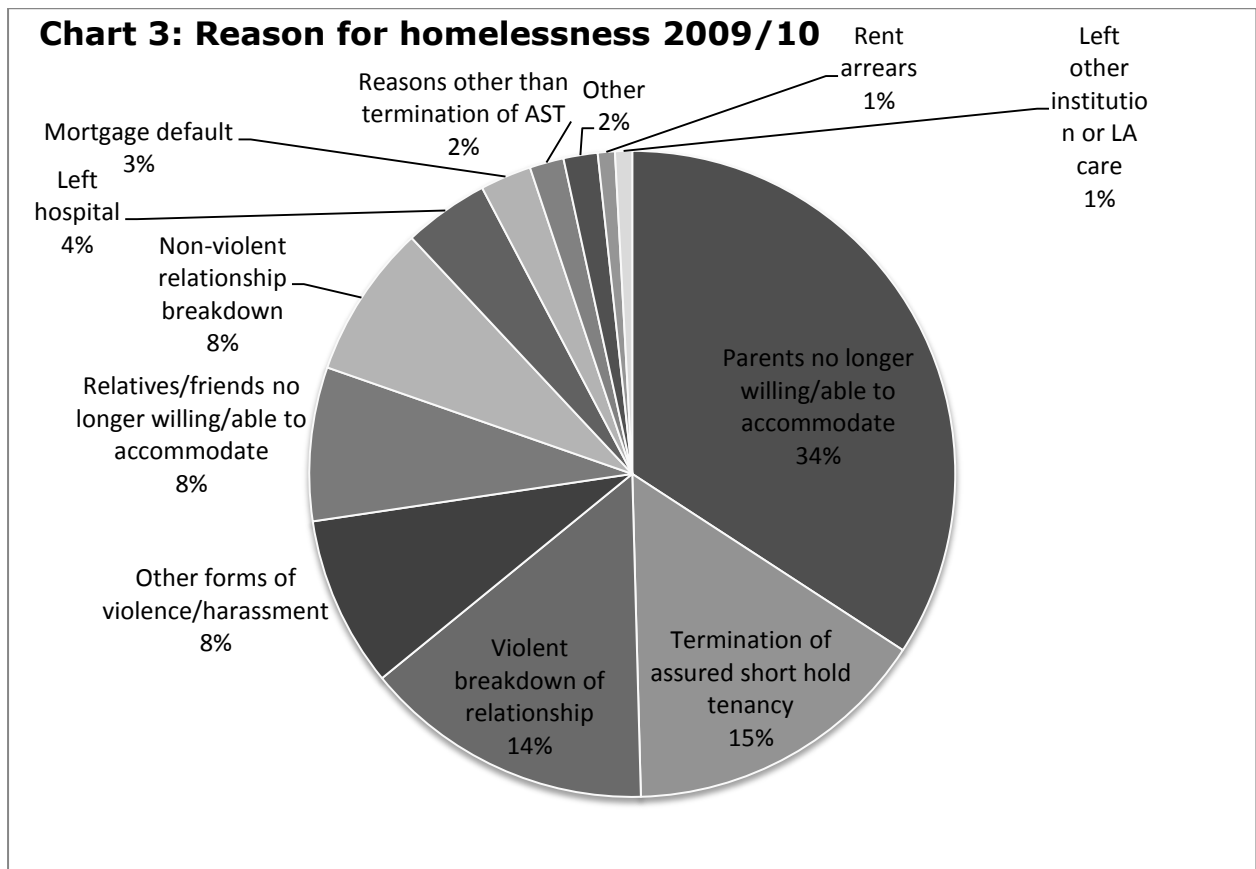
- 297 individuals were aged 16 and 17
- 286 (14.7%) were sleeping rough at the time of referral
- 417 (21.4%) were 'sofa surfing'

- 236 (12%) were in prison with no accommodation to go to on release
- 16 were sleeping rough or sofa surfing in Sevenoaks, 51 in Tonbridge and Malling and 76 in Tunbridge Wells.

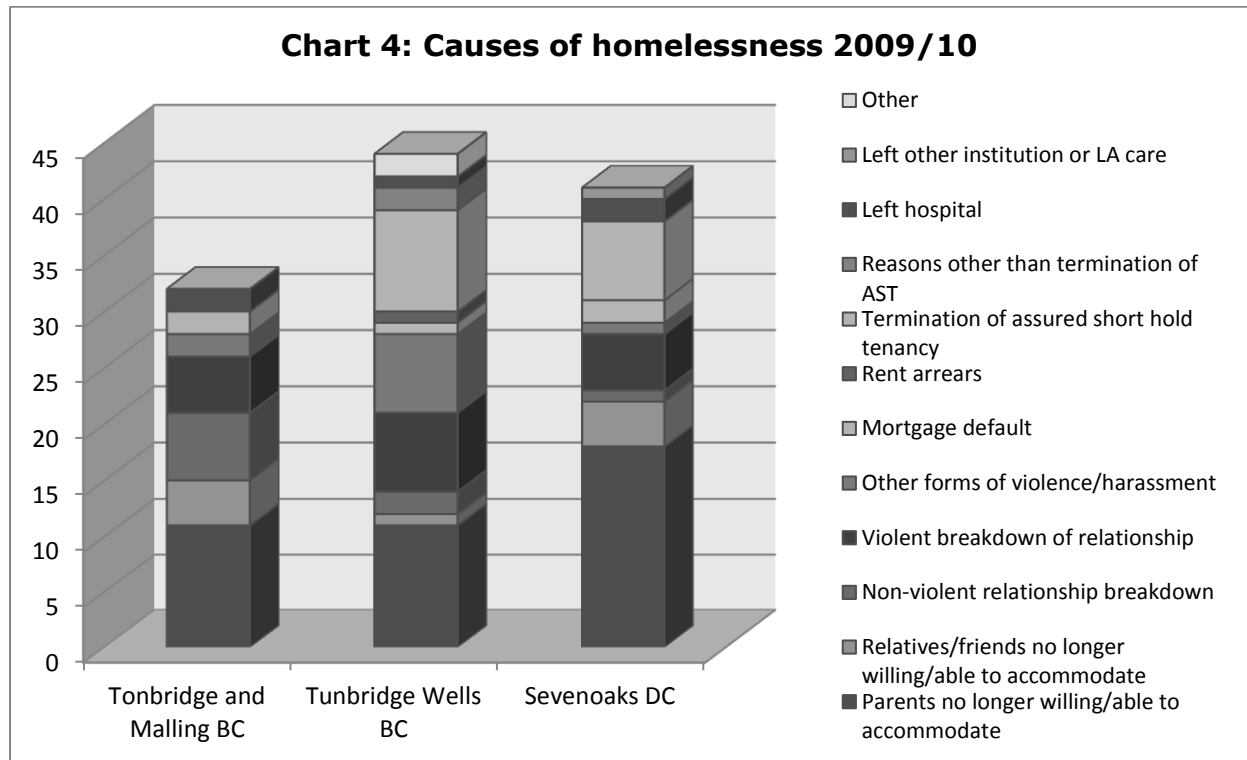
6.16. The picture of single homelessness further emerges through surveys and Rough Sleeper counts. A survey of single homelessness carried out in Kent during 2007 reported 731 respondents in total (107 in West Kent), half of whom has slept rough within the previous 12 months. These were predominantly men between 26-59, many with mental health, drug or alcohol problems and with a history of being in care or prison. They were mostly living in hostels or with friends/family and more than half had been homeless for more than 12 months. Most had become homeless as a result of disputes with their family or partner or as a result of leaving prison.

6.17. Who becomes homeless, and why?

6.18. While trends do shift slightly over time, the most common causes of homelessness have remained consistent over the last four years. As Chart 3 shows, the most common reason is family breakdown, where parents or relatives are no longer willing or able to accommodate the (usually young) applicant (accounting for around one third of cases). Breakdown of relationships (either violent or non-violent) account for around another third of cases. The third most common cause is termination of assured shorthold tenancies (either because of arrears, problems in sustaining tenancies or landlords selling properties) which account for around 15% of cases.

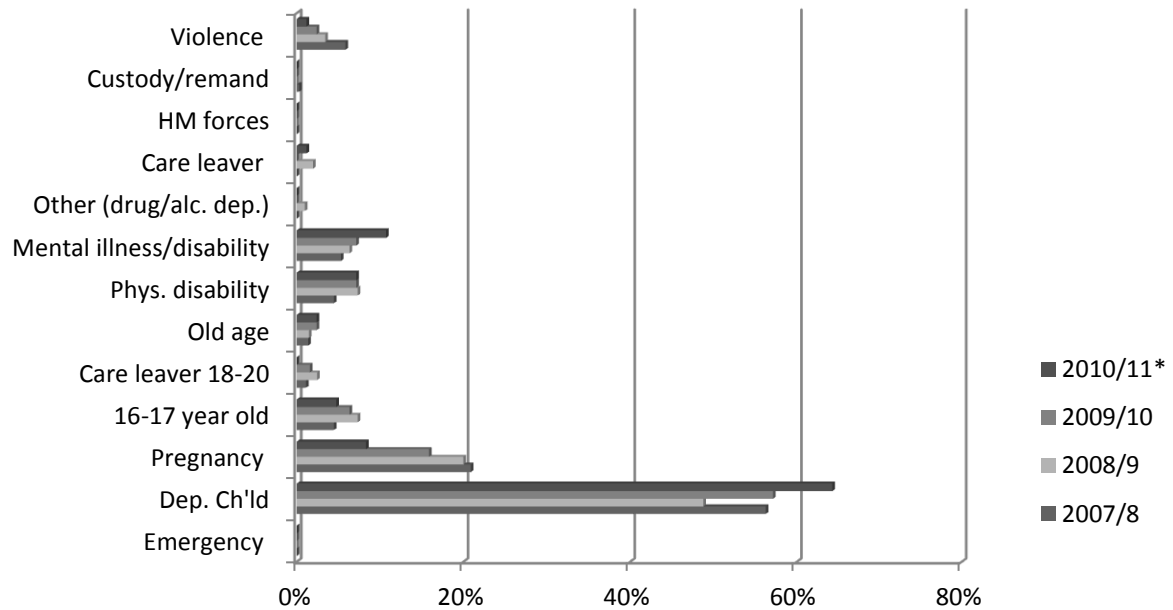


6.19. The picture varies slightly between authorities (see Chart 4) but is very similar to that at the time the last strategy was written, indicating a consistent pattern of how and why homelessness arises in West Kent.



6.20. People accepted as homeless are most often families with dependent children (50%+) or pregnant women (a further 15-20%), often because they have been evicted by their families. Mental illness/disability and physical disability account for around 7% of cases, as do 16/17 year olds. Vulnerability due to domestic violence features in around 7% of cases in Tunbridge Wells, less so elsewhere (and possibly linked to the presence of a women’s refuge within the borough). This picture is fairly consistent across time and geography (Chart 5).

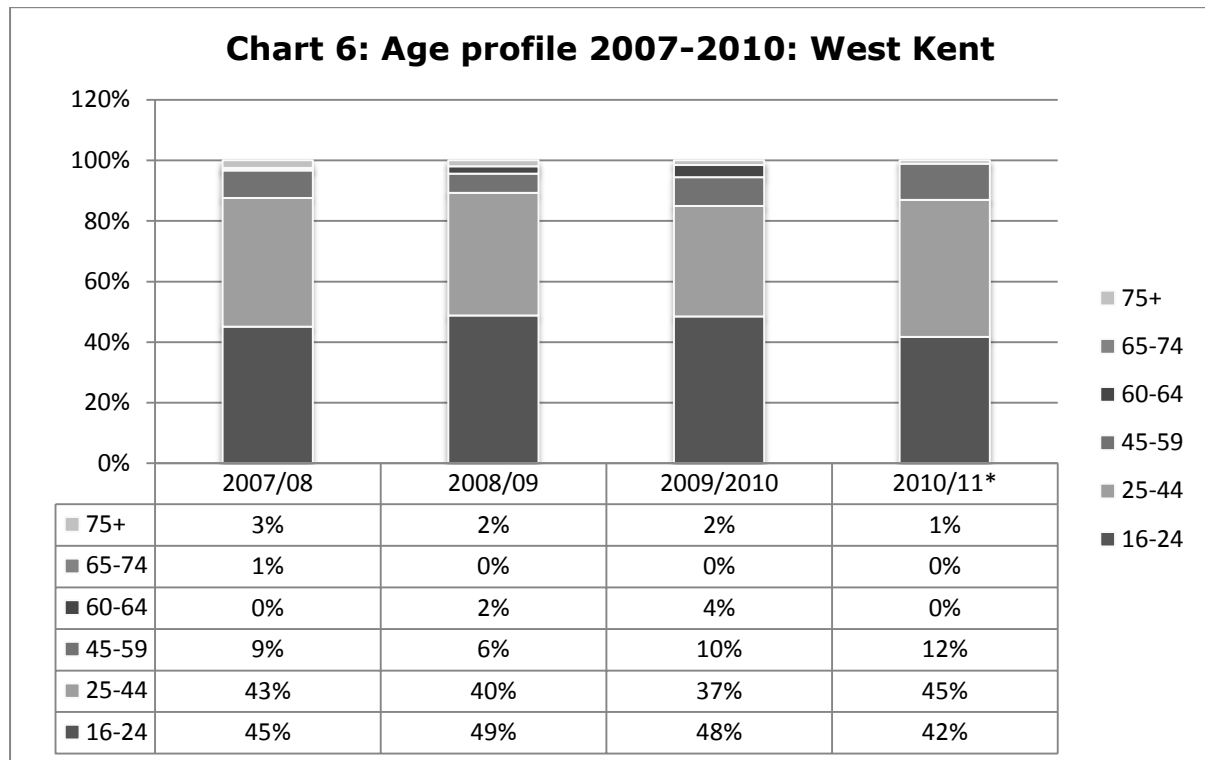
Chart 5: Priority need category 2007-2010: West Kent



	Emergency	Dep. Ch'ld	Pregnancy	16-17 year old	Care leaver 18-20	Old age	Phys. disability	Mental illness/disability	Other (drug/alc. dep.)	Care leaver	HM forces	Custody/remand	Violence
■ 2010/11*	0%	64%	8%	5%	0%	2%	7%	11%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
■ 2009/10	0%	57%	16%	6%	2%	2%	7%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
■ 2008/9	0%	49%	20%	7%	2%	1%	7%	6%	1%	2%	0%	0%	3%
■ 2007/8	0%	56%	21%	4%	1%	1%	4%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%

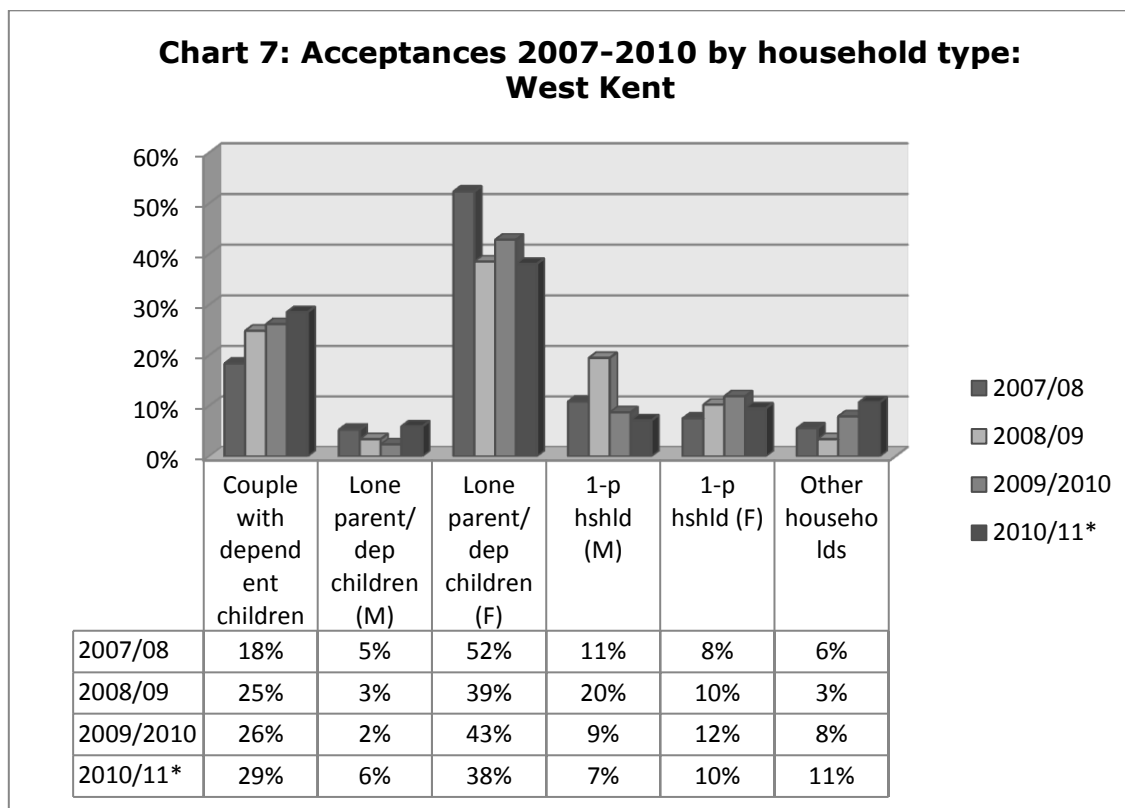
*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.21. The age profile is striking with just under half of people accepted as homeless being young (16-24) and a further 40% aged 25-44 (see Chart 6). This picture is consistent across all three districts and probably reflects the greater availability of alternative accommodation for older people threatened with homelessness, rather than a lack of demand as such.



*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.22. Households are most often lone parents, usually single mothers (43% of cases in 2009/10), with a further 25% families with children (up from 18% in 2007/8) (see Chart 7).



*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.23. The numbers of people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health problems accepted as homeless have increased slightly over recent years. This may in part be due to a lack of support provided through statutory services or failure to access floating support (which helps to sustain tenancies). With proposed cuts to funding, there is a risk that more vulnerable people will fall into homelessness (including rough sleeping) as cuts to floating support impact on drug and/or alcohol dependence services which then may have a significant knock-on effect on homelessness services. Supporting People have indicated that a strategic approach will be adopted to ensure that the programme can continue to provide floating support to vulnerable people. However, demand is likely to increase for such services.

6.24. The ethnic profile of homeless people in West Kent is broadly in line with the general population. In Sevenoaks, BME people account for 4.5% of homeless acceptances (6.1% in the general population); in Tunbridge Wells, for 10.3% (9.4%); and in Tonbridge & Malling 4.5% (4.8%). The figures do not indicate that there is any one particular ethnic group at greater risk of homelessness, rather numbers are divided fairly evenly among all of the ethnic groups.

6.25. Gypsies and travellers (the largest minority group in Sevenoaks DC) are at risk of homelessness where there is a shortage of suitable sites and accommodation for them. In 2006, there were a total of 81 public and 107 privately owned pitches in

West Kent and an estimated shortfall of 70 over the next 5 years⁷. Existing sites include:

- Edenbridge (Sevenoaks) with 12 pitches (undergoing refurbishment and extension to 16 pitches)
- Cinderhill site in Matfield, Tunbridge Wells with 6 pitches.
- Kent County Council sites at Hawkhurst (3 pitches), Polhill (7 pitches) and Ash (35 pitches).
- Coldharbour in Tonbridge & Malling with 8 pitches
- Windmill Lane with 14 pitches

6.26. Recent initiatives such as the employment of a Site Warden at one Sevenoaks-managed site has helped reduce demand on homeless services from the gypsy traveller community by helping resolve disputes quickly.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **the Housing Options approach to homeless prevention has been very effective with homeless applications and acceptances falling year-on-year since 2005**
- **however, there are clear signs that this trend is now reversing and applications and acceptances are on the rise**
- **although we can't be exact, around three times as many people may be "hidden homeless" and not counted in official homelessness statistics**
- **young people are much more likely to become homeless than older people**
- **around 4 in 5 homeless households contain children**
- **the most common causes of homelessness are eviction by parents or family, relationships breaking down or short term private sector tenancies coming to an end**

6.27. Achievements and progress since 2005

6.28. With the publication of "Sustainable Communities: Homes for All" in 2005, the prevention of homelessness became one of the Government's key priorities. Homelessness prevention is based on the Housing Options model, based on the assumption that, by providing advice, support (including financial support) or advocacy before homelessness actually arises, alternative solutions can be found and the need for a homeless application will not arise. Prevention can take the form of enabling people to remain in their current home or by finding them alternative accommodation.

6.29. One of the key priorities identified in the 2007 Joint Homelessness Strategy was the provision of housing options and advice. Approaches to homeless prevention have evolved over the last five years and all three authorities have developed considerable expertise and skills in this area. As a result, they have been very successful at prevention, as shown by the downward trend in homelessness applications and acceptances from 2005 until 2010. Table 9 provides an overview

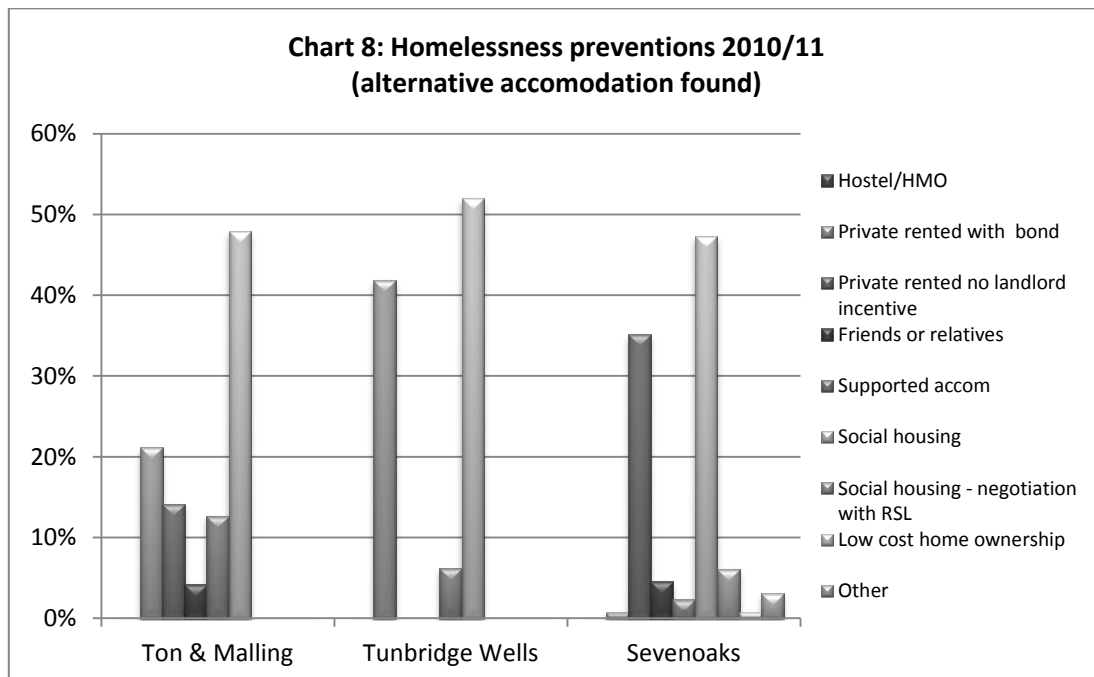
⁷ Ashford, Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling & Tunbridge Wells Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2005/6

of the preventative approaches used during the first half of 2010/11⁸ when over 550 people were assisted.

6.30. Again the data shows interesting differences in practice with Sevenoaks' prevention work focusing on keeping people in their existing home whereas Tonbridge & Malling are more likely to place people in alternative accommodation. The figures for Tunbridge Wells are the result of recording issues (which have now been resolved), rather than differences in practice.

Table 9: Homelessness Preventions	2010/11			
	Ton & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Total West Kent
Preventions (remained in the home)	26	-	226	253
Preventions (found alternative accom)	71	98	131	300
Total	97	98	357	553

6.31. Where people are assisted to remain in their existing home, it is usually through mediation, conciliation or advice to resolve arrears or benefit problems. Where alternative accommodation is found, it is most usually within social housing (around half of all cases) though all councils make extensive use of the private sector, usually with some form of rent deposit or guarantee (see Chart 8).



6.32. Across all three local authorities, the use of temporary accommodation and bed & Breakfast has reduced considerably over recent years with all three ahead of their target to cut the numbers in TA by half by April 2010. At the end of Quarter 2

⁸ The data for Tunbridge Wells BC is somewhat unreliable due to recording issues which are currently being rectified.

2010/11, Sevenoaks had a total of 20 households in temporary accommodation (3 in B&B); Tonbridge & Malling had 13 (8 in B&B); and Tunbridge Wells had 18 (2).

6.33. Preventing homelessness: what works?

- 6.34. All three Housing Options teams use a variety of preventative tools and techniques and each team prides itself on delivering advice that is specific to the needs to the client. The most commonly used types of intervention are described here.
- 6.35. **Meditation or conciliation** - given that parental eviction is the most common cause of homelessness among young people, meditation can be a very useful prevention tool. Most commonly used when young people are being evicted by their family, informal mediation to allow the young person to stay in their home or give them more time to find suitable accommodation is offered by all three authorities. Sevenoaks carry out a home visit in every case of threatened parental eviction while Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling undertake mediation face-to-face or over the phone. Informal mediation is successful in up to 80% of cases and was described, in some cases, as a 'reality check' in managing the expectations of families who may have benefited from social housing in the past and have similar expectations for their children.
- 6.36. Formal mediation has been tried in the past but was less successful, mainly because the intervention of a third party was felt to be less effective than informal mediation provided as part of an overall 'package' of advice offered by the Housing Options Teams.
- 6.37. **Supporting victims of domestic violence** – Tunbridge Wells fund Intouch to operate the Sanctuary scheme. This offers victims of domestic violence advice and practical support to make their home safe and secure, so they are able to remain in their home (through additional security measures such as extra locks, gated security, emergency lighting etc.). Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks operate a similar scheme called 'Safe Haven' while housing association partners have also contributed by making security improvements to properties where necessary.
- 6.38. **Rent in advance and deposit guarantees to private sector landlords** – given the importance of the private sector as a long term housing solution – and with many landlords reluctant to let to tenants on benefits - effective rent deposit schemes are key to the successful use of the private sector in homeless prevention. All three authorities offer private sector landlords rent in advance plus some form of cash deposit or guarantee/bond covering any damage to the property. These schemes (usually funded through Homelessness Grant) are seen as highly effective examples of "spend to save" and a key prevention tool, giving landlords assurance in case of damage and overcoming any delays in the first payment of Housing Benefit. In most cases, rent deposits are only available to priority homeless.
- 6.39. Each authority operates a different scheme with varying degrees of success:
- **Sevenoaks** have a dedicated Private Sector Lettings Scheme officer to work directly with people looking to rent privately and also with landlords who have vacant homes to rent. The Private Sector Lettings Scheme acts as an introduction agency putting landlords in touch with those looking for a home, providing deposit bonds (backed up by an inventory carried out by the Council) and rent in advance loans to enable those eligible for assistance to secure a private tenancy. To qualify for assistance under the scheme those looking for a home must be either homeless or threatened with homelessness, on a low

income and have a connection with the Sevenoaks District. The scheme is linked with the Council's Accreditation Scheme which provides advice and grant funding to private landlords to bring their properties up to the Decent Homes Standard. Preventing Homelessness Grant has been used to supplement the funding available for loans under this scheme.

- **Tonbridge & Malling** offer a deposit bond (where landlords can claim against a bond in the case of any damage), or a cash deposit where a landlord is not prepared to accept a bond. In exceptional cases, one month's rent in advance can also be paid to the landlord. Payments made to landlords are repayable by the tenants over an agreed period at an affordable amount. In 2009/10, 48 customers were assisted with rent deposits/bonds and/or rent in advance payments and a further 36 in the first three quarters of 2010/11.
- **Tunbridge Wells** operates a rent deposit guarantee (bond) scheme, which provides landlords with a guarantee equivalent to up to 1 ½ months' rent. The housing options team also has limited funds available to provide, in exceptional circumstances, cash deposits or rent in advance. During 2009/10, the Council provided deposits and deposit guarantees to a total of 69 households. So far during 2010/11, over 60 households have already been assisted through the scheme. The Council also operates a successful property-based accreditation scheme, which helps increase the number of good quality private rentals available to the Housing Options Team. Once a property has been accredited, the landlord is given the option of advertising their vacant rental properties free of charge on Kent Homechoice. The Council is able to assist non-priority need customers with a rent deposit guarantee at their discretion.

Case Study

Ms X was living in a women's refuge with her 2 young children, having fled from her violent partner.

She approached the Council for advice about housing and subsequently applied to the PSL scheme. The application to the scheme was accepted.

A landlord with a property to let contacted the Council. The Council had previously assisted the landlord bring the property back into use by giving an Empty Homes Grant, following which the property was registered on the Council's Accreditation Scheme, confirming the home was of good quality and complied with the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard. As the landlord was happy to accept a tenant who would be claiming LHA and using a Deposit Bond & Rent-in-Advance loan, arrangements were made for Ms X to view the property.

Both landlord and Ms X were happy to proceed with the tenancy and the tenancy recently commenced.

As there is to be a shortfall between the LHA rate and the contractual rent, the Council's Benefits Team have agreed to award some DHP towards some of the shortfall.

6.40. **Negotiating with lenders/landlords** - mortgage companies do, in some cases, advise councils of repossessions, giving the authorities the opportunity to negotiate over mortgage arrears in order to keep people in their home. Authorities will also intervene with private/social landlords over rent arrears or where eviction is treated for other reasons.

Case Study:

Mr & Mrs A approached Tunbridge Wells BC in March 2010. Mr A had broken his back in a building site accident 10 years previously. He had started his own business as he could not work for anyone due to the accident but the business collapsed.

Mr & Mrs A have seven children and were living in a 5 bedroom house. The mortgage outstanding was £161,000 and the property value was £230,000; there were mortgage arrears of over £7,000K as well as four loans secured on the property totalling £37,500. All of these loans were in arrears and the loan companies were also attempting to repossess the property whilst the mortgage rescue case was going through.

At the repossession hearing in March, the court was contacted by the Housing Options Adviser, who explained that the Government Mortgage Rescue Scheme was being pursued. As a result, possession was not granted and the Court allowed the Council and Moat Housing Association time to process the application for mortgage rescue.

During the legal process, it came to light that the family did not have the appropriate planning permission and building regulations certificates for works that had been completed on the property. This could have derailed the process. However, effective liaison with Planning, the housing options adviser managed to get this permission quickly in special circumstances.

Mr & Mrs A's mortgage rescue completed in September 2010.

6.41. **Providing advice or assistance through other organisations** – all three authorities use the Citizen's Advice Bureau to carry out homeless prevention and organise regular joint training and liaison. All three authorities have referral arrangements with Porchlight for the rough sleeper and outreach services, funded by the Supporting People Programme.

6.42. The **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)** is a key resource for rough sleepers in time of severe weather and has been successfully used in West Kent in recent years. However, the temporary accommodation can be located away from any support links that the individual may have and, in some cases, may not be practical to travel to or from at times of severe weather.

6.43. There are a number of other initiatives included within the previous strategy that have met with more limited success. These include:

- **Schools projects** – all three local authorities have worked with Porchlight to go into schools to advise young people of the realities of homelessness (though funding is due to expire in March 2011). Access into schools has not always been easy though progress has been made recently in Tunbridge Wells.
- **Supported lodgings** – the idea of supported lodgings is to place a young person with a host family who can support them pending a move to independent accommodation. A project with the Bridge Trust did not however take off due to problems recruiting host families and concerns over health and safety. With the economic downturn, however, the scheme may now be more attractive to host families and there are examples from elsewhere of successful supported lodgings schemes
- **Crash pads** – these provide a space for a (usually) young person to 'cool off' after family disputes that could lead to eviction. Lack of funding and suitable premises has prevented this idea being developed in the past though the three local authorities still see a need for this service and would support a cost-effective solution
- **Direct access shelter** – the three authorities have run seasonal shelters in the past though demand for this service has reduced since Colebrook Road opened.

Although agencies have indicated a desire for a permanent facility in each district, in the absence of identified suitable locations and external capital funding, this looks unlikely to be a priority in the foreseeable future. Revenue funding to support accommodation-based supported housing for young people at risk (aged 16-24) has been agreed through the Supporting People Programme. Currently the funding is used to provide floating support to this client group in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells.

6.44. Tackling issues beyond homelessness

6.45. **HERO project** – in recognition of the fact that local authorities need to look beyond the accommodation needs of homeless people and address underlying issues such as debt, long term unemployment and lack of educational opportunities, Sevenoaks DC has attracted external funding to develop this trailblazer enhanced housing advice project. Through a specialist advisor, they provide holistic advice on housing, debt, welfare benefits, saving money on fuel bills, retraining and further education options, getting back to work and business start-up. The project has been very successful and has helped many clients since it was set up. Although funding for the project is due to expire in June 2012, Sevenoaks is determined to use the lessons of the project to evolve its housing options service into a more holistic service.

Case Study

Mrs L. recently moved into the Edenbridge area. She was lacking in self-confidence and did not know anyone in the area. She had not worked for over a year and came to the HERO project needing debt and employment advice.

HERO worked very closely with the volunteering centre, getting her working in a retail environment in order to build up her confidence and work experience. Her confidence grew and within 4 months of Mrs L.'s coming to the HERO project, she had found volunteering work in the public and private sector.

Mrs L also referred her 17-year old daughter to the service and she is now in a volunteering work placement as well as in fulltime education studying to be a carer.

6.46. Tunbridge Wells and Rother Councils jointly secured Government Trailblazer funding in 2008 which has helped deliver debt and employment advice over the last two years, alongside housing options advice. Both Councils are now considering how to maintain key elements of this service in the future, in the context of continuing economic uncertainty. Tunbridge Wells are optimistic that funding to continue the housing and debt advice service, through the local Citizens Advice Bureau, will be secured for the immediate future.

6.47. Choice based lettings

6.48. The launch of the Kent-wide Choice Based Lettings scheme has brought many advantages including more mobility across the county, more transparency and improved cost effectiveness. CBL has also been a useful preventative tool with the authorities using the Register in such a way as to encourage applicants to work with them to resolve their housing situation, either by the way points are allocated or by proactively bidding on behalf of applicants.

6.49. Inevitably however, some applicants find the system quite hard to understand. This was shown in the service user consultation where many people said that they found the system quite complex. The scheme is now looking to move to a

Common Assessment Framework and a Working Group has also been established to explore other future options for the register.

6.50. Accommodation and services for homeless people in West Kent

6.51. **Partnership working with other agencies** - in addition to the housing options and advice provided by the local authorities, there are many agencies working across West Kent providing generic or specialist housing advice and assisting in homeless prevention. These include:

- **Connexions** - assists 14-19 year olds who are homeless and estranged from their families to access benefits
- **Crisis Recovery Day Centre** - help people who are homeless or those with alcohol or drug addictions
- **HOPE** - provide supported accommodation throughout Kent for homeless ex-offenders or those at risk of offending
- **Kent Police** – through MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) assist with high risk domestic abuse victims with re-housing or securing existing accommodation.
- **Moat HA** – run Colebrook Road hostel
- **Platform 51 (YWCA)** – provide support to young women; have done pre-tenancy training courses
- **RSLs** - prevent homelessness through the provision of affordable housing, including social housing, intermediate rent and shared ownership
- **Salvation Army** - provide hot meals and clothing to homeless people
- **Shelter** – provide free advice on housing, debt and welfare benefits issues to people across Kent

6.52. The following partners also provide services funded through Supporting People:

- **The Bridge Trust** – single homeless hostel for homeless young men and women in Tunbridge Wells
- **Catch 22** - supports 16/21 years leaving local authority care, supporting their move into independent living.
- **Chapter One** - supported accommodation for homeless young women in Tunbridge Wells
- **Porchlight** – focus on street homelessness, rough sleeping and non-priority single homeless households. Also offer floating support for individuals with drug or alcohol-related issues.

6.53. There are also many successful partnerships with public sector bodies, including Health, Social Services and Offending. These relationships are enshrined in a series of protocols setting out responsibilities and key procedures. Feedback from staff suggests that some of these work well, others less so.

6.54. Supporting People commissions a variety of supported accommodation and services across West Kent. West Kent has a limited amount of accommodation for homeless people and, as such, demand always exceeds supply. The current facilities funded by Supporting People are listed in Table 10. A new scheme for young people at risk has come on line in Tonbridge & Malling. It is revenue funded by Supporting People. Needs analysis carried out by Supporting People has identified need for further supported accommodation for young people in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, as well as women’s refuges in both those authorities and a scheme for people misusing alcohol in West Kent. Until those services can be delivered, the programme delivers floating support in West Kent.

Table 10: Short term (up to 2 years) accommodation based supported housing funded by Supporting People

Scheme	Bed spaces	Location	Client Group	Description
Colebrook Road	13	Tunbridge Wells	Single homeless with support needs	Maximum stay 13 weeks. Operated by Moat
Chapter 1	17	Tunbridge Wells	Single homeless women and families with support needs	Shared facilities
West Kent YMCA	24 s/c	Tunbridge Wells	Single homeless with support needs	A further 15 units are to open shortly. Shared among 3 West Kent Authorities
Women's Refuge	6	Tunbridge Wells	Women fleeing domestic abuse	Access is shared with Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and Malling
Bridge Trust	22	Tunbridge wells/Tonbridge and Malling	Single homeless with support needs	Shared facility
Richmond Fellowship	15	Sevenoaks	People with mental health problems (dual diagnosis)	Greensands scheme. Shared house.
Richmond Fellowship	6	Tonbridge and Malling	People with mental health problems	Dispersed s/c supported accommodation
Vine Court Road	9	Sevenoaks	People with mental health problems	Shared house.
HOPE Tonbridge	6	Tonbridge and Malling	Offenders or at risk of offending	Shared facilities
New Wharf	9	Tonbridge and Malling	Young people at risk (aged16-24)	Self-contained accommodation.

6.55. Supporting People also currently provides generic floating support for a range of vulnerable people and specialist floating support for people at risk of offending, with mental health problems, fleeing domestic abuse and misusing substances. The programme also funds rough sleeper and outreach services. All these services are accessible to the vulnerable people of West Kent.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Homeless prevention has been very effective in West Kent over recent years and the teams have developed effective toolkits for prevention**
- **Approaches differ between the three authorities and there are opportunities to better share 'what works', particularly around rent deposit schemes which will become increasingly important to prevention in the future**
- **Accommodation for homeless people is in short supply and demand always exceeds supply**
- **There is a need for additional accommodation for young people at risk in Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling, women's' refuges in Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling and for people misusing substances in West Kent**
- **Strong partnerships between local authorities, agencies, housing associations and other public sector bodies exist across West Kent**

PART TWO: THE STRATEGY

7. LESSONS LEARNT

7.1. During the course of consultation with partners, stakeholders and staff, a number of themes emerged that have informed the strategy going forward (see Appendix 2 for summaries of the consultations). These were:

How things work

- a desire for more commonality in how the three authorities work and in their processes and procedures and for existing protocols to be better understood and enforced
- an appetite for more shared services across West Kent or county-wide
- an appetite for more innovation, moving away from “the way things have always worked” to exploring more radical solutions
- a feeling that there is some duplication and overlap between some services and therefore an opportunity to streamline
- an appetite for more sharing of knowledge, information and good practice amongst the authorities and partner agencies
- a need to streamline how some processes and procedures work so they do not get in the way of delivering effective services
- more ‘joined up’ and effective referral processes
- the importance of effective partnership working
- the need to involve service users in designing procedures and protocols

New services and ideas

- build on the existing relationships with private sector landlords, to understand their issues and overcome the barriers they have to letting their properties to people on benefits
- the importance of robust, cost-effective rent deposit schemes to successful prevention
- support for schemes that would allow people who had not been tenants before to become “accredited” through a course in how to manage a tenancy
- the need for tenancy sustainment when people need specific support to help them keep their tenancy
- the need for more preventative work with young people and in schools
- the need for more floating support, particularly for new tenants
- the need for more direct access accommodation for non-priority homeless

7.2. The key themes that emerged from service user consultation were:

- **Staff** – The quality of interaction with staff within the Housing Options Teams was often cited as the best or worst part of users’ experience with the common themes around quality of staff, empathy and communication skills. In many cases, households felt listened to, were kept informed and felt very positive about their experience. However, others were less positive, saying that they felt ‘judged’ by staff who lacked empathy with their situation.
- **Realistic advice** – several households said that they needed more advice about their likely success bidding on properties, the amount of accommodation available and on what they might expect from the council. One household in particular said they would not have come to the area if they had known beforehand how difficult it was likely to be to find a new home. The feedback showed that expectations are, in some cases, high. Several users said that they

would have liked more information from the outset and that this would have empowered them to make better choices and so take control of their own situation.

- **Rent deposits** – received positive feedback, but there was a feeling that the cap should be raised on the monthly rent you can access through this scheme. Several users struggled to find accommodation at rent levels under the cap.
- **Private Accommodation** – the lack of availability of private accommodation for people receiving benefits was mentioned with people wanting more help accessing landlords willing to accept them. Several users reported, once they had found a home, that they were happy with the quality of accommodation
- **Temporary Accommodation** – this was a worry for some households in terms of being able to maintain employment and family contact when placed long distances from their communities. There were also a number of concerns about poor quality, cleanliness and, in one case, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse in TA which the user found highly intimidating
- **The HERO project** received very positive feedback.

8. OUR VISION AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

8.1. We have used the following guiding principles in developing the strategy and action plan:

- they should build upon evidenced need of homeless people
- they should contain specific, actionable objectives rather than aspirations
- they should be aligned to the objectives of related national, regional and local strategies
- they will be delivered through partnership working between the three authorities, local agencies and the voluntary sector

8.2. The overall vision of the West Kent Homelessness Strategy is to:

“proactively support and empower people to plan their own futures so that homelessness within West Kent is significantly reduced”

8.3. Responding to the consultation with stakeholders, partners and service users – and building on the successes over the last five years, we have defined five strategic priorities. These are:

- 1. Maximising homelessness prevention through the provision of appropriate housing options and choices**
- 2. Maximising resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective**
- 3. Working effectively with private sector landlords**
- 4. Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness**
- 5. Meeting the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness**

8.4. Despite such uncertainty in the economic, funding and policy situation, we are confident that these broad strategic priorities will provide a sound framework for the next five years. However, given the current uncertainty and pace of change nationally and regionally, the detailed Action Plan covers the period to June 2013. We will review the Action Plan at that point to ensure that it remains relevant and up to date as things evolve.

8.5. Strategic Priority One: Maximising homelessness prevention through an enhanced Housing Options service - by 2016, our goal is to develop a highly effective, personalised housing options service that empowers customers to make the best choices for themselves

- 8.6. All three authorities have been very successful at preventing homelessness. However, with proposed changes to benefits, reduced investment in social housing and uncertain economic times ahead, there is a wide consensus that the services will be put under considerable pressure in the coming years and that demands on the services will increase. The teams will have to understand, and plan for, these changing demands as the situation evolves – including from non-priority homeless who are less visible in the homelessness statistics and from young people on low incomes who are no longer able to access the housing market.
- 8.7. The current preventative tools will come under increasing pressure, so it is important that the teams use the coming months to ensure that processes and protocols are working well, being exploited to the full and that any barriers to their use are removed where possible. There is scope for the three teams to share best practice more effectively and to work together more closely and, through the development of the strategy, have identified an appetite – and opportunities – for this. At the same time, the Housing Options Teams will be tested through increased pressure on services and skill sets will need to evolve, with more emphasis on negotiation and mediation skills, detailed benefits advice and employment and training.
- 8.8. At the same time, there will be a significant task in managing customers' expectations. Service user consultation revealed that many applicants already have unrealistic expectations about their future housing prospects, while proposed changes to waiting lists, the allocation of social housing, social housing tenancies and the use of the private sector will need to be communicated, with messages to customers being clear and upfront. Improved advice and information will need to be made available through the internet (with more self servicing), as well as new and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. It could also involve more creative ways to reach the 'front line' of homelessness with advice available in doctors surgeries, support centres for mental health clients, schools etc. The need for more co-ordination of information, advice and guidance was identified throughout the consultation in order to reduce duplication.
- 8.9. In order to deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:
- ensure that we fully understand and analyse emerging trends in homelessness and that changing demands on the service are understood and planned for
 - ensure that the impacts of cuts to support and other services are understood by Housing Options Teams, customers and other stakeholders and prioritise resources accordingly
 - hone our 'prevention toolkit', ensuring that we are maximising the options that are available and making best use of available techniques and resources
 - provide clear and timely information to people threatened with homelessness so that they are fully aware of their options and can make realistic choices
 - building on the HERO project, develop more holistic approaches to prevention that tackle the underlying causes of homelessness

8.10. Strategic Priority Two: Maximising resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective - by 2016, our goal is to deliver more effective services using fewer resources

8.11. At the same time as this anticipated increase in homelessness, local authority and Supporting People funding is facing significant reductions. There is a real pressure not just to 'do more for less' but to think – and act - radically about how services can be delivered more cost effectively in the future. The three West Kent local authorities have a long and successful history of working together and, in developing the strategy, have demonstrated an appetite to take partnership working further. There may be opportunities to share staff and expertise, either between the three authorities or with other teams and partners (including housing associations and voluntary agencies) and identifying such opportunities is a key priority for the next two years.

8.12. Teams could also develop shared processes and procedures, learning from the best within West Kent as well as more widely. The consultation revealed clear scope for reviewing processes and procedures in order to cut out any duplication and this exercise could usefully be completed with partner agencies to make sure that the best use is being made of all available resources. There is a link here with the service mapping exercise identified in Priority 4, which will give opportunities to review exactly how homelessness services can best be delivered across agencies and local authorities.

8.13. Finally, with resources so scarce the authorities will need to maximise any funding that is available. This will mean having an eye to central and local government priorities and thinking and ensuring that the profile – and successes - of the homelessness services is maintained. This will particularly be the case when Homelessness Grant loses its ring-fenced status in 2013. The authorities will also need to ensure that benefits are maximised, with improvements to procedures and expertise a priority.

8.14. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- identify opportunities to share resources, services and expertise across the three authorities, and more widely
- maximise the external resources available to tackle homelessness
- with other Kent authorities, develop and implement a common Assessment Framework across Kent
- make best use of existing housing stock, in partnership with housing associations
- maximise the availability of accommodation for people threatened with homelessness, both in the social and private rented sectors

8.15. Strategic Priority Three: Working effectively with private sector landlords

– by 2016, our goal is to understand and overcome the barriers to increased private sector lettings

8.16. The private rented sector is already central to successful prevention and will become even more so when local authorities are able to fully discharge their duties into private rent. At the same time, many private landlords are wary about accepting tenants who may be vulnerable and/or on benefits and, in what is an affluent commuter area, are under little pressure to do so. With changes to benefits on the way, persuading landlords to accept benefit claimants will become an even greater challenge.

8.17. All three authorities work with private landlords and have had varying degrees of success in forging links with the sector and in understanding and removing the (real and perceived) barriers. A key priority for the future strategy is therefore to improve these links, ensure that the priorities and motivations of private sector landlords are understood and that the authorities develop an 'offer' to landlords that meets the needs of both parties.

8.18. This could include looking at rent levels (perhaps trading certainty for price), preferred options for rent in advance and deposits, whether tenants could achieve 'accreditation' that would provide reassurance to landlords and a package that would help more vulnerable residents sustain their tenancy. It may also mean ensuring landlords have access to a package of grants or loans to improve their properties so they meet Decent Homes and affordable warmth standards.

8.19. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- work with private sector landlords in order to understand their priorities, perceived barriers to letting to tenants on benefits and to develop a 'win-win' culture that offers reassurance to both parties
- develop a Tenancy Sustainment programme that will enable vulnerable residents maintain their tenancy
- work with landlords to improve property standards in private sector through Accreditation Schemes

8.20. Strategic Priority Four: Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness - by 2016, our goal is to strengthen existing partnerships, maximising synergies to meet the needs of homeless people

- 8.21. Strong and effective partnerships already exist between the authorities and the many voluntary agencies and housing associations that work in West Kent. These provide a firm basis for what will need to be even closer partnership working in the future.
- 8.22. At this time of real pressure on resources, it is vital that every organisation with a role in tackling homelessness in West Kent is clear about the contribution they make to the overall vision and delivery of this strategy. The consultation identified that there is some duplication between agencies and services as well as some gaps. An important early task therefore is to understand the resources available through joint service mapping with partners to identify roles, client group(s), expertise and resources. This need not necessarily be started from scratch – where mapping has already been carried out (for example The Bridge Trust has undertaken some mapping as part of their Homelessness Survival Handbook), this should be used as the starting point and built upon. This information will need to be accessible and web-based and data kept updated every 18 months - two years. A useful additional feature would be a 'share point' to share information, customer feedback and policies.
- 8.23. By bringing together this information and filling in any gaps, the authorities can facilitate a conversation with partners about the best way to deliver a joined-up service across West Kent. This may mean radically reviewing how these partnerships work in practice and whether there is further scope for services to be delivered in different ways, by different organisations. For example, organisations such as Porchlight and the Citizen's Advice Bureau may be best placed to lead on making contact with hard-to-reach groups while the CAB and Shelter could best provide advice and guidance to people with no recourse to public funds. Clarifying and formalising these relationships and roles would mean better use of resources, with the most appropriate agencies delivering services in the most appropriate way at the 'front line'.
- 8.24. Again, building on existing relationships, improved links will be made with a range of public sector bodies who play a part in delivering the strategy such as Housing Benefit, Job Centre Plus (maximising the use of existing 'back to work' schemes), Children's Trusts and the Kent-wide and local Learning Disability Partnership Boards. New relationships will need to be forged with Health, with PCTs being abolished in 2012 and new bodies such as the Swanley, Dartford and Gravesham Pathfinder formed. Links with Young Persons' Services need to be strengthened, in particular to focus on issues of throughput and move-on. Where protocols currently exist, these will be monitored to check that they are working effectively. Given the proposed benefit changes, links will be made with London Boroughs to address the potential increase in homelessness resulting from displacement of families from London.
- 8.25. With regard to rough sleepers, Tunbridge Wells has agreed that the needs of this group will be discussed at the JARS panel which will give an opportunity to discuss cases with agencies such as mental health teams, ensuring that the appropriate support is available.
- 8.26. Homeless prevention could also benefit from improved information sharing across organisations and the authorities have identified a need to work together with housing association partners on evictions and on difficult-to-house people.

8.27. The Homelessness Strategy Group is the body which brings together all of the agencies in West Kent working with homeless people and which monitors the delivery of the strategy. Building on the work already done, this group will refocus how it operates by establishing a series of sub-groups which bring together cross-sector partners to concentrate on key themes such as crime reduction, health and vulnerable people, developing knowledge and relationships across sectors. These groups would have clear accountability for focusing on, and working towards achieving, relevant strategic priorities in the Action Plan and report back to HSG on a regular basis. Members of HSG will also share resources and expertise through committing to a programme of joint training, shadowing and knowledge sharing. They will also better co-ordinate information, advice and guidance with no duplication of information and a mechanism for sharing legislative and other good practice updates.

8.28. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- undertake a mapping exercise of homelessness organisations and services across West Kent, creating a shared, updatable resource
- work more closely with RSL partners
- improve links with public sector bodies
- increase the effectiveness and accountability of the Homelessness Strategy Group

8.29. Strategic Priority Five: Meeting the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness - by 2016, our goal is to understand and meet the needs of the diverse range of groups affected by homelessness

8.30. Homelessness affects a broad range of people, as illustrated by the case studies in this strategy. The relatively affluent nature and geography of West Kent mean that people threatened with homelessness face specific challenges of accessing accommodation and services while pressures on funding are already impacting on support services that enable people to sustain their tenancies. At the same time, homelessness is affecting a broader range of households, and local authorities are seeing an increase in approaches from owner occupiers hit by the recession.

8.31. While the P1E data enables the authorities to undertake some analysis of who is becoming homeless and their needs, more detailed information and research is needed. This will enable the authorities to gain a fuller insight into the experiences of customers, better understand the complex patterns of 'pulls and pushes' that can cause homelessness and so better tailor services to individuals' needs.

8.32. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- gain deeper insight into the customer experience to help us to achieve personalisation in service delivery to fully address equality and diversity matters

8.33. **Young People** – young people are particularly affected by homelessness and authorities have a particular duty to consider the interests of children (16-18 year olds). Going forward, the definition of young people will be expanded to 16-35 year olds and will cover those classed (in terms of the legislation) as low priority with limited support needs (though the definition in terms of SP funded accommodation will not change). The priority here will be for early intervention to avoid homelessness arising. Research⁹ has shown that young people value information, advice and guidance (including through schools) as their preferred support options while new and social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) offer opportunities to interact with young people in ways that suit them. We will:

- using the Kent-wide Young Homeless Persons' Protocol, ensure we work effectively with Children's Services departments to assist homeless 16/17 year olds
- signpost young people to literacy and numeracy classes where appropriate
- promote and support young people to access tenancy sustainment courses
- support the commissioning of supported accommodation for young people in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks

8.34. **People experiencing domestic violence** (both women and men)– we will:

- Where funding permits, extend the use of and promote the Sanctuary scheme to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their home
- support the commissioning of refuges in Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks
- following on from the successful MARAC training in 2010, ensure that staff receive on-going training on domestic abuse (resources to be identified)
- continue joint working with other agencies such as the Police through, for example, MARAC meetings

⁹ On the Right Track? Consulting young people about the National Youth Homelessness Scheme (YMCA, 2007)

8.35. **People with disabilities** (including learning disabilities) – we will:

- audit existing supply of temporary accommodation to ensure that there is provision to meet the needs of people with disabilities
- with Private Sector Housing colleagues work with housing association partners to implement the Kent Housing Group standard for funding disabled adaptations in housing association stock

8.36. **People with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse** – we will:

- seek advice from health services and other specialists about the specific needs of this group and how best to engage with them and provide appropriate training for staff (may require additional resources)
- work more closely with adult Social Services and KDAAT and explore the possibility of joint assessments to identify the housing and support needs of this group

8.37. **Gypsies and travellers** – we will:

- work with the KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit to better understand the housing and support needs of the gypsy and traveller community

8.38. **Older people** – we will:

- provide training for staff on the risks of financial and domestic abuse among older people
- develop an information pack for older people facing homelessness

8.39. **Rough Sleepers** – we will:

- with other Kent authorities and partner agencies, develop joint initiatives for rough sleepers using funding allocated by DCLG
- identify options for sourcing accommodation that can be used as temporary winter shelters to support the Severe Weather Policies of each authority

8.40. **Offenders** – we will:

- implement and monitor the Protocol for the Resettlement and Housing of Offenders

8.41. Finally, service users have important knowledge about their experiences of the Housing Options Services that can be used to improve and shape services in the future. In order to use this valuable resource, we will:

- develop a co-ordinated approach to service user consultation and involvement, including minority groups e.g. gypsies and travellers

PART THREE: DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

9. RESOURCES AND FUNDING

- 9.1. Financial resources for tackling homeless are limited and are likely to come under significant pressure in the coming years. Funding to deliver this strategy comes from a number of sources:
- 9.2. **General Fund** - each local authority funds the majority of their revenue expenditure on homelessness and related activities through their General Fund. This includes the costs of providing a housing options and advice service, grant funding to voluntary partners that provide services to homeless people, and the cost of providing emergency accommodation to homeless households. Government grant to each of the three authorities has been cut by around 25% in the next two years, creating huge challenges in delivering services at affordable levels.
- 9.3. **Homelessness Grant** – this is specific Government funding based on the level of need identified in each area, intended to fund the development of preventative initiatives, such as mediation services and outreach and resettlement services. The Government has recently confirmed that Homelessness Grant will continue to be available and has increased funding for 2011/12 in anticipation of increasing pressures on services (see Table 11), though funding for 2012/15 has not yet been identified. Funding is ring-fenced only for 2011-2013: after then, the grant will not be specifically tied to homeless prevention.

Table 11: West Kent: Homelessness Grant 2009-2012

	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks
2009/10	£41,050	£63,000	£46,000
2010/11	£41,050	£62,000	£46,000
2011/12	£57,470	£88,000	£92,000

- 9.4. **Supporting People funding** - Supporting People funding is allocated through the Kent Supporting People Team and provides the revenue funding for services that support homeless people across West Kent. This includes temporary accommodation such as direct access hostel provision, women's refuges and accommodation-based support for people with specific needs, such as alcohol or drug dependency. Supporting People also funds the countywide Outreach and Resettlement Service that is delivered by Porchlight.
- 9.5. Supporting People resources are limited and under considerable pressure. Commissioning decisions are made by the Commissioning Body of which the three authorities are members. The Programme's agreed priorities for new service development are enshrined in the Kent Supporting People Strategy 2010-2015 and include services for young people at risk. The 2010/11 Supporting People budget is just in excess of £32 million for Kent. The current distribution funding supported housing across West Kent is shown in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Current distribution of funding for supported housing

Total West Kent	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge & Malling
£6,093,696	£1,918,898	£1,499,726	£876,195

The data only includes district specific distribution. However, as identified elsewhere, vulnerable people across the three authorities can also access a range of floating support services delivered across six districts/boroughs in west Kent and countywide.

- 9.6. **Funding for voluntary sector organisations** - the majority of voluntary sector organisations that provide services to homelessness people across West Kent are funded by grants and donations.
- 9.7. **Discretionary housing payments (Housing Benefit)** - Discretionary Payments are housing benefit payments made to people who are experiencing housing difficulties and can help them to access and retain accommodation. With proposed change to affordable rents (moving to 80% of market rents) the Housing Benefit bill will come under pressure
- 9.8. **Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding** - the main source of capital funding for new accommodation based services for homeless households and new affordable housing. Budgets from 2011/12 have been drastically reduced with an expectation that, in future, new schemes will be funded through charging rents of up to 80% of market rent levels.
- 9.9. **Other funding** - from time to time additional grant resources are made available for new accommodation based initiatives and/or to improve existing accommodation. These resources are generally bid for by each authority or with partners where practical.
- 9.10. The other main resource available to the local authorities is, of course, their staff and profiles of the Housing Options Teams in each of the three local authorities are shown at Appendix 6.

10. MONITORING, REPORTING AND REVIEW

- 10.1. The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan contains detailed individual objectives for delivering this Strategy. Performance will be monitored in various ways:
 - the Homelessness Strategy Group will be the main monitoring mechanism, with reports made to HSG by the authorities and partner agencies on a quarterly basis
 - progress against each objective is continuously monitored at both a district/borough and sub-regional level
 - through the internal audit process within each authority, which undertakes audit reviews of specific services to ensure that they are being delivered appropriately.
 - by Central Government, through the quarterly P1E return.
- 10.2. Clients' views will be obtained regularly through the service user group which will be established to facilitate service user input.

11. ACTION PLAN 2011-2013

- 11.1. The detailed action plan to deliver the strategy accompanies the strategy (see Appendix 7). Despite such uncertainty in the economic, funding and policy situation, we are confident that the five strategic priorities will provide a sound framework for the next five years. However, given the current uncertainty and pace of change nationally and regionally, the detailed Action Plan covers the period to June 2013. We will review the Action Plan at that point to ensure that it remains relevant and up to date as things evolve.

Appendix One: West Kent Homelessness Strategy Project Team

Helen Clarke, Housing Needs Manager (Tonbridge Wells DC) (until 30/11/10)

Jane Ellis, Service Manager - Social Housing (Sevenoaks DC)

Jane Rogers, Housing Options Manager (Tonbridge Wells BC) (from December 2010)

Janet Walton, Chief Housing Officer, (Tonbridge & Malling BC)

Lynn Wilders, Housing Needs Manager (Tonbridge & Malling BC)

Pat Smith, Head of Housing and Communications (Sevenoaks DC)

Rav Kensrey, Housing Options team Manager (Tonbridge and Malling BC) (from December 2010)

Appendix Two: Summary of Homelessness Strategy Group Consultation Events

Event One: July 2010	
<p>Addressing the needs of Young people 16-25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More preventative work in education around housing and mediation services ▪ More supported accommodation from low support to high support ▪ More floating support services to reduce waiting lists ▪ A much more clear protocol with regards to crisis situations around housing services ▪ Clearer information and improved communication on services and signposting ▪ Emergency Housing such as Nightstop or Open House. ▪ Preventative education - leaflet/booklet for Young Persons and agencies? ▪ Housing Awareness for young people to dispel myths
<p>Non Statutory homeless - maximising the use of the private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Same rent deposit scheme for all local authorities ▪ More direct access accommodation e.g. Colebrook Road ▪ More early intervention ▪ Expanding information provided in Gateways ▪ Raising awareness –expand available information ▪ Allocation pointing system to recognise those in supported accommodation ▪ maximise use of DHP payments ▪ Non priority applicants to be able to access Rent Deposit schemes ▪ Maximising benefits
<p>Maximising the Use of the Private Sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting People banding – can those about to move into a private rental get prioritised for support so they receive help when they need it? ▪ People housed into tenancies from supported accommodation should be entitled to a run on of support from accommodation provider for 4 weeks ▪ Can LA housing options teams provide an in house tenancy support service to help sustain tenancies? Pooled across West Kent? ▪ Robust rent deposit schemes – strong relationships with landlords ▪ Housing options teams make full use of DHP funds ▪ Private sector leasing scheme that is attractive to landlords – e.g. rent at LHA rate, not below, guaranteed rent even when property is void?
<p>Assisting vulnerable people with a high support need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training of staff – education on what is available across sectors ▪ Comprehensive advice from organisation such as the CAB ▪ Access to expertise on managing challenging behaviour ▪ Financial encouragement to landlords to work with high support clients ▪ Effective joint working protocols ▪ Producing a directory of services ▪ Involving clients in producing protocols and making them work. ▪ Gap in provision between supported accommodation and needs for residential care/provision. ▪ Need for high support scheme that will work with clients with complex needs
<p>Best Practice/Provision for those affected by</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Sanctuary Scheme - better promotion required ▪ Quantifying demand– monitoring demands/more data collection. ▪ Consistent training & increase ease of access to information – same standard/level across all areas of local

Domestic Abuse	<p>authorities/RSL's/other housing providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All RSL's to introduce Domestic Abuse as a breach of tenancy. ▪ Ensure a consistent approach to out of hours housing advice and response. (Contact Centres to have at least one person with DA specialist knowledge) ▪ Widen reciprocal arrangements between local authority areas; ▪ Have joint policies and procedures; ▪ Provide more refuge accommodation in each borough ▪ To have early intervention in schools
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Event Two: December 2010			
	Aims	Tasks	Barriers
Working Effectively With Private Sector Landlords	<p>Increase the number of private sector landlords</p> <p>Ensure rent gets paid on time</p> <p>Tenancy sustained</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LHA Direct ▪ Tenancy sustainment resource ▪ Evidence of failures in the rent system ▪ Tenant training and accreditation ▪ Review rent deposit schemes ▪ Establish a Steering group of landlords to work with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reluctance to take LHA tenants ▪ Resources
Maximising Resources (Efficiency & Effectiveness)	<p>Make best use of stock across all sectors</p> <p>Transparent policies</p> <p>Work 'smarter' – avoid duplication of services</p> <p>Include accredited private rented sector in CBL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop under occupation schemes ▪ Bring back into use empty/in disrepair properties ▪ More cohesive thinking across organisations ▪ Promoting the needs of local people ▪ Joined up, efficient referral processes ▪ Share knowledge, expertise and best practice ▪ Explore new technologies ▪ Promotion of self-help measures ▪ Streamline processes ▪ Explore councils managing private lets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HB changes ▪ Financial incentives ▪ Support with the logistics of moving ▪ Flexible tenancies ▪ Managing aspirations ▪ Resources ▪ Smaller associations find this difficult ▪ National policies ▪ Culture ▪ Negativity of agents ▪ Prejudice against HB ▪ Payment for advert
Meeting The Diverse Needs Of The Community	<p>Helping young people more effectively</p> <p>Gypsy & traveller community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forum for young people and agencies working with this age group ▪ Engaging/reaching them – are we doing this effectively? ▪ Providing facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geography – hard to get around the WK area ▪ Cultural difficulties and

	People with mental health problems	Getting provisions for 17 year olds	geographic
Homelessness Prevention	<p>Management of expectations</p> <p>School lessons in financial literacy</p> <p>Improve mediation</p> <p>Widen scope of rent deposit scheme</p> <p>Better use of stock – use empty homes above shops Decent Homes Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communication – seek advice early ▪ Legal advice ▪ Education in schools/at Sure Start ▪ Adult numeracy and literacy ▪ Partnership with the private sector 	<p>District Council’s cost</p> <p>Social exclusion/ mental illness</p> <p>ASB by tenants Landlords are anti-benefit clients</p> <p>No policy yet</p>
Creating Strong Partnerships	<p>Pooling resources</p> <p>Develop Kent-wide protocols</p> <p>Explore options appraisals for shared working</p> <p>Sharing knowledge/avoid overlapping and duplication</p> <p>Challenge of district/borough boundaries</p> <p>Getting local agencies to work together effectively</p> <p>Ensuring there is no duplication of advice services</p> <p>Looking at co-location and pooling budgets (e.g. minibuses)</p> <p>More effective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share best practice (e.g. HERO project) ▪ Joint training ▪ Building relationships ▪ Better communication of WNK of JPPB with strategy ▪ Procurement of shared services e.g. mediation ▪ Expanding the employment and training ▪ Understanding the local area ▪ Logical steps through supported to permanent/independent living ▪ Improved communication between agencies ▪ Discussion between relevant agencies 	<p>Capacity to develop staff – outsourcing work</p> <p>Fear of the loss of control</p> <p>Agreeing clear requirements HB changes</p> <p>Talk to each other! Flexibility Limited finance</p> <p>Logistics need to be resolved and fear of financial risks worked through</p> <p>Accepting need for</p>

	<p>advice and referrals</p> <p>Telephone conferencing advocacy</p> <p>LA fund more preventive homeless advice</p> <p>Work with landlords forums and letting agents</p> <p>Get social services and LAS to work together on under 18s</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Test efficiency of referral process (secret shopper) ▪ Co-ordinate housing advice ▪ Work with e.g. CAB ▪ Communicate and encourage a more proactive approach to accept benefit claimants <p>E.g. Connexions in schools and colleges</p>	<p>change by service providers</p>
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Event Three: January 2011

This event focused on the draft strategy with attendees giving comments on the draft document. The session also looked at the draft action plan (Strategic Priorities 4 &5), with outcomes of which were incorporated into the final draft of the action plan.

Organisations represented in consultation meetings

- Tonbridge CAB
- NHS Capital Planning
- Sevenoaks DC
- Age UK – Sevenoaks
- The Bridge Trust
- Shelter
- Sevenoaks Seniors Action Forum
- Porchlight
- Tunbridge Wells CAB
- KCC Children’s Services
- Moat Housing
- Catch 22 Housing
- Sevenoaks CAB
- Kent CC 16 Plus Services
- Kent CC Supporting People Team
- Hope Kent
- Connexions
- KCC St Johns Community Mental Health Centre
- TMBC Community Safety Manager
- YWCA
- Kent Youth Offending Services
- MIND Sevenoaks
- DGS Mind
- SDSAF
- YOS
- Catch22
- Probation
- KMDASG
- NHS West Kent
- West Kent YMCA

Appendix Three: Summary of Service User Consultation

1. In order to seek the input of service users into the strategy, detailed telephone interviews were carried out with a total of 12 services users. These were selected at random from a list of contacts supplied by the three local authorities.
2. The interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes each, were semi-structured and asked a series of questions:
 - Household details
 - How did you first come into contact with the Council's housing service?
 - Ease of accessing information and advice?
 - What they expected before they turned up?
 - Good things about the service?
 - What could have been better?
 - How did advice etc. help change their situation?
 - Name one thing that you would have wanted the Council to do differently?
3. The household characteristics of the interviewees were as follows:

Household composition	No. Households
adult, 1 child	5
1 adult, 2 children	2
1 adult, 3 children	1
2 adults, 1 child	2
2 adults, 3 children	1
2 adults, 4 children	1

4. The reasons for homelessness were varied with two households suffering domestic violence, two being evicted from the family home having had a child, three leaving private sector rented properties, two relationship breakdown and one an owner occupier whose home was repossessed.
5. Overall, the feedback about the service was generally positive. Most households found it easy to contact the Housing Options Team and several mentioned how helpful they found them (this is particularly noticeable at Sevenoaks DC where several applicants praised the clarity of advice and information given). A small number of interviewees found staff attitudes towards them somewhat unsympathetic and expressed the view that they would have liked staff to be more understanding of their situation.
6. Expectations of the service were mixed. In some cases, applicants expected to be housed by the local authority quickly whereas others had much lower expectations, anticipating that little assistance or a negative experience.

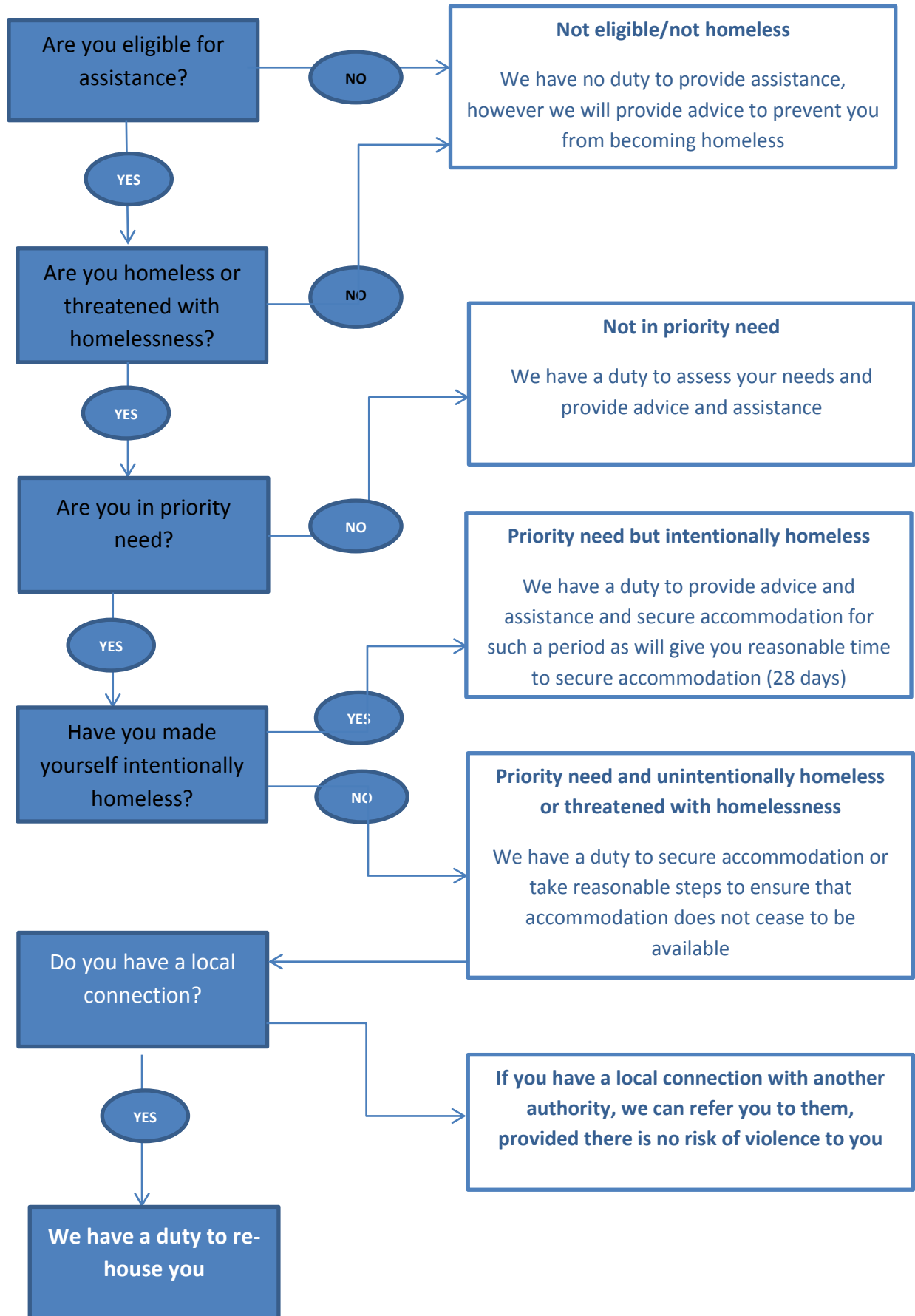
7. Positive aspects of the service were felt to be:

- The quality of the service, especially helpful staff
- Being kept informed and not making false promises
- The HERO project received particular praise
- Rent deposits (though there was a feeling that the caps were too low to find an acceptable property)
- Sensitive to family history of domestic violence

8. Aspects of the service felt to be less effective included:

- concerns about poor quality and cleanliness in temporary accommodation
- temporary accommodation was a worry for some households, in terms of being able to maintain employment and family contact when placed long distances from their communities
- what were perceived to be complexities of the points systems and of bidding for properties under Choice Based Lettings
- several people would have liked more help and guidance completing forms
- the difficulty of securing decent quality private rented accommodation

Appendix Four: A summary of the Housing Options Process



Eligibility

Applicants are not eligible for housing assistance if they...

- do not have full rights to live in the UK because of their immigration status
- are not considered to be 'habitual' resident in the UK, even if a British citizen

Homeless/threatened with homelessness

Applicants are classed as homeless if they...

- have no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere that is available for occupation and that they have a legal right to occupy
- have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it
- have accommodation but it is a moveable structure, for example, a caravan or houseboat, and have no place to put it or moor it, where it can be lived in
- have accommodation but it would not be reasonable for them to occupy it

Applicants are classed as being threatened with homelessness if they...

- are likely to become homeless within the next 28 days

Priority Need

Applicants are in priority need if...

- they are pregnant or if dependent children live, or might reasonably be expected to live with them
- they have become homeless or are threatened with homelessness as a result of a flood, fire or other disaster
- they are aged 16 or 17
- they are 20 or under and a former relevant child (see below for definition)
- they are over 21 and are **vulnerable** as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered at some time in their life
- they are **vulnerable** due to 'old age, mental illness, handicap, physical disability or other special reason
- they are **vulnerable** as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular navy, military or armed forces
- they are **vulnerable** as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence or harassment from another person or threats of violence from another person that are likely to be carried out

The only exceptions to these are, if they are a:

'Relevant Child' - if they are 16 or 17 and were in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and were looked after on their 16th birthday.

'Relevant Student' - a former relevant child in full time education and their term time accommodation is not available to them during a vacation.

'Child in need' - if a duty is owed to them under the Children Act 1989.

Intentionality

Applicants are considered intentionally homeless if they...

- a) deliberately did or did not do something
 - b) which caused them to leave housing which they would otherwise have stayed in
 - c) and it would have been reasonable to stay there
- All these points must apply.

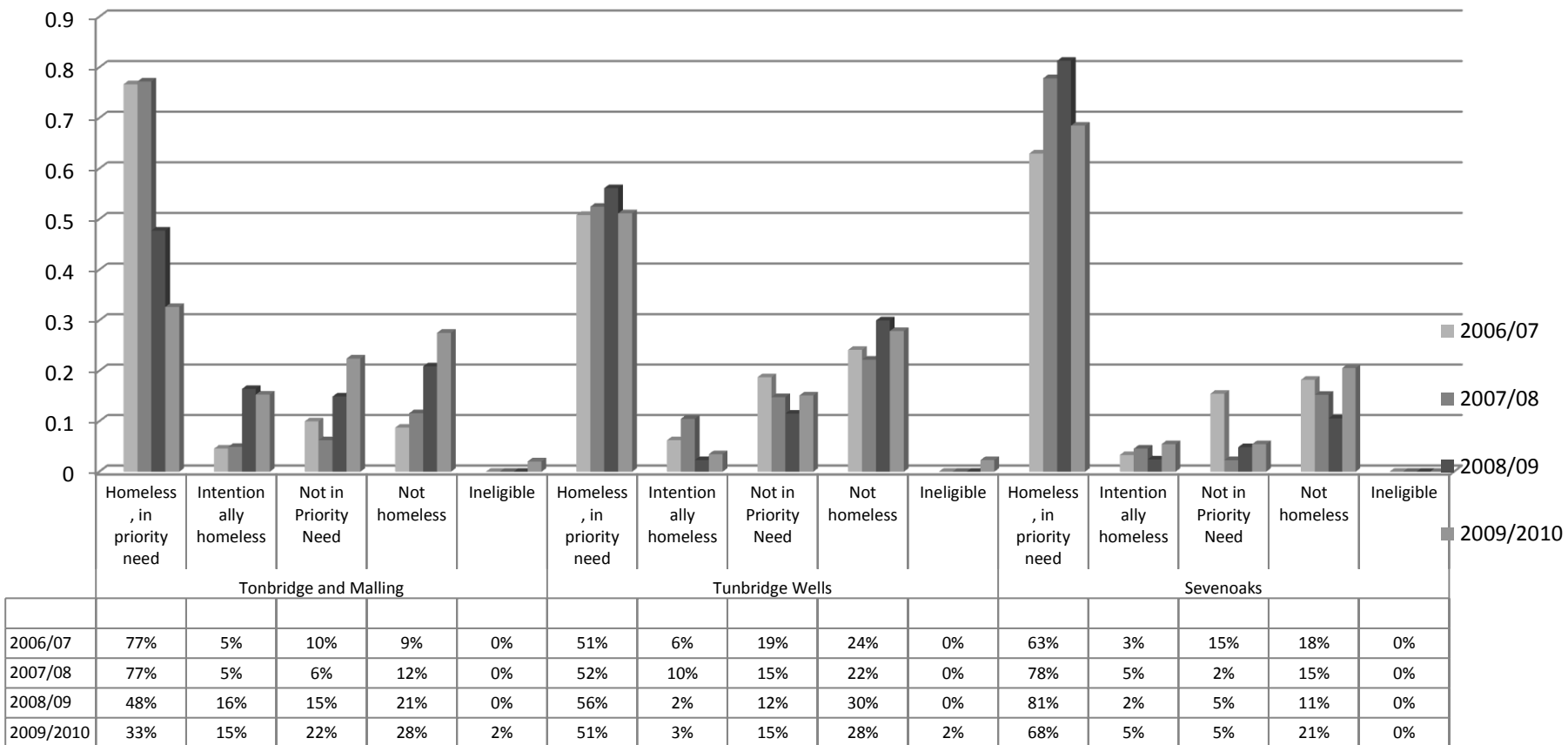
Local Connection

Applicants have a local connection if they...

- have lived in the area by choice for a certain time (usually for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years)
- have a family connection in the area
- work in the area
- have a connection with the area for 'another special reason'

Appendix Five: Key data and trends in homelessness by local authority area

Appendix 5a: Outcomes of decisions 2006-2010



Appendix 5b: Reasons for homelessness 2007-2011 by borough

	Tonbridge and Malling				Tunbridge Wells				Sevenoaks			
	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*
Parents unwilling/unable to accommodate	60	7	11	20	21	23	11	8	38	45	18	18
Relatives/friends unwilling/unable to accommodate	11	5	4	4	5	11	1	6	9	12	4	6
Non-violent relationship breakdown	25	1	6	16	5	3	2	2	3	3	1	2
Violent breakdown of relationship	16	6	5	12	14	8	7	6	7	6	5	10
Other forms of violence/harassment	3	1	2	6	8	4	7	4	3	1	1	0
Mortgage default	9	3	0	2	1	1	1	2	3	9	2	0
Rent arrears	0	1	0	0	3	1	1	2	0	5	0	6
Termination of assured short hold tenancy	38	3	2	10	13	9	9	8	19	9	7	4
Reasons other than termination of AST	6	4	0	2			2	2	9	2	0	4
Left hospital	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0
Left other institution or LA care	2	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	3	1	2
Other	3	1	0	0	11	10	2	0	7	4	0	4
Total	173	32	32	72	85	73	44	40	102	100	41	56

* figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures

Appendix 5c: Age of applicants accepted as homeless

Tonbridge and Malling							
	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+	Total
2007/08	76	77	14	1	1	4	173
2008/09	16	14	1	1	0	0	32
2009/2010	15	14	2	0	0	1	32
2010/11*	28	32	10	0	0	2	72

Tunbridge Wells							
	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+	Total
2007/08	35	37	8	0	0	5	85
2008/09	29	36	3	1	0	4	73
2009/2010	19	16	6	2	0	1	44
2010/11*	18	14	8	0	0	0	40

Sevenoaks							
	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+	Total
2007/08	51	39	11	0	1	0	102
2008/09	55	33	9	3	0	0	100
2009/2010	27	16	4	3	0	0	50
2010/11*	24	30	2	0	0	0	56

* figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures

Appendix 5d: Priority Needs Group 2007-2011

	Tonbridge and Malling				Tunbridge Wells				Sevenoaks			
	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*
Emergency	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dependent children	99	18	15	48	47	33	27	22	56	49	30	38
Pregnancy	38	6	5	2	13	12	5	2	24	23	10	10
16-17 year old	5	1	2	4	6	7	3	4	5	7	3	0
Care leaver 18-20	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	2	2	1	0
Old age	2	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	3	3	1	2
Physical disability	8	4	2	4	3	3	3	4	5	8	4	4
Mental illness or disability	6	2	6	10	9	6	2	6	4	5	1	2
Other (drug/alcohol dependency)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Vulnerable = care leaver	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0
Vulnerable - HM forces	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vulnerable - custody/remand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Vulnerable - violence	14	0	1	2	6	7	2	0	1	0	0	0
Of which: a. domestic violence	12	0	1	2	6	7	2	0	1	0	0	0
Total	173	32	32	72	85	73	44	40	101	100	50	56

Data source: P1E forms

*** figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures**

Appendix 5e: Household Type, applicants accepted as homeless

		Tonbridge and Malling						
Year		Couple with dep children	Lone parent with Dep children (male)	Lone parent with Dep children (female)	1-person household (male)	1-person household (female)	All other households	Total
	2007/08	23	13	101	13	9	14	173
	2008/09	10	1	13	5	2	1	32
	2009/2010	6	1	12	5	5	3	32
	2010/11*	10	6	34	4	8	10	72

		Tunbridge Wells						
Year		Couple with dependent children	Lone parent with Dep children (male)	Lone parent with Dep children (female)	1-person household (male)	1-person household (female)	All other households	Total
		19	5	34	13	11	2	84
		17	3	25	20	8	0	73
		13	1	18	3	5	4	44
		10	2	12	6	6	4	40

		Sevenoaks						
Year		Couple with dependent children	Lone parent with Dep children (male)	Lone parent with Dep children (female)	1-person household (male)	1-person household (female)	All other households	Total
		24	1	53	13	7	4	102
		24	3	41	15	11	6	100
		14	1	24	3	5	3	50
		28	2	18	2	2	4	56

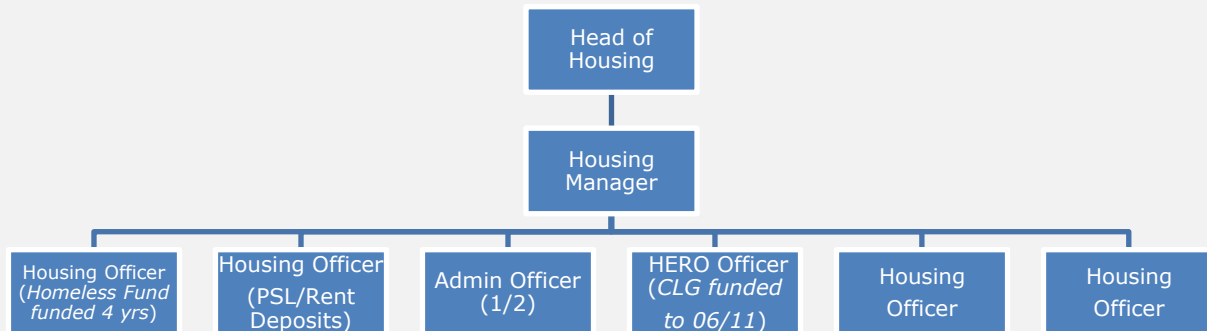
Data source: P1E forms

* figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures

Appendix Six: Overview of the West Kent Homeless Teams

Sevenoaks District Council

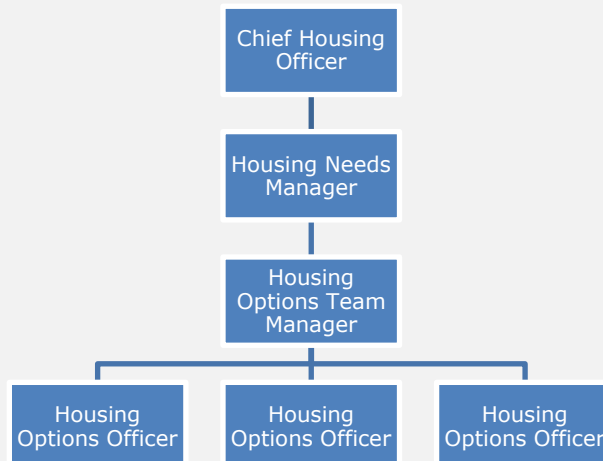
The Social Housing Team is led by a dedicated Service Manager. There are 3 Housing Officers responsible for delivering the Homelessness Prevention and Advice service (one a temporary, externally funded post) while a further Housing Officer delivers the Council's Private Sector Lettings Scheme which offers rent in advance, loans and deposit guarantee bonds to help people secure private lets. The team is supported by one shared administrative officer.



SDC attracted external funding to the HERO Project which employs 1 specialist worker to provide holistic advice covering housing, saving money on fuel bills, debt, welfare benefits, retraining and further education options, getting back to work, business start up.

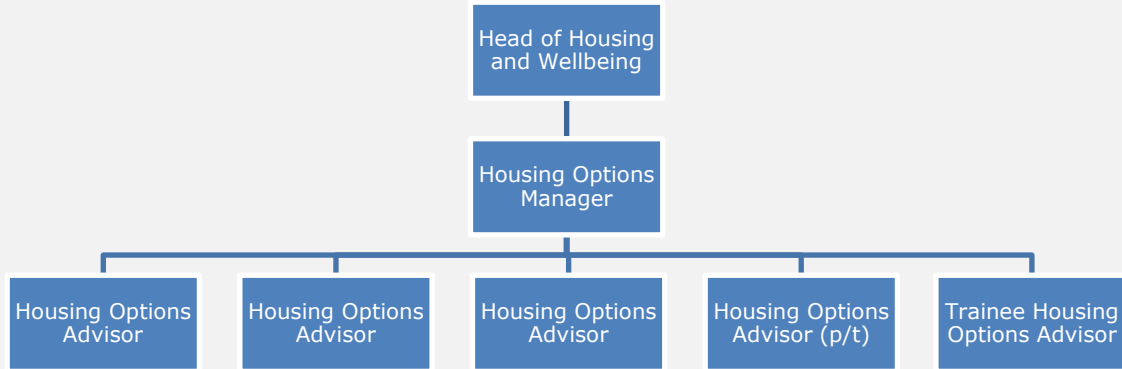
Tonbridge & Malling BC

The housing options service was brought back in house in April 2008, having previously been managed by Russet Homes. The Housing Options Team is led by a dedicated Housing Options Team Manager (a post shared with a neighbouring authority) and consists of three Housing Options Officers responsible for delivering the Homelessness Prevention and Advice service, plus administrative support. The recruitment of a fourth Housing Options Officer for a period of 12 months was approved at the end of 2010.



Tunbridge Wells BC

The team operates from the Town Hall in Tunbridge Wells and is led by a Housing Options Manager and consists of 4 Housing Options Advisors and one trainee delivering the Homelessness Prevention and advice.



APPENDIX 7: ACTION PLAN: July 2011-June 2013

STRATEGIC PRIORITY ONE: MAXIMISING HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION THROUGH AN ENHANCED HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE			
<i>By 2016, our goal is to develop a highly effective, personalised housing options service that empowers customers to make the best choices for themselves</i>			
Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To ensure that we fully understand and analyse emerging trends in homelessness and that changing demands on the service are understood and planned for	1. Develop a format and timetable for undertaking joint customer surveys, including a Rough Sleeper count	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	2. Using the Homelessness Prevention and Advice Manager module, develop format for collection of data on non-priority homeless cases	September 2011	
	3. Review format for collecting customer feedback, developing a standardised approach across the three authorities	September 2011	
To ensure that the impacts of cuts to support and other services are understood by Housing Options Teams, customers and stakeholders, and prioritise resources accordingly	4. Monitor changes in legislation and emerging Government policy, analysing impacts on West Kent	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers/Strategy & Enabling Managers
	5. Work closely with statutory and voluntary agencies to minimise the impact of savings to be made	Ongoing	Homelessness Strategy Group
To hone our 'prevention toolkit', ensuring that we are maximising the options that are available and making best use of available techniques and resource	6. Review and expand our prevention toolkit	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	7. Improve mediation services for people facing eviction from the family home (NB: Additional training resources may be required)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	8. Identify opportunities for the three teams to share best practice more effectively and develop the skill sets within the Housing Options Teams	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	9. In appropriate cases, promote the take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants to adapt properties and prevent homelessness	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers & Private Sector Housing Teams
	10. Promote the use of court desks to advise/assist customers	Ongoing	Housing Needs

	attending possession hearings		Managers & Homelessness Strategy Group
	11. Continue to refer people to CAB for assistance with debt advice so they can receive specialist assistance with debts	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	12. Finalise draft Rent Arrears Protocol and secure the commitment of partners to implement in all relevant cases	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	13. Provide housing options training to staff from the Welfare Advice Service to enable them to provide a combined housing and benefits surgery to customers at the Tonbridge Gateway (NB: funded to March 2012)	July 2011	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
To provide clear and timely information to people threatened with homelessness so that they are fully aware of their options and can make realistic choices	14. Monitor the success of Porchlight's county-wide education project to raise awareness in schools of the realities of homelessness and the housing market	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers (Tonbridge Wells BC to lead on the development of information for young people)
	15. Review and update the content and format of information that is provided to customers (via websites, leaflets & general correspondence), ensuring all written documents have a fog index readability of between 8 and 12	September 2012	
To build on the HERO project, develop more holistic approaches to prevention that tackle the underlying causes of homelessness	16. Encourage local employment for low-paid workers so that young people are able to stay in the districts for work (NB: Additional funding in place for the twelve months to June 2012)	Ongoing	Sevenoaks District Council
	17. Extend the HERO model to offer advice on jobs, benefits and skills	June 2012	

STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO: MAXIMISING RESOURCES ACROSS WEST KENT (BECOMING MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE)

By 2016, our goal is to deliver a more effective service using fewer resources

Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To identify opportunities to share resources, services and expertise across the three authorities, and more widely	18. Identify options for sharing good practice and developing shared initiatives across the three authorities (or more widely)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	19. Via the Kent Housing Options Group, establish regular 'good practice' sessions between the Housing Options Teams	From September 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	20. Improve cross-borough reciprocal arrangements and referral procedures between authorities for urgent cases	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
To maximise the external resources available to tackle homelessness	21. Maximise the availability of benefits through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ early notification of changes to individuals' circumstances; ▪ access to a specialist Benefits Advisor to act as champion for residents; ▪ having effective procedures in place to maximise Discretionary Housing Payments within budget ▪ provision of in-house verification training for staff in benefits, customer services and housing needs Teams. 	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers/ Housing Benefit Mangers
With other Kent Homechoice partners, implement a common assessment framework across Kent	22. Evaluate the implications of a shared housing register across West Kent	September 2011	Housing Needs Managers
To make the best use of existing housing stock, in partnership with housing associations	23. Develop an under-occupation strategy with RSL partners based on DCLG revised policy on under-occupation	TBC	Housing Strategy & Enabling Sub-Group (part of Kent HG)
	24. Improve the condition of the existing housing stock and bring back long term empty properties back into use	Ongoing	Private Sector Housing Teams
	25. Make links with London Boroughs to address the potential increase in homelessness resulting from displacement of families from London	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
To maximise the availability of accommodation for people threatened with homelessness, both in the social and private rented	26. Identify a partner to evaluate the provision of a direct access 'crash pad' facility to manage crisis homelessness and allow 'cooling off' space for young people (NB: It is likely that the evaluation will identify that additional resources will be required before any facility can actually be delivered)	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers

sectors			
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STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE: WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PRIVATE SECTOR LANDLORDS			
<i>By 2016, our goal is to understand and overcome the barriers to increased private sector lettings</i>			
Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To work with private sector landlords in order to understand their priorities, perceived barriers to letting to tenants on benefits and to develop a 'win-win' culture that offers reassurance to both parties	27. Establish a Steering Group with private sector landlords in order to understand their priorities, understand and overcome barriers and develop a 'win-win' approach	June 2012	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
	28. Develop and promote the West Kent Private Landlord Forum	Ongoing	Private Sector Housing Teams
	29. Develop a West Kent Landlord Information Pack	March 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	30. Develop a common/shared rent deposit scheme between the three authorities	June 2013	Housing Needs Managers
To develop a Tenancy Sustainment programme that will enable vulnerable residents maintain their tenancy	31. Explore the development of a tenancy sustainment package to support tenants to sustain their private sector letting	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	32. Where tenancies in the private sector are at risk, link vulnerable tenants to floating support services	Ongoing	
To work with landlords to improve property standards in private sector through the Accreditation Schemes	33. Maximise participation in Landlord Accreditation Schemes	Ongoing	Private Sector Housing Teams
	34. As part of the review and expansion of our prevention toolkit (see strategic priority 1), provide fuel poverty advice as part of housing options work	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers

STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOUR: CREATING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS

By 2016, our goal is to strengthen existing partnerships, maximising synergies to meet the needs of homeless people

Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To undertake a mapping exercise of homelessness organisations and services across West Kent, creating a shared, updatable resource	35. Undertake joint service mapping to identify role, client group(s), expertise and resources among all agencies working in homelessness in West Kent	June 2012	The Bridge Trust
To work more closely with RSL partners	36. Improve partnership working around hard-to-house tenants including vulnerable groups with complex needs	June 2012	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
To improve links with public sector bodies	37. Monitor existing Kent-wide protocols (e.g. mental health discharge, care leavers and prison discharge)	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	38. Build relationships with the health sector including the Swanley, Dartford and Gravesham Pathfinder	June 2012	
	39. Improve joint working with Job Centre Plus in order to maximise the use of existing 'back to work' schemes	June 2012	
	40. Assist vulnerable people through either the JARS Panels (TWBC) or the Kent Assessment Process (SDC and TMBC)	Ongoing	
Increase the effectiveness and accountability of the Homelessness Strategy Group	41. Review the operation of HSG, increasing its accountability for delivery of the strategy	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	42. Establishing themed sub-groups with responsibility for delivering strategic priorities		
	43. Undertaking shared training and sharing of good practice		

STRATEGIC PRIORITY FIVE: MEETING THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

By 2016, our goal is to understand and meet the needs of the diverse range of groups affected by homelessness

Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To gain deeper insight into the customer experience to help us to achieve personalisation in service delivery to fully address equality and diversity matters	44. Investigate the potential for, and means of, using the Kent and Medway MOSAIC classification to target groups with advice and information about preventing homelessness	March 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	45. Identify staff within the West Kent authorities and partner agencies who are able to assist with translation services for people whose first language is not English	June 2012	
	46. At six monthly intervals, analyse reasons for homelessness against protected equality characteristics	September and March	
To understand and meet the needs of young homeless people	47. Using the Kent-wide Young Person's Protocol, work with Children's Services departments to assist homeless 16/17 year olds	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	48. Signpost young people to literacy and numeracy classes where appropriate	Ongoing	
	49. Promote and support young people to access tenancy sustainment courses	Ongoing	
	50. Support the commissioning of supported accommodation for young people in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks	TBC	Tunbridge Wells BC & Sevenoaks DC
To understand and meet the needs of people experiencing domestic violence	51. Where funding permits, extend the use of and promote the Sanctuary scheme to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their home	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	52. Support the commissioning of refuges in Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks	Ongoing	Tonbridge & Malling BC & Sevenoaks DC
	53. Following on from the successful MARAC training in 2010, ensure that staff receive on-going training on domestic abuse (NB: Resources to be identified)	December 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	54. Continue joint working with other agencies such as the Police through, for example, MARAC meetings	Ongoing	
To understand and meet the needs of homeless people with disabilities	55. Audit existing supply of temporary accommodation to ensure that there is provision to meet the needs of people with disabilities	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	56. With Private Sector Housing colleagues work with housing association partners to implement the Kent Housing Group	Ongoing	

	standard for funding disabled adaptations in housing association stock		
To understand and meet the needs of people with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse	57. Seek advice from health services and other specialists about the specific needs of this group and how best to engage with them; and provide appropriate training for staff (NB: May require additional resources)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	58. Work more closely with adult Social Services and KDAAT and explore the possibility of joint assessments to identify the housing and support needs of this group	September 2011	
To understand and meet the needs of the Gypsy & Traveller community	59. Work with the KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit to better understand the housing and support needs of the gypsy and traveller community	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
To understand and meet the needs of older people	60. Provide training for staff on the risks of financial and domestic abuse among older people (NB: May require additional resources)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	61. Develop an information pack for older people facing homelessness	March 2012	
To understand and meet the needs of rough sleepers	62. With other Kent authorities and partner agencies, develop joint initiatives for rough sleepers using funding allocated by DCLG	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	63. Identify options for sourcing accommodation that can be used as temporary winter shelters to support the Severe Weather Policies of each authority	October 2011	
To understand and meet the needs of ex-offenders	64. Implement and monitor the Protocol for the Resettlement and Housing of Offenders	Ongoing	
To involve service users in shaping services	65. Develop a co-ordinated approach to service user consultation and involvement, including minority groups e.g. gypsies and travellers	June 2012	Porchlight