



**ASHFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## **Homelessness Review**

**February 2008**

# **Draft**

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# 1. Summary and Gaps Identified

## Conclusions and next steps

This section summarises the main findings from the remainder of the document, draws conclusions and identifies the next steps to be taken. It is intended that this summary can be read as a stand-alone document.

### Context

This review will inform the second homelessness strategy for Ashford. The first strategy was adopted in 2003 following the Homelessness Act 2002, which introduced a new statutory duty for Local Authorities to conduct a review of homelessness and produce a 5 year strategy to tackle homelessness based on the findings in the review. The first strategy runs until July 2008 and this review will inform the second 2008 – 2012 strategy.

The review follows government guidance and makes use of best practice. In particular it seeks to understand homelessness in a wide context. It covers all homeless households, not just those for whom a statutory duty is held and reflects on the causes of homelessness. It considers the challenges of addressing homelessness within the context of both the housing strategy as a whole, and other issues facing the Borough.

The review has involved extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders and service users and has been guided by a multi-agency steering group.

Ashford Borough has a population of around 110,700, based on information from the 2001 census and there are approximately 45,000 homes.<sup>1</sup> As a designated growth area, there are an additional 31,000 homes anticipated between 2001 and 2031.

The 65 and over age group is expected to account for one in five of the population by 2016. In a 2005 survey 4.6% of households stated their ethnic origin as a category other than British and they comprise around 2,000 households.

Between 2001 and 2021 there are projected to be 5,955 affordable housing completions. House prices in Ashford are significantly higher than the national average. The latest housing needs survey, completed in 2005 found that 67% of households cannot afford private rental and 78% cannot afford open market purchase.

The survey estimated an annual shortfall of 655 affordable homes. Discussions will take place during 2008 with other Kent authorities to make arrangements for a housing market assessment to be completed in line with government guidance. The highest income to purchase and private rental prices ratios are in the rural areas of the borough. The survey identified an increasing requirement for sheltered housing.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources for statistics are not referenced in this summary, but are provided in the main body of the document.

In total, 18.5% of households contain somebody with a disability and of these, 58% are aged over 60.

## **Current and future levels of homelessness**

### **Statutory Homeless**

There were 197 homelessness decisions made between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007. This is slightly higher than the previous year, but less than in each of the preceding three years. The same pattern applies to homelessness acceptances, of which there were 120 in 2006/07, 60% of the total number of homelessness presentations.

At around 4.6%, the proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) households in Ashford is lower than the national average. The Office for National Statistics reported the National BME households to be 7.9% in 2001. There were only four homelessness decisions relating to those from a BME group in 2006/07 and 11 in 2005/06. Although proportionately slightly more may have been expected, further BME households may be hidden within those whose ethnicity is unknown and with such small numbers firm conclusions about the extent to which BME households are represented amongst homelessness applicants cannot be drawn.

Most homeless acceptances are within the younger age groups of 16 to 24 and 25 to 44. There was a 21% increase in the number of 16 to 24 years olds accepted as homeless between 2005/06 and 2006/07.

Most homelessness applications originate for the more densely populated urban areas, however further analysis would be required to identify if an applicant is more likely to be accepted as homeless if they apply from an urban area. In addition it may be useful to identify whether the pattern of causes of homelessness vary between urban or rural locations.

The mapping of addresses of those presenting as homeless and those requiring assistance from social services or education may assist in targeting joint projects with specific communities to address. Currently this information is not readily available and further work would have to be completed to identify this. However Ashford Borough Council have produced a list of post codes of service users recorded on the housing waiting lists and this information is being used to inform the expansion of the town centre Gateway joint service point to provide a mobile service to hard to reach areas in partnership with Kent County Council.

### **Non statutory homeless**

Those found intentionally homeless and those homeless but not in priority need have reduced in number, while those eligible but found not to be homeless have increased. This may be in part due to increased assistance provided by Ashford Borough Council for applicants to access the private rented sector as more applicants are accessing this option as an alternative to pursuing their homelessness claim.

Households found to be homeless and in priority need represent a small proportion of those receiving housing advice from the Council. During 2006/07, a total of 1,376 households received a housing advice interview. Of these, 677 initially presented with a homelessness query and 168 were passed to a homelessness officer. During the first two quarters of 2007/08, a total of 731 housing advice interviews were conducted.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 improved monitoring arrangements have been established for approaches to the housing advice service. This will enable the service to record outcomes more precisely. A new computerised system is due for implementation during 2008 which will enable improved reporting mechanisms.

### **Reasons for homelessness**

The most common reasons for statutory homelessness are families or friends no longer being able or willing to accommodate and terminations of assured shorthold tenancies from the private sector. Other reasons that feature significantly are relationship breakdowns (non violent) and mortgage arrears. Mortgage arrears were the main reason for homelessness amongst those accepted as priority homeless in six instances in 2005/06 and seven instances in 2006/07. The local Citizens Advice Bureau have indicated that their records show increasing numbers of people approaching them for assistance due to debt including mortgage arrears.

Children feature strongly amongst statutory homeless acceptances. By far the most common priority category is households with dependent children. This category, combined with those containing a pregnant woman accounted for 86 (72%) out of 120 priority homeless families in 2006/07 and 82% of acceptances for the first six months of 2007/08.

### **Reasons for non statutory homelessness**

Ashford Borough Council's overall Information relating to non-statutory homelessness has improved since the first strategy, but further improvements such as refining data collection and reporting on causes of homelessness, ethnicity, vulnerability reasons, etc will help to identify some of the reasons contributing to homelessness for this group and this will help to inform more focussed efforts to combat the issues.

### **Future levels of homelessness**

A number of pressures have been identified which are likely to impact on the homelessness and housing advice service. These include, growth of the population in general in line with Ashford's growth area status, decanting as a result of the Stanhope private finance initiative, increased numbers of people in housing need as a result of national affordability issues, pressures on the ability to provide preventative services due to the Council's budget deficit. There will also be an increase in student numbers associated with the Ashford learning campus although this project is currently unlikely to be built before 2010.

Ashford Borough Council have already endorsed an Invest to Save approach in responding to homelessness, however, the expansion of the housing advice service and of preventative initiatives will be challenging to address, particularly in the context of the Council's wider general fund budget pressures. This will necessitate partnership working with other statutory and voluntary agencies to formulate cost effective prevention of homelessness services which provide value for money and deliver effective services.

## **Client Groups**

As a group, clients accessing Supporting People funded services, present with a consistent pattern of vulnerability issues. Many are homeless, suffering from violence, mental health, substance misuse problems and many clients present with multiple needs.

Across Kent, by far the largest Supporting People client group is single homeless people with support needs. They accounted for 35% of all clients in 2006/07, much higher than the national average of 28%.

The proportion of homeless families in Kent is however lower than the national average; 5% compared to 8%.

There is a higher proportion of older people with support needs, 8% compared to 4%. Other groups where the proportion is higher than the national average include:

- learning disabilities
- offenders or those at risk of offending
- young people leaving care
- teenage parents and
- rough sleepers.

The proportion of drug and alcohol users and young people at risk are lower than the national average.

During consultation with districts as part of a Kent County Council strategic review of short-term accommodation, the need for resettlement and outreach services was identified. Such services could ensure that homeless people or those at risk of homelessness could be supported within the communities where they live rather than trying to access scarce resources outside their area. There was also a suggestion that the demand for supported housing for homeless people is such that a redistribution of resources over time from areas with the main bulk of resources to areas with no or comparatively small provision is needed.

Kent County Council published its five year Supporting People strategy in April 2005 which identified the following client groups as priorities for service development:

- People with multiple/complex needs (including single people, who are homeless/at risk of homelessness with mental health, drug and alcohol needs, a history of offending

- Young people at risk (including homeless 16 and 17 year olds)
- People who misuse alcohol and drugs
- Frail older people

The Supporting People Strategy also acknowledges the need for short-term accommodation in Ashford for people with mental health problems.

The subsequent Supporting People needs review concludes that the priority groups identified for service development still apply. A reconfiguration of floating support, following a review of such services, goes some way towards meeting the needs of particular priority groups, such as ex-offenders, people misusing substances and people with mental health problems.

Following a review of short term supported accommodation the commissioning body has agreed to the establishment of a countywide outreach and resettlement service for rough sleepers which will go some way towards meeting the needs of some homeless people with highly complex needs.

In the longer term priorities across Kent for short-term supported accommodation are:

- Young people at risk in West Kent
- People with mental health problems in Ashford
- Domestic violence in Sevenoaks or Tonbridge & Malling
- People misusing substances in West Kent
- Teenage parents in Maidstone

## **Activities to prevent homelessness**

Ashford has increased the range of preventative services offered since the last homelessness strategy was completed in 2003. A mediation service and a homeless prevention bond scheme have been introduced; the bond scheme has also been recently reviewed. A Private Sector, Landlord Liaison Scheme is being piloted with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007 and a private sector leasing scheme has also been introduced. New appointments have been made to the role of Tenancy Sustainment Officer and a jointly funded post of Domestic Violence Prevention Officer with Maidstone Borough Council.

A series of Housing Options Advice Sheets have been developed which detail all of the options and preventative schemes available. The council's housing advice and homelessness service is currently being re-structured following a review.

Preventative services currently offered include:

- Dispute resolution with private landlords
- Prevention fund
- Homeless prevention bond scheme
- Homeless prevention savings facility
- Advice for dealing with debt, or rent or mortgage arrears

- Discretionary housing benefit payments
- Pre-tenancy determination
- Domestic violence prevention officer
- The Ashford 'sanctuary' project
- Young person's drop in
- Mediation with relate
- Ashford home improvement agency
- Floating support
- Housing advice via the council and a range of other agencies
- Kent multi-agency parent order support service

## **Accommodation for homeless people and people who may become homeless**

### **General needs housing**

As at 1 November 2007 there were 4,722 Council homes managed by the council of which 627 were managed by Moat Housing Group under a private finance initiative and a further 2,057 rented homes were provided by Housing Associations.

Properties that became available for letting have reduced markedly in recent years. During 2006/07 there were 376 lettings within the local authority and housing association housing stock in Ashford. There were 308 general needs lettings and 68 lettings in supported housing schemes. Of these, 47 lettings in general needs housing, and 30 lettings in supported housing were to households who were recorded as statutory and non statutory homeless via the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. In addition to lettings via the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, Council properties were offered as temporary accommodation to those found to be statutory homeless.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

In September 2007 Ashford Borough Council had 133 homeless households in temporary accommodation, made up as follows:

Private Sector Leased (PSL) Properties.....	48
Insecure Tenancies in Council Stock.....	60
Bed and Breakfast.....	16
Other .....	7
Refuge.....	1
Private Rented.....	1

The lack of affordable housing available means that the Council can offer only limited options to homeless households and as a result where the Council has a duty to secure accommodation temporarily, this is often, initially, in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Council and all stakeholders agree that this is not an acceptable solution and the Council is working to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Private Sector Leasing trading account runs at a surplus. This surplus provides a sink fund for damage and bad debt and also funds prevention of homelessness initiatives.

## **Supported Accommodation**

### **Long term supported accommodation**

Ashford has 1,239 units of long term accommodation for older people with support needs, 18 units for people with learning disabilities, 8 units for people with physical/sensory disabilities and 10 units of generic provision

### **Short term supported accommodation**

There are 11 short-term units in Ashford for single homeless people, 21 for young people at risk, and an 18 unit women's refuge, which is only available to female victims of Domestic Violence from outside of the Ashford area.

The Kent County Council, Supporting People Team recognise Ashford as one of the local authority areas with comparably little supported housing provision. There is a particular shortage in Ashford, of accommodation for vulnerable single homeless. Accommodation that is available comprises an 11 bedspace hostel run by Cyrenians and 21 bedspaces available for young homeless persons aged 16+ in shared flats via Stonham.

There is a countywide need for more move-on accommodation from supported housing, particularly for homeless people with mental health problems, young people at risk, people who misuse substances and ex-offenders. Ashford Borough Council has set up a supported housing move on group to consider ways to address move on requirements. The group are looking into using the MOPP (Move on Plans Protocol) toolkit.

There is also a countywide need for accommodation-based services specifically for homeless young people at risk aged 16 and 17. Ashford is not one of the County Council's priority areas for this provision.

## **Future supply**

Housing Corporation funding has been secured to provide an additional 444 affordable homes between 2006 and 2011. There are three key strategic sites identified at:

- Templar Barracks (Repton Park)
- Park Farm
- Cheeseman's Green

A private finance initiative, currently underway at Stanhope will demolish 410 flats and redevelop the area with 442 dwellings. Of these, 219 will be for social rent, 67

for shared ownership, and 23 will be for intermediate rent and 133 will be for private purchase.

An intensive supported housing scheme is currently being developed for people with mental health problems to prepare them to move on to independent living, three new sheltered housing schemes are to be built on new developments in Ashford town, and a 40 bed extra care scheme is to be developed. The council has also partnered with Rainer to provide 3 units of temporary accommodation for young people aged 16 to 21 by converting a council property into a shared housing scheme.

### **Support for homeless people, those who may become homeless and to prevent repeat homelessness**

A range of floating support is also provided across East Kent, but there is currently no Supporting People funded support for:

- People living with HIV/AIDs
- Traveller or Gypsies
- Refugees
- People with complex needs

Ashford has 15 floating support places. Sevenoaks has the same level of floating support and Dartford has 3, all other areas have more than Ashford.

At the end of March 2007, there were 52 people waiting for floating support services in Ashford. The client group with the greatest number waiting was families with support needs (15), followed by people with mental health problems (8) and then young people at risk (5) and those with complex needs (5).

### **Joint working**

Ashford BC is involved in a number of different partnership arrangements relevant to the homelessness and homelessness prevention agenda. These include:

- The Kent partnership
- Ashford Partnership (Local LSP)
- Kent housing group
- Joint policy and planning board
- The Ashford Gateway
- Kent homeless officers group
- Housing care and support group
- Ashford accommodation forum for people with learning disabilities
- No recourse to public funds network
- Ashford domestic violence forum and prevention Officer
- Domestic Violence Homelessness Prevention Officer
- Ashford mental health accommodation forum
- Ashford young person's accommodation forum
- Sure Start Children's Centres
- Kent Rent Deposit Bond Group

A single agency assessment process is in operation and the partnerships have been successful in agreeing and implementing the following joint protocols:

- Protocol for intentionally homeless families with children
- Joint protocol to address the needs of homeless young people aged 16 to 21 in Kent
- Protocol for mental health teams and local authority services to address homeless

Work to recognise and develop the important working partnership with the private sector is underway with the launch of a Private Landlord Regional Event in February 2008. The event will provide a forum for private landlords to receive information from the Council, which is relevant to them and will also facilitate a deeper understanding of opportunities for joint working.

## **Funding**

The housing options service is financed by the council general fund, central government homelessness grant and a private sector leasing contribution. The Supporting People programme providing revenue funding to support vulnerable households also has close links with homelessness prevention.

Ashford BC is heavily reliant upon the Central Government grant of £31,000 and the Private Sector Leasing contribution to deliver prevention of homelessness initiatives. Central Government have identified potential changes to the subsidy arrangements for housing benefits on Private Sector Leasing Schemes and the authority will have to consider how these changes will affect its ability to continue to fund prevention initiatives from the surplus monies in future years.

## **Monitoring Performance**

Performance monitoring information is reported to Members on a quarterly basis. The average number of days spent in bed and breakfast increased markedly between 2005/06 and 2006/07. This reflects an increase in the time spent in bed and breakfast by all household types due to additional pressures on the supply of accommodation. The number of lettings is steadily decreasing and there are competing requirements for the available properties from households decanted as a result of the PFI programme, urgent needs households on the housing register and move on from B&B for homeless households in need of temporary accommodation.

The actual number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation has reduced. The target time for relets of local authority housing is 24 days. For 2006/07 this was narrowly missed, the average relet time being 25.35 days. Performance on preventing homelessness, reducing repeat homelessness and repeat cases of domestic violence, is good based on BVPI's. In general Ashford performs well in comparison to other Kent authorities other than for the length of stay in bed and breakfast. Times taken to relet local authority housing are shorter than in all other Kent authorities based on 2005/06 data.

The proportion of bed and breakfast charges recovered from housing benefit and recharges, stands at 88.06% compared to a target of 80%.

Since April 2007 some local housing advice performance indicators have been produced to provide improved monitoring information.

The requirement for all English authorities to produce a Best Value Performance Plan will be removed from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. From this date a new set of national indicators will come into effect. All other indicator sets, including BVPIs will be abolished.

A new indicator to measure the number of households living in temporary accommodation will be introduced to monitor progress towards halving the number of households in temporary accommodation from 101,000 households to 50,500 households by 2010.

## **Gaps Identified**

### **Information Gaps**

The latest housing needs survey was completed in 2005 and requires updating to meet current guidance. Planning policies should be informed by an up to date Strategic Housing Market Assessment that follows the guidance issued in August 2007. This includes information related to numbers of homeless households and those in temporary accommodation. Specific reference is also made, in the guidance, to the links between affordability and homelessness and to homeless households in communal establishments.

Both the homelessness P1E returns and Supporting People Client data routinely provide some information that relates to vulnerable groups and homelessness. In addition the Kent Supporting People Team regularly updates needs information. There are however some areas where data currently falls short:

- The current data relating to the number of referrals to short-term accommodation for those who misuse substances is incomplete.
- There is a lack of reliable data on the number of people with learning disabilities currently living with ageing carers and forecasts of future need for supported accommodation. Similarly there is a lack of forecast information on the support needs for people diagnosed on the autistic spectrum.
- There is a lack comprehensive information available concerning those with complex needs that may fall within a number of categories. In particular information is lacking on the full range of need for homeless people presenting as ex-offenders, substance misusers and those with mental health problems.

Ashford's growth status will inevitably have an impact on the demand for a number of services including those aimed at homeless and potentially homeless households. Whilst the number of homes in the Borough will increase and with that the number of affordable homes available, there is also expected to be an increase in population which will require an increase in the capacity of services currently provided. The

growth area will take many years to deliver in full and the impact on services as it progresses will need to be kept under review.

The collection of data relating to statutory homeless households is now routine and submission of data on a quarterly basis is a CLG requirement. The same requirements do not exist for non-statutory homeless households and consequently the data collated is much less comprehensive. Ashford BC has made recent improvements that provide monitoring information relating to housing advice interviews and prevention of homelessness. Further improvements are however necessary for a greater understanding of the circumstances of non-statutory homeless applicants. Ideally this would include age, ethnicity, household composition, current location and housing circumstances, reasons for presenting and vulnerability issues. The homelessness strategy will include an action to investigate what information it is practical to collect.

Further improvements to monitoring information would be beneficial to ensure a full understanding of the homelessness situation and the impact of services delivered. This should incorporate information relating to the costs of various parts of the service, should include cost information relating to services provided by agencies other than the council. This would ideally involve a value for money assessment in partnership with other local authorities on a sub regional basis.

Further information relating to the ethnicity of clients within client groups for specialist and other supported accommodation, beyond white or non-white would be useful. Ethnicity information for those receiving floating support would also be of assistance.

## **Service Delivery Gaps**

The restructuring of the service to provide a full housing options approach is being completed. The main issues for service delivery raised as part of the consultation process for the review concern increased working with private sector landlords to extend and improve the assistance that private rented accommodation is able to offer to homeless and potentially homeless households. Improved working relationships with housing benefits was also raised.

Homelessness strategies have links to a great many of other strategic documents. Many of these relate to vulnerable client groups and are often the responsibility of countywide agencies. There is a need to ensure, with partner local authorities that the needs of homeless and potentially homeless households are thoroughly embedded within these strategic documents.

## **Accommodation Gaps**

Improved provision of general needs affordable housing would mean an overall increase in supply and reduced pressures on homelessness and housing advice services.

Most housing strategies across Kent identify a high demand for adaptations, which would enable many people with physical disabilities to stay in their own homes.

The population is ageing and there is a future need for extra care accommodation.

There is a need for additional authorised pitches for Gypsies and Travellers

### **Supported housing**

There is a clear countywide future need for supported accommodation, both short and long term, for people with learning disabilities currently living with ageing carers.

There is a need for supported housing for people with mental health problems including provision for those with high level support needs, ex-offenders and people misusing substances.

Currently there is no specific service provision for those with complex needs.

### **Move on accommodation**

A need for move on accommodation from supported housing across Kent has been identified. There are particular needs relating to homeless people with mental health problems, young people at risk, people who misuse substances and ex-offenders.

There is also a need for supported accommodation for those moving from hospital to the community.

### **Temporary accommodation**

The government has set a target for reduction of the use of temporary accommodation. Ashford BC is aiming to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation and is working towards targets to achieve this. There is however, a need for good quality temporary accommodation and alternatives to bed and breakfast for vulnerable single homeless (particularly 16 and 17 year olds)

### **Support Gaps**

There is a general need for resettlement and outreach services.

There are no support services specifically for people with a dual diagnosis of mental health problems and substance misuse or for ex-offenders.

There are likely future support needs for people diagnosed on the autistic spectrum, particularly those with Asperger's syndrome.

There is a need for floating support for people with mental health problems; and specialist provision for Gypsies and Travellers, ex-offenders and those living with HIV/AIDS. There may also be an unmet need for floating support for elderly owner-occupiers.

There is a need to develop housing pathways for young people to assist in preventing homelessness.

Additional floating support has been identified as a need across Kent.

An extension to existing mediation arrangements to provide a full service is being actively considered.

## **Homelessness Prevention: A Strategy Healthcheck**

This document has been used in partnership with stakeholders in assisting to produce a list of service gaps and in the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

## **Conclusions**

The key issues arising from the review are:

- Prevention must be a key aim
- Need to continue to endorse an invest to save approach to continue to deliver prevention work
- Prevention activity needs to focus on early intervention
- There needs to be a focus on the needs of young people
- Possible expansion of the mediation service needs to be considered
- Regeneration activity needs to take account of the impact on homelessness
- The strategy needs to consider the non priority households as well as those covered by the homelessness legislation
- Between them the categories of parents and other relatives or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate, make up 38% of all priority homelessness acceptances.
- The private rented sector needs to be encouraged to play a bigger role in housing homeless households
- Suitable temporary accommodation needs to be made available
- Improved relations are needed between the housing benefit service and private landlords
- The restructuring of the homelessness and housing advice service needs to be completed.
- There is a need to increase the provision of general affordable housing, move on accommodation, supported housing and support services including floating support
- Better communication within and about the service is needed
- More opportunities for joint working and sharing best practice need to be sought
- Bring empty property back into use
- Issues around alcohol and substance misuse need to be considered
- Strategic links need to be strengthened

These issues have been considered by the homelessness working group and Policy Advisory Group and the following priorities have been identified to be incorporated in the homelessness strategy.

<p>Priority 1: Increase the supply of homes for homeless and potentially homeless households</p>	1. Increase the supply of affordable rented and intermediated tenure homes to meet local need and demand
	2. Develop policies to assist in bringing empty properties back into use and ensure their availability to those in housing need including homeless households
	3. Ensure the best use of the existing housing stock for homeless and potentially homeless households
	4. Increase the availability of supported housing and housing related support services in the district in line with identified need
	5. Evaluate the potential and plan for supported housing schemes to be incorporated in new housing developments
<p>Priority 2: Prevent and reduce homelessness</p>	1. Undertake a risk assessment of current funding for the Council's homelessness prevention and options service
	2. Increase early identification and intervention to reduce the number of households who present as homeless
	3. Provide timely and high quality advice and information that enables households to resolve their housing issues
	4. Strengthen work with landlords to prevent evictions
	5. Develop a strategic framework for addressing the needs of homeless and potentially homeless young people
	6. Work with partners to develop a sub-regional minimum standard for collecting data about the needs of non-priority and priority homeless applicants
	7. Complete refocusing of homelessness and housing advice services
	8. Review the current mediation service and potential for expansion based on a value for money approach, good practice and experience in other areas.
<p>Priority 3: Increase access to a choice of settled home</p>	1. Increase understanding of the impact of the housing market and housing market interventions on homeless and potentially homeless households
	2. Improve the housing options available through the Choice based lettings scheme
	3. Increase the role of the private rented sector in providing a choice of settled and affordable homes
	4. Increase the rate of successful and sustainable move-on from temporary accommodation (supported housing, hospital etc)
	5. Develop an understanding of the urban/rural dimension to homelessness

Priority 4: Further develop partnerships with key stakeholders to improve the delivery and co-ordination of housing related services to vulnerable people	1. Ensure a homelessness dimension to existing client group forums and those to be set up in future
	2. Promote and encourage the use of protocols related to homelessness – intentionally homeless families protocol, young person homelessness protocol, mental health referrals protocol
	3. Increase understanding of the causes of homelessness and the housing and support needs of homeless and vulnerable households
	4. Work with health to develop work with the Visitors and A&E departments to identify potential Domestic Abuse Victims in order to promote advisory services.
Priority 5: Improve the quality and range of information and advice services available	1. Update and expand the range of leaflets/fact sheets covering housing options
	2. Raise awareness of the Housing Options service and housing issues among key local agencies through a joint training programme
	3. Provide awareness training for Victim Support Service on housing options for people experiencing domestic violence
	4. Develop a communications plan to ensure all key stakeholders are always appropriately engaged in strategic housing issues and developments related to homelessness
Priority 6: Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households	1. Enable redevelopment of Ashford Women’s Refuge to improve standards of accommodation
	2. Evaluate the Private Sector Leasing arrangements to include projected need and consider opportunities for working with other Kent Authorities to provide value for money
	3. Research the need for move-on accommodation from supported housing
	4. Undertake an appraisal of suitable temporary accommodation options to provide an alternative to bed and breakfast
	5. Review existing accommodation based and floating support services for young people and develop a young person’s housing pathway

A multi agency homelessness forum event was held to look at key priorities in relation to homelessness. These were grouped under the following topic areas:

- Working with partners
- Prevention of homelessness
- Young people
- Customer focus
- Working with the private sector
- Other issues

The key issues raised are shown in appendix 2 and will help to inform the homelessness strategy.

## **Next Steps**

The homelessness review will be published on the website and circulated to stakeholders. The issues raised during the course of the review will be developed into a draft homelessness strategy including a detailed action plan. Actions will be developed and prioritised by the homelessness strategy working group in the first instance and will then be subject to a further month's consultation. The final draft Homelessness Strategy will be submitted to the Council Executive for endorsement. The housing strategy for Ashford has been developed alongside the homelessness strategy and the headline actions, informed by the review have been incorporated. There will be an invitation to make any further comments about aspects to be addressed in the homelessness strategy.

There are existing commitments to:

- Develop a vulnerable persons strategy;
- Complete an intensive supported housing scheme for those with mental health difficulties.
- Complete a mental health housing needs survey with partner agencies. The aim is to quantify the need for a short-term accommodation based supported housing scheme to complement the intensive supported scheme currently in development and the availability of floating support locally.
- Work with neighbouring authorities to commission a strategic housing market assessment.

## 2. Introduction and context

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all Local housing authorities (LHAs) must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. The social services authority, which is KCC must provide all reasonable assistance. LHAs in England were required to publish a Homelessness Strategy, based on a full review of homelessness in their area, by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003. It is a requirement that Homelessness strategies are reviewed at least every five years.

The Homelessness Review must consider the following;

- (a) Current and future levels of homelessness;
- (b) Activities which are carried out for any of the following purposes:
  - (i) Preventing homelessness
  - (ii) Securing that accommodation is available for homeless people in the district and will be available for people in the district who may become homeless;
  - (iii) Providing support for people in the district who
  - (iv) are homeless
  - (v) may become homeless
  - (vi) have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again;
- (c) Resources available to the housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for activities mentioned in b.

In 2005 the Government produced its strategy document Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives which sets out the government's aim to halve the number of households living in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010, by:

- Preventing homelessness;
- Providing support for vulnerable people;
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness;
- Helping more people move away from rough sleeping; and
- Providing more settled homes.

As highlighted in the most recent Code of Guidance, it is now time for LHAs to ensure that they are able to produce a new Homelessness Strategy by 31 July 2008<sup>2</sup>. The main changes in guidance relevant to the process are that:

- The Code emphasises the need to consider all groups of homeless people
- There is a stronger focus on understanding the causes of homelessness – across all groups

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<sup>2</sup> Unless they are categorised as an “excellent authority”

This is in accordance with the Council's emerging Social Inclusion Strategy. Further changes are concerned with the development of homelessness strategies, including a requirement that prevention is a key strategic aim of all homelessness strategies.

## **Homelessness Strategy 2003**

This is the second review of homelessness in Ashford, the first having been completed in May 2003 by Ashford Borough Council, in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies. A five year strategy to tackle unmet homelessness needs was produced in July 2003.

The strategy identified two headline targets:-

- Reduce the number of households presenting as homeless
- To increase the number of households where homelessness is prevented

The homelessness strategy action plan is included in appendix 7. There have been a number of significant developments since the strategy was adopted including:

- Implementation of a homeless prevention bond scheme
- Implementation of a Prevention Fund Scheme
- Implementation of a private sector leasing scheme
- Establishment of a mediation service to prevent homelessness
- Recruitment of a jointly funded post of Domestic Violence Prevention Officer between Ashford and Maidstone Borough Councils
- Recruitment of a Tenancy Sustainment Officer
- Development of a shared supported housing scheme for Young People
- Development of a Young Persons Drop In

## **Strategic Links**

There are a host of strategies, policies and programmes at a national level that homelessness strategies must pay heed to. There are further tiers of documents at regional, sub-regional, local authority and neighbourhood levels that need to both influence and be influenced by the Homelessness Strategy. Many of these relate to vulnerable groups of people who tend to come into contact with homelessness and homelessness prevention services. A list of key texts and issues that the homelessness strategy will link to is included in appendix 1. Some of the main links are discussed below. Many of these relate to vulnerable client groups that are covered more fully in section 7. Ensuring that these linkages are as effective as possible will form an important aspect of the homelessness strategy.

## **Links to Ashford Borough Council Housing Strategy and the Local Development Framework**

The homelessness review has been timed to coincide with both the review of the overall Housing Strategy and the development of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. This has ensured synergy between the documents produced and helped to avoid consultation overload. In addition to the consultation processes that

have been carried out as part of the Homelessness Strategy Review, opportunities for views to be expressed about homelessness and housing advice have been made available through the consultation arrangements for the overall Housing Strategy.

- A Housing Strategy Review workshop with partner organisations and interest groups was held in June 2006 as the first step in reviewing the 2004 – 06 Housing Strategy and informing the key priorities and objectives of the current strategy.
- Working group sessions have been held with local stakeholders to consider and formulate ways of addressing specific housing and related needs that were identified by the Housing Strategy Review workshop and during the period of the last Housing Strategy.
- There have been opportunities for the wider community to respond to the Housing Strategy via a consultation on the Council's website.
- Consultation has taken place with the Government Office for the South East.

The Draft Housing Strategy identifies five Strategic Priorities

1. Increasing the supply of homes
2. Developing sustainable communities
3. Supporting independence
4. Ensuring homes of decent quality
5. Providing accessible information on housing options

More detailed objectives relate to the five Strategic Priorities. Those most directly concerned with homelessness and housing advice fall under Strategic Priority Five. In particular:

- Improve the housing options available through the Choice Based Lettings scheme
- Improve the quality and range of housing options advice and assistance available
- Prevent and reduce homelessness
- Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households.

Many of the other objectives also have an indirect impact. An adequate supply of affordable accommodation is crucial to ensure that homeless families are not locked into temporary accommodation and to reduce pressures in the market place that may lead to more families becoming homeless. Supported housing and housing related support is also vital to prevent homelessness and achieve appropriate housing solutions for vulnerable households. Linkage between the overall housing and homelessness strategies will be detailed further in the homelessness strategy.

The Regional Spatial Strategy prepared by SEERA also known as the draft South East Plan 2006 to 2026 sets the target for affordable homes in Ashford Borough at 5,938. Ashford's Core Strategy, which is currently going through the examination in public process, has a requirement for 35% affordable housing on eligible sites to meet this target.

## **Corporate Plan and Community Strategy**

The Council's Corporate Plan 2007 – 2010 has 8 themes including housing. Within the housing theme, there are four objectives, including an objective to 'Promote an effective housing service to reduce homelessness and temporary accommodation. The Community Strategy is currently being reviewed.

The first Ashford Community Strategy was adopted in 2004 by the Ashford Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership). The strategy covers the period 2004-2014 and is accompanied by a 3 year action plan. The Community Strategy also includes 8 themes, one of which addresses social exclusion, which incorporates some of the issues covered by the Homelessness Strategy.

The Ashford Partnership has commenced a review of the Community Strategy, which should result in a new "Sustainable Community Strategy" (SCS) by the end of 2008. This new type of Community Strategy will reflect the themes in the emerging Kent Agreement 2.

It is anticipated that there will be even stronger links to the Housing and Homelessness Strategies in the new SCS.

## **The Kent Agreement**

The Kent Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Kent Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA 2) are combined together within The Kent Agreement: serving Kent together. A new LAA for Kent is in the process of being negotiated and will be in place from 1 April 2008.

## **Strategies for vulnerable groups**

Under the Kent LPSA 2, target 9 is 'to help Kent's most vulnerable adults, aged 18 - 64, living independent and fulfilled lives in the community.

A Supporting Independence Programme (SIP) was set up in Kent in 2002. SIP research has identified 10 main groups of people who are most in danger of becoming trapped in a spiral of deprivation.

- School leavers with low educational attainment
- Young people/adults with a record of repeat offending
- Young people in care or leaving care
- Lone and Teenage parents
- Parents lacking basic life and social skills and who lack basic literacy or numeracy skills
- People with alcohol and substance addiction
- People with health problems, learning or physical disability who are applying for low-level, long-term incapacity benefit
- Transient or seasonal groups, including refugees, asylum seekers and the homeless
- The long-term unemployed over 50

- Vulnerable older people aged 70 plus

Despite this list containing many similarities with those groups most likely to suffer homelessness, and a specific mention of homeless households, the link to homelessness for the remainder of the vulnerable groups listed is not made explicit in the Kent Annual Plan. No other mention of homelessness or homelessness prevention is made in the document.

## **Supporting People Strategy**

An aim of the Supporting People Strategy is 'preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness'. A strategic review of short-term accommodation was completed in 2007. One of the aims of the review was 'to realise the potential of supported housing to deal with issues of homelessness and other needs in a planned and structured way. Further details of this review are discussed in section 7.

## **Social Exclusion**

Groups where there may be a high incidence of homelessness include young people, (particularly those who have been in care), offenders, those with mental health or substance misuse problems and adults with multiple problems.

The Council's Corporate Plan includes a commitment to prepare a social inclusion strategy by 2010, which will raise awareness of social exclusion and, with our partners, seek to improve how all services are accessed by hard to reach groups.

## **Drugs, Alcohol and Crime**

Housing is one of the key 'wraparound' services which support drug users. Integration of employment, housing and resettlement services delivered in an integrated way are needed to support drug free futures.

## **Mental Health**

Assertive outreach work, rather than waiting until homeless people with mental health needs approach services for help is recommended by the Department of Health.

## **Children and Young People**

Close links are needed between leaving care and housing teams to ensure suitable accommodation for those leaving care. For other vulnerable young people effective joint working is key. Kent's first Children and Young People's Plan was approved by the Kent Children's Trust in July 2007 following extensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders and with children and young people.

A Kent Wide Young Persons Protocol has been developed between housing providers, social services and other agencies. This sets out each agencies role in responding to the needs of this client group.

Ashford BC have developed a Youth Strategy which responds to the views and concerns raised by local young residents from the borough of Ashford which were raised during a consultation exercise in 2004. The Strategy is 'What Matters 2006 – 2009' and can be viewed at [www.whatmattersashford.co.uk](http://www.whatmattersashford.co.uk)

## **Kent Parenting Strategy**

The Kent Children's Trust has commissioned the development of a Parenting Strategy that will draw together, plans programmes and services that have until now, been separate.<sup>3</sup>

## **Employment, Education and Training**

The Kent Community Programme (KCP) aims to ensure that young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) are supported and given the skills to reach their potential. The KCP is designed to engage those who have become disenchanted with education and who are already in or likely to fall into the NEET groups and will promote independent living and learning.

There are a number of initiatives aimed at improving employment and training opportunities for young people in Kent. Links to homelessness prevention are not made explicit.

## **Domestic Violence**

Kent's domestic violence strategy recognises that the availability of safe and secure accommodation for women experiencing domestic violence is of critical importance. It states that 'housing strategies should encompass the following elements:

- Appropriate temporary accommodation
- Refuge provision
- Fast-tracking re-housing
- Help for victims in managing their tenancies
- Support to enable victims to remain safely in their own homes (Sanctuary Schemes)

Ensuring the availability of an appropriate range of support and accommodation is closely tied with the statutory responsibility of local authorities under homelessness legislation.<sup>4</sup>

Further co-operation to ensure that intelligence held by local authorities regarding the prevalence of domestic violence amongst those making homelessness applications or seeking housing advice would assist in providing a fuller understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> KCC Annual Plan, Performance in 2006/07, Priorities and Targets for 2007/08

<sup>4</sup> Kent and Medway Multi-agency Strategy: An Integrated and Proactive Response to Domestic Violence 2007- 2010, Oct 2007

## **Structure of the remainder of this document**

Section 3 of this document describes the methodology used to undertake the homelessness review including good practice guidance utilised, secondary data sources incorporated, and the consultation process undertaken. Results from the consultation are detailed in appendix 2 and where relevant incorporated to support findings in other sections.

Section 4 provides contextual information related to Ashford Borough. It includes key demographic information about the population, ethnicity and age structure and key information about the housing market. It also provides some headline information about employment and housing benefit.

Section 5 describes the current homelessness situation and recent trends. It includes information relating to statutory homelessness decisions including the decisions made, ethnicity, causes of homelessness, age of statutorily homeless households, household type and gender and priority need categories. This section also provides information about housing advice interviews and the use of bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. Finally it shows the number of households requiring accommodation on the housing register.

Section 6 is concerned with future levels of homelessness and identifies a number of current issues that are likely to impact on this. Key issues include Ashford's Growth area status, the Ashford Learning Campus, continuing work under the private finance initiative at Stanhope, the continuing national affordability crisis and resources constraints within the Council.

Section 7 considers the needs of specific vulnerable client groups in relation to homelessness. It uses supporting people client records to look at the prevalence of homelessness for individual groups at a national and county wide level. It also draws on work undertaken by or for Kent Supporting People, including the Supporting People Strategy, and the most recent needs review, and a Kent wide strategic review of short-term accommodation. After summarising the information available regarding the need for support services across all vulnerable client groups, information relating to each client group is then considered separately. Most of the information provided is at a county wide level, but where possible data relating specifically to Ashford borough has been included.

Section 8 describes the current homelessness support and prevention initiatives provided by Ashford BC and its partner agencies. It also provides information about ongoing changes to the council services following a review of private sector housing services and provides details of existing joint working arrangements.

Section 9 is concerned with the current and future supply of accommodation to meet the needs of homeless households, both in terms of settled housing and temporary accommodation. Supported housing provision is also included in this section.

Section 10 looks at the resources available to fund homelessness and related services across Ashford.

Section 11 considers current arrangements for monitoring performance including performance against national best value and local performance indicators.

### **3. Methodology**

In July 2007 Ashford Borough Council commissioned Consultants, Housing Quality Network (HQN) to support the Council to undertake a review of homelessness and related services, by ensuring that the process of review is robust and by providing assistance in the development of the homelessness strategy.

This section describes the methodology used to undertake the homelessness review including good practice guidance utilised, secondary data sources incorporated, and the consultation process undertaken.

This review follows the guidance set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, CLG, 2006 and makes use of the much fuller guidance contained in Homelessness strategies: a good practice, DTLR, 2002. It also draws on a number of strategy and good practice documents concerned with or linked to the homelessness agenda, these are listed at Appendix 8. This review provides an up to date assessment of homelessness in Ashford and the extent and nature of need for homelessness and related services. It provides an audit of current service provision including an assessment of the resources available and it gives details of consultation arrangements to inform the homelessness strategy.

#### **Strategic Groups**

The homelessness review and strategy process is being managed by the Homelessness Strategy Working Group. This group is headed by Ashford Borough Council's Housing Operations Manager for this service area, supported by a member of the Housing Options Team. Membership of the working group includes other officers from Ashford Borough Council concerned with community youth projects, community safety, and voluntary sector development. The group also includes representatives from Kent County Council, Social Services (children and families and adult services), NHS, officers concerned with specialist accommodation, teenage pregnancy, Supporting People and representation from the Probation service.

A wider Homelessness Forum has also been established to take advantage of the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of professionals whose work is connected with homelessness. Membership of the Working Group and the Forum are shown in appendices 5 and 6.

The following tasks were undertaken as part of the review:

#### **Review of relevant documentation**

The review has been informed by a number of key documents, including:

Draft Ashford Housing Strategy 2007 to 2011

The Kent Supporting People Strategy 2005 to 2010

Updated Needs Analysis, 2007

Strategic Review of Short-term Accommodation-Based Supported Housing in Kent, Kent Supporting People Team, 2007

## **Review of Statistical Information**

### **Analysis of Supporting People client records**

Supporting People Client Record forms provide a useful source of information on new clients receiving Supporting People funded services. This information is recorded by service providers.

### **Analysis of quarterly data on homelessness applications**

The council completes regular P1E returns for the government; these record information regarding the number of decisions made by the council following homelessness applications. They also record household characteristics of those who have been accepted as homeless under the legislation.

This type of data provides only part of the picture of homelessness and urgent housing need; a number of other factors impact on the level of homelessness as recorded by the council, for example, not everyone will approach the council.

### **Additional statistical information held by or available to Ashford Borough Council**

- Details of households accessing homeless prevention services such as the homeless prevention bond scheme and the prevention fund.
- Performance data for Best Value and local indicators
- Information relating to the housing register
- Information relating to placements in Bed and Breakfast
- CORE (COntinuous REcording) system on lettings made by housing associations and the local authority

## **Consultation**

### **Working Group Sessions with Stakeholders**

A series of working group sessions have been held with the stakeholders as part of the housing strategy review. They are concerned with vulnerable groups and provide information relevant to homelessness services. The groups were:

- Substance misuse and dual diagnosis working group
- Older people and people with physical disabilities working group
- Mental health working group
- People with learning disabilities

A Youth Forum Sub Group has also been set up to look at issues of Housing and Homelessness facing young people.

## **Service-user questionnaire**

A questionnaire was sent to 426 households that had used the homelessness service. 41 questionnaires (roughly 10%) have been returned. A copy of the questionnaire is included in appendix 4.

## **Stakeholder questionnaire**

A questionnaire was sent to service-providers in July 2007. This exercise aimed to identify the role services have to play in preventing homelessness and supporting households in urgent housing need to resolve their problems. A copy of the questionnaire is included in appendix 5

## **Consultation 'Speak out' exercise at Simon Mead House**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> August 2007 a user group consultation exercise was carried out at Simon Mead House – accommodation for single homeless clients. The exercise involved a staff member from the Housing Options Team, a Tenant Participation Officer, an officer from East Kent Cyrenians and four current residents from Simon Mead House although all hostel residents were invited. Residents were advised that this was an opportunity for them to voice their views of the existing homelessness service provided in Ashford.

## **Staff Consultation**

Structural changes to bring together housing advice and homelessness services through the creation of generic roles are currently being implemented by the Council. A proposal has also been made for the creation of two new part time posts; one of a 'Homelessness Strategy, Prevention and Implementation Officer' and also an additional part time 'Landlord Liaison Officer'.

A 'Moving Forward Event' was held on the 19 July 2007 with all Housing Advice and Homelessness staff. This one-day workshop was designed to support the review of housing advice and homelessness services and Ashford's Homelessness Strategy. This was an ideal opportunity for staff to both contribute to the homelessness review and strategy, and to consider how that translated into action and so aid the change process. It provided space for the staff involved to think about the future of the services they deliver and how they are able to contribute to the success of those services. The objectives for the day were to have:

- Created a shared vision for the future of the Team and its activities
- Explored and endorsed an outline Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- Agreed on how to streamline service processes
- Identified and agreed the necessary steps to a higher emphasis on prevention work and alternative housing options.

Several subsequent service improvement planning sessions have since been held with the Housing Options Team.

## **Ashford Young Persons Accommodation Forum**

This recently established forum held a meeting in August 2007. This was attended by a CLG specialist advisor and the discussion was geared towards an input to the homelessness review and strategy.

### **Elected members**

As part of the review, emerging findings were presented to elected members in September 2007. This provided an opportunity to raise awareness of housing need and homelessness in the borough, particularly important to secure resources for the future. This was also a useful exercise to qualify findings from the review and particularly to identify what long-standing members of the community consider to be Ashford's unique features.

### **Voluntary Sector**

Ashford Community Network have been consulted via a member of the Homelessness Strategy Working Group on emerging findings from the review. Comments made are summarised in appendix 2.

### **Next Stages**

The findings of this review will be used to formulate a homelessness strategy for 2008 to 2012, including a detailed action plan. A draft of this strategy will be subject to a further four week consultation period.

## 4. Profile of Ashford

This section provides contextual information related to Ashford Borough. It includes key demographic information about the population, ethnicity and age structure and key information about the housing market. It also provides some headline information about employment and housing benefit.

Ashford Borough is, geographically, the largest of the 12 districts comprising Kent. Ashford is the main settlement and the remainder of the Borough is made up of rural areas and the small town of Tenterden. Geographically, 90% of the Borough is rural, but only 41% of the population reside in the rural areas.

### Population<sup>5</sup>

The population of the Ashford Borough Council area is estimated to be 110,000. This equates to 6.8% of the total population of Kent. There are approximately 45,000 homes in the district.

As a designated growth area it is predicted that between 2001 and 2031 there will be an additional 31,000 homes in the Borough. Projections indicate that the population of the district will increase by an additional 18,300 people by 2016 rising to an expected population of 136,100 by 2021.

Compared to national and regional figures, Ashford Borough has a higher proportion of households aged 0 to 9 and 30 to 44. The proportion aged 15 to 30 is lower than the national average. The 65 and over age group is expected to account for 1 in 5 of the population by 2016. The population in all age groups is expected to increase.

The number of households in the borough is set to increase to 50,300 by 2011 and to 55,600 by 2016.

### Ethnic Profile

The Housing Needs Survey 2005 identified that 4.6% of households in the borough stated their ethnic origin as a category other than British. This compares to a national proportion of 11% and means an ethnic minority population in Ashford of around 2,000 households. The largest ethnic minority groups are:

- White other 55.3%
- Black Caribbean 11.5%
- White Irish 11.1%
- Bangladeshi 7.4%
- White & Asian 4.9%
- Other Asian 4.6%

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<sup>5</sup> All statistics in this section are taken from Ashford Borough Council draft housing strategy 2007 – 2011 or from the Office for National Statistics

As at 1 April 2007, the make up of the housing register was recorded as 86.4% White British. The next largest group is White other, accounting for 4.5%. No other group is represented in large numbers, however the total proportion of the register from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups is larger than that found in the population of Ashford as a whole.

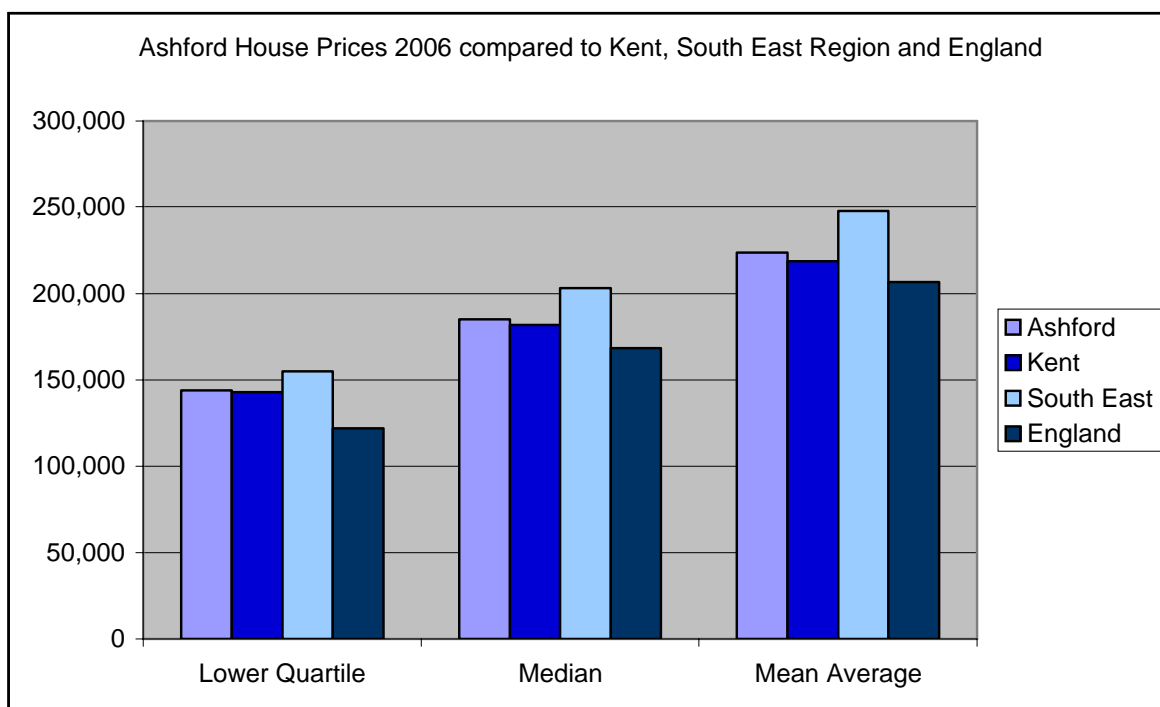
## Housing

The 2005 housing needs survey identified that there are 45,000 homes in the Borough. Roughly 10% of the stock is privately rented, the Borough Council manages 4,722 units and a further 627 are managed by Moat Housing Group under a private finance initiative. There are a total of 2,057 properties managed by RSLs (Registered Social Landlords) in the Borough.

## Housing Market Trends

The overall housing growth target is to provide an additional 31,000<sup>6</sup> homes by 2031.

House prices in Ashford Borough are slightly higher than the Kent average, slightly lower than the average for the South East and significantly higher than the average for England as a whole. This is true for the lowest quarter house prices, the lowest half of all house prices and for the overall numerical average.



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<sup>6</sup> Ashford Borough Council draft housing strategy 2007 – 2011 unless otherwise stated

<sup>7</sup> CLG housing market live tables

## **Housing Needs Survey Information**

A comprehensive Housing Needs survey was completed in 2005. This was jointly commissioned with Maidstone Borough Council. The survey found that 67% of households cannot afford private rental and 79% of households cannot afford to purchase a home on the open market.

Annually there is a need for 1,027 affordable homes. After allowing for the supply from re-lets there is an annual shortfall of 655 affordable homes.

The overall picture in the private sector is a shortfall of one and two bedroom properties and an oversupply of three and four bedroom properties. The greatest shortfall is for two bedroom houses.

There is a shortfall of affordable housing across all housing types except for a small surplus of two and three bedroom flats. The shortfall is particularly acute in one bedroom flats and two bedroom houses, where there is a shortfall of over 1,000 properties of each type. 95% of newly forming households are looking to occupy one or two bedroom accommodation.

The highest income to purchase and private rental prices are in the rural areas of the borough. Consequently levels of need for affordable homes are high in the rural parts of the district, including Tenterden which is a small town with a population of less than 10,000 within the Ashford borough.

The survey identifies an increasing requirement for sheltered housing. Over a three year period demand is estimated at 678 units, made up of 280 affordable units and 340 in the private sector.

In the Ashford area, 18.5% of households contain somebody with a disability. More than half (58%) of those with a disability are aged over 60. Walking difficulties are most common and 9.8% of households contain a member who is a wheelchair user. Half of the wheelchair users, 478 people, do not live in suitably adapted homes.

Ashford Borough Council is currently in discussion with neighbouring authorities about joint housing market assessments.

There is also a proactive and successful rural affordable local-need housing programme which is designed to ensure that every parish of less than 3,000 residents is assessed by 2010, through a programme of four surveys a year. These have been successful in assisting to develop 249 affordable homes on exception sites since 1990 and in doing so, will have helped to prevent homelessness

## **Private Sector Homes**

A house condition survey took place in 2001 and was reported on in 2002 in the Private Sector House Conditions Survey, it indicated that under the Housing Health and Safety Rating system some 4,000 dwellings had serious hazards to the health and safety of the occupier. 32% of dwellings with serious hazards are occupied by vulnerable groups.

## Private Rent Levels

The following are the average monthly rental costs in the Ashford Borough<sup>8</sup>:

- 1 bedroom flat £509
- 2 bedroom flat £547 - £600
- 2 bedroom terraced house £529 - £600
- 3 bedroom terraced house £635
- 2 bedroom semi detached house £557 - £600
- 3 bedroom semi detached house £700

There is considerable variation in costs across the borough. The lower priced private rented accommodation is found in the Ashford urban area with rents rising by approximately £200 per month for comparable sized accommodation in the rural areas.

As at February 2008, provisional rates for Local Housing Allowance for the Ashford Broad Rental Market Area to be introduced in April 2008 are:

Room Category	Weekly LHA	Monthly LHA
Category A – shared	£65.77	£285.00
Category B – 1 bedroom	£109.04	£472.51
Category C – 2 bedrooms	£132.69	£574.99
Category D – 3 bedrooms	£160.38	£694.98
Category E – 4 bedrooms	£230.20	£997.53
Category F – 5 bedrooms	£345.00	£1495.00

## Houses in multiple occupation.

As at 29 October 2007, the private sector housing team have licensed 46 houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and have a further six waiting to be licensed. A programme of improvement for those licensed will take place and work will then be carried out to identify other licensable dwellings.

## Employment<sup>9</sup>

Ashford has a low unemployment rate – 1.7% in Spring 2007, compared to a national average of 5.5%. Service industries are the major employers in the Borough. The creation of new jobs is an important principle of the growth agenda. It is forecast that 7,350 new jobs will be created between 2006 and 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Data based on Ashford Housing Needs survey 2005 updated by local knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> Ashford Borough Council draft housing strategy 2007 – 2011

## **Housing Benefit**

During 2006/07 there were 5,328 Housing Benefit claims. Of these 775 (37.8%) were from those living in housing associations dwellings, 3,408 (45%) council tenants and 1,145 (27.1%) in the private sector.

## **Discretionary Housing Payments**

During 2005/06 there were 118 applications made for DHP, 70 of these were successful with an overall payout of £27,869.71 of the total Government allocation of £29,900. During 2006/07 there were 99 applications for DHP, 56 of these were successful with an overall payout of £29,930.25 of the total Government allocation of £29,412. In the first 41 weeks of 2007/08 127 applications had been received, 62 of which had been successful with a total paid of £25,606.61 of the Government's allocation of £29,977.

## **5. Current homelessness trends<sup>10</sup>**

This section describes the current homelessness situation in Ashford and recent trends, with some comparisons at county, regional and national level. It includes information relating to statutory homelessness decisions including the decisions made, ethnicity, causes of homelessness, age of statutorily homeless households, household type and gender and priority need categories. This section also provides information about housing advice interviews and the use of bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. Finally it shows the number of households requiring accommodation on the housing register.

### **Homelessness Presentations and Acceptances**

There has been a steady reduction in both homelessness presentations and priority homelessness across Kent. In 2003/04 there were 5,002 presentations and 2,713 priority homeless acceptances, falling to 4,339 and 2,287 respectively in 2004/05, and further falling to 3,204 and 1,607 in 2005/06. In Ashford, the number has fluctuated, but over the period 2002/03 to 2006/07 homeless acceptances have fallen from 140 to 120.

With the exception of households with dependent children and those containing a pregnant woman, the highest number of acceptances have been for young vulnerable people aged 16 and 17, followed by people with mental illness or learning disabilities and those with physical disabilities. The one client group that has seen a steady rise over the last few years are vulnerable young people aged 16 and 17. In 2004/05, Ashford accepted a duty to 15 (9.5% of acceptances) vulnerable young applicants, in 2005/06 a duty to 16 (14.9% of acceptances) vulnerable young applicants was accepted and in 2006/07 a duty to 16 (12.9% of acceptances) vulnerable young applicants was accepted.

In 2005/06 the number of homelessness acceptances per thousand households in Ashford stood at 2.4. This compares to a Southeast regional average of 2.7 and a national average of 4.5. Canterbury has the lowest rate of acceptances per thousand households in Kent, 1.5 in 2005/06, and Dartford the highest at 6.3.

During the year from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007, there were a total of 200 homelessness decisions made by Ashford Borough Council. Of these 124 were accepted as being homeless and in priority need. Both figures show a slight increase from the previous year, but are significantly lower than the numbers presenting or being accepted as homeless, in the three years preceding 2005/06.

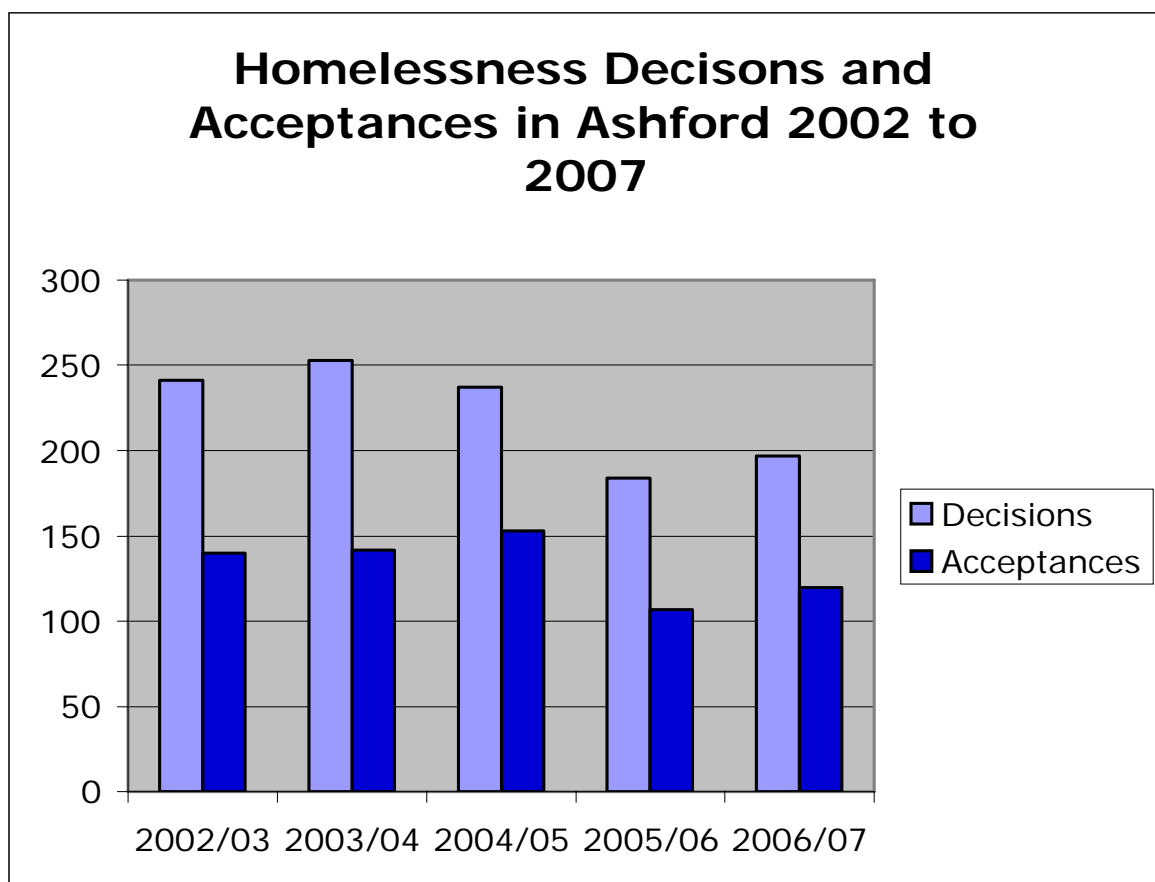
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<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise stated data in this section is drawn from CLG live table 627 and more detailed P1E statistics.

The table below shows a break down of homeless presentations from 1 April 2002 until 31 March 2007

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need	140	142	157	107	120
Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so	31	34	29	35	12
Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	17	27	19	21	7
Eligible but not homeless	53	50	38	23	57
Total	241	253	243	186	200

During the first two quarters of 2007/08, there were 103 homelessness decisions. Of these 41 were accepted as homeless and in priority need.



## Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Households

The vast majority of homelessness applications in Ashford are from White British households. During 2006/07, only four of the total 197 homelessness decisions made were for BME households. The ethnic groups and decisions were:

White Other (1)	Eligible, homeless but not in priority need (1)
Asian Bangladeshi (1)	Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (1)
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean (1)	Eligible, homeless but not in priority need (1)
Other ethnic groups (1)	Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (1)

In the previous year 2005/06, there were a total of 184 homeless decisions made, of which, 11 (6%) related to BME households. The ethnic groups and decisions were:

White Other (3)	Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (2) Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so (1)
Black African (3)	Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need (1) Eligible, homeless but not in priority need (1) Eligible but not homeless (1)
Black Caribbean (1)	Eligible but not homeless (1)
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean (3)	Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so (3)
Other ethnic groups (1)	Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need

## Main causes of homelessness

The most common six reasons for loss of last settled home for homeless households in priority need over the last year (2006/07) compared to the previous year (2005/06) are:

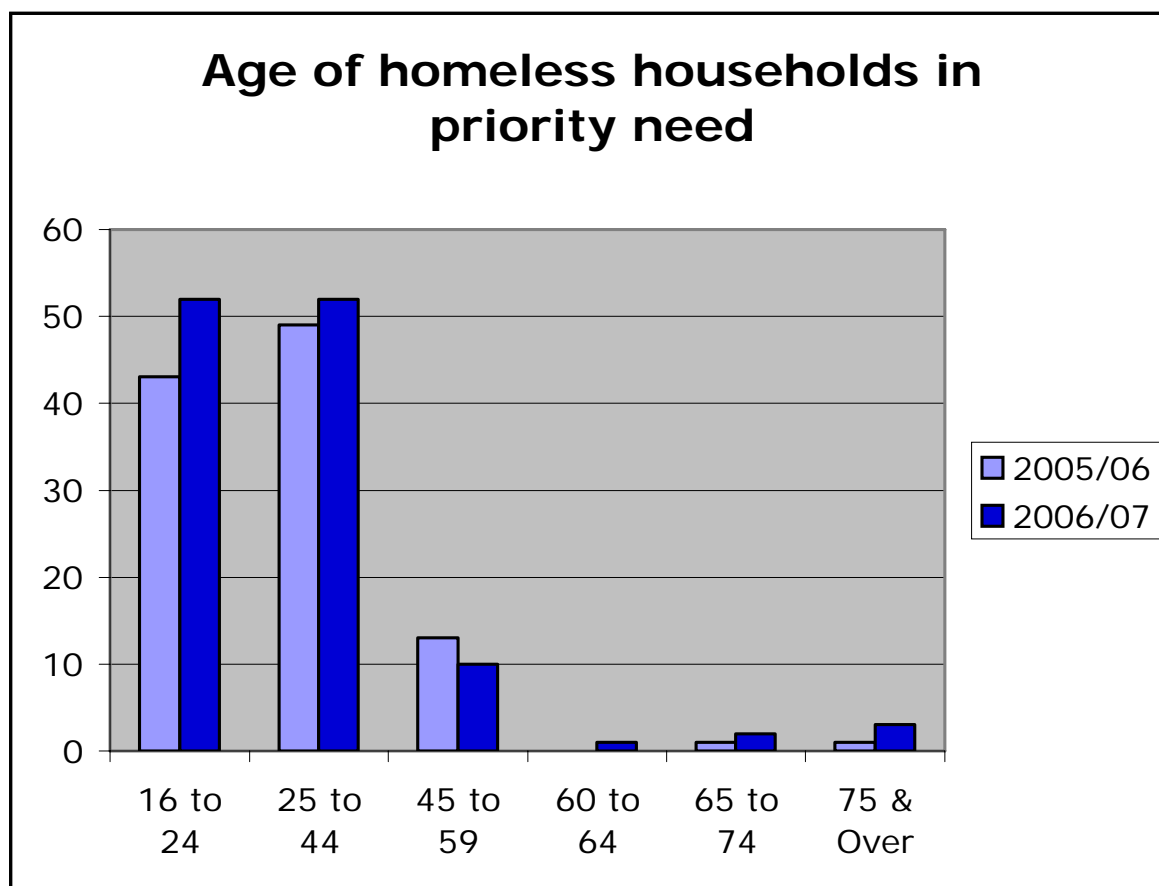
Reason	2005/06		2006/07	
	Number of acceptances	% of total	Number of acceptances	% of total
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	20	19%	30	25%
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	22	21%	25	21%
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	9	8%	15	13%
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	11	10%	12	10%
Mortgage Arrears	6	6%	7	6%
Other reason (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad)	2	2%	7	6%

Between them the categories of parents and other relatives or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate, make up 38% of all priority homelessness acceptances.

The main reasons are similar to those found by the last homelessness review. During 2001/02, of the 141 priority homelessness acceptances, 37 (32%) were because of parents or other friends or relatives no longer being able to accommodate. The numbers accepted because of termination of an assured shorthold tenancy were higher in 2001/02. There were 49 during the twelve month period, 35% of all homeless priority acceptances.

During the first two quarters of 2007/08 the same main reasons for homelessness continue. Of the 41 priority homeless acceptances, 29 were because either parents or other relatives or friends were no longer able or willing to accommodate, five were because of non-violent relationship breakdown and five violent. There were 12 related to terminations of assured shorthold tenancies and one loss of rented/tied accommodation for other reasons. There were four instances of mortgage arrears, one private sector rent arrears and one local authority rent arrears.

## Age of homeless households in priority need



This data is only available for the last two years. It does however show a significant increase (21%) in priority homelessness acceptances for those aged 16 to 24. During the first two quarters of 2007/08 a further 27 households in this age range have been accepted as homeless and in priority need.

## Household Type and Gender

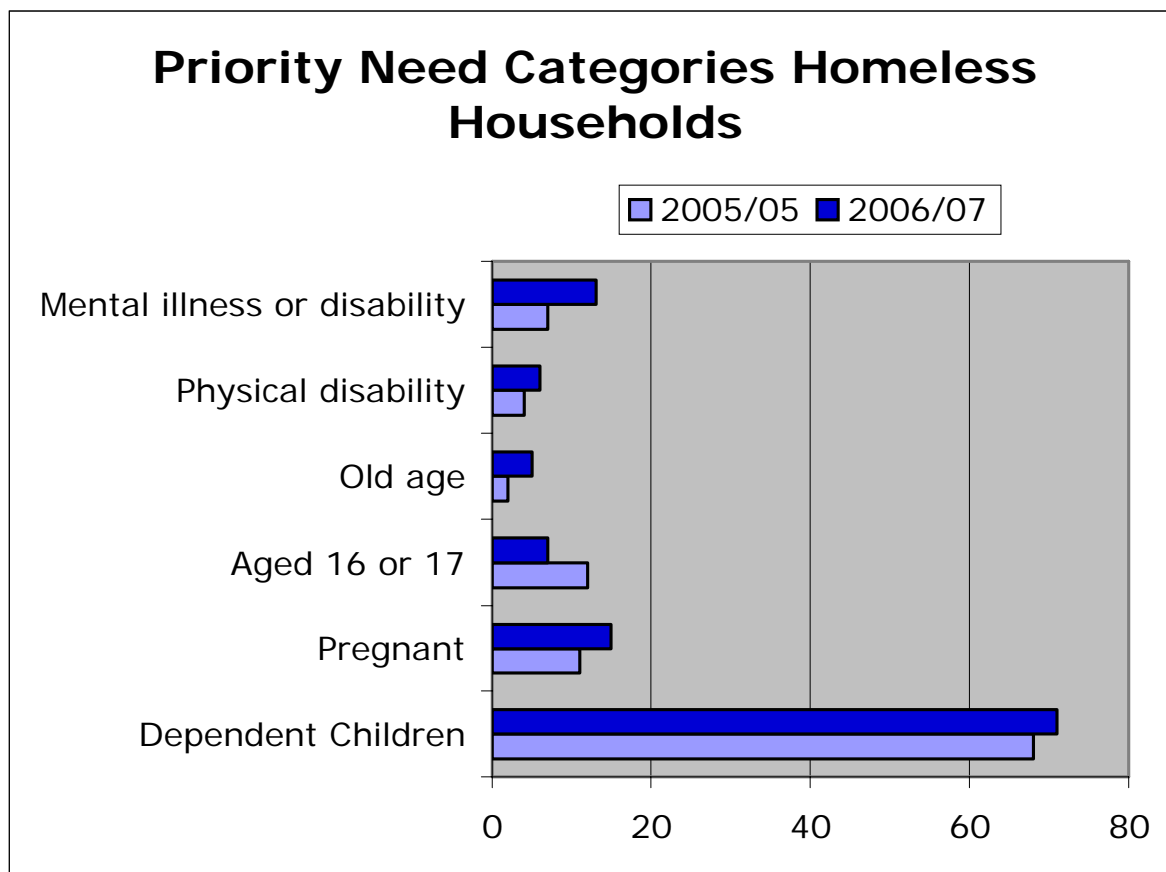
This data has only been collected on P1E forms recently and consequently data is only available for 2006/07. The most common household type is of priority homeless households in Ashford in lone parents accounting for 46 or 38% of the total. Of these, 40 were female-headed households.

The next most common type of household are couples accounting for 33 or 27% of the total, closely followed by single person households, of which there were 32. Of the single person households, there were 18 males and 14 females. The remaining 9 households are shown as 'other'.

During the first two quarters of 2007/08, of the 61 households accepted as homeless and in priority need, 22 were couples with dependents, 27 were single parents, 10 were single people and two were other household types.

## Priority Need

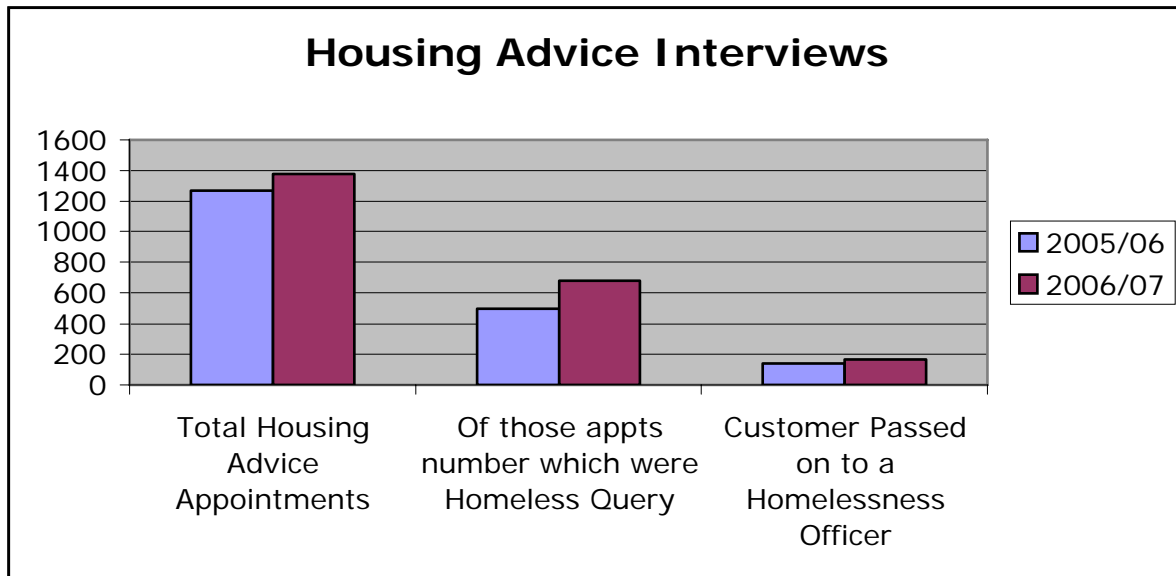
The top six priority need categories are shown in the chart below. By far the most common priority category is households with dependent children. This category, combined with those containing a pregnant woman accounted for 86 (72%) out of 120 priority homeless families in 2006/07.



During the first two quarters of 2007/08, of the 61 households accepted as homeless and in priority need, 50 (82%) households contained either dependent children or a pregnant woman. There were four households accepted under the priority category of mental illness, two were not defined, one fleeing violence, one on custody/remand, one old age, one with a physical disability and one age 16/17.

## Information from Housing Advice

In 2006/07 a total of 1,376 housing advice interviews were conducted, 110 more than in the previous year. Of these 677 were homelessness queries compared to 500 in 2005/06. A total of 168 were passed to a homelessness officer for a homelessness application to be made compared to 140 in the previous year. In the first two quarters of 2007/08 a total of 731 housing advice interviews were conducted, of these 431 were homeless queries and 94 were passed to a homelessness officer.



Ashford Borough Council has, since 1 April 2007, established improved monitoring arrangements for approaches to the Housing Advice service. This has meant more complete information available for strategic and service planning activity and provides information necessary for the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 213.

It has also been identified that further work needs to be done in terms of monitoring the effectiveness of housing advice and of the homelessness prevention mechanisms that are in place to prevent homelessness with regard to reaching people from each of the 6 diversity groups. Monitoring processes are being developed to ensure that a service is developed that provides equality and reaches all of the minority groups.

The Council has recently procured a new computer system which will be implemented during 2008; the new system will allow for improvements in data held and enable more effective monitoring.

There have been 295 clients seen by housing advisors between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 and the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007. Of these around two thirds (63%, 184 households), presented as homeless and 45 (15% of all clients seen) of these progressed to a formal homelessness interview and decision. Ten households were referred on to other agencies.

The more detailed information collated regarding housing advice clients is useful, however there are further information improvements that could be made which would allow for a more complete picture of homelessness across the Borough. In particular more information regarding age, ethnicity, household composition, current location and housing circumstances, reasons for presenting and any vulnerability issues would be helpful.

## Housing Register

In April 2007 there were 1,420 households with housing need points on the Borough Council's housing register. The size of home required is broken down as follows:

- 1 bed 696
- 2 bed 414
- 3 bed 224
- 4 bed 74
- 5 bed 9
- 6 bed 3

## **6. Future Levels of Homelessness and Ability to Respond**

A number of pressures have been identified which are likely to impact on the homelessness and housing advice service. Predicting future trends in homelessness is not purely a numerical exercise, but requires a judgement of the extent to which past trends are likely to continue, and the impact of proposed policy and service changes.

### **Growth Area**

As the population increases, so a rise can be expected in the number of people requiring homelessness, housing advice and other services that are closely associated, such as those aimed at various kinds of vulnerable households.

The extent of that impact needs to be better understood. A significant growth in population is projected. There is estimated to be a 32% growth in population by 2021. The number of households is expected to increase by 10.7% by 2011. A 32% rise in current homelessness applications would mean an increase from 197 to 260 a year. A corresponding increase in homelessness acceptances would mean 158 a year compared to the current level of 120.

### **Ashford Learning Campus**

South Kent College is planning a major expansion with the Ashford Learning Campus. The expected student numbers will be in the region of 14,000 FTE with 1,000 Higher Education students provided for. The new Learning Campus is going to be a major attraction for students outside of Ashford. Increasing student numbers will result in an increased demand for housing. Those not accommodated in purpose built accommodation are likely to look to the private rented sector to satisfy their housing requirements. It is, however, unlikely that the building of the Campus will commence prior to 2010.

### **Private Finance Initiative**

The refurbishment of dwellings under the private finance initiative at Stanhope includes a decanting programme while work is carried out. This has put extra pressure on lettings. The terms of the agreement mean that lettings need to be available for the decanting programme to avoid financial penalty. This in turn means greater difficulty in securing accommodation for homeless households. The decant programme has been made up of 410 one bedroom flats and two bedroom maisonettes. Some of the tenants have a need for larger property and are being moved to three bedroom accommodation. The decant programme is scheduled to run until June 2010. This will on average mean around seven or eight decants per month.

## **Affordability**

The Housing Needs Survey indicates that approximately 67% of households cannot afford private renting and home ownership is beyond the reach of 79% of concealed households, even though around 35% of them earn over £27,000.

Social housing makes up 15.3% of the housing stock, lower than the national average of 19.3% and provides 372 net re-lets each year. Annually 1,027 affordable housing units are needed, resulting in a shortfall of 655 units of accommodation each year.

## **Resource Constraints**

There is limited funding available to increase preventative services to keep pace with demand. The Council as a whole needs to close a current budget deficit and hence there is a pressure on all service areas to reduce expenditure.

The review of private sector housing service and experience with the mediation service both suggest improvements to the services provided that have a resource implication. Experience across the country has shown that considerable cost benefit can be drawn from improved preventative services. The potential costs and benefits will be considered further in the homelessness strategy.

## **Changing housing market**

During staff consultation for the homelessness review the following housing market trends were mentioned as impacting on homelessness:

- More buy to let properties
- Scarcity of housing
- Higher values and rents
- Lenders restrictions preventing renting to social housing tenants
- London ripple – near enough to travel in to London to work

## 7. Specific Client Groups

This section considers the needs of specific vulnerable client groups in relation to homelessness. It uses supporting people client records to look at the prevalence of homelessness for individual groups at a national and county wide level. It also draws on work undertaken by or for Kent Supporting People, including the Supporting People Strategy, and the most recent needs review, and a Kent wide strategic review of short-term accommodation. After summarising the information available regarding the need for support services across all vulnerable client groups, information relating to each client group is then considered separately. Most of the information provided is at a countywide level, but where possible data relating specifically to Ashford borough has been included.

There is considerable overlap between homelessness and housing advice services and services designed to meet the needs of a variety of vulnerable groups. Many of these services are funded via Supporting People.

### Information from Supporting People Client Records

At a national level, single homeless people and women at risk of domestic violence have year on year consistently made up the greatest proportion of Supporting People client groups. The next most common groups are:

- Mental health problems
- Homeless families
- Young People at risk
- Drug Problems Rough sleepers
- Generic
- Alcohol Problems
- Offenders or those at risk of offending
- Older people with support needs

Between 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007, nationally 22% of new Supporting People clients were statutorily homeless and this information was unknown in a further 10% of cases.

Clients accessing Supported People funded services, as a group present with a consistent pattern of vulnerable needs with many being homeless, suffering from violence or having mental health or substance misuse problems. Many clients present with multiple needs. The type of secondary need has remained consistent with single homelessness, drug and alcohol problems and mental health problems characterising the most common secondary needs.

Across Kent, by far the largest Supporting People client group is single homeless people with support needs. They accounted for 35% of all clients in 2006/07, much higher than the national average of 28%. The proportion consisting of homeless families in Kent is however lower than the national average; 5% compared to 8%. There is a higher proportion of older people with support needs, 8% compared to 4%. Other groups where the proportion is higher than the national average include:

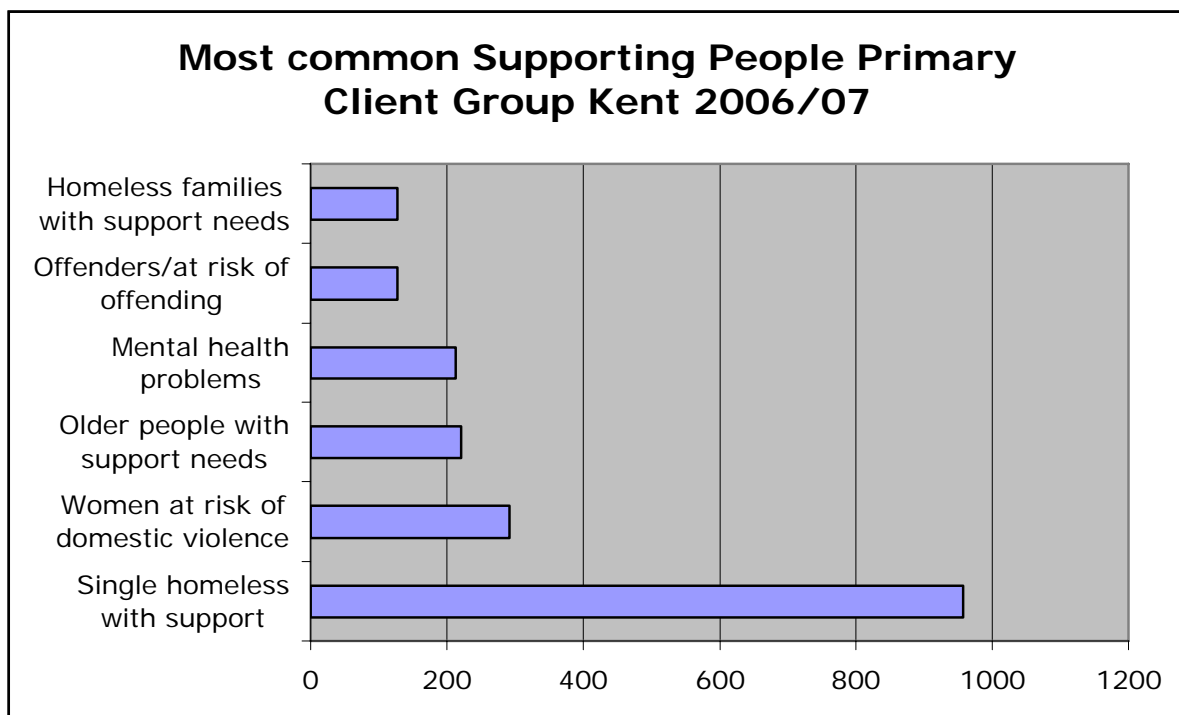
learning disabilities, offenders or those at risk of offending, young people leaving care, teenage parents and rough sleepers. Those groups where the proportion is less than the national average include: drugs, alcohol and young people at risk.

During consultation with districts as part of a Kent County Council strategic review of short-term accommodation, the need for resettlement and outreach services was identified. Such services could ensure that homeless people or those at risk of homelessness could be supported within the communities where they live rather than trying to access scarce resources outside their area. There was also a suggestion that the demand for supported housing for homeless people is such that a redistribution of resources over time from areas with the main bulk of resources to areas with no or comparatively small provision is needed. Ashford is identified as one of these areas.

There is a need for more temporary accommodation and alternatives to Bed and Breakfast for vulnerable single homeless (particularly 16 and 17 year olds). Ashford is recognised by the County Council as an area with a particular shortage.

There is a countywide need for more move-on accommodation from supported housing, particularly for homeless people with mental health problems, young people at risk, people who misuse substances and ex-offenders.

There is also a countywide need for accommodation-based services specifically for homeless young people at risk aged 16 and 17. Ashford is not one of the County Council's priority areas for this provision.



<b>Primary Client Group 2006/07</b>	<b>England %</b>	<b>Kent %</b>
Older people with support needs	3.87	8.1
Older people mental health	0.29	0.33
Frail elderly	0.39	0.33
Mental health problems	9.39	7.8
Learning disabilities	2.13	3.74
Physical or sensory disability	2.87	2.71
Single homeless with support	28.33	35.05
Alcohol problems	3.94	2.86
Drug problems	3.88	1.06
Offenders/at risk of offending	3.22	4.65
Mentally disordered offenders	0.11	0.04
Young people at risk	7.39	3.74
Young people leaving care	0.96	2.89
Women at risk of domestic viol.	11.07	10.7
People with HIV/AIDS	0.3	
Homeless families with support needs	8.44	4.65
Refugees	1.46	0.15
Teenage parents	2.02	3.19
Rough Sleeper	3.18	3.99
Traveller	0.16	0.33
Generic	6.58	3.7

### **Supporting People strategy and needs review**

Kent County Council published its five year Supporting People strategy in April 2005 which identified the following client groups as priorities for service development:

- People with multiple/complex needs (including single people, who are homeless/at risk of homelessness with mental health, drug and alcohol needs, a history of offending)
- Young people at risk (including homeless 16 and 17 year olds)
- People who misuse alcohol and drugs
- Frail older people

The Supporting People Strategy also acknowledges the need for short-term accommodation in Ashford for people with mental health problems.

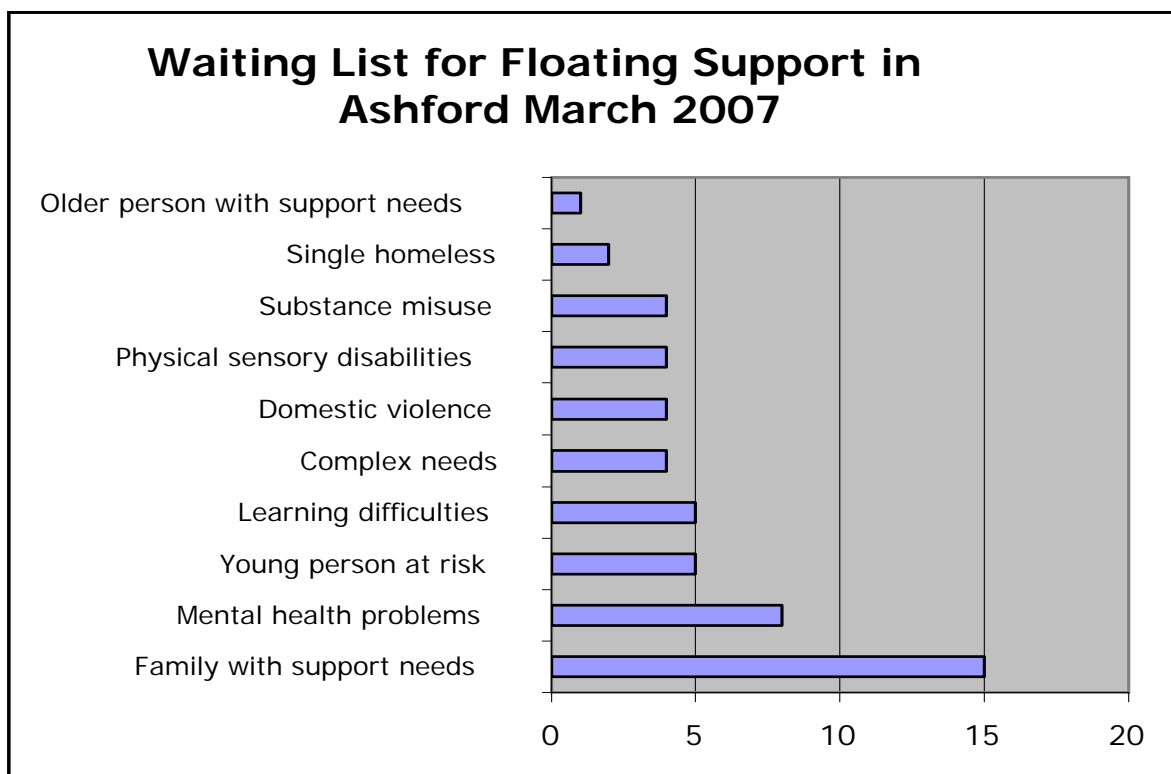
To keep information up to date the Kent Supporting People Team aims to review need on a six monthly basis. The most recent review was in May 2007.

63% of support across Kent is accommodation based and 37% is floating support, however accommodation based support accounts for 75% of grant spend. Services for older people make up 71% of units of provision but only 19% of the Supporting People Grant. The next largest client groups in terms of expenditure are those with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems. Total grant expenditure in Ashford stands at £1,271,129 for 2006/07, this is 4.39% of total expenditure and is the fifth lowest expenditure across 16 identified areas.

Ashford has generic provision of 10 long-term accommodation based services at a cost of £51,575. It also has 15 floating support 'units' at a cost of £51,146. Sevenoaks has the same level of floating support and Dartford has 3, all other boroughs within Kent have more.

At the end of March 2007, there were 52 people waiting for floating support services in Ashford. The client group with the greatest number waiting was families with support needs (15), followed by people with mental health problems (8) and then young people at risk (5) and those with complex needs (5).

This indicates that those households at risk of homelessness as repeat homelessness who may benefit from floating support may not be able to access those services at an early enough point to contribute towards preventing homelessness.



The Supporting People needs review concludes that the priority groups identified for service development in the five-year Supporting People Strategy still apply. A reconfiguration of floating support, following a review of such services, goes some way towards meeting the needs of particular priority groups, such as ex-offenders, people misusing substances and people with mental health problems.

Following a review of short term supported accommodation the commissioning body has agreed to the establishment of a countywide outreach and resettlement service for rough sleepers which will go some way towards meeting the needs of some homeless people with highly complex needs but there will still be a difficulty in identifying appropriate accommodation for this group.

Further support needs remain. In particular supported housing for young people at risk across Kent and in some areas people with mental health problems, misusing substances, dual diagnosis, and frail elderly. Should funding become available the following developments will be considered:

- Specialist floating support –Gypsies and Travellers, people from Asian communities in North Kent and people living with HIV/Aids.
- Floating support for people with mental health problems in East Kent
- In the longer term priorities for short-term supported accommodation are:
  - Young people at risk in West Kent
  - People with mental health problems in Ashford
  - Domestic violence in Sevenoaks or Tonbridge & Malling
  - People misusing substances in West Kent
  - Teenage parents in Maidstone

### **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), new and emerging communities**

Of 167 referrals for floating support in Ashford, the vast majority (141) were white British. There were 2 white-other, 1 mixed-other, 1 black/British-Caribbean, 1 black/British-African, 1 other ethnicity and 20 not recorded.

Further work is needed to identify why BME groups are under represented in these referrals. In addition, work needs to be completed with local community groups to raise awareness about services available.

### **Domestic Violence**

#### **Context**

‘For women aged 19 to 44, domestic violence is the leading cause of morbidity.<sup>11</sup> According to police statistics in 2006/07 there were 20,303 recorded incidents of domestic abuse across Kent. A quarter were repeat victims over a 12 month period. This is a 4% increase on the previous year’s figures.

<sup>11</sup> Kent and Medway Multi-agency Strategy: An Integrated and Proactive Response to Domestic Violence, 2007 – 2010, Oct 2007

The domestic violence strategy points to clear and significant links between domestic violence and substance misuse. It is an issue in between one third and a half of incidents and victims may become substantial misusers themselves. The following housing related actions are included in the strategy:

- To commission additional domestic violence refuge provision in West Kent
- Monitor and conduct ongoing needs analysis, to determine need for domestic violence housing related support and ensure ongoing funding is available
- Promote service user involvement

Between April and December 2006, 34 people fleeing domestic abuse were accepted as statutorily homeless across Kent. None of these were in Ashford. However, during the year 2006/07 Ashford accepted a duty to 5 households as a result of a violent breakdown with a partner.

Women from minority ethnic groups experience particular problems in accessing support. A report published by Rethink Sahayak in 2006 and involving 60 participants from South Asian communities found that

55% had experienced domestic abuse, in many cases for over 5 years. Language difficulties, 'shame' and 'family honour' are all significant barriers. Another significant factor was fear of deportation (11% held refugee status and 8% had extended leave to remain)

## **Supply**

Between June and November 2006, there were 255 referrals for specialist short-term supported accommodation, 10.6% of all referrals. Of these 9 were for young people aged 16 or 17. In keeping with the needs of the client group, most were housed away from their originating area. They were an ethnically diverse group, 17.3% non-white.

Ashford has a refuge for domestic violence for 18 people. The cost to Supporting People was £228,938.85 in 2007/08. The refuge has planning permission to be redeveloped by Amicus Horizon who have completed a programme of decanting its tenants. The refuge is scheduled to be redeveloped by January 2009 and will provide 16 units of accommodation for families plus 2 units adapted for those with disability needs which will be capable of being converted to 1 large family unit. However, these units will not be available to referrals from Ashford.

During 2006/07, there were 116 referrals for floating support for this client group. Of these 14.6% were also identified as having mental health problems and 6% as misusing substances. There is a lack of provision for women fleeing domestic violence who also have more severe and enduring mental health problems or substance misuse.

## **Gaps**

At March 2007, 24 individuals were waiting for a support service across the county.

## **Young homeless people (including young offenders, young people leaving care, and other young people at risk)**

### **Context**

In March 2005, there were 2,485 'Looked After' children in Kent. Of these, 155 were unaccompanied asylum seekers.

In 2005 there were 1,046 teenage pregnancies in Kent, a rate of 38 per 1,000 women. This is lower than the rate for England, but higher than that for the South East region (34.2).

During 2005/06, the Youth Offending Service received 5,997 referrals for young people aged 10 to 19 and dealt with 4,154 clients. Of those, 1,776 were aged 16 to 19.

### **Supply**

The May 2007 Kent Supporting People Updated Needs Analysis report that there were 427 referrals in Kent for Young People at risk, 17.7% of all referrals between June and November 2006. Of those referred to specialist accommodation for this client group, 48% were either sleeping rough or staying in a variety of unstable accommodation with friends or acquaintances. 7.2% of referred young people at risk were recorded as being of non-white ethnicity. All care leavers were recorded as white.

There were 187 referrals for teenage parents. Specialist services for teenage parents received 40 referrals. 19 of these were aged 16 or 17.

In Ashford there are 13 units of floating support for teenage/vulnerable parents, provided at a cost to Supporting People Grant of £53,760 per annum.

### **Gaps**

At the end of March 2007 there were 34 young people in Kent waiting for a support service.

During consultation with stakeholders as part of the strategic review of short-term accommodation, all stakeholders identified a need for more supported housing for this client group in particular those age 16 and 17. This should include provision for those with mental health problems as well as those misusing substances.

There is a rising incidence of statutory homelessness for the 16 to 18 age group in Kent. Many of the young people have to be placed in inappropriate Bed and Breakfast accommodation. There is a countywide need for more appropriate temporary accommodation with support for young homeless people aged 16 or 17 years.

There were 122 referrals for floating support for young people aged 16 or 17 of which 32.7% were teenage parents, 30% were staying temporary accommodation and 7.3% were described as lodging with a friend or 'sofa surfing'.

It is clear that some young vulnerable people have multiple needs, lead chaotic lives and are particularly hard to reach. To meet their multiple needs, more specific services may be required. Consultation responses highlight the need to develop housing pathways.

## **Older homeless people**

### **Context**

Kent has an ageing population. At the 2001 census 22.3% of the population was aged 60+ compared to 21% for England as a whole. There is forecast increase across the county of 30 to 40% between 2001 and 2021.

According to statutory homeless data for April to December 2006, the numbers of homeless older persons were 22 across Kent.

### **Supply**

Ashford Borough currently has 1,239 units of long-term accommodation for older people at a cost to Supporting People of £336,469.65 for 2007/08. There are also 100 units of floating support in Ashford at a cost of £36,566.36. There are currently no services aimed specifically at frail elderly or at older people with dementia in Ashford. There is a 'Better Homes, Active Lives' PFI in partnership with Housing 21 to develop 34 extra care housing units at Hopkins Field by late 2009. There are Home Improvement agencies operating across the county.

Of the 24,640 community care assessments completed in 2005/06, 76% were for people aged 65+. Of these 91% had physical/sensory disabilities. A further 28,600 people over 65 were already in receipt of community care packages.

During 2006/07, 148 floating support referrals were for elderly people. At the end of March 2007, 33 elderly people were waiting for floating support.

### **Gaps**

Based on the assumption that increasing longevity brings increasing dependency levels, Kent will need to provide additional extra care accommodation for frail elderly people. There may also be unmet need for floating support services to owner-occupiers.

A strategic review of all services for older people with support needs has concluded that provision needs to be more strategically directed at those who need it. There may be a reconfiguration of services towards provision via floating support.

## **People with mental health problems**

### **Context**

Many people with mental health problems also have secondary needs: of 396 referrals for floating support for people with mental health problems, 59, or 14.9%, were also identified as misusing substances. 16 people, or 4%, were also identified as fleeing domestic abuse. A review carried out by the Community Mental Health Team in 2006, found that 15 people with mental health problems in Ashford, were also in housing need and would require some form of support to help them live independently.

### **Supply**

There are no housing related support services available specifically for those with mental health problems in Ashford at present. Although East Kent Cyrenians have recently launched a young persons outreach service helping 16-21 year olds who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. There are 18 units of long-term supported accommodation in Ashford at Turner Close, but these have tended to house applicants with learning disabilities. Across Kent as a whole, there are 145 long-term accommodation-based units, 164 short-term accommodation-based support units and 242 floating support units. A Dispersed Intensive Supported Housing (DISH) Scheme made up of 6 units of accommodation and known as 'Horizons' is planned for development at Park Farm, Ashford.

Specialist service for people with mental health problems received 99 referrals across Kent between June and November 2006. Since such services only accept referrals for people known to mental health services, it can be assumed that many more vulnerable people access other supported housing such as short-term accommodation for single homeless. Of those referred to specialist mental health services, 7.2% were recorded as being of non-white ethnicity.

Data from the analysis of floating support across Kent indicates that people with mental health problems are the client group with the highest demand for services in all districts. Over the last year, 448 referrals were made which constitutes 21.8% of all referrals. Of the 448, 14.5% were also identified as misusing substances and 2.2% were ex-offenders. There is considerable unmet need for floating support. A quarter of the waiting list, 172 out of 624 referrals are for this client group.

### **Gaps**

In 2004, the East Kent NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust undertook a review of its in-patient service for people with mental health problems. This review revealed that many people who are capable of living independently are currently in hospital or residential care because there are insufficient supported housing opportunities for them.

During consultation with stakeholders, as part of the strategic review of short-term accommodation, some districts, including Ashford Borough Council, identified a need for more supported housing for this client group. Service providers and users also identified a need for more specialist supported housing for those with high levels of support needs who currently often access services for single homeless people. There is a need for more choice and for more long-term supported housing.

There is also a need for specialist floating support services for this client group across Kent.

There is a countywide need for more supported accommodation for those moving from hospital to the community.

There are no support services specifically for people with a dual diagnosis of mental health problems and substance misuse or mentally disordered ex-offenders.

## **Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

### **Context**

The May 2007 Kent Supporting People Updated Needs Analysis reported that in January 2005, there were 807 asylum seekers registered in Kent. The highest numbers are in Canterbury followed by Ashford.

There is currently no specific service provision for refugees. Unless given leave to remain and becoming refugees, asylum seekers are not eligible for Supporting People grant.

Statutory homelessness data April to December 2006, shows no former asylum seekers were accepted as statutorily homeless.

According to Home Office data, at the end of June 2006, there were 20 asylum seekers (excluding children) in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS, in Ashford.

### **Supply**

There are about 600 unaccompanied asylum seeking minors in Kent who will need move-on accommodation. The majority of these are 18+, with a significant number nearing 21.

Floating support data 2006/07 shows 3 refugee referrals and a further 9 referred under other headings.

### **Gaps**

There does not appear to be a need for specialist provision for this group at present.

## **Gypsies and Travellers**

### **Context**

In many areas of Kent, Gypsies and Travellers are significant minority ethnic populations. Under Section 175(2) of the Housing Act 1996, a person or household are homeless if they have nowhere to park their caravan where they are entitled or permitted both to place it and reside in it.

### **Supply**

Ashford have a Gypsies and Travellers site at Chilmington, which has funding for redevelopment. The council holds a waiting list for this site.

At present, Kent does not fund any housing related support services for this client group.

As at July 2006, there were, in Kent, 265 caravans on site without planning permission. There were 265 caravans on local authority maintained sites and a further 436 caravans on private sites.

In July 2007, there were 135 occupied caravans on 57 private sites in Ashford. Of the 135 private caravans, 84 are occupied gypsy caravans on 31 sites. 44 private sites are licensed.

No primary referrals for floating support in 2006/07 were for this client group, however one individual was identified as such under secondary client group. Ethnicity data reveals 8 clients as Gypsies and Travellers. Other individuals within this client group are likely to be subsumed into other client groups.

### **Gaps**

Gypsies and Travellers accommodation needs have recently been researched. A sub regional study was commissioned across Ashford, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling. This has shown a need for 64 additional authorised pitches across the four areas over the next five years. The preference for Gypsies and Travellers is for smaller private authorised sites in countryside locations. There is also some demand from the Gypsy and Traveller community for permanent housing and they are likely to have support needs to make this transition.

According to the data provided by the Gypsy Unit on sites managed by the Unit there are sizeable numbers of older people with support needs many of whom have mobility and other physical health problems. Other vulnerable client groups with some support issues include teenage parents, domestic abuse and substance misuse. Some travellers on site have debt issues.

So far, Supporting People has only been able to obtain sketchy data about the potential housing-related support needs of this client group. There is a need for

a specialist-type of floating support service for this client group. Current referrals are only for individuals accessing generic housing provision. Support should also include the housing related support needs of those living on sites.

Many gypsies and travellers live on sites, but a considerable number live in permanent housing of which exact numbers cannot currently be established.

## **Learning Difficulties**

### **Context**

An estimated 34,000 people in Kent have a learning difficulty, of which 26,000 are adults. In 2003, around 4,600 people with learning difficulties were living in residential homes or supported housing. According to anecdotal evidence, only a very small number of people with learning difficulties are on housing waiting lists and service users are unlikely to go through the homeless route to access housing.

Kent County Council projections from the Kent Supporting People Updated Needs Analysis indicate that the numbers of people with learning difficulties living in the Ashford Borough will increase by 16.3% by 2016, which is an additional 49 people<sup>12</sup>.

### **Supply**

Ashford has long-term accommodation based support for 18 people with learning difficulties or mental health problems. The cost to Supporting People is £86,308.24 for 2007/08. There are also 11 units of floating support at a cost of £35,015.56.

During 2005/06 there were 250 community care assessments for people with learning difficulties. An additional 3,030 already receive community care packages.

There were 170 referrals made for people with learning difficulties across Kent in 2006/07. Of these 22.3% also had mental health problems. As at March 2007, 61 people were waiting for floating support services.

Between June and November 2006 specialist support services for people with learning difficulties received 10 referrals.

The Adult Social Services team is currently working with 321 individuals with learning difficulties in the Ashford district. Of this group 65 are currently living in a residential care setting. Three people with learning difficulties live in accommodation owned and supported by the NHS.

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<sup>12</sup> Ashford Borough Council's Housing Strategy

## **Gaps**

During consultation with stakeholders as part of the strategic review of short-term accommodation, stakeholders referred to likely future need for supported accommodation for people with learning difficulties currently living with ageing carers. Service users themselves referred to their need for choice of provision and the need to move away from institutionalised settings.

There are likely future support needs for people diagnosed on the autistic spectrum, particularly those with Asperger's syndrome.

## **Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment**

### **Context**

Between April and December 2006, 62 people across Kent with physical disabilities were accepted as statutorily homeless.

During 2005/06, 99 statutory homeless acceptances were recorded across Kent.

In Ashford during 2005/06 duties were accepted to 9 households where a member of the household had a physical disability and in 2006/07 duties were accepted to 13 households.

### **Supply**

Ashford has 8 units of long-term accommodation based at The Limes at a cost to Supporting People of £56,263.14 for 2007/08.

During 2005/06, a total of 24,640 clients had community care assessments completed of which 91.8% were for people with physical/sensory disabilities. A further 32,670 were already in receipt of community care packages.

There were 129 referrals for floating support for people with physical disabilities during 2006/07. At the end of March 2007, 41 people in this client group were waiting for floating support.

### **Gaps**

Most housing strategies across Kent identify a high demand for adaptations, which would enable many people with physical disabilities to stay in their own homes.

The current need is to ensure that the existing supplies of supported housing or adapted accommodation is effectively utilised.

## **Ex-Offenders**

### **Context**

Of the 46 individuals referred as ex-offenders, 30.4% also misuse substances and 15.2% were also identified as having mental health problems. There is some evidence that this client group is subsumed into other groups: particularly people with complex needs, people misusing substances and single homeless.

### **Supply**

There is no current specialist provision for ex-offenders in Ashford or for those with complex needs.

There were 158 referrals to specialist services for offenders for short-term supported accommodation in Kent between June and November 2006, 6.5% of all referrals. In addition to this, there were a further 181 referrals from probation, giving a total of 339, 14% of all referrals. Of those referred to specialist accommodation for this client group, the majority (64%) were at time of referral in prison. With regard to ethnicity, this client group is one of the most ethnically diverse, with 9.5% of referred people recorded as being of non-white ethnicity.

Data from the analysis of floating support services across Kent indicates that there were 46 referrals from April 2006 to March 2007. Another 57 were identified where 'ex-offender' was given as secondary client group.

### **Gaps**

Many districts, including Ashford BC (2003 Homelessness Strategy) have identified supported housing for ex-offenders in their homelessness strategy.

There is a need for more specialised supported housing for this client group in all districts of Kent. Given that many offenders have been identified as misusing substances, a case can also be made for more short-term accommodation for this client group. The Kent drug and alcohol action team currently funds housing related support in a scheme in Maidstone which will come to an end shortly.

Kent Authorities working on an ex offenders Housing Protocol due to be launched in March 2008.

There is no specific provision in Kent for ex-offenders with mental health problems.

There is a need for specialist floating support services for this client group across Kent.

## **People Misusing Substances**

### **Context**

In Kent between April and December 2006, 15 people were accepted as statutorily homeless with a priority need identifying substance misuse problems.

In Ashford during 2005/06 a statutory homeless duty was accepted to 5 households with a drug or alcohol dependency. During 2006/07 a duty was accepted to 2 households with a drug or alcohol dependency.

According to Kent Drug and Alcohol Team, as at February 2007, 1,892 people were in treatment and 2,743 had been in treatment in the year to date. As at September 2006, 397 young people were receiving treatment.

During 2005/06, 230 community care assessments were completed for people who misuse substances. An additional 230 people were already in receipt of community care packages.

### **Supply**

There is no specialised provision in Ashford.

Data on referrals to specialist services is incomplete, however for the 48 referrals that are known about, all were recorded as being of non-white ethnicity.

111 people who misuse substances as a primary client group were referred for floating support. Of the 111, 18.9% were also ex-offenders, 18.9% had mental health problems, 4.5% were young people at risk and 4.5% were fleeing domestic violence. At the end of March 2007, 49 people were waiting for a floating support service.

### **Gaps**

There is a need for specialist floating support services for this client group across Kent.

During the review of short-term accommodation, Ashford Borough Council, along with Dover Council, identified a need for more supported housing for this client group. This was echoed by service providers. There was also an identified need for floating support services when moving on from supported accommodation.

During consultation with clients in March 2007 it was stated that substance misuse is a major problem in south Asian communities and that it is a male problem often leading to people experiencing financial difficulties and potentially jeopardising their housing. Cultural barriers, such as shame and family honour as well as language barriers, stop people from seeking aid.

A Kent wide housing needs study in 2005 indicated that out of a sample of 7,351

people with multiple needs currently engaging with services during 2004:

- 20% were homeless
- 38% were known offenders
- 60% were known to engage with substance misuse treatment

There are countywide gaps in specialist supported accommodation, with particular gaps identified in Ashford, Dover and West Kent.

Many providers identified the need for short-term accommodation-based support provision for people not having undergone treatment but willing to address their problems.

## **People living with HIV/Aids**

### **Context**

In 2003, 418 people in Kent and Medway were diagnosed with HIV and received HIV related care. There are unknown numbers living in Kent who access HIV services elsewhere.

### **Supply**

There is no specific service provision currently for this client group in Kent.

Kent County Council currently provides support to 193 service users which also includes some housing related support. 70 are supported across Ashford, Maidstone and Shepway.

### **Gaps**

Anecdotally, a minority of service users access floating support, but these tend to be entered on the referral form as generic or complex needs due to the stigma surrounding the illness.

Information provided by adult services indicates that there is a need for specific provision through specialist floating support.

## **Complex needs**

### **Context**

There were 141 referrals under this client group during 2006/07 and 57 waiting for a support service at the end of March 2007.

### **Supply**

Currently there is no specific service provision for this client group. Many of

those with complex needs are provided with generic support.

### **Gaps in information**

Although some information can be gleaned, full data is not available on the overlaps between groups where a complex range of needs is present. In particular information is lacking on the full range of need for homeless people presenting as ex-offender, substance misusers and those with mental health problems.

Data relating to the number of referrals to short-term accommodation for those who misuse substances is incomplete.

Further information relating to the ethnicity of clients within client groups for specialist and other supported accommodation, beyond white or non-white would be useful. Ethnicity information for those receiving floating support would also be of assistance.

There is a lack of reliable data on the number of people with learning disabilities currently living with ageing carers and forecasts of future need for supported accommodation. Similarly there is a lack of forecast information on the support needs for people diagnosed on the autistic spectrum.

## **8. Support and Prevention Initiatives and Partnership Working**

Section 8 describes the current homelessness support and prevention initiatives provided by Ashford Borough Council and its partner agencies. It also provides information about ongoing changes to the council services following a review of private sector housing services and provides details of existing joint working arrangements.

### **Crisis points which can precipitate homelessness**

Research shows the following events can precipitate homelessness<sup>13</sup>

- Leaving the parental home after arguments
- Leaving care without adequate support
- Leaving prison
- Discharge from the armed forces
- Marital or relationship breakdown
- A financial crisis of mounting debts
- Eviction from a rented or owned home
- A sharp deterioration in mental health or and increase in alcohol abuse

Many of the preventative services offered are aimed at intervening at these crisis stages.

Service users were asked as part of the review what extra help or services could have prevented them becoming homeless. The answers concerned the nature of the problem rather than suggesting additional preventive services. Many referred to personal problems relating to mental health issues and family/relationship problems, including domestic violence. Some had become homeless after leaving prison, the armed forces or when a private tenancy came to an end.

Both stakeholders to the homelessness forum and housing options staff see early intervention as a critical aspect of homelessness prevention.

### **Services provided directly by Ashford Borough Council Housing Advice and Homelessness Service**

The current service is headed by a Housing Operations Manager who also has responsibility for lettings. Included in the team are two Lettings Officers and one trainee, two Homeless Persons Officers and one Assistant, three FTE Housing Advice Officers, one Tenancy Sustainment Officer and one part time Domestic Violence Homelessness Prevention Officer. This team is currently being reshaped following a service review.

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<sup>13</sup> Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook, CLG, 2002

The Council offers a drop in housing advice service at The Gateway in Ashford, Monday to Friday, between 9 am and 4 pm and on Saturdays between 10 am and 2 pm. Some services are also available at a sub office at the Fairings, at Tenterden which is open 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Thursday and 9 am to 4.30pm on Friday.

Advice is available on the following types of housing related issues:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landlord and tenant problems including disrepair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenancy agreements including rights and responsibilities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent increases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harassment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illegal eviction</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent arrears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mortgage arrears</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship breakdown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic violence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding accommodation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustaining your tenancy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice based lettings</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare Benefits Advice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehousing Options (social &amp; private sector)</li> </ul>

The team of Housing Advice Officers also offer a signposting service for the following types of housing related issues:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbour disputes including racial and other harassment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Mediation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to treatment and support for people with substance misuse or mental health problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debt advice</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Floating support</li> </ul>	

Service user consultation shows that approaches to the council offices and the Gateway between them make up over 70% of the first points of contact for homeless people. A positive picture is given of the quality of advice received. See appendix 2.

### **Council Website**

Advice is available on the Council's website [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk). This includes a benefit calculator to enable those who would like to rent privately to obtain estimation of what housing benefit they may be entitled to.

### **Private Sector Liaison Scheme**

The Council is piloting a new scheme that offers assistance to resolve disputes between private landlords and tenants. This includes:

- Negotiating with tenants to ensure they understand their responsibilities

- Negotiating with landlords on a tenants behalf if they have difficulty talking to them
- Negotiating a payment plan with them if the tenant has fallen into arrears as a result of a change in circumstances
- Helping with claims for Housing Benefits or to sort out problems with and existing claim
- Signposting to other services such as floating support and debt advice

## **Prevention Fund**

This scheme is available to people who hold current tenancies but have experienced problems resulting in the threat of notice of seeking possession, being given by the Landlord. Eligibility is dependent on the tenant's ability to sustain the tenancy with the help of officers to assist, and on both landlord and tenant being willing to negotiate a further 12-month tenancy. The budget for the fund for 2007/08 is £25,000 of which £12,019 has been spent up to the 1 October 2007. The fund has assisted 14 households during this period.

## **Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme**

This scheme aims to help single people, couples and families who urgently need assistance to move into privately rented accommodation as long as they meet the following criteria:

- Be over 18 and have lived in the Ashford Borough for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years
- Be threatened with homelessness or homeless

The scheme is, generally, not available to those who have:

- Financial means to provide their own deposit
- Been evicted from a property for anti-social behaviour or for serious rent arrears but each case will be considered on it's own merits

All properties let under the Homeless Prevention Deposit Bond Scheme are inspected using the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) within a few days of the property being made available to the scheme. Properties must be free of category one hazards. Once a property has been found a tenant is usually able to move into a property within 14 days.

The tenant is required to fill in a detailed application form to ensure that the property is affordable to and suitable for the tenant and consequently a sustainable tenancy is created.

The scheme commenced in July 2004 and as at 30 November 2007 has resulted in tenancy sustainment and homeless prevention for 151 households.

The budget for the Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme has been £35,000 for 2005/06, £35,000 for 2006/07 and £50,000 for 2007/08.

The diversity breakdown for the groups assisted via this scheme has been as follows:

### **Ethnicity Monitoring**

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08 (1 <sup>st</sup> 2 quarters)
White	41	47	36
Mixed	0	2	0
Asian	0	1	2
Black	1	3	0
Chinese	0	0	0

### **Area Monitoring**

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08 (1 <sup>st</sup> 2 quarters)
Rural	5	2	4
Urban	37	51	34

### **Disability Monitoring**

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08 (1 <sup>st</sup> 2 quarters)
Non Disabled Household	41	52	38
Disabled	3	1	0

### **Household Composition**

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08 (1 <sup>st</sup> 2 quarters)
Single	16	14	8
Single Parent Families	17	24	21
Couples	3	3	0
Couple Families	6	12	9

Between 2005/06 and 2007/08, 8 households required repeat assistance via this scheme.

## **Homeless Prevention Bond Savings Facility**

The Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme features a savings facility for the tenant to contribute between £2.50 and £10.00 per week in order to accrue a deposit amount for the future. This forms another homeless prevention initiative.

## **Private Sector Liaison Scheme**

A 3 month pilot scheme is in operation from December 2007 which offers a range of very early stage intervention and prevention tools aimed at tenancy sustainment and prevention of homelessness.

## **Advice for dealing with debt, or rent or mortgage arrears**

Free and confidential advice is available from; the Consumer Credit Counselling Service, the National Debt Helpline and, the Citizens Advice Bureau.

## **Discretionary Housing Benefit payments**

Those in receipt of Housing Benefit and suffering short-term financial hardship due to a shortfall in rent, can apply for an additional award under the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) scheme. The Council has an application form for this scheme and a Housing Options Information Sheet. DHP's can never be considered as a long-term means of meeting rent. Full figures for DHP are shown under section 4, the profiles of Ashford. The budget for DHP for 2007/2008 £29,977 per annum, which is usually fully spent. Applications are administered by Housing Benefits. Housing have a service level agreement with Housing Benefits which includes reference to joint working in relation to DHP and also sets out performance information required.

## **Pre-tenancy determination**

A pre-tenancy determination can be obtained from the rent officer, which decides the maximum amount of rent that will be used to work out housing benefit entitlement. This service is also available on line. With the introduction of the new Local Housing Allowance with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is currently in operation in 18 pilot authorities and will be introduced nationally on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2008. LHA is a new way of working out claims for Housing Benefit for tenants renting accommodation from a private landlord. It does not apply to council or housing association tenancies. LHA is a flat rate allowance based on rent levels for the area in which a person lives and how many people live with them. Payment will normally be to the tenant, who will pay the landlord.

The aims of the scheme, according to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) are:

Fairness, Choice, Transparency, Personal responsibility, Increased work incentives and Simplicity.

Direct payments to the landlord can continue if the tenant has more than 8 weeks rent arrears and/or where some of the tenant's income support or job seekers

allowance is being paid to the landlord and in some cases if there are arrears from a previous tenancy. There is scope for Housing Benefit to be paid directly if the tenant is considered vulnerable or is unlikely to pay. Despite the safeguards there are continuing concerns that:

- More tenants will fall into arrears
- Tenants may face increase harassment from landlords
- The choice of substandard accommodation for a lower rent will impact negatively on people's health
- There will be no incentive for landlords to improve the quality of accommodation, as condition will not be part of any assessment of rent
- Rent levels will increase

## **Services commissioned by Ashford Borough Council**

### **Domestic violence prevention officer**

Ashford Borough Council have a domestic violence homeless prevention officer who is based at the Civic Centre on Wednesdays and Fridays and at the Gateway on Tuesday afternoons.

This post has been developed in partnership with Maidstone Borough Council with the officer working one half of the week in Ashford and the remainder of the week in Maidstone.

Her role is to help victims of any type of domestic violence. An appointment system is available along with a domestic violence drop in at the Gateway between 12 and 2pm on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month. The drop in is supported by other agencies and the Officer attends the Domestic Violence Forum; the Forum fund a 'Freedom Programme' within Ashford and are in the process of developing a 'Home Truths Programme' which is aimed at children of parents in abusive relationships. The Forum is currently trying to obtain Charity Status.

The Domestic Violence Homeless Prevention Officer works closely with the police and is currently making further links with the Fire Brigade and the local A&E department to aid early identification.

The Freedom Programme is a free 12-week rolling programme open to any women living in the Ashford area who has experienced or is experiencing Domestic Violence.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Officer is currently developing information for Ashford Borough Council's website. Domestic violence policies and a protocol are also in development and alterations to the Allocations Policy to provide for emergency management transfers and reciprocal arrangements between authorities, in particular Maidstone are also being made.

## **The Ashford ‘Sanctuary’ Project**

The ‘Sanctuary Project’ is a victim centred initiative that aims to make it possible for victims of domestic violence and hate crime to remain in their homes and to feel safe. An officer at the council, a police officer or a social worker can make a referral to this project. Over the last year 15 homes have been made safer.

Ashford Borough Council have signed up to a Sanctuary Scheme provided by ‘Kent Homesafe’ which is a scheme funded by Kent County Council which aims to help vulnerable, disabled or older people feel safe in their own homes by carrying out security works and minor aids and adaptations to their homes. However, should there be any time delays between referrals and the provision of the scheme, Ashford Borough Council have a small budget which can be used as a backup provision to enable them to engage contractors via the Housing repairs team contracts at short notice.

## **Young person’s drop in**

Since April 2007 the Council has funded the provision of a pilot drop in service to provide support for young people with homelessness issues. The drop in service is expected to provide the following outcomes for young people:

- Preventing the need for the young person to leave their home
- Returning a young person home providing each party is willing to talk
- Supporting the family for a short term while a planned move is organised.
- Support young people already in housing to maintain a good relationship with their relatives and sustain their tenancy.
- Young person receives advice and information on the consequences of leaving home.
- Family relationships are improved, helping to prevent homelessness in the long term (this can be monitored by checking the home situation after 6 months)
- Cross referencing to other agencies.

The service is run by KCHT Moving Forward and Breakthrough whose staff are knowledgeable and are experienced and trained mediators. They will also have a good networking base for specialist support e.g.drug/alcohol misuse, abuse or domestic violence. Breakthrough also already provide a contract service for under 16 year olds for social services locally.

A weekly drop in is staffed by a Breakthrough keyworker for approximately 3 hours – there is also provision for 3 hours of follow up work to be completed per week. This takes place in the Ashford Gateway Building. This has proven to be problematic as a base, as there is no dedicated room available for confidential conversations. In addition, as the drop in facility is only available once a week, it is limited in the numbers of young people that can be referred to it.

In order to reduce the number of young people leaving home and approaching Ashford Borough Council for housing, Breakthrough also assesses the referrals that

come into the office from other agencies for young people under the age of 16. Those young people, who present, with an identified risk, suggesting they may become homeless at some stage in the future, will be offered a support package that aims to reduce that risk. Breakthrough can only work with people up until their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Breakthrough offers a range of support mechanisms, which include one to one support for the young person, one to one with the parents/carers, joint mediation, shuttle mediation, advocacy and a signposting service. If the young person requires advice or support beyond Breakthrough's remit, they endeavour to signpost them to the appropriate agency.

A progress report produced in August 2007 confirms that five young people were referred to the service between April and August. Two were supported to remain at home, one was offered short-term support before their parent moved away and the remaining two failed to engage. The housing issues included domestic violence, parent moving away, teenage pregnancy and breakdown of communication. All were aged 16 or 17, three female and two male.

Breakthrough recommend that alternative venues be sought, that are more accessible and appealing to young people. These could include connexions access points or YMCA drop ins. They also consider that there is a real need for a service that can work with those aged 16+ and that there is an urgent need for suitable accommodation for young people, which needs to include provision for supporting them with life skills and budgeting.

The pilot has identified that young people are not always sure where they should go for help and that some end up going backwards and forwards between the Civic Centre and the Gateway. Breakthrough consider that If the project were to become a full time post, a presence at the main council offices at regular intervals would be helpful.

In view of these findings, Ashford Borough Council has taken a report to the Young Persons Accommodation Forum which is a multi agency forum developed by the Council so that multi agency proposals for improved services can be considered and recommended by that group.

### **Young Persons Accommodation Forum**

This is a sub-group of the Homelessness Forum, it feeds into the East Kent JPPB and the Children and Young Persons District Planning Group.

It was set up by Ashford Borough Council to monitor the use of the young persons joint assessment protocol and to report on the operation of the protocol every six months to the East Kent JPPB. The Forum also inform and contribute to the Homelessness Forum and to act as a forum for consultation on, the Housing Strategy, the Homelessness Strategy and other Housing policies affecting the housing options of young people

The group has representatives from Ashford Borough Council, Kent Social Services, Supporting People, Stonham, KCHT Breakthrough, Rainer Kent Housing, Casa Support –

Vulnerable Parents, East Kent Cyrenians, Shelter, KCA, Kent Youth Service and Kent Teenage Pregnancy Group.

The current work programme includes the following:

- Self assessment review of responses
- Mediation project proposals
- Relate project evaluation
- Kent young persons protocol
- Floating support
- Case studies
- Self Assessment/planning toolkit
- Consideration to extending the Breakthrough Pilot

### **Mediation with Relate**

As part of a National Pilot Project, Ashford Borough Council have partnered with Relate to deliver a family mediation service provided by a Counsellor. The service with Relate commenced in April 2007 and will be reviewed after a year.

Monitoring forms returned to date show that of the 16 people referred, who attended appointments:

- 15 were female and 1 was male
- 12 were aged between 16 and 21, and 4 were aged between 22 and 50
- 13 were Christian and 3 were of no religion
- Current living arrangements were:
  - 9 living with parents/carers or guardians
  - 1 with family/friends
  - 2 were homeless
  - 1 lived in temporary accommodation
  - 3 were in private rented accommodation
- 3 felt that they had to leave their accommodation, 5 felt they were being forced to leave, 1 wanted to leave and the others didn't respond to this question.

The outcomes of the service show 8 of those referred returned home on a temporary basis, 1 went to live with a friend and for 7 no out come was recorded.

The early indications from the project so far are disappointing in terms of prevention of homelessness. Discussions are underway with Relate to identify the potential reasons for this and this will form the basis for the renewed work.

### **Ashford home improvement agency**

The agency service is provided by 'In Touch', a specialist division of Hyde Housing Group. It offers help and advice to older, vulnerable and/or disabled people to assist them to remain in their own homes in comfort and safety. It works closely with the

Council to enable local disabled people to take up Disabled Facilities Grants to make adaptations to their home to enable more independent living.

## **Floating support**

Floating support can help with difficulties in managing a tenancy. A referral can be made by any housing officer and self referrals can also be made. Following an initial visit a support plan is agreed. Examples of help available include:

- Budgeting and financial management
- Rent arrears and evictions
- Claiming welfare benefits
- Setting up home and resettlement support
- Understanding tenancy agreements
- Life skills and being independent at home
- Staying safe at home
- How to access daytime activities, training, education and employment within a community
- Finding a doctor and accessing other necessary services
- Dealing with other agencies
- Neighbour issues

Supporting People currently fund the following floating support in Ashford<sup>14</sup>.

- 15 units      Generic provision
- 10 units      People with mental health problems
- 13 units      Teenage/vulnerable parents
- 19 units      Ex-offenders/those at risk of offending
- 39 units      People misusing substances
- 35 units      People fleeing domestic violence
- 11 units      People with learning disabilities
- 100 units     Including Home Improvement Agency for older persons with support needs

There is currently no Supporting People funded housing related support for:

- People living with HIV/Aids
- Travellers and Gypsies
- Refugees
- People with complex needs

## **Intermediate care for homeless people**

Some groups of homeless people may remain in hospital for longer than necessary due to a lack of interim accommodation where they could receive support from community care teams. Step down facilities to provide intermediate care for homeless people are currently provided at HomeBridge.

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<sup>14</sup> Ashford Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2008-2012

HomeBridge is a recuperative care facility adjoining the sheltered housing scheme at Farrow Court in South Ashford. It consists of 7 bungalows, all of which are self-contained. People are able to move into a property for a 6-week period and with help from the site-based care and support staff they are helped to get back on their feet. The facility helps overcome problems with delayed hospital discharge, and can even prevent hospital admission in some cases due to the care and support that is made available. It provides, in effect, a bridge between hospital and home.

Admission to the facility is via multi-agency admissions panel, consisting of Social Services, Housing and health professionals; any one of these agencies can make a referral for consideration.

### **Choice Based Lettings**

Ashford Borough Council has been operating a choice based lettings system since 2002 for council and RSL properties. Details of empty properties are included in a fortnightly Property Newsletter sent to those on the housing register who have housing need points. Expressions of interest in properties can be placed via text, telephone, or in person.

Ashford Borough Council is part of a Kent Wide Consortium to develop a Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Ashford are due to take part in the first phase of implementation of the project in the summer of 2008.

However a shortage of available properties has meant that it is difficult to implement this policy in temporary accommodation. The Lettings policy provides that if applicants in temporary accommodation do not demonstrate that they are actively bidding for permanent housing the Council may bid on their behalf and a property may be allocated to them to the Council's discharge duties.

### **Services provided by other agencies operating in Ashford**

A number of other agencies in Ashford offer housing advice:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Shelter
- Connexions (the services offered by Connexions are available to people under 19, or up to 25 for those with a learning disability)
- Ashford Social Services
- Homestart
- Surestart

### **Kent multi-agency parenting order support service**

The parenting order and support service has been established to work with those parents subject to or at risk of receiving a parenting order. The service's primary objective is to empower those parents of children and young people who are experiencing particular problems, setting boundaries and structure for them. The

immediate aims of the service are to increase school attendance, reduce crime and incidents of anti-social behaviour by the children of service users and to support children and young people remaining in their own homes.

## **Review of homelessness and housing advice services**

The Council engaged Inside Housing Solutions to conduct a comprehensive review of Ashford Borough Council's relationship with the private rented sector was undertaken in 2007. Many of the recommendations from the review are related to homelessness and particularly homelessness prevention services. The work included a review of the Rent Deposit/Bond Scheme and other homelessness prevention schemes, housing benefit efficiency and the relationships between internal departments and other partnerships.

As part of the wider restructuring of the Housing Options Team, it has been recommended that the Tenancy Sustainment Officer post is developed into a Landlord Liaison role and that an additional part-time Landlord Liaison Officer is recruited to support development of new projects.

During the course of this review the Housing Operations Manager suggested that the posts of the Homelessness Officers and Housing Advisors be revised as generic Housing Options Officers. There has also been a request for a new post of part time Homelessness Review, Prevention and Strategy Officer.

The recommendations from the private sector review were developed into a prioritised action plan summarised below:

### **Red Priority 1 targets**

- Creation of Housing Options Advisors
- Creation of Landlord Liaison Officer post
- Streamline back office procedures
- Improve communication

### **Gold Priority 2 targets**

- Incorporation of funds to the general fund
- Provision of discretionary grants by the private sector housing team
- Provide a home visit service
- Revise homelessness out of hours service
- Prevent notices to quit
- Continue a tenancy sustainment service

### **Green Priority 3 targets**

- East Kent Cyrenians partnership
- Ashford Gateway property board
- Avenue lettings partnership
- Kent wide housing education programme
- Community youth action group

In order to develop and maintain a consistent and efficient level of service, it is vital that the work with the private sector is adequately resourced and that Housing should undertake work to highlight the way housing links in with wider community issues such as the local economy, health, community safety and regeneration and promote the benefits of delivering a well resourced.

The need to improve relationships with the private landlords and to develop more effective communication and joint working with the housing benefits service were both raised during the private sector review work and also the same issues were identified by the homelessness forum during consultation for the homelessness review (see appendix 2)

## **Joint working**

### **Partnership groups**

#### **The Kent partnership**

The Kent Partnership is the countywide local strategic partnership made up of representatives from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors. The Kent Agreement, the Local Area Agreement, forms part of the work of the partnership. Proposed outcomes for a new agreement have been consulted on and will be negotiated with GOSE in November 2007. A new agreement will be signed off in March 2008

#### **Kent housing group**

‘The voice of housing in Kent’

Membership of the Kent Housing Group is open to all local housing authorities, LSVT housing associations and other housing associations with a significant presence in Kent. A representative from Kent County Council also attends and representatives from GOSE and the Housing Corporation are invited to attend as guest observers.

The purpose of the group is to provide a forum for significant housing organisations in Kent, to be the voice of housing in Kent: providing strategic leadership; shaping and setting the housing agenda; building relationships and influencing decisions for the benefit of Kent; drawing in resources from both traditional and alternative sources; working together to improve the supply and quality of homes and create sustainable communities in Kent.

#### **Joint policy and planning board (JPPB)**

The Joint policy and planning board (JPPB) is a strategic partnership between local housing authorities, health and social care organisations including; social services, probation and supporting people. This partnership provides a multi-agency approach to housing and health related needs. The board promotes and co-ordinates services that meet housing and support needs of vulnerable people. The Board has produced a 2006 to 2010 action plan with the following aims:

- To ensure a co-ordinated multi-agency response to those with health and support related housing need
- To ensure a co-ordinated multi-agency approach exists to addressing the specific housing and support needs of young people
- To improve opportunities for joint training between health, housing and social care staff on issues of shared importance
- To improve the qualitative information available on the links between housing, health and social care needs

The council has been fully involved in developing and achieving the action plan for the JPPB as part of this Ashford Borough Council has signed up, along with KCC and other statutory services, to a Young Persons Homelessness Protocol covering the county. There has also been the development of the Single Agency Assessment (SAA) Process and also 6 schemes providing intensive supported housing for people with mental health problems across East Kent.

### **Kent homeless officers group**

The Kent homeless officers group feeds into Kent housing group, Kent housing strategy and enabling Group, JPPB, and Ex-offenders (sub group). A working protocol produced in March 2007 identifies the following areas of work to be considered in an action plan:

- provision of information packs,
- approach to working with victims of domestic violence
- protocols – young people, mental health and intentionally homeless protocols are already established. A protocol relating to ex-offenders is under discussion
- Bringing empty properties back into use
- Housing Benefit
- Use of temporary accommodation – including a centralised register of B&B accommodation, minimum acceptable standards, feedback sheets completed by those leaving bed and breakfast
- Quarterly benchmarking
- Website development

This group monitors the application of the Joint protocol for services to address the needs of intentionally homeless families with children

### **Kent Rent Deposit Group**

A sub group of the Kent Homeless Officers Group. The group is made up of representatives from 12 Local Authorities with the joint aim to research and share best practice, identify areas of commonality and to develop joint working.

## Homelessness Champions

Six of the Fourteen Housing Associations with property in the Ashford borough have appointed Homelessness Champions as detailed below:

Hyde Housing Association Ltd	Paul Singleton, Group Chair Telephone: 020 8297 7602 or at Hollingsworth House, 181 Lewisham High Street, Lewisham, London SE13 6AA.
London & Quadrant Housing Trust	Tba
Accent Foundation Limited	David Vincent is the contact for Ashford although overall the Championship of Homelessness is handled by the Camberley Office
Salvation Army Housing Association	Pete Watts, Principal Manager Foyers and Supported Schemes. Tel: 0845 300 0008.
Crowebridge Housing	Tba
Southern Housing Group Limited	Mike Griffin, Head of Lettings
Housing 21	Tba
Sanctuary Housing Association	Neil Salter, Housing Services Manager Email : <a href="mailto:neil.salter@sanctuary-housing.co.uk">neil.salter@sanctuary-housing.co.uk</a> Telephone 0800 781 4755
Moat Homes Limited	Simon Watts, Regional Director
Places for People Homes Limited	Dave Lewis, Regional Head of Housing <a href="mailto:Dave.Lewis@placesforpeople.co.uk">Dave.Lewis@placesforpeople.co.uk</a>
Raglan Housing Association Limited	Tba
Home Group Limited	Tba
Downland Housing Association Limited	Tracy Evans, Director
English Rural Housing Association	Kathryn Watson, Housing Services Co-ordinator, Tel: 0207 8207930.

## Housing Care and Support Group

Existing partnership arrangements are being developed further to better coordinate the services available and provide a clear picture of housing and support needs. The Housing, Care and Support Group is to become a sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership and will take the lead in reviewing the existing Older Persons Housing Strategy and expanding its scope to cover all vulnerable adults.

## **Ashford Accommodation Forum for People with Learning Difficulties**

The Ashford Accommodation Forum for People with Learning Difficulties is a sub group of the Ashford District Partnership. The aim of the Forum is to drive forward work in Ashford Borough to develop a range of appropriated accommodation and related support services for people with learning difficulties.

By bringing together representatives from statutory, private, voluntary services and service users the forum will ensure joint working achieves a holistic approach to the accommodation needs of people with learning difficulties.

The group will work together to develop a vulnerable persons strategy for the borough. It will also take lead responsibility for delivering relevant actions in the housing strategy that relate to people with learning difficulties including developing an action plan and monitoring and review of progress.

## **No recourse to public funds network**

Ashford BC is a member of this national network hosted by the London Borough of Islington. No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) refers to destitute people from abroad who are subject to immigration control and have no entitlement to welfare benefits, Home Office support for asylum seekers or to public housing and who are assessed as having care needs. The network works at practice, policy and strategic levels and aims to:

- share information and good practice amongst local authorities and other agencies working in this area
- work with government departments to raise the practical and policy issues of NRPF
- obtain reimbursement for local authorities of the costs of providing support to people with NRPF
- develop a strategic response to NRPF

## **Ashford Domestic Violence Forum and Prevention Officer**

The Council supports and is a fully involved member of the Ashford Domestic Violence Forum. A post of Domestic Violence Prevention Officer is jointly funded with Maidstone Borough Council. The number of homelessness cases as a result of domestic violence has fallen from fourteen in 2005/06 to five in 2006/07

## **Ashford Mental Health Accommodation Forum**

Ashford Borough Council hosts and is an active member of the Ashford Mental Health Accommodation Forum, which is administered by the NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust. The forum is taking an increasingly strategic approach to identifying and planning for the housing needs of people with mental health problems in the Borough and will be undertaking a mental health housing needs survey. The forum has recently launched a Young Persons Mental Health outreach service aimed at 16-21 year olds who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

## **Ashford Young Person's Accommodation Forum**

The young person's accommodation forum is a sub-group of both the Ashford housing strategy and homelessness fora and aims to represent the range of statutory, private and voluntary services concerned with the needs of young homeless people in the area are aged between 16 and 25 years.

The Chair of the Young Persons Accommodation Forum, is the District Manager for Children's and Families Service and also sits on the Children's Consortia as well as on the Homelessness Strategy Working Group.

The terms of reference for the group are concerned with developing and delivering a strategic approach to meeting the needs of homeless and potentially homeless young people including:

- an active contribution to relevant strategies and research;
- exchanging information on best practice and;
- understanding the evolving national, regional and local context.

The group meets quarterly, a range of partners are represented on the group and the discussions are informed by case studies. The groups remit further extends to:

- monitoring the use of the young person's joint protocol on a six monthly basis;
- promoting the use of the single agency assessment and;
- working together to improve and promote the housing options and advice available to young people. A self-assessment checklist is in the process of being completed on a multi agency basis and an action plan is being developed.

## **Single Agency Assessment and Joint Protocols**

### **Single Agency Assessment**

Ashford Borough Council works with partner statutory agencies to operate a single agency assessment process. This allows partners to make a direct referral to the Council of anyone they believe needs to move because they have a health or support need that cannot be met where they currently live, or, is being made worse by where they currently live.

During the year 2006/07<sup>15</sup>, partner agencies made 52 referrals made up of 47 with physical disabilities, one with a learning disability, two with a mental health issue, and three with multiple issues. Of these, 22 had been housed as at November 2007.

The 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

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<sup>15</sup> ABC "SAA Revised spreadsheet" excel.doc

finding alternative accommodation when necessary. Since its inception, three people have been to the council's housing service following a stay in hospital.

The system of Single Agency Assessment is widely considered by the Council's partner agencies to be effective and successful. Referral data can also be utilised strategically to inform needs profiling.

### **Protocol for intentionally homeless families with children**

In 2005 an agreement was signed to adhere to a joint protocol for intentionally homeless families with children between Kent County Council and local authority housing services.

The protocol promotes co-operation between the agencies, clarifies statutory duties and the approach agencies will take and aims to prevent future homelessness through addressing support needs at the earliest opportunity and enabling tenancy sustainment. The protocol includes three targets:

- 100% of intentionally homeless households with children referred to Social Services within three working days of s184 being issued
- 100% of families who have agreed to an initial child in need assessment will be seen within seven working days by social services
- No children who have been assessed, taken into social services care solely due to lack of accommodation

This protocol became effective and was launched in conjunction with a homeless young persons' protocol.

### **Joint Protocol to Address the Needs of Homeless Young People Aged 16 to 21 in Kent**

This Joint Protocol between the following partners was re-launched in 2007:

- Kent County Council – children's social services
- Local housing authorities
- Rainer Kent 16 plus service
- Connexions Kent and Medway
- Kent primary care trusts
- Voluntary sector agencies
- Kent youth offending service
- Supporting People

The aim of the protocol is to clarify statutory duties and to establish a system that ensures a seamless service to vulnerable young people regardless of which agency they present to first or of which district they live in.

The protocol also promotes co-operation and joint working and ensures that, through methods such as mediation, reconciliation between young people and their families/carers is achieved wherever possible.

## **Protocol for Mental Health Teams and Local Authority Services to Address Homelessness**

This protocol includes an agreement to jointly assess homeless applicants who receive support from the community mental health team; a robust and efficient client centred referral process.

There are two targets included:

- 100% of referrals made Monday to Thursday by the local housing authority to the community mental health team will be screened within 2 working days.
- 100% of referrals to the local housing authority will be given advice and assistance in 2 working days.

Referrals under the protocol will be monitored by the local housing authorities; records will be kept on:

- whether agreed targets are being met
- reasons for homelessness
- the number of cases where neither the local housing authority or the community mental health team can identify suitable accommodation.

Quarterly monitoring statistics show seven referrals under the protocol during 2005/06 and nine during 2006/07.

## **Nominations Agreement with Housing Associations**

The council has negotiated a new nominations agreement with housing associations operating in the area, this document has been highlighted as good practice by the Homelessness Action Team and has been used to develop a template. The obligations under the agreement are:

- The association will provide a minimum of 75% of its true voids for nomination from the Housing Register, this includes waiting list and homeless applicants;
  - On all new developments within the Borough, the council will have 100% nomination rights for first lettings
  - On all developments built after 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004 the council will have 80% of relets but will be advised of all voids on a quarterly basis
  - On all developments built before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004, the council will have 75% of relets but will be advised of all voids on a quarterly basis
  - The remaining 20% or 25% can be used at the discretion of the association
  - The percentage of true voids made available to the council should be a variety of types and sizes of dwellings reflective of the property profile within the Ashford borough
- All nominations should be in line with the council's lettings policy and with the choice based lettings scheme

- In the event of a known serious offender being nominated, a full risk assessment will be provided by police and probation and via the Housing options team at the point of nomination
- Where appropriate a local lettings plan will be devised by the managing RSL and by stakeholders in accordance with Ashford Borough Council's lettings policy. The local lettings plan will outline the nominations that will be requested
- The RSL will provide a full breakdown of voids by size, type and location on a quarterly return basis and indicate the properties used for their internal transfers
- The council will advise all vacancies via the choice based lettings scheme and will publish the advertising cycle to RSL's at the start of the financial year.

It was agreed that the effects of the new Nominations Agreements should be reviewed after a period of 6 months.

## 9. Supply of Accommodation

### Current Supply

#### General Needs Housing

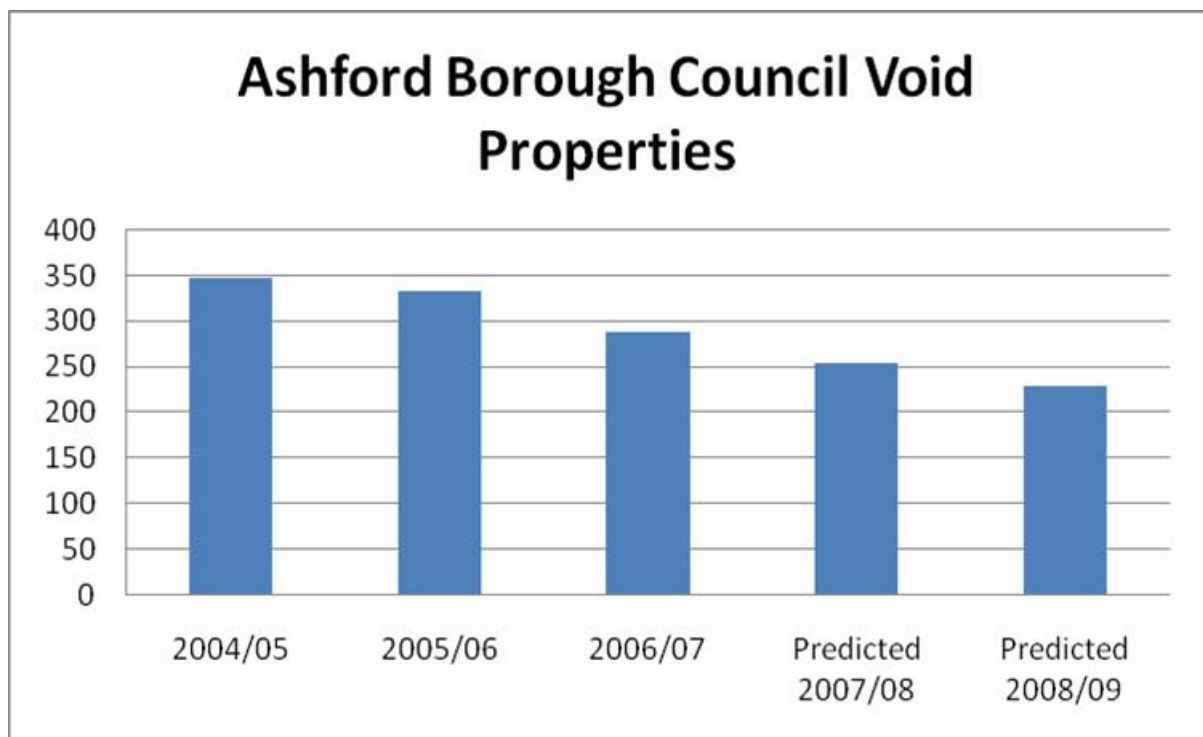
An increased supply of accommodation for homeless households is seen as vital if use of temporary accommodation is to be kept to a minimum. This was seen as a priority in consultation exercises (see appendix 2). A further priority identified for increasing supply, was to consider what more could be done to encourage the private rented sector to play a more substantial and responsible role in lettings for homeless households.

The Council has identified in its review of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme that the scheme would be further enhanced by incorporating Private Sector lettings into the process thus offering alternatives to those in housing need.

#### Existing Council Stock

The council manages 4,722 homes, 627 homes have recently been transferred to Moat Housing Group under a private finance initiative<sup>16</sup>.

Properties that become available letting within the council stock have reduced in recent years.



<sup>16</sup> Ashford Borough Council Housing Strategy 2007 - 2011

The number of voids expected during 2007/08 is projected to be 253 of which 58 will be needed by residents decanting from Stanhope. Based on previous void patterns, the voids are expected to consist of the following property types:



This means that 108 of the available properties will be for older applicants, leaving 145 general needs properties of which 58 will be prioritised for the Stanhope decanting programme. This leaves just 87 general needs stock compared to a demand of 120 new homelessness acceptances and as at 1 January 2008, 1360 applicants on the housing register with housing need points.

### **Right of first refusal**

The council has, from July 2007, introduced a policy that gives the ability to purchase back certain former Council properties. By the end of 2007, 3 properties had been repurchased. It is too early to estimate the impact of this policy.

### **Housing Association Properties**

There are currently 14 Housing Associations with housing stock in Ashford. Between them they own 1,936 properties in the Borough<sup>17</sup>. The largest stock owners for social rented stock are<sup>18</sup>:



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<sup>17</sup> Ashford Borough Council Housing Strategy 2007 - 2011

<sup>18</sup> Source: <http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConLA>.

## Lettings to homeless households

CORE data on lettings for 2006/07, show 376 lettings within local authority and housing association stock in Ashford, 308 general needs lettings and 68 lettings in supported housing schemes<sup>19</sup>. Within the general needs lettings, 33 were for households that were statutorily homeless and a further 14 were non-statutorily homeless. There were 25 lettings made to statutorily homeless households by housing associations following nomination. The reasons for re-housing within the general needs lettings show that households were moved either because:

- They were asked to leave by family or friends
- of overcrowding
- of a need to move to independent accommodation

These figures suggest there may be many more potentially homeless households than those who have been recorded as statutory or non-statutory homeless households.

87 lettings were to single people, of which 17 were aged 60 or over. There were 82 lettings to families with children, of which 43 were single parent families.

Of the 68 supported housing lettings, by far the largest number, 35, were because of domestic violence. There were 14 statutorily homeless households amongst the supported housing lettings and 16 other homeless.

## Temporary Accommodation

At April 2007 Ashford Borough Council had 168 units of temporary accommodation. To meet the Government's target for reducing the use of temporary accommodation for homeless household's, Ashford Borough Council needs to reduce the amount of temporary accommodation in use to 100 by 2010.

An action plan has been established to reduce the use of temporary accommodation. The following actions are included:

- Introduce monthly monitoring and conversion of insecure tenancies to secure tenancies. The current allocation policy provides that households on non-secure tenancies can be converted to secure tenancies after a period of 12 months, but this can be considered after a period of 6 months at the discretion of the Housing Operations Manager.
- Monitoring applications from households in other forms of temporary accommodation to ensure that they are registered on waiting lists and are bidding for properties on Choice Based Lettings
- Researching other ways of converting private sector leased properties to qualifying tenancies
- Increase budget for deposit schemes and re-define procedures

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<sup>19</sup> Annual report of CORE data, Ashford area, summary statistics, April 2006 – March 2007

- Liasing with RSL partners to maximise nomination agreements and reviewing checklists with them
- Regular liaison with the supported housing schemes in Ashford both to improve access via nomination rights and to assist with move-on.

It is projected that during 2007/08 there will be demand for 120 new homeless cases to be housed giving a total of 288. It is anticipated that non-secure tenancies will be reduced by 30, there will be 10 qualifying offers in the private rented sector, an increase in prevention initiatives will reduce demand by 30, and a further 48 will be made 'part 6' offers. Together these give a reduction of 138, leaving a projected 150 households in temporary accommodation at the end of the year.

In September 2007 Ashford Borough Council had 133 units of temporary accommodation, made up as follows:

Private Sector Leased Properties	48
Insecure Tenancies in Council Stock	60
Bed and Breakfast	16
Other	7
Refuge	1
Private Rented	1

This performance is better than had been expected, but it is not anticipated an improvement on this can be achieved without further dedicated resources to improve capacity to deliver prevention initiatives.

## **Bed and Breakfast**

Bed and Breakfast accommodation is only used as short-term emergency accommodation, usually while circumstances are investigated. If a duty to house is found under the homelessness legislation a more settled home will be found as quickly as possible. Where no duty is found, a reasonable period is allowed for the applicant to find themselves alternative accommodation.

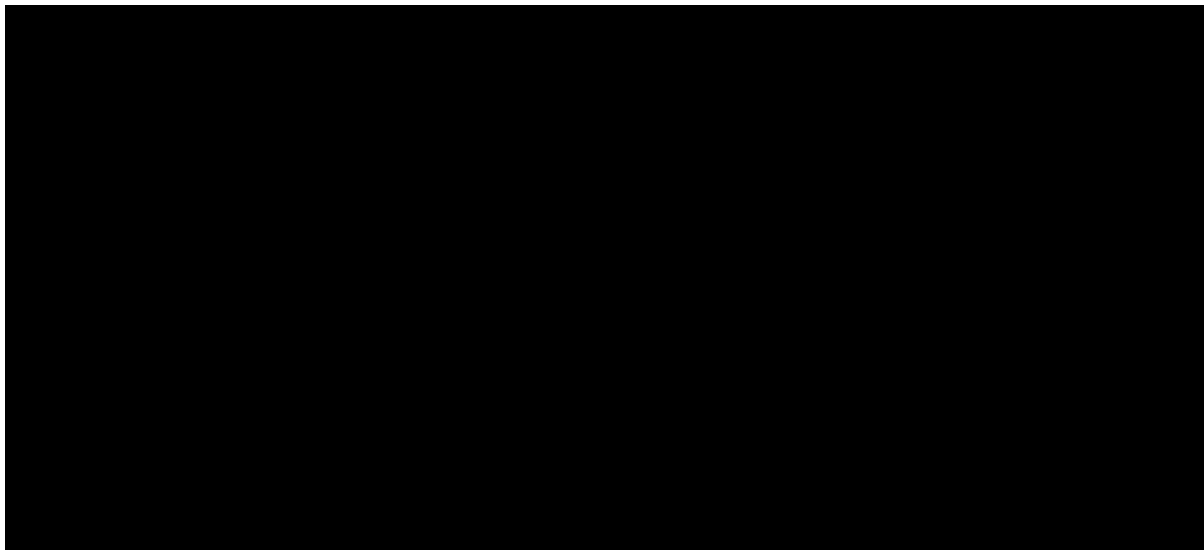
Those who are pregnant or have children in the household will be moved to more suitable accommodation within 6 weeks. Other households may have to stay for a longer period. The lack of affordable housing available means that the Council can offer only limited options to homeless households and as a result where the Council has a duty to secure accommodation temporarily, this is often in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Council and all stakeholders agree that this is not an acceptable solution and the Council is working to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Working with private landlords, the use of private rented accommodation, increased prevention and early warning mechanisms are key to achieving this.

Service users placed in bed and breakfast were asked how suitable it was for their requirements. Those who didn't find it suitable gave the following reasons (see appendix 2 for further details):

- No kitchen or cooking facilities

- Cramped conditions
- Unsuitable upstairs placement
- Placement not near school or work
- Drug/alcohol use outside the bed and breakfast
- No privacy
- Dirty

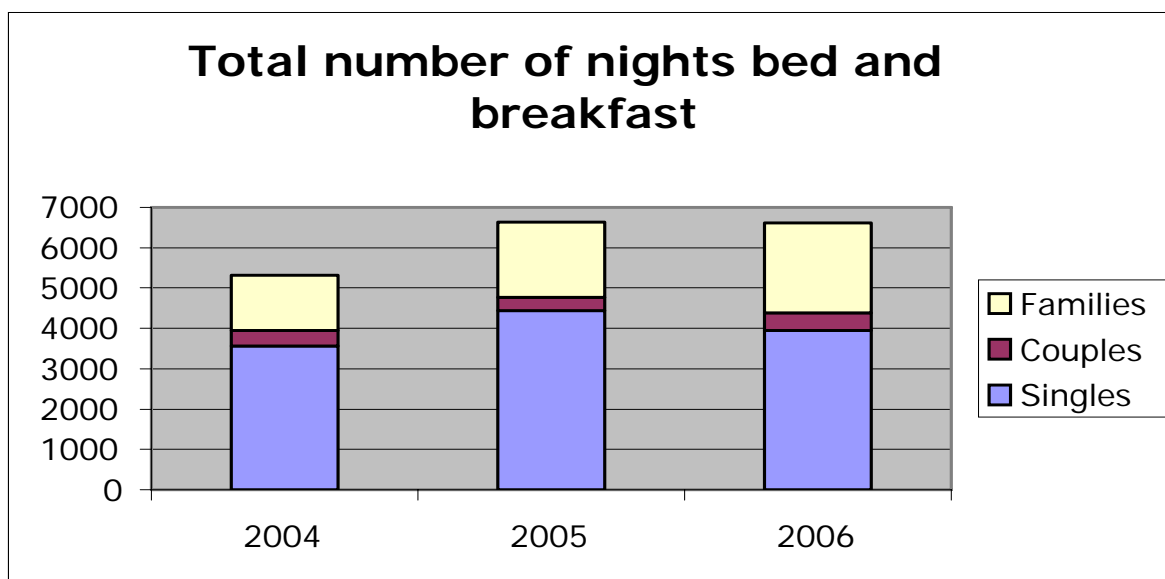
The cost of bed and breakfast accommodation to the Council has been rising. In 2004, the cost was £178,324. By 2006, this had risen to £231,853. The costs are affected by the cost per night, which varies with the household size, the number of households placed and the length of stay. See section 10 on resources.



The total number of households placed in bed and breakfast was 163 in 2004, rose to 176 in 2005 and dropped again to 166 in 2006. The number of single person households placed dropped from 105 in 2004 to 76 in 2006. There were 48 single households placed between January and July 2007. The number of couples has remained fairly constant, but the number of families placed has increased from 45 in 2004 to 79 in 2006. There have been 54 families placed between January and July 2007. This is a particular pressure given the decanting issues in relation to the Stanhope PFI Scheme.

The average number of nights has increased for single households from 34 in 2004 to 52 in 2006. The average number of nights for couples also increased over this period from 30 to 39 nights. The average number of nights for families shows a slight drop over the period from 30 to 28.

The total number of nights in bed and breakfast has reduced slightly for single person households between 2004 and 2006, has increased and then reduced again for couples, and increased significantly from 1,369 nights to 2,228 nights for families (one night for a family is likely to cost more than double that for a single person households).



The above table shows that, by far, single people are in Bed & Breakfast longer than other types of household, indicating a need to identify alternative temporary housing.

### Real Costs of Bed and Breakfast

The table below shows the net cost to housing budgets following income collection from the Housing Benefits Service.

	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 (1 <sup>st</sup> 2 Qtrs) £
Cost of Bed & Breakfast	208,306	267,229	121,00
Income	165,705	194,357	105,000
Net Cost to Housing Services	42,601	72,872	16,000
Loss of Government Subsidy on Housing Benefit as a result of using B&B	57,000	67,000	62,000
Total Cost to Ashford Borough Council General Fund	99,601	139,872	78,000

However, in order to identify the real cost to the Local Authority, it is useful to look at the loss of subsidy on Housing Benefit. On Housing Benefit claims for those in Bed & Breakfast, we can only claim 100% subsidy back up to the threshold figures of £116.91 per week. For costs higher than this we can only claim 10% of any expenditure between the threshold and the cap, which is £206.73 per week. We cannot claim anything back above the cap. These rules came in on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004. During 2006/07 the loss of subsidy to the Local Authority was approximately £65,000, however, it is projected that during 2007/08 the loss of subsidy will be in the region of £100,000. Rather than wasting this resource, it is suggested that further

thought be given to reinvesting part of this sum into the service to support new prevention initiatives or support the revenue costs of a Temporary Accommodation Scheme. This ultimately could lead to less overall expenditure on Bed & Breakfast

## Supported Housing

The table below shows supported housing schemes currently funded by Supporting People grant in Ashford.

<b>Availability of Supporting People Funded Accommodation Based Support in Ashford April 2007</b>		
Service user group	Long-term accommodation based units	Short-term accommodation based units
Single homeless		11 (Simon Mead House)
Generic provision	10	
Young people at risk (including teenage/vulnerable parents, young people leaving care and young people at risk of offending)		21
People fleeing domestic abuse		18 (Ashford women's refuge)
People with learning disabilities	18	
People with physical/sensory disabilities	8	
Older persons with support need (including frail older persons and older people with mental health problems or dementia)	1,239	

### Simon Mead House

Simon Mead is an 11 bedspace hostel available for single homeless male and female clients aged 18+, the hostel has, however, tended to house only male clients. Referrals are taken from the Local Authority, from other agencies or from probation.

Some of the residents move into the hostel from outside the Ashford Borough area and do not therefore approach Ashford BC for assistance.

Simon Mead House receive between eight and ten referrals per month and at the time of conducting this review had two applicants on their waiting list.

Applicants can stay for up to two years before moving on.

### Ashford Women's Refuge

The refuge offers accommodation to women and their children fleeing domestic violence, the Council has supported the redevelopment of the refuge to provide modern self-contained accommodation. On completion of the project the refuge will provide 16 units of accommodation for families plus 2 units adapted for those with disability needs, these 2 units will be capable of being temporarily converted to a large family unit depending upon demand.

### **Farrow Court 'Home Bridge' Recuperative Care Facility**

This facility addresses the problems of delayed discharge from hospital by providing 7 units of accommodation for people to stay for up to six weeks while they prepare to return home after, sometimes very prolonged, stays in hospital. While in this facility people have their own front doors, there is access to support from care workers and an individual rehabilitation programme. Between May 2004 when the centre opened and December 2007, 70 people have benefited from using the facility.

### **Sheltered Housing**

There are currently 20 sheltered housing schemes in the Ashford borough, 13 of which are owned by the Council and 3 or which are owned by RSLs. Significant sums have been set-aside in the capital to programme to improve sheltered housing including upgrading with state of the art telecare services.

In one of the more central sheltered schemes, provision has been made for the homeless team to utilise the guest room as a temporary accommodation facility usually used for older or disabled applicants.

### **Haven Bungalows**

Ashford Borough Council has just over 700 Haven Bungalows. A haven bungalow is one which provides the tenant with an alarm call facility should they need it at any time during the day or night. The alarm is linked to the Council's Monitoring Centre who can contact the appropriate person or organisation on their behalf.

The accommodation detailed in the table below is provided in other parts of Kent, but can be accessed by Ashford residents.

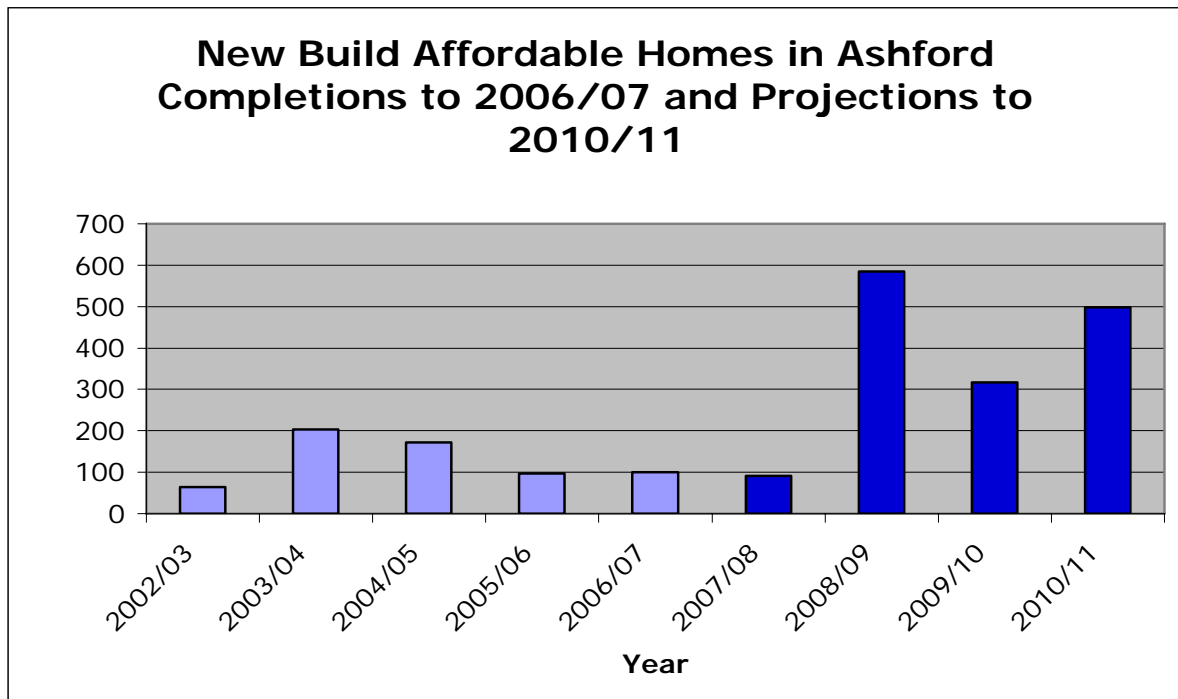
<b>Availability of Supporting People Funded Accommodation Based Support in Ashford April 2007</b>		
Service user group	Long-term accommodation based units	Short-term accommodation based units
Single homeless		6
Generic provision	10	
Young people at risk		18
Young people leaving care		87

People misusing substances		15
People with learning disabilities	25	
People with physical/sensory disabilities	8	36
Older persons with support needs		78
People living with HIV/Aids		20

## Future supply

### Affordable Homes New Build Programme

The following graph shows the number of new affordable homes built between 2002/03 and 2006/07 and projected completions for 2007/08 to 2010/11.



The total number of dwellings completed since 2001 is 3,941. Affordable housing completions in 2005/06 totalled 97 and in 2006/07 rose slightly to 100.

Although not specifically related to homelessness, new affordable housing increases the supply of homes available and reduces pressure on homelessness services. In 2006/08 total allocations of grant funding from the Housing Corporation of almost 20m were secured in the Borough to provide 444 homes between 2006 and 2011. Three strategic sites are identified within the Ashford growth area:

- Ashford Barracks
- Park Farm
- Cheeseman's Green.

### Stanhope PFI

Ashford has a PFI initiative at Stanhope. In total there will be 410 flats demolished and the areas will be redeveloped with a total of 442 dwellings. Of these 219 will be for social housing rent, 67 will be for shared ownership and 23 will be for intermediate rent and for commercial facilities that include shops, a public house and a legacy community building.

## **New Supported Housing**

### **Intensive Supported Housing Scheme (Mental Health)**

This scheme is currently being developed with an RSL partner and will provide a supported environment for up to six people leaving hospital or residential care to prepare them to move-on to independent living.

### **Sheltered Housing**

Ashford BC has negotiated the provision of three new sheltered housing schemes for older people on new developments around the town; this will result in 96 new flats for older people by 2011.

### **Extra Care Scheme**

Ashford BC has been working with partners, including private developers to produce an 'Extra-care sheltered housing' design specification, to ensure that new sheltered housing schemes are sustainable into the future and to provide accommodation that older people want and need. Ashford is an active partner in Kent County Council's PFI project to provide a 40 bed extra care scheme in Ashford during the next 18 months.

### **Young Person's Shared Accommodation Project with Rainer**

Ashford Borough Council have partnered with Rainer to provide temporary accommodation for young people aged between 16 and 21. This is a Council 3 bedroom maisonette, which has been converted into a shared housing scheme. The Social Services Children and Families Team have expressed an interest in funding further shared housing schemes via this method. As there is no Supporting People funding available, Ashford Borough Council is funding the schemes. Support costs directly at a value of £12,000 per annum.

### **Move on Accommodation**

Work with the homelessness forum identifies the need for more move on accommodation as an important aspect in preventing homelessness.

Ashford Borough Council have set up a MOPP meeting locally with supported Housing providers to:

- Agree move on agreements with each provider

- Encourage and promote the use of the private sector as an option for move on, utilising access to the Council's Homeless Deposit Bond.

## 10. Resources

### Sources of funding

#### Funding Available to Ashford Borough Council for Housing Services

This table sets out the revenue budget for Ashford's housing services. Capital resources are set out the Housing Strategy and have not been repeated in this document.

<b>Ashford Borough Council general fund revenue expenditure</b>				
	2007/08 Budget £000	2008/09 Forecast £000	2009/10 Forecast £000	2010/11 Forecast £000
Renovation grants	61.8	58.4	65.7	68.4
Private sector housing	137.2	140.7	175.3	182.4
Research and Development	79.6	96.1	99.9	103.9
Housing options (including bed and breakfast budget)	235.5	290.1	301.7	313.8
Chilmington Gypsy and Traveller Site	6.1	19.6	20.4	21.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>520.2</b>	<b>604.9</b>	<b>663.0</b>	<b>689.7</b>

Additional resources for the housing options service (homelessness and housing advice) are also available from central government homelessness grant and from the private sector leasing surplus.

<b>Ashford Borough Council general fund revenue expenditure</b>				
	2007/08 Budget £000	2008/09 Forecast £000	2009/10 Forecast £000	2010/11 Forecast £000
Housing options (including bed and breakfast budget)	235.5	290.1	301.7	313.8
Private sector leasing surplus and central government homelessness grant	141.5	141.4	141.1	125.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>377.0</b>	<b>431.5</b>	<b>443.4</b>	<b>438.8</b>

## Private Sector Leasing

The Council's Private Sector Leasing scheme generates surplus income from rents, which is reinvested in services for homeless households. Currently the Council relies heavily on this income to provide preventative services, which would be severely restricted if the PSL surplus ceased to be available. For 2007/08, the estimate PSL surplus is £149,500.

## Funding from Supporting People grant

Revenue resources for supported housing and other housing related support are accessed via Kent countywide Supporting People Grant. The only exception to this is the shared housing scheme with Rainer, which is funded from PSL surpluses, as Supporting People funding is not available for this scheme.

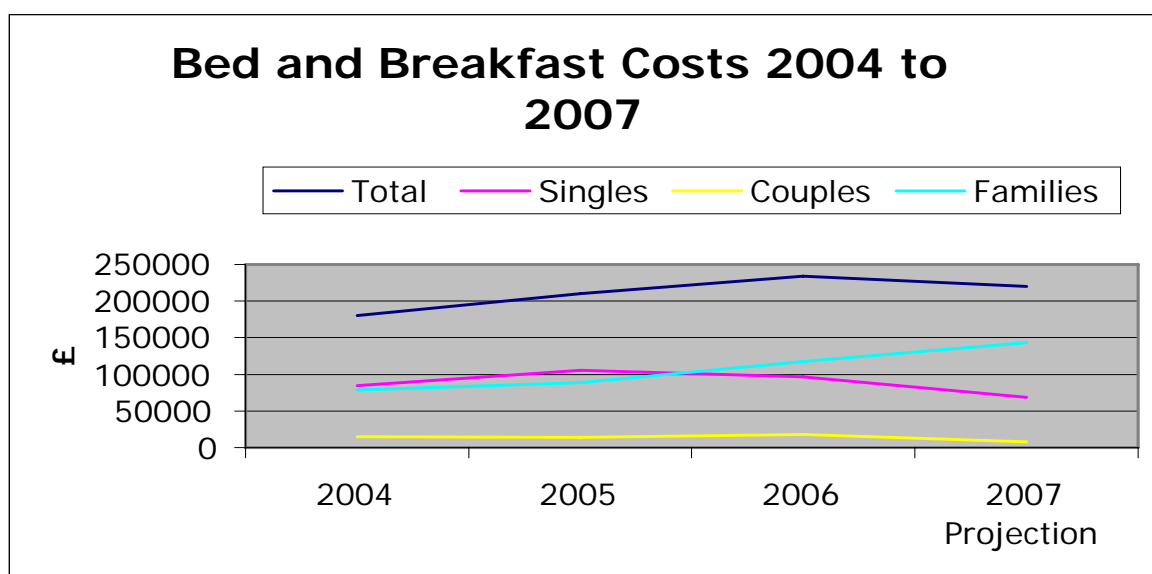
## Funding from the Housing Corporation for affordable housing

The National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) prospectus sets a ring fenced target of funding for the Ashford growth area of 3.18% within a forecast allocation for the region of £359m. The council's forecast for NAHP funding between 2007/08 and 2010/11 is £11.42m per annum.<sup>20</sup>

## Expenditure

### Expenditure on Bed and Breakfast

Bed and breakfast costs over the last three years have risen from £180,328 in 2004 to £233,859 in 2006. Between January and July 2007 expenditure totalled £128,160. If costs continue at the current rate till the end of the year, this will result in a cost for the year of £219,703, a reduction of £14,156 (6%) on last years figures.



<sup>20</sup> Ashford Borough Council Housing Strategy 2007 - 2011

Families in Bed and Breakfast account for the most significant part of the overall expenditure and have also accounted for the rise in costs.

Bed and Breakfast Costs 2004 to 2007				
	2004	2005	2006	2007 (Jan to July)
Singles	£84,495	£105,543	£96,200	£40,043
Couples	£14,800	£14,023	£18,235	£4,668
Families	£79,029	£88,687	£117,418	£83,449
Total	£180,328	£210,258	£233,859	£128,160

### Staffing Costs

The budget relating to staffing costs for the Housing Options team for 2007/08 was £272,430, including salaries, on costs and equipment.

### Supporting People expenditure

Housing related support services in the Borough are revenue funded by the Government's Supporting People programme. Ashford Borough Council receives around £326,000 of Supporting People funding to pay for services to older-people living in the Council's sheltered-housing schemes. Many other housing related support services in the Borough receive funding from Supporting People. In 2006/07 Kent Supporting People provided £1,257,139.14 funding for those services available only in the Ashford Borough. Some services cover the whole of Kent but are also available to people living locally and Kent Supporting People provided £3,302,254.95 for these services.

### Value for Money Assessments

#### Value for Money Assessment – For Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme

##### 2005 / 2006

Household Types	No. of each household type assisted in year.	Amount of Assistance from Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme	Total Spend	Cost of alternative option of B&B	Cost for 6 weeks average stay in B&B	Savings (Difference between predicted B&B Cost and Actual Spend)	Total Savings
Single Household (Based on	19	£504.00	£9576	£175.00 pw	£1050.00	£546.00 per house-	£10,374

single/ Couple no Deps)						hold	
Family Household (Based on 2 + 2)	23	£948.00	£21804	£476.00 pw	£2856.00	£1908.00 per house- hold	£43,884
TOTALS	42	-	£31380				£54,258

## 2006 / 2007

Household Types	No. of each house- hold type assisted in year.	Amount of Assist- ance from Homeless Pre- vention Bond Scheme	Total Spend	Cost of altern- ative option of B&B	Cost for 6 weeks average stay in B&B	Savings (Differ- ence between predicted B&B Cost and Actual Spend)	Total Savings
Single Household (Based on single/ Couple no Deps)	17	£466.75	£7934.75	£175.00 pw	£1050.00	583.25 per house- hold	£9915.25
Family Household (Based on 2 + 2)	36	£748.65	£26951.40	£476.00 pw	£2856.00	£2107.35 per house- hold	£75864.60
TOTALS	53		£34886.15				£85779.85

## 11 Monitoring Performance

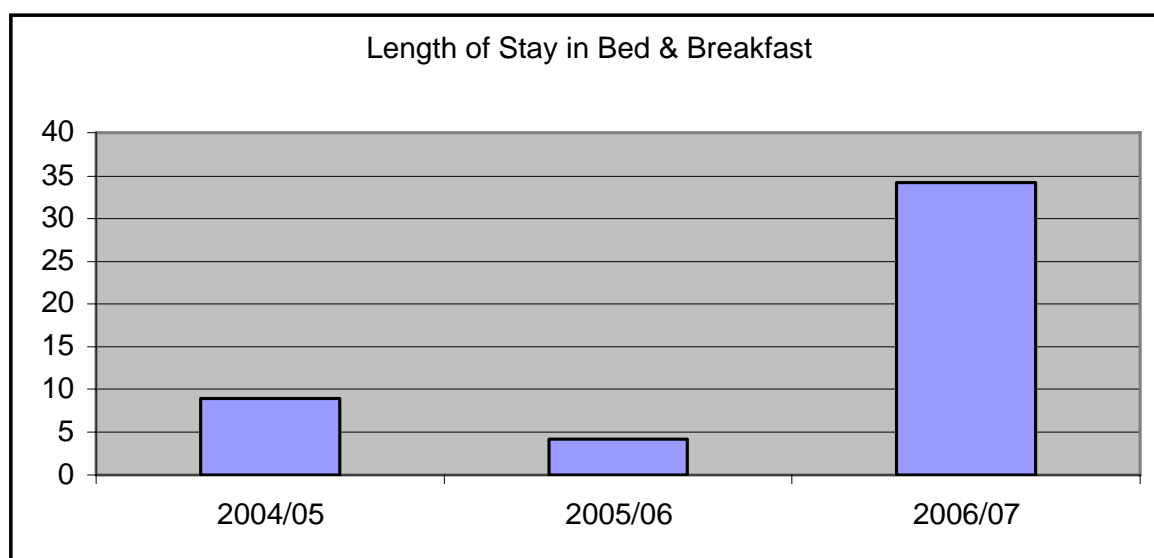
### Performance Indicators

#### Best Value Performance Indicators

The progress against Best Value Performance Indicators is reported to Members on a quarterly basis and annually to the Audit Commission. Targets are set at the top quartile level for local authority performance.

#### **BVPI 183a Length of Stay in Temporary Accommodation (Bed & Breakfast)**

This indicator measures the average number of days spent in bed and breakfast accommodation. As shown by the chart below, this has increased markedly over the last year. For 2006/07, the average number of days was 34.21. The top quartile target for this indicator is 1 week. The performance reflects an increased time spent in bed and breakfast by families due to additional pressures on the supply of family accommodation. The number of lettings is steadily decreasing and there are competing requirements for those lettings from households decanted as a result of the PFI programme.



#### **BVPI 183b Length of Stay in Temporary Accommodation (Hostel)**

It is not Ashford Borough Council policy to use hostel accommodation, nor do they have access to any hostels, so the target and return is always 0.

#### **BVPI 202 Number of Rough Sleepers**

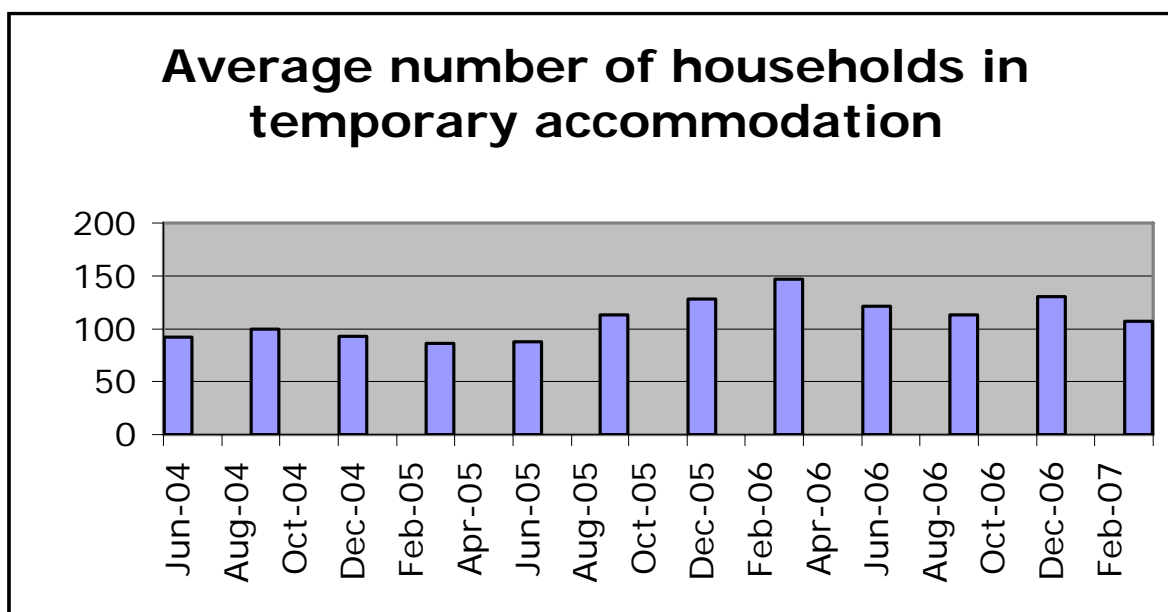
Ashford Borough Council has a target of less than 5 rough sleepers. There was a rough sleeper count on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006 when two rough sleepers were found. A further rough sleepers count was conducted in the Ashford Borough

Council area on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007 when no rough sleepers were found. Despite this latest count, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there may continue to be an element of rough sleeping locally.

### **BVPI 203 Change in the number of families in temporary accommodation**

The average number of families in temporary accommodation for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 was 119. For the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, this dropped to 117.75. This is a 1% reduction. The top quartile target is –6.94%.

The chart below shows the average number of households in temporary accommodation on a quarterly basis.



### **BVPI 212 Average Time to Relet Local Authority Housing**

The top quartile target is 24 days. For 2005/06 and 2006/07, this target was narrowly missed, with the average number of days being 25.34 and 25.35 respectively.

### **BVPI 213 Housing Advice Service: Preventing Homelessness**

This indicator is calculated per 1,000 households who approached for housing advice because they considered themselves to be homeless but where detailed casework has prevented them from becoming homeless. The target for this indicator is 11 cases per year. Performance in 2005/06 was 9.07 and for 2006/07 was 10.30.

### **BVPI 214 Repeat Homelessness**

This indicator measures the proportion of households accepted as statutorily homeless who were accepted as statutorily homeless by the same authority within the last two years. The Council's target for this indicator is 16%. The proportion of

repeat case in 2005/06 was 7.48%. This improved markedly in 2006/07 to 0.83% and only one repeat homeless case.

### **BVPI 255 Number of repeat cases of domestic violence**

During 2006/07 there were no repeat cases of domestic violence

### **Comparisons with other Kent Authorities**

The data for homelessness indicators across Kent for 2005/06 shows a mixed picture of Ashford Borough Council's performance.

Based on the 2005/05 data the length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation was longer in Ashford than in seven of the other authority areas. However this indicator has worsened in Ashford over the following year and is likely therefore to mean a worse comparative performance.

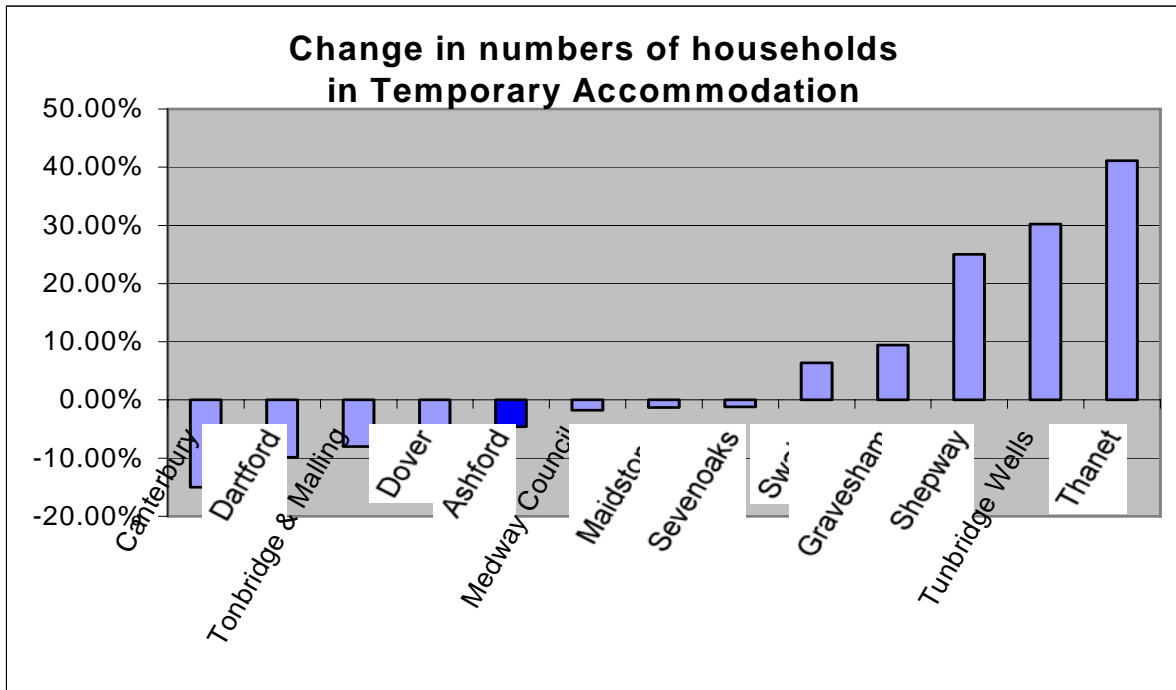
Six of the other authorities in Kent make use of hostels for temporary accommodation and in general have much longer stays than those in bed and breakfast.

The 2006 rough sleepers count showed that rough sleepers are highest in Tunbridge Wells, Medway and Dover, all with five. In Canterbury, Dartford and Gravesham, each had 3 rough sleepers. There were two in Ashford, one in Shepway and Thanet and none recorded in Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Swale and Tonbridge and Malling.

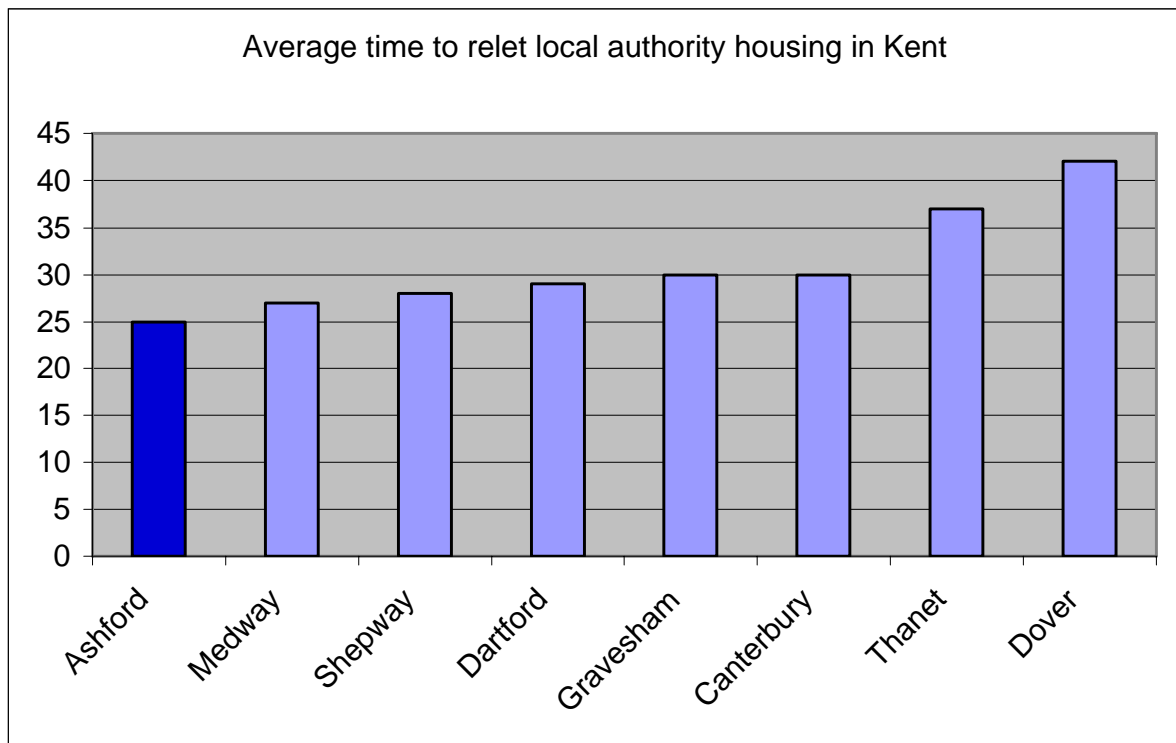
The change in numbers of households in temporary accommodation between 2004/05 and 2005/06 is shown in the chart below<sup>21</sup>. The numbers have continued to reduce in the Ashford Borough Council area in 2006/07.

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<sup>21</sup> [www.bvpi.gov.uk](http://www.bvpi.gov.uk)



The time taken to relet local authority stock is shorter in Ashford than in all other Kent authorities, based on 2005/06 data.

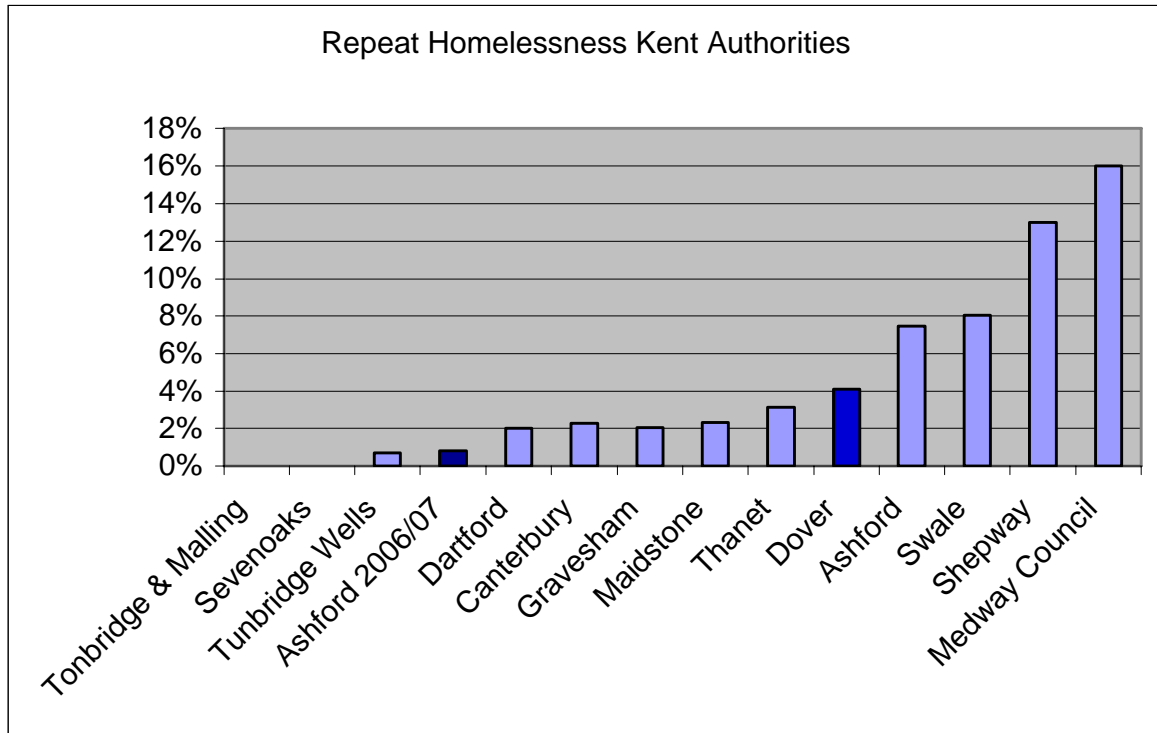


The figures returned for housing advice preventing homelessness are extremely variable. Five of the authorities performance was either 0% or 1%, while Medway, Sevenoaks, Shepway and Tunbridge Wells, performance was 615%, 79%, 176% and 24%. For Ashford the figure was 9%. A variation of this magnitude suggests differences in how this indicator is being interpreted.

Repeat homelessness cases in Ashford were higher than in nine of the other 12 Kent authorities. Ashford's performance for 2006/07 would move them into fourth position on the assumption that the other authorities performance remained constant.

The requirement for all English authorities to produce a Best Value Performance Plan will be removed from 1 April 2008. From this date a new set of national indicators will come into effect. All other indicator sets, including BVPIs will be abolished.

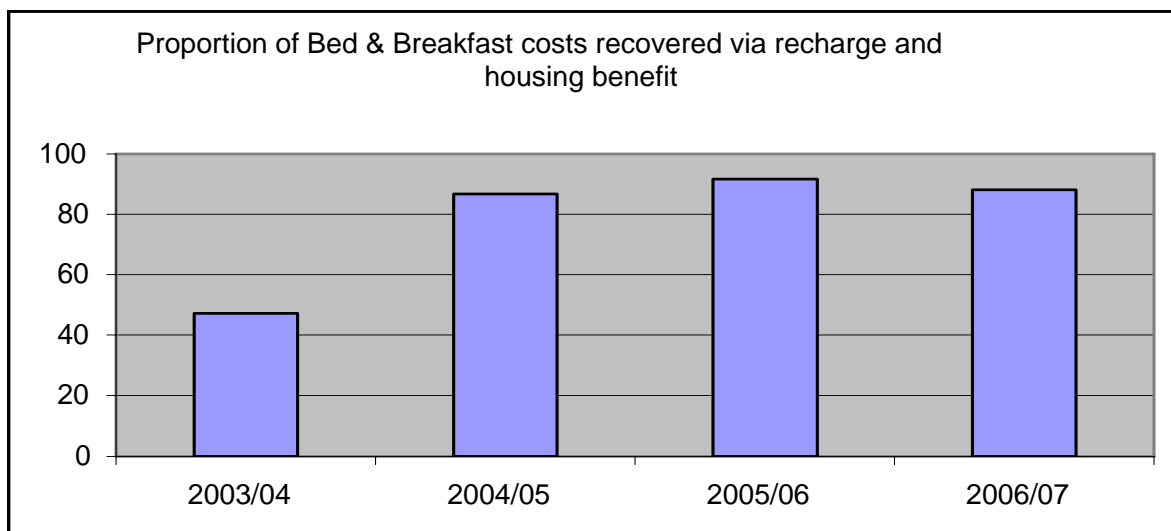
The table below shows instances of repeat Homelessness in Kent Authorities for 2006/07.



## Local Performance Indicators

### The Proportion Recovered, via Recharge and Housing Benefits, From the Cost of Providing Bed and Breakfast

The target for this indicator is 80%. Performance improved dramatically between 2003/04 and 2004/05, and showed a further improvement in 2005/06 before tailing off a little in 2006/07. The target was however still met, with 88.06% of Bed and Breakfast costs recovered.



The Council aims to complete homelessness investigations and make a decision within 33 days.

### Housing Advice Performance Indicators (HAPI)

Since 1 April 2007, the council has been moving towards using the HAPI's to record BVPI 213. The first and third of these indicators are used to collate information for BVPI 213 – preventing homelessness. For April to June 2007 the number of homelessness cases prevented (HAPI 1+ 3) was 30.

HAPI 1	Homelessness Prevention	Resulting in client remaining in their own home for more than <b>6 months</b>
HAPI 2	Homelessness Delayed	Resulting in the client remaining in their own home for more than <b>1 month</b>
HAPI 3	Settled Accommodation Secured	Securing accommodation which the client can reasonably occupy for at least <b>6 months</b> (accommodation secured cannot be following application under Part 7, unless the Part 7 application is withdrawn)
HAPI 4	Temporary accommodation secured	Securing any form of temporary accommodation for any <b>period less than 6 months</b> (accommodation secured cannot be following application under Part 7, unless the Part 7 application is withdrawn)
HAPI 5	Local authority temporary accommodation secured	Following a successful challenge under Part 7 application
HAPI 6	Client rehoused	Number of clients rehoused where there is no threat of homelessness

The following HAPI's are also collected

HAPI 7	Income generation	Securing compensation or charity money, saving rent, increasing benefits or recovering deposits
HAPI 8	Property and management improvements	Resulting in repairs being carried out, increase in services or improvement in management or building

Or just one of the following

One Off Advice		No case file opened, client has approached for one off specific advice
Ongoing Case	Applicant has been in previously and has a case file	Where no outcome of case has yet been reached but where applicant has come in for further advice or a case update

Further work needs to be completed to ensure that the service is accurately and consistently recording all Housing Advice using the HAPI's and that calculation on performance are consistent with guidance.

## 2. Strategic Links – Key Texts and Issues

## Appendix 1

Subject Matter	National Texts	Key Issues	Regional, sub regional and local texts	Key Issues
Housing strategy	<p>Ends and means: the future roles of social housing in England (2007) (the Hills review)</p> <p>Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable – the Housing Green Paper (2007)</p>	<p>The Hills Review noted that there is now a concentration of low levels of economic activity amongst social tenants, and the chance of a job-related move by social housing tenants is minimal. He also noted the increasing use of temporary accommodation and the decline in space standards. Amongst other ideas, Hills suggests that landlords should offer a more varied menu to existing and potential tenants, and local authorities should integrate employment and housing advice, to give people a wider range of options.</p> <p>The Housing Green Paper proposes several key policy shifts including delivery of more homes, improvement to existing homes, conversion of temporary accommodation into settled homes, building on the</p>	<p>Regional Housing Strategy Review: Draft for Consultation, February 2007, South East Regional Housing Board</p> <p>Ashford Borough Council Housing Strategy 2007-2010 (Draft)</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy Review Draft supports the emphasis on prevention as much as housing provision.</p> <p>The local housing strategy is the key vehicle for identifying ways in which aspirations for preventing and addressing homelessness can be realised through settled housing. Strategic priorities identified in the draft Housing Strategy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing the supply of homes;</li> <li>Developing sustainable communities;</li> <li>Supporting independence;</li> <li>Ensuring homes of a decent quality; and</li> <li>Providing accessible information on all housing options.</li> </ul> <p>The homelessness strategy will incorporate actions related to each of these priorities. There are a great many actions</p>

Subject Matter	National Texts	Key Issues	Regional, sub regional and local texts	Key Issues
		successful Settled Homes Initiative in London.		<p>in the housing strategy which impact on homelessness agenda's, including the provision of new housing and use of existing stock which will increase the supply of housing available for homeless households; and a number of actions related to support for vulnerable households which will address the prevention agenda. The following three objectives within the strategy relate specifically to homelessness and prevention of homelessness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the quality and range of housing options advice and assistance available;</li> <li>Prevent and reduce homelessness;</li> <li>Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households.</li> </ul>

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Homelessness strategy	Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives, A strategy for tackling homelessness, 2005			A regional homelessness action plan was agreed in 2006 and a South East Regional Homelessness Forum established with aims including providing advice of a consistent standard and continuing to tackle homelessness.
Delivering homelessness strategy through partnerships	Tackling homelessness: the Housing Corporation strategy, 2006	Key delivery partners. Homelessness Champions	Homelessness review and strategy  RSL Management Forum	The homelessness review has identified joint working with RSLs to develop a new nomination agreement. The RSL Management Forum will provide a vehicle for making the linkages with the homelessness strategy.
Vulnerable people	National Supporting People Strategy (2007)	The Supporting People programme provides support to the most vulnerable and excluded households to enable them to live independently. This includes support to households that prevents homelessness and enables them to sustain accommodation. In future, Supporting People funding will be delivered through Local Area Agreements.	Strategic review of short term accommodation based supported housing in Kent, 2007, A housing strategy for people with a learning disability, Kent 2003 Planning Housing and Support with Learning Disabled People in Kent, 2003 Updated needs	An aim of the five year Supporting People strategy is 'Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness' One of the aims of the strategic review of short term accommodation was 'To realise the potential of supported housing to deal with issue of homelessness and other needs in a planned and structured way'. The housing strategy for people

Subject Matter	National Texts	Key Issues	Regional, sub regional and local texts	Key Issues
			analysis, Kent Supporting People Team Transforming Services: A report on a strategic review of Kent's Supporting People funded services for older people	with learning disabilities does not make explicit links to homelessness agendas.
Drugs	Tackling drugs to build a better Britain (Drugs Strategy) 1998/2002, together with consultation paper for a new drugs strategy.	Housing is one of the key 'wraparound' services which support drug users. Greater integration is needed across employment, housing and resettlement so that drug misusers can realise drug-free futures.	Housing needs analysis of substance misusers in the county, Kent drug and alcohol team, 2005.	A study in 2004/05 identified 449 people presenting to services in Ashford of which 46 were homeless.  There is a Kent commitment to enhanced 2 tier working to identify ways of developing shared improved outcomes and efficiencies.
Alcohol	Alcohol harm reduction strategy (2004) Safe, Sensible, Social – the next steps in the national alcohol strategy (June 2007)	Many homeless people are dependent on alcohol. Integrated care pathways are to be developed for the most vulnerable people, including those who are homeless.	Kent Commitment to sustainable communities and the health and well being partnership	Health and well being partnership considers local issues impacting on health and does have some funding to work towards their aim.

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Social exclusion	Tackling social exclusion (2004) Reaching out: action plan (2006) Reaching out: think family (2007)	Groups for whom homelessness may be a feature include young people, particularly those who have been in care, offenders, those with mental health or substance misuse problems and adults with multiple problems. Five guiding principles are: Better identification and early intervention Systematic identification of what works Better multi-agency working Personalisation, and rights and responsibilities where appropriate Supporting achievement and managing underperformance Reaching out: Think Family has identified the need for intervention for families with multiple problems. The adults Facing Chronic Exclusion pilots include schemes aimed at rough sleepers	ABC's Social Exclusion Strategy commitment is contained within the Corporate Plan 2007	Being prepared

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Financial exclusion	National strategy to tackle financial exclusion	Financial exclusion is a likely contributor to homelessness, although current methods of recording reasons for homelessness, beyond rent and mortgage arrears, do not allow a direct link. For those who get into debt or struggle to make payments, the supply of free face-to-face money advice falls far short of demand.	The Local CAB provides the main debt advice locally	Joint working group with CAB and Housing Benefit to consider developments in advice provision. Local CAB service under resourced to meet demands for debt advice locally.
Gypsies and Travellers	Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE (2004-07)	Issues for local authorities include the question of how to provide enough sites with security of tenure, and how to help those who decide that they need to move into settled housing, and may have support needs to enable them to sustain such housing. CLG has funded a new project We're Talking Homes, which is seeking to reduce homelessness amongst this group and to build bridges between Gypsies and Travellers and local authorities.	Ashford, Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment report 2005/06: Final report: 2007: DCA	

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Crime	Reducing re-offending national action plan Cutting crime – a new partnership 2008-2011	Homeless ex-offenders are twice as likely to be reconvicted as those with stable accommodation, and the Home Office suggest that finding accommodation for ex-offenders could reduce re-offending by 20%. It is expected that agencies work together to share information, secure accommodation and tackle debt.	Community Safety Partnership Strategy 2005 - 2008	Tackling anti- social behaviour Tackling drug and alcohol misuse Reducing crime by 5% each year Tackling fear of crime and improving quality of life in priority neighbourhoods Tackling rural crime Develop a public relations and communications strategy
Respect and anti social behaviour	Respect – addressing anti-social behaviour – action plan (2006) Respect standard for housing management (2007)	Work to address anti-social behaviour should be part of a wider approach to homelessness prevention, for example, through action to promote amility intervention projects, and education work about homelessness with young people in schools and youth projects, as well as identifying the need for intensive support for new tenant, and providing clear expectations at the start of a tenancy	ABC's Anti Social Behaviour Policy	Development of working protocols for all social landlords are to be considered via the RSL Management Forum.

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Domestic violence	Safety and justice and the national Delivery Plan on Domestic Violence 2005	Key objectives include improving the chances of early identification, and building capacity within the domestic violence sector: widening the range of housing options for women suffering from domestic abuse, and exploring options to address issues concerning male victims, and perpetrators.	Kent and Medway Multi-agency strategy: An integrated and proactive response to domestic violence 2007 – 2010 Domestic Violence Multi Agency Forum Sustainable Communities Health and Wellbeing Group	
Mental health	Breaking down the barriers-the clinical case for change	Employment, housing and a strong social network are as important to a person's mental health as the treatment they receive. Common mental health problems need to be addressed as well as serious and enduring problems. Assertive outreach work, rather than waiting until homeless people with mental health needs approach services for help, is now being recommended by the Department of Health as a key part of the range of services.	CMHT review of cases in 2006.  Review of in patient services in 2004  East Kent NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, review of mental health and inpatient services	The community mental health team assessed their cases in 2006 to specifically identify those individuals in housing need, the results of this review suggest that 2% (17 no.) of people using mental health services had an immediate housing need and would require some form of support to help them live independently.  Many people capable of living independently are in hospital or residential care because there are insufficient supported housing opportunities for them.

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Children and young people	Every Child Matters – issues for young people leaving care Working together to safeguard children 2006	Almost one in six young people leaving care are placed in unsuitable – sometimes unsafe - accommodation. Close links are needed between leaving care and housing teams within local authorities. For other young people, including children with disabilities, young people at risk of offending, homelessness, or sexual exploitation, young parents and children of drug or alcohol users, key issues are effective joint assessments, information sharing, prevention and adaptations.	Forthcoming Kent integrated youth support strategy  Positive about our future, Kent Children and Young People’s Plan 2006 to 2009  Kent multi-agency parenting order support service, policy and procedures  Kent Protocol for Young People  Kent teenage pregnancy strategy 2001 to 2011 To be rolled out by Children’s Centre Services across Kent	The integrated youth support strategy aims to ensure the availability of high quality differentiated services tailored to address the needs of all young people. To date work does not appear to have made links to homelessness agendas.  Reduce conception levels in 15 to 17 years olds by 50% by 2010  Reduce social isolation of teenage parents by increasing their involvement in education, training and employment  110 new Children’s Centres are planned in Kent  4 are identified in next round for Ashford at Hothfield, Tenterden, East Stour and Phoenix

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
Demographic change	National strategy housing in an ageing population	This strategy will follow on from the pre-strategy consultation paper published in May 2007. It is recognised that the scale of demographic change means that current housing and service levels are not sustainable for the future.	A strategic review of older person's services in Kent, executive summary, November 2006. Transforming Services: A report on a strategic review of Kent's Supporting People funded services for older people (version 2), Riseborough Research and Consultancy	The review of older person's services was concerned with those services in receipt of Supporting People funding. Links to the homelessness agenda are not made explicit.
Employment	In work, better off: next steps to full employment (Welfare Reform Green Paper) (2007)	Changes in benefits systems, simplifying benefits for sick and disabled people, lone parents with children aged 12 or over (seven or over from 2010) being expected to start seeking work; work focused interviews every six months for couples who are parents; personalised responsive support for long-term job seekers, based on accepting support or loss of benefits; and addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged in the		Homelessness Strategy will identify ways to consider linking with local job centre to deliver advice about getting into work or training.

<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>National Texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Regional, sub regional and local texts</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
		<p>labour market.</p> <p>Local Housing Allowances being introduced. Concern these will have an impact on vulnerable people (including those in supported housing as the benefit will be paid direct to applicants). Support will be required, in some cases extensive, to ensure that the rent is paid. Potentially additional work for floating support and supported housing providers. Impact on staff and on vulnerable people needs to be considered.</p>	<p>Local Landlord event being launched in February 2008</p>	<p>Joint Media campaign with Housing Benefit</p> <p>Working Group with CAB to raise awareness</p>

## 2. Consultation

## Appendix 2

### Service User Questionnaire

A questionnaire was sent to all households that had used the homelessness service over the previous 18 months and all households in temporary accommodation. The questionnaire is included in appendix 3. A total of 426 questionnaires were sent out and 41 have been returned, roughly 10%. The characteristics, where shown, of those responding to the survey are as follows:

Gender	Male 17 (42%)	Female 23 (58%%)
Age	16 to 18	2 (5%)
	18 to 24	7 (17%)
	25 to 49	26 (63%)
	50 to 74	5 (12%)
	75+	1 (2%)
Ethnic Origin	Bangladeshi	2 (5%)
	Black African	1 (2%)
	Black Caribbean	1 (2%)
	White British	31 (76%)
	White Other	2 (5%)
	Any Other	4 (10%)

### First approach when made or threatened with homelessness

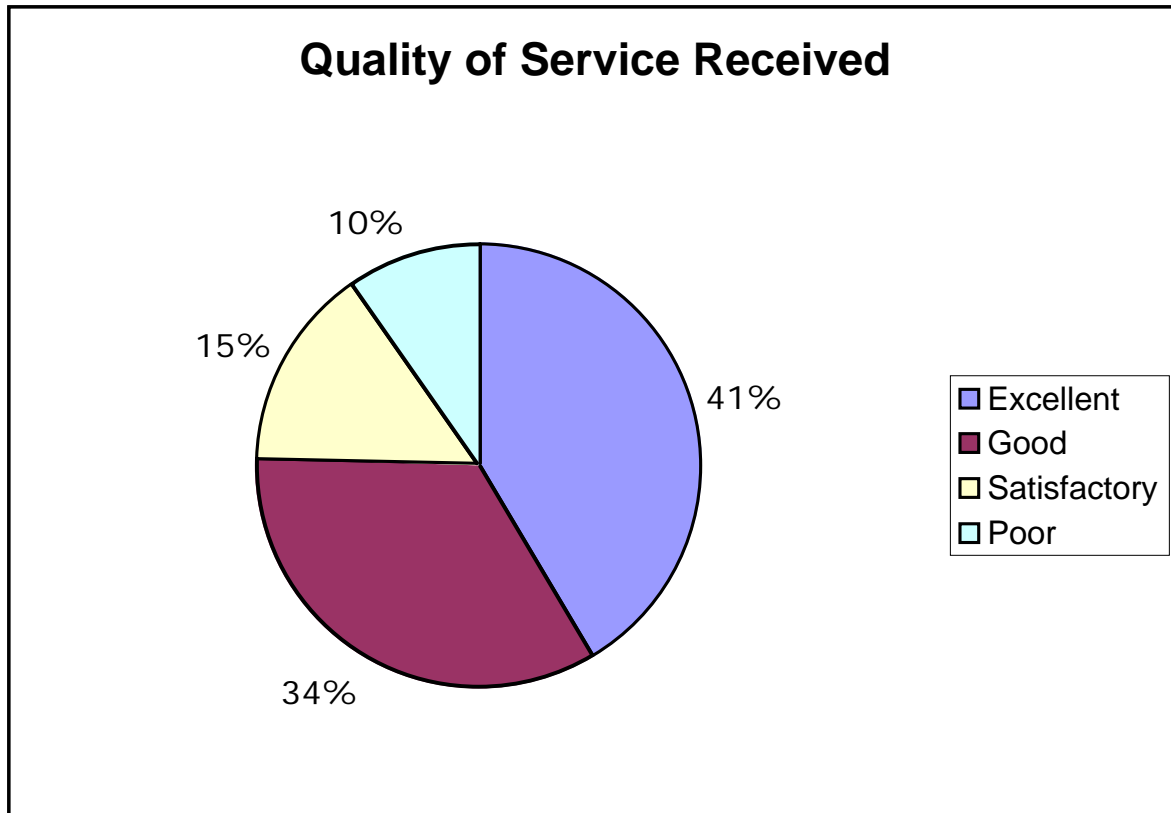
For most the first approach they made when made homeless or threatened with homelessness was to the Council, homelessness service – 23 (56%). A further 6 (15%) made an approach to the Gateway. These together make up over 70% of the first points of contact with homeless people. The remainder of approaches were made to Citizens Advice Bureau, while in hospital, mental health, shelter and social workers – each accounting for one or two of the 41 survey responses.

### Assistance received

A range of assistance was given including:

- how to register on the housing waiting list
- information on legal rights
- securing temporary and supported accommodation
- options on private renting
- placement at a refuge

Overall a positive picture is given of the advice given, with more than 70% rating the quality of the service as either good or excellent and 83% thought they had received clear advice and information. Over 90% confirmed that they understood the advice received and found the staff to be knowledgeable.



The majority (80%) found staff to be helpful and three quarters of those responding thought they had received enough advice and were kept informed of what was going on.

### **Improvements to the existing service**

Suggestions for improvements to the existing service included the following:

- Act quickly to access temporary accommodation and avoid placement in costly bed and breakfast accommodation
  - More emergency housing
- Ensure the same training for all staff to avoid customers being 'shoved from pillar to post.'
- Better communication with others
  - Benefits
- Town centre services could be more helpful
- Keep in contact more
- Be clear about the cost to the occupant of a stay In bed and breakfast
- Place families in their home towns
- Listen to people and treat them with respect and consideration

Some negative comments were received about the gateway, in comparison to the service received at the Council offices, both in response to this question and that relating to the general quality of the service.

## **Services to prevent homelessness**

When asked what extra help or services could have prevented them becoming homeless in the first place most responses concerned the nature of the problem that had made them homeless without making suggestions regarding additional services that might help. Many referred to personal problems relating to mental health issues and family/relationship problems including domestic violence. Some had become homeless after leaving prison, the armed forces or when a private tenancy came to an end. More housing available quickly was seen as a solution along with the ability for the Council to act before people became homeless.

## **Bed and Breakfast Accommodation**

Of the 41 respondents, 25 (61%) had been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, of which 14 thought the accommodation suitable for their requirements. Those who didn't find it suitable gave the following reasons:

- No kitchen or cooking facilities – mentioned by five people
- Cramped conditions – mentioned by three people
  - Sharing one room with three children including a teenager
  - One room for two people
  - Room too small
- Unsuitable upstairs placement
  - Top floor placement with a young baby
  - Upstairs placement when ill (and lack of heat)
- Placement not near school or work
- Drug/alcohol use outside the bed and breakfast
- No privacy
- Dirty

Five of those responding said that they had to give up work because of the bed and breakfast placement, one had to make arrangements to change school and two said that it affected other support received.

## **Other Temporary Accommodation**

There were 11 households placed in other temporary accommodation, including council owned properties, the refuge, Simon Mead House and other temporary accommodation. Of these households, ten found it suitable for their requirements. Reasons given by those not finding it suitable concerned the accommodation being too small and being upstairs. Three people had to give up work, two had to change schools and two had other support affected by the stay in temporary accommodation.

## Standard of Temporary Accommodation

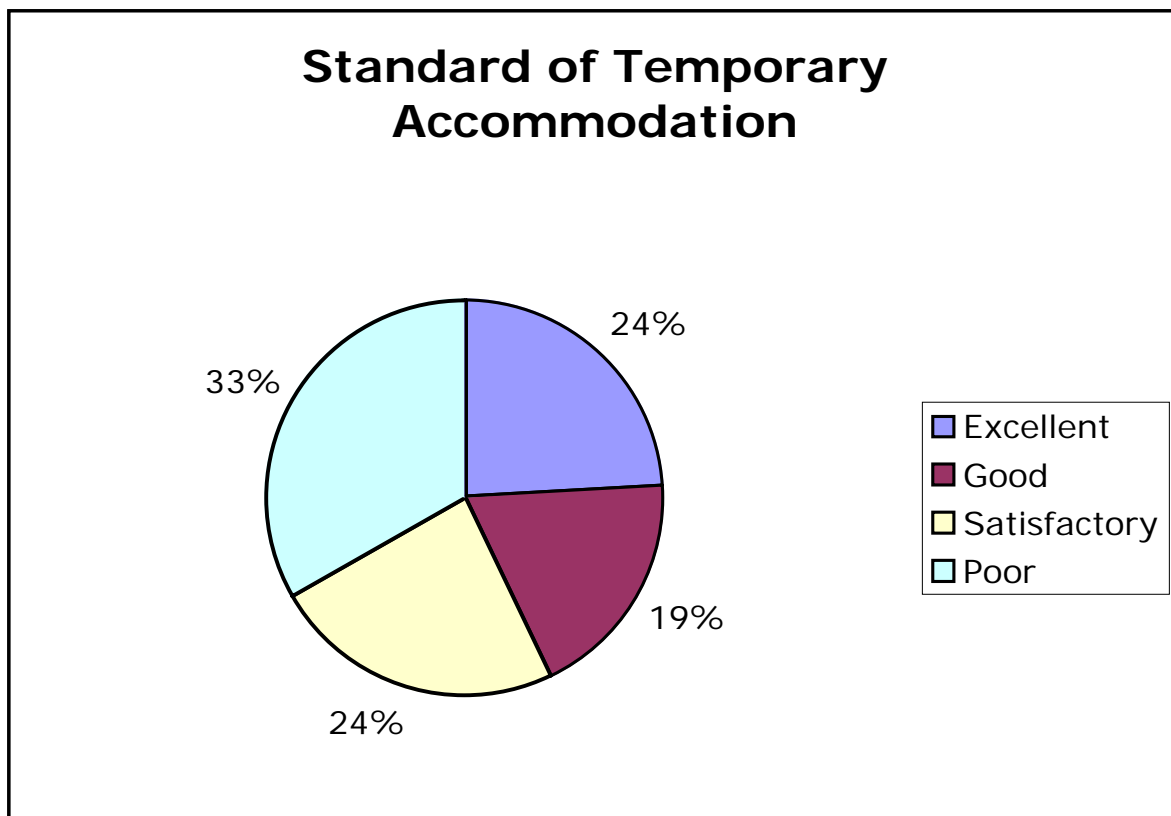
Ashford BC are mindful of the standards within the Code of Guidance. An inspection of Bed & Breakfast establishments used by Ashford Borough Council for homeless temporary accommodation took place in 2004. A programme of reinspection was completed towards the end of 2007 by the Private Sector Housing team.

The questionnaire asked the service user how they would rate the standards of the temporary accommodation. Two thirds found the standard of the temporary accommodation to be excellent, good or satisfactory. There were seven people who thought the standard was poor. Reasons given were:

- Dirty
- Small
- Health and Safety Issue
- No water basin or toilet facilities on the same floor
- No fridge
- One bedroom for two adults and one child

One person was particularly unhappy with the standard, giving the following reasons;

'Not cleaned, toilet being used by contactors and not flushed, didn't get keys on the right day, no water for three days, broken car port, no secure fencing for kids to play outside, garden overgrown, food/drink marks up walls.'



## **Consultation Exercise at Simon Mead House**

This consultation exercise involved four residents of Simon Mead House and was conducted by an officer in the Housing Options Team, a Tenant Participation Officer and a staff member from East Kent Cyrennians. Residents were advised that this was an opportunity for them to voice their views of the existing homelessness service provided in Ashford. The main issues raised were:

- Long term homeless households who have lived transient lifestyles often do not meet local connection criteria either to join a housing register or to fit homeless legislation.
- Housing benefit do not work with private landlords causing difficulties for customers leaving supported housing to access privately rented properties.
- One Simon Mead resident told of how one of his family members had 'played the system' and lied to jump up the housing register.
- Residents were unhappy and believed that customers who had not been long term resident in this country could obtain council housing ahead of themselves.
- Residents who had approached as homeless often found that they had unwittingly made themselves intentionally homeless either by taking previous bad advice or being unaware of the law and were therefore not statutory homeless.
- Often residents had difficulty in accessing privately rented accommodation because they are unable to get a landlord reference.
- Most residents would be happy to move from Simon Mead House to a shared house with some support as an interim measure.
- There was a general perception that customers are treated poorly by the Local Authority when presenting as homeless.

## **Staff Consultation**

Structural changes to bring together housing advice and homelessness services through the creation of generic roles are currently being implemented. A 'Moving Forward Event' was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2007 with all Housing Advice and Homelessness staff. This one day workshop was designed to support the review of housing advice and homelessness services and Ashford's Homelessness Strategy. This was an ideal opportunity for staff to both contribute to the homelessness review and strategy, and to consider how that translated into action and so aid the change process. It provided space for the staff involved to think about the future of the services they deliver and how they are able to contribute to the success of those services. The objectives for the day were to have:

- Created a shared vision for the future of the Team and its activities
- Explored and endorsed an outline Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- Agreed on how to streamline service processes
- Identified and agreed the steps to a higher emphasis on prevention work and alternative housing options.

The staff recognised that in meeting an overall objective of reducing homelessness presentations and acceptances, advice to prevent homelessness had a crucial role to play. The key aim would be to make an early intervention to have the best chance of preventing households becoming homeless.

An increased supply of accommodation for homeless households was also seen as vital if use of temporary accommodation is to be kept to a minimum. An issue highlighted was the increased pressure on lettings as a result of the decant programme within the stock managed under the Private Finance Initiative. It will be important for Housing Options staff to work closely with those involved in regeneration activity to understand when and in what areas and property sizes pressures are most likely to impact in order that those pressures can be eased where possible and alternative options sought.

A further priority identified for increasing supply was to consider what more could be done to encourage the private rented sector to play a more substantial and responsible role in lettings for homeless households.

The current review of lettings arrangements needs to be mindful of the impact on homeless households, to ensure that there is an adequate supply of permanent accommodation.

Staff also commented on the need for more supported housing and support services for vulnerable people.

For improving their own services they identify the following key areas:

- Managing unrealistic customer expectations through ensuring service transparency
- Ensuring effective service delivery by improving information flows
- A need for self assessment and the identification of building blocks to achieve a 3 star service
- Communicating the story –raising awareness, promoting options and strong positive PR

Staff identified the following contextual issues to be reflected in the Homelessness Strategy:

- Legislation/regulation/targets
- Migration into the area
  - patterns
  - labour markets – high number of Polish workers taking up private sector lets paying high rate
- Changing housing market
  - more buy to let
  - scarcity
  - higher value/rents
  - lenders restrictions preventing renting to social housing tenants
  - London ripple – London near enough for people to live here and travel to work

## **Homelessness Forum**

A multi agency forum event was held to look at the key priorities for the Ashford borough in, raising awareness, preventing homelessness and assisting families and individuals faced with the prospect of homelessness

The day was split into two sessions with the first session providing an opportunity for each of the stakeholders to identify issues within the following topic areas.

- Working with partners
- Prevention of homelessness
- Young people
- Customer focus
- Working with the private sector
- Other issues

During the second session, the forum split into two groups to draw out the key issues and priorities identified from the mornings session. The main issues raised are shown under the relevant headings below.

A second focus took place in mid February 2008 to look at ways of moving forward with the targets and actions from the Draft Homelessness Strategy.

### **Working with Partners**

The Forum Considered who should be working together and why. They also considered whether Ashford BC could work across Kent with other Councils/stakeholders and who they would be.

### **Key issues**

- More interaction between Partners – service users, voluntary groups, faith groups
- Identify key stakeholders and engagement
- Knowledge of funding opportunities
- Sharing good practice/information
- Who to take the lead in Partnerships? ABC?
- Who are key players – where should referrals be made to
- Training – regular
- Consistent information
- Expand Gateway Service and promote/publicise – talk to voluntary sector groups
- Training to provide consistent information
- Create/Maintain/Expand Homelessness Forum
- Audit of who does what
- share information with partners (keep up to date)
- engage with all agencies

## **Prevention of Homelessness**

The Forum considered how Ashford BC could improve the range of options for those who are homeless, how we can get early notification of a threat of homelessness and who we can get it from?

### **Key Issues**

- More resources/early intervention – schools, mobile advice, going out to hard to reach groups
- More move on accommodation
- Funding to move to accommodation
- Review of Rent Deposit Bond
  - landlord forums/newsletters
- Floating support from start of tenancy
- Parties making people homeless (rent and mortgage) earlier referral, joint interview/advice
  - training when and who to refer to
  - understanding of floating support
  - RSL Management forum
- Early intervention
  - drop in advice before actual homelessness
  - RSL/Mortgage lender
- Funding/resources to provide
- Raising profile of floating support
- Move-on accommodation (institutions and supported housing)

### **Young People**

The Forum looked at where there are gaps in Service and what advice Ashford BC should be providing for young people.

- Early intervention – targets schools
- Early advice on family planning
- Mediation
- A range of accommodation needed with links to education and employment ie foyer
- More resources ie floating support
- Listen to what young people say they want – don't make assumptions
- Joint working with other agencies – Sure Start, Family Courts, Do Joint Training

### **Customer Focus**

The Forum looked at how we can improve.

## **Key Issues**

- Training for front line staff ) signs and symptoms
- Gatekeeping ) Skilled interviewing – probing
- Signposting ) Asking the right questions
- Consistency of advice given
- Promoting and advertising services
- Multi agency working
- More help for ‘Non priority’ groups
- Scrine Foundation
- Supported Accommodation
- Private Rented

## **Working with the Private Sector**

The Forum considered how Ashford BC could improve communication with landlords and what incentives are needed. They also considered what advice and help applicants need.

### **Key issues**

- Empty Homes – bring back into use
- Lack of sustainment support/awareness – information leaflets
- Housing benefit – consider fast tracking for homeless and potentially homeless households entering the private rented sector
- Promotion of services
- Information for Landlords – forums
- Managing Local Allowance changes
- Consider how to remove stigma associated with those in receipt of benefits.  
Establish a Landlord Forum

## **Other Issues**

The Forum considered if there is anything else that Ashford BC can do to address homelessness along with any other points.

- Alcohol and substance misuse leading to homelessness
- Make private renting more attractive and affordable by giving cash incentives to landlords
- Joint initiatives with RSLs to enable people to get on the housing ladder.

## **Stakeholder Questionnaire**

As part of the review process, the Council has sought to map homelessness needs and provision in Ashford. Key stakeholders were sent a questionnaire as part of this process. In addition to detailing the services offered the questionnaire also sought information about the nature and causes of homelessness, future trends and the strengths and weaknesses of the homelessness service in Ashford.

## **Key points**

- Anecdotal difficulties in accessing staff
- Debt and welfare advice was considered good
- Need to address whether there are issues such as drink/drug dependency, learning difficulty, mental health issues
- Lack of single person accommodation
- Availability of occasional independent units under Assured Shorthold Tenancies would be helpful
- Women accessing the refuge have found the homelessness investigation process to be traumatic
- More floating support and early intervention is needed
- There is a need for an improved bond scheme to access private rented properties
- Increasing repossessions likely in future
- There is a need for more and more suitable accommodation
- Family breakdown and leaving care considered to be main contributory factors leading to homelessness for young people
- Providing accommodation that accepts 16/17 year olds is a priority
- More move on accommodation is needed to free up shared supported accommodation.

## **Ashford Young Persons Accommodation Forum**

This is a recently established forum. A meeting held in August 2007 was attended by a CLG specialist advisor on youth homelessness. The ensuing discussion was designed to feed in to the Homelessness Review.

## **Key points**

- Young people can reach crisis point, without having been known to statutory services and it can be difficult to get statutory services involved.
- Young people need room to make mistakes, without them leading to being classed as intentionally homeless.
- There needs to be an ability to move back into supported accommodation if they prove unable to live independently.
- Providing young people with somewhere to talk in confidence about problems as they are often afraid of consequences if they talk about their circumstances.
- Early intervention provides young people with information about leaving home. Workshops in schools in Dartford help to educate young people at an early age.
- The growth of town means new families and children presenting with problems, which makes preventative work harder.
- There is concern over use of bed and breakfast for young people. Placements out of area can mean the loss of a job. There is a need to try to create pathway of accommodation services.

- Levels of support are sometimes too low or inappropriate.
- Use of private sector accommodation can be difficult to secure for under 18's. Landlords can be reassured if they know a package of support is available for the young persons.
- 16 – 17 year olds are seen as vulnerable but on occasion it needs to be recognised that some young people are destructive and it is not appropriate for them to remain at home.
- Mediation needs to be long lasting, and if possible start before the young person presents as homeless.

It was generally agreed that when working with young people:

- The voluntary sector has a valuable role, linking in with the statutory sector.
- Flexibility is needed as young people have complex needs and cannot be compartmentalised.
- Early intervention can help reduce young people presenting as homeless
- Ongoing, appropriate, support and a range of accommodation types need to be available.
- A greater degree of joint working is required that is outcome focused, with the long-term outcome for the young person being at the centre.

## **Ashford Community Network**

The Voluntary Sector Development Officer for the Ashford Future's Team is a member of the Homelessness Strategy Working Group. Via this officer, Ashford Community Network have been consulted on a working draft of the homelessness review and have made some useful comments and suggestions, which can be summarised as:

- Ashford Community Network is generally supportive of the aims of the review and particularly the focus on prevention
- A greater focus on possible improvements to existing services and protocols
- Greater attention to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and improvements to partnership arrangements, including involvement in the commissioning process, including forums where homelessness criteria are decided
- A detailed funding plan that describe how a more ambitious and comprehensive service can be provided
- Explore the potential for credit unions
- Analysis of how well housing associations perform and whether they could improve their practice

### 3. Service User Questionnaire

### Appendix 3

Ashford Borough Council is in the process of reviewing its current homelessness strategy.

- As part of the review process, we seek to review homelessness needs and provision in Ashford.
- As a key service user we ask that you support this process by answering some questions about your homeless experiences.

Firstly, please specify your gender (Mark an X in the box) Male  Female

What age group do you fall in? 16-18  18-24  25-49  50-74  75 +

(Optional Question) Name .....

Current Address .....

What group would best describe your ethnic origin?

White British		Asian Pakistani	
White Irish		Asian Bangladeshi	
White Other		Asian Other	
Black African		Mixed Asian	
Black Caribbean		Mixed African	
Black Other		Mixed Caribbean	
Chinese		Mixed Other	
Asian Indian		Any Other	

Who did you first approach when you were homeless or threatened with homelessness?

What kind of advice did you receive from Homelessness Services?

Please tick [✓] as appropriate

1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Satisfactory, 4 = Poor

How would you describe the quality of service that you received?

1  2  3  4

Did you understand the advice you had been given? Yes  No

Did you receive clear information and advice about the services available? Yes  No

Did you find the staff knowledgeable? Yes  No

Did you find the staff helpful? Yes  No

Do you think that you received enough information? Yes  No

Do you think that you were kept informed of what was going on? Yes  No

What do you think we could do to improve existing services?

What extra help or services could have prevented you becoming homeless in the first place?

### **Bed and Breakfast**

Were you placed in Bed and Breakfast at any stage? Yes  No

If yes, did you find the accommodation suitable for your needs? Yes  No

If no please give your reasons?

Did the stay in Bed and Breakfast:

Necessitate you having to give up work? Yes  No

Necessitate your children having to change schools? Yes  No

Affect any other support received? Yes  No

Please give further details?

## Temporary Accommodation

Were you placed in Temporary Accommodation at any stage (other than B&B)?

Yes  No

What was the name of the accommodation you stayed in?

If yes, did you find the accommodation suitable for your needs

Yes  No

If no please give your reasons?

1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Satisfactory, 4 = Poor

How would you rate the standard of the temporary accommodation?

1  2  3  4

If poor please give your reasons?

Did the stay in temporary accommodation:

Necessitate you having to give up work?

Yes  No

Necessitate your children having to change schools?

Yes  No

Affect any other support received?

Yes  No

Please give further details?

## 4. Stakeholder Questionnaire

## Appendix 4

Ashford Borough Council is in the process of reviewing its current homelessness strategy. As part of the review process, it seeks to map homelessness needs and provision in Ashford. As a key stakeholder, we are contacting your organisation in the hope that you will support this process by completing the attached questionnaire. If any of the questions do not apply to your service please leave them blank.

### Mapping Current Services Survey

1.	Your Name.					
2.	Your Organisation's Name.					
3.	Please tell us the name of your homelessness service if different from above.					
4.	Who is the lead contact for your homelessness project or service.					
5.	Please note your website (if applicable).					
6.	Please specify the nature of your organisation: (Please place X in box).	Charity/voluntary sector	Yes		No	
		Local Government	Yes		No	
		Housing Association	Yes		No	
		NHS	Yes		No	
		Faith-based organisation	Yes		No	
		Private Sector	Yes		No	
		Other (please specify)				
7	Please provide a description of your homelessness project or service and or details of any accommodation you have which is specifically used as temporary accommodation.					
8	If applicable please state the address of your temporary accommodation and the number and size of units.					
9.	What resources do you currently allocate to homelessness?					

10.	Please list any other organisations you work in collaboration with to deliver the project or service.						
11.	Which client groups do you primarily work with? (Please place X in box).	Families	Yes		No		
		Single	Yes		No		
		Both	Yes		No		
12.	Which gender group do you specifically deal with? (Please place X in box).	Male	Yes		No		
		Female	Yes		No		
		Both	Yes		No		
13.	Which age groups do you work with (Please place X in all boxes that apply).	Young people 16 – 25 years	Yes		No		
		Adults (18 years +)	Yes		No		
		Adults (25 years +)	Yes		No		
		Adults (50 years +)	Yes		No		
		Adults (75 years +)	Yes		No		
		All ages	Yes		No		
14.	How many referrals did your service receive in 2005/06 and 2006/07 and how many of these referrals were accepted?	2005/07		No. accepted			
		2006/07		No. accepted			
	Are you able to identify how many have a homeless issue	Homeless issue number					
	If you have a waiting list please indicate the total number on the list	Waiting list number					
15.	Please indicate which of the following groups are involved in delivering the initiative/project/ service? (Please place X in box).	Paid staff	Yes		No		
		Volunteers	Yes		No		
		Homeless people	Yes		No		
16.	What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the homelessness service to be in Ashford?	Strengths					
		Weaknesses					
17.	What are the main contributory factors leading to homelessness for your client group?						

18	How would you suggest these factors could be addressed?		
19	What do you consider the main priorities to be for the homelessness services improvement	For ABC to offer	
		For other agencies to offer	
20.	What do you consider to be the main gaps in service provision for homeless people in Ashford?		
21.	How does your organisation support prevention of homelessness?		
22 a.	Do you anticipate any future trends or problems that may lead to an increase in homelessness for any specific client group?		
22 b	Can you identify or predict any plans over the next 5 years which may have an impact on the number of people being threatened with homelessness.		
23.	Are you able to identify any further opportunities for partnership working?		
24	Please use this space to note any other information of relevance about your project/service		

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey.

**Please return the completed survey by email to:  
[vicky.hammond@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:vicky.hammond@ashford.gov.uk)**

H/VH - Homelessness Strategy 2007-10 Quest July 07

## 5. Homeless Strategy Working Group Appendix 5

Organisation	Job Title	Name	Telephone Number	Email Contact
Ashford Borough Council	Housing Operation Manager (Housing Options Team)	Sharon Williams	01233 330803	<a href="mailto:Sharon.Williams@ashford.gov.uk">Sharon.Williams@ashford.gov.uk</a>
Ashford Borough Council	Lettings Officer (Policy)	Vicky Hammond	01233 330807	<a href="mailto:Vicky.Hammond@ashford.gov.uk">Vicky.Hammond@ashford.gov.uk</a>
KCC	Planning & Development Officer – Specialist Accommodation (Mental Health Team)	Sue Scammel	01622 221852	<a href="mailto:Sue.Scammel@Kent.gov.uk">Sue.Scammel@Kent.gov.uk</a>
KCC	Teenage Pregnancy Co-Ordinator	Ruth Herron	01304 222284	<a href="mailto:Ruth.Herron@Kent.gov.uk">Ruth.Herron@Kent.gov.uk</a>
Probation	Senior Probation Officer	Jo Kenny	01233 656500	<a href="mailto:Jo.Kenny@kent.probation.gsi.gov.uk">Jo.Kenny@kent.probation.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Ashford Borough Council	Community Youth Projects Co-Ordinator	Carole Morton	01233 330290	<a href="mailto:Carole.morton@ashford.gov.uk">Carole.morton@ashford.gov.uk</a>
Social Services (Children & Families)	Duty Manager	Debbie Simmons (leaving in August 2007)	01233 205821	<a href="mailto:Debbie.Simmons@Kent.gov.uk">Debbie.Simmons@Kent.gov.uk</a>
Social Services (Adult Services)	Duty Manager	Chris Beany	01233 205746	<a href="mailto:Chris.Beany@Kent.gov.uk">Chris.Beany@Kent.gov.uk</a>
KCC Education	Joint Commissioning Officer	Carol Tomlinson	01622 696685	<a href="mailto:Carol.Tomlinson@Kent.gov.uk">Carol.Tomlinson@Kent.gov.uk</a>
Ashford Borough Council	Community Safety Officer	David Lloyd	01233 330891	<a href="mailto:David.Lloyd@ashford.gov.uk">David.Lloyd@ashford.gov.uk</a>
Ashford's Future Team	Voluntary Sector Development Officer	Simon Bannister	01233 330814	<a href="mailto:Simon.bannister@ashford.gov.uk">Simon.bannister@ashford.gov.uk</a>

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b>	<b>Email Contact</b>
KCC Supporting People	Policy & Strategy Officer/Policy & Strategy Manager	Ute Vann/Jo Pannell	01622 694825	<a href="mailto:Ute.Vann@Kent.gov.uk">Ute.Vann@Kent.gov.uk</a>
PCT Health and Promotion	Health Promotion Practitioner Specialist Community Development	Katie Blissett	01304 828 730	<a href="mailto:Katie.Blissett@ekcpct.nhs.uk">Katie.Blissett@ekcpct.nhs.uk</a>
Cultural Services	Deputy Head of Cultural Services	Ian Bailey	01323 330689	<a href="mailto:Ian.bailey@ashford.gov.uk">Ian.bailey@ashford.gov.uk</a>

## 7. Action Plan – Annual Homelessness Targets and Priorities For 2003 - 2008

## Appendix 7

This is the action plan that was presented in the first homelessness strategy produced in 2003. This chart shows outcomes against the other actions previously identified.

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Outcome as at end September 2007
Provide with partners an effective pro-active advice service to those in housing need or threat of homelessness to maximise housing options and choices for all homeless households	Draw up a Customer Charter, which will be continually monitored and reviewed.	ABC Customer Charter and draft Service Standards have been drawn up and tenants forum have been consulted. However, Customer Charter targets are to be tightened and implemented via a working group over the next 6 months and the service standards will be further renewed to ensure that they are challenging and meaningful
	Review and ensure older peoples needs are met in relation to the provision of advice and information	Needs to be included in new Action Plan
	Produce and distribute leaflets providing a range of advice to potentially homeless families including health issues	Housing Advice Sheets have been produced but need to develop to include additional information. This item should be included in the new Action Plan
	Produce and provide an advice and information pack to all households placed in Bed and Breakfast	Homestart have provided packs for families in B&B. An advice sheet has been developed but is not fully used at present. This item needs to go into new Action Plan and needs to be reviewed in conjunction with Homestart packs.
	Monitor service with Local Performance Indicators	Local Performance has been monitored via the housing management team. However it is suggested that these are reviewed and therefore this item needs to be carried over to the new Action plan

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Outcome as at end September 2007
	Carry out a Best Value Review	This review has considered a wide range of issues and improvement plans are being developed with reference to good practice and the Key Lines of Enquiry.
	Review the current Lettings Policy to improve choice to applicants	Lettings Policy has undergone a fully review and is now reviewed annually
	Draw up Policy and Procedures for Homeless and Housing Advice enquiries	Some procedures have been produced but a full policy and procedure document still needs to be produced and this needs to be an item carried over to the new Action plan.
	Implementation of the Rent Guarantee Scheme	This Scheme has been set up and is now running as the Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme. The review and strategy include details from an external consultant on moving the Scheme forward
	Research and implement a Private Sector Leasing Scheme	A Private Sector Leasing Scheme has been implemented and we are now looking at reducing the numbers of PSL properties used and improving the Move on from these properties in order to meet the temporary accommodation target
	Review existing e-government services to customers on the provision of housing and homelessness advice	This is an ongoing target and should also be included in the new Action plan
	Review communication with customers	A Customer Satisfaction survey has been introduced and consultation arrangements have been put in place as part of the new Strategy. This target is, however ongoing and should be included in the new Action plan

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Outcome as at end September 2007
	Review and promote the services to Domestic Violence victims to include services for all victims	Ashford Borough Council introduced, in 2005, a Domestic Violence Prevention Officer in partnership with Maidstone
	Research, review service provision to ensure intervention and prevention is at the fore front of the service	This is an on-going target
	Recruitment of a Tenancy Sustainment Officer	This post was recruited in 2005 and proposals have been put forward to change the title and focus of this post to Landlord Liaison Officer and to recruit an additional part time officer to assist.
Implement the recommendations of the Homelessness Audit	Policy and Procedure notes to be written, amended and dated appropriately	Some procedures have been produced but a full policy and procedure document still needs to be produced and this needs to be an item carried over to the new Action plan.
	Central records are to be maintained of all current homeless persons applications, and all records are clear and referenced	This target has been achieved and improved upon since July 2007 with a new database. There is also a proposal for new IT to be procured which will improve this process. This target should be ongoing and included in the new Action plan.
	Review of Bed and Breakfast establishments for their suitability to accommodate homeless persons	Inspections completed by Private Sector Housing Team but this should be an ongoing process
	Monitor services with Local Performance Indicators	Some measures introduced and monitored but they need to be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Outcome as at end September 2007
Continue to develop a multi-agency approach to reducing the incidences of homelessness through services that prevent homelessness	Establish protocols for joint working	Protocols established for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intentional families with children</li> <li>• mental health CMHT and</li> <li>• mental health hospital discharge.</li> </ul> Need to develop joint working and establish further protocols.
	Provision of consistent support for people moving between services	This has been achieved in the Kent Homeless Officer group and is ongoing
	Identification of common training needs and provision of joint training sessions	Consider regular meetings or 1 to 1 sessions to discuss training needs.
	Improvement in links with the private sector in achieving the aims of the strategy	The Tenancy Sustainment Officer is working continually with the private sector to improve links. The review and action plan produced by Inside Housing Solutions sets out further targets which will be reflected in the new strategy action plan.
Encourage the use of mediation where homelessness is caused by parental eviction	Set up a Mediation Service to prevent homelessness through parental eviction	Mediation Service set up March 2007 and subject of ongoing review to monitor success of this service
Implement the Rent Collection and Arrears Recovery Strategy and Policy and support	Implement the Council housing management policies and practices to ensure that they work to prevent homelessness wherever possible	Policies recently reviewed. Action to be included in New Plan to review Vulnerable Persons Protocol via the RSL Management Forum.

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Outcome as at end September 2007
provision to sustain tenancies	Develop a homelessness/housing assessment process that identifies the need for housing support	To form part of new Action Plan The new CBL application form does identify support needs but procedure need to be developed via the vulnerable person protocol to attempt to identify appropriate support for applicants prior to referral for housing on offer
	To continue the provision of floating support to families and others threatened with homelessness	The monitoring of floating support referrals and provision is an ongoing target
Work to ensure that no family/individual is placed in Bed and Breakfast except in the case of an emergency	Families not to be placed in Bed and Breakfast for longer than 6 weeks	ABC are currently meeting this target, except where the stay in B&B is discretionary.
	Convert a room in a Sheltered Scheme for use by the elderly homeless	44 East Stour Court has been converted (Guest Room) but this service needs to be reviewed as no access to cooking facilities etc
	Provision of a small supported house to accommodate teenage pregnant mothers and their children.	Review document to assess whether we have a need for this. Not completed so needs to be carried forward to new action plan.
Continue to monitor Rough Sleeping	Review and monitor the situation and organise a count if rough sleeping increases	Rough sleeping count took place in November 2006 and in November 2007. Numbers remain low.
Continue to monitor and Benchmark the homelessness service to ensure that services provided meet best practice and provide value for money	Work with the Benchmarking Group, facilitated by Housing Quality Network to ensure best practice and value for money	Kent Homeless Officers Group are considering benchmarking via this Group. A recent benchmarking exercise has taken place but needs to be an ongoing action on a regular basis.

Objectives	Actions/Outcomes	Outcome as at end September 2007
Increase the supply of affordable accommodation and make best use of existing stock	Continue to provide additional affordable housing through the development and implementation of the Housing Strategy and affordable housing policy	Proposal that affordable housing % increased with core strategy and LDF. 35% of Affordable Housing proposed on new development. Large new build programme in place
	Review the use of under used garage sites for redevelopment for affordable housing	A review is under way at the moment.
	Review sheltered housing to assist the Council in deciding on the best use of its stock	A review is under way and work is also being carried out on improving our tenant profile information.
	Promotion of assisted moves and incentives to move to make the best use of its stock	Assisted move payments have been increased and advertising taken place. This is an ongoing target

## 8. References

## Appendix 8

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