

## Consultation responses

Area of strategy	Issues raised	Response from housing strategy
Adequacy, scale and resources	The adequacy of the strategy in tackling the scale of homelessness was questioned. Welfare Reform and other changes would suggest that more households will struggle with affordability in the future. The strategy does not detail the resources, or any additional resources that will be used.	The council works within budgetary constraints and the available budget for all homelessness work, including the provision of temporary housing, has not increased. It is likely that an element of funding will be received from the government for additional duties placed upon the council by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This will be limited to the first two years after the Act comes into force. The amount of funding is yet to be confirmed. After that time the government anticipates that the increased prevention work will lead to savings from using less temporary accommodation. These anticipated reductions in the use of temporary accommodation will be expected to cover the additional costs of increased prevention work.
Affordable housing	The low level of affordable housing is not addressed through the strategy	The council recognises the need to increase the number of affordable rented homes and strives to ensure housing developments do provide additional affordable housing. The council aims to ensure 204 affordable homes are built each year. Over the last 3 years, in difficult financial times, we delivered 187 homes in 2014/15, 172 in 2015/16 and 91 in 2016/17. This is forecast to increase to deliver 200 or more homes per year over the next 3 years. Currently there are 17,000 units of affordable housing in Medway and we are

		working towards increasing this number as new sites are allocated as part of the Council's Local Plan.
Building local authority housing	We need more affordable homes and the council could build them, possibly using prefabricated or other unconventional construction methods. There is a challenge not to over rely on the private sector to provide new affordable housing.	The Council reviews opportunities to build additional stock where this is viable. It is recognised that private rented properties as well as social housing stock form the bulk of available housing for homeless households.
Using our council housing stock for temporary accommodation	Using council housing stock as temporary housing removes those homes from the stock available to let. High concentrations of homes used for temporary accommodation in one area have the potential to destabilise the local community.	We have planned to use 60 units of council housing for temporary accommodation. This is less than 2% of the council housing stock. Many council districts within Kent currently use some of their council stock as temporary accommodation. Temporary accommodation is generally sourced from the private rented sector but the cost of this provision is higher, so an element of social housing stock allows a flexible response which reduces overspends.
Empty homes	Empty homes should be brought back into use as temporary housing.	Bringing empty homes back into use can be a slow and resource intensive process. They often require significant investment to bring them up to a standard suitable for temporary accommodation. As current resources do not include an officer dealing with empty homes, we will look to see what measures we can undertake. The planning department have confirmed they are exploring options to bring long term empty homes into use. Council Tax has agreed to include information leaflets from us to encourage bringing empty properties back into use.

<p>Rough Sleepers</p>	<p>The numbers of people visible on the street are increasing. Rough sleepers, and begging, are having an impact on the High Streets in Medway. Some responses called for a year round night shelter, increased day centre provision, others proposed a policy of tolerating encampments of rough sleepers in lower profile sites.</p>	<p>Though the verified rough sleeper count found 14 people, the members of the Homelessness Forum, in conjunction with the Housing Strategy Team, believe the estimate to be closer to 50-60 people who sleep rough in Medway. This is not a fixed number and people move between a variety of accommodation types and living on the street in a fluid pattern. During the winter months, staff from the Housing Solutions service visited the Medway Winter Night Shelter every Thursday and built trust with the volunteers and the clients. They helped ten people using the shelter find settled accommodation and continue to work to help clients with complex needs find suitable accommodation.</p> <p>There is currently no resource to provide a venue, funding or staffing for additional night shelter or day centre provision. Caring Hands provide a day centre 9.00-4.00 Monday to Friday with other services providing drop-ins at other times.</p> <p>The council understands the concerns about people sleeping on the streets and rough sleeping encampments and needs to consider the needs of all sections of our community in our response. Housing Services will continue to work in partnership across statutory and voluntary partners to address the rough sleeping issue, looking to accommodate people in general needs housing or supported housing where viable, and to consider other options from established best practice. This may include a designated rough sleeping Co-ordinator and exploring the viability of a Housing First pilot.</p>
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Working with groups	The council needs to work with groups effectively to ensure efforts are not duplicated and that rough sleepers are not enabled to continue to sleep rough by the help they receive.	The council works with a range of statutory, charity and voluntary sector organisations that provide services to households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This work is done via the Homelessness Forum, its task and finish groups, and informal liaison. We share information about services and encourage signposting to services, including Kingsley House. We are working to increase joint work across services with the aim of developing good practice and will be developing a homelessness charter for all agencies to sign up to.
Staff attitudes and empathy	All public facing council staff should be trained in customer service. Those working with vulnerable people need to demonstrate openly caring and empathic behaviour.	All Housing Options staff are trained in customer service. Staff are trained to gather and provide information in a thorough and caring manner. They are required to balance explaining decisions based on legislation with an awareness of the needs of the individuals. We recognise that when receiving an unwanted message that the council cannot provide the assistance you seek, the recipient may be dissatisfied.
Dual Diagnosis	Some people have both mental health needs and misuse substances. Services for mental health and substance misuse have been reported as unwilling to treat one issue before the other is addressed. This can potentially lead to an impasse where the client does not receive treatment for either issue.	The difficulties people with both mental health needs and substance misuse issues experience in accessing services is recognised nationally. KMPT and Turning Point have a remit to work with this client group and we will be working closely with colleagues in these services to ensure we understand the referral criteria and how we can best support people in accessing these services.