

23 November 2021 at 7.00 pm

Council Chamber, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks

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# Housing & Health Advisory Committee

## Presentations

	Pages	Contact
6. Progress on Digital Inclusion	(Pages 1 - 10)	Kelly Webb Tel: 01732227474
7. Homelessness Update - Quarter 2	(Pages 11 - 26)	Rebecca Wilcox Tel: 01732227272

If you wish to obtain further factual information on any of the agenda items listed above, please contact the named officer prior to the day of the meeting.

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# Digital Exclusion



October 2021

# Digital Exclusion and Inclusion



- Digital inclusion is about ensuring everyone has access and the skills to use the Internet and digital technologies. Digitally excluded people can lack skills, confidence, and motivation, along with having limited or no access to equipment and connectivity.
- Two socio-demographic groupings of those most likely to be digitally excluded have been previously identified (**‘mature and older people’** and **‘working age on low incomes’**).
- In Sevenoaks District, 16.8% of households are classified as ‘mature and older people’ (21.9% for KCC) and 8.0% of households are classified as ‘working age on low incomes’ (15.9% for KCC).

# In Sevenoaks District...



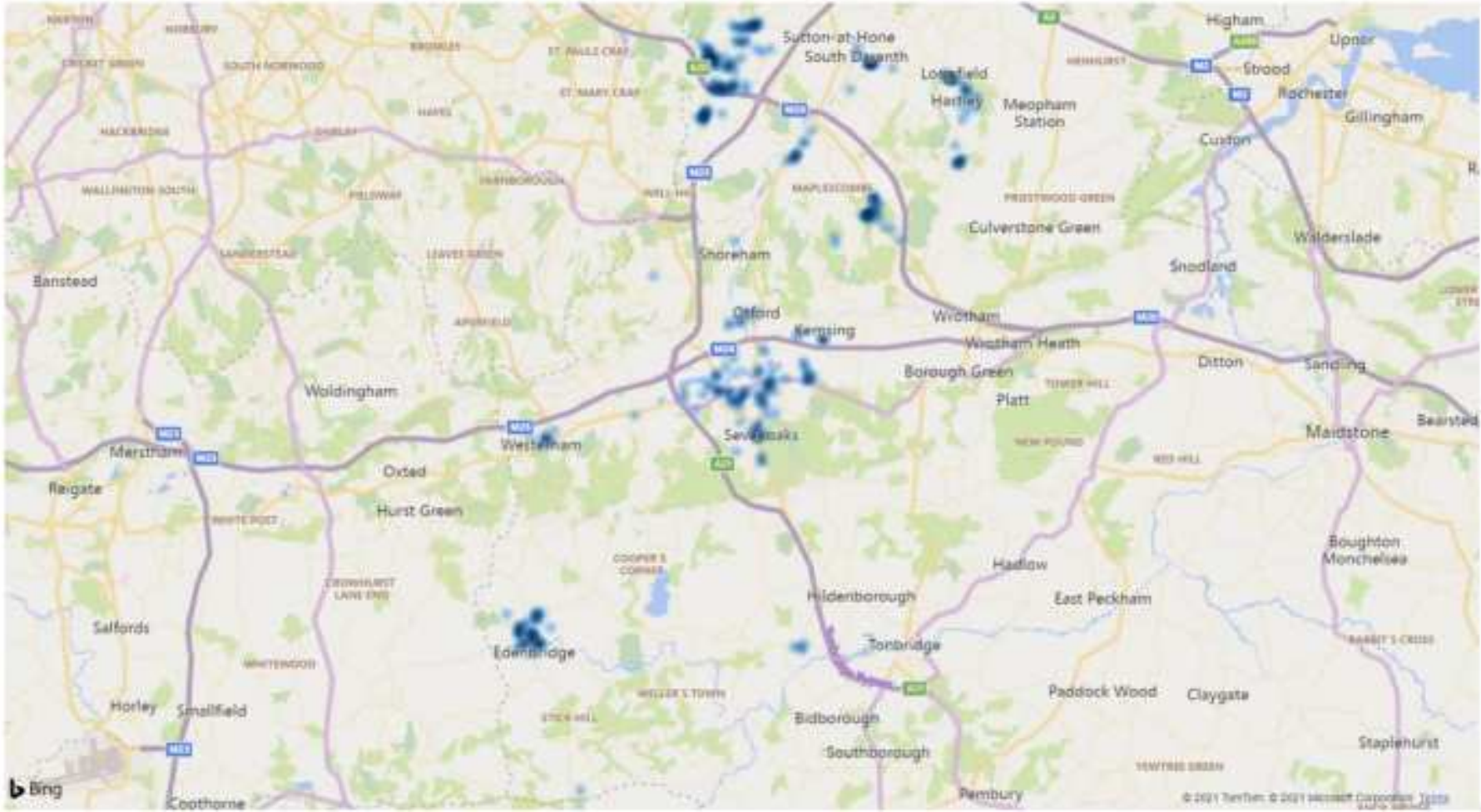
- 20% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are classified as one of the four digitally excluded profiles according to the Internet User Classification. This is a significantly lower proportion of LSOAs than Kent overall (46%).
- 0% of LSOAs in Sevenoaks are in the 10% most likely to be digitally excluded neighbourhoods in Kent.
- The average LSOA digital inclusion score is significantly lower than for Kent (41.58 vs 49.32) with fewer LSOAs in the most likely to be digitally excluded.
- 40.6% of LSOAs are categorised in the most likely to digitally access the Census (equivalent to the UK).
- The average proportion of households who use the Internet less than every day for LSOAs is 9.4%, which is significantly lower than for Kent.
  - Interestingly, around 40% households in one LSOA in Sevenoaks are likely to not use the Internet every day as compared to 0% of households in another LSOA in the same district, highlighting the marked disparity in Internet use within the district.

# Broadband

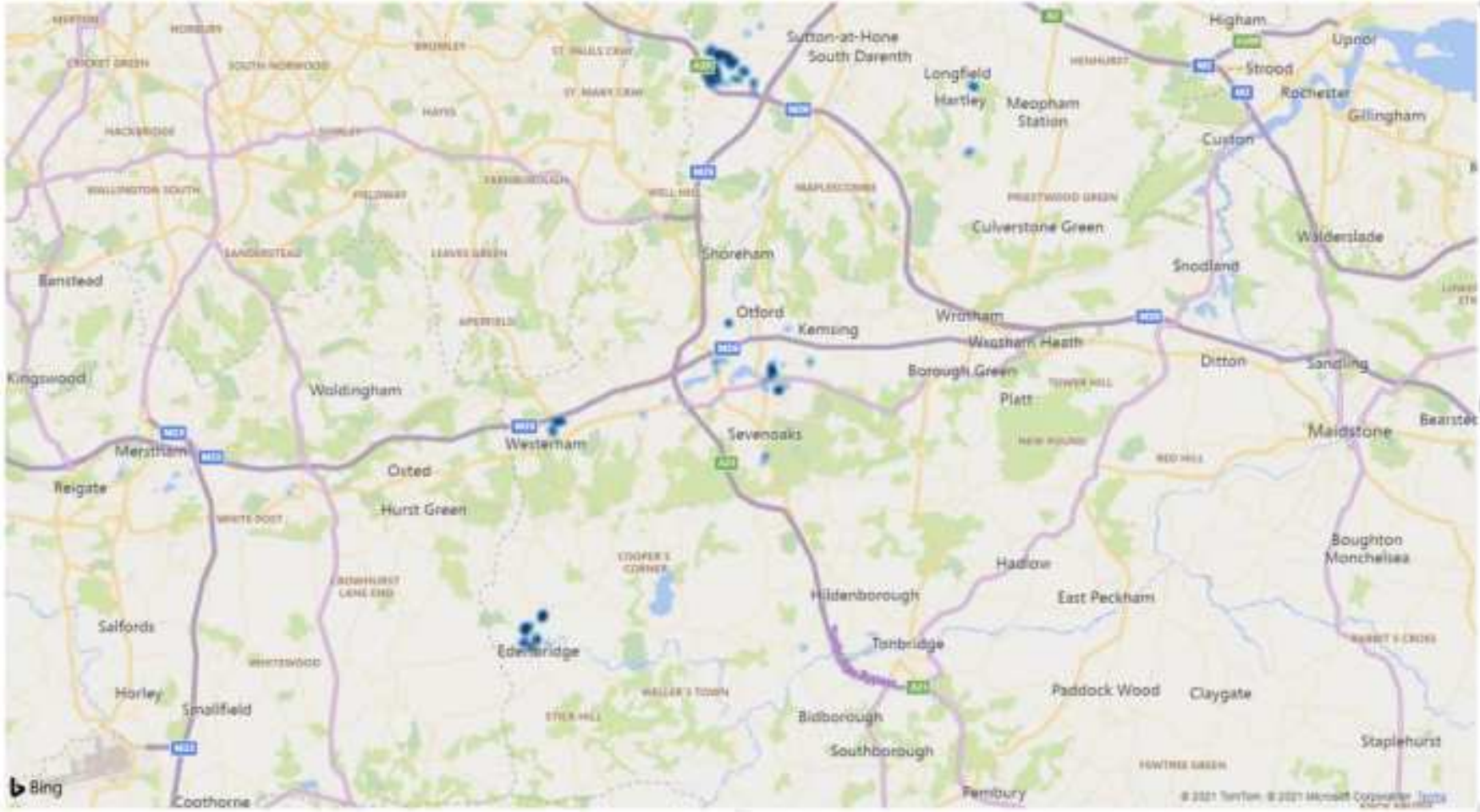


- The average broadband speed per LSOA is 56.26Mbps, which is significantly lower than Kent (66Mbps).
- There is a clear divide between rural and urban LSOAs with urban LSOAs receiving an average broadband speed of 61.6Mbps and rural LSOAs receiving an average broadband speed of 49.3Mbps.
- The average proportion of households per LSOA with poor broadband is 0.5%, which is consistent with Kent (0.5%).
- **There are less digitally excluded populations in Sevenoaks as compared to Kent. However, broadband speeds could be a potential issue, particularly in rural areas.**
- **There are also disparities in digital inclusion across different areas in Sevenoaks.**

# Household clusters - mature and older people

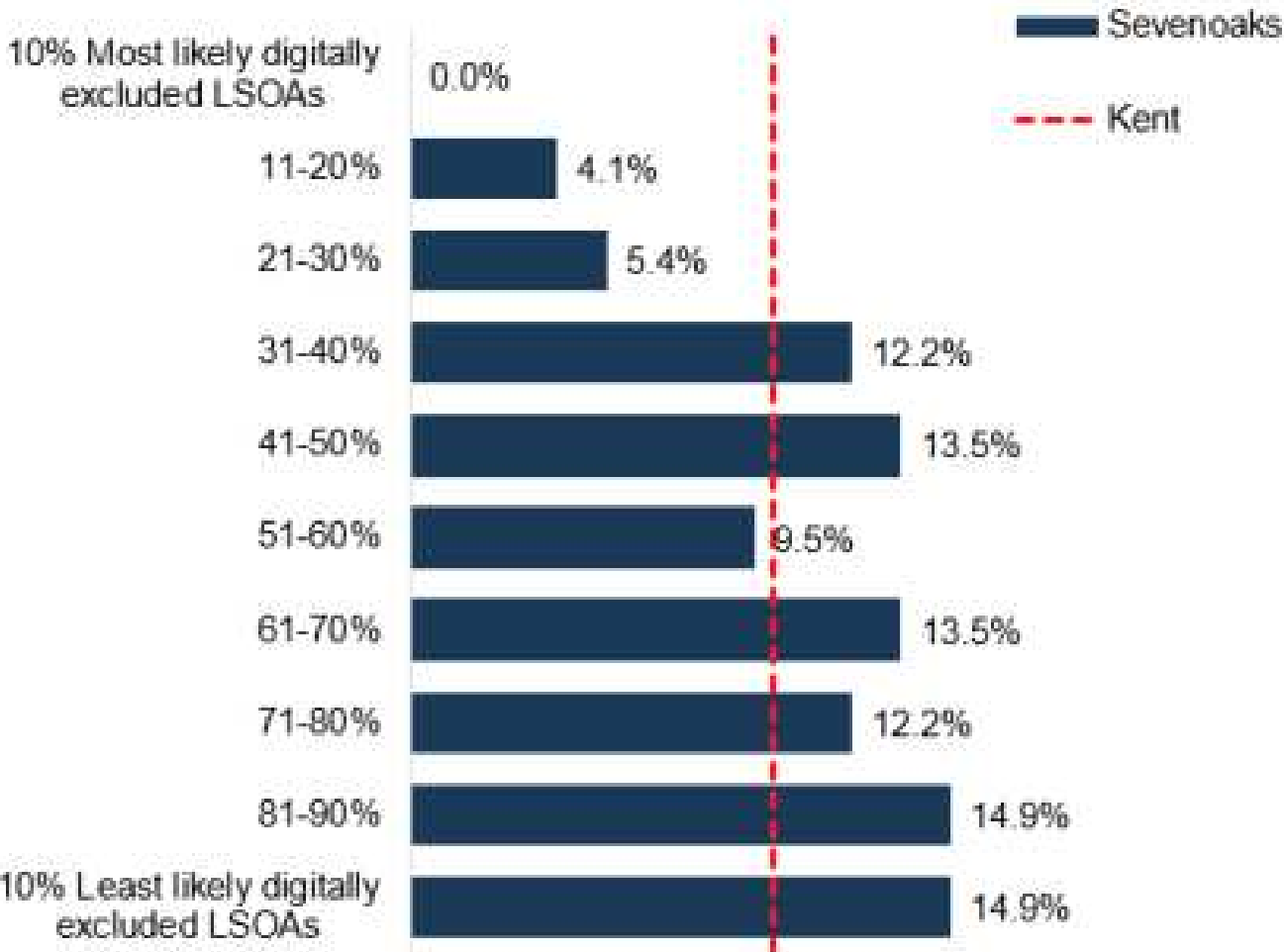


# Household clusters - working age on low income





# Proportion of LSOAs in Sevenoaks in each digital exclusion decile



# Digital inclusion - actions



- Working with Sam Lain-Rose, KCC Digital Lead to understand Sevenoaks District digital exclusion profile and explore project and funding support.
- Secured £10k and match funding from WKHA to develop a partnership project with Compaid to support our customers with digital support needs through the provision of devices, data and training. A dedicated Digital Trainer has been appointed by Compaid and is supporting WKHA customers. This pilot project is due to end on 31 March 2022.
- Secured £79k funding to deliver a bespoke project in partnership with Compaid to support some of our most vulnerable homeless customers, who would like to be able to access online services (e.g. GP, addiction and mental health services, Universal Credit and other support net).

# Digital inclusion - actions



- Submitted funding bids for over £1m to UK Community Renewal Fund and KCC Helping Hands towards a Community Hub project in Swanley to support 18-24 year NEETs, which includes a digital inclusion support element.
- Adopted as a priority for Sevenoaks District Local Strategic Partnership and its Community Wellbeing Fund – 3 local projects have been supported and funded this year.
- Delivering digital training and information support in partnership with Compaid as part of Silver Sunday Week in October.
- Working with Kent County Council, who have been awarded funding to deliver Government’s ‘Project Gigabit’ Programme aimed at improving local broadband connectivity to up to 122,000 premises across the county, notably rural areas.

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# Homelessness Quarter 2 position statement October 2021

# Homelessness Reduction Act 2017



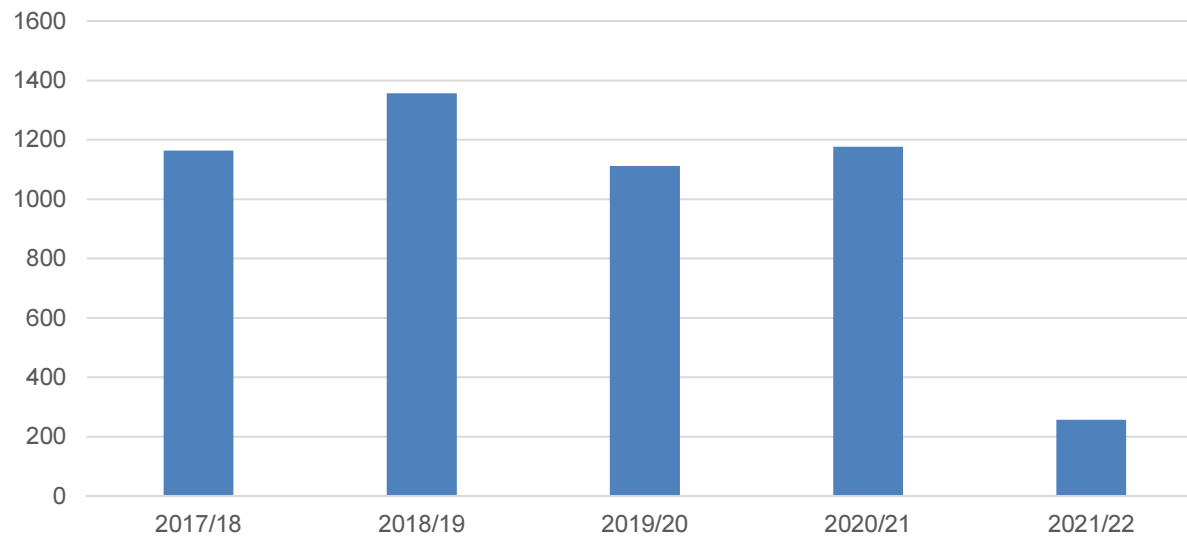
- Most significant change in homelessness legislation
- New approach to tackling homelessness
  - To expand the provision of advice and information about homelessness with prevention and relief of homelessness as a primary focus
  - Extending the period of “threatened homelessness” for households from twenty eight to fifty six days and allow earlier intervention
  - New duties to both prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people [irrespective of their priority need or any issues of intentional homelessness]
  - Tailored assessment and Personalised Housing Plan [PHP], setting out actions that local authorities and clients need to take to secure alternative accommodation
  - Encouraging public bodies and agencies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a new legal “duty to refer”

# Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 - implementation



- Implementation April 2018
  - Report presented to the Housing & Health Advisory Committee in September 2018
  - Highlighted key implications and challenges
  - Most significant impact on approaches

Approaches per annum



# Reasons for a rise in homelessness - post April 2018



- The continued impact of the HRA, placing the additional new duties on the local authority including *duty to refer*
- Welfare reform and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) caps
- Lack of affordable housing supply
  - High competition for private rented housing
  - Increased rental costs
  - Increase housing market prices
  - Reduction in new build delivery
- New Buy-to-Let tax rules impacted the private rented market
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021



# Reasons for a rise in homelessness - Covid-19



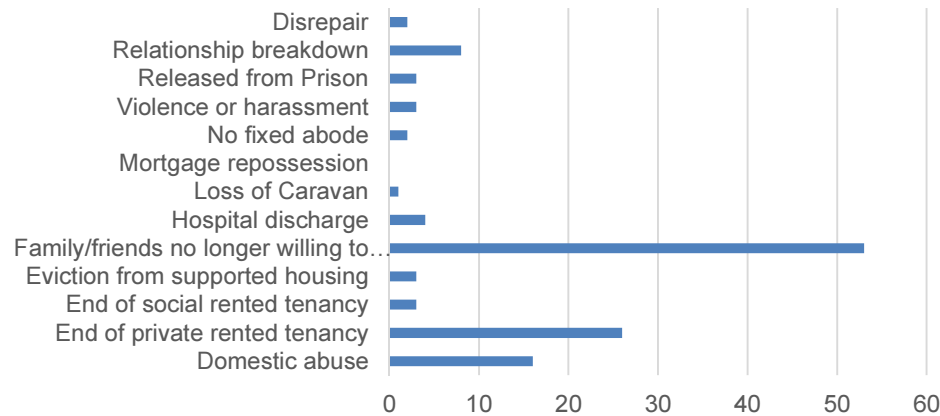
- Covid-19 hit the service hard and had a substantial impact on residents in the District leading to increased levels of homelessness.
- At short notice, following the announcement of a national emergency on 23 March 2020, the Government required rough sleepers or those threatened by rough sleeping to be housed under the “Everyone In” policy.
- Single homelessness - in part attributable to not being able to ‘sofa surf’ between family and friends
- Eviction ban and extension to notice period
- Family and friends now longer will to accommodation
- Funding restrictions/ending

# Homelessness statistics



- HERO support - 2020/21- 594 customers including KCC Covid-19 referrals (£90,755 worth of arrears cleared) 2021/22 - 411 customers to end of quarter 2.
- Increase applications to our housing waiting list - 352 April 2019 - 881 September 2021(250% increase in 30 months)
- Temporary accommodation - consistent supply (46 average)
- Under ‘Everyone In’ which ran between March 2020 - June 2021, the Council was approached for assistance by 73 individuals resulting in 65 being offered emergency accommodation. 13 have remained with a full duty accepted.

Emergency & temporary accommodation placement reasons (August 2021)



# Homeless Prevention Team - new challenges

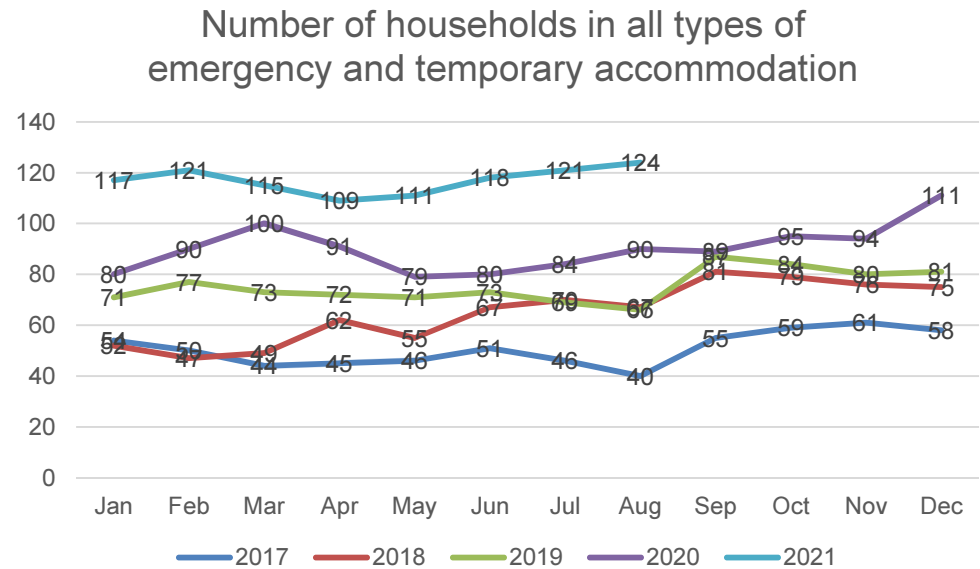
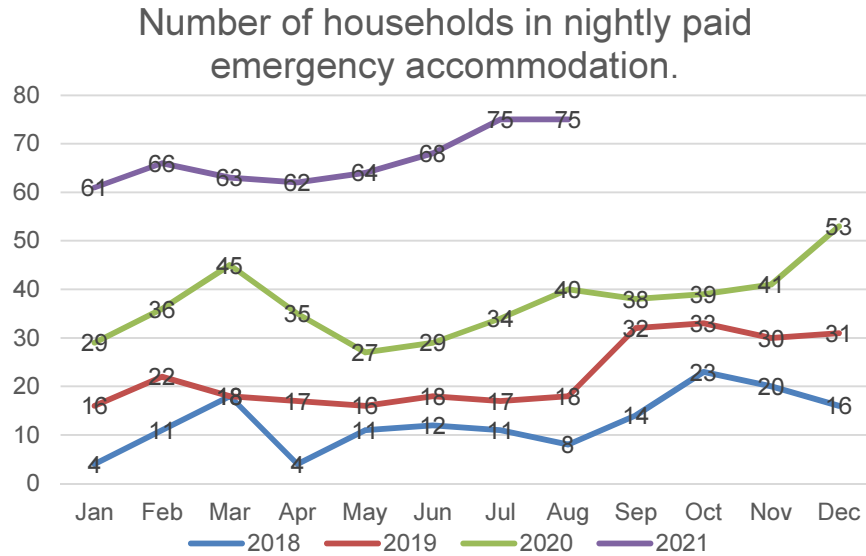


- Eviction ban lifting and “standard” notice period returned
- End of furlough - 30 September 2021
- End of Universal Credit uplift
- Increasing cost of utilities
- Rough Sleeper Action plan (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - DLHC)
- Reduction in the use of emergency accommodation (nightly paid)
- Increased approaches due to the new Domestic Abuse Act
- Increased approaches of customers with complex/multiple issues
- Lack of ongoing Government funding to support additional pressures and costs of homelessness (accommodation/staffing)

# Impact of Homelessness Reduction Act - Emergency & Temporary Accommodation



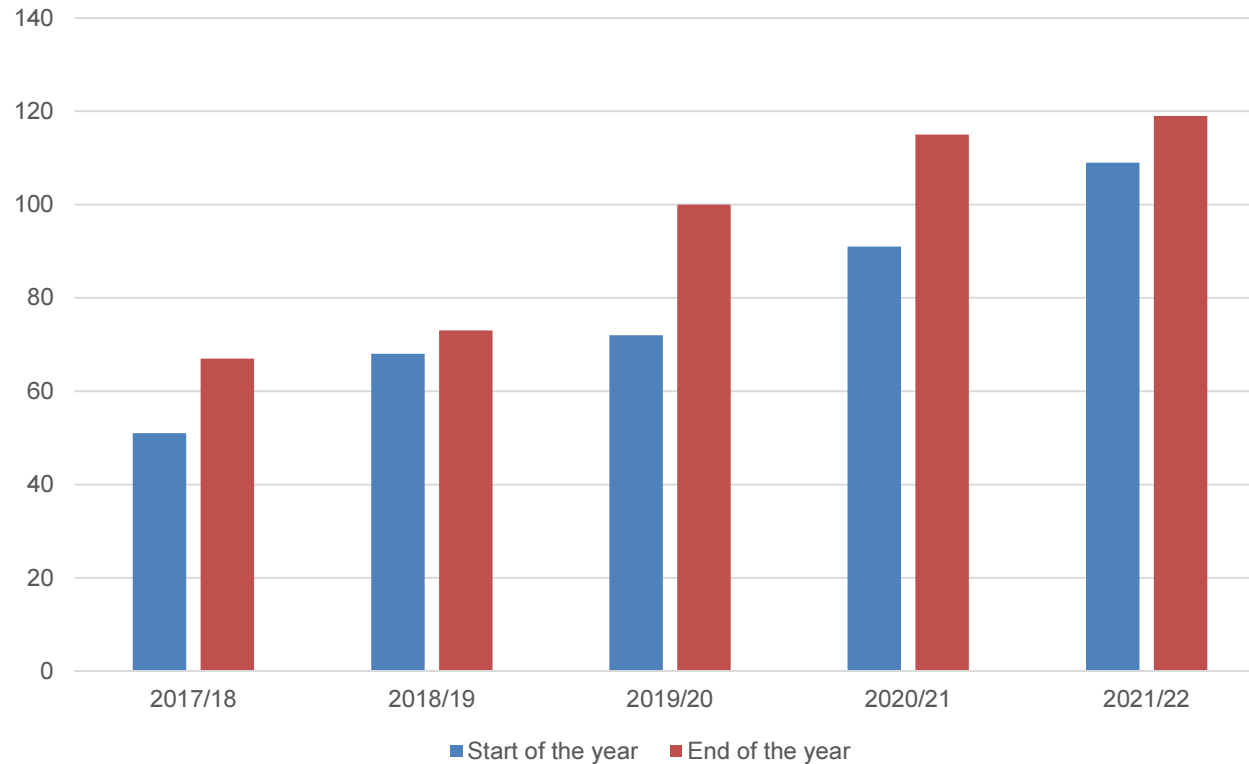
- Increase in emergency accommodation (nightly paid)



# Emergency & Temporary Accommodation



Temporary Accommodation Figures at the start and end of each financial year (2017-2022)



- Placement assessment
- Charging schedule for nightly paid placements

# Actions & achievements



- Restructure - live from January 2021
- Senior appointments - Homelessness Prevention Manager (November 2020), Head of Housing (March 2021) and Housing Strategy Manager (September 2021)
- Creation of a holistic homelessness prevention and support service - HERO, Housing Advice & Accommodation Services Team
- Holistic approach to homelessness to respond to the HRA - prevent, intervene and recover
- Homeless Prevention Team workshops hosted
- Temporary Accommodation Action Plan implemented
- Triage service launched - early intervention & assessment
- All temporary accommodation/emergency accommodation placements assessed against the HRA and sign off by senior managers
- Staff training programme in place

# Actions & achievements



- HRA Assessment Framework introduced
- Bid/grant applications to support the delivery of the service
- Yoti - verified electronic signature app to support new customer declaration, consent & authorisation form launched
- Review process in place for reclaiming of housing benefit
- Launch of our Voluntary Relocation Scheme & Family Incentive
- Quercus Housing Business Plan updated to allow prudential borrowing via the Council
- 37 Vine Court Road - joint supported housing accommodation with West Kent Housing Association (WKHA), Kent County Council commissioning (KCC) & Look Ahead (commissioned homelessness support services)
- Virtual engagement event with local letting agents and landlords
- Re-branded private rented sector offer - Help to Let
- New Help2Rent rent guarantee insurance policy
- Increased funding contribution from WKHA for our HERO service
- Launched Digital Inclusion project in partnership with Compaid

# Pipeline projects



- Delivery of 37 Vine Court Road
- Delivery of the District's first Housing-Led project at Orchard Close
- Implementation of our nightly rental and occupation charging schedule
- Handover of 11-13 High Street, Swanley (Quercus Housing)
- Progress purchase of Abbey Court, West Kingsdown (QH)
- Launch of our new private sector offer - Help to Let
- Expansion of our HERO team - HERO+ officers
- Procurement of private sector accommodation including emergency accommodation
- Revision of the Council's Homelessness Strategy and Allocations Policy
- Develop Empty Homes Action Plan
- Explore the feasibility of a Council-led Social Lettings Agency.
- Review of Council land assets - potential affordable housing delivery



# Pipeline projects



- Work with local churches to provide winter accommodation (when SWEP is triggered) as an alternative to temporary accommodation
- Review website to encourage self-help to resolve housing issues, noting that elsewhere where this has been undertaken a 25% drop in footfall and calls to respective call centres has been seen
- Develop suite of customer 'factsheets' to provide support and guidance
- Smarter use of data to support early intervention
- Work with Customer Solutions to understand the top 5 customer requests for housing and how we can address these to reduce customer demand
- Review the viability for the Council to provide its own emergency accommodation
- Develop Business Plan for the purchase of TA at The Rosary (QH)

# Financial income



- Homeless Prevention Grant 2021/22 **£434,897**
- Rough Sleeper Initiative 4 - **£293,742** (31.03.22)
- Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme - **£233,175** including £57,675 capital funding for WKHA
- Accommodation for ex-Offenders - **£67,000** (31.03.22)
- Helping Hands - **£65,000**
- Kent Housing Group joint COMF bid- **£175,000** (31.03.22)
- Housing benefit income - LHA rate at 90% of 2011 levels (approximately 38% of gross cost of nightly paid)
- Charging schedule (nightly paid) **£36,000** per annum

# Risks

- Resources
  - Financial - grant allocation under the Homeless Prevention Grant for 2022/23
  - Nightly paid rates for emergency accommodation (approximately 38% recoverable via housing benefit)
  - Staff - staff levels will reduce significantly - 6.6 FTE (1 x FTE triage officer, 2 x FTE housing advice officers, 1 x 0.6 FTE domestic abuse co-ordinator, 1 x FTE HERO (Covid) are contracted to 31.03.22. 1 x FTE HERO+ officer until 31.08.22 and 3 x FTE Rough Sleeper support officers 30.06.22)
  - The homeless prevention team have worked tirelessly over the last 18 months on significantly reduced staff for long periods of time (long term sickness of 2.6 FTE) and recruitment issues.
- Continuing demand for nightly paid accommodation in Kent resulting in procurement issues
- Housing benefit income rates
- Affordability of the private rented sector
- Affect of the removal of the UC uplift and furlough
- Available housing via the housing register - low void turnaround or lack of lettings chains

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