

Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023



Foreword

Introducing our Strategy on Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping 2019-2022.

We are currently in the midst of a national housing crisis, a housing crisis which is becoming an emergency, with demand outstripping supply, making it difficult for some members of our communities to find and afford a place to live. Every member of our community deserves warm, safe, decent housing that they can afford. This is why tackling homelessness and accelerating affordable housing delivery are at the heart of this administration's priorities. This strategy will steer our resources and response to housing so we are focusing on the issues that will have the biggest impact for our residents, whilst we continue to lobby central government on the key policy issues that need to be addressed. This strategy alone won't solve the issues overnight and should be viewed as a first step towards providing a proactive response to the housing and homelessness crisis that affects too many families and individuals across our area.

As Cabinet Member for Housing I will ensure that we tackle this issue as best we can given current legislation by:

- Delivering Affordable Homes;
- Preventing Homelessness;
- Reducing the need for emergency and temporary accommodation;
- Improving conditions in existing homes;
- Supporting community led housing schemes;
- Working with third parties to provide necessary outreach and support.

We must be ambitious to bring about a step change for our residents and it is my commitment to ensure that our residents have the best opportunity to have the right access to housing that is warm, safe and affordable.

Cllr. Ben J Martin

Cabinet Member for Housing

Introduction

This Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy covers the period 2019-2023. The document sets out the high-level strategic issues affecting the Borough and the Council's plans to work in partnership with others to meet the identified housing needs in the Borough.

Preventing homelessness is a statutory requirement of the Council and one it takes very seriously and will use every opportunity it has to achieve. It has strong relationships with social housing providers and it is through these partnership that we want to accelerate the provision of affordable housing in the borough.

Rough Sleeping has also become an increasing issue and this strategy places a priority on support put in place to safeguard these most vulnerable individuals.

It is recognised that Swales' housing challenges are a result of many inter related issues both nationally and locally including:

- London displacement with Swale being an attractive option that is more affordable;
- The disparity between house prices and local incomes;
- The inability of our local market to meet the housing needs of local people;
- Lack of mobility in housing market;
- Lack of direct access to social housing properties;
- The cost of the private rented sector in Swale compared to Local Housing Allowance rates;
- The availability of services to support people in sustaining their tenancies;
- The general lack of truly affordable housing;
- Prison discharge – with 3 prisons on the Isle of Sheppey, Swale has a number of ex-offenders that present as homeless even if few qualify.

The strategy has been developed following a detailed analysis of the housing issues in Swale and a comprehensive review of the Council's Homelessness Service. These documents form the evidence base for the strategy and are included as appendices.

It recognises that the Council will be more effective by working together with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector. Examples include Kent County Council, the Health Sector and Housing Providers such as Optivo, Moat Homes and Hyde Housing and housing co-operatives. It is committed to improving its delivery relationships for the benefit of Swale residents.

Our strategic priorities are:

- 1 Delivering affordable homes;
- 2 Preventing homelessness;
- 3 Reducing the need for emergency and temporary accommodation; and
- 4 Improving conditions in existing homes.

In order to deliver these priorities, the Council has committed to deliver on 6 key objectives:

Key Objectives:

- Develop a borough wide approach to invest in and deliver affordable homes;
- Promote early intervention and a more customer focussed homeless prevention service;
- Develop and enhance the partnership approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough;
- Prevent the need for and length of time spent in temporary accommodation;
- Ensure support is available for vulnerable households; and
- Improve private sector housing conditions and management practices including helping older, disabled and vulnerable people to live in safe adapted homes through a range of initiatives.

National housing policies

Government direction for housing is set out in section 1 of Appendix I 'Detailed Analysis of Housing Issues in Swale' and includes:

- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Housing Green Paper – A New Deal for Social Housing
- Fixing the Broken Housing Market – Government's White Paper
- Changes to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Government Changes to Delivery Agencies
- Welfare Reform
- Care Act 2016 and Better Care Fund
- Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018

Summary of national housing issues to respond to:

- Reduce homelessness and meet requirements of new legislation
- Housing growth – to meet the needs of current and future population.
- Encourage diversity in the market including modern/ non -traditional methods of construction that speed up delivery of housing and new products e.g. Self-build, modular, starter homes
- Improve conditions in the private rented sector
- Ongoing welfare reforms as they impact on housing
- Role of housing in prevention – helping vulnerable people to live independently and reducing costs on acute health and social care services.
- Reduce rough sleeping

Strategic context

The context within which this Strategy sits is set out in section 2 of the 'Detailed Analysis of Housing Issues in Swale' and includes:

- Corporate Plan 2019 – 2022 Delivering a Better Borough for you
- Statement of Accounts 31st March 2018
- Economic and Regeneration Framework 2018 – 2021
- Swale Community Safety Plan 2018/19
- Kent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy - Outcomes for Kent
- Annual Public Health Report
- Bearing Fruits 2031 The Swale Borough Local Plan Adopted July 2017
- Kent Housing Group and emerging Housing Strategy.

Summary of strategic issues:

- The provision of housing and related services in Swale should sit within a coherent strategic framework with clear links to the strategic direction and commissioning priorities of other relevant public services. The Council will seek to work with partners to ensure seamless provision of service. This is a particular concern regarding vulnerable groups that KCC commissioned services lead on including substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse, supported housing schemes and prison releases.
- The Council has the ability to use its borrowing powers to make meaningful interventions in the local housing market, in all likelihood with a partner. The financial proposition may also need some revenue budget support from the Council.
- A new Housing Strategy for Kent and Medway is being developed, using the countywide Growth Infrastructure Framework to frame a strategic conversation with Government about Kent's approach to planning and delivering housing growth. This will be used to help channel Government investment into the County and it is therefore important that Swale is appropriately linked into this workstream. The following four priorities have been agreed as strategic direction:
 - Accelerating housing delivery;
 - Affordability;
 - Health and wellbeing; and
 - Infrastructure and investment.

For a statistical profile of Swale see section 3 in Appendix I 'Detailed Analysis of Housing Issues in Swale'.

Summary of strategic issues:

- The Strategy needs to reflect the diversity of the Borough. There is a varied geography with urban centres and rural villages. The main centres of population are Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness
- Swale's demographic make-up is equally as diverse, including a mix of affluent and less affluent areas, but in general the borough is less well-off than is typical for the south-east. There are some concentrated pockets of severe socioeconomic deprivation to be found in locations across the area.
- The population is growing and changing. The numbers of residents are due to increase by 20% over the next 20 years and there will be a significant increase in the over 65 years age group which needs to be recognised in the likely demand for housing and related support services.

Swale's housing market

For information on the housing market see section 4 in Appendix I 'Detailed Analysis of Housing Issues in Swale' document.

Summary of strategic issues:

- There are over 58,000 dwellings in Swale. 69.3% are owner occupied, 14.3% are housing association, and 15.2% are rented privately. Semi-detached and terraced properties make up the largest property type
- House prices vary across the Borough with hot spots in Faversham and surrounding affluent villages and cooler spots on the Isle of Sheppey and (to a lesser extent) Sittingbourne
- House prices in Swale are relatively affordable when compared to some other Kent boroughs and London and may be a reason why people choose to locate in Swale and commute into other areas, including London, where they have the level of income that allows that.
- Swale reflects the national trend and is seeing a long-term worsening in the affordability of accommodation in Swale across all tenures. The median income of employees in Swale in 2017 was £29.5k pa. The average house price was £262k and median house prices are over 9 times median incomes. Housing is therefore largely out of reach for local first-time buyers and those on low/moderate incomes.
- When comparing average rent levels and Local Housing Allowance rates it can be seen that in all areas, and across all property sizes and types, average weekly private sector rent levels exceed Local Housing Allowance rates. This means that the private rented sector is very difficult for those on low/moderate incomes to be able to afford. Use of the private rented sector as an option for homeless people is therefore severely restricted.
- The Council does not have substantial land holdings, and as such it will be dependent upon land that comes forward when it makes call for sites through the Local Plan process. The challenge is to ensure that the right affordable homes are delivered in the right places.

Priority 1 – Deliver affordable homes

For information about the scale and distribution of housing growth in Swale see section 5 of Appendix I 'Detailed Analysis of Housing Issues in Swale'.

Summary of strategic issues:

- There is a need for 190 new affordable homes per year. Recent output has been for 122 new affordable homes (17/18) and 144 (16/17). As such a more proactive negotiation with developers is needed, insisting on the numbers of affordable set out in the Local Plan.
- The current trajectory suggests that it will be challenging to meet the Council's housing targets for the next three years. Thereafter, given the developments planned, outputs will increase so we are more on track with targets. Given the current reliance on s106 to deliver new affordable housing we can expect the trajectory of new affordable homes to follow this trend line
- There are four active developing housing associations in Swale and there is commitment for ongoing investment in the Borough. Positively, two of the Council's housing association partners have recently become strategic development partners with Homes England. This should increase the chances of investment in the Borough and help to boost delivery, subject to Swale taking a proactive approach to this issue by negotiation with developers and insisting on the numbers of affordable set out in the Local Plan
- The highest need remains for affordable rented housing but there is also need for intermediate housing products for aspiring home owners. Going forwards it is important that the Council continues to diversify the housing offer to meet a range of housing needs at various price points
- To date, there has been a reliance on Section 106 to deliver the majority of new affordable homes and there is a need to consider other innovative ways to deliver. The opportunities for development on Council-owned sites have been taken with 11 new homes due to be built on land sold to Optivo for affordable housing. Options on other public sector land, use of borrowing abilities through PWLB, and the potential for a Council-led Housing Development Company could be considered.
- The Council has Government funding through the Community Led Housing Fund for proactive work in rural areas and it is important that this is used to generate new homes in rural areas

- Projections show an increase in the number of older people in our district. It is important that our housing supports healthy ageing and as well as initiatives to help people live independently for longer. We want to increase the provision including bungalows and well-designed single level accommodation, and potentially extra care, subject to KCC's commissioning priorities
- There is unmet need for additional supported housing for adults with learning disabilities and mental health problems.

Strategic objectives for the delivery plan:

- Develop a borough wide approach to invest in and deliver affordable homes;

Priority 2 - Preventing homelessness and supporting homeless people

For detailed analysis of homelessness see Appendix II - Homelessness Review.

Summary of strategic issues:

- The Council is challenged by the current housing market, with increased demand from people unable to access either owned or rented housing in the private sector
- The Allocations Policy sets a local connection for the Housing Register and does not give sufficient priority to homeless households. This should be reviewed in order to support the prevention of homelessness.
- There has been good progress in developing new initiatives and work with private landlords in the area is delivering results albeit slowly
- Operationally partnerships are good but more could be done to work with partners at a strategic level to build relationships and this could be achieved through holding a regular Housing Forum
- Supported housing funded by Kent County Council is generally meeting the need of vulnerable households, with single people in particular benefiting from the single homeless supported housing provision. There is a need to monitor support for both young people and people with complex needs who may fall through the net. Kent County Council's commissioning strategy needs to be closely monitored and informed by Swale BC since there are strategic and operational risks associated with their proposals to remodel the support service at The Quays and other services for vulnerable people. Swale BC need to work closely with Kent County Council to secure the best outcome for the population
- The number of rough sleepers is increasing. At the most recent count (November 2018) the numbers increased from 9 to 32, placing Swale in the top 10 authorities with the largest increase. Along with a strategic and co-ordinated approach to this, steps should be taken to agree more formal arrangements for periods of severe weather. The Council could also seek to develop their relationship with both voluntary sector and faith groups to further support the work of the team. A pro-active approach to early identification and prevention will support this.

Strategic objectives for the delivery plan:

- Promote early intervention and a more customer focussed homeless prevention service.
- Develop and enhance the partnership approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

Priority 3 – Reducing the need for emergency and temporary accommodation

For detailed analysis of temporary accommodation see Appendix II - the Homelessness Review.

Summary of strategic issues:

- Increasing demand on the service has resulted in an increasing number of households living in temporary accommodation with increased cost to the council. Numbers are likely to continue to increase and a pro-active approach to homeless prevention will be required. This is addressed through actions identified in the delivery plan.
- There is a mixed portfolio of temporary accommodation and this is used effectively although bed and breakfast is still used. Ending the use of B&B and significantly reducing the number of nightly let properties is a priority and is addressed in the Delivery Plan. Officers are aware of the need to work more closely with housing providers in order to address this and an interim Recovery Plan is already delivering results
- A review of the Allocations Policy will help bring down numbers in temporary accommodation as will a focus on pro-active prevention and delivering new housing supply.

Strategic objectives for the delivery plan:

- Prevent the need for and length of time spent in temporary accommodation.
- Ensure support is available for vulnerable households.

Priority 4 - Improving conditions in existing homes

For information about the current housing stock see section 7 of Appendix II 'Detailed Analysis of Housing Issues in Swale'.

Summary of strategic issues:

- There is an ongoing need for Council intervention to improve private sector housing conditions; an estimated 5% of all homes (2000) had some form of hazard, with the highest levels in Sheerness and Queenborough.
- Poor housing conditions have a detrimental impact on health outcomes and there is a need for ongoing work to tackle category 1 hazards (excess cold, falls on stairs, falls on levels, damp and mould) in the private rented sector and owner occupied sector, especially where these homes are occupied by older or vulnerable people. The highest levels of category 1 hazards are found on the Isle of Sheppey
- There are 7,695 properties identified in fuel poverty, with 48% being occupied by a retired resident and 41% containing a disabled resident. Initiatives to tackle fuel poverty are in place and therefore remain important
- The Council undertakes some proactive work but reactive work is the main action to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector. About 300 cases are investigated per year and appropriate action is taken. In 2017/18, 45 homes were improved to the Decent Homes standard, 130 homes required enforcement action of some type, 9 HMOs are currently licensed, with more expected due to changes in legislation, and 111 empty homes were returned to use.
- Recognising the links between housing and health, the Staying Put services provide flexible and person-centred Home Improvement Agency Services. In 2017/18 they provided advice to over 2,000 people, completed 160 Disabled Facilities Grants, over 1,000 Handyperson jobs, 270 health and safety assessments to identify and remedy hazards, facilitated over 130 hospital discharges and prevented over 550 potential falls. This low level preventative work has a huge impact on people's quality of life and provides savings to health and social care budgets preventing or delaying the need for more institutional forms of care.

Strategic objective for the delivery plan:

- Improve private sector housing conditions and management practices, helping older, disabled and vulnerable people to live in safe, adapted homes, through a range of initiatives within resources.

Delivering the Strategy

A delivery plan has been developed for this Strategy (pages 15 – 21). It is intended to be a live document, with the flexibility to deliver in a responsive way against the priorities.

It will be reviewed annually to identify any new opportunities and ensure our approach achieves the most effective outcomes.

Along with the existing Housing Services budget additional funding has been invested in staffing. Business cases will be explored in order to accelerate affordable homes and inform investment decisions. External funding will be sourced to ensure that delivery opportunities are maximised in Swale.

Performance Monitoring

Key Data Indicators have been selected to ascertain performance of the delivery of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. These are based upon data that is readily available to the team. They will be chosen to ensure a golden thread between this strategy, the Corporate Plan and Housing Service plans. A focus will be on customer satisfaction, early intervention and proactive approaches to homelessness.

Priority One – Deliver affordable homes

- No. of affordable homes negotiated/planned
- No. of affordable housing completions

Priority Two – Preventing Homelessness

- % of customers who rated the customer service as positive
- % of households who secured accommodation for 6+ months when prevention duty ended.
- % of households who secured accommodation at end of relief duty
- No. of rough sleepers identified at annual rough sleeper count /estimate.

Priority Two – Reducing the need for emergency and temporary accommodation

- No. of households in temporary accommodation at end of each quarter.
- No. of households in Bed or Breakfast or shared facilities
- No. of new households in temporary accommodation this quarter
- No. of households moved out of temporary accommodation this quarter.
- No. of lettings through the Housing Register per quarter
- % of Housing Register lets by band

Priority Four – Improving conditions in existing homes

- % of long-term empty properties brought back into use
- % of enforcement cases closed with positive outcome
- % of DFG grant allocated
- No. of homes brought up to the decent homes standard
- No. of cases completed by Home Improvement Agency that allow residents to stay in their house safely.

Delivery Plan 2019 – 2023

Priority One: Deliver affordable homes				
Objective	Action	Resource Requirement	Lead Officer	Timescales
1. Develop a borough wide approach to invest in and deliver affordable homes (with a focus on social rent);	1.1. Seek opportunities where the Council can intervene in the market to increase affordable housing in the borough.	Officer Time / Investment	Strategic Housing / Planning Policy	March 2020
	1.2. Develop the housing offer in Swale by delivering a range of affordable homes that meet a range of incomes and needs.	Officer Time		March 2023
	1.3. Maximise opportunities for Swale through Homes England Strategic partnerships and Housing Infrastructure Funding.	Officer Time		Quarterly Review
	1.4. Work proactively with KCC, RP's, developers and planning to deliver schemes to support its Accommodation Strategy for older people and other 'groups' (LD, Mental Health etc.) to ensure need is met.	Officer Time		Quarterly Review
	1.5. Support initiatives emanating from the Community Led Housing Fund in our rural communities.	CLH Funding		Quarterly Review
	1.6. Work with owners to bring back into use long-term empty properties.	Officer Time	PS Housing Manager	Quarterly Review

Priority Two: Preventing Homelessness

Objective	Action	Resource Requirement	Lead Officer	Timescales
2. Promote early intervention and a more customer focussed homeless prevention service	2.1. Promote the Housing Options service through the website and social media to encourage early access to the service.	Officer Time	Housing Options Manager	Dec 2019
	2.2. Review the current customer process from end to end and ensure effective and consistent delivery (including effective use of Locata).	Officer Time		Dec 2019
	2.3. Explore co-location opportunities with partner agencies to improve access to the service for residents.	Office Time		March 2020
	2.4. Develop a prevention first approach within the Housing Options Team through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a prevention protocol • Developing a prevention toolkit, especially focusing on parental, end of tenancy evictions and caravan park homes. • Evaluate current pilot initiatives (e.g. Landlord Introduction Scheme) • Create a dedicated prevention and outreach team 	Officer Time / Prevention budget		Dec 2019
3. Develop and enhance the partnership approach to tackling	3.1. Establish a Housing Forum to enhance joint working on homelessness and rough sleeping projects.	Officer Time	Housing Options Manager	Sept 2019
	3.2. Promote and monitor referrals through the duty to refer and commitment to refer mechanisms to ensure	Officer Time		Quarterly Review

homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.	<p>that homeless prevention is a priority with partner agencies.</p> <p>3.3. Develop a response to rough sleeping in Swale, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review response to SWEP • Bid to government for resources through Rough Sleeping Initiative • Develop an enhanced outreach service • Work with the voluntary sector to increase provision for night shelters and support. 	Officer Time / RSI Funding		Nov 2019
Priority Three: Reducing the need for emergency and temporary accommodation				
Objective	Action	Resource Requirement	Lead Officer	Timescales
4. Prevent the need for and length of time spent in temporary accommodation	<p>4.1 Work with the social housing sector to identify properties suitable for move-on accommodation for those in temporary accommodation.</p> <p>4.2 Review the Housing Allocations Policy to ensure it maximises opportunities for those in most need to access social housing.</p> <p>4.3 Work with the private rented sector to overcome the barriers for residents to access their accommodation.</p>	<p>Officer Time</p> <p>Officer Time</p> <p>Officer Time</p>	Housing Options Manager	<p>Quarterly Review</p> <p>March 2020</p> <p>Quarterly</p>

	<p>4.4 Review current arrangements for the provision of emergency and temporary accommodation in order to eradicate the use of B&B and Shared Accommodation for families by end of 2019.</p> <p>4.5 Lobby to address the root cause and policy issues in relation to the housing market that are impacting on homelessness in Swale.</p>	<p>Officer Time</p> <p>Officer / Member Time</p>		<p>Review Dec 2019</p> <p>Quarterly Review</p>
5. Ensure support is available for vulnerable households	<p>5.1 Engage with the new providers of Adult and Young People KCC commissioned services for homelessness, to ensure integration with Swale Services.</p> <p>5.2 Work with Social Services and Early Help to provide Housing advice and support to reduce homelessness for young people.</p> <p>5.3 Inform and engage with commissioned services for Substance misuse, Mental Health and Domestic abuse services to ensure our residents receive the right support.</p> <p>5.4 Commit to the armed forces covenant to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families are treated fairly.</p>	<p>Officer time</p> <p>Officer Time</p> <p>Officer Time</p> <p>Officer Time</p>	Housing Options Manager	<p>Quarterly Review</p> <p>Quarterly Review</p> <p>Quarterly Review</p> <p>Quarterly Review</p>

Priority Four: Improving conditions in existing homes

Objective	Action	Resource Requirement	By Who	By When
<p>6. Improve private sector housing conditions and management practices including helping older, disabled and vulnerable people to live in safe adapted homes through a range of initiatives within resources</p>	<p>6.1. Target enforcement action on the worst private rented sector properties and licensable HMO's to improve living conditions within the private rented sector</p>	<p>Officer Time</p>	<p>Private Sector Housing Manager</p>	<p>Quarterly Review</p>
	<p>6.2. Work in partnership to improve energy efficiency within homes</p>	<p>Officer Time</p>		<p>Quarterly Review</p>
	<p>6.3. Promote the Landlord Forum in partnership with Housing Options, holding events twice a year</p>	<p>Officer Time</p>		<p>Quarterly Review</p>
	<p>6.4. Review use of Better Care Funding in relation is disabled grants to maximise its use</p>	<p>Officer Time / BCF</p>		<p>Quarterly Review</p>
	<p>6.5. Promote Disabled Facilities Grants by working in partnership with agencies/ organisations to enable individuals to live independently in their own homes</p>	<p>Officer Time/ DFG</p>		<p>Quarterly Review</p>
	<p>6.6. Promote HIA, home safety checks, preventative work on falls preventions, hospital discharge and admissions</p>	<p>Officer Time</p>		<p>Quarterly Review</p>
	<p>6.7. Explore selective licencing schemes in Swale</p>	<p>Officer Time</p>		<p>Quarterly Review</p>

