

CABINET

8 AUGUST 2017

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2017-19

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Housing and Community Services

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Summary

This report sets out the background to Medway Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19, the consultation process, and the refinement of the strategy based on feedback received, including consideration by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to take a strategic and integrated approach to tackling homelessness and allocating housing.
- 1.2 The Act places a requirement on authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in the local area. This review is to be undertaken with input from social services and in consultation with the voluntary sector and other relevant bodies.
- 1.3 The results of this review inform the formulation of strategies to tackle and prevent homelessness, which is then published as the authority's Homelessness Prevention Strategy.
- 1.4 This process is to be carried out periodically to ensure a new strategy is published within five years of the publication of the previous strategy.
- 1.5 Final approval of the Strategy is a matter for Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1 Medway Council's existing Homelessness Prevention Strategy was written in 2014 following a review in 2013. It was recognised that an updated strategy was required to reflect the current and emerging trends in homelessness and the Council's planned response. To inform this, a review was carried out from June to August 2016 using statistical data from our housing services and in consultation with stakeholders from statutory and voluntary agencies. A stakeholder event was undertaken in July 2016 to better understand local pressures and look to agreeing best practice and potential future service development. Further input was sought, particularly from Adult Social Care and Children's Services, once the draft version was completed, and the review was amended accordingly to produce the final brief to inform the Homelessness Prevention Strategy. The revised draft Homelessness Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.2 The draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy was written in response to the review, but taking into account knowledge of the potential changes coming through the legislative framework. The key piece of legislation which will impact on our duties, and our strategic and operational response, will be the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 2.3 Due to the uncertain timeframe of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the changes which will come with full Universal Credit rollout in February 2018, and the expected Green Paper on Changes to Supported Housing Funding due to be published in the spring, it was decided that a three to five year strategy would need to be updated frequently to reflect these changes, or become out of date. It was therefore agreed that a two year strategy would be written, with a review planned for 2018 to inform a new strategy in 2019.
- 2.4 The Strategy was drafted between September 2016 and February 2017 and was published after consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services in March 2017. The draft Strategy was uploaded to the council website with a consultation period running up until 21 April 2017. The website link to the consultation document and questionnaire was widely publicised to elected Members, statutory partners, voluntary sector agencies and members of the public. Consultation events were held in commissioned Housing Related Support services for people receiving support and accommodation around homelessness.
- 2.5 A total of 35 responses were received to the consultation. The responses were broken down as follows; 10 from members of the public, 15 from service users and 10 from organisations.
- 2.6 The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19 has been designed to tackle the homelessness situation in Medway through four overarching aims:
- Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before crisis point is reached.

- Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead.
- Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs.
- Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living.

2.7 The strategy has a detailed action plan, broken down into four subsections, giving specific outcomes to be met to progress each of the aims.

2.8 The consultation process directed people to explore whether the strategy (and related action plan) adequately targeted the aims as outlined, whether they felt that the strategy was wide ranging enough and whether there were further activities the Council should be undertaking.

2.9 The responses to the strategy have been analysed and discussed by officers within strategic housing services. This is summarised in section 5 – advice and analysis.

3. Options

3.1 The options available are:

- a) To agree to adopt the Homelessness Prevention Strategy with the current format and content.
- b) For Cabinet to propose further amendments to the Strategy before the final version is published

4. Consultation

4.1 Consultation on the draft strategy ran from 16 March to 21 April 2017.

4.2 The responses were collated via:

- An online survey tool designed by officers from Strategic Housing and Housing Services with input from Communications colleagues.
- An easy read paper version (designed with input from one of our support providers) distributed to supported housing services, and supported by visits to services working with people with a history of homelessness.
- Direct email/letter responses.

4.3 The consultation process included visits to supported housing schemes for vulnerable people and group discussion with service users.

4.4 The results of the consultation inform the following advice and analysis section.

5. Advice and analysis

5.1 The consultation process raised a number of common themes, which are summarised in appendix three. In summary the major themes which emerged were:

- Some respondents felt there will be an increase in housing need and related hardship beyond the scope of the strategy. Specifically it was felt that affordable housing will not meet demand and the Council needs to build more housing directly.
- Concern was raised about the amount of social housing stock being used as temporary accommodation.
- Respondents felt that more work should be done to bring empty homes back into use.
- More work to support rough sleepers, or otherwise resolve issues around rough sleepers was suggested.
- Coordination of groups should be carried out to make sure resources are effectively used and duplication of services reduced.
- Some respondents felt that Council staff should have additional customer service training.
- Some respondents felt that additional work needs to be done around provision of support to people with dual diagnosis.

5.2 In response to the consultation, the following action was inserted: '*Provide information to owners of long term empty homes regarding businesses that help people rent or sell their property.*' This has been agreed by the Council Tax section as an insert to Council Tax letters to owners of empty properties.

5.3 The other points which were raised are addressed through individual responses contained in the appendix. It is felt that these other suggested actions align with the activity which will flow from the implementation of strategy and accompanying action plan.

5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment was carried out following the initial homelessness review, and was used in shaping the direction of the strategy.

The findings of the Diversity Impact Assessment were as follows:

- No groups with protected characteristics would be adversely impacted by the priorities of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy.
- The implementation of the Strategy, in particular the move to earlier identification and prevention, as well as strengthening joint work across statutory services, was indicated to advance equality of opportunity for the following protected characteristics; Sex, pregnancy and maternity, disability and age.
- There was no anticipated impact on fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

5.5 The Diversity Impact Assessment is presented as appendix 4.

5.6 The Action Plan is design to bring into operation the overarching aims of the strategy as summarised below.

5.7 Section one. Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before the crisis point is reached. This will be achieved by:

Partnership work. Strengthening our working arrangements with statutory partners to achieve better housing, income, training, work opportunities and health outcomes for vulnerable people. Draw up an overarching Youth Homelessness Action Plan with statutory partners. Work with Registered Providers on joint solutions to prevent homelessness. Directly assist households to take up private sector tenancies and encourage private landlords to work with us via provision of a support hotline, landlord forum, landlord accreditation and training and readying tenants to take up private tenancies through the tenancy accreditation scheme. Work with partners to deliver advice on housing through attendance at panels and MARAC and MAPPA meetings.

Signposting and information. Provide information and advice via dedicated pages on our website. Signpost people threatened with eviction to commissioned advice providers. Brief other agencies on identifying those who are at risk of becoming homeless. Provide information around the NACRO prison discharge service.

Practical solutions. Provide individually tailored advice to all eligible people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness. Understand and prepare for the impact of upcoming welfare reforms on households and target advice and support to those affected. Work to deliver preventative interventions to stop households becoming homeless.

Further developments. Establish viability of a 'one stop shop' for advice and support to non-priority households.

5.8 Section two. Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead. This will be achieved by:

Inform and advise. Develop 'myth busting' information packs for young people considering leaving home. Standardise information provided to people in temporary accommodation. Update and publicise information on resources available to homeless people across Medway.

Quality check. Audit customer outcomes for quality of work delivered and effectiveness across services provided by strategic housing services.

Further developments. Agree a homelessness charter covering voluntary and statutory agencies involvement and ensure it is widely publicised.

5.9 Section three. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs. This will be achieved by:

Increase available supply. Work with developers to oversee delivery of agreed amounts of affordable housing. Provide support to people to facilitate downsizing into more appropriate housing. Provide information to owners of empty properties. Work with providers to deliver shared housing for young people.

Target resources effectively. Using a task and target approach to determine suitable housing outcomes for vulnerable homeless people. Build on existing work with winter shelters to look at housing solutions. Ensure the SWEP is appropriately publicised and referrals pathway understood. Understand impact of migration into Medway from other local authorities.

Further developments. Explore feasibility and cost benefits of housing first model using existing best practice.

- 5.10 Section four. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs. This will be achieved by:

Housing related support provision. Assess quality of services using agreed frameworks and monitor outcomes achieved during support period.

Move on and success factors. Ensure that providers use a wide range of housing options in facilitating move on tailored to each person. Follow up successful maintenance of tenancies using longitudinal data.

Further developments. Review our overall provision in light of emerging priorities and any perceived gaps and plan future commissioning program.

6. Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 6 July 2017

- 6.1 The Committee considered the draft Strategy on 6 July 2017.

- 6.2 Members considered the background to the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19, the consultation process, and the refinement of the strategy based on feedback received. The following issues were discussed:

6.2.1 Funding to deliver the Strategy

In response to a question about whether there was sufficient funding to deliver the Strategy, the Head of Strategic Housing replied that none of the actions would require additional funding. The Strategy would be funded from existing resources, partner contributions and also external funding would be explored.

A Member welcomed the Strategy as a step in the right direction.

6.2.2 Supply of affordable homes/S106 agreements

Noting the aim in the Housing Strategy to increase the supply of affordable homes, a Member noted that numbers of affordable homes in recent years

had been very low. The point was also made that affordable housing covered a range of types of housing and what was really needed was a significant increase in social housing. The Head of Strategic Housing acknowledged the supply of social housing had fallen since 2012 but supply had increased this year with 220 units projected to be delivered in 2017-18, including some shared ownership.

Another Member commented that the biggest threat to the delivery of affordable homes was developers using viability reports to successfully argue that the recommended contributions made the development non-viable, leading to affordable home numbers being renegotiated. The extent of liaison with the planning team on this issue was queried and the Head of Strategic Housing advised that the Affordable Housing Officer liaised with the planners and developers and there was a robust process in place to scrutinise viability reports. The Council also learnt from other councils about best practice in this area. If necessary, external specialists would be brought in to ensure affordable housing was delivered in respect of the Council's regeneration projects.

A Member referred to a large developer who had not delivered on a S106 agreement and asked if this had been shared with other councils. Members were advised that this case would be raised in future discussions with Government bodies.

6.2.3 Intentionally homeless

A Member asked for figures of people deemed intentionally homeless as opposed to homeless. As the figure was not available an undertaking was given to provide the information. The focus of the Strategy was to prevent homelessness as far as possible. The housing team also worked with colleagues in Children and Adults so that joint assessments were carried out when people presented as homeless.

6.2.4 Home bonds scheme

Referring to difficulties people were finding in getting home bonds accepted in the private sector rental market, a Member asked for an update on this scheme. The Head of Strategic Housing advised that persuading some private sector landlords to accept Home Bonds could be challenging in spite of work with the Landlords Forum and the scheme was not suitable for everyone. The scheme was being revised with a view to the Council taking on more of a match maker role.

6.2.5 Kingsley House

A Member referred to reports of staff at Kingsley House providing a poor service to some users. The Head of Strategic Housing commented it was recognised that vulnerable people's interaction with housing staff could sometimes become confrontational. The team at Kingsley House had now

been split and a preventative team had been established which assessed an individual's circumstances and helped them find accommodation.

6.2.6 DCLG funding bids

In response to a comment that the failure of the recent bids had been frustrating, Members were advised that the Council had asked for feedback from the bidding process.

6.2.7 Homelessness Forum

A Member noted the involvement of the Homelessness Forum in the development of the Homelessness Charter and commented that the Forum was seen by some as not being very transparent. The Head of Strategic Housing replied that the aim of the Charter was to set out the responsibilities of the various partners and their roles in tackling homelessness problems. The Forum was well established and comprised statutory and voluntary agencies. Relationships with volunteers could be complex and though they were well meaning there was the potential for their approach to exacerbate problems.

6.2.8 Accommodation for 18-35 year olds

Referring to the aim of delivering 10 rooms in shared housing for 18-35 year olds, a Member asked if the 10 rooms were in one building or spread across Medway. The Head of Strategic Housing advised the plan was to turn larger properties into shared accommodation.

6.2.9 Out of Borough placements

A Member commented on a big increase in people living in Chatham who had been placed there by other councils (mainly London Boroughs). They would often have complex problems and he asked what would happen if the Council which placed a family no longer had a duty of care for them. The Head of Strategic Housing commented that the Council could not stop these placements but would raise concerns with a Council which placed people in sub standard accommodation or were paying above market rates for accommodation. There was a requirement to notify the host Council in the case of housing placements but this did not apply for social services placements.

6.2.10 Supply of landlords

Noting that a significant proportion of rental properties in Medway were let to London commuters, a Member asked what would happen if there were not enough private landlords prepared to house homeless people. The Head of Strategic Housing commented that the priority was to ensure the current arrangements were working properly. If necessary the Council would need to house people out of borough but that would be a last resort.

6.3 The Committee agreed to note the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy and ask Cabinet to consider its comments on the Strategy.

7. Director's comments

7.1 The Committee identified a number of issues, all of which underpin the need for a comprehensive and flexible strategy to meet the needs of Medway residents through a time of legislative change. Our service model is responsive to these developments and will be monitored to ensure change is understood, proactively anticipated and planned for. The Homelessness Prevention Strategy, along with the supporting multi-agency action plan, is founded on the principle that joint work across statutory services and stakeholders will drive the Strategy to meet these stated aims. Taking this into account, the Cabinet is recommended to adopt the Strategy.

8. Risk management

8.1 The following risks have been identified:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
That the strategy does not remain relevant.	With upcoming legislative changes, the strategy will require amendment in 2018/19	The strategy has been deliberately designed to be short term in nature and a new strategy will be written to cover the period from 2019	E4
That the actions required by the strategy are not carried out.	There is a detailed action plan, covering outputs which will need to be achieved to meet the outcomes required by the strategy.	Monitoring of progress against the action plan will be externally verified by the Homelessness Forum and be managed under the PDR process for officers in the Housing Strategy service.	D3
That agencies do not work in a coordinated fashion to achieve the aims of the strategy.	Actions detailed to fulfil the aims of the strategy will need the input of statutory and voluntary partners.	Officers will ensure that meetings are timetabled to progress specific elements of the strategy and that all agencies sign up to a charter of shared aims and commitments.	D2

That additional staffing and systems required exceed current budget provision.	Implementation of change – e.g. the homelessness Reduction Act - will require a change in focus and potentially need increased staffing resource and generate additional processes and monitoring.	Once the additional burdens funding amount is known, services can be tailored in response to this and efficiencies sought, e.g. by increased co-working with commissioned services and streamlining processes.	D3
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9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy and action plan does not include any budgetary commitments over and above those already planned for.
- 9.2 Additional requirements stemming from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will receive additional burdens funding, which will cover the period of the draft strategy. This may not cover the requirement entirely and is listed as a risk.
- 9.3 As part of Medway Council’s strategic response, internal funding may be identified to support additional activity e.g. the creation of a coordinator post to work alongside existing statutory and voluntary provision.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1 The Cabinet is asked to consider the comments of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in paragraph 6 of the report.
- 11.2 The Cabinet is asked to approve the Homelessness Prevention Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

12. Suggested reasons for decision

- 12.1 Approval of the Strategy will allow Medway Council to meet the legal requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.

12.2 Approval of the Strategy will allow formal publication to our partners, stakeholders, and Medway residents. This will ensure full understanding of the range of strategic planning and direct activity undertaken by Medway Council and its partners in preventing and addressing homelessness in Medway.

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Appendices

- 1) Current draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19
- 2) Summary of consultation issues raised and responses
- 3) Accessible version of consultation questionnaire.
- 4) Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7841/152056.pdf

Homelessness Act 2002 Explanatory Notes

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/notes/contents>

Medway Council

**Homelessness Prevention Strategy
2017-2019**

Contents

Introduction

Part 1 Homelessness Review

Part 2 Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019

Part 3 Strategic Priorities

Part 4 Case studies from partner organisations

Part 5 Resources

Part 6 Delivering and Monitoring

Part 7 Action Plan

Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area, and develop and publish a strategy to prevent homelessness, based on the findings of the review. Medway's current Homelessness Prevention Strategy was approved by Cabinet in February 2014 and despite the challenging climate, a number of successes have been achieved over the life of the strategy. This has been due largely to joint working involving our statutory, private and voluntary sector partners.

However homelessness levels have been increasing both locally and nationally over the last five years and the need to respond to homelessness in a multi-agency coordinated way has increasing impetus.

Relationship breakdown, being asked to leave the family home and the end of a tenancy are issues which pose a risk of homelessness. In general households are able to cope and find alternative accommodation using their own resources. For other households, who lack the resources to tackle the immediate challenges or have underlying issues which make it harder for them to deal with their situation, these experiences can trigger homelessness.

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019 sets out how Medway Council will work with its partners to prevent and address homelessness. The strategy has been shaped by current and anticipated national policy. It will be reviewed once the outcome of the Homelessness Reduction Bill is known later in the year and revised when the bill is enacted and guidance released. The Homelessness Reduction Bill aims to ensure a greater focus on the prevention of homelessness and offers some increased protection for single homeless people and couples without dependent children.

Our efforts to reduce homelessness are part of a bigger picture, which includes tackling the causes of social and economic exclusion, improving cooperative with health and social care services and promoting services from the community and voluntary sector. This requires greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention through multi-agency working including sharing of resources and seeing creative and innovative solutions.

Factors such as the economic climate, high levels of unemployment, changes to the welfare benefit system and difficult housing market conditions disproportionately affect vulnerable people and increase the risk of homelessness. This strategy recognises that homelessness is a complex problem with multiple causes requiring flexible innovative services to reach the people affected. The strategy has identified four priorities to respond to these issues:

- Use early interventions to **prevent** homelessness before the crisis point is reached

- Provide timely housing **information** enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead
- Ensure fair access to a supply of **housing** to meet housing needs
- Ensure access to **services** to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy links to other relevant strategies and the Council Plan and for a full picture it should be read in conjunction with the Housing Strategy 2015 and taking into account the Homelessness Charter which will be developed with statutory and voluntary sector partners during 2017-18.

Council Plan 2016/17 to 2020/21

Medway: A place to be proud of

Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential

Maximising regeneration and economic growth

Housing Strategy 2015 to 2018

Increase the **SUPPLY** of suitable and affordable homes

Improve the **QUALITY** of homes, environment and people's lives

Promote **SUSTAINABILITY** by supporting people within their community

Improve the **FLEXIBILITY** of accommodation

Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019

Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before the crisis point is reached

Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead

Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs

Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living

Part 1 Homelessness Review

This section presents the key findings from the Homelessness Review. The review outlined what is driving homelessness in Medway and sets out how housing demand and policy decisions at a national and local level have shaped the response.

The Homelessness Review was carried out over three months in summer 2016 and included collecting data and evidence whilst talking with organisations delivering homelessness related services. It considered the housing market and the pressures from it that contribute to a household's housing problems. It also considered patterns of homelessness, including the main causes and types of households affected.

The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act will place additional duties on the council. These will include;

- Extending the period when the Council would regard a household as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days
- Extending the duty to relieve or prevent homelessness to all eligible applicants
- Requiring the council to produce a written homelessness prevention plan with each household

The key findings of the review were:

- **Increasing numbers of households seeking assistance**

The number of households approaching the Council for assistance has continued to rise since the last review was undertaken in 2013. The number of homelessness applications made rose by 30% between 2013-14 and 2015-16, with 787 in 2013-14, a peak of 1383 in 2014-15 and dropping to 1126 in 2015-16. Nationally applications peaked in 2003-04, dropped to a low in 2009-10, and have increased since. In 2016-17, there has been an average of 190 households approaching for assistance per month however, not all households go on to become homeless with their situations being resolved by other means.

- **Reasons for being homeless**

The most common reason for becoming homeless over the last three years has been that parents, relatives or friends were no longer willing to accommodate. This is consistent with previous years and accounted for 35% of the cases in 2015-16.

There has been an increase in the number of households making a homeless application due to losing their rented accommodation over the last three years, accounting for 32% of total applications made in 2015-16.

Nationally the most common reasons for becoming homeless are due to the loss of settled accommodation followed by parents, relatives or friends no longer willing to accommodate.

- **Homeless households are generally young**

The majority (86%) of those accepted as homeless over the last three years in Medway were 44 years old or younger. 51% were aged between 25 and 44 and 35% were aged between 16 and 24 years old. Of the young people accepted as homeless 4% were 16/17 year olds.

- **Homelessness preventions have increased**

The Council is active in preventing homelessness in households that seek help. In 2015/16, 148 households were assisted to remain in their existing home and 207 were assisted to obtain alternative accommodation. This represents a 30% increase in the number of cases where homelessness was prevented compared to 2013-14.

- **There is a low level of affordable rented homes**

Medway has a low level of affordable rented homes and 867 homes were let in 2015/16. The demand for privately rented homes has increased and this may lead to landlords being more selective about tenants and able to charge higher rents.

It is anticipated that 572 households would be adversely affected by the benefit cap when it was amended in autumn 2016.

692 applicants were awarded a discretionary housing payment in 2015/16. The Local Housing Allowance is a flat rate based on the size of the household and the area in which they rent their home. Tenants receive the allowance as housing benefit or part of universal credit and it is the tenant's responsibility to make up any shortfall between the local housing allowance and the rent. In Medway social housing rents are covered by the local housing allowance. However the local housing allowance is generally lower than the average private sector rent. The Chartered Institute for Housing estimated in 2016 that in many areas of England the Local Housing Allowance would be lower than the bottom 20% of private sector rents. In Medway the amount of the average private sector rent covered by the Local Housing Allowance ranges from a low of 74% for homes with 4 or more bedrooms to a high of 91% of the rent for a 2 bed roomed home resulting in most private sector tenants experiencing some shortfall between the local housing allowance and their rent.

- **Rough sleepers**

Medway Council has an obligation to organise a yearly count of rough sleepers and return the overall number to DCLG. The count is to establish how many rough sleepers are present in an area as a snapshot on a typical night. Teams made up of

Council officers, charitable organisations and housing providers identified 14 rough sleepers, which was the same as the previous years count.

We work with partners via the Homelessness Forum to gather intelligence on rough sleepers and this indicates that there are approximately 50 to 60 individuals that may have slept rough recently or are at risk of sleeping rough.

The Review has provided a clear direction for preventing and addressing homelessness in Medway. The findings and recommendations have formed the basis for the development of this new Homelessness Prevention Strategy for the next two years, subject to changes in legislation. The next section outlines the progress we have made against the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2014-2016 and introduces the priorities for 2017 to 2019.

Part 2 Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019

This section looks at what homelessness is and sets out Medway Council's approach to tackling homelessness. It introduces our vision and the four strategic priorities, which will help to achieve this. It details how the strategy will be delivered, the role of the Homelessness Forum, and gives a summary of how the consultation helped to shape the strategy

What is homelessness?

The term 'homelessness' is often considered to apply to people sleeping rough yet this is only part of the picture. Homeless households are more likely to be threatened with the loss of, or unable to continue with, their current accommodation.

Statutory homelessness is where the local authority accepts a household is homeless within the terms of the homelessness legislation. Where the household is found to be priority need and not intentionally homeless the local authority has a duty to offer accommodation. Those in priority need include households with dependent children, pregnant women and adults who are assessed as vulnerable. The legal provisions are contained in the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order.

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness. Rough sleepers may be seen in doorways, car parks, or in tents. Rough sleepers are often out of sight and move from place to place. People who sleep rough may fall outside of the definitions of statutory homelessness and move in and out of temporary accommodation.

The homelessness legislation places a general duty on housing authorities to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and preventing homelessness, is available to everyone in their area free of charge. The legislation also requires authorities to assist individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Homelessness is caused by a complicated relationship between the household's individual circumstances and adverse factors outside their direct control.

The Council has legal duties towards certain groups of homeless households, but this strategy will cover all forms of homelessness, not just where there is a statutory duty to provide housing.

Impacts of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2014-2016

Improvements relating to the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2014-2016 include;

- The Housing Solutions Team has relocated to Kingsley House in Gillingham and adopted new ways of working that have reduced the time households wait for an interview from several weeks to five working days.

Households who will be homeless on the day are seen that day by the duty officer.

- A Joint Housing Assessment protocol with Children's Services has been put into practice across services to ensure that young people aged 16-17 receive consistent advice and a holistic assessment of their needs.
- A range of Housing Related Support contracts have been commissioned and monitored to ensure that they achieve the desired outcomes of supporting independent living and the prevention of homelessness.
- A tenant accreditation scheme has been developed providing training for tenants and supporting tenants and landlords in the private rented sector. In the two years since the beginning of the scheme in February 2015 it has helped more than 170 people access and sustain their tenancies.
- A landlord hotline number has been introduced providing advice and support to landlords who take households under the Home bond scheme.

Priorities for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019

From the findings of the homelessness review, and the legislative framework in which the council operates, we have identified four strategic priorities;

- **Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before crisis point is reached**
- **Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead**
- **Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs**
- **Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living**

An action plan is provided at the end of this strategy. This will be monitored to ensure actions are achieved and will be revised as needed to keep it relevant.

While the Homelessness Act 2002 obliges the council to produce and publish a strategy we recognise how vital partnership working is to achieving the priorities and carrying out the actions. We worked with the Medway Homelessness Forum in developing the strategy and will continue working with the forum, and its task and finish groups, to ensure the action plan is delivered.

As well as being responsive to changes in legislation the strategy will be reviewed each year, and delivery monitored every six months, to ensure it remains up to date and relevant.

Consultation

The views of stakeholders were a significant contribution to the development of the strategy. A consultation event was held in July 2016 to identify strategic priorities

and actions for meeting them. The event focused on identifying examples of best practices and used this as a basis for thinking about how existing activities could be improved and enhanced.

The strategic priorities were discussed at the Homelessness Forum in November 2016 before the strategy was drafted. A number of focused meetings have since been held with stakeholders to ensure buy in to underpinning actions.

A public consultation was held on the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy in March and April. A large number of organisations were emailed to seek a response and the consultation was promoted on the council website. Service users were encouraged to respond with a visit to supported housing and paper surveys being made available. 15 responses were received by service users, 10 from members of the public and 10 from organisations. All the responses were considered carefully and an action was added to the action plan.

Part 3 Strategic Priorities

This section sets out the four overarching strategic priorities and shows how partnership working is central to delivering the actions and achieving the shared vision.

Strategic Priority 1 - Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before crisis point is reached

Homelessness impacts significantly on familial and community ties, employment, health and educational outcomes. Our first priority is to work with those at risk of homelessness at the earliest possible stage and continue to develop our focus on prevention. We need to develop innovative and cost effective service delivery, working with other departments and stakeholders, to develop solutions focused plans for individual households.

What did the Homelessness Review find?

Prevention work is embedded in Housing Options Team practice with many households helped to remain in their current accommodation and other households helped to find new accommodation.

Welfare Reform has impacted on households and the council provides support to help households adapt to changes in their income. It will be necessary to monitor how services deliver a range of options to help households avoid housing crises.

What do we need to put in place?

We aim to provide timely and accessible services to prevent people becoming homeless, and work in partnership to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness. Practical advice and support to enable people to keep their existing homes, when suitable and appropriate, is an essential element in ensuring resources are targeted effectively.

Information on homelessness prevention services will be distributed to partner organisations so they are able to signpost with confidence. Tailored information and advice will be provided to non-priority households where a full duty to accommodate is not owed. In conjunction with the Homelessness Forum, we will evaluate opportunities to set up a one stop shop providing practical advice and support to find accommodation. We will brief partners so they can identify those who are homeless or under threat of homelessness and refer to appropriate local services.

We will continue to work with the Early Help Panel in identifying households who may be at risk of becoming homeless and provide advice to professionals working with these families around tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention. We will also work with the Medway Action for Families Team in identifying which families require support and work with them to improve their life chances.

We will work with partners in Children's Services, Early Help and Youth Services to target preventative activity to young people needing additional input, especially Care Leavers.

In partnership with the Housing Benefits team and the DWP we will identify households affected by welfare reforms and provide them with targeted support and advice. This will be particularly important given the full rollout of Universal Credit across Medway in February 2018.

Advice services are co-located in Kingsley House with Housing Options and households served with faulty notice to quit, or needing advice on debt, housing matters and legal matters can access their advice. They also provide outreach services across Medway including an evening session for those unable to attend services within normal office hours.

A significant part of our approach is improving the quality of accommodation within the private rented sector. We work with private sector landlords and tenants to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of each are understood to maintain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

The Medway Landlord Accreditation scheme has been very successful recognising landlords who demonstrate that they understand their responsibilities. Since it was introduced in 2009 over 300 landlords have joined the scheme. We will strengthen our partnership with private landlords to ensure the private sector can continue to provide sustainable housing solutions for households. This complements the Tenants Accreditation Scheme, helping tenants become 'tenancy ready' giving them a better chance of securing and sustaining tenancies in the private rented sector.

The housing needs of those affected by homelessness are a key element of future service and policy design. We will continue to support a joint commissioning approach for services and review and update protocols with local hospitals, Community Mental Health Teams, prisons, probation and other relevant agencies. We will continue to be involved in Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, adding our input to help offenders resettle and reduce future reoffending.

It is important that we link housing and health services as poor physical or mental health can lead to homelessness and a period of homelessness often exacerbates, and causes further, issues. We will strengthen working relationships with Public Health to prevent homelessness and improve the health and wellbeing of people in Medway. We will also continue to commission Housing Related Support which helps vulnerable people improve their quality of life and wellbeing by enabling them to live as independently as possible in their community.

Strategic Priority 2 – Provide timely housing information to enable people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead

Working with partner agencies, we will continue to develop accurate and up to date information and provide timely advice to help those in housing need. We will create a Homelessness Charter to support partnership working and strengthen Medway Council's offer to single homeless people.

What did the Homelessness Review find?

The Housing Solutions Services provides a comprehensive and realistic assessment of the housing options available to each household seeking support. Information on how to access the service is provided on the Council's website and partner organisations that may refer individuals to the service are able to advise on contact arrangements.

Advice services are co-located with the Housing Solutions Service and provide information and advice to those in housing need with a wide range of issues, directly relating to their housing situation, and broader issues including debts and other legal matters.

What is happening in Medway?

The Housing Solutions service will continue to undertake a comprehensive assessment of a household's situation arriving at a conclusion on available housing options. This will range from preventative advice and support to enable households to sustain their existing accommodation, where appropriate, or to access alternative accommodation solutions where necessary. The Homelessness Reduction Bill will have a significant impacts should it be enacted, as seems likely, and this will require a review of current service to ensure it will meet any new responsibilities. This will include a provision to help non priority households create an action plan towards gaining accommodation and the council will review the most appropriate ways to do this effectively.

We will continue to undertake regular quality assurance checks across the Strategic Housing Service to provide an independent audit of customer experience.

We will review our joint working protocol with Children's Services to create a pathway for families with dependent children who are found to be intentionally homeless to find a home in the private rented sector.

To facilitate understanding and successful signposting we will continue to invite partner organisations to provide information about their services at the Homelessness Forums and related task and finish groups.

We will also develop short information packs to give information on the practicalities and costs of setting up a home to young people considering leaving home, making sure we explain the impact of universal credit and other benefit changes.

As demand for our housing and homelessness services continues to grow, it is increasingly important that we encourage and support self-help. As well as face-to-face advice and information, we want to ensure that good quality information is available online. We will review current information on our website and leaflets to ensure it meets the needs of individuals threatened with homelessness and provides useful information to agencies signposting to services.

Strategic Priority 3 – Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs

Having a stable home enables people to access support services, integrate into their local community and to obtain and sustain work and training. We will continue to manage the expectations of customers and ensure that we maximise access and availability not only to social rented accommodation but to other housing options. This approach will help us to meet housing need, prevent homelessness and reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

What did the Homelessness Review find?

Social housing in Medway is scarce and there is an increasingly competitive private rented sector. This has meant that many people are struggling to secure affordable and suitable housing. There is a wide spectrum of housing needs across households which apply to the Housing Register. The needs presented range from those who need action urgently to resolve their housing situation (Band A) to those in housing need who have worsened their situation through action or inaction (Band D). Bands A to D are considered 'active' bands and number approximately 5,400. This includes those people in sheltered housing as well as those applying for transfers (which accounts for 3,500 of the active numbers).

In addition to this we have a large number of 'inactive' households who are housed securely but wish to retain the option of potential moves to social housing in the future. These currently form the majority of people on the Housing Register and add approximately 14,000 households to our reported total.

A number of districts neighbouring Medway Council have chosen to reframe their Housing Register resulting in significant drops in annual numbers reported. Medway Council's allocations policy is due to be reviewed and consideration will be made as to whether we should adopt similar practice and restrict our Housing Register solely to those households in housing need.

The numbers of households being placed in temporary accommodation has increased year on year and the council has had to work hard to ensure that almost all accommodation provided is within Medway. This enables households to maintain

employment, health and education with the minimum of disruption. A wide range of temporary accommodation has been sourced to meet the needs of all sizes of households and those including people with disabilities.

What is happening in Medway?

The private rented sector is increasingly important as a source of accommodation for those in housing need. We will seek to strengthen the work that we currently undertake to build relationships and trust with private sector landlords to increase the supply of rental properties, enabling access for both statutory and non-statutory homeless households. We will continue to provide schemes to access the private rented sector and interventions to resolve issues quickly and sustain tenancies.

The level of affordable housing in Medway is lower than for many nationally comparable urban areas. The North Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment, a document informing the draft Local Plan, highlights Medway will need an additional 17,112 affordable homes built between 2012 and 2035. The council is currently consulting on the Local Plan which recognises the need for 17112 affordable homes whilst ensuring sites remain viable. We will continue to work with Registered Providers and the Homes and Community Agency to deliver a range of affordable homes to meet need.

The increase in the number of households approaching the Council, coupled with a reduction in the number of social housing lets, has resulted in the numbers of households in temporary accommodation increasing. We will review the options for temporary accommodation provision and where we have no other option but to place households in temporary accommodation we will ensure that vulnerable people are offered targeted support to help them move on into settled accommodation when possible.

Changes to the welfare benefit system, and increases in rent levels, have meant that the private rented sector accommodation has become unaffordable for low-income households in many areas. This has increased the cost and use of temporary accommodation which in turn has resulted in some Local Authorities, particularly London Authorities, procuring temporary accommodation outside of their area.

The Housing Act 1996 sets out that "so far as *reasonably practicable* a local housing authority shall...secure that accommodation is available for the occupation of the applicant in their district." However, this does not prevent homeless households being placed a long way out of their local area as long as this is done on a case-by-case basis and not as a matter of course. Medway is an area with more affordable accommodation than London and so we will continue to monitor placements made from out of the area.

We will continue to work with London Authorities and follow the out of area placement advice note which aims to encourage co-operation, transparency and

effective working, between officers in different authorities with the objective of assisting households that may need to move away from their home area.

When we have to make a placement out of our area we will work to assist households in moving back to the home area and refer them back to local services.

All local authorities have a responsibility to undertake an annual rough sleeper count. The process is independently verified by Homeless Link to ensure the methodology is consistent on a national level. The count carried out in Medway in November 2016 found a total of 14 rough sleepers in Medway. Intelligence from partners, gathered via the Homelessness Forum and associated task groups, indicates that there are approximately 50 to 60 individuals that may have slept rough recently or are at risk of sleeping rough.

Intelligence from partner organisations suggests that there are people who have engaged with services at times and are long term rough sleepers and also people who are new to rough sleeping who may be less aware of the services available. We will provide information at key places including the TV screens in Globe Lane car park and in the Twydall hub regarding services for rough sleepers.

We will work with partner organisations to assess the feasibility of piloting the Housing First model in Medway. In this approach the rough sleeper is offered housing with no pre-conditions regarding engagement with other services. A case worker visits the person each day to offer support and referrals yet engagement is not a condition of the tenancy. There is evidence that this approach can work with those who have struggled to engage with traditional service models.

We will ensure that emerging trends and changes in the make up of those sleeping rough are a focus at the Homelessness Forum. This will include highlighting best practice, sharing intelligence and identifying funding opportunities not available to local authority bids. The Forum's Task and Finish group will review practical solutions to rough sleeping and look to establish opportunities for partnership work with existing members of the wider forum and agencies currently not involved.

We will seek feedback annually to refresh the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPEP) and we will work in partnership with the Homelessness Forum to explore options for working with the winter shelters currently provided by faith groups.

We will continue to explore options to fund an outreach service to identify rough sleepers and signpost them to support services.

We will continue to work with the Blue Light Group to identify and work with individuals who are resistant to change and frequent users of emergency services. Interventions will be determined on a case-by-case basis and support tailored around the specific needs of the individual.

Strategic Priority 4 – Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living

For many people who become homeless the provision of suitable accommodation is the only problem that needs to be addressed. However, many people can become homeless or threatened by homelessness due to a range of support needs. For example, this can be related to a mental or physical disability or a particular circumstance such as domestic violence, a past history of offending behaviour or drug and alcohol misuse. By working with our partners to provide targeted, specialist support, we endeavour to limit the number of vulnerable people who become homeless.

What did the Homelessness Review find?

A range of supported housing and floating support is provided for young people, households fleeing domestic abuse, people with sensory or physical disabilities, people with learning difficulties, ex-offenders and people with mental health issues.

Faith, voluntary and charitable organisations provide drop in services for vulnerable people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to help them seek employment, reduce social isolation, have a meal, have a shower, launder clothing and access a wide range of support services.

What is happening in Medway?

Medway Council directly commissions 246 units of supported housing through the Housing Related Support budget. These units include 93 rooms and flats specifically commissioned for homeless people. These services offer support planning, outreach and accommodation to single homeless people in the area. Additionally, Housing Benefit funds approximately 340 units of accommodation for vulnerable people to prevent them from becoming homeless through intensive housing management and tenancy support.

We ensure Housing Related Support commissioned services meet required standards through the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). This forms the basis of review visits to the services, interviews with people who use the service and staff, and a review of policies and procedures. Our contracts require improvement from meeting required standards to exceeding them within twelve months of contract award. This supports continuous improvement of service delivery and allows us to identify and share best practice.

It is important to ensure there are adequate move-on arrangements from supported housing providers to ensure the goal of independent living is attainable and that there is movement through schemes. As part of this work we will review move-on processes with local young persons' supported accommodation providers and also how the process of transition from children leaving care to living independently is being managed.

The council aims to work with organisations that provide services for vulnerable people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to support them to co-ordinate the services they offer to reduce duplication and address any areas of need.

We will work to ensure that local services provide realistic and appropriate options for people fleeing domestic abuse and promote a “safety paramount” approach across services through linking with our Domestic Abuse Forum. We will ensure housing is continually involved in the co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse through the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference and will undertake a review of the Sanctuary Scheme. We have received funding from the DCLG to pilot local domestic abuse support in general needs housing. This will allow us to set up six units of accommodation as a short term intervention as a potential alternative to people having to relocate from the local area.

A significant issue we will face is the proposed changes to how supported housing is funded. From April 2019, the maximum amount that will be paid for rent and service charge for any supported accommodation will be the Local Housing Allowance at the one bedroom flat rate. In February 2017 this was £110.67. This is lower than a significant number of current claims. Any difference between the amount currently claimed and this figure will be paid to the council as a ‘top up’ fund for distribution. The details of how this will operate in practice have not been communicated yet. We are continuing to monitor updates on this and the potential impact on our services.

Part 4 Case studies highlighting partner organisations

Partner organisations are vital to delivering real change for homeless people and preventing vulnerable people becoming homeless. Both commissioned and non commissioned supported housing providers deliver services in Medway that help adults with a range of support needs gain accommodation and prepare for living independently. Some organisations providing support supplied anonymised case studies to highlight the work they do in Medway.

Case study from organisation A

“H had previously been living with both his brother and his sister and their respective families for a number of years. He had never had accommodation of his own before. Due to his alcohol issues, and overcrowded living conditions, he was advised to look for alternative accommodation. H was informed of our service by Turning Point and applied for accommodation with organisation A in April 2015.

When H moved in he was assessed as having a high support need for alcohol use. He had been abusing alcohol for many years and he had recently engaged with support from Turning Point. He was suffering with some emotional issues following an operation to remove a blood clot from his brain in January 2015 which formed a result of a fall when intoxicated. H would be at risk if he fell again.

H began to progress almost immediately. He threw himself into training course after training course and volunteered for everything and anything. By now he was in recovery and he found he could progress if he was kept busy mentally and physically. He engaged whole heartedly with Turning Point and joined the air sports football team after receiving the OK from his GP as long as he did not head the ball. H has relapsed on a few occasions, usually for 2-3 weeks at a time, but each time he safely withdrew from alcohol and got back on track. During these times staff have supported him alongside Turning Point. Staff would meet regularly with H’s key worker at Turning Point so the support could be a joint effort.

H was registered with Medway Home Choice and re-banded to a ‘C’. It was clear after a while H was going to struggle to find any suitable accommodation. Staff and management at organisation A supported his application to mhs homes nomination. This also included the support from his key worker at Turning Point. In a short time H was offered accommodation with mhs homes and he moved out of organisation A’s services. Staff have continued to support him from a distance. He has painted and made his new home his own. He is extremely happy and he can start to live his life. H has attended a tenancy course since he moved in and is successfully learning to manage and maintain his tenancy and bills. H continues to maintain his accommodation and is eternally grateful to all those involved in his transition to independent living.”

Case study from organisation B

“XX has been well known to the Medway Towns for decades and has very much been a part of the rough sleeper community in Medway. During this time many services have worked with XX with mixed and limited success.

In 2014 XX approached organisation B as a homeless person with a wide range of needs and risks including substance misuse (both drugs, leading to overdoses and alcohol misuse leading to personal injuries), physical health (a wide range of substance misuse related illness and injuries) and very high levels of anti-social behaviour. Regularly XX would be found in public places heavily under the influence leading to members of the public calling emergency services. Often Police would attend initially as first on scene to find XX unable to walk or communicate effectively. This would then lead to paramedics attending, treating on scene and then taking XX to A&E.

XX is very vulnerable due to these needs and risks and has been assaulted on a number of occasions and is subject to an amount of predatory behaviour from others in the street community.

Over the months working with XX, organisation B where possible have tried to track the number of issues XX has been involved in. Including the amount or calls made to 999; attendance by the ambulance and attendance by the Police.

Organisation B initially recorded the following interactions between XX, their staff and statutory services:

June:

Ambulance called – 16
Taken to A&E – 12
Unsocial Behaviour – 12
Multiple organisation B staff – 9

July:

Ambulance called – 13
Taken to A&E – 10
Unsocial Behaviour – 33
Multiple organisation B staff – 24

The cost of this behaviour on statutory service in particular the impact on Paramedic and A&E is estimated to be around £5,935 per month based on the figure for two months above. Estimated upward for the year at over £71,000 to NHS service alone.

To continue to improve opportunities for XX organisation B engaged a number of services. These include:

- Substance Misuse Services
- Police
- GP

- Care Services
- Local Authority Financial Affairs
- Organisation B also increased its own staff interventions with XX.

Over the months that followed organisation B saw the impact of behaviour on statutory services decrease to the following:

August:

Ambulance called – 8
 Taken to A&E – 3
 Unsocial Behaviour – 22
 Multiple organisation B staff – 37

September:

Ambulance called – 10
 Taken to A&E – 1
 Unsocial Behaviour – 14
 Multiple organisation B staff – 27

October:

Ambulance called – 3
 Taken to A&E – 1
 Unsocial Behaviour – 9
 Multiple organisation B staff – 32

November:

Ambulance called – 3
 Taken to A&E – 1
 Unsocial Behaviour – 10
 Multiple organisation B staff – 17

In the last two months the cost of behaviour on statutory services in particular the impact on Paramedic and A&E is estimated to be around £977 per month. This represents a decrease of an estimated £5,000 per month for the NHS alone although this led to a financial increase to organisation B services.

We believe that this shows the beneficial impact of coordinated services and also the benefit and success possibilities that the organisation B services can have with highly complex people, with multiple needs and who have low outcome possibilities.

Furthermore, in January 2015, working in partnership with other key services, organisation B was successful in securing care/sheltered accommodation for XX. This service was out of the Medway area allowing XX the ability to break away from the network of individuals that contribute negative choices XX was making. The service is well suited to XX's needs and risk management and we feel confident that XX will continue to improve her lifestyle further.

There is of course the possibility and risk that XX's success so far does not continue to move in the direction it has been. But should it be the case that service has to stop organisation B will look to reopen its door at a later date if required."

Case study from organisation C

Organisation C provides refuges for women and their dependant children who are fleeing domestic abuse. The nine refuges across Kent are made up of self-contained units and shared accommodation properties. All refuges are staffed by our experienced Supported Housing Officers. In addition to our staff we have a wealth of professionals and volunteers who help support the service users in their journey to live safe independent lives.

Background; DF self referred to Swale refuge in August 2015 after fleeing the family home in July. She moved to Hackney in 2007, married and experienced 8 years of abuse from her husband. She felt isolated as she could only speak limited English. DF's husband was very controlling and prevented her from contacting family members and friends. She felt very vulnerable and dependent on him. DF was subject to emotional, verbal and physical abuse, her husband was regularly aggressive towards DF in front of the children which made them very scared and frightened. DF would regularly have to lock her and the children in a room to protect them from harm. There were physical incidents where DF's husband would beat DF with a spatula in the kitchen. DF's perpetrator has never physically assaulted the children, however there was an occasion where he tried to beat their son and DF managed to calm him down before he harmed their 4 year old son. The emotional effects on the children were evident.

Initial assessment; A Risk Assessment and Support Plan were completed to assess the level of need and risk.

Initially DF needed to register the children with a school, register the family with a local doctor and get help with budgeting. During her relationship she had been denied the opportunity to manage any finances, improve her English and make new friends.

DF's abusive relationship had a detrimental effect on her emotional wellbeing. DF was nervous of attending groups and DF decided on a one to one counselling programme with individual play therapy sessions for the children.

Although DF had concerns she was committed to ensuring that her children had contact with their father so discussed possible options for safe contact.

DF's main goal is for her and her children to live independently and to live free from harm and abuse. She hoped to have her own home that was in an area that was safe but close enough to friends and family for support.

Work undertaken; We wrote a letter and registration form for the local doctors and dentist and DF and the children were registered.

Together we contacted DWP and DF was awarded all entitled benefits. We supported DF to apply for Housing benefit. She had to pay a weekly service charge here. During her stay at the refuge she successfully managed all of her finances.

We helped DF register the children with a school and worked with the school's family liaison officer to create a safety plan and agreed actions to take should the children's father attend the school.

We made an application to the local adult education centre in the area to enrol DF on an English writing, reading and language course. DF enrolled in September 2015.

We arranged for Fresh Visions, a counselling service, to start counselling the following week within the scheme. We facilitated the play therapy for the children after school and both DF and the children attended sessions.

We helped DF contact MW Solicitor via the Domestic Abuse Forum to put child contact arrangements in place and to apply for divorce proceedings. The solicitors applied to the court with regards to putting in place child contact. The case went to court in May.

We made a homeless application to DF's chosen area. She was added to the home choice website where she was able to bid for properties for her family.

Safeguarding and Protection from abuse; We completed a CAADA- DASH risk assessment with DF. She scored fairly highly and as result her case was heard at a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). As a result of the MARAC risks were identified and the appropriate conditions were put in place. These included safeguards when DF attended court.

Diversity and Inclusion; DF was a committed Muslim and prayed several times a day. We spoke about her commitments to her faith and we respected that she needed time without disturbance to pray. We were able to get paperwork translated into Arabic. We gave her details on local mosques, and local supermarkets that provided Turkish ingredients.

Outcome; The multi agency partnership approach to this support has enable DF to achieve all of her support plan goals. She feels more confident overall and in particular with her English language skills. Her sense of self-worth and emotional strength has grown and developed. She is now stronger and well equipped to maintain a safe, happy, healthy independent life.

The children are much happier and more settled. They have grown into confident young people and have made friends at school and are achieving well academically.

We are currently waiting on divorce proceedings and arrangements for child contact. DF continues to bid for properties and is hoping to move on very soon.

Part 5 Resources

The delivery of the actions set out in the strategy will rely on the resources of the council and partner organisations.

Current joint working arrangements and information sharing will need to be maintained and further links created to ensure all partners are connected in ways relevant to their service. Making sure that agencies are engaged, the current profile of services are understood, and the remit of each organisation is clear to others working with homeless people and those threatened with homelessness, will be essential.

We will continue to identify areas where our provision could be strengthened, and look to identify where funding opportunities to support our work with homelessness may lie. This may take the form of bids by the local authority, or in supporting bids by our partner agencies/consortia. Our cross agency expertise will continue to support this activity.

The government has indicated it will allocate a countrywide total of £48 million new burdens funding towards extra services required under the Homelessness Reduction Bill. How much Medway will receive is yet to be determined, but it is certain that this will cause major changes in how we discharge our homelessness duties. This new burdens funding will only be provided in the first two years after the Homelessness Reduction Bill is enacted.

Part 6 Delivery and monitoring

The plan sets out the actions Medway Council and our partners, have agreed to take. Each action has a timescale and a measurable target or performance indicator to achieve. Any action will either be the responsibility of a sole agency, or several organisations or teams may jointly contribute towards an action.

As well as new actions identified, a number of actions and projects are already underway and will continue through all or part of the timescale of the plan. This is a live document, so actions may be amended in light of changing political, structural or operational requirements.

Housing Strategy Services will monitor progress on a 6 monthly basis and highlight any actions at risk of failing to meet deadlines. The Homelessness Forum and its Task and Finish Groups will also be involved in confirming progress against the action plan. A report on progress towards the plan, and any remedial measures required, will be discussed at the 6 monthly Forum meetings.

Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan 2017-2019

Strategic Priority 1. Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before the crisis point is reached

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
1.01	<p>Develop and agree, or review existing protocols with relevant partner agencies to ensure joined up services for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with mental health issues and homelessness • Providing advice for offenders due to be released from local prisons • Ensuring effective procedures for move on for young people leaving care • Families with dependent children who are found to be intentionally homeless • Homeless people being discharged from hospital • Young Persons Joint Housing Assessments • Households at risk of being evicted by Housing Associations 	<p>Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team, and relevant partners in NHS, local prisons, Children's Services, and Housing Associations</p>	<p>Protocols are agreed by relevant parties and reviewed annually</p>	<p>As fitting each protocol</p>	<p>High</p>
1.02	<p>Provide housing options advice to all eligible households, including those without a local connection,</p>	<p>Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team.</p>	<p>All eligible households are provided with meaningful advice on how to secure a home and a</p>	<p>December 2017</p>	<p>High</p>

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
	that are intentionally homeless or are at risk of homelessness within 56 days. Use relevant technology to assist in creating written personal housing action plans with households including a referral process from Housing Options to relevant services. Review the information given to single non priority households and ensure it is current, relevant and easy to read.		personal housing action plan. Referral process in place, and number of appropriate referrals monitored every six months. Consistent information provided for use at first points of contact including Kingsley House and our website		
1.03	Work with partners to prepare for the further roll out of Universal Credit including requirements for individuals to have ID and a bank account	DWP, Medway Council, Homelessness Forum and its Task and Finish Groups	Partner organisations signpost households to suitable sources of information on Universal Credit, obtaining ID documents and opening a bank account	February 2018	High
1.04	Use the Homeless Prevention Fund to facilitate the progressive shift from reactive to preventative work	Housing Options Team	Cost effective interventions are put in place to prevent a minimum of 550 households from becoming homeless per year	Ongoing, Monitor spend and performance annually	High
1.05	Review the Private Rented Sector Scheme's performance, in assisting households to secure accommodation in the private sector	Housing Solutions Team	A minimum of 125 households accept assistance from the private rented sector scheme	Monitor the number of households assisted by the scheme	High
1.06	Roll out the landlords' hotline	Housing Solutions	Review effectiveness and take	Annual review	High

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
	service to all landlords	Team	up of hotline after implementation, analyse whether evictions are prevented	following October 2017 implementation	
1.07	Refresh young people's homelessness prevention action plan – in line with nationwide best practice - with input from DCLG Youth Homelessness Advisor. Work in partnership with Children's Services to ensure that the additional needs of Care Leavers are addressed throughout. Utilise the Sufficiency Report from Children's Services in understanding the scope and input from commissioned supported accommodation.	Children's Services/Early Help/Family Support/Youth Services/Housing Options/Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Action plan produced including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and training on realities of youth homelessness including 'myth busting'. • Map out impact of welfare reforms on young people • Explore shared living options for young people. • Multi agency participation in panels • Review options around early intervention and mediation. • Evaluation of a 'one council' approach to youth homelessness. 	December 2017	Medium
1.08	In conjunction with the Homelessness Forum explore opportunities to provide a practical advice, and support one stop shop, for non priority households.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team. Homelessness Forum	Using examples of best practice, agree format and remit of one stop shop, and confirm budget and facilities required.	November 2018	Medium
1.09	Work with colleagues in DWP	Housing Benefit	All households affected by	Ongoing.	Medium

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
	and housing benefits team to identify households affected by the Implementation of Universal Credit and other welfare reforms, and provide targeted support and advice	DWP Housing Solutions Team	welfare reform are identified and offered support and advice	Annual data collection on number of households supported	
1.10	Signpost households to appropriate advice provision, ensuring defective Notice to Quit documents, served by landlords, are challenged	Commissioned advice providing organisation	Defective Notice to Quits are effectively challenged	Monitor take up and performance annually	Medium
1.11	Promote the Landlords Accreditation Scheme to increase landlord awareness	Private Sector Housing Team	Provide training for landlords four times per year. Monitor landlords and letting agents informed about the scheme and ensure new landlords and agents are identified and contacted.	Monitor yearly in April	Low
1.12	Review the information currently available online, rewrite as required to ensure easy to understand, and relevant to help households to seek accommodation independently where appropriate.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team and relevant Homelessness Forum task and finish groups	Medway Council's webpages for Housing Services are a useful source of information for residents, and organisations supporting homeless people	Monitor and seek feedback from stakeholders each April	Low
1.13	Agree content of briefings to partner organisations via the	Housing Strategy and Partnerships	A planned program of briefings via the Homelessness Forum is	April 2018	Low

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
	Homelessness Forum, so they can identify those who are homeless, or under threat of homelessness and how to refer to services	Team. Home choice/Housing Options Team. Homelessness Forum	agreed		
1.14	Promote the Tenant Accreditation Scheme, to provide information and support to tenants to find and maintain tenancies.	Private Sector Housing Team	Additional 10 tenants achieved accreditation, and 90 attended training each year	Monitor yearly in April	Low
1.15	Work in partnership with registered housing providers to support in-house tenancy sustainment services to their tenants, including benefit advice, addressing anti-social behaviour, finding employment and meaningful voluntary work, resolving neighbour disputes, referring to other support agencies	Registered Housing Providers and Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Vulnerable tenants receive appropriate advice and support to help them maintain their current tenancy. Number of evictions and abandonments from social housing providers in monitored to ensure impact of welfare benefit changes are minimised.	April each year review and report on emerging trends	Low
1.16	Facilitate the Landlords Forum twice a year to disseminate information from the Council to landlords, and share good practice. Provide information for landlords and agents on our circulation list	Private Sector Housing Team	Ensure effective working relationships between landlords and relevant sections of the council, and share relevant information	Ongoing. Monitor attendance yearly and seek stakeholder feedback on the forum's effectiveness.	Low

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
1.17	Refresh the collaborative working agreement between Strategic Housing, Adult Social Care and Public Health, to include specific joint working arrangements that contribute to the prevention of homelessness and improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people	Housing Strategy and Partnerships team and Public Health Team	Refresh the tripartite collaborative working agreement	December 2017	Low
1.18	Work with partners through MAPPA and MARAC to give advice on any statutory housing duties owed to an ex offender, and advise on their housing options	Safeguarding Lead	Housing advice given at MAPPA and MARAC meetings. 100% of MAPPA and MARAC meetings attended.	Ongoing	Low
1.19	Provide an accommodation advice leaflet and offer a place on tenancy ready group to all prisoners 12 weeks before release from HMP Rochester	NACRO	All prisoners are given written information on accommodation, and offered a place on the tenancy ready group before release	Begins June 2017	Low
1.20	Provide households in temporary accommodation, with a list of jobs in Medway provided by Job Centre Plus to help them access employment	Housing Solutions and Job Centre Plus	100% of working age households in temporary accommodation are provided with information on jobs available in Medway	September 2017 and ongoing	Low

Strategic Priority 2. Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
2.01	Agree a Homelessness Charter between statutory and voluntary organisations providing services to homeless people in Medway	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team, Homelessness Forum	A charter is signed up to by 100% of relevant organisations	April 2018	High
2.02	Carry out regular quality audits to assess and enhance the experience of customers using the Housing Solutions and Home Choice Team's services. Review a 5% sample of cases. Any learning relevant to the whole team to be shared with the team	Housing Solutions Team, Home Choice Team	Managers review a percentage of cases each month/quarter, and address matters as they arise	Ongoing as part of performance management	Medium
2.03	Develop short information packs to give information on the realities and costs of setting up a home to young people considering leaving home including changes in housing costs from Universal Credit rollout	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team, and Young Lives Foundation	Provide information online, and publicise this amongst partner agencies.	December 2017 to be reviewed annually	Medium
2.04	Provide information to each household in temporary	Temporary Housing Team, Housing	100% of households in temporary accommodation are	April 2018 Ongoing	Medium

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
	accommodation to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help them understand their tenancy responsibilities, • help them apply for relevant benefits • assist them to move on into settled accommodation show them the location and contact details of local GPs, Dentists and pharmacies	Solutions Team	given information on their tenancy responsibilities, benefit maximisation, how to move to settled accommodation and how to access local health services and intervention recorded	reviewed on an annual basis	
2.05	Collate knowledge from the Homelessness Forum to map services in Medway that support households who are, or are at risk of, homelessness. Invite partner organisations to provide short presentations on their work at the Forum and task and finish groups to facilitate signposting	Rough Sleeper Task and Finish group and Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Current information is shared across the Forum and relevant partners each year	Ongoing, six monthly	Medium
2.06	Provide information using leaflets and the public TV screens on location of frontline services to those found sleeping rough in Medway	Urban Rangers and Wardens, Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team,	Rough sleepers found by urban rangers or wardens are given information regarding frontline services. Information on the public TV screens is updated.	Ongoing Confirm updates to information every 6 months	Medium
2.07	Review current information on our website, and leaflets to ensure it is appropriately worded and provides sufficient detail to individuals threatened with homelessness, and	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Relevant information is provided in accessible formats	September 2017, reviewed annually by stakeholder survey	Low

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
	agencies signposting to services.				

Strategic Priority 3. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
3.01	Develop a case based approach to identify individual needs, and the services needs to provide support to reduce homelessness, and help people maintain accommodation	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team and Blue Light group	At least 10 vulnerable individuals are identified and offered a package of interventions annually	December 2017.	High
3.02	Liaise with the organisations providing Winter Shelters, to ensure they are able to provide appropriate signposting to housing advice and other services.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Organisations providing Winter Shelters are given information and support	November each year.	High
3.03	Work with developers and planners to provide 204 units of affordable housing, including larger homes, each year	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	204 Affordable housing units are built each year	Quarterly report and annual review in April each year	High
3.04	Identify tenants who under occupy their socially rented home, and provide targeted advice and support to enable them to move to a smaller home. Consider examples of use on incentives from	Home Choice Team	Percentage increase in number of households that under occupy homes, moving to smaller homes	Review number of households moving to a smaller home annually and use this to set following year target	Medium

	comparable successful local authorities				
3.05	Work with partner organisations to assess the feasibility of piloting a Housing First model in Medway, and provide a workable proposition for a pilot.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team Homelessness Forum	Feasibility assessed, including modelling and costing and briefing paper produced	December 2017	Medium
3.06	Review the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), seeking feedback from partners at the Homelessness Forum.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team and Homelessness Forum	Review carried out, any learning used to inform future SWEPs procedures in April, and refresh understanding of SWEP at subsequent Homelessness Forum	Annually in April and November	Medium
3.07	Deliver 10 rooms in shared housing to address affordability issues for 18-35 year olds	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	10 rooms in shared housing are provided	September 2018	Medium
3.08	Provide information to owners of long term empty homes, regarding businesses that help people rent or sell their property.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team and the Council Tax Team	To provide written information to owners of empty homes with their council tax bill	December 2017	Low
3.09	Analyse National Audit Office information on households being placed in Medway from outside area (London Boroughs and Kent Districts in particular).	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Levels of influx and emerging trends are understood on an annual basis. Feedback report to Directorate	March 2018 and annually.	

			Management Team and the Portfolio Holder.		
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Strategic Priority 4. Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living

Ref	Action	Resources	Target/Outcome	Timescale	Priority
4.01	Work with supported housing providers, private and social landlords to ensure pathways for people to move out of supported housing are identified	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team and supported housing providers	Ensure supported housing providers promote a range of options not limited to Home choice during monitoring meetings	December 2017 review move on outcomes annually	High
4.02	Carry out assessments including the Quality Assessment Framework to ensure all supported housing and floating support meets the satisfactory standards	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	QAF assessments and outcome reviews carried out annually	Annually	Medium
4.03	Commission floating support and supported housing to help vulnerable households with a range of housing matters, including developing independent living skills and tenancy sustainment	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Review effectiveness of services and carry out future planning for commissioning based on expected need across the authority	Review across the commissioning cycle to optimise use of Housing Related Support budget for 2018-19, recommissioning of all services.	Medium
4.04	Review the effectiveness of Sanctuary Scheme, in enabling households to remain in their home safe from domestic abuse	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	At least 160 eligible households annually are helped to remain in their home.	July 2017 and then annually	Medium

			Numbers and unit costs are understood.		
4.05	Review long term outcomes of move on from supported housing provision. Establish numbers successfully living independently without additional support or re-referral to supported housing.	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team	Understand what percentages of move on into social housing provision are sustained after 12-24 months. Initial review will allow target setting in subsequent years.	March 2018	Medium

Appendix 2

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.
Rough Sleepers	The numbers of people visible on the street are increasing. Rough sleepers, and begging, are having an impact on the High Streets in Medway.	Though the verified rough sleeper count found 14 people, the members of the Homelessness Forum, in conjunction with the Housing Strategy Team,

	<p>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>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>
Working with groups	The council needs to work with groups effectively to ensure efforts are not duplicated and that	The council works with a range of statutory, charity and voluntary sector organisations that

	rough sleepers are not enabled to continue to sleep rough by the help they receive.	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.

Homelessness Prevention Strategy Consultation for users of services

What you think is really important so we can be sure that our Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019 achieves what want it to. After you have read the strategy document please answer the following questions.

Your name (can leave blank if you want)

Part A: Please say whether you agree with each of our 4 priorities below.

1. Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before the crisis point is reached (doing things when someone is close to becoming homeless to try to stop it happening)

<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

2. Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead (give good information on housing so people can make decisions and plan ahead)

<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

3. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs (help people get the type of housing they need and make sure there is enough housing for those who need it)

<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments

4.Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living (make sure people with housing support needs can access services and support to help them continue to live independently)	
<input type="radio"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	
<input type="text"/>	
5. Are there any other things that you think we need to do? Is there anything you think that we should stop doing? Please tell us about it here;	
<input type="text"/>	
If you are happy for us to contact you to discuss your comments please leave your email address or phone number	
Email	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
All your comments will be recorded and discussed. The document may be changed if you tell us about something we hadn't thought of. When the final version is agreed it will be put onto our website and we will start working with organisations on what was agreed we would do.	

Diversity impact assessment

Appendix 4

TITLE <i>Name / description of the issue being assessed</i>	Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019
DATE <i>Date the DIA is completed</i>	14 June 2016
LEAD OFFICER <i>Name, title and dept of person responsible for carrying out the DIA.</i>	Helen Miller, Senior Housing Strategy and Partnerships Officer, Strategic Housing

1 Summary description of the proposed change

- *What is the change to policy / service / new project that is being proposed?*
- *How does it compare with the current situation?*

- Section 1 (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires that the authority publish a Homelessness Prevention Strategy based on the findings of the Homelessness Review. This strategy refreshes the previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2014-2016 and has the very similar key priorities of;

1. Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before crisis point is reached
2. Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead
3. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs
4. Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living

The action plan reflects the information provided in the Homelessness Review regarding levels of homelessness, reasons for homelessness and the social context of high housing costs and welfare reform.

2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment

- *Eg: Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user records etc.*
- *Eg: Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile*

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy used P1E returns and other data sources and to consider the households who are affected by homelessness.

- Age; 86% of those accepted as homeless between 2013-14 to 2015-16 are aged 44 years or younger however, the ONS mid year estimates for 2014 showed that in Medway just 59.5% of the population are aged 44 or younger. 35% were aged between 16-24 year with 4% being 16-

Diversity impact assessment

17 year olds. This indicates that younger people are more likely to present as homeless and so the strategy will be more likely to have an impact on younger people than people 45 and older.

- **Disability;** of the 418 applicants found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need in 2015-16 13% were households with a person with a physical or mental disability or mental illness. In the 2011 census 16.4% of people self identified as having a long term limiting illness, however not all of these would be considered to be physically or mentally disabled or having a mental illness under the homelessness legislation so this may not be comparing like with like. However, the homelessness legislation does consider that some physical or mental disabilities or mental illness could make an applicant more vulnerable and makes provision for this.
- **Sex;** of the 418 applicants found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need 7.9% were households included a pregnant woman with no dependent children and 72% included dependent children. In the last three years in Medway 100% of households fleeing domestic violence and seeking support from the Council were headed by a woman. The homelessness legislation is likely to find more women than men will be considered in priority need than men and so will receive a higher level of support.
- **Ethnicity;** Of the households on who a homeless decision was made in 2013-14 to 2015-16 79.6% were white, 6.4% were black, 2.8% were Asian, 2.2% were mixed race, 1.6% were other and 7.4% did not state their ethnicity. In 2011 10.4% of the Medway population was Black and Minority Ethnic and that proportion had increased from 5.4% in 2001 and the proportion may have risen further since then. As such the proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic households where a decision was made on homelessness was a little higher than that found in the Medway population.

3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?

Is it likely to :

- *Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups?*
- *Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups?*
- *Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't?*

(insert ✓ in one or more boxes)

Protected characteristic groups	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Age		✓	
Disability		✓	

Diversity impact assessment

Gender reassignment			
Marriage/civil partnership			
Pregnancy/maternity		✓	
Race			
Religion/belief			
Sex		✓	
Sexual orientation			
Other (eg low income groups)			

4 Summary of the likely impacts

- *Who will be affected?*
- *How will they be affected?*

Statutory homelessness is where local authorities have determined a household as homeless within the terms of the homelessness legislation. Where they are found to be in priority need and not intentionally homeless, the local authorities will have a duty to offer accommodation. Those in priority need can include households with dependent children, pregnant women and adults who are assessed as vulnerable. The legal provisions are contained in the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002. The council must follow the legislation and relevant guidance when carrying out housing authority functions.

Age; All households including a dependent child will be considered to be in priority need. People aged 16-17, and care leavers up to the age of 21, are considered vulnerable and will be in priority need when homeless. Those aged 16-17 will attend a joint assessment with housing and social care in accordance with legislation and guidance.

Disability; People with a disability are more likely to be considered vulnerable when homeless and the legislation and guidance requires the council to give due regard to their disability when regarding whether they would be in priority need.

Pregnancy/maternity/sex; It is likely that more women than men will be helped as the legislation and guidance recognises pregnant women as vulnerable and in priority need when homeless. Households including dependant children are considered vulnerable and women are more likely than men to be single

Diversity impact assessment

parents.

It is likely that more women than men will be helped as the legislation and guidance recognises those fleeing domestic violence as vulnerable and in priority need when homeless.

5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

- *Are there alternative providers?*
- *What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?*
- *Can demand for services be managed differently?*

Single people and childless couples more likely to be assessed as non priority and only owed advice and support through the legislation. The action plan addresses supports non priority households by;

- ensuring they are given full support to prevent homelessness,
- the provision of an updated homebond scheme, including for renting rooms, to help them find new accommodation
- ensuring they are able to access advice and support from Kingsley House and non statutory organisations
- recognising the need for a range of accommodation, including smaller homes, in the Local Plan
- providing supported housing to help them prepare for independent living
- activities to help rough sleepers access services

6 Action plan

- *Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence*

Action	Lead	Deadline or review date
We will consult with a wide range of partner organisations on the strategy and action plan and use the feedback to amend the strategy as needed	Helen Miller	April 2017
We will consult with those who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness by seeking the views of tenants in supported housing and use the feedback to amend the strategy as needed	Helen Miller	April 2017

Diversity impact assessment

7 Recommendation

The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be:

- to proceed with the change, implementing the Action Plan if appropriate
- consider alternatives
- gather further evidence

If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.

A consultation was held in March and April 2017. Many organisations were contacted to inform them of the consultation including organisations representing ethnic minorities, women, young people, older people and disabled people. Responses from service users were sought by visiting supported housing and sending a shorter version of the strategy and survey to supported housing providers. The consultation received 15 responses from service users, 10 from members of the public and 10 from organisations. The responses did not highlight any new groups likely to experience adverse impacts from the strategy. Responses were received from men and women of all age groups. The majority described their ethnic origin as White - English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British, with a small number of responses from people describing themselves as Black / Black British – Caribbean, Asian, and other mixed / multiple ethnic background with some choosing not to give that information.

The responses supported the strategic priorities and some suggested additional items to be considered. After careful consideration an additional action was included around bringing empty homes back into use.

In the meantime the Homelessness Reduction Bill has been enacted. This strategy would be used until the guidance is released and a subsequent strategy is drafted.

The recommendation is for this strategy to be used.

8 Authorisation

The authorising officer is consenting that:

- the recommendation can be implemented
- sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned
- the Action Plan will be incorporated into the relevant Service Plan and monitored

Assistant Director

Date

Contact your Performance and Intelligence hub for advice on completing this assessment

RCC:	phone 2443	email: annamarie.lawrence@medway.gov.uk
C&A: (Children's Social Care)	contact your normal P&I contact	
C&A (all other areas):	phone 4013	email: chrismckenzie@medway.gov.uk
BSD:	phone 2472/1490	email: corppi@medway.gov.uk
PH:	phone 2636	email: david.whiting@medway.gov.uk

Send completed assessment to the Corporate Performance & Intelligence Hub (CPI) for web publication (corppi@medway.gov.uk)