

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Medway Council is required to carry out a Homelessness Review by the Homelessness Act 2002. This review must cover;
 - The current and future levels of homelessness in Medway
 - The provision of services to prevent homelessness, provide accommodation for homeless households and support those at risk of homelessness including repeat homelessness
 - The resources being made available by Medway Council and a wide range of partners in Medway.
- 1.2 The review will inform Medway's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy by identifying key issues and any gaps in service. It will use data from the council's records on homelessness as well as seeking information from other organisations. This will provide a baseline for estimating future levels of homelessness in Medway.
- 1.3 The review will be published on the council's website and drawn to the attention of our partners in the Homelessness Forum. We have, and will continue to seek, partner organisations' comments via engagement events and the Homelessness Forum and its task and finish groups to ensure we get meaningful participation.
- 1.4 The review describes types of homelessness, the current legislation and policy context. It highlights the impacts of demographic change, the economy and the housing market on homelessness. It considers the data for statutory homelessness, the use of temporary accommodation, rough sleeping and sofa surfing. It profiles the households that become homeless in Medway and their vulnerabilities.
- 1.5 It moves on to consider the current provision of services, accommodation and support provided by Medway Council and partner organisations, and gaps in provision, and suggests some objectives and actions to be included in the subsequent Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 1.6 It is easy to think of rough sleepers when we think of homelessness, but in Medway rough sleepers make up a small minority of homeless households. Households are considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy which is accessible to them and in which it is reasonable for them to continue to live. This can include 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 domestic violence. Homelessness also includes the 'hidden' homeless, including people who are sofa surfing or sleeping in vehicles.
- 1.7 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 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.

2. Social and policy context of homelessness

- 2.1 The most significant policy change relating to homelessness since our review in 2016 is the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force on 3rd April 2018. This legislation implements significant changes to the rights of homeless people. These are;
- The period when a household is described as ‘threatened with homelessness’ is extended from 28 to 56 days. Households served with a valid section 21 notice seeking possession are included in the definition. This provides the Council with an opportunity to work with households earlier with the aim of preventing their homelessness,
 - The new 56 day ‘prevention’ and ‘relief’ duties placed on the Council to ‘take reasonable steps’ to prevent or relieve the homelessness of any eligible households threatened with homelessness,
 - To assess all eligible applicants housing and support needs, and give them a written personalised housing plan setting out the steps the Council and the applicant are required to take to seek to resolve the applicants homelessness or threatened homelessness,
 - The Council must give advice and information about homelessness and preventing homelessness to anyone requiring it and ensure that the advice and information meets the needs of vulnerable groups
 - Some organisations, including hospitals and prisons, have a duty to refer households that appear to be homeless or threatened with homelessness to the Councils housing service. They must have the households consent to refer.
- 2.2 In August 2018, the government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy setting out its vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. The strategy is based around three core pillars: Prevention, Intervention and Recovery. The strategy can be found online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>
- 2.3 The government has made series of changes to welfare provision since 2010. The significant changes since the 2016 review include;
- Universal Credit (UC) - a single payment (including for housing costs) paid monthly, rolled out to most new claimants in Medway from May 2018, with roll out to existing claimants expected in 2023
 - Benefit cap - The cap is applied through Housing Benefit payments or Universal Credit. The benefit cap was lowered in 2016 to £20,000 in Medway for families (£15,410 for a single person)
 - A four-year benefits freeze from 2016 to 2020
- 2.4 One of the key findings of the National Audit Office’s report on the DCLG’s response to Homelessness published in September 2017 was that “*Changes to Local Housing Allowance are likely to have contributed to the affordability of tenancies for those on benefits, and are an element of the increase in homelessness*”.
- 2.5 It is important that the council’s plans and strategies support each other. The Council Plan 2016/17 to 2020/21 states the council’s three priorities are;
1. Medway: A place to be proud of
 2. Maximising regeneration and economic growth
 3. Supporting Medway’s people to realise their potential

- 2.6 'Preventing Homelessness' and 'Delivering new homes to meet the needs of Medway residents' are outcomes under priority two of the Council Plan.
- 2.7 The Housing Strategy 2018-22 identified three strategic priorities;
1. Deliver homes that meet the identified needs of Medway residents
 2. Improve the quality of homes and lives
 3. Ensure people can access housing and services to keep them independent
- 2.8 Its action plan shows the multi-agency approach that will be taken to address housing matters in Medway.
- 2.9 The Tenancy Strategy 2018 encourages social housing providers to consider using fixed term tenancies so they can be reassessed periodically and ensure that social housing is allocated to those currently in housing need. This has led to some housing providers reviewing the types of tenancies they will offer and one has begun to offer fixed term tenancies. This should lead to a small increase in the number of social lets becoming available each year.
- 2.10 The Local Plan has not formally adopted however the targets relevant to homelessness include an aim to provide 204 affordable homes per year with 60% affordable rent and 40% shared ownership. In developments of 25 and more units 25% should be affordable and in rural locations this percentage applies to developments of 15 or more units.
- 2.11 The Rough Sleeper Initiative is funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to fund specific activities in Medway from July 2018 to March 2020. These are;
- A rough sleeper co-ordinator
 - Personal budgets to allow a rough sleeper gain accommodation
 - An assertive outreach service
 - Increasing the capacity of the Housing First service
 - Rough Sleeper Assessment and Accommodation Service
 - Private Rented Sector Brokerage Worker
 - Mental health professional services
 - Temporary emergency accommodation provision
- 2.12 The effectiveness of this initiative is monitored closely by the Ministry and the council carries out monthly rough sleeper estimates and bimonthly rough sleeper counts to track the numbers of rough sleepers in Medway.



3. Factors influencing homelessness

- 3.1 A range of factors affect homelessness including population increase, the local economy and the housing market.

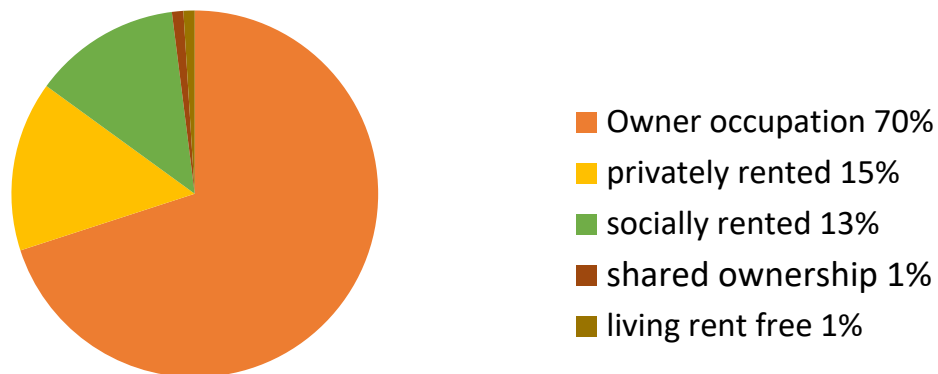
Demographic change

- 3.2 Growth in the number of people and households drives demand for housing. The Office for National Statistics estimates the population in Medway will increase by just under 15% by 2035, reaching 317,529, representing an increase of just over 40,500 people. The number of people aged 65 and over will increase by 48% by 2035, 0-15year olds will increase by 10% and those of working age up by 8%. Natural growth, births exceeding deaths, is predicted to make up the majority of Medway's population growth.
- 3.3 The cost to rent, or buy, a home in Medway is lower than London and some households move to Medway and commute to London. The cost for renting and buying is also a little lower than in some neighbouring local authorities and this can draw households to live in Medway. Some London and neighbouring Housing Authorities place households in Medway in Temporary Accommodation.

Local Economy, Housing Market

- 3.4 Medway has more owner occupiers (70%) compared with the rest of the country (63%), and the proportion of private rented homes has increased from 8% of the total housing in 2001 to 15% in 2011. Some homes for social rent are built each year but some are sold via the national 'right to buy' requirement.

Percentage of households in each tenure In Medway

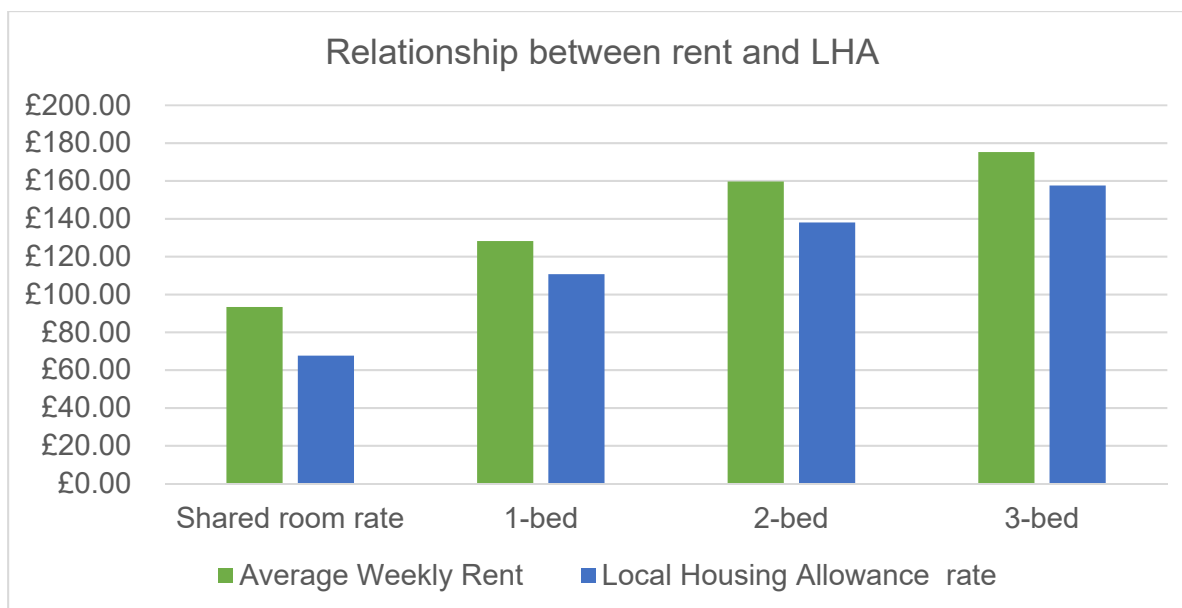


- 3.5 The average cost of renting in Medway has increased, particularly in two bed homes. Government data shows rental increases of around 13% in Medway between September 2014 and September 2017.
- 3.6 The NOMIS data for July 2017 to June 2018 showed that 82.8% of the working age population of Medway were economically active, slightly higher than the average for the South East at 81.1%. However, in 2018 the average weekly pay for full time workers living in Medway was £588.50, lower than the South East average of £614.50 which may be connected to the lower than average level of qualifications in the population. <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157282/report.aspx#tabempunemp>

- 3.7 House prices have increased over the last ten years but have become more stable in 2018. The average price paid for a semi-detached house in Medway in August 2018 was £286,361
- 3.8 The median weekly Medway resident earnings were £588.50 per week, or £30,602 per year, in 2018. A person could borrow £99,000 to £138,000 on this median annual salary. However, the average cost of a semi-detached house in Medway was £286,361 in 2018. If a person earning the median salary was offered the largest likely mortgage amount to borrow, they would require a deposit of £148,361 to be able to buy the average semi-detached house. However, a couple, both earning the average resident weekly wage of £588.50 each, would be able to borrow £153,000 to £214,000. This would indicate that the couple probably could afford a semi-detached home with a deposit of £72,361 or more. This would suggest that a couple both earning the average wage for a Medway resident would be unlikely to be able to afford to buy a semi-detached home without a very large deposit, but may be able to buy a much smaller home.

Housing Benefit and Universal Credit

- 3.9 The local housing allowance is a flat rate, based on the size of the household and the area lived in. Tenants receive this allowance as either means tested housing benefit or universal credit. In August 2018 there were 5856 housing benefit claims assessed under the Local Housing Allowance. Most new claimants will now claim Universal Credit for their housing costs and there were 1341 claimants on 3rd September 2018.
- 3.10 Universal Credit (UC) is designed to reflect wages so has a monthly payment cycle and claimants generally wait five or more weeks to receive the first payment. In Medway every UC claimant is offered an advance at the start of their claim which can include their housing element. There is currently no evidence of a correlation between UC claims and rent arrears leading to homelessness in Medway since it was rolled out to families in May 2018, however this may occur in time. Medway's Jobcentre plus liaise regularly with Medway Council's Housing team to ensure the new benefit is rolled out with the minimum disruption for tenants and landlords. Jobcentre Plus can arrange managed payments to landlords for vulnerable households where there is evidence that the tenant may struggle to manage their money. Some landlords preferred direct housing benefit payments and have raised concerns that they cannot get direct payments of the housing element of universal credit for all tenants. Jobcentre Plus offers Personal Budgeting support to all vulnerable universal credit claimants in an aim to prevent future households budgeting problems.
- 3.11 Unfortunately, there is often a shortfall between the amount of benefit for housing costs received and the average private sector rent. The figures used below for private sector rent are for the year 2017-18 and may be lower than the average of all private sector rents as tenants in receipt of housing benefit are likely to either choose cheaper rents or have limited access to the more expensive end of the market). This illustrates that even at the more affordable end there is still a significant shortfall between the weekly rent and housing costs which can be claimed. Single people aged 18-35 are entitled to the rate for a room in a shared house and the gap between the private sector rent and benefit level is particularly high for this group.
- 3.12 The chart below shows the typical rent paid by people who claim housing benefit in Medway compared to the local housing allowance.



3.13 This indicates that the average household receiving housing benefit in Medway experience a significant weekly shortfall between their rent and the amount of housing benefit they receive. It is likely that rent paid by households that do not receive housing benefit could be higher.

The benefit cap

3.14 The benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of benefit that most people aged 16 to 64 can receive. The cap is set at £384.62 per week (£20,000 a year) for couples, with or without children, and single parents, or £257.69 per week (£13,400 a year) for single people with no children living with them. The table below shows the number of households affected by the benefit cap and the amount of money 'lost' per week.

Amount of housing benefit 'lost' per week to benefit cap	Households
£0-25	101
£26-50	70
£51-75	75
£76-100	28
£100-125	24
£126-150	20
£151+	12

Discretionary Housing Payments

3.15 Medway Council can award Discretionary Housing Payments to households receiving housing benefit or housing costs in their Universal Credit, to help towards their housing costs in a crisis.

Reason for DHP award	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Benefit cap	16	97	231
LHA reform	92	204	316
No welfare benefit change impact	324	379	315
Social sector size criteria	259	183	115
Two reforms	1	1	3
Total	692	864	980

3.16 The number of households affected by the benefit cap has increased significantly over time. The number of households affected by the social sector size criteria has reduced as those customers have either moved to a smaller home or adjusted their finances so they can pay the shortfall.

Housing Supply

3.17 Socially rented homes are let at a lower rent than those in the private sector. They are highly sought after by households that struggle to afford private rents. From April 2013 to March 2018, 3129 new homes have been built in Medway with an average of 23% being affordable rented or shared ownership, as shown below.

Year	Affordable Homes Completed	Private and Affordable Homes Combined	Percentage of Affordable Housing as percentage of total
2013/14	166	597	27.8%
2014/15	187	532	35.2%
2015/16	172	630	27.3%
2016/17	91	675	13.5%
2017/18	132	695	19%
2013/14-2017/18	748	3129	23.9%

3.18 The council continues to work with partners to provide affordable housing and this year aims to support just over 200 new affordable homes to be provided. The government has recently removed the borrowing cap for social housing and Medway Council is reviewing its house building plans accordingly.

4. Current and future levels of homelessness

- 4.1 This will consider homelessness prevention and relief work, housing advice services, rough sleepers and sofa surfers. It will provide a cautious forecast of future levels of homelessness.
- 4.2 For the past few years we have consistently seen 2000 or more households seeking assistance from Medway Council's homelessness services. In 2017-18 2308 households approached for assistance but from April to November 2018, since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, this has increased by nearly 20%. Since April 2018 every eligible household threatened with homelessness is provided with advice and homelessness prevention work to help them to remain in their current accommodation. In Medway we have been working towards increasing our homelessness preventions for several years which has provided us with a firm foundation from April 2018 to meet our statutory obligations to provide this assistance in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Homeless preventions in Medway	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Mediation	0	3	1	0	0
Conciliation	5	2	12	20	12
Homeless prevention fund	7	5	10	14	22
Debt advice	4	5	0	1	0
Resolving housing benefit	2	7	5	8	48
Resolving rent arrears	10	2	19	27	60
Sanctuary Scheme for survivors of domestic abuse	0	1	0	0	0
Crisis intervention	0	72	1	1	3
Negotiation of legal advocacy	6	31	21	23	32
Help to remain in private rented sector	2	3	24	18	11
Mortgage arrears interventions	8	35	12	6	18
Other	29	33	43	125	80
Total preventions	73	199	148	243	316

- 4.3 Homelessness is most frequently prevented by resolving rent arrears and housing benefit problems and by providing legal advice and assistance to seek to prevent illegal evictions. The Council seeks to develop initiatives to sustain tenancies. In summer 2018 an additional family support service was introduced which helps families who have asked an adult child to leave home address matters to enable that person to remain, including budgeting and benefit maximisation. In December 2017 we introduced our Call B4 you serve hotline to enable landlords to seek support and advice from Medway Council's Housing Options service when they have a concern that may lead to them evicting their tenant. We have also been reaching out to social landlords to find ways to work together to prevent evictions. This has been particularly successful with mhs homes who have weekly appointment slots with our Housing Options service.
- 4.4 Homelessness relief is the work to help a homeless household find suitable accommodation.

Homelessness prevention work – type of other accommodation found	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-2017	2017-18
Hostel/HMO	21	4	1	2	3
Private rented scheme with landlord incentive	57	98	67	98	133
Private rented sector without landlord incentive	40	66	52	49	74

Accommodation with friends/relatives	5	55	6	20	6
Supported Accommodation	1	10	10	31	28
Social housing management move	4	0	1	1	1
Social Housing Part 6 offer	24	47	38	29	22
Social housing- negotiation with an RSL outside a part 6 offer	3	2	2	1	2
Low cost home ownership	0	0	0	0	1
Other	18	7	30	85	86
Total preventions	173	289	207	316	356

- 4.5 This work has increased over the last five years. The larger increases are in helping households find a home in the private rented sector accommodation. This work is supported by our Private Rented Sector (PRS) Scheme which can offer rent in advance, deposits, and practical help to source suitable accommodation and negotiating with the landlords.
- 4.6 From April to November 2018 the Housing Options team prevented or relieved an average of 72 cases per month, up, from an average of 34 cases per month in April to September 2017.
- 4.7 When the council is unable to prevent or relieve homelessness successfully it must assess whether it owes the household the main housing duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. The number of these decisions made is not the only way to measure need of homelessness services as many households in need of help have been supported to retain or secure accommodation via successful prevention or relief work, with no final main housing duty assessment being required.

Homelessness Decisions in Medway	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Homeless & in priority need	357	491	418	344	257
Eligible, homeless, in priority need, but intentionally homeless	95	114	116	110	72
Eligible, homeless, not in priority need	181	490	348	120	186
Eligible but not homeless	190	257	209	90	89
Ineligible	14	33	35	8	18
Total number of applications	837	1385	1126	672	622

- 4.8 It is also likely that some households threatened with homelessness do not approach Medway Council for support but find alternative accommodation without assistance from the Council.

Gypsies and Travellers

- 4.9 Local authorities carry out a count of caravans on traveller sites twice a year, in January and July, providing a snapshot of the number of caravans on the day of the count, to reflect winter residence and summer travelling trends. A count of caravans/moveable dwellings occupied by Travelling Showpeople is made once a year in January. In July 2018, the socially rented site at Cuxton which provides 12 pitches counted 10 of them as being occupied, there were five privately funded sites with full planning permission occupied by 19 caravans/moveable dwellings and there were four sites with temporary planning permission occupied by 12 caravans/movable. There were also four unauthorised sites with nine mobile homes and four tourers counted in July 2018. The travelling Showperson Guild site is in Strood and 23 caravans or moveable dwellings were counted in January 2018.
- 4.10 As some data was collected in January and some in July caution is needed when interpreting the figures but it would indicate approximately 77 mobile homes or tourers

have been found pitched on known sites in 2018. Many other gypsies and travelling showpeople are likely to have pitched temporarily in other unauthorised locations across Medway.

Families supported by social services

- 4.11 Some families with no recourse to public funds are provided with accommodation and weekly financial support from Childrens Social Services. This number changes over time and was 16 families in August 2018.
- 4.12 This number has significantly reduced since the beginning of the year, when the total number of families being supported in January 2018 was 30 families. Medway Council's Children's Services have linked up with the NRPF Connect network, which is used by many Local Authorities across the UK. Since accessing the Connect Database, Medway Children's services have found the outcome of an individual's immigration application has had a decision made within a shorter time period.
- 4.13 For the individuals who have been granted limited leave to remain with recourse to public funds, Medway Children's Services cease financial support as the family is no longer destitute under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989. Children's Services no longer have a duty to support. Our Family Support Workers link up with DWP and support families in making the relevant claims for public funds. Once an individual has access to public funds, they are no longer deemed NRPF and are referred to Medway Council Housing Options Team for support with identifying suitable and affordable accommodation.

Rough Sleepers and Sofa Surfers.

- 4.14 The numbers of people sleeping rough has increased significantly across England, from 1768 on 2010 to 4751 in 2017. However, these numbers are based on annual rough sleeper counts and estimates and may not reflect the full numbers. In November 2017 the official annual rough sleeper estimate in Medway was 44. This estimate showed 75% men and 25% women. Since August 2018 Medway Council has been carrying out more frequent measurements and the estimate in October identified 56 people sleeping rough. The official rough sleeper count in November 2018 found 19 people. The council and its partners are aware that a rough sleeper count follows the official guidance and methodology and yet does not reflect the full picture of rough sleeping and an estimate is a more accurate way to reflect the true nature of rough sleeping in the area.
- 4.15 It is difficult to estimate the number of people sofa surfing. In September 2018 the floating support service were supporting 11 people who were sofa surfing. In the same month Pathways for Independence were aware of 19 people sofa surfing. It is likely that the number of people sofa surfing is higher, changing frequently and that people move back and forth between rough sleeping to sofa surfing.

Likely future levels of homelessness.

Factors relating to Medway Council services

- 4.16 The number of households seeking advice and support relating to homelessness has remained consistently above 2000 per year for several years and indications in 2018 suggest it will increase going forward to nearer 3000. However, the statutory duty to refer may assist some households unaware of our housing service to be able to access the service or to access it earlier. The duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible households should reduce the number of households that experience homelessness and the duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible households should help more households resolve their situation. This will reduce the amount of homelessness and possibly the number who begin rough sleeping in Medway.

- 4.17 The rough sleeper initiative is a programme from July 2018 to March 2020 funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. It funds new streams of work and expands existing work and the service is working towards having a personal plan for each rough sleeper to have them access relevant services and suitable accommodation. From its beginning in July 2018 to November 2018 the initiative has helped 41 rough sleepers into accommodation.

Factors relating to partner services

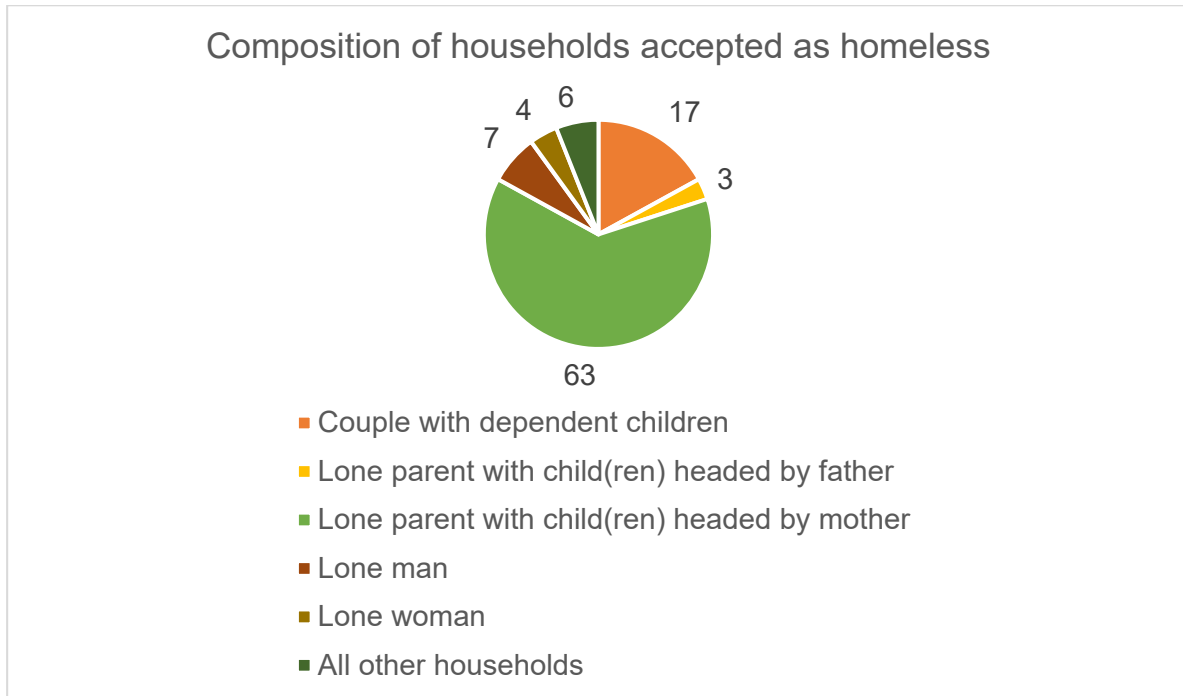
- 4.18 Some people believe that rough sleepers move to Medway as there are more services for rough sleepers, including a range of soup kitchens, supported housing providers, and centres providing support, than in some areas in Kent. Equally it is likely that the services have been set up in Medway as there are visible rough sleepers in the area. What is generally agreed is the importance of each service helping each client towards stable accommodation and engaging with services to enable the client to achieving the most independent life they can. This aim is embedded in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Charter agreed by a range of statutory and voluntary services which can be found at https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/3226/homeless_charter

Social Factors

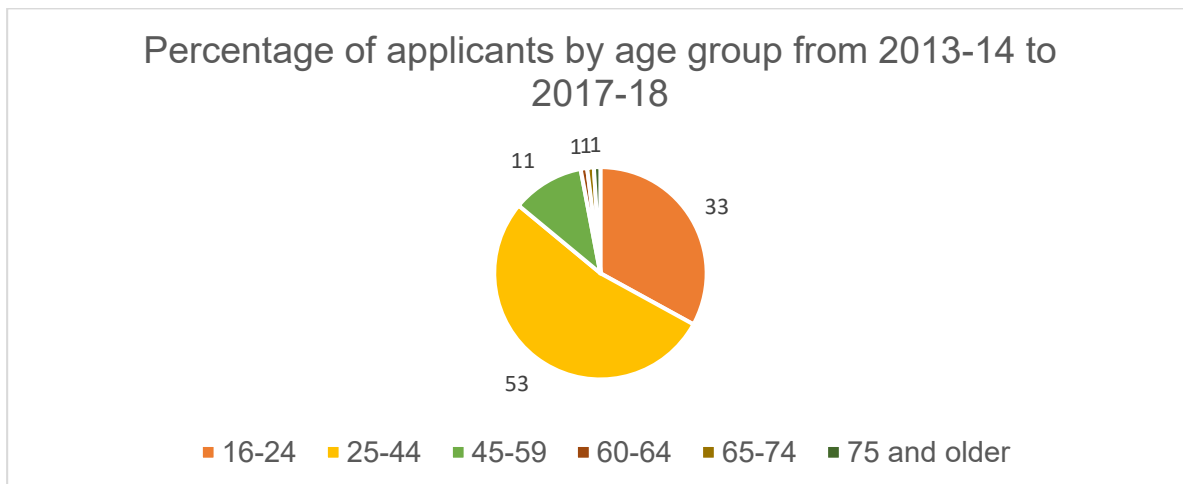
- 4.19 It is very difficult to predict how leaving the European Union could impact on the level of employment available or the housing market in Medway in coming years. The government has announced the end of austerity in general terms but there has been no announcement suggesting there will be significant welfare reforms or that the benefit freeze will end before 2020. As such it seems likely that many households will continue to experience a shortfall between the housing element in universal credit or housing benefit and the cost of the full rent.
- 4.20 To conclude, it seems likely that at least 2000 households will seek homelessness advice at Kingsley House each year for the next few years. It is likely they will seek advice earlier in their journey towards losing their accommodation as more people become aware of the new ways of working and are referred under the duty to refer and this should allow more prevention work to be carried out. However, the difficulties in finding affordable housing are likely to continue making work to prevent or relieve homelessness, and discharge our housing duty, increasingly challenging. The rough sleeper initiative should help those currently sleeping rough to access support services and move into accommodation and should result in fewer people sleeping rough in Medway.

5. Profile of Homeless Households

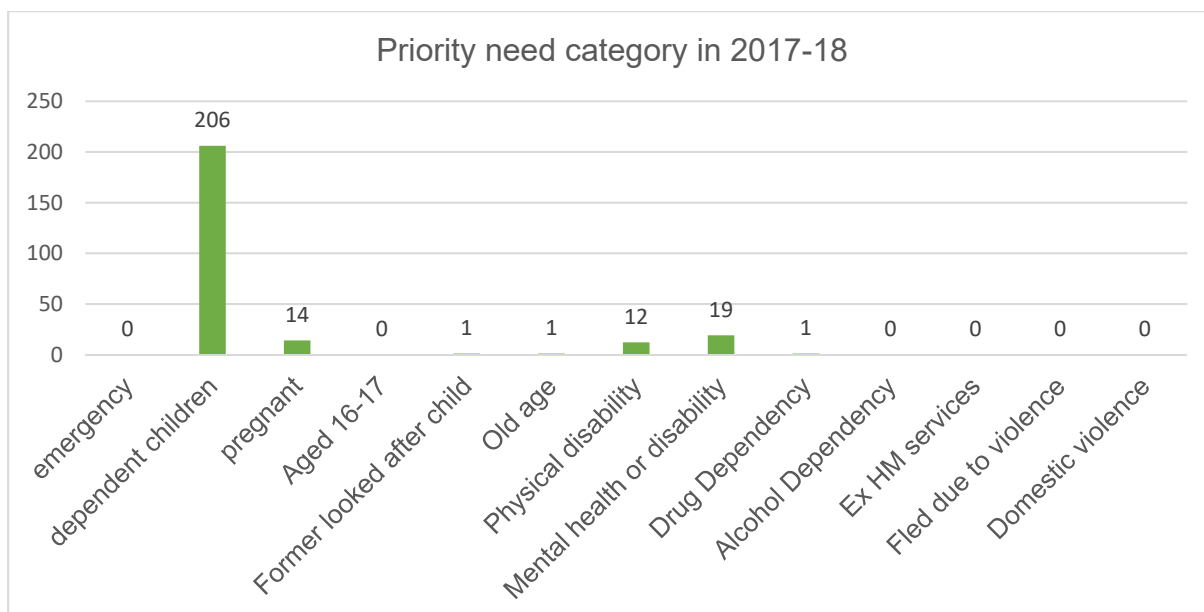
- 5.1 Of the households accepted as homeless in Medway in 2017-18 the highest proportion is of single parent households headed by a mother, followed by couples with dependent children.



- 5.2 The majority (86%) of those accepted as homeless over the last five years were aged 44 or younger. Very few households lead by a person aged 60 or older are accepted as homeless.



- 5.3 By far the most common reason a household, that is accepted as homeless, is considered to be in priority need, is that the household includes dependent children. This is followed by vulnerability due to mental ill health or disability, then the household including a pregnant woman, then physical disability.



- 5.4 The number of households considered to be vulnerable due to having been in the care system is low and the numbers of care leavers is expected to remain relatively stable for the next few years. Medway Council has a local offer for its care leavers and has a Leaving Care Team. This team supports people from the age of 16 to help young people plan their move into independent living. Young people leaving care have a personal advisor until at least the age of 21 and they support and advise as needed.
- 5.5 The number of ex-forces personnel seeking homelessness support is very low in Medway. In November 2018 none of the verified rough sleepers were ex-service personnel. This could be due to the extensive support the armed forces provide people leaving the forces or that ex-service personnel are accessing the support provided by Royal British Legion, the Kent and Medway Armed Forces Network and SSAFA.
- 5.6 The most common reason for a household to become homeless in Medway in 2017-18 was the termination of their tenancy, affecting 27% of cases. This was followed by parents no longer willing to accommodate, affecting 21% of cases. Rent arrears in the private rented sector accounted for approximately 5% of cases.

6. Securing accommodation for homeless people

- 6.1 Medway Council provides temporary housing for households owed the main housing duty until they are made an offer of settled accommodation. It also commissions supported accommodation for people who need support whilst they become able to live independently.

Temporary Accommodation Service

- 6.2 The Temporary Accommodation service provides temporary housing for vulnerable homeless households referred by Housing Options. It has a pool of landlords including private landlords, housing associations and Medway Council Housing who provide a range of housing sizes throughout the year. The accommodation must be suitable for the needs of the household. These homes are inspected to ensure they have gas safety records, electrical installation conditions reports and are safe and free from serious hazards. West Kent Communities housing support workers visit households in temporary accommodation to provide advice and assistance to help them maximise income, pay their rent, access services and other needs that arise.
- 6.3 The number of households requiring temporary accommodation has grown over time. It varies over the year and this table shows how many households we had in temporary accommodation on the first of August in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Date	01/08/2016	01/08/2017	01/08/2018
Number of households in TA	154	337	344

- 6.4 Demand is generally highest for two bedroomed homes, followed by three and then one bedroomed homes.

Supported Accommodation provided by Strategic Housing Services

- 6.5 Medway Council Strategic Housing Service provides supported accommodation for homeless people, young people, ex-offenders and those fleeing domestic abuse. These services provide a safe home whilst the client is supported towards living independently. It is available for up to two years, yet clients move out when they are ready to live independently.
- 6.6 Some people who have been homeless, including rough sleepers, need support to address a range of needs including budgeting and understanding benefits, accessing physical and mental health services, using drug and alcohol services and planning their move into settled accommodation.
- 6.7 Young people are more likely to become homeless. They may lack skills to run their budget, manage their time or discover the type of education, training or employment they are suited to. Their supported accommodation services help them access services for adults and prepare to live independently.
- 6.8 Approximately 25% of the people attending shelters in Medway in winter 2017-18 were ex-offenders indicating they are at great risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. Some will leave prison without ID documents or a bank account and this will present a barrier to them gaining a tenancy, a job or applying for benefits. However, NACRO works with prisoners close to release to help them gain ID and seek accommodation. Jobcentre Plus and the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company currently help their clients to gain ID documents. National statistics show that homeless ex-offenders are more likely to re-offend than those with accommodation. Supported

accommodation for ex-offenders helps them to access services, seek training, volunteering opportunities, education and employment, learn to budget and run their finances and avoid committing further offences.

- 6.9 People fleeing domestic abuse may need help and support to gain the skills for independent living. Perpetrators of domestic abuse may be very controlling and prevent their partners from participating in some aspects of normal life including household finances, leaving the house or accessing health and other services, and survivors benefit from support in re-learning how to participate in these activities.

Number of placements funded by Medway Council Strategic Housing Service

Client group	Number of spaces provided
Homeless people	93
Young people	60
Ex-Offenders	41
Domestic Abuse	14

- 6.10 Medway Council Strategic Housing Service also commissions the Sanctuary scheme which helps survivors of domestic abuse remain in their home more safely. It acts quickly to fit lights and security devices to the homes to make it easier to see an intruder and make it harder for a potential intruder to gain access.
- 6.11 In Medway, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, Kingsley House, the One Stop Shop, the Police, and MARAC, will help a household identify housing needs. There is no wrong door and whichever service the client presents to first they will be helped to access all the relevant services. The services co-operate to refer clients as needed. They are working towards a fully integrated domestic abuse service from April 2019.
- 6.12 Medway Council Strategic Housing Service commissions a floating support service that helps households with a wide range of support needs access services, claim benefits, learn to budget, maintain their tenancy and seek support as needed. It can support up to 400 clients with general needs and also 151 ex-offenders. Clients can self-refer or be referred by other services.
- 6.13 Medway Council's Strategic Housing Service commissioned a review of housing related support in 2018 and will use the findings of this report to ensure it commissions the most suitable services in the future.

Supported housing provided by Medway Council's Adult Social Care

- 6.14 Adult Social Care service provides supported housing to adults to help them live as independently as possible whilst ensuring they are properly supported. These services are generally not for a fixed period and clients live in the accommodation for as long as needed.

Category of need of adult	Number of supported living places provided
Deaf services	1
Early Help and prevention	3
Learning Disability	7
Long Term support	24
Mental Health	12
Physical disabilities in clients 18-24	25
Physical disabilities in clients 25 and older	80
Total Placements	152

6.15 Organisations not commissioned by Medway Council also provide supported accommodation. These include organisations providing a significant amount of housing with a range of levels of support to smaller organisations offering lower levels of support.

7. Housing, Homelessness and health

- 7.1 Housing provides more than shelter and access to cooking and personal hygiene facilities. It can also provide a space to rest and relax in safety. When a household is homeless they lack these benefits. A household in temporary accommodation or a hostel can feel insecure and socially isolated whilst learning about their new neighbourhood. A rough sleeper also lacks basic shelter and the safety and warmth a home provides.
- 7.2 A Crisis report on mortality in rough sleepers showed rough sleepers are more likely to die young, with an average age of death of just 47 compared to 77 for the general population. The Homeless Link national Health Needs Audit 2016 showed that homeless people are significantly more likely to experience a physical health problem than the general population with problems with joints and muscles, teeth and breathing being most common. Many reported a mental health difficulty with depression being most common, followed by dual diagnoses with alcohol or drug use.

Health status	Rough Sleepers	Emergency or temporary accommodation
Report a physical health problem	88%	81%
Diagnoses mental health condition	45%	40%
Has alcohol problem	44%	18%
Is registered with GP	76%	87%
Is registered with dentist	28%	46%

- 7.3 This indicates that homeless people often have poorer health than the general population and that rough sleepers have poorer health, and less access to healthcare, than homeless people as a whole.
- 7.4 The Rough Sleeper Forum identified concerns regarding registering with a GP and these were raised with Medway Clinical Commissioning Group who confirmed that GPs may not refuse to register a person due to their status as a rough sleeper. Medway Council signposts households in temporary accommodation and rough sleepers to help them register with a GP if they are not already registered. Caring Hands helps clients arrange and attend appointments with a GP.
- 7.5 One Big Family host Greenlight at their soup kitchen once a month to bring health care to rough sleepers. Services include wound dressing, health advice and sexual health advice.
- 7.6 Public health liaises with the Homelessness Forum's Rough Sleeper Task and Finish group to bring the health checks for people who are 40 and older to people living in supported accommodation and rough sleepers.
- 7.7 The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment recognises the need for suitable housing and the challenges that homelessness and rough sleeping present to maintaining good health. The Health and Wellbeing Board agrees the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Health and Wellbeing Plan. Public health, Social Care and Strategic Housing are drafting a Collaborative Working Agreement to support good working arrangements and help the services working together to provide better services to customers.

8. Homelessness Prevention Services

- 8.1 The Housing Options service at Kingsley House has been covered in previous parts of the review. Briefly, it is the first point of contact for many households at risk of homelessness and for many organisations through their duty to refer. They work to prevent or relieve homelessness, including working with partner agencies.
- 8.2 A home may be considered unsuitable due to its condition or safety concerns. The private sector housing team inspect homes and liaise with tenants, landlords and interested parties to ensure hazards are reduced to a safe level. They identify and inspect houses in multiple occupation, including those that require a license, and ensure they have adequate means of escape in case of fire, and sufficient bathrooms, toilets and kitchens for the number of occupants. These homes are let as rooms to rent in a shared house and require frequent maintenance and management to ensure the homes remain safe and do not give rise to complaints from neighbours.
- 8.3 The team receive approximately 1000 requests for service each year. There are currently 115 houses registered as houses in multiple occupation and this number is expected to grow due to changes in legislation that require that some two storey HMOs be licensed now.
- 8.4 Households with a person with a disability may contact the Council to seek help with aids or adaptation and this work prevents homelessness by ensuring the home becomes suitable for occupation by that household. The Occupational Therapy Service will arrange for the disabled person to be assessed and establish their needs.
- 8.5 They may require building works to help them get in and out of their home, move around inside their home and use facilities in the kitchen or bathroom.
- 8.6 To help pay for the agreed works they can apply for a disabled facilities grant, which is means tested, if the disabled person is an adult. If the applicant's assessed contribution is higher than the cost of works, a grant will not be payable. These works can enable a household to remain in their home but occasionally a home cannot be converted to meet the disabled person's needs and they may be supported to find more suitable accommodation.

Financial year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of enquiries	136	257	218	214	152
Number of grants approved	125	136	105	144	139

- 8.7 The Homechoice service runs the choice based lettings system to advertise and allocate socially rented homes. Applicants are assessed and if suitable they join the housing register in a band to reflect their need for housing. Homes that are available for letting are advertised and applicants can bid for the homes. A short list of suitable applicants is produced and the home is offered by the landlord. On 1st August 2018 there were 1934 households on the active register.

Priority Band on homechoice register	Number of households
A	158
B	236
C	1383

D	157
Inactive	2500

8.8 The age of the main applicant for homechoice is shown below. This does not mirror the heavy proportion of those aged 44 or younger seen in applicants accepted as homeless.

Age band of applicant	Number of applicants of that age group	Percentage of applicants in age band
16-24	487	11
25-44	2143	48
45-64	1207	27
65+	597	14

8.9 Unfortunately the number of homes that are available for allocating each year is low. The table below shows the numbers vary each year but demand outstrips supply and every effort is made to ensure that homes are allocated to households in highest housing need.

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of homes available to let	986	871	883	754	649

8.10 Many statutory and voluntary organisations operate in Medway providing support and advice, advocacy, food and practical assistance and health related support. These organisations provide services that help prevent homelessness;

Organisation	Services Provided	Target Groups	Areas served
Aids and Adaptations team	Disabled Facilities Grants	Children and adults with a disability needing help to use home	Medway
Blue Light Project	Multi-agency group with GDPR data sharing protocol to create personal plan	People frequently using blue light services, problem drinkers and high risk rough sleepers	Medway
Centra	Family Support Service	Young people being asked to leave home and their families	Medway
Homechoice team	Manages the social housing register	Households seeking a socially rented home	Medway
Housing Options	Homelessness advice, prevention, relief and assessment. Call B4 you serve landlord hotline.	Households at risk of homelessness	Medway

Private Sector Housing Team	Help tenants and landlords ensure homes are safe	Private Sector homes	Medway
Temporary Accommodation Team	Temporary housing for those in priority need	Vulnerable homeless households	Medway
West Kent Communities	Floating support services to help maintain a tenancy or help into accommodation	Vulnerable adults needing support to access services and keep their accommodation	Medway
West Kent Communities	Drop in sessions for any support around homelessness	Any household in Medway	Medway

8.11 There are a wide range of commissioned and non-commissioned supported accommodation providers in Medway. These include;

Organisation	Services Provided	Target Groups	Areas served
AMAT	Supported accommodation	Homeless adults	Medway
Centra	Supported accommodation	Young adults at risk of homelessness	Medway
Centra	Domestic abuse refuge	Women and their children fleeing domestic abuse	Medway
Emmaus	Supported housing and employment	Homeless adults	Medway
Langley House Trust	Supported accommodation	Homeless ex-offenders	Medway
mhs Endeavour	Supported accommodation	Young adults	Medway
Pathways to Independence	Supported accommodation providers	Rough sleepers and ex-offenders	Medway
Riverside	Supported accommodation and Housing First providers	Homeless people and rough sleepers	Medway
Homeless Emergency Winter Refuge	Night Shelter when night time temperature feels like freezing and Saturday and Sunday nights from mid Nov to end March	Rough sleepers and sofa surfers at risk of rough sleeping	Medway
Medway Night Shelter	Night shelter with hot dinner from January to March	Rough sleepers	Medway

8.12 A wide range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations provide services to homeless people in Medway. Caring Hands, Helping the Homeless, Medway Street Angels, One Big Family, Open House Project and Time for the Homeless focus mainly on the needs of rough sleepers. These organisations generally provide food, clothing and signposting and some provide a much wider range of advice and advocacy services. The others listed provide services to the wider public and serve the homeless. The rough sleeper initiative is dedicated to identifying rough sleepers, finding ways to work with partner organisations to address their support needs and help them into accommodation. This list is not exhaustive.

Organisation	Services Provided	Target Groups	Areas served
Caring Hands	Day Centre with food, showers, clothing exchange, access to IT & phone, advocacy and support	Rough sleepers	Chatham
Citizens Advice Medway	Advice on housing, welfare benefits, employment, debt, etc.	All people	Gillingham & outreach across Medway
Helping the homeless	Soup Kitchen	Rough sleepers	Gillingham
Improving Mental Health Provision	Weekend overnight mental health crisis support, drop in sessions, peer led support and counselling.	People with mental health needs, rough sleepers & ex-offenders	Chatham & outreach across Medway
Jobcentre Plus	Benefits management and budgeting advice	Adults needing welfare benefits	Medway
Kent and Medway NHS Social Care Partnership Trust	Secondary mental health services	Adults experiencing severe mental health difficulties	Medway
Kent, Surrey and Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company	Support and advice for people on probation	People on probation	Medway
Medway Food Bank	Emergency food parcels	Households in temporary need	Medway
Medway Street Angels	Soup kitchens, clothing, bedding, toiletries, help to attend appointments	Rough sleepers	Medway
Medway Clinical Commissioning Group	Primary care medical services in Medway	General population including homeless people and rough sleepers	Medway
One Big Family	Soup kitchen, rough sleeper outreach, advocacy and support to	Rough sleepers and sofa surfers	Medway

	attend appointments.		
Open House Project	Soup kitchen	Rough sleepers	Rochester
Open Road	Drug and alcohol recovery services	Adults recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction	Medway
Police	Protect law and order and direct street population to relevant services	The street population, rough sleepers and general population	Medway
Rough Sleeper Initiative	Assertive outreach, rough sleeper personal plan, support to find accommodation, take up benefits, access services,	Rough sleepers	Medway
Salvation Army	Drop in evening and morning job club	Homeless people and rough sleepers	Chatham
Time for the Homeless	Soup kitchens	Rough sleepers	Chatham & Rochester
Turning Point	Drug and alcohol treatment services	Adults with drug and/or alcohol problems	Medway

- 8.13 Many of the prevention, accommodation and support services listed above recognise the value of partnership working and are members of Homelessness Forum. The forum meets three times a year to identify shared concerns and best practice on matters including safeguarding adults, supporting clients with dual diagnoses, how to refer to the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and winter shelters, etc. The forum is aware that young people and ex-offenders are more likely to struggle to find and maintain affordable accommodation and that rough sleepers require additional support and it has the Young Persons, Ex-offenders and Rough Sleepers task and finish groups. These three groups meet six times a year to address the challenges their client group faces in accessing and maintaining suitable accommodation.
- 8.14 The Blue Light Project tackles change resistant drinkers in the community who put a significant burden on the public resources. The project is a multi-agency approach which provides joint interventions by agencies including mental health services, voluntary services, Kent police, support services and specialist drug and alcohol services. The group writes a simple support plan the help the individual gain or retain their accommodation and engage with relevant support services.

9. Resources for tackling homelessness in Medway.

9.1 Flexible Homelessness Support Grant

The council received £760,515 in 2018-19 for the flexible homelessness support grant that is used to fund temporary accommodation.

9.2 Rough Sleeper Initiative

The council received £410,000 for the rough sleeper initiative for July 2018 to March 2019 and anticipates receiving £486,000 for April 2019 to March 2020. The MHCLG expects Medway Council to use this money for the actions agreed with the aim of reducing the number of people sleeping rough in Medway.

9.3 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 new burdens funding

The government allocated new burdens funding to support local authorities meet the cost of the extra duties brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Year	Amount
2017-2018	£159,248
2018-2019	£145,871
2019-2020	£154,196
Total	£459,315

9.4 Disabled Facilities Grant

This is used to fund adaptations that enable disabled people to live more independently in their home and prevents them from being homeless due to the home not being reasonably suitable for them to occupy. The fund for 2018-19 is £2,310,864

9.5 Supported Housing and Floating Support

The council budget for floating support and supported housing for young people, ex-offenders, homeless people and those fleeing domestic abuse is £1.5 million in 2018-19. Other organisations also provide supported accommodation which is funded via enhanced housing benefit.

9.6 Other organisations

Many statutory and voluntary organisations provide resources to prevent homelessness and support homeless households. Their contribution is invaluable.

10. Next Steps

- 10.1 This review will provide the factual basis for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which we will draft in 2019. We will continue to engage with partners to fully understand homelessness within Medway and ways to address it.
- 10.2 The review and engagement events identified some potential weaknesses in service provision. Services for rough sleepers appear to be clustered in Chatham with less provision in Gillingham and Rochester and almost no provision in Strood, Rainham and the rural areas. We have an outreach service that covers all of Medway and can signpost to services yet people may not choose to travel to services.
- 10.3 Few supported accommodation providers accept couples and individuals in couples will often decline an offer of supported accommodation where they cannot move in with their partner. Supported accommodation will be re-commissioned in 2020 and Medway Council will review need including whether supported accommodation should be provided for couples and how effective that would be.
- 10.4 The proportion of female rough sleepers is higher in Medway than the national average. We should research how to meet the needs to female rough sleepers and make adaptations as needed.
- 10.5 The Jobcentre Plus and job clubs are currently provided in Chatham. We should review whether this is an important matter to reducing homelessness and whether any actions are needed regarding this.

Priorities for Strategy;

- 10.6 The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 recommends that the strategy should include;
 - Advice and information
 - Early identification
 - Pre-crisis intervention
 - Preventing recurring homelessness, and
 - Partnership arrangements
- 10.7 The engagement event identified possible actions that are connected to each theme;

10.8 Provide Advice and Information

- Provide information to general population about the services and how to access them until it becomes common knowledge
- Provide information to secondary schools and colleges form young people on leaving home in a planned way
- Provide information to relevant professionals on homelessness and how to spot it.
- Provide information to landlords about support services available
- Provide information and advice for EU nationals and those supporting them
- Advise people of need for ID for a tenancy and a bank account for benefits and most jobs
- Research possible actions around maintaining a vibrant street scene whilst keeping the street population safe
- Address perceptions that nothing is being done to help homeless people
- Provide brief advice for staff of non-housing/homeless services on how to respond to rough sleepers

- Provide advice on our website to enable people to take action for themselves if preferred
- Provide information to challenge perceptions that households that are non-priority will receive no help

10.1 Identify those at risk of homelessness earlier

- Highlight duty to refer and monitoring responses received. Contact any organisations with a duty to refer if no referrals received.
- Give organisations guidance on how to spot homelessness and research whether most of the referrals relate to rough sleeping or homelessness more generally
- Provide advice on how to identify sofa surfers and encourage them to seek support

10.2 Pre-crisis intervention

- Work with offenders in prison to help them become tenancy ready
- Provide or commission life skills and budgeting training.
- Promote the support available for parents having/had child taken into care.
- Identifying and recognising needs for RS women
- Encourage social landlords to contact housing options when they are considering evicting a household
- Monitor whether universal credit does relate to an increase in homelessness and liaise with DWP
- Identify ways to help single people under 35 access affordable rooms.

10.3 Prevent recurring homelessness

- Review the provision of commissioned supported housing before the tenders are written, to ensure provision matches needs.
- Review pathways from supported accommodation to general needs housing and any additional support that should be provided
- Review whether new extra care schemes could be open to under 55's if they meet care needs requirement
- Identify any ways to help clients needing a guarantor to gain a tenancy
- Work with providers of peer support to ensure they are adequately trained
- Review whether and when to provide basic furniture to households moving into an unfurnished home

10.4 Partnership arrangements

- Liaise with health services regarding commissioning services that are easier for less organised clients to use, more drop ins and less appointments, more text messages to remind,
- Develop the Homelessness Charter
- Seek sign up to the Agreement between frontline services and supported accommodation.
- Seek multi-agency agreement on providing tents and best ways to help people into accommodation
- Encourage services providers to provide psychologically informed environments
- Work with internal partners including those in Planning, social care, town centre management and street scene services to ensure all Medway Council policies support each other.
- When commissioning services include a requirement for them to support clients to register with a GP and dentist.