

4. Housing and Health

There are strong proven links between housing conditions and health. For this reason it is important for housing issues to be considered in a health context and Ashford Borough Council works in close partnership with the local PCT and NHS services. The White Paper 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say' 2006 sets out 4 main aims to be achieved by health and social care services, many of which will require partnership working with other agencies:

- Better prevention services with earlier intervention.
- More choice and a louder voice.
- Tackling inequalities and improving access to community services.
- More support for people with long term needs.

The links to housing in the White Paper are:

- An emphasis on promoting independent living & social well being, care at home, increasing activity, individual choice & prevention.
- Encouraging housing and health services to work together to improve the well-being of homeless people and to prevent homelessness.

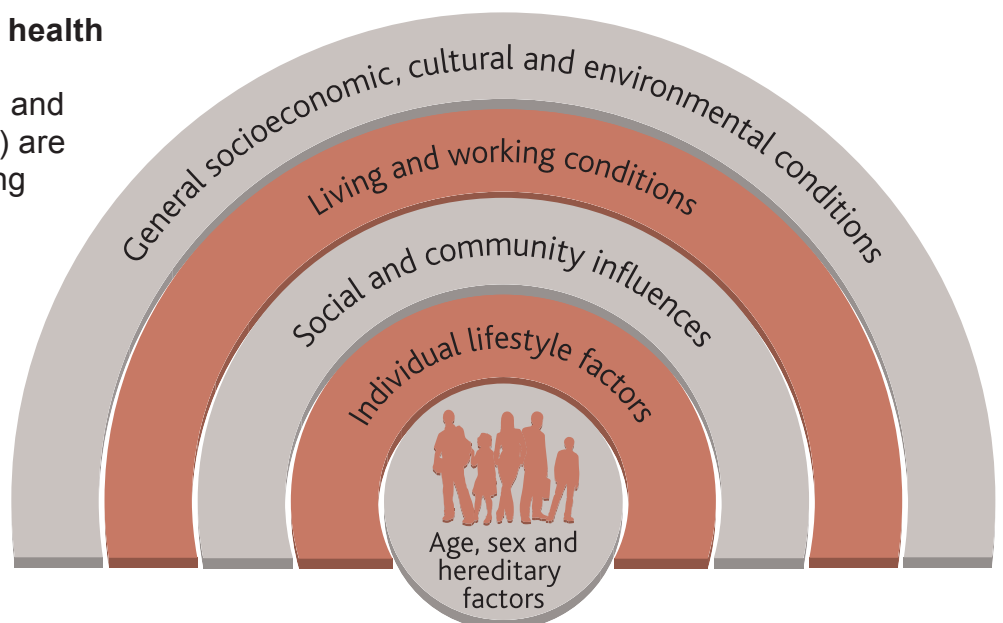
- Providing care closer to home for as many people as possible, by increasing the use of community services including extra-care sheltered housing.
- Reducing delayed discharges from hospitals.
- Assessing the impact of new housing developments. The NHS will be encouraged to work closely with planning authorities to address increasing demands on health, care and community services.

Ashford Borough Council recognises that poor housing conditions affect health negatively in a number of ways, particularly:

- Physical health: cold and damp, indoor pollutants; design quality, injury & safety hazards; ease and safety of active transport (walking, cycling). These can lead to: excess winter deaths, obesity and heart disease, asthma and respiratory disease.
- Social and mental well-being; affects of noise, over-crowding, unstable housing tenure/homelessness, poor neighbourhood quality and community safety; infrastructure deprivation - access to services, open spaces, transport.

Figure 8 - Determinates of ill health

As illustrated in figure 8, social and community and living (housing) are significant factors in determining health and well-being.



Source: Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust (PCT)

The Health Profile of Ashford for 2007

produced by the Department of Health indicates that the health of the borough is generally good. Life expectancy for men is above the national average and that for women is the same as the national average. Early death rates from heart disease, strokes and cancer are falling and all are below the national average. However, there are still health inequalities in the borough and those in routine and manual occupations are likely to experience poorer health than those in professional occupations and are more likely to be smokers. Infant mortality is higher than average for babies born into this group.

Delayed discharge from hospital results in a reduction of availability of acute beds in hospital. Housing related issues sometimes prevent patients from returning home when they are first ready to and are often related to difficulties in physically accessing their homes. Work with the William Harvey Hospital Discharge Coordinator is mapping the number of local incidents of delayed discharge and we will use this information to help the further development of this Housing Strategy. Currently facilities to provide intermediate care for older people leaving hospital who are not quite ready to return home immediately are provided by Ashford Borough Council in partnership with the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) at Farrow Court through the Home Bridge scheme.

The Single Agency Assessment (SAA) referral procedure encourages hospital staff to assess potential housing needs among patients as early in their hospital stay as possible so that the council can assist in finding alternative accommodation when necessary. Since its inception 3 people have been referred to the council's housing service following a stay in hospital using the SAA. We suspect that more people could benefit from this method of referral to the council and will be working with the William Harvey

Hospital to make sure that staff there are aware of it.

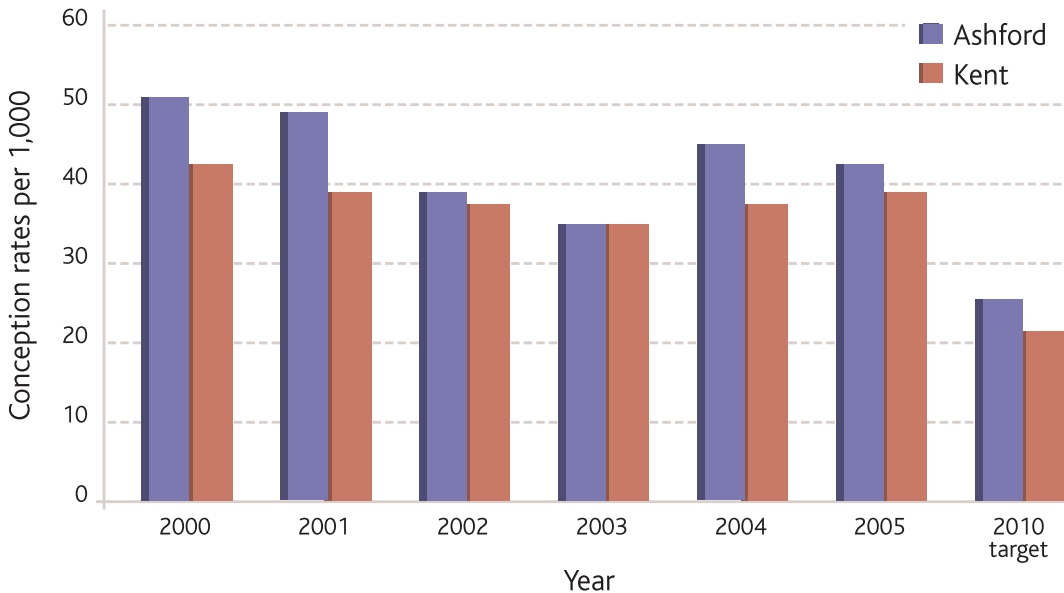
Falls - it is widely recognised that falls represent the most frequent and serious type of accident in the over 65's and 75% of falls related deaths occur in the home, highlighting the importance of the availability to older people of suitable housing, accident prevention in the home and the timely provision of aids and adaptations. Data from the Kent Ambulance Trust indicates that there were 247 falls resulting in injury in the over 65's for 2005/06. The objective of East Kent Falls and Osteoporosis Service is to reduce falls and fractures, particularly hip fractures, by a minimum of 15%. Preventing 15% of the hip fractures that occur locally would save the local health economy £1.4 million per annum.

Teenage pregnancy - the vision of the Kent Teenage Pregnancy Strategy 2001 to 2011 is that by 2011 all young people will have easy access to high quality services. Two main goals are to:

- Reduce conception levels in 15–17 year olds by 50% by 2010.
- To reduce social isolation of teenage parents by increasing their involvement in education, training and employment.

This includes a range of measures for prevention of teenage pregnancy and support for young parents and includes providing appropriate housing opportunities. In the Ashford area between 2000 and 2005 conception rates in females under 18 years of age have fluctuated, see figure 9, but are higher than the average for Kent. To reach the 2010 target will require a further 41.5% reduction in conception rates. A housing related support service is provided by Casa Support within the borough to young vulnerable parents.

Figure 9 - Rate of teenage pregnancies in under 18's



Substance misuse including alcohol -

substance misuse and homelessness are often interlinked with both problems causing, exacerbating and entrenching the other. It is widely recognised that supported housing and move-on accommodation, together with the appropriate floating support are essential to this client group. There is no supported accommodation specifically for substance misusers in the borough.

Children's Health - Every Child Matters

(2003) sets out the government's vision for delivering better outcomes for children. By achieving the Decent Homes Standard Ashford Borough Council has directly helped improve the health and life chances of local children. Measures to prevent homelessness, close working between Housing Services and children's agencies can ensure that the needs of children are addressed. The council works with partners to adapt housing so that children with disabilities can access basic amenities within the home and help families stay together when a parent or sibling has a disability. Providing supported accommodation for young parents and care leavers, making provision for travellers and meeting the housing needs of young unaccompanied asylum seekers protects some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the community.