

### Homelessness and rough sleeper strategy 2019-2024

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19 was agreed by Cabinet in August 2017, progress has been monitored and many successes have been achieved. This strategy was written to address homelessness in Medway whilst the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was coming into force and the guidance was being released. We carried out a Homelessness Review in autumn 2018 and this strategy is based upon its findings.
- 1.2 The number of households who have sought advice regarding homelessness and the number of people found sleeping rough has increased nationally and locally since 2017.
- 1.3 Households are considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy which is accessible to them and where it is reasonable for them to continue to live. This includes households becoming homeless if their landlord follows the legal procedures to evict them, if they are required to leave by others in the household, or if they can't use their home due to disability or are fleeing abuse or violence. Homelessness also includes the 'hidden' homeless, including people who are sofa surfing or sleeping in vehicles.
- 1.4 Homelessness is driven by a complex web of interacting factors. These include poverty and may also be driven by the high cost of renting or buying a home, the freeze on welfare benefits, the roll out of Universal Credit, the benefit cap and individual factors including mental and physical ill health, support needs and substance misuse. Family and other relationships which support people may be able to prevent homelessness, or prevent it for some time. Care leavers and those leaving prison are more vulnerable to homelessness.
- 1.5 It is easy to think of rough sleepers when we think of homelessness, but rough sleepers make up a small minority of homeless households. Rough sleeping is not a lifestyle choice. People slide into rough sleeping due to challenges they are unable to address at that time, including relationship breakdown, unmet mental or physical health problems and drug or alcohol problems. These complex needs can make it difficult to help a rough sleeper off the streets and they may have support needs as well as needing housing. It is important to remember that most rough sleepers do not beg and some beggars do have accommodation.
- 1.6 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 extended the duty for Medway Council to work with households at risk of homelessness to prevent homelessness and also to relieve homelessness and to create a personalised housing plan to help each household find settled accommodation. The government released a Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities> The Government also released The Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy> which sets out the government's vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. This includes the Rough Sleeper Initiative and Medway Council was successful in bidding for funding and our Rough Sleeper Initiative has been running since July 2018.

1.7 This strategy has regard to the changes in legislation and guidance. These include a requirement in the Rough Sleeper Strategy to have an annual action plan and call the strategy the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. It is also shaped by feedback from the engagement event in October 2018 where a wide range of partner organisations told us what was working well, what the challenges are and actions needed to address those challenges.

1.8 This led us to identifying five broad themes to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in Medway;

- Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness
- Identifying households at risk of homelessness early
- Intervening before homelessness occurs
- Preventing recurring homelessness
- Working with partner agencies

1.9 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy has due regard to other relevant strategies.

1.10 The Council Plan 2016-17 to 2020-21 sets out how we will provide the best possible services for our residents, our priorities and ways of working.

The Council Plan can be found here

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200138/your\\_council/342/the\\_council\\_plan/1](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200138/your_council/342/the_council_plan/1)

1.11 The Allocations Policy has been reviewed, a public consultation has been carried out, and it will go through the political processes with a view to being approved in autumn 2019. Proposed changes include allowing two care leavers to apply for a two bed home together, and right to move that supports current social housing tenants moving home to take up employment.

## **2 Homelessness Review 2018**

- 2.1 The Homelessness Review was carried out late in 2018 and included collecting data and evidence and talking with organisations delivering homelessness related services. It considered the data for statutory homelessness, the use of temporary accommodation, rough sleeping and sofa surfing. It considered the current services, the accommodation and support provided by Medway Council and partner organisations, gaps in provision and suggested some actions needed in this strategy. Data collection methods changed when the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced in 2018 and the 2018-19 data has been used to inform this section. Key points include;
- 2.2 The local housing allowance, awarded as housing benefit or as part of universal credit, is lower than the average private sector rent. This shortfall must be paid by the tenant to avoid falling behind on their rent. Some landlords do not rent to households in receipt of benefits due to fears they could fall behind on their rent. The council cannot discharge its main homelessness duty unless the new accommodation will be affordable for that household and the high private sector rents present a barrier.
- 2.3 The number of households seeking help in 2018-19 was 16% more than in previous years. However, due to increases in homelessness prevention work, the number of households found to be homeless has decreased from a peak in 2014-15.
- 2.4 The most common reason for a household to become homeless in Medway in 2017-18 was the termination of their tenancy, closely followed by parents no longer being willing to accommodate. However, from April 2018 this has changed to more households being asked to leave by family and friends followed by termination of their tenancy, following the national trend.
- 2.5 By far the most common reason for being in priority need was having dependent children, followed by having a mental health or disability issue, pregnancy or a physical disability. Over 85% of households accepted as homeless are under 45 years old.
- 2.6 The number of cases of homelessness prevented or relieved has increased since the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced with the number of successes increasing significantly over the course of the year. In 2018-19 over 250 households were helped to remain in their current accommodation and 200 were helped find alternative accommodation. In the same year over 150 households' homelessness was relieved by securing them accommodation for at least 6 months.
- 2.7 Medway has a low number of affordable rented homes. From April 2013 to March 2018, 3129 new homes have been built in Medway with 23% being affordable rented or shared ownership. The council continues to work with partners to provide affordable housing and aims to support 204 new affordable homes to be provided each year. Demand for socially rented homes is high and the Tenancy

Strategy 2018 encourages social landlords to use fixed term tenancies to ensure homes are let to those in current housing need.

2.8 In November 2018 the official rough sleeper count found 19 people sleeping rough. However, this is a snapshot of one night and the council and partner organisations recognise the number of people at risk of sleeping rough is 50-70. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government awarded Medway Council just over 1.1 million pounds to spend between July 2018 and March 2020 to support rough sleepers. Outcomes include helping 65 rough sleepers into accommodation and to access existing services including mental health services.

2.9 Many statutory and voluntary organisations provide housing related support, advice, and food to homeless people and rough sleepers. Voluntary sector organisations can be responsive so the services offered can change frequently and we produce a leaflet to show what is available. The Homelessness Forum aims to encourage these organisations to co-operate with each other and share good practice.

2.10 The full Homelessness Review will be available online at <https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/200134/housing> and provides the direction for addressing homelessness and rough sleeping in Medway.

### **3 Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019-24**

3.1 The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19 was written to improve services whilst the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force in 2018 and the government guidance was released.

3.2 Using the findings of the Homelessness Review, the partner engagement event in October 2018, the guidance provided by the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities and the government's Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018 we have identified five themes for the most effective interventions;

- **Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness**
- **Identifying households at risk of homelessness early**
- **Intervening before homelessness occurs**
- **Preventing recurring homelessness**
- **Working with partner agencies**

3.3 An engagement event was held with a wide range of partner organisations in October 2018. This identified what was working well, the challenges and areas to address and actions to complete going forward. We asked our Citizens' Panel about homelessness and rough sleeping and this has informed how we will share information about services and ways to access them.

3.4 This strategy was written in spring 2019 and we ran the consultation from July to September to seek feedback from organisations, members of the public and service users. The feedback received was used to make any changes needed to the year 1 action plan.

### **4 Delivering and Monitoring**

4.1 The action plan will set out the actions Medway Council, and our partner organisations, have agreed to take to work towards the five aims. 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.

4.2 The Strategic Housing Service of Medway Council will monitor progress every three months, celebrate successes and highlight any actions at risk of failing to meet deadlines and ways to ensure progress is made. We will report of progress to the Homelessness Forum each year.

4.3 A new action plan will be written each year to ensure the strategy remains relevant and addresses current needs.

### **Theme 1; Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness**

1.1 The Housing Options service at Kingsley House, Gillingham, provides free information and advice to all households. Comprehensive general information,

and information for specific vulnerable groups, is also available on our website. We are piloting a drop in service one day a week at The Hub @411 in Chatham aimed at providing homeless services to single people and couples without children.

1.2 However, members of the public who have not experienced homelessness are unlikely to know where to seek advice and information to prevent homelessness. The Citizens' Panel indicated that residents would like information about homeless services to be provided in Medway Matters, on our website, via community hubs and libraries and via our social media and we will ensure this happens. We have been taking action to improve awareness of our homelessness service and will create a communications plan to address this.

1.3 Residents may mention concerns over losing their home whilst at other services discussing other issues. It is important that partner agencies are aware that homeless services are provided at Kingsley House and feel comfortable to signpost residents to those services.

1.4 It is possible that some people may struggle to attend or phone Kingsley House during opening hours and we will review the ways that residents can make initial contact with our services.

1.5 Working age households without a person in employment can struggle to afford their housing costs. Employment advice and support to complete CVs and application forms is available from Jobcentre Plus, the Employment Medway Advice Centre, The Hub, the Salvation Army and Christians Against Poverty. The Hub and the Salvation Army provide many other types of support including food, access to toilets and washing facilities and help with literacy which help a person become ready to seek employment.

1.6 To address our aim to provide advice and information to prevent homelessness we will;

- Provide information to the public on where to seek advice on homelessness
- Ensure the members of the Homelessness Forum know how to signpost their clients
- Continue to provide useful information on homelessness on our website
- Regularly update the leaflet of services for homeless people

## **Theme 2; Identifying households at risk of homelessness early**

- 2.1 Research indicates that poverty, particularly childhood poverty, increases a person's likelihood of experiencing homelessness. This can be compounded by social factors including low wages, high rents and lack of social housing. These interact with personal factors including poor physical or mental health, experiencing domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, no social support network and difficulties in seeking help. We will continue to explore how to analyse data to identify households at risk of homelessness with the aim of helping vulnerable households earlier.
- 2.2 The government has placed a duty to refer on prisons, youth offenders institutions, secure training centres, secure colleges, youth offending team, probation services (including Community Rehabilitations Companies), Jobcentres, social services, emergency departments, urgent care treatment centres and hospitals for their inpatients to notify Medway Council when they become aware of a household that is, or may become, homeless. They must have the household's permission to send their details to the Council. Medway Council has worked with all these organisations to explain the duty and provided a link on the website for this purpose [https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200151/housing\\_advice/630/helping\\_the\\_homeless/3](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200151/housing_advice/630/helping_the_homeless/3) . We are flexible and some organisations do not use the website and refer in via other means. The homeless services contact every household referred to offer assistance to help prevent the household from becoming homeless or to relieve their homelessness if they have already lost their home.
- 2.3 It is likely that organisations that are not listed above also become aware that a household is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They are encouraged to signpost clients to the service and can share the information available online [https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200151/housing\\_advice/82/at\\_risk\\_of\\_homelessness/2](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200151/housing_advice/82/at_risk_of_homelessness/2)
- 2.4 The domestic abuse service in Medway supports those experiencing or fleeing domestic abuse with a range of solutions including the Sanctuary Scheme to help survivors remain in their home more safely and also to help them find a refuge out of the area if needed. Medway Council provides domestic abuse refuges and has arrangements with other refuges to accept Medway residents needing to leave the area.
- 2.5 Medway Council provides a floating support service to help vulnerable households maintain their accommodation. Clients may self-refer or be referred to the service.
- 2.6 The gap between the local housing allowance and private sector rents is particularly large for single people under 35 who rent a room in a shared house. The freeze on local housing allowance runs from 2016 to 2020 and we do not know what will happen in 2020. We will lobby the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure they are aware of the difficulties the large gap between the local housing allowance and private rents causes vulnerable residents in Medway. To address the issue the council is exploring options to compete with the private sector to provide affordable housing that is not social housing.

2.7 St Mungo's Stop the Scandal: an investigation into mental health and rough sleeping, released in 2016 found that 89% of those who became homeless said they had mental ill health before they became homeless.

2.8 Anti-social behaviour and also hoarding can be indicators of a mental health concern. Professionals seeing anti-social behaviour or hoarding can call a professionals meeting where the client's needs can be discussed and an action plan to support them created. This will help vulnerable clients gain support and prevent homelessness.

2.9 To address our aim to identify households at risk of homelessness early we will:

- Provide training for frontline staff and partner agencies on homelessness, sofa surfing and rough sleeping
- Plan ways to provide affordable rooms for those under 35
- Consider mental health needs when dealing with anti-social behaviour



### **Theme 3; Intervening before homelessness occurs**

- 3.1 Since the Homelessness Reduction Act was enacted more households have presented for advice and we have prevented and relieved more cases of homelessness than in previous years. This work has helped prevent households moving into temporary accommodation has kept the numbers of households in temporary accommodation stable at a time when many councils are seeing significant increases. To help us achieve this we have employed 5 more staff in the homelessness service and improved our database. We received £459,315 new burdens funding from 2017-18 to 2019-20 and the funding will end in March 2020. However, we anticipate that the numbers of households requiring assistance will continue to increase and we will review resourcing for our homelessness work and ensure a suitable service is provided.
- 3.2 Many ex-offenders struggle to find accommodation when leaving prison. Approximately 30% of rough sleepers using the winter shelters in Medway in winter 2018-19 were ex-offenders. Some lacked ID documents which presented a barrier to claiming benefit, getting a job or beginning a tenancy. We liaise with JobCentre Plus and the Community Rehabilitation Company to help these clients obtain ID to remove the barrier.
- 3.3 From April 2019 the Community Rehabilitation Company's "Through The Gate" services are clarified with the outcomes of helping ex-offenders obtain and maintain safe, settled accommodation, and to increase their ability to obtain and maintain such accommodation. This will include work to identify and discuss housing needs, provide relevant advice on their housing options, complete housing referrals and help with applications. It also supports with opening a bank account, obtaining ID documents and fulfilling their duty to refer to the homelessness services. However, the government has recently announced that Community Rehabilitation Companies will be brought back under the control of the National Probation Service by December 2020. Medway Council commits to working with all relevant agencies to help them assist ex-offenders find and maintain suitable accommodation on release.
- 3.4 Medway Council has been awarded funds with Canterbury City Council, Thanet District Council and Maidstone Borough Council to provide greater support to people leaving prison for one year. This £200,000 contract will be managed by Canterbury City Council with the aim of reducing the number of people being released from Kent Prisons who then immediately become rough sleepers.
- 3.5 Jobcentre Plus's Prison Work Coaches work with offenders in the weeks before their release to help them prepare for claiming Universal Credit on release and to book them an appointment very close to release to enable them to begin their claim swiftly.
- 3.6 Households with no recourse to public funds are at high risk of homelessness and destitution because they cannot access mainstream housing, welfare benefits, and for some, employment. It is likely some of these households will not disclose their status due to fear of deportation or lack of language skills. Some will have entered the country legally with a valid visa knowing they would have no

recourse to public funds. Others will lack documents as they entered the country without a visa or stayed after the expiry of their visa. Some may have no documents due to having been trafficked into the country.

- 3.7 Medway Council is trialling a pilot to help single people and childless couples to have accommodation while they take steps to organise their paperwork to enable them to access services. A presentation was given at the Homelessness Forum to help members understand trafficking and how homeless people may be targeted.
- 3.8 Medway Council's Leaving Care Team supports people from the age of 16 to help them plan their move from leaving care into independent living. From April 2019 young people leaving care have a personal advisor until at least the age of 25. They will have a personal pathway plan, which includes a needs assessment, a focus on the young persons' accommodation needs and the suitability of their accommodation, which is reviewed at least every six months. Medway Council has workers who have specialist support areas including domestic abuse, young people with disabilities, young people who are not in education, employment or training and young people in custody.
- 3.9 Occasionally Medway Council's private sector housing team may find a home with such severe safety concerns that they have to displace tenants for their own safety. When this occurs they will contact the homelessness service so they can help the households find alternative accommodation.
- 3.10 When a social landlord is considering evicting a tenant they will inform the homelessness services who will work with the landlord and tenant with an aim to preventing homelessness.
- 3.11 Private landlords have said they find the CallB4U serve hotline helpful. It is dedicated to working with landlords and tenants to solve problems that could lead to a household being evicted and so prevent homelessness.
- 3.12 Medway Council's private rented access scheme has been very successful in helping homeless households move into homes in the private rented sector. It ensures the homes are affordable, safe and have the required safety certificates. It can provide a rent deposit and rent in advance and helps the household apply for housing benefit or universal credit if needed.
- 3.13 Many young people present as homeless when asked to leave by their family. The young person's homeless preventions service has been running for some months and its effectiveness in preventing homelessness will be reviewed.

3.14 To address the aim to intervene before homelessness occurs we will

- Work with partners to provide extra support for ex-offenders to help them find and maintain accommodation
- Provide materials for people who struggle to budget
- Monitor the effectiveness of support for those leaving care in preventing homelessness
- Review resourcing for our homelessness service
- Work with partners to support those with no recourse to public funds to gain ID documents, etc. to be able to seek work and accommodation

## **Theme 4; Preventing recurring homelessness**

4.1 When considering the households that have approached our homelessness service more than once we found that common factors are;

- Younger clients who have been evicted from supported accommodation due to their behaviour
- Households being evicted from privately rented homes due to not paying the full rent due to budgeting or change of circumstance leading to benefit concerns, benefit cap, loss of benefit or loss of employment
- Individuals who sofa surf so have no fixed abode and move between prison, accommodation and hospital and are not in priority need.
- Individuals asked to leave by family or friends
- Rough sleepers, many of whom have often lost their accommodation more than once due to their complex range of needs

4.2 The homelessness service encourages supported accommodation providers to tell them if they are planning to evict someone, and some do, but they are not under a legal duty to do so.

4.3 Many households do struggle to pay private sector rents. They can be helped to do this by improving their budgeting skills and encouraging them to recognise outgoings which must be prioritised. Households are encouraged to inform Jobcentre Plus of any changes of circumstance as early as possible so any problems can be addressed swiftly.

4.4 The local housing allowance does not cover the whole rent for most households in the private sector and the gap is very noticeable for people renting a room. Many single people, including sofa surfers, would benefit from more houses let as rooms at a rent closer to the local housing allowance and we will review what help could be provided.

4.5 Following a successful bid, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government awarded Medway Council just over 1.1 million pounds to spend between July 2018 and March 2020 on specified activities to support rough sleepers and help them move into accommodation. Activities include:

- an assertive outreach team that seeks rough sleepers, verifies whether they are sleeping rough and helps them engage with services
- a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator who meets weekly with partner organisations to create a plan for each rough sleeper including helping them move into accommodation, allocates resources and maintains a database of all rough sleepers in Medway
- an extra 6-8 clients into the Medway Council's Housing First pilot scheme
- emergency accommodation for rough sleepers whilst seeking other accommodation,
- changing 11 units of supported accommodation places to meet the needs of rough sleepers with higher levels of support need,

- a mental health worker to assess and support rough sleepers and help them access mental health and social care services, and
- private sector brokerage worker to support homeless people to find accommodation, provide a rent deposit, set up a benefit claim and buy essential furniture and household items for unfurnished accommodation

4.6 The Rough Sleeper Initiative has helped more than 65 rough sleepers off the streets. Many have moved into supported accommodation, some into the Housing First scheme, others have returned to their local area. It works very closely with partner organisations including One Big Family, the Medway Night Shelter, the Homeless Emergency Winter Refuge, AMAT, Riverside, Pathways and Caring Hands. These partner organisations have been essential to getting the service running quickly and helping to form working relationships with the rough sleepers.

4.7 Medway Council does not yet know whether the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government will continue to award money for activities to support helping rough sleepers from April 2020, however, we shall lobby government to continue funding. We will work with partners to determine how to provide meaningful services to rough sleepers should the funding end, reduce or remain.

4.8 A Cold Weather Fund is provided by the Ministry to provide basic accommodation from November to March for rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds. We provide support to help the occupants apply for identity documents and a bank account to enable them to gain employment or apply for benefits.

4.9 Organisations and members of the public can tell the Rough Sleeper service about a rough sleeper by email, phone or online at <https://www.medway.gov.uk/xfp/form/183>. If the outreach team are not already aware of the rough sleeper they will go out to make contact. Voluntary services have supported the outreach team by allowing them to attend their soup kitchen, night shelter or day centre.

4.10 Medway Night Shelters and the Homelessness Emergency Winter Refuge play an important role in helping rough sleepers and sofa surfers into accommodation. They work with partners including the homelessness service, the outreach team and supported housing providers to help rough sleepers find accommodation and address any difficulties as they arise so as to maintain the tenancy.

4.11 The Somewhere Safe to Stay service began in February 2019. It is staffed 24 hours a day to assess rough sleepers referred by the Rough Sleeper Initiative to identify their support needs and create a housing plan. It is hoped that many will be made an offer of suitable accommodation soon after using this service.

4.12 Medway Council commissions 205 units of supported accommodation for single homeless people, young people and ex-offenders to help them learn how to live independently. The homelessness service assigns the priority to each applicant and supported housing providers offer accommodation to those in highest need

first. We assess these services using the Quality Assessment Framework which includes visiting the service, interviewing staff and service users and reviewing their procedures and policies. Some clients accessing supported accommodation will have experienced trauma and would benefit from a trauma informed care approach which will be considered when supported housing is re-commissioned. Other organisations provide supported accommodation in Medway to help prevent them from becoming homeless through intensive housing management and tenancy support.

- 4.13 Many clients struggle to find affordable accommodation in the private sector when they are ready to leave supported accommodation. These clients are not homeless and so not currently eligible for help from the private rented sector access scheme. We will review eligibility for the scheme and determine whether it would be cost effective to extend it to those leaving supported accommodation. Supported housing providers work with clients to create a move on plan.
- 4.14 Our Floating Support service supports vulnerable people, including rough sleepers, to find or maintain accommodation. Clients can self-refer or be referred by organisations and can receive support for up to two years. Support can include help to apply for benefits, access services, learn how to budget and use the banks, support for form social networks. The service also provides a drop in session at Kingsley House in Gillingham and another at Caring Hands in Chatham.
- 4.15 Many homeless households struggle to maintain contact with their GP and dentist and may not keep them informed of changes of address which can lead to missed appointments. The Department of Health and Social Care found text reminders reduced the number of appointments missed by the general population. Rough sleepers have less structure available to remind them of health appointments and One Big Family are willing to remind them of and accompany them to appointments if asked. An MCH nurse provides healthcare to rough sleepers on a drop in basis on Thursdays at Caring Hands. They will also help rough sleepers to register with a GP. The floating support service helps households in temporary accommodation inform their health professionals of their current address. Walk in GP clinics can be simpler to access than those requiring appointments. Medway Council is working with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group to identify ways to make the health services more accessible.
- 4.16 People who misuse drugs or alcohol are at higher risk of homelessness or rough sleeping. Treatment services are provided by Open Road and Turning Point in Medway but many people are not accessing services. The personal housing plans created in the homelessness service and the rough sleeper initiative both signpost people to these services. The rough sleeper outreach team, and some partner organisations, help rough sleepers who wish to attend drug and alcohol services to do so.
- 4.17 Research from St Mungo's and Porchlight show that women rough sleepers are likely to have more complex needs and may find existing services do not meet their needs. It suggests women may be more likely to access women only

services. We will continue to monitor the emerging research and respond appropriately.

- 4.18 Medway Council provides a female specialist support worker for female rough sleepers as part of the Rough Sleeper Initiative. This worker engages with women who sleep rough and has been very effective in helping them move into accommodation. The worker continues to support women after they are accommodated to help them maintain their tenancy.
- 4.19 Though most rough sleepers are single some are couples. Research is emerging on how to meet the needs of rough sleeper couples and both members of the couples. Currently many supported accommodation providers are reluctant to accommodate couples and do not have suitable accommodation. Many couples do not split to allow one person to enter accommodation and this lack of provision for couples may extend the length of time people are sleeping rough.
- 4.20 Hepatitis C is a virus that can infect and damage the liver. It is normally spread by blood to blood contact, though can be spread through unprotected sex, and is treatable. The Hepatitis C Trust are commissioned to locate and support people into treatment for Hepatitis C. They are working with partner organisations that work with rough sleepers and this has enabled them to test and begin treatment for some vulnerable adults.
- 4.21 The provision of temporary accommodation cannot prevent homelessness but it is needed to provide a temporary home for homeless households in priority need whilst a settled home is sought. Medway Council has an excellent track record in providing this accommodation within Medway, which reduces disruption to education or employment, and will continue to research ways to diversify its provision. Medway Council currently use around 350 properties, the majority being paid for nightly, 60 from our own socially rented stock, a small number from a housing association and a small number that are corporately owned. We will work to move away from the reliance on nightly paid accommodation and find more long leases.
- 4.22 The Housing service takes an active role in Safeguarding Week each year. We use this opportunity to highlight the housing role to professionals working in social care, health care and emergency services. We share relevant points with partner organisations via the Homelessness Forum.
- 4.23 Some rough sleepers have social care needs. When the rough sleeper initiative comes into contact with a person it believes has a social care need it will make a referral to the Adult Social Care team and provide assistance in locating the person and agreeing a suitable venue for an assessment. A safeguarding adults review will be carried out if a rough sleeper dies or is seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect.

4.24 To help use to prevent recurring homelessness we will:

- Review the supported accommodation we provide and support to leave it
- Review services provided by the Rough Sleeper Initiative and ways forward from April 2020
- Ensure we use our agreements with service providers to ensure good services and create new agreements as needed.



## **Theme 5; Working with partner agencies**

- 5.1 Medway's Homelessness Forum is vibrant and inclusive, bringing statutory and voluntary organisations together to learn, share information and co-operate. Its task and finish groups focus on ex-offenders and rough sleepers and meet six times a year. It is informed by a forum of rough sleepers who meet to identify their concerns and a forum for women who sleep rough or have recently slept rough. The feedback is useful to find out what matters to people sleeping rough and identify and dispel myths. We have a Homelessness Charter which shows our direction and ways of working.
- 5.2 Many council departments and partner organisations can play a part in preventing homelessness. This can be via the duty to refer placed on some organisations, being aware of and signposting to homelessness services, working directly with the homelessness services to prevent or relieve homelessness or making your services accessible to those who are homeless.
- 5.3 The Blue Light Project is a multi-agency group that meets monthly to identify individuals that use the blue light services frequently due to heavy alcohol consumption or rough sleepers that are prominent on the street scene. It creates a simple plan, often involving several agencies, to help the individual to access services and reduce behaviours likely to harm health and monitors the progress of the plans. This way of working is highly effective and has resulted in some vulnerable adults being helped to access a range of services and move into accommodation.
- 5.4 The Community Safety Partnership works with a range of partner organisations to reduce crime and address social isolation and will sometimes discuss the street scene of the town centres in Medway and rough sleeping and begging.
- 5.5 The majority of rough sleepers do not beg and some beggars do have accommodation. The Citizens Panel indicated that many local people feel sympathy for rough sleepers and will sometimes give something, perhaps food, drink or money. It is likely that some members of the public believe that all beggars are also sleeping rough.
- 5.6 A small minority of beggars can be aggressive in their begging behaviour and police will deal robustly with incidents reported. The Police work closely with all partner agencies to support individuals who are found begging so it can ascertain the reasons they are begging and signpost them to relevant support. If support is not required then a more robust approach is considered in relation to Community Protection Warnings or arrest of the individual.
- 5.7 Some sex workers are rough sleepers. The rough sleeper initiative's female specialist support worker visits them on the streets with the Police. The worker begins to engage with them and refers them to relevant services including drug and alcohol services, domestic abuse services and sexual health services.

5.8 To help us to achieve our aim of working with partner agencies we will:

- Provide training to help people work with rough sleepers and also people with mental health needs.
- Work with partners to support beggars and reduce begging