



ASHFORD  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



# Homelessness Strategy

2008-2012

## Foreword

### From the Housing Portfolio holder

I am pleased to introduce Ashford Borough Council's second Homelessness Strategy which builds upon the successes of the first strategy.

Following the review of the existing homelessness provision a second homelessness strategy has been produced and written in partnership with our stakeholders and takes on board views from the wide ranging consultation that took place during 2007.

The Strategy focuses, not only on improving the availability, quality and standard of accommodation for families faced with homelessness, but also seeks to strengthen preventative measures to ensure that households are not faced with homelessness in the first place.

We, in Ashford, strive to deliver improved and joined up services to all in Ashford and at the time of this Strategy going to press, we have been pleased to learn that Ashford have been recognized as one of Communities and Local Government's 'Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazers' on the EXTRA programme which will assist us with funding to offer an exciting and innovative approach to delivering housing advice.

Prevention is at the heart of the homelessness agenda for Ashford. We recognise that by preventing the stress and uncertainty which comes as a result of being homeless, we can build on improving health and well being, opportunities for employment and education and deliver strong sustainable communities.

Cllr Peter Wood  
Portfolio Holder for Housing



## Contents

## Page

1.	Introduction and Context .....	5
	National Targets .....	5
2.	Homelessness in Ashford .....	7
3.	National, Regional, Sub-Regional and Local Context.....	13
	Homelessness Prevention .....	13
	Government focus on Youth Homelessness .....	13
	Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006 .....	14
	Homelessness Prevention in Ashford.....	14
4.	The context we work in.....	16
	Homelessness, education and employment .....	16
	Homelessness, Crime and Re-offending .....	16
	Homelessness, Drugs and Alcohol.....	17
	Homelessness and Health.....	18
	Overcrowding Action Plan .....	18
	Working in partnership.....	19
5.	Strategic Priority 1 .....	25
	Increase the supply of homes for homeless and potentially homeless households .....	25
	Increase the supply of affordable rented and intermediate tenure homes to meet local need and demand .....	25
	Developments Proposed .....	26
	Lettings in existing social rented stock .....	27
	Best use of the existing housing stock.....	27
	Empty properties .....	28
	Supported Housing.....	29
	Floating Support .....	30
6.	Strategic Priority 2 .....	32
	Prevent and reduce homelessness .....	32
7.	Strategic Priority 3.....	38
	Increase access to a choice of settled home .....	38
	Tenancy Sustainment Services .....	41

8.	Strategic Priority 4 .....	45
9.	Strategic Priority 5 .....	52
	Improve the quality and range of housing options advice and assistance available .....	52
10.	Strategic Priority 6 .....	58
	Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households .....	58
11.	The resources we have to deliver our strategy .....	61
12.	Monitoring Delivery of the Homeless Strategy .....	63
	Appendix 1 - .....	65
	Progress since the last Ashford Homelessness Strategy .....	65
	Appendix 2 .....	66
	Homelessness and the new National Indicators .....	66
	Appendix 3 .....	69
	Homeless Strategy Review Timetable 2007 .....	69
	Appendix 4 - References .....	74
	Appendix 5 – Groups involved in strategy development .....	78
	Appendix 6     Glossary of Terms .....	81
	Appendix 7 - How to get further information .....	84

# 1. Introduction and Context

Homelessness can affect anyone, at any time, and for any number of reasons. The best way we can prevent and respond to homelessness is to work together. This strategy has been developed by a group of organisations, representing Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council, the primary care trust and Probation, amongst others.

This is Ashford's second Homelessness Strategy following the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002. Our strategy places a high priority on preventing homelessness. It builds on the successes from our first strategy, and seeks to develop and enhance existing services and initiatives. Details of our progress on the first strategy can be found in Appendix 1

The Government has set the following national targets in relation to homelessness and Ashford Borough Council and their partners are committed to ensuring that they are achieved and sustained.

## National Targets

- A commitment to end, by 2010, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.
- End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children, except in an emergency, and then for no longer than six weeks
- Halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation to 50,500 nationally by 2010.
- A target was set in 1998 to reduce levels of rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002. In 1998 the rough sleeping figure recorded was 1,850; by 2001 the target had been achieved. By June 2007 the nationally recorded rough sleeping figure was 498 and the national target is now to sustain this and also to reduce to as close to zero as possible

To deliver these targets we have identified the following priorities for action in Ashford (they are all considered to have equal importance):

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Strategic Priority 1:</b> | Increase the supply of homes for homeless and potentially homeless households                         |
| <b>Strategic Priority 2:</b> | Prevent and reduce homelessness   |
| <b>Strategic Priority 3:</b> | Increase access to a choice of settled homes  |
| <b>Strategic Priority 4:</b> | Further develop partnerships to improve the delivery of housing related services to vulnerable people |

**Strategic Priority 5:** Improve the quality and range of housing options advice and assistance available

**Strategic Priority 6:** Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households

## 2. Homelessness in Ashford

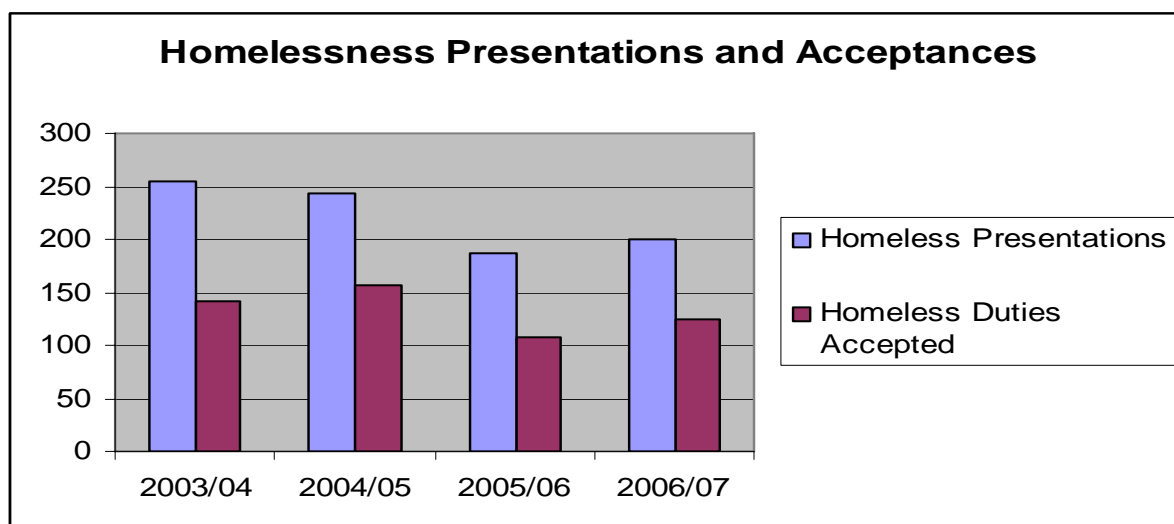
Our plans to prevent and respond to homelessness in Ashford are based on a good understanding of what the issues are – who is homeless, why does homelessness happen, what services exist to prevent and respond, and where is there a need for us to improve?

We carried out a detailed and comprehensive review of homelessness in Ashford during the latter half of 2007 and the early part of 2008. We involved a wide range of people in the review process including those who have accessed our services and the people who provide or fund services. We paid particular attention to involving people who could inform our understanding of the problems faced by people who may not normally have a voice, for example young and older people, people with mental health problems or learning disabilities and so on.

The main findings of this review are provided here, and in the chapters on our priorities. More information from the review is available on the council's website [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk).

### Statutory Homeless

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, the Council made 197 homelessness decisions. 120 households (60%) were accepted as homeless and in priority need. These figures are significantly higher than in previous years but less than in each of the preceding three years. 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.



In Ashford we have a lower proportion of black and minority (BME) households than the national average, and only very small numbers present as homeless. It is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about homelessness and BME households and further work will take place with local BME groups to ensure that access to the housing options service is promoted.

Most households who are accepted as homeless 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 year olds accepted as homeless between 2005/06 and 2006/07.

Ashford is a substantially rural area, but most homelessness applications originate from the more densely populated urban areas. Further analysis is needed to identify whether there are differences in the patterns of homelessness in urban and rural areas and to assess the extent of hidden homelessness.

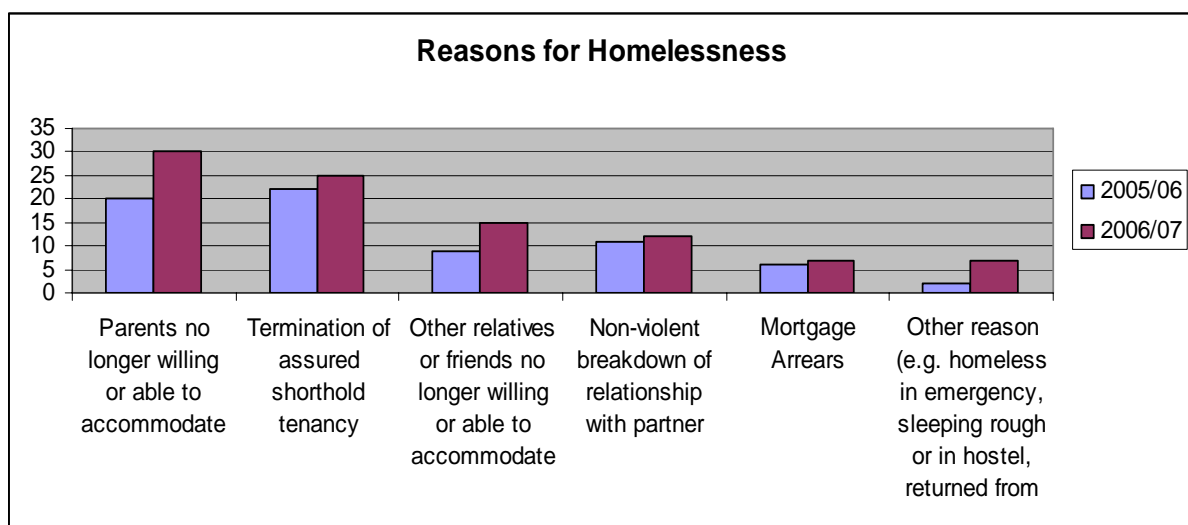
### Non Statutory Homeless

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.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 the Council improved monitoring arrangements 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 2009 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 has 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.

## **Households vulnerable to homelessness**

The Supporting People programme provides a range of services to people who need support to enable them to live independently. This includes people who are already homeless, or who have been homeless before, and people who - without support - are likely to become homeless.

Across Kent, by far the largest numbers of people who receive Supporting People services are single and homeless. 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%.

In Kent more households from the following groups access support services compared with the national average: -

- Older People
- Learning disabilities
- Offenders or those at risk of offending
- Young people leaving care
- Teenage parents
- Rough sleepers

## **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.

## Summary

The following table brings together all the findings from our review of homelessness and indicates how we will respond.

<b>Key issues arising from the review</b>	<b>Issues addressed by</b>
Prevention must be a key aim	Prevention is central to this Strategy and key activities are shown under Strategic Priority 2
Need to continue to endorse an invest-to-save approach to continue to deliver prevention work.	An objective is included to undertake a risk assessment of funding for the council's homelessness prevention and housing options service. Strategic Priority 2
Prevention activity needs to focus on early intervention	An objective to increase early identification and intervention is included under Strategic Priority 2
There needs to be a focus on the needs of young people	A commitment to produce a strategic framework for the needs of homeless and potentially homeless young people is included under Strategic Priority2
Possible expansion of the mediation service needs to be considered	A review of the mediation service is included under Strategic Priority 2
Regeneration activity needs to take account of the impact on homelessness	Strategic Priority 1 is related to increasing the supply of housing including affordable housing and housing related support. An improved understanding of the needs of homeless households will result from objectives under Strategic Priority 3 from the completion of a housing market assessment and developing an understanding of the urban/rural dimension to homelessness
The strategy needs to consider the non priority households as well as those covered by the homelessness legislation	This is addressed by Strategic Priority 4 related to partnerships with key stakeholders and is addressed in particular by objectives concerned with understanding the causes of homelessness and improving data monitoring arrangements

<b>Key issues arising from the review</b>	<b>Issues addressed by</b>
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 focus on youth homelessness and the review of the mediation service will both contribute to activity to prevent homelessness under this priority category
The private rented sector needs to be encouraged to play a bigger role in housing homeless households	This is addressed by Strategic Priority 3 – Increase access to a choice of settled home, under an objective to ‘Increase the role of the private rented sector’
Suitable temporary accommodation needs to be made available	Strategic Priority 6 – Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households
Improved relations are needed between the housing benefit service and private landlords	This is addressed by an objective to ‘Strengthen joint working with landlords’ under Strategic Priority 3
The restructuring of the homelessness and housing advice service needs to be completed.	This is covered by an objective under Strategic Priority 2 to ‘Complete refocusing of the homelessness and housing advice services. Improved outcomes will also result from Strategic Priority 5 to ‘Improve the quality and range of housing options advice and prevention
There is a need to increase the provision of general affordable housing, move on accommodation, supported housing and support services including floating support	These elements of provision are covered under Strategic Priority 1 ‘Increase the supply of homes for homeless and potentially homeless households’ and Strategic Priority 3 in relation to move-on accommodation
Better communication within and about the service is needed	Strategic Priority 3 has a specific objective to ‘Raise awareness of the housing options service and housing issues among key stakeholders through a joint training programme’. Other objectives under this priority also contribute, including one related to increasing and updating literature available and one related to raising awareness of the role of other agencies.

<b>Key issues arising from the review</b>	<b>Issues addressed by</b>
More opportunities for joint working and sharing best practice need to be sought	This is dealt with under Strategic Priority 4 and specifically by an objective to 'Investigate further ways of working with partners and across boundaries to prevent homelessness and to improve the range of services available to homeless households'.
Bring empty property back into use	Strategic Priority 1 includes an objective to 'Develop policies to assist in making the best use of existing stock and bringing empty properties back into use and ensure their availability to those in housing need including homeless households'
Issues around alcohol and substance misuse need to be considered	Housing related support is dealt with under Strategic Priority 1. There is a recognised gap in support services for alcohol and substance misuse. Plans to address this gap will be developed in conjunction with partner agencies including the Supporting People Team
Strategic links need to be strengthened	Actions to address strengthened strategic links run through much of the Strategy. The most direct actions associated with this are covered under Strategic Priority 4 concerning partnership working. Of particular importance is the objective to ensure the contribution of homelessness services to delivering local and national priorities is recognised.

### **3. National, Regional, Sub-Regional and Local Context**

#### **Homelessness Prevention**

Prevention of homelessness is at the heart of national policy and of homelessness policy in Ashford. As homelessness has become better understood, it has been determined that it is far better, where this is possible, to avoid the economic and social costs of experiencing homelessness for families, individuals and wider society.

Preventative services focused on rough sleeping were central to the 1999 'Coming in from the Cold strategy' and are central to the 2002 Homelessness Act. In recent years the Government's agenda in relation to homelessness has been to:

- Reduce rough sleeping
- End the long term use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families with children
- Prevent homelessness

There is a Government target to halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation to 50,500 nationally. The approach to achieving this is set out in the CLG strategy document Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives, published in 2005.

Recent good practice guidance has been focussed on the prevention of homelessness through:

- A much stronger emphasis on housing advice that is focused on preventing homelessness from occurring wherever possible
- A range of other support services designed to prevent homelessness among households or individuals at risk of experiencing it, including
  - Rent deposit schemes
  - Family mediation (focussed on preventing youth homelessness)
  - Domestic violence (focused on removing the need for women to leave their existing home to escape a violent partner and causing them to be homeless)
- Preventative services for ex-offenders (who are deemed to be at heightened risk of homelessness)
- Tenancy sustainment services (floating support that is intended for households or individuals at risk of becoming homeless)

#### **Government focus on Youth Homelessness**

Recently attention has focused on measures to tackle youth homelessness, including:

- A commitment to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation by Local Authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010
- An expectation of the availability of family mediation for young people
- A new national supported lodgings scheme providing accommodation, advice and mediation for young people who can no longer stay at home.

## **Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006**

The most recent Code of Guidance for homelessness emphasises the following changes in expectations from homelessness strategies<sup>1</sup>:

- Prevention must be a key strategic aim of all strategies
- The role of social services in providing assistance, and taking the strategy into account, is strengthened
- The Code emphasises the need to consider *all* groups of homeless people
- There must be a clear alignment with other strategies and plans
- Work at county/sub-regional level is encouraged
- The guidance notes the value of consulting with service users, and consulting other agencies before adopting the strategy
- Action plans should be planned to include actions to be taken by all relevant agencies and be led and facilitated by the strategic housing function within the local housing authority
- Action plans must be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound)

Other government aims and policies that need to be taken into consideration within activity to prevent and respond to homelessness, such as the focus on tackling worklessness and the introduction of local housing allowances, and good practice such as developing partnership working, are referred to where relevant throughout the remainder of this document.

## **Homelessness Prevention in Ashford**

Ashford Borough Council is committed to working with partners to ensure a preventative approach to homelessness is central to their own services and those of partner agencies. Preventative services currently offered are shown under the main findings of the Homelessness Review. Prevention is the theme of Strategic priority 2 and gives detail of ongoing work in relation to:

- Refocusing the service to place an even greater emphasis on prevention
- A review of current mediation arrangements to strengthen their effectiveness

---

<sup>1</sup> HQN briefing paper, Homelessness strategies – preparing for the 2008 deadline

- Improving early identification
- A risk assessment of the current funding of the prevention and housing options service
- Developing a strategic framework for young people

Prevention is also a key theme running through other priorities in the strategy. In particular Strategic Priority 3 – Increase access to a choice of settled home, Strategic Priority 4 concerning partnering arrangements, and Strategic Priority 5 – Improve the quality and range of advice and assistance, all have a strong preventative focus.

## **4. The context we work in**

Homelessness is more often than not the result of a large number of other personal circumstances, ranging from family breakdown, to health problems, to loss of employment. Providing someone with a new home will not resolve these issues; we need to ensure that people have access to services that can do this.

Homelessness has a negative and costly impact on people and communities; on their health and wellbeing. For this reason the Government has made it a priority to prevent homelessness wherever possible. However, meeting these targets alone is not enough. We need to join up our services to respond to the range of issues that lead to homelessness.

### **Homelessness, education and employment**

It is important that those in housing need are able to access good quality advice at the right time about what their realistic options are and what they can do to improve their chances of securing the home they need.

The Government is also committed to addressing poverty and worklessness. For this reason there are resources available to develop enhanced housing options services that connect people with advice and support about skills, in-work benefits and jobs can help set people on the path into work.

Ashford offers advice from the Gateway which is a multi-agency service that delivers public services in an innovative way, from a high street location. The Gateway provides access to a range of other services and has been highlighted by CLG in their case studies for a new trailblazer programme to develop enhanced housing advice<sup>2</sup>. Further information is included under Strategic Priority 5 concerning improving the quality of advice and prevention services.

### **Homelessness, Crime and Re-offending**

The relationship between homelessness and crime is complex and homelessness can be both a cause and a result of crime. Long-term solutions that effectively combat homelessness and housing need will contribute to other social policy targets such as improved health and educational achievement, but importantly, challenging homelessness among offenders will make a very significant contribution to crime prevention. Services to prisoners should begin prior to their release and continue until their resettlement, including advice and information and practical assistance dependent on individual needs. Accommodation problems are a contributory factor in causing barriers to ex-prisoners when attempting to re-integrate into mainstream society. For example homelessness also mitigates against access to employment. A cycle of homelessness and social exclusion is exacerbated as re-offending continues.

---

<sup>2</sup> Expanding Choice, Addressing Need - (March 2008) Communities and Local Government

Resettlement can be improved through the provision of risk and need assessments, interventions on drugs and alcohol issues, educational and vocational initiatives, assistance with housing, debt and relationship problems, statutory supervision after release and partnerships between relevant organisations that seeks to develop some of the interventions begun in prison.

Reducing re-offending is a key element of the Home Office Strategy, Cutting Crime: A new partnership 2008 – 2011. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is committed to both reduce the volume of adult and youth re-offending, and the severity of re-offending. A consultation has just been completed and a Strategic Plan for Reducing Re-offending is imminent.

Ashford is working with, and will continue to work with partners to aim to deliver a consolidated service provision to assist applicants to consider options for tackling drug and alcohol dependency.

## **Homelessness, Drugs and Alcohol**

Many homeless people also have problems which are related to alcohol and drug misuse and hostels are often reluctant to accept homeless people with drug or alcohol problems.

The connection between drug misuse and homelessness is strong. The two problems can cause and reinforce each other and tackling one without at the same time addressing the other can lead to failure. Stable housing is widely regarded as key to successful treatment. When treatment and housing services work together to support each other, there can be many benefits for service users, commissioners and the wider community, including:

- Improved access to a wider range of private sector and social housing
- Better engagement and retention in treatment services
- Lower rates of tenancy breakdown and repeat homelessness
- Reduced re-offending and anti-social behaviour

Housing and support services need to be flexible enough to be able to respond to changing levels and patterns in the individual's drug use. A system of services with clear pathways between them is needed.

Similarly there is a need to co-ordinate housing services and those dependent on alcohol. Nationally around half of homeless people are dependent on alcohol. For homelessness agencies a key issue is whether to allow people who have consumed alcohol to use their facilities. Wet services allow service users to drink alcohol, including on the premises. Providers of wet services take the view that it is better to allow service users to use alcohol than to exclude them altogether. It is arguable that wet services reach more people but are more difficult to provide.

Those with dual diagnosis who also experience mental health problems have particularly severe difficulties in finding somewhere to stay or appropriate support services.

Ashford BC will investigate ways to further enhance access to health and social care for those approaching the Council for advice.

## **Homelessness and Health**

Homeless people have specific health needs. They are more at risk of ill-health and from certain illnesses and they often have difficulty in accessing health services.

Prevention of homelessness has been shown to have positive health and social benefits. Good housing is essential to achieving health and well being. People who are homeless commonly present to health and social care services in crisis, with severe multiple problems. Effective joint working arrangements and protocols are key to ensuring joined up services. Health and social care should be easily available to those living in insecure accommodation.

## **Overcrowding Action Plan**

In December 2007 the Government launched its overcrowding action plan. Overcrowding is very closely linked to homelessness. The starting point is to understand the levels of overcrowding and under-occupation and for Ashford, the sub-regional Housing Market Assessment which is due to take place by April 2009 will assist in this process.

Overcrowding pathfinders around the country will be expected to use a range of means to tackle overcrowding including:

- Securing better deals with the private rented sector
- Reviewing the Housing Allocations Policy to give greater priority to under-occupiers
- Targeted support for under-occupiers to make them aware of the options available to them
- Giving greater priority to severely overcrowded households
- Joint working with housing associations to ensure a common approach to overcrowding through an agreed standard, common housing register and reciprocal nominations; and
- Supporting adult children of overcrowded households to explore their own housing options

Ashford is considering how aspects of this agenda can be incorporated locally and is already undertaking work with the private rented sector and has completed a review of the allocations policy. Progress of the pathfinders will be monitored and good practice applicable to Ashford will be replicated as appropriate.

## **Working in partnership**

The changing context for homelessness includes an increased emphasis on agencies working together to ensure a comprehensive and joined up approach to tackling homelessness issues. The Homelessness Code of Guidance is particularly concerned to ensure that social services are involved in homelessness strategies.

There has also been considerable attention given to the role that Housing Associations play in relation to homelessness. Housing Associations are seen as having a strategic role in homelessness prevention. There is a particular emphasis on Housing Associations ensuring that their potentially vulnerable tenants have access to support and that those among their tenants at risk of arrears are supported to prevent homelessness.

In Ashford, work on the homelessness review and the homelessness strategy has been co-ordinated through the Homelessness Strategy Working Group (HSWG)<sup>3</sup> which has representatives from a wide range of agencies including Kent County Council Social Services (Children and Adult Services). A wider Homelessness Forum has also been involved in the process. Full details of these groups are included in the Homelessness Review. Both groups will continue to meet throughout the life of the Strategy, with the HSWG taking responsibility for monitoring, review and updating.

The Council has made efforts to keep partners involved as much as possible whilst recognising that this can involve a considerable work load, particularly for county wide partners. Kent is a particularly large county covering 12 district areas. Wherever possible work is co-ordinated between districts to both improve joint working at a district level and facilitate county involvement. In addition to being involved in the HSWG and the Homelessness Forum, considerable joint work concerned with homelessness and related issues is undertaken with social services and others through the Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board.

There are a range of other partnering arrangements that have an interest in homelessness. Key groups are shown under the main findings of the Homelessness Review and further detail of partnership working arrangements is included under Strategic Priority 4.

## **Homelessness and sustainable communities in Ashford**

While we must develop our services in Ashford to contribute to national priorities and targets, it is also important that we contribute to what matters most locally and regionally. This is done by ensuring that our plans to prevent and tackle homelessness are linked to other local plans; these links are described here.

## **Ashford Housing Strategy and the Local Development Framework**

The process of carrying out the homelessness review and developing the strategy was timed to coincide with both the review of the overall housing strategy and the

---

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ashford.gov.uk/pdf/Housing\\_HomelessnessReview2008-2012.pdf](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/pdf/Housing_HomelessnessReview2008-2012.pdf)

development of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. This has ensured synergy between the documents produced and helped to avoid consultation overload.

- 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 (GOSE).

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 a 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 has been given sound status, has a requirement for 30% affordable housing in the growth area and 35% affordable housing elsewhere in the borough 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 was submitted to GOSE on 30th May 2008. Data for the forthcoming Kent LPSA2 is being collected from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

Kent Housing Group was asked by the Kent Support Partnership to consider new priorities for the second Local Area Agreement for Kent. Members met to discuss the key priorities for Kent and how these could feed into the next LAA. Homelessness was a key area highlighted by the subgroup (issues around domestic violence, licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), strategic working around multi-agency protection panel etc,

Despite these priorities being submitted as part of the consultation process for the LAA, it does not include homelessness as a priority, there is still a consensus amongst councils that monitoring and improving the homelessness services is still a high priority. Work will continue at a local level to integrate where possible into the national indicators agreed for Kent, not necessarily within the High Quality Homes theme.

## **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+

However, although this list contains 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 adequately included within the Kent Annual Plan. Strategic Priority 4 of this strategy has a focus on ensuring that the contribution homelessness makes to achieving national and local outcomes is recognised. Further work needs to be carried out to ensure that links to corporate agendas at a county level sufficiently recognise homelessness services

## **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.

## **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.

Ashford Borough Council has 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.

## **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.

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.

## **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 and this is an area for further work.

## 5. Strategic Priority 1

### Increase the supply of homes for homeless and potentially homeless households

#### Objectives

1a.	<p>Increase the supply of affordable rented and intermediate tenure homes to meet local need and demand</p> <p><b>Targets</b> Complete 444 affordable grant funded homes between 2006 and 2011 Complete 30% affordable housing in the growth area and 35% affordable housing elsewhere on qualifying sites as set out in Ashford Core Strategy</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Complete the following developments on Strategic sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Phase 1b South and North at Templar Barracks by January 2010</li><li>- Park Farm South by March 2009</li><li>- Park Farm East by January 2010</li><li>- Cheeseman's Green by March 2012</li></ul>
1b.	<p>Develop policies to assist in making the best use of existing stock and bringing empty properties back into use and ensure their availability to those in housing need including homeless households</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Review Ashford BC's Lettings Policy by September 2008 Develop an Empty Homes Strategy by March 2010</p>
1c.	<p>Increase the availability of housing related support services in the district in line with identified need</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Completion of KCC 40 bed extra care scheme in Ashford by the end of January 2010 Identify sites for and deliver three new extra care schemes by March 2011 Complete supported housing scheme for people with learning difficulties by September 2010</p>
1d.	<p>Evaluate the potential and plan for supported housing schemes to be incorporated in new housing developments</p>

### Increase the supply of affordable rented and intermediate tenure homes to meet local need and demand

The homelessness review found that the number of social rented properties becoming available for letting has reduced markedly in recent years. In addition

homelessness acceptances due to the loss of accommodation from family and friends remain one of Ashford's main causes of homelessness.

Increasing the supply of homes is the first priority of Ashford's Housing Strategy 2007 -2011. The Housing Strategy identifies an annual shortfall of 655 affordable homes. The status of Ashford as a designated housing growth area means that Ashford is well placed to achieve this. An additional 31,000 homes are predicted to have been completed by 2031. To increase the supply available for homeless and potentially homeless households, there is a need to take advantage of the opportunities presented by growth status to increase the number of affordable homes. The Core Strategy requires that on housing developments of 15 or more units, between 30% and 35% of the homes must be provided as affordable 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. Improved provision of general needs affordable housing would mean an overall increase in supply and reduced pressures on homelessness and housing advice services. This was seen as a priority in consultation exercises for the homelessness review.

The two main delivery mechanisms for affordable housing are via grant funding from the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) and through developer contributions from S106 agreements. NAHP Resources have been secured to provide 444 homes between 2006 and 2011 and between 30% and 35% affordable housing is a requirement of qualifying private sector sites. There is a need to work closely with RSLs and others to make best use of National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) funding and to work closely with planning and enabling colleagues to maximise opportunities through the planning system and ensure the delivery of appropriate dwellings.

A specific Supplementary Planning Document is to be produced to set out in more detail than is possible in the Council's Core Strategy, what the Council's requirements and expectations are about how affordable housing will be delivered through the planning process. Development briefs are prepared for all major development sites. These are informed by housing needs information, including that relating to homeless and potentially homeless households. A Strategic Housing Market Assessment will be completed by 2009 and will improve the information on housing need and demand available.

## **Developments Proposed**

As a result of Ashford being a major growth area, the supply of affordable homes in Ashford is set to increase significantly from 2008/09 to 2010/11. Housing Corporation funding has been secured to provide an additional 444 affordable homes between 2006 and 2011. Three strategic sites are identified within the Ashford growth area:

- Ashford Barracks
- Park Farm
- Cheeseman's Green

A private finance initiative at Stanhope will demolish 410 flats and redevelop the area with 442 dwellings.

### **Lettings in existing social rented stock**

A target will be set for the number of lettings required for homeless households based on an analysis of the numbers needed to facilitate a move on from temporary accommodation within a specific period of time. The number of lettings becoming available will continue to be monitored, and in particular the impact of the delivery of the Stanhope Private Finance Initiative as this has brought new requirements for lettings from tenants decanted and impacts on overall supply.

### **Develop policies to assist in bringing empty properties back into use and ensure their availability to those in housing need including homeless households**

Increasing supply does not rely entirely on new build properties. Increases can be achieved through the development of a clear strategic approach to wasted homes, including those that are empty, under-occupied dwellings, 'flat over shops' and buildings suitable for conversion into dwellings.

A strategy for minimising empty homes will include consideration of developing schemes for tackling under occupation in social housing, bringing empty private sector properties back into use and bringing flats over shops into residential use. An effective strategic approach to wasted, including empty homes, will seek to add value to the strategy by improving access to vulnerable households.

### **Best use of the existing housing stock**

The Council operates an assisted move scheme that encourages council tenants, who are under-occupying family sized accommodation to move to bungalows or sheltered housing accommodation. The scheme is also available to tenants of a property adapted for the use of, but not currently occupied by, a disabled person. Targets will be set for freeing-up under-occupied social rented dwellings.

A review and improvements in 2008 to Ashford's Allocations Policy will also introduce points for tenants who are under occupying non Social housing.

The council has, from July 2007, introduced a policy that gives the ability to purchase back certain council properties purchased under the right to buy – right of first refusal. It has been calculated that around five properties per year, based on average house prices could be bought back. A promotions campaign will be implemented on the availability of financially assisted moves and the effectiveness of the policy will be monitored and reviewed.

The procedure for dealing with void Council properties will be reviewed and will aim to increase efficiency on re-let times.

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

Ashford has worked with RSL partners via the RSL Management Forum to introduce a nominations agreement, which sets out clear nomination arrangements. The agreement also sets out monitoring arrangements and specific arrangements for provision of temporary accommodation

## **Empty properties**

The housing strategy identifies 450 properties across Ashford have been empty for more than six months. A full assessment of the numbers and type of homes standing empty will be completed. Currently less than 5 long-term empty homes are being returned to occupation each year.

An empty property strategy will be completed by March 2010, this will include measures to ensure homeless and potentially homeless households benefit through improved access and choice.

## **Increase the availability of housing related support services in the district in line with identified need**

There is an established need for support to help people overcome homelessness. Homeless people often have complex and multiple needs that demand a range of support services.

Clients accessing Supporting 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 abuse problems. 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 consisting of homeless families in Kent is however lower than the national average; 5% compared to 8%.

There are 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.

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.

## **Supported Housing**

In many instances it is possible for independent living to be maintained through the provision of floating support in general needs housing, however supported housing schemes remain a vital part of the range of housing solutions offered. Housing and housing related support is a key aspect of building and retaining sustainable communities and achieving social inclusion for the most vulnerable members of society.

The homelessness review identifies some specific gaps in relation to supported housing.

- There is a countywide need for both short and long term supported accommodation for people with learning disabilities currently living with ageing carers.
- A need for supported housing has also been identified for people with mental health problems including provision for those with high level support needs, ex-offenders and people misusing substances.
- The population is ageing and there is a future need for extra care accommodation.
- There is no specific service provision for those with complex needs.
- To ensure that there is an appropriate accommodation pathway for young people.

There is also a need for move-on accommodation and a need for good quality temporary accommodation and alternatives to bed and breakfast. These issues are addressed under strategic priority 3: increase access to a choice of settled home, and strategic priority 6: enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households. There is a need for additional authorised pitches for Gypsies and Travellers

The following new supported housing schemes will be delivered:

- 6 units of self-contained intensive supported housing for people with mental health problems
- 6 units of self contained supported housing for people with learning difficulties
- 3 new sheltered housing schemes on s106 sites in Ashford by March 2011
- A 40 bed extra care scheme is being developed
- The council has also partnered with Rainer to provide temporary accommodation for young people aged 16 to 21.

Provision of these schemes will be monitored along with those built outside Ashford, that Ashford residents are able to access.

## **Floating Support**

There is a general need for resettlement and outreach services. 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).

Additional floating support has been identified as a need across Kent. 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. Currently there is no specific service provision for those with complex needs. There are no support services specifically for people with a dual diagnosis of mental health problems and substance misuse or mentally disordered ex-offenders.

Support needs assessments will be introduced for all households who present as homeless and for all referrals to social housing tenancies. A quarterly review will be completed for all people receiving tenancy or floating support to ensure that support is targeted most effectively and arrangements are working effectively for those ready to move off support.

## **Evaluate the potential and plan for supported housing schemes to be incorporated in new housing developments**

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.

Current demographic projections suggest that demand for many types of supported housing will continue to grow considerably in coming years. Good information on future need and current provision needs to underpin investment strategies. This is particularly true for older people. For supported housing projects revenue funding is critical, and the links between capital investment and broader support packages from

a variety of health and social care agencies are key to delivery. Ensuring good linkages between those involved in agendas relating to vulnerable people and those involved in funding and delivering new housing, regeneration and growth agendas, are vital to ensure that the needs are understood and appropriate attention is paid to supported housing delivery.

Future priorities will be identified in consultation with relevant stakeholders and incorporated into development plans. Consideration will be given in development briefs for all major sites of the potential to include supported housing provision. There are likely future support needs for people diagnosed on the autistic spectrum, particularly those with Asperger's syndrome. The viability of providing additional intermediate care/dementia care units at existing council owned sheltered schemes will be assessed. The Homelessness Review has reiterated the need to address gaps around alcohol and substance misuse. Plans to address this will be developed in conjunction with Supporting People and other stakeholders.

## 6. Strategic Priority 2

### Prevent and reduce homelessness

#### *Objectives*

2a.	Undertake a risk assessment of current funding for the council's homelessness prevention and options service by March 2010
2b.	Increase early identification and intervention to reduce the number of households who present as homeless. All preventative initiatives should assist in reducing numbers which should be reflected in statistical returns from 2008/09 onwards
2c.	Develop a strategic framework for addressing the needs of homeless and potentially homeless young people by March 2010.
2d.	Complete refocusing of homelessness and housing advice services by October 2008
2e.	Review the current mediation service and potential for expansion based on a value for money approach, good practice and experience in other areas. Introduce an improved mediation service by January 2009.

#### **Undertake a risk assessment of current funding for the council's homelessness prevention and options service**

Prevention is now widely viewed as the key aspect in reducing homelessness. By ensuring a resource is available to tackle problems early, they are prevented from escalating and resulting in an increased cost. Central to the prevention ethos is a pro-active rather than a reactive approach. The main aspects of prevention work are<sup>4</sup>:

- Improving the quality of housing advice
- Facilitating access to private tenancies
- Preventing the loss of private sector tenancies
- Family mediation services
- Preventing homelessness through domestic violence victim support
- Tenancy sustainment services
- Improved debt advice services and welfare benefits advice

Since the first homelessness strategy, Ashford has been active in introducing further prevention work and the success of this is reflected in a reduction in the number of

---

<sup>4</sup> Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, CLG, 2007

homelessness presentations and acceptances. Although there was a small rise between 2005/06 and 2006/07, the numbers are still considerably smaller than those in 2003/04.

Since the last homelessness strategy was completed, a mediation service and a homeless prevention bond scheme have been introduced; the bond scheme has also been recently reviewed. A private sector leasing scheme (PSL) has 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. In addition, a series of Housing Options Advice Sheets have been developed which detail all of the options and preventative tools available.

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
- a shortage of social rented housing
- increased numbers of people in housing need and a potential increase in mortgage repossessions, as a result of national affordability issues
- pressures on the ability to provide preventative services due to the council's budget deficit
- an increase in student numbers associated with the Ashford learning campus

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 agencies to formulate cost effective prevention of homelessness services which provide value for money and deliver effective outcomes.

### **Increase early identification and intervention to reduce the number of households who present as homeless**

The termination of assured shorthold tenancies is the second most common reason for the loss of their last settled home for households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in Ashford. This reason accounted for 21% of all homelessness acceptances during 2006/07.

A comprehensive review of the Council's relationship with the private sector, has been undertaken. Many of the recommendations from the review are related to homelessness prevention services, one of which is a new Landlord Liaison Officer post be created. The need to improve working relationships with both the private sector and those responsible for housing benefits applications was also raised as an important issue by the Homelessness Forum during consultation for the Homelessness Review. These views were echoed by residents at Simon Mead

House during the consultation with them. Housing Advice and Homelessness staff see early intervention as a key aim to have the best chance of preventing households becoming homeless and early intervention is also considered important by Ashford Young Person's Accommodation Forum.

The council is piloting a new private sector liaison 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 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 an existing claim
- Signposting to other services, such as floating support or debt advice

Working procedures with landlords will seek to embed processes/protocols for early identification of problems. The Council will also continue to work closely with other agencies to improve early identification of homelessness cases. A follow up process will be established for clients signposted to another agency. This will assist in the monitoring of outcomes and in preventing repeat homelessness.

### **Develop a strategic framework for addressing the needs of homeless and potentially homeless young people**

Statutory protection available for 16 and 17 year olds was strengthened by including them in new priority need categories in 2002 and there is a clear intention by the government to tackle youth homelessness.

Centrepoint's Youth Homelessness Index identified eight risk factors or triggers that make young people vulnerable to homelessness<sup>5</sup>:

- Unemployment and socio-economic marginalisation
- Experience of/leaving local authority care
- Family disruption in childhood especially after age 3
- Experience of living with a step parent, particularly for young men
- Experience of parental neglect, abuse or violence
- Strained relationship and relationship breakdown with parents and step parents
- Reliance on insecure accommodation settings such as staying with friends/relatives

---

<sup>5</sup> Centrepoint Youth a Homelessness Index: An estimate of youth homelessness for England, 2004

- Being asked to leave or being thrown out of the parental home

Elements of the government's approach to tackling the issue include:

- An expectation that mediation in cases of threatened homelessness from a family home would be available in all areas
- The development of a greater number of supported lodgings schemes across the country, providing accommodation, advice and mediation for young people who cannot stay at home
- Encouragement for local authorities and other agencies to develop a range of different approaches to preventing, tackling, and managing homelessness amongst young people

Most homeless acceptances in Ashford 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 year olds accepted as homeless between 2005/06 and 2006/07.

There is a need to develop housing pathways for young people to assist in preventing homelessness and there is also a countywide need for accommodation-based services specifically for homeless young people at risk aged 16 and 17.

Ashford Borough Council will work with its partners to develop a young person's housing pathway. This will be initiated by a review of existing accommodation and floating support services.

Attention will be focused on developing an outreach programme with schools. An education programme, including peer talks by young people who have been homeless, will help to raise awareness of risks of homelessness, and information will be provided regarding the services available for homelessness prevention. The Council will work with school liaison officers to develop early warning mechanisms of potential homelessness. Literature, including leaflets and posters specifically aimed at young people will be developed. Arrangements will also be made to deliver pre-tenancy training for young people.

### **Complete refocusing of homelessness and housing advice services**

The council's housing advice and homelessness service is currently being reshaped following a review, to provide a full housing options approach. The reorganisation of the service has been prompted by the review of the Council's relationship with the private sector and by evolving good practice in homelessness prevention. The main issues for service delivery raised as part of the consultation process for the Homelessness Review concerned 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, and improved working relationships with Housing Benefits.

The Housing Options Team currently covers three areas of work – choice based lettings, housing advice and homelessness. The housing advice service consists of 3 full time equivalent (FTE) Housing Advice Officers (HAO) based at the Gateway,

and the homelessness service consists of 2 FTE Homelessness Prevention Officers (HPO).

The restructuring of the service will include focus on the creation of a generic housing options role. One of the changes to service delivery will be to increase the number of home visits and this is seen as one of the key improvements to the council's prevention work. Criteria will be established for determining instances in which home visits are most appropriate and targets will be set with timescales for visits to take place. Central to this new role will be undertaking a holistic overview of the applicant's needs.

The role of Tenancy Sustainment Officer is being reshaped and will become Landlord Liaison Officer. Two, part time, new posts are being created - a Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Development Officer, and an additional Part Time Landlord Liaison Officer.

The current Housing Advice Officer (HAO) and Homelessness Prevention Officer (HPO) posts will be removed and replaced by generic posts to be known as Housing Options Officers (HOO). A training programme will be implemented in-house and where possible costs will be shared with neighbouring authorities. Costs for these changes are expected to be in the region of £15,000 including training and will be met from the PSL scheme contribution.

Training will be provided for all staff on homelessness legislation and statement taking. For any new staff (and for existing staff as appropriate) training will be provided on interview skills, housing benefit, maximising benefits, basic debt advice and landlord and tenant law including court advocacy procedures.

The benefits of the change will include:

- An improved and more consistent experience for customers
- A more robust investigations process
- Improved staff satisfaction through a more varied role, better team working, communication and integration of the Gateway staff
- A more flexible and individualised approach to customer's needs
- Better use of resources, reducing double working and other procedural inefficiencies and flexible use of resources, including 'out of hours' provision

As part of the service re-organisation, a full review of the processes for the delivery of front line services is being undertaken. This will focus on the outcomes for clients. A complete review of the telephone service offered to customers will be undertaken. Casework and follow up procedures will be improved.

The new structure is expected to be operational from May 2008. Further improvements to service delivery will follow a complete 'systems thinking' analysis of all front line services and a review of the management of case files. A more formalised structure for one to one supervision meetings will be established and supervision procedures for a sample of interviews as a quality control mechanism.

## **Review the current mediation service and potential for expansion based on a value for money approach, good practice and experience in other areas**

The categories of parents, and other relatives or friends, no longer being willing or able to accommodate, accounted for 45 (38%) out of the total of 120 homelessness priority acceptances during 2006/07. Tackling this cause is therefore seen as a priority. A mediation service has been introduced but at present is not working as successfully as was hoped.

Mediation is a process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party helps people in finding a mutually acceptable resolution. Local authorities are encouraged to work with landlords and tenants where relations have broken down, and negotiate to extend or renew Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) where appropriate.

There is potential for a conflict with homeless duties and the Court of appeal has ruled that where a local authority is obliged to conduct a formal homelessness assessment mediation intervention or other homelessness prevention measures must not delay this process.<sup>6</sup>

A systematic recording of the cost benefits of mediation services across the country is not available. In two instances where calculations have been made they show a reduction in costs from £653 to £330 per client and £1,255 to £350 per client as a result of mediation<sup>7</sup>. Operating costs are well below expected savings in costs of temporary accommodation.

Mediation has the potential to pave the way for a young person to return home without 'losing face' and to ensure their needs are taken seriously. Even where it is not possible to facilitate a return home an improvement in relationships reduces the vulnerability of the young person to homelessness in the future.

It is thought that mediation is most effective in cases where the homelessness risk is due to routine teenage/parent arguments and tensions. It is less likely to be effective for applicants leading chaotic lives (e.g. involving drug abuse).

A full review of the existing mediation arrangements and options for expansion is to be undertaken. This will draw on good practice examples to ensure that the service can be developed in a way that is effective and provides good value for money. The Council will work with the Young Person's Accommodation Forum to identify a process for distinguishing which cases are appropriate for mediation referral and which are not.

---

<sup>6</sup> Robinson v Hammersmith & Fulham LBC 2006 EWCA Civ 1122

<sup>7</sup> Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, CLG, 2007

## 7. Strategic Priority 3

### Increase access to a choice of settled home

#### Objectives

3a.	Increase understanding of the impact of the housing market and housing market interventions on homeless and potentially homeless households  <b>Milestone</b> Carry out a sub-regional housing market assessment by April 2009
3b.	Improve the housing options available through the choice based lettings scheme  <b>Milestones</b> Implement new allocations policy by September 2008 Review nominations agreement by July 2008 and six monthly thereafter Review progress in advertising intermediate tenure properties through CBL by September 2008 Participate in the development of a sub regional choice based lettings scheme to be completed by September 2008
3c.	Increase the role of the private rented sector in providing a choice of settled and affordable homes  <b>Milestones</b> Review progress on work with lettings agents to include private sector homes on CBL by March 2009 Advertise private sector properties through CBL scheme by September 09 Establish new Landlord Liaison Officer role, and new working arrangements by August 2008 Further develop option to assist people to access private tenancies and review viability of options on a six monthly basis from December 2008 onwards
3d.	Increase the rate of successful and sustainable move-on from temporary accommodation (supported housing, hospital etc)  <b>Milestone</b> Research the need for move-on using the MOPP toolkit by December 2008
3e.	Develop an understanding of the urban/rural dimension to homelessness  <b>Milestone</b> Monitor rural homelessness and housing advice applications and produce an analysis to inform future policy approach. Review findings May 2009.

3f. Strengthen joint working with the housing benefit service

**Milestones**

Develop a service level agreement with housing benefits section by May 08  
Review use of discretionary housing payments to maximise prevention activity on a quarterly basis from August 2008 onwards

3g. Promote and encourage the use of existing protocols related to homelessness and develop new protocols

**Milestones**

Deliver training to partners on use of protocols by March 2009  
Monitor existing protocols on a quarterly basis from September 2008 onwards  
Develop new protocols for ex-offenders by June 2008, domestic violence by March 2008, hospital discharge by March 2009, and management of people with alcohol/drug dependency by June 2009

### **Increase understanding of the impact of the housing market and housing market interventions on homeless and potentially homeless households**

Increasing supply requires in the first instance, good information relating to the level and nature of housing need. The main tool for delivering this is the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). A full assessment should be completed periodically, with updates completed in between. The SHMA should include information relating to homeless households.

The latest housing needs survey was completed in 2005 and requires updating to meet current guidance. The Council will work with neighbouring authorities to carry out a sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment and will ensure that the methodology gives consideration to the needs of homeless and potentially homeless households.

It is also important for housing options services to understand the nature of homeless households being housed in temporary accommodation, their size, circumstances, areas in which they are presenting, and the length of time spent in temporary accommodation. This will assist in understanding of the main pressure points and priorities for supply. This will be addressed through improved data monitoring along with other information of relevance to the homelessness and housing advice services such as any increases in mortgage repossessions.

The projected growth in Ashford is highlighted by the Homelessness Review as an issue likely to impact on homelessness services. The Council will monitor any impact through the number of households seeking advice from the Council and other homelessness and housing advice agencies, along with the number of homelessness applications and acceptances. Numbers per 1,000 population will be considered as well as overall numbers. It is unlikely however to be possible to draw a direct causal relationship between the growth agenda and increased pressure on homelessness services. Similarly, the impact of other housing activity, such as

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO licensing), will be monitored, but the same difficulties apply to drawing a direct link to the impact on homelessness.

### **Improve the housing options available through the choice based lettings scheme**

The turnover of local authority stock has reduced in recent years, reducing the opportunities for rehousing, including those for homeless households. As demand outstrips supply, it is important for the Council to ensure that lettings within Council and Housing Association stock are targeted effectively and that effective use is made of alternative housing solutions. The Council has negotiated a new nominations agreement with Housing Associations operating in the area and has carried out a review of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. This identified that the scheme would be enhanced by incorporating private sector lettings into the process thus offering alternatives to those in housing need. Landlords will be encouraged to work with the council in advertising private rented sector properties via the choice based lettings scheme and the possibility of a home finding service to match homeless people with private sector tenancies will be investigated.

Alterations will be made the allocations procedures to allow for effective move-on. Alterations are in progress that will provide for emergency management transfers and reciprocal arrangements between authorities, particularly Maidstone, for victims of domestic violence.

Ashford Borough Council is also part of a Kent wide consortium to develop a regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme, the first phase of which will be implemented in summer 2008.

### **Increase the role of the private rented sector in providing a choice of settled and affordable homes**

The need for additional housing to meet the needs of homeless households is a recurrent theme from those consulted during the homelessness review and ensuring a good relationship with the private sector to maximise the provision of settled housing is recognised as one of the ways in which this can be achieved.

The Government's 5 year strategy "Homes for All" highlights the importance of the private rented sector in helping to provide settled housing solutions. Local Authorities often use the private rented sector to provide temporary accommodation for those to whom the main homelessness duty is owed. Fewer Authorities encourage people who need accommodation to accept private sector tenancies directly<sup>8</sup>. A comprehensive review of Ashford Borough Council's relationship with the private rented sector was undertaken in 2007.

The private rented sector has a reputation for being hard to access by homeless people, especially for those on benefits, which is the majority. Good practice is emerging on how the sector can provide a positive housing solution and as a result attitudes to the private rented sector are becoming more positive.

---

<sup>8</sup> Settled housing solutions in the private rented sector, 205

Understanding the nature of the private rented service and identifying the largest landlords/agencies to engage is a vital first step. A private sector landlord event will be held at least once every six months (a regional event was held in February 2008) to sustain momentum following a recently held event. A smaller business club will be set up to work with landlords on specific issues facing the private rented sector.

Assured Shorthold Tenancies are for a minimum of six months. Local Authorities seeking to increase access to the private sector can seek to negotiate longer tenancies and assist tenants to negotiate new tenancy agreements before the end of term.

Running an efficient and effective Housing Benefits (HB) service is a vital corporate aspect of increasing direct lets by private landlords. Rent deposits or bonds need to be made available, discretionary housing benefit used appropriately and contact for landlords made easy. Ensuring landlords are aware of HB cycles and overpayment responsibilities is also important.

Landlord accreditation schemes can improve the standard of accommodation and the standard of property management and will be investigated with the landlord forum.

## **Tenancy Sustainment Services**

Work with the private rented sector will seek to increase the role of private landlords in Ashford in providing settled and affordable accommodation. The new role of Landlord Liaison Officer, as part of the service restructure will be instrumental and will strengthen work with landlords to prevent eviction.

Tenancy sustainment services generally aim to assist households newly housed in an effort to prevent repeat homelessness, and/or to support potentially homeless households to retain tenancies and prevent them from becoming homeless.

Services are typically client centred and involve drawing up a support plan between a dedicated support worker and the client. These generally include support with:

- Claiming benefits
- Budgeting and debt management – seen as a crucial aspect
- Accessing community resources and services
- Furnishing accommodation
- Finding voluntary work and other meaningful occupational activities
- Resolving neighbour disputes<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Evaluating homelessness prevention, CLG, 2007

Tenancy sustainment services can also assist with presenting problems by linking to specialist services, such as, drug/alcohol advice, support centres and mental health support services.

Key elements of 'what works' include flexible and client centred provision, and close working with other agencies. There is a need for timely intervention, including the need for active promotion of the service and early contact with clients on referral.

There is a relatively large revenue cost, to tenancy sustainment services, often with the bulk of the cost being met through Supporting People grant for floating support. It is unlikely that this cost will be justified purely through savings to homelessness and housing advice services, however savings to other public sector services are likely to be substantial.

Ashford will continue to work with Supporting People to maximise support to vulnerable people at risk of homelessness.

### **Increase the rate of successful and sustainable move-on from temporary accommodation (supported housing, hospital etc)**

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.

The move on plans protocol (MOPP) is designed to help local authorities and service providers address local factors preventing move-on. It consists of six stages:

- Partnership development
- The move on audit
- The move on plan
- Work to achieve against the plan
- Analysis of progress
- Review

The methodology developed by the MOPP will be used to research the need for move-on accommodation from supported housing and develop an approach to ensure that temporary accommodation does not silt up. The methodology will also be used to plan rehousing for those being discharged from hospital or leaving care, prison or institutional settings. A working group of supported accommodation housing providers has been set up to look at how the principles of MOPP can be used for Ashford. This working group will continue to meet regularly.

## **Develop an understanding of the urban/rural dimension to homelessness**

The Borough of Ashford is a largely rural area, with Ashford town forming the only substantial urban area. Tenterden is a smaller town within the Borough. The Council and its partners have recognised that there is not currently a full understanding of whether the extent to which homelessness is an issue for the rural compared to urban parts of the Borough and ways in which rural homelessness is distinct from that in urban areas.

Poverty, social exclusion and lack of affordable housing combine to increase individuals' vulnerability to homelessness in rural areas. At a national level, although the overall numbers are smaller, statutory homeless figures have been rising at a faster rate in rural than in urban areas.

The locations where people sleep rough in rural areas are often hidden, and consequently often missed by official figures. Homeless people in rural areas often have similar support needs and backgrounds to those in urban areas (problems with parents, abuse, history of early drug abuse, being in care, involvement with crime, mental health problems, alcohol misuse), but services to address these support needs may be more difficult to access.

The most common issues identified by rural homelessness agencies are<sup>10</sup>:

- Lack of, or limited access to, appropriate and affordable accommodation
- Lack of recognition of the level of need in rural areas due to the hidden nature of homelessness
- Higher costs of delivering services in rural areas
- Advice and assistance not meeting people's needs
- Difficulties with transport impact on services
- Inability to access specialist support for clients (most commonly emergency accommodation, and services for multiple/high support needs)
- Wider social/political issues
  - Lack of employment/vulnerability of agricultural economy
  - Debt, mortgage defaulting
  - In some areas
    - Migrant workers
    - Ex-prisoners
    - Ex-service personnel

Partnership working and the use of ICT can help to overcome barriers, as can developing local services, monitoring and evidencing need, lobbying and networking with funders, and linking in to strategic decision making bodies.

---

<sup>10</sup> Supporting homelessness agencies to deliver services in rural areas, 2007

Improvements to monitoring information and joint working with stakeholders will seek to gain a better understanding of the rural dimension to homelessness in Ashford.

### **Strengthen joint working with the housing benefits service**

The need to improve working practices with the Housing Benefit service was a key finding of the review of private sector services and was also highlighted by the Homelessness Review. A new service level agreement will be drawn up that will include named contacts who are able to give a same day response in urgent cases. Effective use will be made of discretionary housing benefit (DHP) to prevent homelessness.

### **Promote and encourage the use of existing protocols related to homelessness and develop new protocols**

There are existing protocols for intentionally homeless families with children, homeless young people and mental health referrals. These will continue to be monitored on a six monthly basis and feedback from stakeholders will be sought.

Further protocols are being developed. Where possible protocols are developed on a Kent wide, or sub-regional basis. New protocols will include:

- A Kent wide protocol for ex-offenders
- Kent wide policies and a protocol for domestic violence
- A hospital discharge protocol
- A Kent wide protocol for the management of people with alcohol/drug dependency
- A protocol with council housing management services and key RSLs for dealing with threatened homelessness involving domestic abuse
- A sub-regional protocol for re-housing cases on a reciprocal basis where victims of domestic violence wish to remain in the area but not in the immediate vicinity
- A protocol with local solicitors and those who undertake criminal justice work for those who are placed on remand or receive short custodial sentences

The council is also working with the RSL management forum to finalise a protocol for homelessness applications from serving prisoners due for release.

Further work will be undertaken with:

- Jobcentre Plus to establish arrangements to target their services for those accepted as homeless who are neither in work or training.
- Youth Offending Teams (YOTS) to ensure a planned approach to accommodation options for young offenders at the end of their sentence

Procedures will be established to notify children's services, education and health for all placements of children in temporary accommodation

## 8. Strategic Priority 4

### Further develop partnerships to improve the delivery of housing related services to vulnerable people

#### Objectives

4a.	<p>Monitor and review the homelessness strategy through the joint housing and homelessness strategy working group and continue to strengthen the involvement of the homelessness forum in developing and delivering the homelessness strategy</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Monitor and review homelessness strategy action plan through the Housing and Homelessness Strategy Working Group on a quarterly basis and report to Members annually Hold meetings of the homelessness forum on a twice yearly basis and continue to seek to strengthen membership. At annual review meetings, develop additional challenging targets to include within the Homelessness Strategy to ensure that the strategy evolves in line with service delivery, local demand and government targets.</p>
4b.	<p>Ensure a homelessness dimension to existing client group and other stakeholder forums and those to be set up in the future</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Establish baseline information relating to existing stakeholder groups including any agreed action plans or terms of reference, and identify where the Housing Options Service is under represented by September 2009</p>
4c.	<p>Increase understanding of the causes of homelessness and the housing and support needs of homeless and vulnerable households</p> <p><b>Milestone</b> Review Ashford BC and Partners' Older Persons Housing Strategy and expand to include all vulnerable adults by March 2009 Supporting People and partners reviewing SP Older Persons Strategy by March 2009</p>
4d.	<p>Improve data monitoring arrangements</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Develop a monitoring framework to identify what data needs to be monitored and the frequency for monitoring and reporting by September 2008 Produce quarterly monitoring reports by September 2009 Report monitoring information to member annually</p>

<p>4e. Ensure the contribution of homelessness services to delivering local and national priorities is recognised</p> <p><b>Milestone</b> Determine what outcomes data needs to be collected to demonstrate homelessness and related services contribution to National Indicators and ensure that it is incorporated in the annual monitoring plan by September 09</p>
<p>4f. Investigate further ways of working with partners and across boundaries to prevent homelessness and to improve the range of services available to homeless households</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Investigate options for a work experience programme for homeless households by December 2008 Investigate training opportunities for homeless households by December 2008 Review with partners the need for and availability of services by March 2009. Ensure requirements of the homelessness strategy are embedded in the council's 'invest to save' strategy by March 09</p>
<p>4g. Develop an improved knowledge and understanding of the time and resources available and required to deliver all of the preventative measure and action points within the strategy.</p> <p><b>Milestones</b> Work with Housing and Homelessness Strategies working group at quarterly meetings commencing September 2008 to develop knowledge or resources. Include an improved resources section within the Strategy by July 2009.</p>

**Monitor and review the homelessness strategy through the homelessness strategy working group and continue to strengthen the involvement of the homelessness forum in developing and delivering homelessness strategy**

The Homelessness Strategy Working Group has managed the process of completing the homelessness review and strategy and is responsible for monitoring implementation. The group will continue to review and update the strategy at least annually and a position statement will be reported to the Council Members.

A wider homelessness forum comprising a range of stakeholders has been actively involved in the homeless review and strategy. This group will continue to be engaged in meetings at least once every 6 months and the composition and attendance will be kept under constant review to ensure that the full range of relevant stakeholders is involved.

## **Ensure a homelessness dimension to existing client group and other stakeholder forums and those to be set up in future**

Homelessness strategies have links to a great many 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.

There is a considerable number of partnership groups currently in existence that undertake work connected to the homelessness agenda. To ensure that homelessness services are maximising the benefit from these groups, baseline information will be drawn together regarding existing representation on the groups and their current working practices, i.e. frequency of meetings, terms of reference, work programmes and the extent to which a homelessness dimension is currently present. Gaps and weaknesses will be identified.

The findings of the homelessness review and priorities within the homelessness strategy will be used to identify the need and influence the actions of other agencies in order to deliver the strategy. The influencing priorities will be compared with existing practice, gaps and weaknesses and a plan prepared to set priorities for partner engagement.

As key delivery partners, particular attention will be paid to working arrangements with Housing Associations and where possible this will be undertaken jointly with other local authorities. The Council will encourage Housing Association partners to make use of the Housing Action Team's, Homelessness Toolkit.

A communications plan will be developed to ensure all key stakeholders are always appropriately engaged in strategic housing issues and developments in relation to homelessness. This will include making greater use of team meetings for exploring and seeking solutions to current and likely future issues.

## **Increase understanding of the causes of homelessness and the housing and support needs of homeless and vulnerable households**

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. 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.

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.

There are some areas where data relating to clients currently falls short:

- The 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.
- Further improvements are 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 Council's overall information relating to non-statutory homelessness has improved since the first Homelessness Strategy, but further improvements to refine data collection will help to identify some of the reasons contributing to homelessness for this group and this will help inform more focused efforts to combat the issues.

### **Improve data monitoring arrangements**

Aspects of improving the evidence base have already been referred to in relation to the need for a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Good performance monitoring underpins all aspects of work. It is key to monitoring the extent to which the strategic priorities are being achieved and in determining value for money. All existing performance monitoring information will be drawn together into a comprehensive monitoring plan and arrangements will be made to address any gaps. A regular reporting cycle will be established for various aspects and where possible will be undertaken with partner agencies to reduce duplication.

The following actions will be undertaken to address identified gaps:

- Establish procedures for monitoring outcomes for those leaving supported accommodation
- Finalise procedure to gather information on outcomes following contact with the Housing Options Service
- Following implementation of the new IT system, monitor time taken for cases to be processed and the length of time for decisions to be taken
- Establish mechanisms to monitor the length of time that clients wait to be seen by housing officers

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. 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.

Further improvements to monitoring information would be beneficial to ensure a full understanding of the homelessness situation and the impact of services delivered. Consideration will be given to how to improve on information available relating to the costs of various parts of the service including cost information relating to services provided by agencies other than the council. Ideally this will involve a value for money assessment in partnership with other local authorities on a sub regional basis.

The Council will work with partners to improve information relating to the ethnicity of clients for specialist and other supported accommodation and those receiving floating support services.

### **Ensure the contribution of homelessness services in achieving local and national priorities is recognised**

It will be particularly important for the future to ensure that there is wide understanding about the impact of homelessness on sustainable communities, and therefore the need for partners to work closely with homelessness and housing services to prevent and tackle it. As homelessness is often the outcome of a number of other issues e.g. health problems, offending etc., only a joint approach will succeed in delivering a sustainable outcome for the household.

The performance of activity to deliver sustainable communities will be measured in future by 198 National Performance Indicators. From April 2008 they will be the only indicators used for the performance management of local authorities and their partners. Particular attention will be given to achieving 35 targets measured by these indicators which will be selected and agreed locally within Local Area Agreements.

Funding to deliver sustainable communities is also changing to make it easier for local authorities and their partners to tackle the most important issues. This will include Supporting People funding from April 2009 (subject to the outcomes of several pilots). This does however mean that we need to ensure homelessness is recognised as a priority so that funding is made available.

Indicators are organised under seven headings:

- Stronger communities
- Safer communities
- Children and Young People
- Adult health and well being
- Tackling exclusion and promoting equality
- Local economy
- Environmental sustainability

While there are no specific measures of homelessness activity within the framework, there are many others that it contributes to. This includes two Supporting People indicators under 'Tackling exclusion and promoting equality.

Homelessness agencies can demonstrate their contribution to targets by<sup>11</sup>:

- Direct work with one or more of the client groups that are specified in the National Indicator set, for example offenders. This is the most direct way in which homelessness agencies can demonstrate their contribution.
- Working with people who could have a significant impact on community National Indicators, for instance working with substance misusers in areas where drug use is considered to be a significant community issue
- Working with clients that are part of the whole population to which the National Indicator refers. For instance work to improve access to health services in areas where health statistics are poor

Further details of the relevance of the targets is included in Appendix One. It will be increasingly important for homelessness agencies to think about, record and report their client groups and outcomes in terms of these groups.

The Council will work with partners to determine what data on client and other outcomes need to be collected on a routine basis to demonstrate homelessness and related services contribution to these indicators. This will be compared to data currently collected and systems will be modified if necessary to ensure information is gathered by the relevant client group and matches the national indicators. Evidence can then be presented as required to ensure homelessness activities are embedded within the LAA process.

### **Investigate further ways of working with partners and across boundaries to prevent homelessness and to improve the range of services available to homeless households**

Effective partnerships are vital to deliver co-ordinated and successful approaches to tackling homelessness and other social needs and in some instances there is a statutory duty for agencies to work together. Activities should be consistent and complimentary and may tackle related issues such as street begging, drug abuse and anti-social behaviour.

Cross boundary partnerships should also be developed including engagement with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and initiatives at a regional and sub regional level.

Common forms of joint working include:

- Multi-agency forums

---

<sup>11</sup> Demonstrate your contribution: Homelessness and the new National Indicators, 2008

- Clear links between homeless and other strategies
- Protocols for the referral of clients between services
- Joint consideration of needs
- Joint planning/commissioning of services
- Joint posts
- Senior representation and commitment
- Appropriate user involvement and consultation

Ashford BC is already well engaged with this agenda and there are numerous examples of partnership working in this document. New opportunities to extend joint working will continue to be developed. This will include the following:

- Opportunities will be explored for delivering a work experience programme for homeless households including via the local authority and through voluntary services and opportunities for training for homeless people will be sought via the local skills council and local training providers.
- A review will be undertaken with partners of the need for and availability of services and funding for rough sleepers including drug, alcohol and general health services and a street outreach service.
- Colleagues in the council will be engaged to ensure the 'invest to save' strategy reflects the requirements of the homelessness strategy.

Increased emphasis is being placed on the role of Housing Associations in preventing homelessness. The Housing Corporation has developed their Homelessness Strategy 'Tackling Homelessness' that sets out what they expect Housing Associations to do in contributing to the prevention and tackling of homelessness. Research has since been completed to assess the nature and success of partnership working between Local Housing Authorities and Housing Associations in:

- The prevention of homelessness
- The provision of temporary accommodation
- Providing settled housing for statutorily homeless people
- Developing and implementing homelessness strategies

Of the 14 Housing Associations with property in Ashford Borough, six have appointed homelessness champions. Ashford has approached all Housing Associations to consult on the contents of the Homelessness Strategy and to seek involvement in the development of their Homelessness Action Plans.

## 9. Strategic Priority 5

### Improve the quality and range of housing options advice and assistance available

#### Objectives

5a.	Update and expand the range of leaflets/fact sheets covering housing options including service standards by March 2009.
5b.	<p>Provide timely and high quality advice and information that enables households to resolve their housing issues</p> <p><b>Milestones</b>            Implement new IT system by March 2008            As part of service refocus, review current practice and implement improvements by September 2008. Continue to review and update practice to keep up with legislative changes and new initiatives            Work with Citizens Advice Bureau to develop a court desk service by March 2009.            Investigate options for a mortgage rescue scheme by March 2009.</p>
5c.	<p>Raise awareness of the housing options service and housing issues among key local agencies through a joint training programme</p> <p><b>Milestones</b>            Produce a newsletter on a six monthly basis from November 2008 onwards            Raise awareness of current issues at the quarterly homelessness meetings            Undertake an awareness campaign regarding the Local Housing Allowance during 2008</p>
5d.	<p>Raise awareness of the role other agencies have to play in preventing and responding to homelessness</p> <p><b>Milestone</b>            Establish a programme of inter-agency briefings at the quarterly Homelessness Forum meetings from July 2008 onwards</p>
5e.	<p>Ensure opportunities to receive feedback from customers are maximised</p> <p><b>Milestones</b>            Add a 'callback' section to the customer satisfaction survey by July 2008            Offer a feedback opportunity via the website by August 2008            Analyse customer satisfaction surveys on a quarterly basis</p>

<p>5f. Ensure that a best practice service is offered to customers</p> <p><b>Milestone</b>  Identify best practice and use information to inform service standards by September 08. Review annually  Achieve a charter mark for the housing advice service by September 2009</p>
<p>5g. Improve knowledge and monitoring of diversity groups accessing housing options services and assist with community integration</p> <p><b>Milestones</b>  Incorporate equality impact assessments for all new and reviews of existing housing options initiatives  Include an equality impact assessment in the annual review of the homelessness strategy action plan  Ensure that computer systems are set up to provide monitoring data on a quarterly basis by September 09</p>

**Update and expand the range of leaflets/fact sheets covering housing options including service standards**

Some of the residents at Simon Mead House, when consulted as part of the Homelessness Review, reported having made themselves intentionally homeless either through bad advice or being unaware of the law relating to homelessness. Housing options staff see managing unrealistic customer expectations through ensuring service transparency as a key area for improving their service, and the Homelessness Forum identify sharing good practice and information as a key issue. This all demonstrates that effective communication with customers and stakeholders is an important part of preventing homelessness. Leaflets and fact sheets, whilst only a small part of this, form an important first step in ensuring that clear and readily accessible information is made available and improvements to them can be achieved without significant resources.

The Council will be reviewing the range of leaflets currently supplied to provide information in relation to homelessness services. These will be updated and improved and will include the service standards that can be expected and information aimed specifically at young people. Consideration will be given to improving display arrangements within council buildings and they will be distributed to partners to make the leaflets available in easily accessible places. Leaflets will be rotated to ensure that information areas are kept looking fresh and inviting. The information displayed on the council’s website will also be updated.

**Provide timely and high quality advice and information that enables households to resolve their housing issues**

Households found to be homeless and in priority need represent a small proportion of those receiving housing advice from the Council and advice relating to housing is also sought from other agencies in the Borough. Aside from the Council approaches are predominantly made to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Shelter, during stay in

hospital and to those working with clients with mental health problems. 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.

Housing advice plays a crucial role in helping people to retain existing accommodation and in helping households find new tenancies.

A traditional housing advice role involves resolving conflicts between private tenants and their landlords. Interventions need to be made at an early stage to improve chances of resolution. Close relations with landlords make it more likely that possible tenancy terminations will come to the Council's notice at an early enough stage for effective action to be taken.

Among statutory homelessness acceptances, termination of assured shorthold tenancy, was the second most common cause in 2006/07 and the most common cause in 2005/06. Action to address this is consequently a clear priority.

Housing advice and homelessness work has become more closely interlinked and many local authorities, as in Ashford, are now integrating the two roles.

The restructuring of the service and the review of processes, along with the introduction of the pilot private sector liaison scheme will strengthen the Council's prevention approach through advice and assistance.

### **Raise awareness of the housing options service and housing issues among key local agencies through a joint training programme**

Raising awareness of homelessness and housing advice services was a consistent theme during the Homelessness Review. It was raised by service users, staff and the Homelessness Forum.

Further efforts will be made to raise awareness of the Housing Options service and housing issues among key local agencies. This will include undertaking a joint awareness campaign with Housing Benefits, regarding the new Local Housing Allowance arrangements due to come into effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Greater attention will also be paid to ensuring that success stories are publicised. The Council will also be making increased efforts to work with schools and colleges.

### **Raise awareness of the role other agencies have to play in preventing and responding to homelessness**

In response to the question 'what do you think we could do to improve existing services' included in the questionnaire to service users during the Homelessness Review, one of the answers received was 'to ensure the same training for all staff to avoid customers being shoved from pillar to post'. Training for housing options staff is covered under section two of this document in relation to the refocusing of the service. There is also a need to hold joint events with stakeholders to ensure an awareness of each others work and the relevant referral practices, protocols etc.

The Homelessness Forum identify more interaction between partners including voluntary and faith groups, sure start and family courts as a key issue, along with regular training to provide consistent information and keep partners up to date. Training concerning when and who to refer to, is seen as particularly important. Given that many households who are homeless or face potential homelessness often have multiple problems, and that housing advice services and those involved in social care often have clients in common, it is particularly important to ensure good communication between these agencies. Health services and job centres are also seen as key partners.

An awareness raising programme will aim to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of the services available and how they operate and will take as an underlying principle that a holistic view of client issues is seen as key to achieving better outcomes.

The Kent Homelessness Officers Group have identified the approach to victims of domestic abuse as one of the issues to be incorporated in an action plan for the group. Ensuring awareness around domestic violence and victim support will be a priority for stakeholder training.

### **Ensure opportunities to receive feedback from customers are maximised**

Ashford is committed to the involving customers to ensure a good understanding of their issues and to help shape services provided directly by the Council and through its enabling role.

The Council will work with partners to improve existing arrangements for customer feedback. Improvements identified include:

- Handing out customer satisfaction survey prior to interview
- Adding a 'callback' section to the satisfaction survey
- Offering a feedback opportunity via the website

### **Ensure that a best practice service is offered to customers**

Ashford already provides a good quality housing advice service. The Ashford Gateway project has been recognised by CLG as a good model working towards the type of enhance housing advice that they wish to see developed.

The Ashford Gateway is a partnership project led by Kent County Council. It is located in Ashford Town Centre in an attractive, easy to access centre with a clearly branded 'shop front'. It is designed to deliver a holistic customer experience, and its cross agency approach means that those with complex needs are served faster, better and more efficiently. The decision was taken to offer housing advice services from the Gateway because of the potential benefits from joint working and increased accessibility. It provides the opportunities to link up with social care and adult-education as well as voluntary sector groups, such as Cyrenians who hold a surgery from the Gateway.

CLG would like to see comprehensive, customer focussed housing options services that deliver results around four key outcomes.

1. Meeting housing need with a wider range of solutions
2. Using stock more effectively
3. Tackling worklessness
4. Improving customer service

The following principles have been identified as those that should be enshrined in an enhanced housing options service:

- Innovation
- Personalisation
- Empowerment
- Holism
- Inclusiveness
- Proactive Engagement
- Partnership working
- Working with the grain of the LAA
- Capturing wider resources
- Cross boundary working

Clearly the Gateway goes a long way towards delivering this kind of service. Ashford Borough Council is now working with key partners including Kent County Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, and Social Services to prepare a bid to CLG, under the Housing Options Trailblazer Programmes, to develop this approach further, improving on existing services to enhance service delivery and outcomes. There will be a particular focus around worklessness. The bid will be under Programme1: The enhanced housing options EXTRA programme to further develop the good practice already evident and works alongside other Local Authorities in a shared approach to improving services.

Consideration will be given to further improvements to the service including:

- A triage style tier housing advice service
- Commissioning a mystery shopping exercise
- Options for an outreach service

Approaches to dealing with illegal eviction and court advocacy will be reviewed and improvements will be made to the information sources on accommodation available through the production of a directory.

## **Improve knowledge and monitoring of diversity groups accessing housing options services and assist with community integration**

An equality impact assessment for the homelessness strategy was carried out in April 2008 and will also be include in annual reviews of the action plan. Impact assessments will also be conducted for any new housing options initiatives. Any current gaps in data monitoring will be identified and plans put in place to address them and computer systems will be set up to provide comprehensive monitoring information on a quarterly basis.

Full equality training sessions will be arranged for all housing options staff.

## 10. Strategic Priority 6

### Enable the provision of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households

#### *Objectives*

6a.	Develop a plan with clear targets by March 2009 to eradicate the use of temporary accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds
6b.	Enable redevelopment of Ashford Women's Refuge by January 2009 to improve standards of accommodation
6c.	Evaluate the Private Sector Leasing arrangements to include projected need and consider opportunities for working with other Kent authorities to provide value for money by December 2008
6d.	Undertake an appraisal of suitable temporary accommodation options to provide an alternative to bed and breakfast by December 2009

#### **Develop a plan with clear targets to eradicate the use of temporary accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds**

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. The Council is aiming to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation and is working towards targets to achieve this.

The government has set targets for halving use of temporary accommodation by 2010 and eliminating the use of bed and breakfast for 16 and 17 year olds. Progress towards achieving the target reduction in the use of temporary accommodation will continue to be monitored and reported to Corporate Management team on a quarterly basis and will be reported to Members at least annually. The overall target for Ashford is to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation to 100 by 2010.

Greater detail will be added to the plan for achieving the target and will include separate targets and approaches for all types of temporary accommodation. Use will be made of a planning tool template to assist with this.

The Government expects that no 16 or 17 year olds will be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Ashford Council's priority will be to establish a plan with clear targets to continue the reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for this age group, to eradicate such use as soon as possible.

## **Enable redevelopment of Ashford Women to improve standards of accommodation**

The existing Women's refuge will be redeveloped by January 2009 to improve the standards of accommodation available. The redevelopment will provide modern self-contained accommodation. On completion there will be 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 larger family unit depending on demand.

## **Evaluate the Private Sector Leasing arrangements to include projected need and consider opportunities for working with other Kent authorities to provide value for money**

Current private sector leasing arrangements are costly, particularly for residents who are employed. Ashford will be working with other authorities in Kent to consider how to tackle this issue and to investigate more cost effective provision through partnership working.

## **Undertake an appraisal of suitable temporary accommodation options to provide an alternative to bed and breakfast**

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 actual number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation has reduced.

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. Although there were less households placed in bed and breakfast in 2006 than there were in 2005, this has not produced a cost saving. The proportion of bed and breakfast charges recovered from housing benefit and recharges, stands at 88.06% compared to a target of 80%.

There is a need for good quality temporary accommodation and alternatives to bed and breakfast for vulnerable single homeless (particularly 16 and 17 year olds).

The key factors in determining the suitability of temporary accommodation secured under the homelessness legislation include<sup>12</sup>:

- The needs, requirements and circumstances of each household
- Space and arrangement
- Health and safety considerations
- Affordability
- Location

---

<sup>12</sup> Homelessness Code of Guidance, CLG, 2006

Bed and breakfast accommodation caters for very short-term stays only and generally will afford residents only limited privacy and may lack certain amenities, such as cooking and laundry facilities. It should be used for applicants with family commitments only as a last resort.

Where applicants are in paid employment account will need to be taken of their need to reach their normal workplace. Account should also be taken of the need to minimise disruption to the education of young people. Isolated accommodation away from public transport, shops and other facilities should be avoided, and as far as possible accommodation should be close to where the applicant previously lived. This however is dependant on the supply of available accommodation.

An appraisal to consider suitable alternatives to bed and breakfast accommodation will be completed. This will include an evaluation of current private sector leasing arrangements, including projections of future need and opportunities for working with other Kent authorities to provide value for money.

Service standards will be adopted for the quality of all temporary accommodation used or procured, including those units that are managed by RSLs and other partners.

## 11. The resources we have to deliver our strategy

Our review of homelessness looked at the resources available to the Council in particular to prevent and respond to homelessness.

The housing options service is financed by a combination of 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 central government grant and the Private Sector Leasing contribution to deliver prevention of homelessness initiatives. The Government has 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 in future years.

The funding available is shown in the revenue and capital funding identified in the table below which supports Ashford BC's Housing Strategy to meet the strategic priorities of the Homelessness Strategy as highlighted.

Any significant reduction in the financial resource will clearly impact on the ability of Ashford BC to resource its priorities and deliver the action plan.

### Ashford BC General Fund Revenue Projections – Net Expenditure 2007-2013

	<b>2007/08 Budget £000</b>	<b>2008/09 Forecast £000</b>	<b>2009/10 Forecast £000</b>	<b>2010/11 Forecast £000</b>	<b>2011/12 Forecast £000</b>	<b>2011/12 Forecast £000</b>
Renovation Grants	61.8	58.4	65.7	68.4	71.1	74.0
Private Sector Housing	137.2	140.7	175.3	182.4	189.6	197.2
Research and Development	79.6	96.1	99.9	103.9	108.1	112.4
Housing Options	235.5	290.1	301.7	313.8	326.3	339.4
Gypsy Site	6.1	19.6	20.4	21.2	22.1	22.9
<b>Total Net Expenditure</b>	<b>520.2</b>	<b>604.9</b>	<b>663.0</b>	<b>689.7</b>	<b>717.2</b>	<b>745.9</b>
<b>Other Contributions – Revenue</b>	<b>141.5</b>	<b>141.4</b>	<b>141.1</b>	<b>125.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Homelessness Enabling						
Total Revenue Resource Available	<b>661.7</b>	<b>746.3</b>	<b>804.1</b>	<b>814.7</b>	<b>817.2</b>	<b>845.9</b>

### Ashford BC General Fund Capital Funding 2007 - 2013

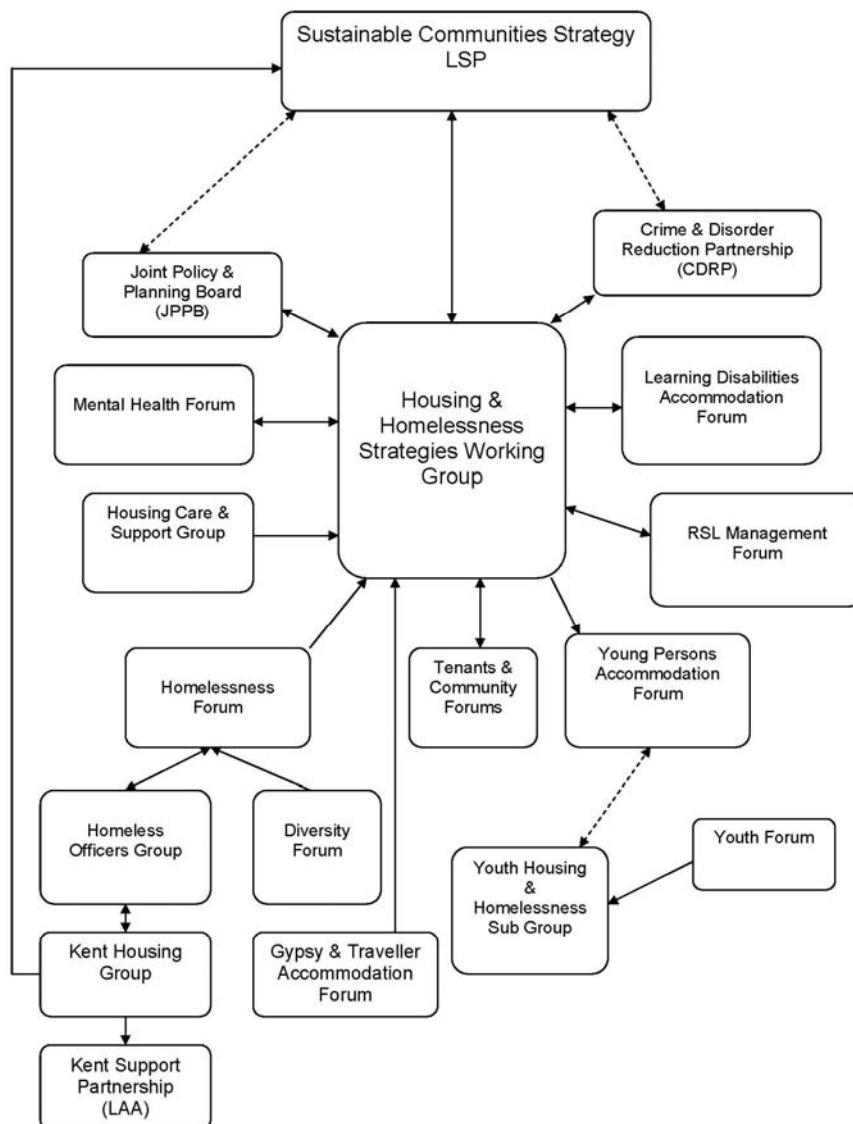
Ashford BC General Fund Capital Funding						
	2007/08 Budget £000	2008/09 Forecast £000	2009/10 Forecast £000	2010/11 Forecast £000	2011/12 Forecast £000	2012/13 Forecast £000
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant						
- ABC	152.1	158.2	164.5	171.1	177.9	185.1
- CLG	228.2	237.3	246.8	256.7	267.0	277.6
<b>Total DFG</b>	<b>380.3</b>	<b>395.5</b>	<b>411.3</b>	<b>427.8</b>	<b>444.9</b>	<b>462.7</b>
Affordable Housing Enabling Housing Market Assessment	62.6	69.2	71.9	74.8	77.8	80.9
Extra Care PFI Chilmington Refurbishment		10.0	25.0			
- ABC	144.0					
- CLG	432.0					
<b>Total</b>	<b>576.0</b>					
<b>Total Capital Resources Available</b>	<b>1,018.9</b>	<b>474.7</b>	<b>508.2</b>	<b>502.6</b>	<b>522.7</b>	<b>543.6</b>

## 12. Monitoring Delivery of the Homeless Strategy

The Strategy contains six Strategic Priorities under which key objectives are included. These are brought together in an Action Plan for delivery of the strategy. Timescales of short (2008/09) medium (2009/10) and long (2010/12) term have been applied to the objectives. More detailed specific actions have been identified to deliver the strategy, and these are more appropriately included in relevant service plans. Only higher level objectives are shown in this document. The action plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains up to date.

The original Homelessness Strategy Working Group will be merged with the Housing Strategy Working Group and expanded to include all relevant stakeholders. The group will meet, at least quarterly from the date that the Homelessness Strategy is adopted and will also communicate regularly by other mechanisms in between working group meetings.

The following chart demonstrates the links between the Joint Housing and Homelessness Strategies Working Group and with other local and regional strategic groups. Each of the groups is overlapped by at least one member.



A post of Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Development Officer has been created to ensure that the actions within the Homelessness Strategy are progressed and to ensure that the Forum and Strategies Working Group meet regularly and are attended by relevant stakeholders at the appropriate level.

The joint Housing and Homelessness strategies working group will monitor the implementation of the strategy action plan. The group will meet quarterly from the date that the Homelessness Strategy is adopted and will use a traffic light system to monitor progress of the action plan. Members of the group are shown at appendix 5. In addition, the Homelessness forum will meet and contribute at least twice a year. The forum will take the form of presentations and workshops sessions looking at relevant action points from the strategy.

The action plan has been developed in consultation with stakeholders throughout the course of the homelessness review. In particular the homelessness forum, the housing strategy working group and the council's Policy advisory group have all been involved. The views of service users, other stakeholders and staff have also been taken into account.

Updates on the progress of the Homelessness Strategy will also be reported regularly to Members and to the Executive.

## **Appendix 1 -**

### **Progress since the last Ashford Homelessness Strategy**

A five year strategy to tackle homelessness in Ashford was produced in July 2003. The strategy identified two headline aims:

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

Over the period 2002/03 to 2006/07 the number of homelessness decisions reduced from 241 to 200 and the number of priority homelessness acceptances reduced from 140 to 120.

Ashford has increased the range of preventative services offered since the last homelessness strategy was completed in 2003. Significant developments have included:

- Implementation of a homelessness prevention bond scheme, this has also recently been reviewed
- 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 person's drop in
- A private sector landlord liaison scheme is being piloted

A series of Housing Options Advice Sheets have been developed which detail all of the options and preventative schemes available. Following a review, the council's housing advice and homelessness service is currently being re-structured to focus more fully on assistance and prevention to potentially homeless households.

## Appendix 2

### Homelessness and the new National Indicators<sup>13</sup>

#### Targets where the client group specified are relevant to homelessness agencies

NI	Target group	Outcome
141	Vulnerable people	Achieving Independent living (old SP KPI2)
142	Vulnerable people	Maintaining independent living (old SP KPI1)
143	Offenders under probation supervision	Living in settled and suitable accommodation
145	Adults with learning disabilities	
149	Adults in contact with secondary mental health services	
147	Young care leavers	
144	Offenders under probation supervision	In employment
146	Adults with learning disabilities	
150	Adults in contact with secondary mental health services	
18	Offenders under probation supervision	Reduced re-offending
30	Prolific and priority offenders	Reduced re-offending
148	Young care leavers (16-19)	In employment, training or education
32	Victims of domestic violence	Reduced repeat incidents of domestic violence
38	Drug users	Reduced re-offending
40		In effective treatment
39	Alcohol misuse clients	Reduced hospital admission for alcohol related harm
13	Migrants (including refugees)	English language skills

<sup>13</sup> Tables taken from Demonstrate your contribution: Homelessness and the new National Indicators, 2008

## Relevant safer and stronger communities targets

NI	Target group	Possible contribution of agency
41	Perceptions of drunk or rowdy behaviour as a problem	Work with street drinkers keeps them off the streets and addresses their alcohol dependency
42	Perceptions of drug use or drug dealing as a problem	Outcomes of drug users addressing their drug use and being suitably housed reduces both drug use and drug dealing within the community
17	Perceptions of anti-social behaviour	Effective work with people otherwise likely to be seen as behaving anti-socially in the community
195	Improved street and environmental cleanliness, including graffiti and litter	Possibly tenuous but linked to reduced street drinking and drug use (cans, syringes etc)
16 & 20	Serious acquisitive crime and assault with injury crime rate	Effective work with those with a history of these crimes and with drug users who may be likely to commit these crimes

## Relevant targets relating to the whole population

NI	Target group	Possible contribution of agency
119	Self reported overall health and well being	Increase in their clients' self-reported health and well-being
134	Emergency bed days per head	Reduction in their clients; use of emergency bed days
137	Healthy life expectancy at 65	Street homeless have a life expectancy of around 40 years so are highly relevant in local targets to increase life expectancy
140	Fair treatment by local service	Enabling their clients to access local services (e.g. GP) where they might otherwise not, and be treated fairly
151	Employment rate	Number of clients into employment

152/ 153	Out of work benefits	Number of clients taken off out of work benefits
161- 165	Qualifications for learners or working-age population	Qualifications for clients
1	Perceptions that people from different backgrounds get on well	Enabling those resettled in their community to get on with neighbours and tackling discrimination against specific groups, e.g. those with mental health issues, drug users
2	Percentage of people who feel they belong in their neighbourhood	Clients housed in the area who feel they belong – floating support services
3	Civic participation in the local area	Civic participation by clients (as above for N2)
8 - 11	Adult participation in sport, libraries, museums, galleries or the arts	Clients participating in these areas

## Appendix 3

### Homeless Strategy Review Timetable 2007

Stage	Activity	Purpose	Timescale	Officer Responsible	Progress
Strategy Working Group	Set up first Homelessness Strategy Working Group Meeting Key stakeholders	To look at: Agreeing Consultation Procedure  Joint working mechanisms & Common Assessment Tools  Performance Indicators  BVR of client services  Service audit  Agreeing Priorities for Action  Setting SMART objectives	1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting to take place late June 2007  Quarterly and individual meetings arranged	SW/VH	1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting 12.07.07  2 <sup>nd</sup> Meeting 13.08.07  3 <sup>rd</sup> Meeting 11.09.07  followed by individual meetings with key stakeholders
Homeless Forum	Set up Homelessness Forum  Invite all Stakeholders and relevant staff to join meeting and workshops	Group set up to consult on proposals forming from Review and from Working Group	Invitation to participate letter June 2007	VH	1 <sup>st</sup> meeting 17.08.07  2 <sup>nd</sup> 15.02.08 during consultation stage

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Officer Responsible</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Liaise with Other Strategies	Liaising with supporting people strategy, community and housing strategy	Ensuring that homeless strategy fits with other key issues and locally adopted strategies	Late June 2007	SW/VH/DW	Continuous
Consultation Procedure	Stakeholder Consultation  Letter and questionnaire	To learn and look at priority issues raised by stakeholders	Sent out 24.07.07	VH	Complete
	Service User Consultation Letter and questionnaire to every service user from past 12 month period  Arrange Focus Groups with voluntary sector, BME community, Young People and Cyrennians  Young Persons Multi Agency Group	To learn and look at priority issues raised by Service Users	Sent out 23.07.07  By Mid August  Arranged for 21 <sup>st</sup> August	VH	returned by 06.08.07 – complete Focus Group with Cyrennians took place 9.8.07 Consultation with young people took place via whatmattersa shford website. Meeting with BME community leaders planned during final consultation phase
	Staff Consultation  Invite to Homeless Forum	Gage staff's views on service provision		VH	Meeting and workshops on 17.08.07 and on 15.02.08

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Officer Responsible</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Service Review	Audit and evaluation of current provision for homeless people	To take stock of where current service level is and feed into work on gaps in service	Completed	VH & SW	Homelessness Review completed in January 2008
Assess Needs	Analysis of Gaps in Service	Identified by comparing present and future needs with current provision	January 2008	SW	All information incorporated into Review document
Plan New Services/Action Plan	Work with Strategy Group on new Service Plan	To develop a comprehensive, fully consulted upon and joint agency plan for improving services and reducing homelessness in the Ashford Borough	By February 2008		Service Planning developed via Working Group and fed into Homelessness Strategy
Liaison Meetings	Lead Officer to meet with Homeless team for action liaison	To inform service provider of progress being made on review and strategy	On going	SW	Regular updates provided to team via team and individual meetings
Review and Drafting	Conclude and complete the writing of the review		By end January 2008	DW (HQN) in partnership with stakeholders	By 30.01.08
	Circulate 1 <sup>st</sup> Draft of Homeless Strategy to Stakeholders		Early January 2008	DW (HQN)	

Stage	Activity	Purpose	Timescale	Officer Responsible	Progress
	Policy Advisory Group	To ensure Members are fully involved in direction and content of strategy prior to submission to Executive	6 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> September 2007	SW	Endorsed by Members –to Executive March 2008
	Final Draft of Strategy to All Stakeholders	Strategy to be posted on website with a consultation feedback form	Mid February 2008	VH	Strategy placed out for consultation for a 4 week period from April 2008
	Submit strategy to Executive Committee for adoption	To adopt as ABC policy	May 2008	SW	May 2008
	Submit strategy to CLG and publish on website	To meet legislative requirements	Mid July 2008	VH	To be completed by 30.07.08
Implement Programme	Email or paper copy to all stakeholders	To ensure all stakeholders have access to the new strategy	March 2008 for draft July 2008 for adopted strategy	VH	
	Set up web link on ABC website		March 2008 For draft July 2008 for adopted strategy	VH	
	Begin work on programme implementation			Housing Options Team in partnership with Stakeholders	Continuous

Stage	Activity	Purpose	Timescale	Officer Responsible	Progress
Monitor, Evaluate and Review	Set up process to enable regular monitoring, evaluation reviews and updates of strategy keeping stakeholders fully involved and informed	To ensure that the strategy is not a transient document	Continuous		Continuous

## Appendix 4 - References

A Housing Strategy for People with a Learning Disability, prepared for Kent County Council Housing Implementation Group of the Learning Disability Partnership Board, 2003

Alcohol harm reduction strategy, 2004

Annual report of CORE data, Ashford area, summary statistics April 2006 – March 2007

Ashford Borough Council Draft Housing Strategy 2007 – 2011

Breaking down the barriers: the clinical case for change

Centrepoint Youth Homelessness Index: An estimate of youth homelessness for England, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, 2004

Clean break: Integrated housing and care pathways for homeless drug users, Homeless Link, 2007

Cutting Crime: A new partnership 2008 – 2011, Home Office

Demonstrate your contribution: Homelessness and the new National Indicators, London Housing Foundation, 2008

Delivering Housing and Regeneration: Communities England and the future of social housing regulation - Consultation, CLG, 2007

Ends and means: the future roles of social housing in England (the Hills Review) 2007

Every Child Matters: Issues for young people leaving care

Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, CLG, 2007

Expanding Choice, Addressing Need: Addressing Housing Need through the Enhanced Housing Options Approach, CLG, 2008

Framework for planning and commissioning of services related to health needs of people who are homeless or living in temporary or other insecure accommodation, CLG, 2007

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, CLG, 2006

Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice, CLG, 2006

Homelessness Prevention Systems Diagnostic, Audit Commission, 2007

Homelessness strategies: a good practice handbook, DTLR, 2002

Homelessness Strategies – preparing for the 2008 deadline, HQN (SEN) briefing paper prepared by Sheila Spencer, 2007

Homelessness Toolkit, Homelessness Action Team, Feb 2008

Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable – the housing green paper, 2007

Huntingdonshire District Council, Empty Homes Strategy 2006 – 2011, July 2006

In work, better off: next steps to full employment, (welfare reform green paper), 2007

KCC Annual Plan, Performance in 2006/07, Priorities and Targets for 2007/08

Kent and Medway Multi-agency Strategy: An Integrated and Proactive Response to Domestic Violence, 2007 – 2010, October 2007, Alison Gilmour, Kent & Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator

Kent Homelessness Officers Group, Working Protocol, March 2007

Kent Multi-Agency Parenting Support Service, Policy and Procedures

Kent teenage pregnancy strategy, 2001 – 2011

Local authorities' Homelessness Strategies: Evaluation and Good Practice, HQN, ODPM 2004

Oldham – Empty Homes Strategy 2007 – 2009 .....empty houses into decent Homes

Planning Housing and Support with Learning Disabled People in Kent, The Skillnet Group 2003

Prevention of Homelessness: the role of health and social care, Housing LIN policy briefing, 2007

Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Healthcheck, 2006

Reaching out action plan, 2006

Reaching out think family, 2007

Regional Housing Strategy Review: Draft for Consultation, February 2007, South East Regional Housing Board

Safe, sensible, social – the next steps in the national alcohol strategy, DoH, June 2007

Setting your homelessness strategy in the broader national policy and strategic context, HQN (SEN) briefing paper prepared by Sheila Spencer, 2007

Settled housing solutions in the private rented sector, CLG, 2005

Strategic Plan for Reducing Re-Offending 2008 – 2011: working in partnership to reduce re-offending and make communities safer: A consultation

Strategic review of short-term accommodation based supported housing in Kent, Kent Supporting People Team, 2007

Supporting homelessness agencies to deliver services in rural area, Homeless Link, 2007

Sustainable Communities: Settled homes; changed lives: A strategy for tackling homelessness, ODPM, 2005

Tackling Homelessness: The Housing Corporation Strategy, Housing Corporation, 2006

Tackling Homelessness: Housing Associations and Local Authorities working in partnership, Housing Corporation,

Tackling Overcrowding in England: An Action Plan, CLG, 2007

Tackling social exclusion, 2004

Tackling youth homelessness: re-housing young people aged under 18, HQN (SEN) briefing paper prepared by Sheila Spencer, 2007

The Kent Agreement: combining the Kent Local Area Agreement and The KCC second generation Local Public Service Agreement, KCC, 2005

Kent Agreement 2 (2008) – emerging themes

The Kent Supporting People Strategy 2005 – 2010

The new performance framework for local authorities and local authority partnerships: single set of national indicators, CLG, Oct 2007

Transforming Services: A report on a strategic review of Kent's supporting people funded services for older people (version 2), Riseborough Research and Consulting 2006

Unlocking solutions: Report of the move on plans protocol (MOPP) pilot, Homeless Link, 2007

Updated Needs Analysis, Kent Supporting People Team, May 2007

Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, HM Government, 2006

## Appendix 5 – Groups involved in strategy development

### Homelessness Strategy Forum Members

The following group members have met, and will continue to meet, regularly to progress the Homelessness Review and now the action plan from the Homelessness Strategy.

Organisation	Officer
Citizen's Advice Bureau	Mick Fleming
E K Cyrenians	Gill Bryant
Connexions	Roberta Fullerton/Joanne Waller
CASA Floating Support	Manager
16 Plus Team	Janice Pearse
KCA	Manager
Ashford Primary Care Trust	Katie Blissett
Occupational Therapy Services	Helen Homewood
Shelter	Mark Ellison
Simon Mead House	Manager
Stonham	Kerry Crossnan
The Kent & Medway NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust	Marian Draper/Richard Bartram
Accent Peerless (RSL)	Housing Manager
CDS Co-Operatives (RSL)	Angela Millard
Downland Housing Association (RSL)	Pam Brivio
Hyde (RSL)	Housing Manager
L&Q Housing Trust (RSL)	Housing Manager
Moat Housing (RSL)	Housing Manager
Raglan Housing Association (RSL)	Rob Bailey
Sanctuary Housing (RSL) Southern Housing Group (RSL)	Helen Charles
West Kent Housing (RSL)	Jane Rush
Rainer	Emma Forsyth
YOT	Chris Cox
Diversity Forum	Maria Hales
Home Improvement Agency	Babs Pointer
KCC (Gateway Project Development Officer)	Peter Brook
Ashford Borough Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private Sector Housing</li> <li>• Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>• Customer Services Manager</li> <li>• Principal Policy Planner</li> <li>• Youth Projects Coordinator</li> <li>• Voluntary Sector Manager</li> </ul>	David Herrick Jennifer Shaw Julie Rogers Ian Grundy Carol Moreton Kim Harlow
Jobcentre Plus	Jayne Faulkner/Melody Macnamara

### Homelessness Review and Strategy Working Group

The following group members met regularly in developing and, in writing the Homelessness Strategy for the Ashford Borough.

Organisation	Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Housing Operation Manager (Housing Options Team)
Ashford Borough Council	Homelessness Prevention & Strategy Development Officer
KCC	Planning & Development Officer – Specialist Accommodation
KCC	Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator
Probation	Senior Probation Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Community Youth Projects Coordinator
Social Services (Children & Families)	Duty Manager
Social Services (Adult Services)	Duty Manager
KCC Education	Joint Commissioning Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Community Safety Officer
Ashford Futures Team	Voluntary Sector Development Officer
KCC Supporting People	Policy & Strategy Officer/Policy & Strategy Manager
East Kent Primary Care Trust	Health Promotion Practitioner Specialist Community Development Officer

### Housing and Homelessness Strategies Working Group

The following group has been set up to meet at least quarterly to discuss and to progress both the Housing and the Homelessness Strategies for the Ashford Borough.

Organisation	Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Housing Operation Manager (Housing Options Team)
Ashford Borough Council	Housing Strategy Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Homelessness Prevention & Strategy Development Officer

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Officer</b>
KCC	Planning & Development Officer – Specialist Accommodation
KCC	Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator
Probation	Senior Probation Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Community Youth Projects Coordinator
Social Services (Children & Families)	District Manager
Social Services (Adult Services)	District Manager
KCC Education	Joint Commissioning Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Community Safety Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Voluntary Sector Manager
KCC Supporting People	Policy & Strategy Officer/Policy & Strategy Manager
East Kent Primary Care Trust	Health Promotion Practitioner Specialist Community Development Officer
Ashford Borough Council	Housing Operations Manager (Older Persons Services)
Ashford Borough Council	Housing Operations Manager (Private Sector)
Ashford Borough Council (LSP)	Deputy Director Cultural Services
Ashford Futures	Sustainability Officer
Stonham	Manager
Porchlight	Manager
Registered Social Landlord	Working Group Member TBA

## **Appendix 6 Glossary of Terms**

### **Affordable housing**

Subsidised non-market housing provided to those whose needs are not met by the market. Affordable housing is a general term for social-rented housing and intermediate housing (shared ownership products and intermediate rent that is rent above social rented but below market rents).

### **Choice Based Lettings (CBL)**

A system to provide a greater choice of home. A list of available properties is circulated fortnightly, to those on the housing register.

### **Community Strategy**

A strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their areas, achieving sustainable communities and is reached by a process of community planning.

### **Empty Homes**

The Government is concerned to ensure that problematic empty properties i.e. those that are not subject to a transactional process – are brought back into occupation. Properties that are empty for less than six months (and are therefore likely to be transactional) are categorised separately for statistical purposes from longer-term empty homes that are more likely to be problematic.

### **Floating Support**

Is a service that is delivered to a family or individual that is not tied to accommodation. Floating support services provide service users with a support package that is based upon their assessed needs and as independence increases, the level of support is reduced until it “floats away”.

### **Government Office of the South East (GoSE)**

Representatives of central government in the regions, bringing together the work of the government departments.

### **Home Improvement Agency**

A not for profit agency offering help and advice on home improvements, repairs and adaptations to older, vulnerable and disabled people.

### **Housing Corporation**

Government organisation that funds and regulates Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations). It administers the National Affordable Housing Programme.

### **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

The accounting process by which local authorities manage the income and expenditure on its own housing stock.

### **Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB)**

Established across Kent representing all the local authorities, Social Services and Health Authority to prioritise, monitor and review the provision of supported housing.

### **Kent Annual Plan**

Publishing an Annual Plan (Best Value Performance Plan) is a statutory requirement for all local authorities. The Kent Annual Plan brings all Kent County Council's activities together in a single document and sets out, 'Performance in the previous financial year', 'objectives and targets for the following year', 'how KCC will transform the organisation and manage resources, 'KCC's Contracts Statement'.

### **Kent County Council (KCC)**

Is responsible for providing a wide range of services including roads, schools, social services, libraries, adult education centres, trading standards and some planning matters.

### **Local Area Agreement**

Local Area Agreements set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area (the local authority and Local Strategic Partnership) and other key partners at the local level.

### **Local Development Framework**

The local development framework documents are set out in the form of a portfolio, which collectively deliver the spatial planning strategy for the local planning authority's area.

### **Local Public Service Agreement**

Local Public Service Agreements are designed to be voluntary agreements between upper-tier local authorities and government. The overall aim is to improve final outcomes for local people by tackling local priorities with support from Government.

### **Local Strategic Partnership**

Local Strategic Partnerships are a way of bringing together people, public sector organisations and businesses to work to improve the local quality of life. The LSP also works to develop the Community Strategy.

### **Mediation Service**

Mediation is a process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable resolution.

### **Policy Advisory Group (PAG)**

Established by the Council and consist of Councillors and Tenant representatives who look at policies and changes under consideration to advise the full council or the executive on implications of any recommended changes.

### **Private Finance Initiative (PFI)**

Government scheme through which large refurbishment projects can be financed.

**Private Sector Landlord**

A landlord renting a home at market prices.

**Right to Buy**

Government policy that allows tenants of local authorities to purchase their home from the council.

**Registered Social Landlord (RSL)**

Technical name for a body registered with the Housing Corporation. Most Housing Associations are RSLs.

**Sanctuary Schemes**

Schemes that aim to make it possible for victims of domestic violence and of hate crime to remain in their home and to feel safe.

**Section 106 Agreements**

Legal agreements between a planning authority and a developer, or undertakings offered unilaterally by a developer, that ensure that certain extra works related to a development are undertaken. In relation to affordable housing planning obligations can be used to prescribe the nature of a development by requiring the inclusion of a given proportion of affordable housing.

**Strategic Housing Market Assessment**

An assessment to assist Local Authorities in developing a good understanding of how the local housing market operates by assessing housing need and demand.

**South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)**

The Regional Development Agency for the South East. Responsible for sustainable economic development and regeneration.

**South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA)**

The Regional Assembly is the representative voice of the region. It comprises 112 members, including elected councillors nominated by the region's local authorities.

**Supporting Independence Programme**

A programme to co-ordinate and focus the work of the public, private and voluntary sectors to assist in reducing dependency and promoting independence and well-being for the people of Kent

**Supporting People**

Government programme to fund care and support services for people with special needs to enable them to live independently in the community.

**Supported Housing**

Housing providing for people with special needs providing a more intensive and supportive housing service than that provided by ordinary housing services.

**What Matters 2006 – 2009**

Ashford Borough Council's Youth Strategy

## **Appendix 7 - How to get further information**

If you would like further information about Ashford Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy please contact:

The Housing Options Team  
Housing Services  
Civic Centre  
Tannery Lane  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN23 1PL

Telephone Number: 01233 330807 or 01233 330803

Email: [Vicky.hammond@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Vicky.hammond@ashford.gov.uk)