



Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Housing Solutions Service

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031

Draft document for consultation

Version	Changes	Section	Date	Author	Status
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Foreword by Cabinet Member for Housing, Environment and Economy

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Tonbridge & Malling – Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy (2026–2031)

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031

1. Introduction

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping have a detrimental effect on individuals, families and communities, and are key challenges facing all communities across the country. They are issues caused by a range of factors, both structural, such as housing affordability and insecurity in the private rented sector as well as individual, such as drug and alcohol abuse, poor physical and mental health, crime and anti-social behaviour, poor educational attainment, debt, unemployment and the breakdown of support networks. Tackling homelessness can be costly when compared to the costs associated with proactively seeking to prevent homelessness in the first place, and many households approach the Council at the point of crisis, and so the ambition is to intervene earlier, and ensure those who come to Tonbridge and Malling Council for support with their housing situation get the right support at the right time.

The strategy sets out how Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council will proactively work to achieve this and prevent homelessness for the next 5 years. It is a summary of the key priorities, and is supported by a suite of documents, namely a robust evidence base, which sets out in detail the main causes of homelessness and is informed by the national, regional and local context within which the homelessness service is delivered and is underpinned by a wide range of statistics drawn from several sources. This context underpinned by statistical information has assisted in identifying the strategic priorities, and these have then been instrumental in the development of the supporting action plan which demonstrates how the Council will deliver services to meet these priorities.

2. Vision

The Council's Housing Strategy contains the vision.

"For Tonbridge and Malling residents to have access to good quality and affordable homes that meet their needs, whether renting or buying"

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2023 to 2027 has a key priority of "Improving housing options for local people whilst protecting our outdoor areas of importance". Within that priority the Council aims to "use every power we can to support those who are most in need of housing support and at risk of becoming homeless."

3. Strategic Context

The strategic context within which this strategy sits at national, regional and local levels can be found in the Evidence base which supports this document. This can be found here

Insert hyperlink when completed and agreed

The new "National Plan to end Homelessness" was published in December 2025 and forms the policy basis for this strategy.

It sets out the Governments long term vision to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring with the key aim framed around shifting the focus of homelessness from managing crisis to preventing homelessness and to step in and resolve it quickly where homelessness does occur. To achieve its commitments, it has developed an action plan based on **5 pillars**.

- **Universal prevention** – this is aimed at tackling the root causes of homelessness and make homelessness rare, by reducing the risk across the whole population. The indicated priorities are around housing affordability and poverty and there is clear

integration here with plans for house building and increasing the supply of affordable housing and poverty which are set out in the national wider Housing Strategy.

- **Targeted prevention** – this provides support for those who are more risk of becoming homeless and ensures that tackling homelessness is shared responsibility with all public services collaborating to prevent homelessness. This contains the creation of joint cross government targets to reduce those leaving institutions such as hospitals and prisons homeless and will introduce the duty to collaborate.
- **Preventing crisis** – this is to help people remain in their homes by giving councils the flexibility to deliver services to meet the needs of the local community and focus on prevention. Local Authority Homelessness Services are the focus of this pillar, with clear direction given to Councils to prioritise people to seek help as early as possible and increase the proportion of households being assisted to remain their current home.
- **Improving emergency responses** – the focus on improving TA and making the experience better if people do become homeless.
- **Recovery and preventing repeat homelessness** – At the heart of this pillar is a new target to halve rough sleeping within the lifetime of this parliament.

Also set out in the document are the underpinning and cross cutting foundations that sit across the strategy and includes how there will be national and local accountability, a new national workforce programme, and the enabling factors as to how the Government will hold itself to account, as well as the introduction of the Local Government Outcomes Framework.

Following the publication of this document in December 2025, Councils in England are expected to develop and publish local action plans to align with the national goals. Given the high profile of this new document and the £3.5bn of funding announced to support this work nationally, this strategy along with the associated documents will demonstrate how Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council will deliver against this locally.

4. What the evidence tells us

The evidence contained within the evidence base shows that the Council is performing well, prevention levels are in line with national averages, numbers are reducing in TA, and households are moving on from TA. However, this strategy sets out how the Council will continue to improve and develop with the aim of delivering excellent services for those who need them.

It shows that housing in the district can be unaffordable for some households and that there is a high demand for social housing, particularly when compared to supply.

Homelessness is at lower-than-average rates given the profile of the borough, but demand on the service is increasing.

Prevention activity is positive and improving, however this can still be improved to continue to reduce those households that access the service at the point of crisis.

The Council needs to address the issue of out of area placements as there are high rates of households placed out of area, disrupting education, support and employment. National guidance requires Councils to minimise this whenever possible.

The borough has low levels of rough sleeping and effective working partnerships are key to keeping these numbers low. The Council and its partners need to ensure those who do sleep rough get the support needed to get away from the streets and stay off the streets.

5. Building on the successes

The introduction of a Triage model has allowed the Council to promptly consider approaches from households and the action required and where required provide more timely advice and assistance to all approaches with the aim of recognising opportunities to prevent at an earlier stage and ensuring they are allocated to a Prevention Officer.

The focus within the service has shifted significantly towards prevention with the development of a specialist prevention service, who do a substantial amount of work by negotiating with families, landlords and providers, assisting with applications for discretionary housing payments, which has resulted in 167 households having their homelessness successfully prevented in 2024 – 2025 and providing advice on accessing the private rented sector. Since the introduction of this in 2021 the service has consistently accepted more prevention duties (before becoming homeless) than relief which is the stage where homelessness has occurred.

It should be noted that this considerable change in the service to focus on prevention followed external consultancy review of which Members supported and drove forwards the recommendations in full including new financial investment into the team.

The recent provision of 19 units of owned and managed TA in the borough, alongside the 15 units already owned and managed by the Council in the district and the further 7 procured in Maidstone (specialist support), has allowed the Council to reduce the number of out of area placements bringing them back to support networks, more local to education and employment as well as reducing the costs for the Council due to the subsidy available for long term owned and managed TA units.

Numbers of rough sleepers have remained consistently low in the district, and Porchlight is the Council's commissioned partner, working with us to prevent rough sleeping and ensuring that anyone is identified on the streets has stays that are brief and non-recurring.

As part of this service provision, the Council has worked with Porchlight and Clarion Housing to open dedicated supported provision to provide off the street accommodation for those who would otherwise not have a priority need for housing and who may remain on the streets.

The following case study highlights one of the successes of having this type of accommodation.

Person X is a 48-year-old man who became homeless following the death of his parents. After his mother's death a year ago, X's relationship with his brother broke down, leaving him without accommodation. He has been sleeping rough for several months in the Tonbridge and Malling area, accompanied by his dog. Having a pet has provided X with emotional support but has also made it harder to find accommodation.

X has a history of mental health difficulties and substance misuse. He attempted to take his own life three months prior to engagement with services, at a time when he described feeling at his lowest due to grief, addiction, and housing loss. With encouragement from a friend, X began attending a 12-step recovery group linked to a local church, which has since become his main source of support. He now attends church three times a week, values the sense of belonging there, and has built positive connections with his sponsor and peers.

At his first assessment in July 2025, he expressed a desire to move into safe housing to help stabilise his wellbeing, reduce the risks associated with rough sleeping, and rebuild his relationship with his teenage son, who lives locally with his mother.

Physically, X reports general aches and back pain caused by rough sleeping, but no diagnosed condition. His mental health remains fragile, and ongoing monitoring is advised due to the previous suicide attempt and history of depression. X is registered with a GP and has previously been prescribed antidepressants.

Economically, X is unemployed and receives Universal Credit. He is a qualified printer and has experience in several other roles. He hopes to return to work or volunteer in the future, potentially with Porchlight, once his situation stabilises.

X has supportive links through his church community and a good relationship with his sister, though contact with other family members is limited. He did not feel safe sleeping rough, particularly as the weather worsened, and worried about theft or harassment. Despite this, he showed resilience by seeking quieter, safer places to camp and staying connected with positive influences.

X has recently moved into supported accommodation with his dog, which is a big step forward in his recovery. He has now been substance free for three months and continues to attend his 12 step meetings and church regularly. The main focus is on helping X stay stable, keep up his mental health and recovery support, and start planning for longer term housing. His move into supported accommodation will help with this by giving him a safe base where he can focus on his wellbeing and future plans.

The Council has also worked with the Kent Housing Group on a revised joint protocol for 16 / 17-year-olds, and a care leavers protocol, which ensure a consistent approach to supporting these groups of potentially vulnerable residents.

Delivery partnerships are a strength; however, the Council needs to continue to build on these and ensure they are maintained and developed and drive service improvement along with feedback from those with lived experience.

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation

Domestic Abuse (DA) is consistently one of the top 3 reasons for the loss of a home in the district. The Council's response when someone approaches could give someone the opportunity to live a life free of abuse. To ensure that the Council is delivering the best possible service DAHA accreditation is being worked towards.

This is a priority for the Council and will result in delivering a whole housing approach to those who approach due to DA.

12 DA Champions recruited across the council, who are responsible for providing and signposting to DA resources, information, learning and good practice

Work with specialist partners such as DAVVs and Look Ahead

A specialist Housing IDVA is employed who works with high-risk cases who approach the service for assistance with rehousing due to DA

Staff training including DASH risk assessments, intersectionality issues and mini bitesize sessions to focus on Female Genital Mutilation and Honour Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and multiple disadvantages, Domestic Abuse and No Recourse to Public Funds

The Council is signed up to a DA Reciprocal protocol, which supports moves for those who are at high risk of DA

The Council also has access to the Kent wide Safer scheme, which allows survivors to remain in their own homes via providing safety measures

6. What are the challenges?

High rents and house prices – the generally high prices in the borough means that accessing the private rented sector is more challenging for lower income households. The Renters Rights Act 2025 could also impact on the number of private rented properties available with changes to tenancies and tenancy law.

The ongoing current economic situation, higher mortgage rates, increasing rents and the freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates are all factors that influence housing options.

The Council has a low rate of ending duties into the private rented sector and this is an area that requires further development to provide more housing options.

The Council has a high number of out of area TA placements compared to other districts in Kent and it is an area that the Homelessness Advice and Support Team advisor has raised as an area to focus on improvement in. Where households are placed out of borough this can have a negative and disruptive impact, for example challenges in accessing usual support, employment, schools etc.

Tonbridge & Malling has low numbers of rough sleepers, but work needs to continue to prevent anyone from accessing street sleeping.

7. What are the priorities?

Given the successes and the areas identified for further work, and within the national framework set out, the priorities focus on the move away from crisis management towards strong advice and targeted prevention, alongside improving TA from a management and resident perspective and further developing partnerships and collaboration with key partners that the Council works with. These priorities align with the 5 pillars set out in the national strategy but deliver locally for those who live in Tonbridge and Malling.

Priority 1 – To prevent homelessness earlier and support those who are at risk of homelessness to remain in their homes

Our aim - Why do we want to do this?

Early prevention means identifying those who may be at risk of loss of home early to stop the homelessness and preventing the loss of that home and this can have a significant and positive impact on households. The Council wants to stop homelessness before it happens.

Our objectives - How will we do this?

- Strengthen early intervention and advice services. Provide accurate and up to date advice and assistance on housing and homelessness ensuring this is accessible to all.
- Work more closely with duty to refer to partner agencies, such as probation, the NHS and prisons, to ensure the service is receiving early notifications of households that may become homeless to maximise the time to work with them and establish closer working relationships with agencies to improve referral processes.
- Review the prevention tools in use and ensure the initiatives employed are fit for purpose to ensure that these support the early identification and the work of the officers to maximise opportunities to prevent the loss of the home.

Our outcomes - How will we measure this?

- Number of total approaches to the service
- Number of Prevention cases accepted
- % of duties owed where homelessness was prevented
- Where prevention was successful numbers where duty was ended by keeping applicant in own home, or alternative and how many became homeless
- Number of duty to refer referrals

Priority 2 – To minimise the use of emergency and temporary accommodation, reduce the reliance on nightly paid out of area TA and reduce numbers requiring TA

Our aim - Why do we want to do this?

The Council recognises that there will always be households who need TA and where this is the case it will ensure that good quality, affordable TA is provided. However, the provision of TA is costly and so exploring options for TA, reducing the use of nightly paid accommodation and reducing the overall number of households and the per unit cost of that accommodation will have a significant impact on Council budgets. It will also have an impact on outcomes for those who do require TA, as they will be closer to their employment, education, support networks, and will contribute to a household's overall health and wellbeing.

Our objectives - How will we do this?

- The approach to prevention will be reviewed with the aim of preventing households from requiring TA (Priority 1)

- Continue to seek alternative ways to provide TA in borough both through provision of the Council's own accommodation and exploring the use of registered provider and private rented accommodation.
- Continue to improve the quality of the Council's own TA and work with partners across Kent to drive up standards in the nightly paid sector
- Work with staff and key stakeholders to review the offer made to landlords to work with the Council to allow good quality suitable private sector accommodation to be secured with a personalised package of support once moved on to reduce stays in TA.

Our outcomes - How will we measure this?

- Total number of households in TA (this is monitored regularly and reported on at month end)
- Number of units the Council owns or leases
- Average length of stay in TA
- Number of households in TA with children
- Number of households placed out of area

Priority 3 – To build on the excellent work already done to maintain the low levels of rough sleeping with the aim of achieving zero rough sleepers in the district

Our aim - Why do we want to do this?

Tonbridge and Malling Council has an excellent track record of having low numbers of rough sleepers and the aim is to sustain this and keep numbers low, with the aim being to fully eradicate any forms of rough sleeping in the district.

Our objective - How will we do this?

- Work with rough sleeping partners to ensure that anyone who enters the street, or is found rough sleeping gets rapid intervention and wrap around support including a pathway for those who may not have a "priority"
- Provide safe and appropriate accommodation
- Develop effective move on pathways from TA into longer term settled accommodation

Our outcomes - How will we measure this?

- Number of people rough sleeping on a single night
- Faster access to accommodation from when the service becomes aware of someone rough sleeping
- Reduced repeat rough sleeping

Priority 4 – To work with partners collaboratively to prevent homelessness

Our aim - Why do we want to do this?

This is an ambitious strategy and is intended to deliver a proactive prevention homelessness service, but this cannot be done alone.

The Council must work with partners, as many factors that cause homelessness are beyond its direct control and so to deliver homelessness services there needs to be collaboration with partners, at a national, regional and local level and this will become more relevant as Local Government Reform progresses.

Our objective - How will we do this?

- Work with RPs to make better use of stock in the district and promote improved access to affordable housing
- Bring together key partners such as Porchlight, registered providers and key voluntary and statutory agencies via the development of a formal partnership board to bring additional resources and expertise to deliver the aims of the strategy
- Continue to gather performance monitoring data to use as evidence to underpin service development and improvement and ensure needs of those in the district are met
- Establish a lived experience advisory panel to further enhance the performance monitoring to further drive forward any service improvements and delivery
- Develop mechanisms for gaining insight through a variety of feedback routes ensuring these are used to drive service improvement
- Maximise opportunities to work with partners such as drug and alcohol services.

Our outcomes - How will we measure this?

- Quarterly performance reports to Management Team
- Quarterly performance reports to partnership board
- Identification of service improvements because of feedback in quarterly reports

8. Monitoring, Governance & Reporting

The Council is the owner of this strategy and is ultimately responsible for delivering against the action plan and monitoring its effectiveness. However, it must be recognised that the Council is not able to deliver this without the support of key stakeholders and partners.

Given this the action plan that supports the strategy will be regularly monitored and updated to ensure that progress made, and the key actions are being delivered. This will be monitored by the Council's Management Team, via quarterly reports in addition to monthly performance monitoring.

The strategy will be kept under review and amended if there are any changes to legislation, or practice which may impact on the strategy and any resulting actions contained within the action plan, but where this happens it will be in consultation with stakeholders.

The strategy action plan will be refreshed each year for the life of the strategy and discussed with stakeholders and presented to elected Members for feedback and endorsement.