

I hereby summon you to attend the Annual meeting of the Sevenoaks District Council to be held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks commencing at 7.00 pm on 18 October 2011 to transact the under-mentioned business.



Chief Executive

AGENDA

Apologies for absence

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 26 July 2011 (Pages 1 - 6)
2. To receive any additional declarations of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda for this meeting. (Pages 7 - 10)
3. Chairman's Announcements
4. To receive any petitions submitted by members of the public.
5. Matters considered by the Cabinet and/or other committees: (Pages 11 - 116)
 - (a) West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016 (Cabinet – 15 September 2011) (Pages 11 - 116)
 - (b) Proposed Changes to Staff Terms and Conditions (Cabinet – 15/9/11 & 13/10/11 – Services Select Committee – 20/9/11)
 - (c) Review of IT Allowances/Provision of Computers for Members (Modern Local Government Group – 6 October 2011)
6. To consider the following reports from the Chief Executive or other Directors on matters requiring the attention of Council: (Pages 117 - 120)
 - (a) Appointments to the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors (Pages 117 - 120)
7. To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the

Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

8. To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.
9. To receive the report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting. (Pages 121 - 124)
10. To receive a report from the Chairmen of the Select Committees on the work of the Committees since the last Council meeting. (Pages 125 - 128)
11. To receive a report from the Chairman of the Performance and Governance Committee on the work of the Committee since the last Council meeting.

(to follow)

To assist in the speedy and efficient despatch of business, Members wishing to obtain factual information on items included on the Agenda are asked to enquire of the appropriate Director or Contact Officer named on a report prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you require a copy of this agenda or any of the reports listed on it in another format please do not hesitate to contact the Democratic Services Team as set out below.

For any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact:

The Democratic Services Team (01732 227241)

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Sevenoaks District Council
held on 26 July 2011 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Mrs D Morris (Chairman)

Cllr. L Abraham, Cllr. Mrs B Ayres, Cllr. L Ayres, Cllr. L Ball,
Cllr. I Bosley, Cllr. Mrs E Bracken, Cllr. R Brookbank, Cllr M Butler,
Cllr. Ms I Chetram, Cllr. P Cooke, Cllr Mrs J Davison,
Cllr. R J Davison, Cllr. Mrs A Dawson, Cllr. C Dibsall, Cllr. M Dickins,
Cllr. J Edwards-Winsor, Cllr. A Eyre, Cllr. Mrs A Firth, Cllr. M Fittock,
Cllr. P Fleming, Cllr J Gaywood, Cllr. Mrs A George, Cllr. J Grint,
Cllr. R Hogarth, Cllr. Mrs A Hunter, Cllr Ms M Lowe, Cllr. K Maskell,
Cllr. P McGarvey, Cllr. Mrs F Parkin, Cllr. A Pett, Cllr. R Piper,
Cllr. Mrs E Purves, Cllr. B Ramsey, Cllr. Mrs J Sargeant,
Cllr. J Scholey, Cllr. Miss L Stack, Cllr. J Thornton, Cllr. P Towell,
Cllr. J Underwood and Cllr. R Walshe

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. K S Bayley,
Cllr. Mrs P Bosley, Cllr. C Brown, Cllr. C Clark, Cllr. Mrs C Clark,
Cllr. M Horwood, Cllr. J London, Cllr. R Orridge, Cllr. S Raikes,
Cllr. T Searles and Cllr. G Williamson

PRAYERS

Canon Paul Francis led the Council in prayers

14. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 24 MAY 2011.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council held on 24 May 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members declarations of interest at meetings from 19 March to 5 July 2011 were noted.

Cllrs. Mrs Dawson, Mrs Parkin, Pett, Piper and Underwood declared a personal interest in agenda item 5(a), Funding to Support the Paralympic Cycling Event, as they are members of the Sevenoaks District Access Group. Cllr. McGarvey and Cllr. Mrs Parkin declared a personal interest in agenda item 5(a), Funding to Support the Paralympic Cycling Event, as they are members of a liaison group at Brands Hatch.

16. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that in view of Cllr. Orridge's absence she had no announcements to make.

17. TO RECEIVE ANY PETITIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

The Chairman announced that a petition containing 399 signatures had been submitted by Councillor Walshe in the following terms:

“We, the undersigned, call on Sevenoaks District Council not to cease expenditure on their minibus service but to provide the vehicles to other suitable organisations together with adequate finance to continue the service”

The Council was addressed by Mr Andrew Michaelides, a member of the public, who presented the petition to the Council. Mr Michaelides reminded the Council that last autumn a decision had been taken to withdraw the Council minibus service in order to make annual savings of £330,000. He recognised the need for savings to be made but felt that the minibus service provided a vital lifeline for the elderly and infirm who found it difficult to access alternative modes of public transport and was also used to provide evening transport to youth events. Mr Michaelides welcomed the gifting of the minibuses to local organisations but drew attention to alternative proposals for savings that were considered during the budget process which he contested could have also allowed the Council to provide financial support for the minibuses. He explained that Age Concern, Darent Valley had expressed concerns about funding and Age Concern, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and District had refused the opportunity to take on a minibus due to the lack of funding. Mr Michaelides asked the Council to re-consider its decision in the light of the petition.

The Council also heard from Cllr. Walshe who had submitted the petition. Cllr. Walshe endorsed Mr Michaelides comments and reminded the Council of the alternative budget proposals made by his Group during the budget process for 2011/12. He felt that these could be revisited in order to provide funding to support the voluntary organisations in continuing to run the minibuses that had been gifted to them.

In response the Leader of the Council said that he had no intention of re-opening debate on the budget but stressed that one of the reasons that the Council's budget had been set in December was to allow more certainty and time for the Council to work with the voluntary sector about the continuation of these services. It had been his Group's idea to gift the minibuses to appropriate organisations and the feedback that he had had from organisations such as Kent Compaid and Sevenoaks Area MIND were that the service had started well and that there had been good take-up. He explained that the cost of the Council service had been £1,000 per permit holder and that this had not been sustainable. At the time the decision was taken an undertaking had been given that the use of the voluntary sector minibus service would be reviewed and it was the intention that this review would take place in September, although it would probably take a year for the service to become established. This would not be a like-for-like comparison

but a review of the service being delivered at that time.

Cllr. Fleming moved and Cllr Mrs Davison seconded that no action be taken in response to the petition.

Cllr. Mrs Bracken commented that the Council's Petitions Scheme was designed to stop vexatious or repetitious petitions and that the Council had erred on the side of generosity in considering this petition. She felt that this had been misused to re-open debate on the budget and hoped that this would not happen again.

The motion was put to the vote and carried.

Resolved: That no action be taken in response to the petition.

18. MATTERS CONSIDERED BY THE CABINET AND/OR OTHER COMMITTEES:

A. Funding to Support the Paralympic Cycling Event

The Leader advised the Council that the Cabinet had considered requested revenue and capital budget carry forwards at its meeting on 23 June including a request to carry forward funding to support the Paralympic Cycling event being held in the District in 2012. However the Cabinet felt that the request did not meet the criteria for carry forward requests but was nevertheless worthy of support. In view of this it resolved to recommend to the Council that an underspend of £35,000 in the Community Development Budget for 2010/11, made up of an underspend of £10,000 plus additional income of £25,000, should be set aside as an earmarked reserve for this purpose. The Cabinet would monitor any spending proposals from the earmarked reserve.

Cllr. Fleming moved and Cllr. Mrs Davison seconded that the recommendation of the Cabinet held on 23 June 2011 be adopted.

Resolved: That the Council agrees the Cabinet's recommendation that the £35,000 underspend in the Community Development Budget 2010/11 be set aside as an earmarked reserve to support the Paralympic Cycling event"

19. REPORTS FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OR OTHER DIRECTORS ON MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF COUNCIL

A. Appointment of a Council Representative to the Sevenoaks Conservation Council

The Leader of the Council advised that a vacancy in the Council representation on the Sevenoaks Conservation Council had arisen following the Annual meeting as one of the Councillors nominated did not wish to take up the appointment. Councillor Raikes had agreed to fill the vacancy.

Councillor Fleming moved and Councillor Mrs Davison seconded the recommendation in the report which was duly carried.

Resolved: That Councillor Raikes should replace Councillor Towell as one of the Council's representatives on the Sevenoaks Conservation Council for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

20. TO CONSIDER ANY QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER PARAGRAPH 19.3 OF PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION

Councillor Brookbank asked the following question of which notice had been given in accordance with Paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 of the Constitution:

“Could the Leader/Cabinet Member please describe what action the Council is taking to further the installation of disabled facilities at Swanley Station before the Paralympic events taking place at Brands Hatch , for which it is the nominated station.”

The Leader of the Council replied that there was good news on the badly needed improvements to Swanley Railway Station and that £250,000 had been allocated to the station from the Access for All Programme. This funding was in addition to funds already allocated to upgrade the lifts at the station. He referred to an email from Southeastern Railways forwarded to him by Michael Fallon MP which listed the following improvements to be made to the station:

- Two lifts to be installed serving all four platforms. Work to include refurbishment of the stairs and installation of new handrails;
- Commissioning a design review to look at remodelling the main station entrance and ticket office foyer;
- Upgrading existing CCTV to digital technology and installing additional cameras;
- New departure screens to the ticket hall and additional screens to all platforms at the foot of the stairs;
- Complete refurbishment of the toilets on platforms one & two, and three & four including provision of a disabled toilet;
- Additional cycle parking to both station entrances;
- Installation of automatic doors to the main station entrance and platform waiting rooms;
- Six additional sets of seating to platforms one and two;
- A new disabled access ticket office counter;
- Anti-slip flooring in the ticket hall;

- Upgrading lighting in the ticket hall;
- Removal of obsolete cycle lockers within the footbridge;
- New directional signage;
- Provision of electrical and water provision for the retail unit on the footbridge;
- Replacement of the station's plumbing system;
- Refurbishment of waiting rooms to include windows, heating, flooring and repainting.

All works would be completed ahead of the Paralympics.

Members welcomed the proposed work and noted the role that the Sevenoaks District Access Group had played in lobbying for station improvements over a long period of time.

21. TO RECEIVE ANY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC UNDER PARAGRAPH 17 OF PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION.

None were received.

22. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON THE WORK OF THE CABINET SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING.

The Leader of the Council reported on the work that he and the Cabinet had undertaken in the period 24 May to 7 July 2011.

The Leader highlighted the meeting that he had attended at the Ministry of Defence with the Minister, Peter Luff MP, and Michael Fallon MP and Jo Johnson MP to discuss Fort Halstead. The Minister had been clear that jobs at Fort Halstead would disappear but had been very supportive. This was reflected in a letter that he had subsequently sent to the Leader of the Council setting out the issues discussed at the meeting and the support given at the meeting, including an undertaking to assist with dealing with any blockages to efforts to secure new uses for Fort Halstead. The Council would be working very closely with Kent County Council (KCC) and other organisations as a group to do whatever it could to lever-in new jobs and uses for Fort Halstead.

The Leader informed the Council that following the Council's representations over the withdrawal of the Sevenoaks Weald element of the 402 bus route, the bus company had reviewed its decision and would maintain the route whilst looking at the viability of the service. He felt that this illustrated the importance and vulnerability of public transport in rural areas. He also highlighted work that he had been undertaking through the LGA on welfare reform and the universal credit.

In response to a question the Leader clarified the role of the Kent Forum

Ambition Board 2. He explained that the Kent Forum was the new name for the Kent Leaders and CEO's and that the Kent Police and Fire Authorities were also members of the Forum. KCC had established 3 ambitions for Kent and Ambition Board 2, of which he was the Vice-Chairman, was looking at tackling poverty in rural Kent by examining how public services could work together to deal with historic issues.

The Leader announced that Councillor Mrs Davison would be the Deputy Leader of the Council until the Annual Meeting in May 2015.

23. TO RECEIVE A REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMEN OF THE SELECT COMMITTEES ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEES SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING.

The Council received the reports from the Chairmen of the Select Committees as follows:

- Environment Select Committee – 7 June 2011
- Social Affairs Select Committee – 16 June 2011
- Services Select Committee – 21 June 2011

24. TO RECEIVE A REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING.

The Council received the report from the Chairman of the Performance and Governance Committee on the work undertaken by the Committee at its meeting on 28 June 2011.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.39 pm

Chairman

MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS FROM
6 JULY 2011 TO 22 SEPTEMBER 2011

Cllr Mrs. Parkin declared a personal interest in minute item 3, Application for a Premises Licence from The El Matador, 49 London Road, Sevenoaks, as a trustee of Sevenoaks and District Age UK and CHIPS in respect of letters from these organisations tabled by applicants at the meeting. (Licensing Sub-committee – 6.7.11)

Cllrs. Mrs Dawson, Mrs Parkin, Pett, Piper and Underwood declared a personal interest in minute item 18A, Funding to Support the Paralympic Cycling Event, as they are members of the Sevenoaks District Access Group. (Council – 26.7.11)

Cllr. McGarvey and Cllr. Mrs Parkin declared a personal interest in minute item 18A, Funding to Support the Paralympic Cycling Event, as they are members of a liaison group at Brands Hatch. (Council – 26.7.11)

Cllrs. Mrs. Dawson and Piper declared personal interests in item 5.03 – SE/11/00813/FUL 85 Solefields Road, Sevenoaks as dual hatted members of both the District Council and Sevenoaks Town Council. (Development Control Committee – 28.7.11)

Cllr. Brookbank declared a personal interest in item 5.04 - SE/11/01506/TELNOT Proposed Telecommunications Mast North West of Junction with London Road, Shurlock Avenue, Swanley as a dual hatted member of both the District Council and Swanley Town Council but clarified that he was not a member of Swanley Town Council's Development Control Committee. (Development Control Committee – 28.7.11)

Cllr. Underwood declared a personal interest in item 5.04 - SE/11/01506/TELNOT Proposed Telecommunications Mast North West of Junction with London Road, Shurlock Avenue, Swanley as a dual hatted member of both the District Council and Swanley Town Council. He added that he lived in close proximity to the site but that this was not prejudicial. (Development Control Committee – 28.7.11)

Cllr. McGarvey declared an interest in item 6.01 310/05/085: Four Winds, Farley Common, Westerham because of the strong views which he voiced last time it was discussed. (Development Control Committee – 28.7.11)

Cllr. Parry declared a personal interest in minute item 9, Localism Bill and the Future Code of Conduct, as he had been discussing the content of the Localism Bill with the Minister of State for Communities and Local Government. However these discussions mostly concerned the powers and finances for Councils, not Codes of Conduct or Standards Committees. (Standards Committee - 2.8.11)

Cllrs. Abraham and Ramsay declared personal and prejudicial interests in item 5.01 SE/11/01112/FUL: Meopham Cricket Club, Manor Road, Longfield as dual hatted members of both the District Council and Hartley Parish Council. Hartley Parish Council had a financial interest in the land because Meopham Cricket Club paid rent to the Parish Council for it. Both Members withdrew from the room after they had spoken to the item. (Development Control Committee – 25.8.11)

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Cllr. Williamson declared a personal interest in item 5.02 – SE/11/01282/FUL: 1 The Stables, Halstead Place, Halstead because he used to live next to Halstead Place. (Development Control Committee – 25.8.11)

Councillor Fittock declared a personal interest in the reports under consideration at the meeting as a member of Swanley Town Council. (Local Development Framework Advisory Group – 7.9.11)

Councillor Mrs Davison and Councillor Davison declared a personal Interest in the reports under consideration at the meeting as members of Edenbridge Town Council. (Local Development Framework Advisory Group – 7.9.11)

Cllr. Mrs. Cook declared a personal interest in minute item 15, Helping Communities to Feel Safe and Be safe, as she is the Chairman of West Kent Mediation. (Social Affairs Select Committee – 8.9.11)

Cllr. Brazier declared a personal interest in minute item 4, Presentation of a Petition regarding Road Safety around Fawkham Church of England Primary School, as it was in his division and that he was called on occasion to advise the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste in his capacity as his Deputy. (Sevenoaks Joint transportation Board – 14.9.11)

Cllr Edwards-Winsler declared a personal interest in minute item 5, Proposed Parking Restrictions in Otford – Part 2, as he is a Member of the affected Ward. (Sevenoaks Joint transportation Board – 14.9.11)

Cllr. Mrs. Parkin declared a personal interest in minute item 17, Housing Services Update, and minute item 18, In-depth Scrutiny – Under Occupation of Social Housing, as she had relatives in both social housing and on benefits. (Services Select Committee - 20.9.11)

Cllr. Brown declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 5.02 SE/11/01125/FUL: Land Adjacent, 1 Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks as a local resident of Plymouth Drive. He withdrew from the room for the rest of the item after he had spoken to it. (Development Control Committee – 22.9.11)

Cllrs. Mrs. Dawson and Piper declared personal interests in items 5.02 SE/11/01125/FUL: Land Adjacent, 1 Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks and 5.04 SE/11/01594/FUL: 41 Buckhurst Avenue, Sevenoaks as dual hatted members of both the District Council and Sevenoaks Town Council. Cllr. Piper also knew the applicant of item 5.02. (Development Control Committee – 22.9.11)

Cllr. Ms. Lowe declared a personal interest in item 5.06 SE/11/01268/FUL: Land at Old Parsonage House, High Street, Farningham as her partner, Kent County Councillor Gough had written in support of the application. She had not discussed the matter with him. (Development Control Committee – 22.9.11)

Cllr. McGarvey declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 5.06 SE/11/01268/FUL: Land at Old Parsonage House, High Street, Farningham as a Member of the Parish Council and an elected member of the Parochial Church Council of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church, Farningham. The Parish Council and the Church Council had financial interests in the land as potential recipients of a gift of the proposed community room. He withdrew from the room after he had spoken to

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the item. (Development Control Committee – 22.9.11)

Cllr. Williamson declared personal interests in item 5.03 SE/11/01510/FUL: Station Court, Sevenoaks Road, Halstead from prior knowledge of the applicants. (Development Control Committee – 22.9.11)

COUNCIL –18 OCTOBER 2011

WEST KENT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2011-16

Report of the: Director of Community and Planning Services

Also considered by: Cabinet – 15 September 2011

Status: For Decision

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of:

- (a) The Vision for Balanced Communities;
- (b) The Sustainable Community Action Plan; and
- (c) Housing Strategy.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Carol Clark

Head of Service Head of Housing and Communications – Mrs. Pat Smith

Recommendation: That it be RESOLVED that Members adopt the WKHS as District Council policy.

Reason for recommendation: to form the strategic document to guide the direction of the District Council's homelessness service and to minimise homelessness in the Sevenoaks District and across West Kent.

Introduction

- 1 The Homelessness Act 2002 granted new provisions and powers for local authorities relating to homelessness and prevention. It also imposed a duty on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a strategy for the future based on the results of that review, outlining how the local authority and their partners would work to prevent homelessness and ensure accommodation and support for those who were at risk of homelessness.
- 2 Disapplication legislation followed in 2005 and removed the duty to provide a strategy for those having achieved 'excellent' status. However, Communities and Local Government (CLG) recommends that local authorities still produce a strategy.

- 3 The draft WKHS (Appendix A), which is an update of the Joint Homelessness Strategy 2007, has been developed in consultation with a wide range of service users and partners across sectors.
- 4 Key themes emerging from consultation include a desire for more commonality in how the three West Kent local authorities (Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) work. This includes: a need for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice; and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information.
- 5 The draft WKHS provides the national, regional and local policy context, methods of consultation, and what the main findings were. The main section of the document covers five key objectives before a conclusion is drawn and an explanation of how the strategy will be monitored and reviewed over the next five-year period.
- 6 The five key priorities of the draft WKHS, are to:
 - I. Maximise homelessness prevention through the provision of appropriate housing options and choices;
 - II. Maximise resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective;
 - III. Work effectively with private sector landlords;
 - IV. Create strong partnerships to tackle homelessness; and
 - V. Meet the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness.
- 7 Members are referred to Appendix A for the full draft WKHS which includes further details of the strategy process, proposed work plan, and intended outcomes.
- 8 The draft WKHS has now been adopted as council policy by both Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells borough councils.

Key Implications

Financial

The WKHS will be delivered using existing resources and as such there will be no additional financial implications.

Community Impact and Outcomes

The draft WKHS aims to minimise homelessness by providing a wide range of housing solutions to prevent or remedy homelessness. The draft WKHS supports a range of other housing solutions which in turn support wider Sustainable Community Action Plan outcomes, such as employment and training.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

The recommendations are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and are not likely to result in any Human Rights Act implications.

Resource (non-financial)

The WKHS will be delivered using existing resources and as such there will be no additional non-financial implications.

Value For Money and Asset Management

- The WKHS and sub-regional working arrangements provides opportunities to reduce the impact on the District Council's assets and may create savings.
- Working across local authority boundaries and with cross-sector partners, there is less consequent requirement for office space.
- The WKHS will not have a negative environmental impact; impact would be positive, though negligible.

Equality Impacts

The WKHS aims to assist those in need and improve life chances. It is need-based and equalises opportunities. The WKHS adheres to the District Council's equality policies.

Sustainability Checklist

Completed and available by request.

Conclusions

That the draft WKHS would be an effective District Council policy to address homelessness and related issues.

Risk Assessment Statement

There are a number of risks associated with not adopting the WKHS.

If the District Council did not adopt the WKHS as District Council policy, this would result in:-

- It not having an up-to-date homelessness strategy and clearly defining objectives and targets to reduce homelessness and to sustain home ownership and tenancies.
- Not having a strategic document setting the way forward to reduce and minimise homelessness in the District and across West Kent;

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- A missed opportunity to partner with organisations across sectors to deliver services together - improving delivery and reducing resource requirements;
- A failure to demonstrate to the community and beyond that the District Council is actively working towards Sustainable Community Plan and Housing Strategy outcomes; and
- A risk of an increase in homelessness.

Attached Documents

Appendix A - Draft West Kent Homelessness Strategy (2011-16)

Background Papers:

Joint Homelessness Strategy (2007)

Sustainable Community Action Plan (2010-13)

West Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009)

Contact Officer(s):

Pat Smith, x7355

Kristen Paterson

Community and Planning Services Director

West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016

Sevenoaks District Council
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Tonbridge Wells Borough Council



July 2011

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1. FOREWORD

Welcome to the second West Kent Homelessness Strategy.

The three West Kent authorities of Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks have a strong track record in joint working together and with other agencies and service users over many years to tackle homelessness across West Kent.

A considerable amount has been achieved since the development of the first West Kent Homelessness Strategy in 2007. However, this strategy has been developed at a time of unprecedented change. Public spending has been significantly cut, and the Government is in the process of radically overhauling the social housing system, much of which will, subject to the passage of the *Localism Bill*, be implemented from April 2012. We have no doubt that this will add to the pressures on services for people who are facing homelessness at a time when resources are at an all-time low.

It is undoubtedly a challenging time to be developing a homelessness strategy, but we remain confident that the broad strategic priorities that the strategy is based on will provide a sound framework for the next five years. Progress against these priorities will be closely monitored, and an earlier review will be undertaken if it is considered necessary. The detailed Action Plan, which sets out individual objectives for delivering the strategy, has been developed to cover the first two years of the strategy only, and it will be reviewed from 2013.

This strategy will strengthen the sub-regional approach that has underpinned many of our achievements to date. It will build on past successes and existing partnerships, without losing sight of district/borough-specific priorities.

It has been developed in consultation with partners, stakeholders and service users, and it reflects the broader strategic priorities that have been identified within national, regional and sub-regional housing policy.

Councillor Jean Atkinson
Cabinet Member for Housing
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Councillor John Cunningham
Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Rural Communities
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Councillor Carol Clark
Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities
Sevenoaks District Council

Agenda Item 5

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. This Homelessness Strategy for West Kent sets out the vision of the three West Kent authorities – Sevenoaks DC, Tonbridge & Malling BC and Tunbridge Wells BC – for tackling homelessness over the period 2011-2016.
- 2.2. The strategy is set against the backdrop of unprecedented change. Public spending is being cut, major changes to welfare benefits (in particular Housing Benefit) are planned, permanent social housing tenancies for new tenants are ending while changes to the allocation of social housing and the homelessness legislation are also on the table. The implications of these changes are not yet fully understood but there is a wide consensus that they will increase pressure on homelessness services, at a time when resources are facing cuts.
- 2.3. West Kent is a relatively affluent area, characterised by a buoyant economy, high levels of owner occupation and high house prices. A shortage of housing in the social rented sector places pressure on the private rental market, where high rents are driven by demand from the buy-to-let and commuter market. This brings specific challenges to homelessness services and will continue to do so, given the increased emphasis on the private sector in providing long term housing solutions. Accommodation for homeless people is in short supply and demand always exceeds supply.
- 2.4. Despite these challenges, homeless prevention has been very effective in West Kent over recent years, with homeless applications and acceptances falling year-on-year since 2005 (in 2009/10, 126 householders were accepted as homeless across West Kent). However, there are clear signs that this trend is now reversing and applications and acceptances are on the rise. Many more people, however, are not captured in the official statistics because they are classed as non-priority homeless and, as such, are at risk of rough sleeping or sofa surfing.
- 2.5. Patterns and causes of homelessness across West Kent stubbornly persist. Homelessness disproportionately impacts on young people and around 4 in 5 homeless households contain children. Most often, these young people and families have been evicted by their parents or family or have suffered from relationships breaking down.
- 2.6. The authorities have developed very effective prevention techniques though approaches and emphases vary between the three. Mediation with family members (often to keep young people at home) has proved effective, as have rent in advance and deposit schemes which have been used successfully across all three authorities to enable applicants to access the private rented sector. Prevention techniques are going beyond the issue of homelessness and are increasingly tackling the underlying causes, with advice on benefits, employment and training.
- 2.7. Partnership working is alive and well in West Kent with a range of public sector bodies, housing associations and voluntary agencies working together to tackle homelessness. The Supporting People programme is also central to prevention, funding a range of accommodation-based and floating support services across the region. These partnerships will become even more important in the future, with pressure on services and resources acting as a catalyst for radical new ideas about how – and by whom – services could best be delivered in future.
- 2.8. This strategy has been developed in consultation with these partners and with service users and the key themes emerging from the consultation have shaped the strategy. They included a desire for more commonality in how the three authorities

work; an appetite for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice; and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information. The importance of effective partnership working was also strongly underlined. Service users wanted good quality, realistic advice and information, which they felt would empower them to make better choices and control their situation and help accessing good quality private housing.

2.9. Our overall vision for homelessness is to ***"proactively support and empower people to plan their own futures so that homelessness within West Kent is significantly reduced"***.

2.10. In order to deliver this vision, we have identified five strategic priorities. These are:

1. **Maximising homelessness prevention through an enhanced housing options service** - with proposed changes to benefits, reduced investment and an uncertain economy, homelessness services will be put under real pressure. To meet this challenge, we will ensure that existing processes, protocols and techniques work well, that any barriers are removed and invest in increasing skills and expertise within the Housing Options Teams. We will also seek to manage customer expectations with good quality, clear and accessible advice and information, using new media and creative ways to reach the 'front line' of homelessness.
2. **Maximising resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective** – with local authority and Supporting People funding facing significant reductions, we will think – and act - radically about how services can be delivered more cost effectively in the future. Building on our history of joint working, we will identify opportunities to share staff and expertise and develop shared processes and procedures that learn from the best.
3. **Working effectively with private sector landlords** – the private sector is already central to successful prevention and will become even more so in the future, despite the reluctance of private landlords to accept tenants who may be vulnerable or on benefits. We will improve links with landlords, understanding their priorities and barriers and develop an 'offer' that works. This will include robust rent in advance and deposit schemes, landlord 'accreditation' and tenancy sustainment packages.
4. **Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness** – we will build on the already strong partnerships that exist to help us make the best use of limited resources. By drawing together information that already exists, we will 'map' homelessness services and resources, facilitating a conversation with partners about the best way to deliver a joined-up service across West Kent, reviewing how these partnerships work in practice and whether there is scope for services to be delivered in different ways, by different organisations. We will also review the operation of the Homelessness Strategy Group, providing clear accountability and opportunities for better sharing of resources, expertise and good practice.
5. **Meeting the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness** – homelessness affects a wide – and widening - range of people. Our focus will be on understanding and meeting the needs of the diverse range of groups impacted by homelessness including young people, people experiencing domestic abuse, vulnerable people and those with complex needs, people with disabilities, gypsies and travellers, older people and offenders. Partnerships are key here and we will robustly enforce existing protocols to ensure that they work for the benefit of clients. Information is also key and we will find new, effective and appropriate ways of providing information.

PART ONE: THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1. This Homelessness Strategy for West Kent sets out the vision of the three West Kent authorities – Sevenoaks DC, Tonbridge & Malling BC and Tunbridge Wells BC – for tackling homelessness over the period 2011-2016. The strategy has been developed within the context of national and local priorities and identifies five strategic objectives that will drive forward the homelessness agenda in the coming years.
- 3.2. The 2002 Homelessness Act placed a duty on local authorities to develop a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this every five years. The previous West Kent Homelessness Strategy, published in 2007 and covering the period to 2010 (with an updated Action Plan to 2011), made an important contribution to tackling homelessness in West Kent. The strategy built on the housing options model, maximising homeless prevention opportunities and contributed to an increase in homeless preventions, a reduction in the number of homeless acceptances and a significant reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.
- 3.3. Despite the real achievements made, challenges remain. The main causes of homelessness remain the same: family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate young people; violent breakdown of relationships; while private rented accommodation is not easy to access in this relatively affluent area. This new strategy seeks to build on the achievements made, address the (significant) new challenges which have emerged during 2010 and establish the strategic objectives that will continue to prevent homelessness across West Kent over the next five years.
- 3.4. It is an exciting - if challenging - time to be developing a homelessness strategy. We are in a time of unprecedented change with the new Coalition Government reducing public spending in order to cut the deficit, proposing major changes to welfare benefits (in particular Housing Benefit) and ending permanent social housing tenancies for new tenants. Changes to the allocation of social housing and to the homelessness legislation are also on the table¹. At the time of writing, it is still unclear how (and, in some cases, whether) these proposals will be implemented but there is a consensus that they will have a significant impact on homelessness and homelessness services. At the same time, the economic outlook is uncertain and local authorities are facing unprecedented cuts in funding and services – both factors likely to add to the pressures on homeless and support services.
- 3.5. In the light of this, it is worth remembering that homelessness prevention saves £5,300 per case per year compared to the cost of helping someone who is already homeless². The savings are both short term (the costs of temporary accommodation and B&B) and long term (the human and societal costs of homelessness in terms of pressures on health and social services, crime and on children's life chances).

¹ Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing, CLG, November 2010

² Research by Heriot Watt University (2007) found that the costs per person of successful mediation are around 9 times less expensive than providing alternate settled accommodation; home visits 3.5 times less expensive; advice on housing options 9 times less expensive; rent deposit schemes 8.5 times less; rent bond scheme 37 times less; Sanctuary schemes save 5.5 times the costs of providing accommodation under the main homelessness duty.

- 3.6. Homelessness is about much more than statistics, strategic objectives and resource implications. It is about real people and their lives. To illustrate the impact that homelessness can have – and the difference that homelessness services can make – we have included some of the stories and experiences we have come across in developing this strategy. These illustrate the successes that have been achieved as well as the challenges that remain going forward.

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4. HOW WE PRODUCED THE STRATEGY

- 4.1. In order to develop this strategy, a Project Team was established consisting of senior staff within the Housing Departments of the three authorities. This Project Team met regularly from September 2010 to January 2011 (see Appendix 1 for membership).
- 4.2. In addition to the Project Team, a workshop was held in November 2011 with all staff working within the Housing Options Teams of the three authorities. This gave valuable 'practitioner' input into the strategy and facilitated the sharing of good practice between the three authorities.
- 4.3. Stakeholders were also key to developing the strategy. The Homelessness Working Group, which had played a key role in developing the previous Action Plan, was reformed into the Homelessness Strategy Group and then involved through three consultation events. 44 partner organisations were invited to the first, a half day event in July 2010, which included talks from organisations working with homeless people in West Kent and discussion groups around five key themes. The second, a half day event in December 2010, attracted 21 delegates included a presentation on the findings of the Homelessness Review and discussion groups to agree and hone the key priorities and actions. The third, held in January 2011, considered the draft strategy document. (See Appendix 2 for notes of these events).
- 4.4. Service user engagement was undertaken through detailed telephone interviews with twelve service users who had been involved with homelessness services in West Kent during 2010. A summary of this consultation appears at Appendix 3.
- 4.5. The Project Team would like to thank everyone who participated in the consultation events and who contributed to the formulation of the strategy.
- 4.6. A review of best practice in homelessness from elsewhere was undertaken through a document review; internet and telephone research; publications including "Homeless Prevention: a guide to best practice (2006); "Homeless Strategies: a good practice handbook" (ODPM 2006); and "Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies: evaluation and good practice" (ODPM, 2004); and a review of 'trailblazer' local authorities.
- 4.7. Data underpinning the strategy was produced from an analysis of the local authorities P1E returns, the statutory quarterly returns made to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Data on the housing market was taken from the 2008 Strategic Housing Market Assessment produced by David Couttie Associates. Other data was provided by the local authorities themselves.

5. THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

5.1. The national policy context

5.2. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to:

- provide free advice and information about homelessness and preventing homelessness to everyone in their district
- assist eligible individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and in priority need.

5.3. A chart summarising the duties on local authorities in respect of homelessness is included at Appendix 4.

5.4. With the 2002 Homelessness Act, the Government made homelessness prevention a priority through providing increased funding to tackle homelessness, setting challenging targets for prevention and placing requirements on the local councils to produce Homelessness Strategies. These strategies were to be informed by a review of performance, current service provision and estimated future need. The Act stated that the focus of these strategies was to be on prevention measures, as well as emphasising the importance of offering advice to all people in housing need.

5.5. The government later identified a number of targets in relation to homelessness. These include:

- to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 by 50% (against December 2004 figures)
- to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless 16/17 year olds by 2010
- to end rough sleeping by 2012/13

5.6. National strategies and guidance that have helped shaped this Homelessness Strategy include:

- "Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives" (2005): Homelessness Prevention, reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010, from 2010 B&B no longer suitable for 16/17 year olds
- "Sustainable Communities: Homes For All" (2005): Choice Based Lettings schemes in all local authorities in England by 2010
- "Tackling Homelessness" (2006): recognises the role of RSLs in preventing homelessness through partnership working, sustainable communities, allocation and management policies and better use of existing stock
- "No One Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping" (Nov 2008): aimed to end rough sleeping in UK for more than one night by 2012
- "Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing": Consultation document (Nov 2010)

5.7. These strategies had some success and homelessness and rough sleeping has fallen nationally over the last five years.

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- 5.8. With the new Coalition Government, however, priorities are shifting. Welfare reform is a major plank of the new Government's agenda, with plans to devolve decision making to the local level and reducing overall welfare spending in particular the burgeoning Housing Benefit bill. As a result, there is an unprecedented amount of change underway that is likely to impact on homelessness over the coming years, both in terms of the resources available to tackle it and demands placed on services. At the time of writing, it is unclear exactly how these changes will impact, either individually or in the round³ but there does seem to be a consensus that services will come under considerable pressure in the medium term while the hoped-for behavioural changes materialise.
- 5.9. A summary of proposed changes to benefits and Local Housing Allowance that will potentially impact on homelessness and homelessness prevention is shown below.

Table 1: Proposed Changes to benefits and Local Housing Allowance

- **reducing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** from 50% of the Broad Market Rental Area (BRMA) to 30% from October 2011. This will impact on many households renting in the private sector, reducing their LHA payments by between £8-25 per week for up to 2,000 households in West Kent
- uprating and increasing the **non-dependent rate** from April 2011 is likely to place pressure on households with adult children still living at home who cannot contribute towards household expenses
- **capping the Local Housing Allowance** is likely to make applicants for private sector letting less attractive to landlords
- **capping the total benefits** to a household at no more than the national average wage is likely to impact larger families
- **limiting payments for people under 35** to the shared room rate (up from 25), making it harder to place young single people in private rented housing
- **limiting Housing Benefit entitlements** for working age people in social housing sector to reflect family size could increase arrears
- **uprating LHA in line with Consumer Price Index (CPI)** instead of Retail Price Index (RPI) will impact on the availability of private sector homes for rent
- **the move towards a Universal Credit** is likely to end Housing Benefit payments direct to landlords, making benefit claimants potentially less attractive as tenants.
- **the replacement for council tax benefit** in 2013 will see less funding available - a consultation exercise is due to start soon.
- administration of **social fund payments** will be transferred to the local level and will play an important role in homelessness prevention, as will the increased **Discretionary Housing Payment** allocations to LAs.

³ The Select Committee on Work and Pensions concluded that "It is difficult to judge at the moment to what extent Housing Benefit claimants will change their behaviour as a result of these proposals. The Government hopes that people will be able to find cheaper accommodation in cheaper areas and that private landlords will be willing to reduce their rents to Local Housing Allowance claimants, so that the new levels will not result in an increase in homelessness" (Report on changes to housing benefit announced in the June 2010 Budget).

5.10. In addition, there are other major changes on the horizon including:

- **Public spending cuts** - in October 2010, the Chancellor set out savings of £81bn to be made from public spending over the next 5 years. Funding for local authorities is being reduced by 26% over the next two years and the West Kent councils are already planning or in some cases, have already implemented, cost cutting measures in their detailed budgets for 2011/12. These include staffing reductions (particularly at managerial level), reducing discretionary funding and planning shared services across authorities (both sub-regionally and with other Kent authorities). The Homelessness Grant which supports local authorities in homelessness prevention, was however increased for 2011/12.
- **Changes to the homelessness duty** – the Government are planning to introduce legislation to enable local authorities to fully discharge their duty to secure accommodation by arranging an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector, without requiring the applicant's agreement. Where applicants become homeless again within two years, the duty will be retained by the original authority.
- **Changes to housing allocations** – changes are planned that will give local authorities flexibility in managing their waiting list. Sevenoaks DC have pre-empted this move, carrying out a review of their Housing Waiting List in 2008 which reduced the list significantly. Tonbridge & Malling BC also reviewed their waiting list in 2008 and continue to do so on an on-going basis.
- **Reducing capital funding for new affordable housing** - capital funding for new affordable housing is to be replaced by a new, yet-to-be developed model of below-market rents supported by revenue subsidy. The impact of this change depends largely on whether housing associations are able to build significant numbers of new homes under this new financial regime but, in the medium term, it is predicted that the supply of new affordable homes will fall.
- **Changes to planning** - with the abolition of centrally-determined targets for new homes (both private and affordable), the existing Regional Spatial Strategies no longer apply (although this is, at the time of writing, subject to legal challenge), replaced by locally-determined plans. This is likely to lead to some uncertainty in the market and a possible hiatus in new house building in the short to medium term.
- **New forms of tenure** - 'tenancies for life' for new social housing tenants may be replaced by fixed term (2, 5 or 10 year) 'flexible tenancies', renewable depending on household circumstances. Details are yet to be finalised but impacts may include reduced turnover in social housing, reduced demand for new social housing tenancies (not least because rents on new build and possibly relets will increase to 80% of market rents) and challenges to community sustainment. On the other hand, the narrower gap between social and market rents may, as the Government hopes, start to change perceptions about the acceptability of the private sector as a long term housing solution.
- **Supporting People funding** - the Programme is required to make savings of £7 million by 2012/13. It will adopt a strategic approach to reducing expenditure, which balances the priorities identified within the current five year strategy, particularly in relation to young people at risk. Whilst contracts for district/borough based floating support services have not been renewed, such support will still be available on a west Kent and countywide basis and other existing housing related support services will have their contracts extended to the end of 2011/12.

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5.11. The uncertainty surrounding these changes on the provision of, and demand for, homelessness services mean that the authorities will need to monitor the situation carefully to ensure that the strategy remains abreast of potential impacts.

5.12. The regional policy context

5.13. The prevention of homelessness is a key priority in The South East Regional Housing Strategy (March 2008) and, although the South East Region is being disbanded by the new Coalition Government, the three aims of the current strategy remain relevant, specifically:

- increasing the supply of new affordable housing
- housing-related support to enable vulnerable households to maintain tenancies
- better use of existing accommodation in both public and private sectors.

5.14. The Kent Forum Housing Strategy (Better Homes: localism, aspiration and choice), launched in May 2011, sets out future priorities as:

- local housing and planning authorities deciding their own housing numbers, based on local people's need and ambitions for growth
- coastal and urban communities revitalised and rural areas thrive and prosper
- homes provided that meet the needs and aspirations of all residents
- people to have the opportunity to choose to live in a high quality home, in the place they want to live
- by creating balanced communities, supporting people, to fulfil their potential and live the best life they can
- using innovative and flexible approaches to finance and regulation to encourage managed growth that makes a lasting and positive impact
- by listening to what people want, providing homes and communities that people can be proud to live in.

5.15. Other relevant regional strategies include:

- Kent Supporting People Five-Year Strategy 2010-2015
- Kent Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011
- Strategy for improving the mental health and wellbeing of people in Kent & Medway (2010)
- Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Strategy (2010)

5.16. The sub-regional and local contexts

5.17. The West Kent authorities have a long and successful history of joint working at regional, sub-regional and local levels (See Table 2). This trend is likely to accelerate as funding and political imperatives encourage the further development of shared services, both between the three authorities themselves but also with neighbouring authorities. For example, Tonbridge & Malling BC have recently established a shared Housing Options Team Manager with Gravesham BC.

5.18. Other examples of where the three West Kent authorities have successfully worked together over recent years include:

- Colebrook Road, a hostel for single homeless based in Tunbridge Wells
- Tunbridge Wells Women's Refuge
- A combined Severe Weather placement scheme
- West Kent Private Landlords Forum

- A young person's accommodation based service (in partnership with the Supporting People Programme which revenue funds the service)
- Homeless Strategy Conferences
- The Local Investment Partnership (also includes Maidstone)
- Piloting a supported lodging scheme

5.19. Finally, each of the authorities has their own housing strategies, all of which make homeless prevention a priority.

TABLE 2: Regional And Sub-Regional Partnership Groups

Joint Policy and Planning Board - a strategic partnership between health, housing, probation, social care and Supporting People. Its main responsibilities are to promote inter-agency working, and to ensure that district housing strategies inform, and are influenced by, the work of partner organisations and other inter-agency plans. The close links between housing and health are well recognised and a key objective for the Board is to improve the health care arrangements for homeless people. This is being taken forward in the Board's 2008 action plan.

Kent Housing Group - a Kent-wide group with membership drawn from the local authority and RSL sectors, as well as the Supporting People Team, Kent Adult Social Service and GOSE. Sub-groups include:

- **Kent Housing Options Group** - this group meets to share good practice and develop new initiatives to tackle homelessness. It is currently developing a schools education programme to raise the awareness of homelessness amongst children in schools.
- **Housing Strategy and Enabling sub-group** - a group that meets to share knowledge and good practice across the county
- **Kent Private Sector Housing sub-group**

West Kent Landlords Forum – meet three times a year to provide advice and support to local landlords and keep them up to date with developments affecting the private rented sector.

West Kent Partnership – a joint Local Strategic Partnership that monitors the Leaders' Programme

Homelessness Liaison Meeting – a group of local authority officers and agencies working on homelessness that meet quarterly at Colebrook Road hostel

Gypsy & Traveller Working Group – a Kent-wide group comprising members/officers working with Kent CC to ensure the needs of Gypsy and traveller communities are met

Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership (KEEP) – helps Kent residents save money through energy saving improvements in their homes

Kent Children's Trust Board – a county-wide body responsible for overseeing strategic direction on young people and families, into which **Local Children's Trust Boards** feed

Supporting People - a Kent-wide strategic partnership between Kent CC, Health, Housing and Probation, administered by Kent CC on behalf of the partners. Based on evidenced need, the Programme commissions and performance manages housing related support to vulnerable people. Decisions are taken by the Commissioning Board, attended by representatives of the partners including districts and boroughs.

Kent and Medway Leaders Forum – a strategic Forum that agreed the Kent Forum Housing Strategy and monitors its implementation

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5.20. The West Kent economy and housing market

- 5.21. Situated in the heart of South East England and to the south east of London, the West Kent sub-region consists of the three authorities of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells. The authorities are situated in one of the UK's most affluent counties with close proximity to London, a dynamic economy, proximity to the international airport of Gatwick, the Channel port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and frequent rail connections to London. Despite this, there are pockets of deprivation in each of the three districts.
- 5.22. The West Kent economy is strong, with lower unemployment and higher incomes than the regional average, indicating a strong pattern of commuting into London. Having said that, 2009 saw the number of unemployment benefit claimants almost double in West Kent⁴ as the recession bit.
- 5.23. The population of West Kent in 2006 was estimated at 332,000 and projected to rise to 341,900 by 2026. The age profile is expected to shift as the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age and people aged 65+ are expected to make up 25% of the population by 2026.
- 5.24. Average house prices in West Kent are significantly higher than the regional average and have risen faster than elsewhere: in Sevenoaks between 2003 and 2008, prices rose by 44%. In 2008, the Land Registry indicated average prices of £401,400 in Sevenoaks, £272,800 in Tonbridge & Malling and £311,800 in Tunbridge Wells. Despite the recession since then, prices have remained relatively buoyant. High property prices mean that owner occupation is out of reach for many households. In 2010, a household would need an income of £40,800/year and a 20% deposit to buy a home – perhaps the reason why the average age of first time buyers in the region is now 37. Demands on the private and social rented sectors are therefore high.
- 5.25. In 2007, West Kent had a total housing stock of 140,800 dwellings, made up of a higher-than-average proportion of owner occupiers and a lower-than-average proportion of social and privately rented homes.

	Owner occupied	Social rented	Private rented
Sevenoaks	35,500 (75.5%)	6,200 (14.0%)	3,000 (6.8%)
Tonbridge & Malling	32,000 (74.8%)	6,900 (16.2%)	2,600 (6.0%)
Tunbridge Wells	30,200 (70.8%)	6,700 (15.8%)	4,500 (10.6%)
National average	13,920,000 (68.1%)	1,238,000 (19.3%)	2,037,000 (10.0%)

- 5.26. Social and private renting declined as a proportion of the stock from 1991-2001⁵ and, while private renting may have increased over the last decade due to the emerging buy-to-let market, the volatility in the housing market over recent years make it difficult to predict how this sector will change in future. Anecdotal evidence is that many landlords are selling properties as prices have bounced back since 2009.

⁴ Kent and Medway Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2010 (DTZ)

⁵ Census 2001

5.27. Looking at the future demand for housing, the SHMA identified significant demand for new homes in West Kent. From 2006 to 2026, there will be an estimated shortfall of 3,353 homes each year in the private sector and 1,368 homes in the affordable rented sector. This significant shortfall illustrates that the discharge of duty cannot be met through social housing alone. It is also worth assessing housing need by looking at the number of applicants on each housing register and those accepted as homeless and comparing that to the number of affordable homes delivered during that year.

Table 4: Need for affordable housing		
	Affordable need p.a.	Affordable need shortfall p.a. (not met from relets)
Sevenoaks	948	646
Tonbridge & Malling	731	432
Tunbridge Wells	728	290
Total	2,407	1,368

5.28. Turnover levels in social housing are low at around 4-5% while right-to-buy sales are now minimal. In 2008, levels of under-occupation (defined as two or more 'spare' bedrooms) in the social rented sector was estimated at 650 (10%) in Sevenoaks, 1,225 (18%) in Tonbridge & Malling and 715 (11%) in Tunbridge Wells⁶. Levels of under-occupation exceed over-crowding by a significant margin.

5.29. In 2007, rents in the private sector were more than double those in the social rented sector. Based on rent of 25% of gross income, these rents would require an income (without any financial assistance) of between £33,600 (Tunbridge Wells) and £37,200 (Sevenoaks).

Table 5: Average monthly rent West Kent			
	Average monthly RSL rent (all sizes)	Average monthly private rent (2 bed)	Average monthly "entry level" private rent (2BF)
Sevenoaks	£325	£920	£800
Tonbridge & Malling	£334	£840	£750
Tunbridge Wells	£361	£800	£700

5.30. Turning to housing need, in 2010, a total of 5, 847 people were on the Housing Register at 31 December 2010.

Table 6: Applicants on housing register				
	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	West Kent
1- Bed	710	1136	1148	2,994
2 – bed	330	716	607	1,653
3 – bed	222	281	403	906
4+ bed	56	101	164	321
Total	1,318	2,234	2,232	5,874

⁶ Housing Survey Data, from Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2008 (David Coultie Associates)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **West Kent is a relatively affluent area, characterised by a buoyant economy, high levels of owner occupation and high houses prices**
- **there is considerable pressure on the social rented sector**
- **high rents in the private rented market are driven by the buy-to-let market and commuter demand**
- **this brings specific challenges to homelessness services in the area**

6. HOMELESSNESS IN WEST KENT

6.1. Key Findings, data and trends 2005-2010

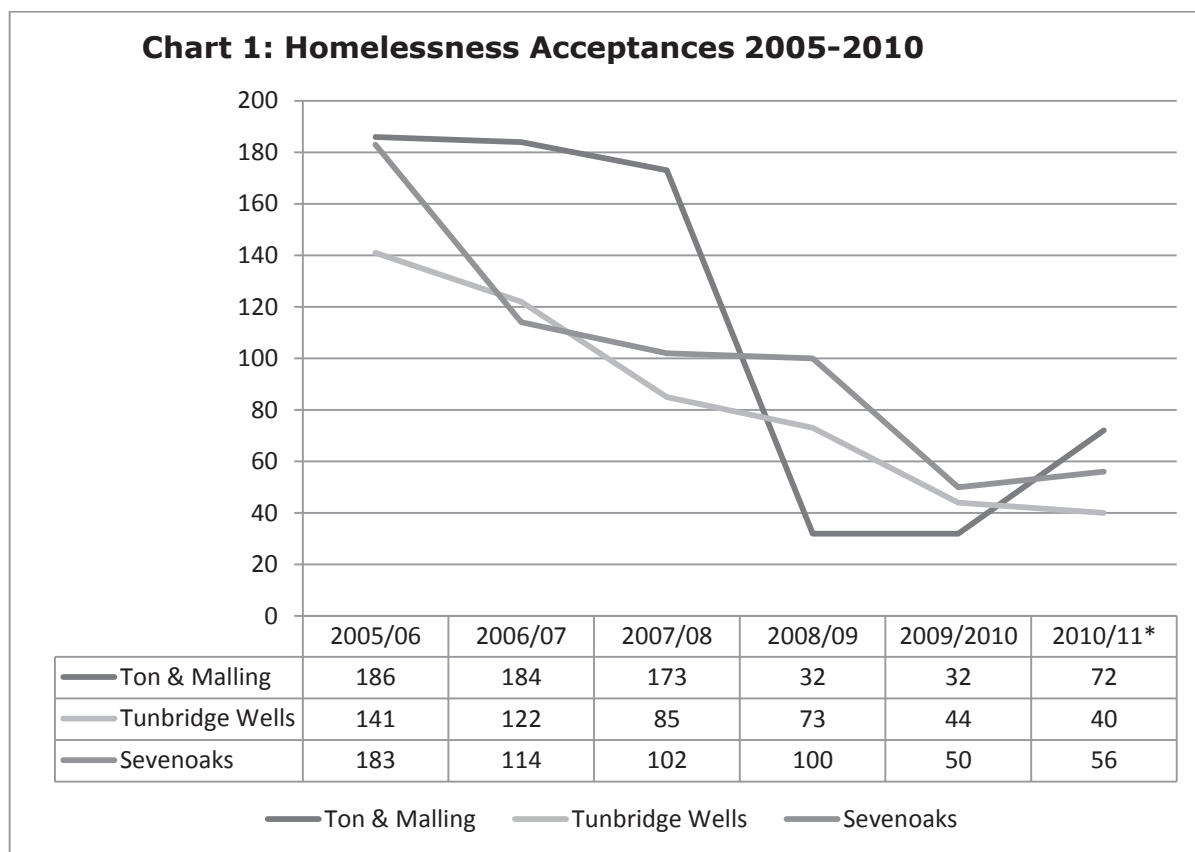
- 6.2. Local Authorities are required to collate statistics every quarter on approaches made to them by homeless applicants. These statistics are referred to as the P1E returns and, as they cover all aspects of homelessness, they provide a useful insight to the levels and nature of homelessness within the area. The data used here is based on the P1E returns for the three districts from 2005/6 to September 2010. The figures for 2010/11 have been extrapolated from the half year position.
- 6.3. Where the pattern or trends are similar across West Kent, the graphs included in the strategy show total or collective figures. Where the picture is significantly different between the authorities, individual figures are given. Appendix 5 details the trends in each individual local authority.
- 6.4. There has been a significant fall in the number of homelessness applications across West Kent over the past five years (see Table 7).

Table7: Homelessness Applications 2005-2010						
Year	Ton & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Total West Kent	Kent CC area	National
2005/06	304	283	346	933	3204	213290
2006/07	240	240	181	661	2102	159350
2007/08	224	162	131	517	2164	130850
2008/09	67	130	123	320	1778	112900
2009/2010	98	86	73	257	1393	89120
2010/11*	160	54	64	278	n/a	n/a
reduction 2005-2010	-68%	-70%	-79%	-72%	-57%	-58%

** figures extrapolated from Q1/2 totals*

- 6.5. Having peaked in 2003/4 at 1,165, applications have fallen by an average of 72% to 257 in 2009/10 – more than the county or national average. This is due to the increasing emphasis on the prevention of homelessness through the Housing Options model and, in particular, to the success of rent deposit/guarantee schemes.
- 6.6. However, as Chart 1 shows, this picture is starting to change. Applications in Tonbridge & Malling saw a sharp increase in early 2010/11 and, while those in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks remain relatively stable, there are signs that they might rise in the future. All three districts have experienced a sharp increase in demand for housing advice services in late 2010/11 and early 2011/12.

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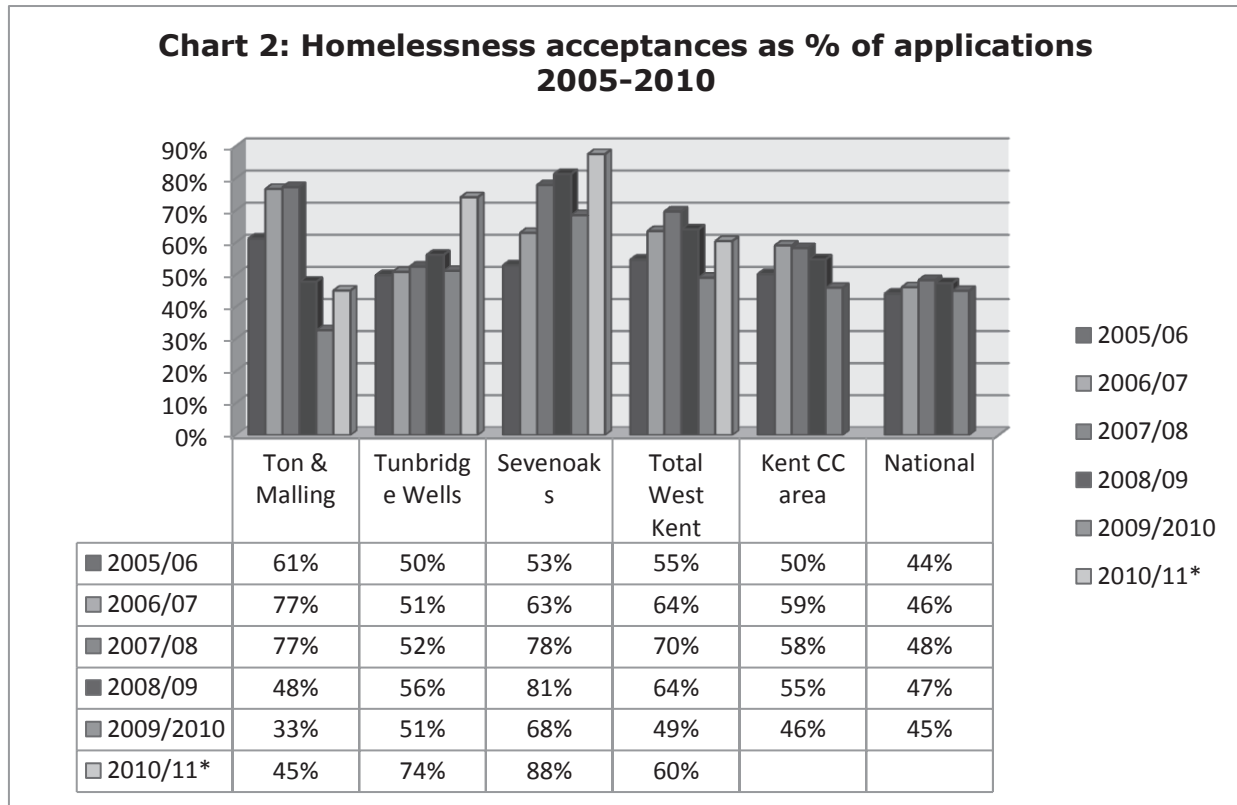
* figures extrapolated from Q1/2 totals

- 6.7. National figures from the DCLG paint a similar picture. Acceptances in Quarter 3 2010/11 were 14% higher than the same quarter last year and, while there has been a decrease in temporary accommodation, there has been an increase in the use of bed & breakfast nationally. Looking at the South East, homeless acceptances in the South East were 17% higher than the previous quarter and 30% higher than the same quarter last year.
- 6.8. From 2005 to 2010, the number of homeless acceptances across West Kent has also been falling, by an average of 75% to 126 in March 2010 (Table 8). However, acceptances for 2010/11 are projected to more than double in Tonbridge & Malling and increase by 15% in Sevenoaks.

Table 8: Homelessness Acceptances 2005-2010						
Year	Ton & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Total West Kent	Kent CC area	National
2005/06	186	141	183	510	1607	93980
2006/07	184	122	114	420	1241	73360
2007/08	173	85	102	360	1260	63170
2008/09	32	73	100	205	973	53430
2009/2010	32	44	50	126	639	40020
2010/11*	72	40	56	168	n/a	n/a
% reduction 2005-2010	-83%	-69%	-73%	-75%	-60%	-57%

* figures extrapolated from Q1/2 totals

6.9. Looking at how many homeless applicants are accepted as homeless, the picture is quite different across the three districts (Chart 2), revealing some interesting differences in practice. In Tonbridge & Malling only a third of applicants were accepted in 2009/10; in Tunbridge Wells the ratio stood consistently at around 50% over the period; while in Sevenoaks, the proportion of acceptances is around 3 in 4. While all three local authorities have robust approaches to prevention, it would appear that applications are treated as more of a 'safety net' in Sevenoaks. There is also a link with how Housing Registers are managed with, in the past, more applicants being accepted as homeless as a means of achieving higher priority on the Housing Register.



*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.10. All three authorities have noted an increase in the number of vulnerable people being accepted as homeless and in the complexity of their needs. Such people are both more at risk of becoming homeless and their situations are often harder to resolve, either due to the shortage of suitable accommodation and problems they may have sustaining tenancies. The Housing Options Teams co-ordinate what can be intensive interventions with these clients, working closely with Social Services, partner agencies and Floating Support (funded by the Kent Supporting People Programme through services for rough sleepers and outreach, and specialist and generic floating support).

6.11. Non priority homeless

6.12. This data, however, provides only a partial picture of homelessness, driven as it is by legislation and definitions of priority need. It does not count what are called the "hidden homeless", people to whom local authorities do not owe a statutory duty (mainly young single people or couples or families with non-dependent children) and who are at risk of sleeping rough or 'sofa surfing'.

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6.13. Although local authorities do have a duty to provide non-priority homeless people with advice and assistance (and can refer them to short-term hostels or provide them with a deposit/rent in advance), many bypass councils (and therefore the 'official' figures) and approach other agencies or housing providers directly. This might be because they are already in contact with those agencies, because they perceive as slim their chances of making a successful homeless application or for convenience, as agencies are often located in town centres.

Case Study

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council recently worked jointly with the Kent-based homelessness charity Porchlight, to help a couple in their forties who had been sleeping rough for a number of years. They had alcohol problems and were struggling to manage after the tent they were sheltering in got damaged. As they weren't in priority need under the homelessness legislation, they weren't entitled to emergency accommodation, except when the weather was very cold and the Council's Severe Weather Policy came into force. They were, however, entitled to advice and assistance to help them find somewhere to live.

One of the barriers this household faced in obtaining social rented housing was the fact that they couldn't prove a 'local connection', as they didn't have a permanent address. As they were well known by several homelessness charities in the local area, their Housing Options Adviser made contact with one of these and requested a letter confirming that they had had regular visits from the couple for at least the last six months. Obtaining proof of a local connection enabled them to be in a much stronger position on the housing register. The Housing Options Adviser then organised a meeting with the couple and their Porchlight outreach worker, plus another member of Porchlight's staff who specialises in finding private rentals for people who have been homeless.

At this meeting the couple's situation was discussed in more detail. It was acknowledged that it might be difficulties in landlords accepting them as tenants due to their alcohol issues, so the adviser asked some of the charities who had worked with them to provide character references. They also contacted the housing association who had provided their last settled home – as this tenancy had gone well they were also happy to provide a good reference. Porchlight identified a landlord and Tunbridge Wells BC provided a rent-in –advance loan.

Their Porchlight worker is continuing to support them during the first few months of their tenancy, to help them make the transition from sleeping rough and sustain their tenancy.

6.14. A large number of vulnerable non-priority homeless people are supported by the Supporting People Programme. Whilst there are no aggregated statistics on these groups some estimates can be made based on data collected through the Programme. According to client records 2009-10, of the 1,069 new clients identified as 'single homeless' accessed services across Kent providers recorded 166 as having been accepted as 'statutorily homeless and owed a duty'. However 572 were classed by providers as homeless but had not been accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a duty (but were nevertheless offered housing advice and assistance). Many of these people have multiple needs such as alcohol, drug and/or mental health problems.

6.15. The Supporting People team is currently collating referral data to short term accommodation-based supported housing. In July-December 2010, a total of (excluding multiple referrals) 1,948 individuals were referred to such accommodation across Kent, many of whom were single homeless people identified under a range of client group headings:

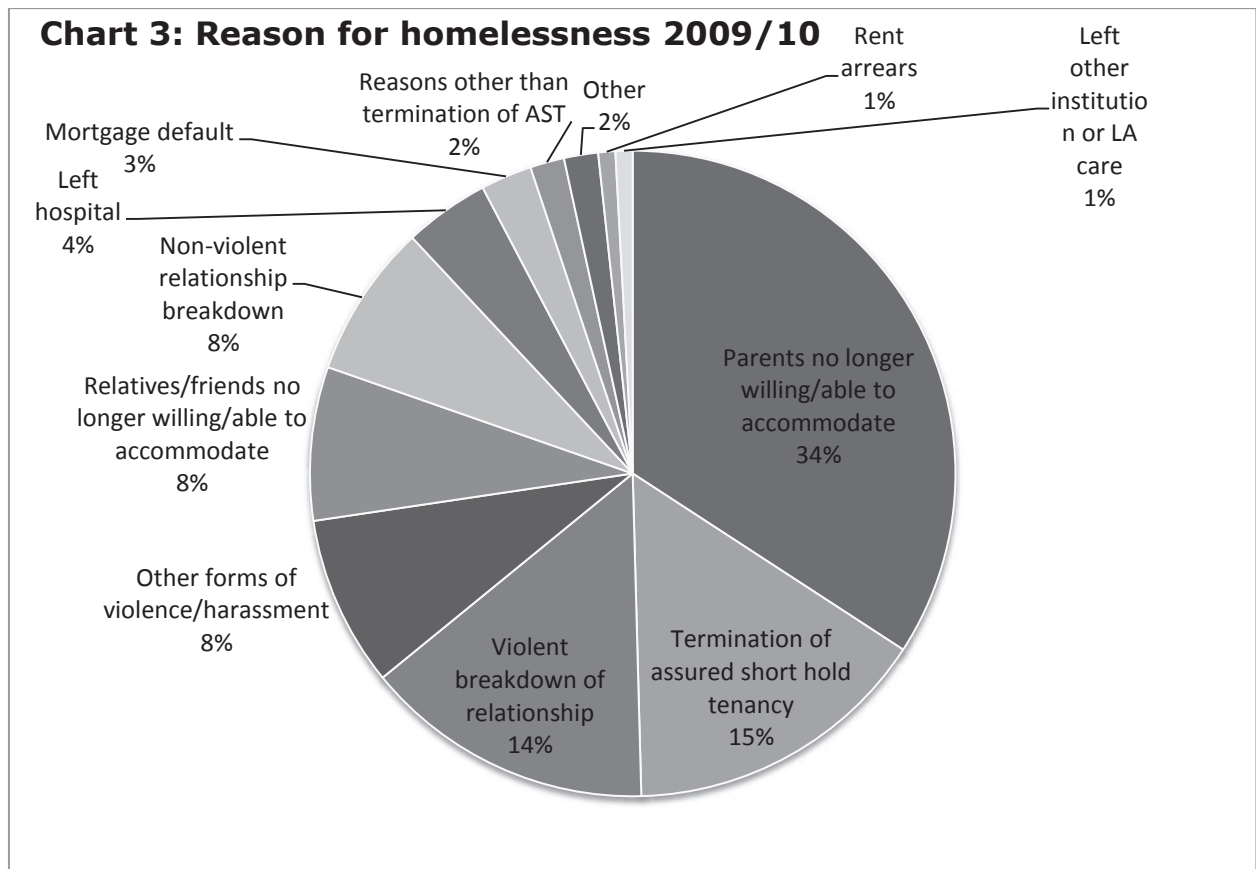
- 297 individuals were aged 16 and 17
- 286 (14.7%) were sleeping rough at the time of referral
- 417 (21.4%) were 'sofa surfing'

- 236 (12%) were in prison with no accommodation to go to on release
- 16 were sleeping rough or sofa surfing in Sevenoaks, 51 in Tonbridge and Malling and 76 in Tunbridge Wells.

6.16. The picture of single homelessness further emerges through surveys and Rough Sleeper counts. A survey of single homelessness carried out in Kent during 2007 reported 731 respondents in total (107 in West Kent), half of whom has slept rough within the previous 12 months. These were predominantly men between 26-59, many with mental health, drug or alcohol problems and with a history of being in care or prison. They were mostly living in hostels or with friends/family and more than half had been homeless for more than 12 months. Most had become homeless as a result of disputes with their family or partner or as a result of leaving prison.

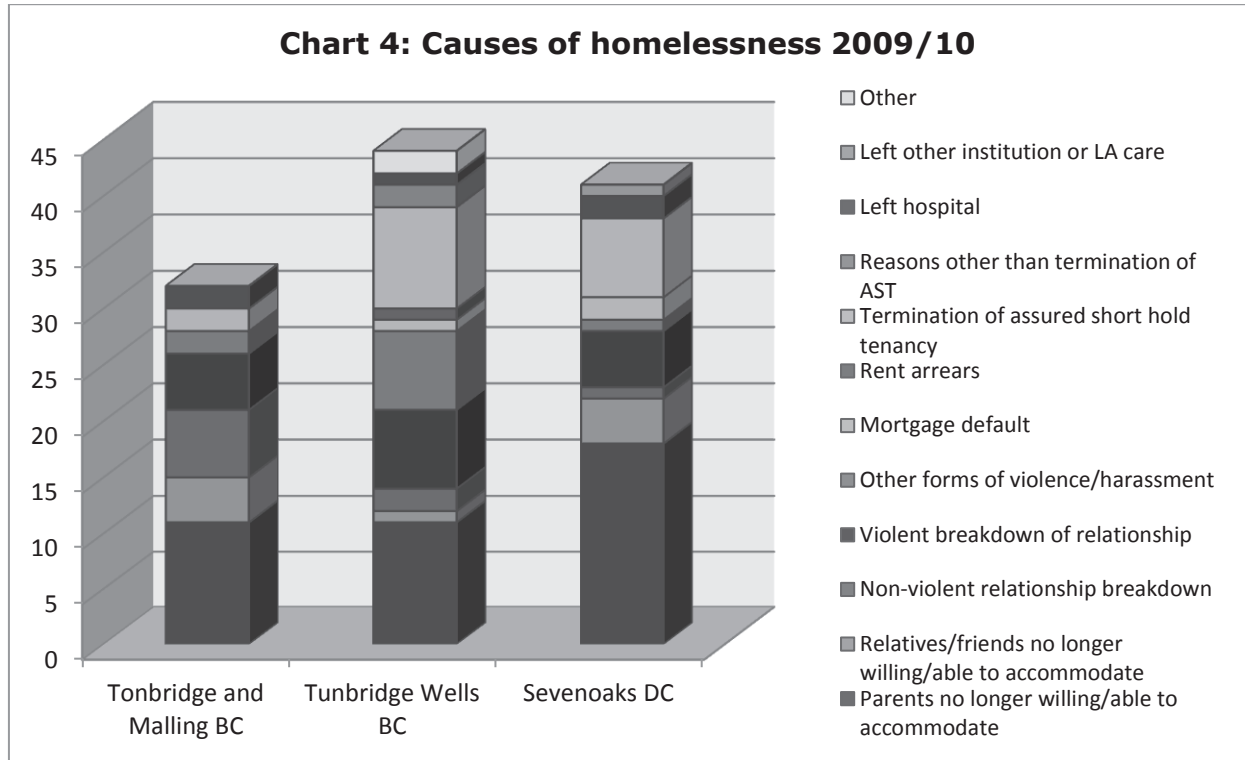
6.17. Who becomes homeless, and why?

6.18. While trends do shift slightly over time, the most common causes of homelessness have remained consistent over the last four years. As Chart 3 shows, the most common reason is family breakdown, where parents or relatives are no longer willing or able to accommodate the (usually young) applicant (accounting for around one third of cases). Breakdown of relationships (either violent or non-violent) account for around another third of cases. The third most common cause is termination of assured shorthold tenancies (either because of arrears, problems in sustaining tenancies or landlords selling properties) which account for around 15% of cases.



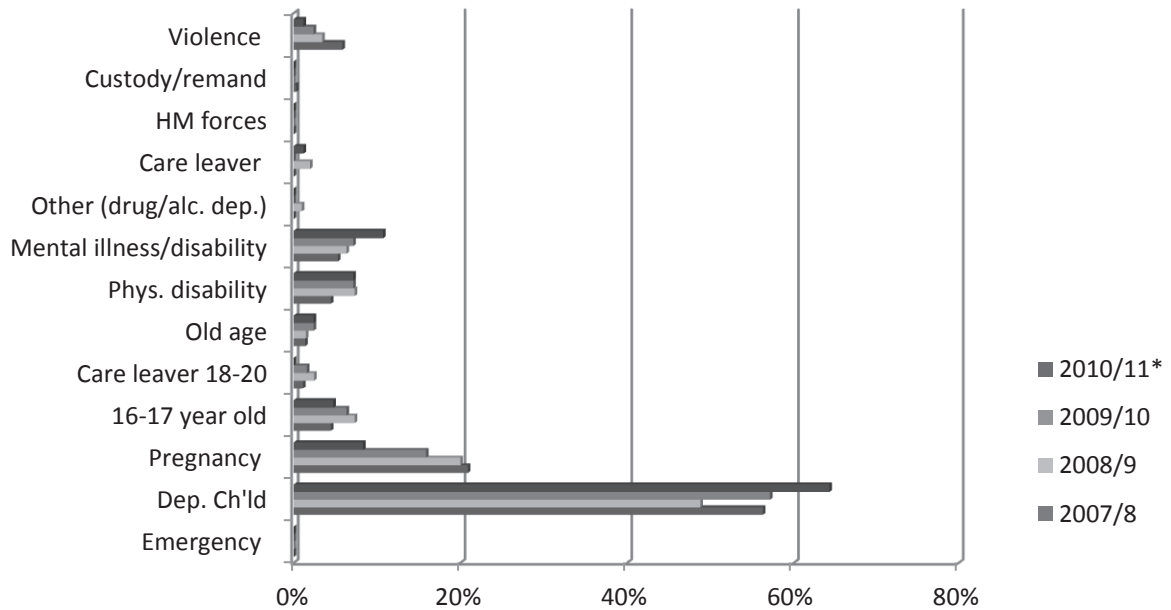
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6.19. The picture varies slightly between authorities (see Chart 4) but is very similar to that at the time the last strategy was written, indicating a consistent pattern of how and why homelessness arises in West Kent.



6.20. People accepted as homeless are most often families with dependent children (50%+) or pregnant women (a further 15-20%), often because they have been evicted by their families. Mental illness/disability and physical disability account for around 7% of cases, as do 16/17 year olds. Vulnerability due to domestic violence features in around 7% of cases in Tunbridge Wells, less so elsewhere (and possibly linked to the presence of a women’s refuge within the borough). This picture is fairly consistent across time and geography (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Priority need category 2007-2010: West Kent

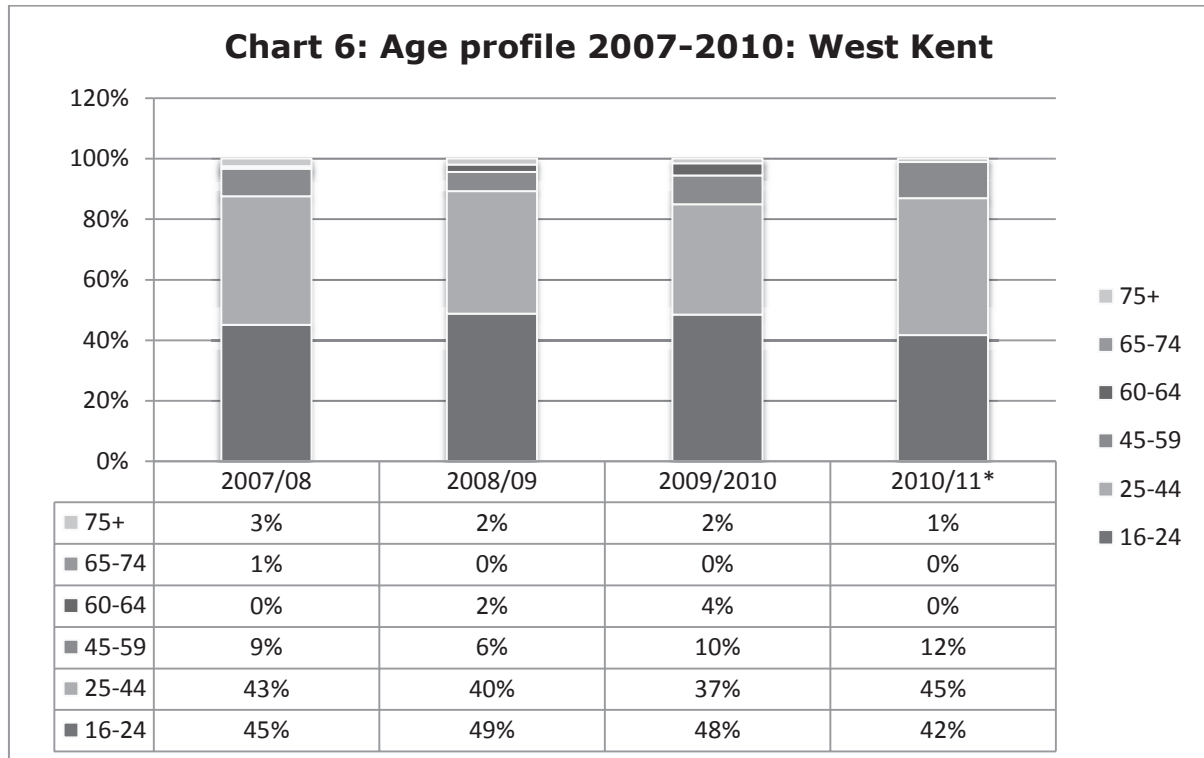


	Emergency	Dep. Ch'ld	Pregnancy	16-17 year old	Care leaver 18-20	Old age	Phys. disability	Mental illness/disability	Other (drug/alc. dep.)	Care leaver	HM forces	Custody/remand	Violence
■ 2010/11*	0%	64%	8%	5%	0%	2%	7%	11%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
■ 2009/10	0%	57%	16%	6%	2%	2%	7%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
■ 2008/9	0%	49%	20%	7%	2%	1%	7%	6%	1%	2%	0%	0%	3%
■ 2007/8	0%	56%	21%	4%	1%	1%	4%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%

*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

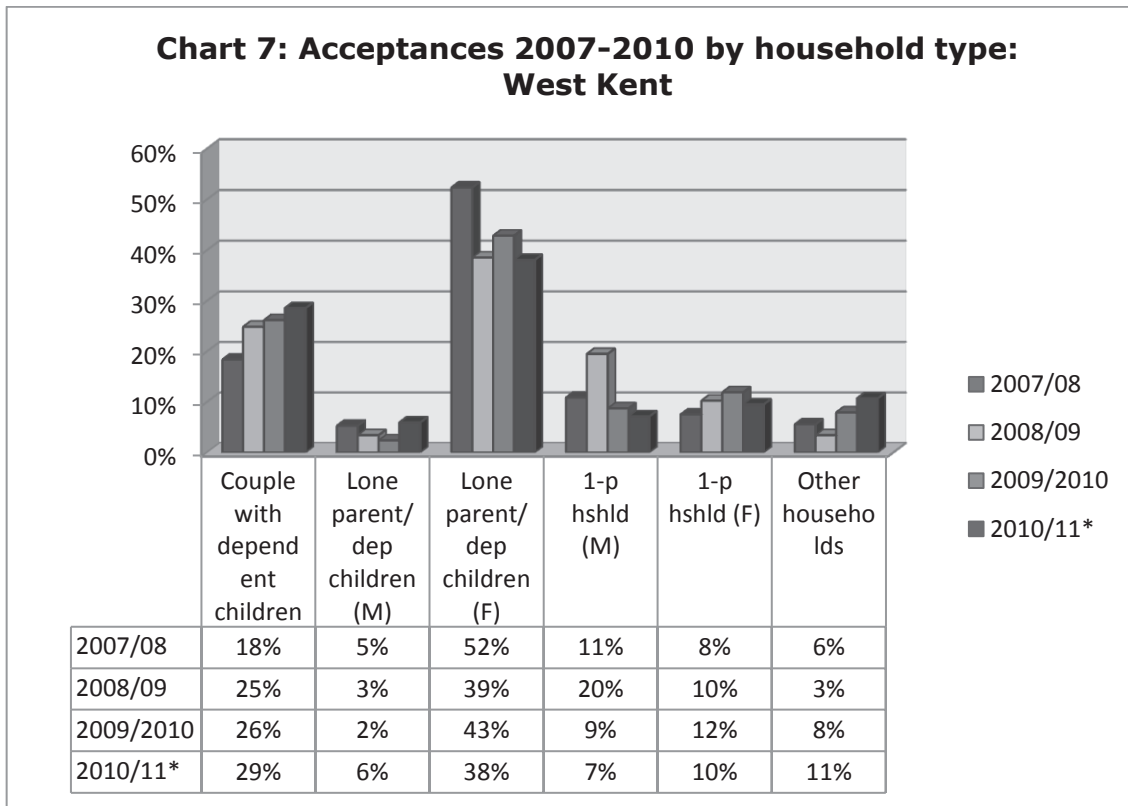
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6.21. The age profile is striking with just under half of people accepted as homeless being young (16-24) and a further 40% aged 25-44 (see Chart 6). This picture is consistent across all three districts and probably reflects the greater availability of alternative accommodation for older people threatened with homelessness, rather than a lack of demand as such.



*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.22. Households are most often lone parents, usually single mothers (43% of cases in 2009/10), with a further 25% families with children (up from 18% in 2007/8) (see Chart 7).



*2010/11 figures extrapolated from Q1/2 data.

6.23. The numbers of people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health problems accepted as homeless have increased slightly over recent years. This may in part be due to a lack of support provided through statutory services or failure to access floating support (which helps to sustain tenancies). With proposed cuts to funding, there is a risk that more vulnerable people will fall into homelessness (including rough sleeping) as cuts to floating support impact on drug and/or alcohol dependence services which then may have a significant knock-on effect on homelessness services. Supporting People have indicated that a strategic approach will be adopted to ensure that the programme can continue to provide floating support to vulnerable people. However, demand is likely to increase for such services.

6.24. The ethnic profile of homeless people in West Kent is broadly in line with the general population. In Sevenoaks, BME people account for 4.5% of homeless acceptances (6.1% in the general population); in Tunbridge Wells, for 10.3% (9.4%); and in Tonbridge & Malling 4.5% (4.8%). The figures do not indicate that there is any one particular ethnic group at greater risk of homelessness, rather numbers are divided fairly evenly among all of the ethnic groups.

6.25. Gypsies and travellers (the largest minority group in Sevenoaks DC) are at risk of homelessness where there is a shortage of suitable sites and accommodation for them. In 2006, there were a total of 81 public and 107 privately owned pitches in

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West Kent and an estimated shortfall of 70 over the next 5 years⁷. Existing sites include:

- Edenbridge (Sevenoaks) with 12 pitches (undergoing refurbishment and extension to 16 pitches)
- Cinderhill site in Matfield, Tunbridge Wells with 6 pitches.
- Kent County Council sites at Hawkhurst (3 pitches), Polhill (7 pitches) and Ash (35 pitches).
- Coldharbour in Tonbridge & Malling with 8 pitches
- Windmill Lane with 14 pitches

6.26. Recent initiatives such as the employment of a Site Warden at one Sevenoaks-managed site has helped reduce demand on homeless services from the gypsy traveller community by helping resolve disputes quickly.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **the Housing Options approach to homeless prevention has been very effective with homeless applications and acceptances falling year-on-year since 2005**
- **however, there are clear signs that this trend is now reversing and applications and acceptances are on the rise**
- **although we can't be exact, around three times as many people may be "hidden homeless" and not counted in official homelessness statistics**
- **young people are much more likely to become homeless than older people**
- **around 4 in 5 homeless households contain children**
- **the most common causes of homelessness are eviction by parents or family, relationships breaking down or short term private sector tenancies coming to an end**

6.27. Achievements and progress since 2005

6.28. With the publication of "Sustainable Communities: Homes for All" in 2005, the prevention of homelessness became one of the Government's key priorities. Homelessness prevention is based on the Housing Options model, based on the assumption that, by providing advice, support (including financial support) or advocacy before homelessness actually arises, alternative solutions can be found and the need for a homeless application will not arise. Prevention can take the form of enabling people to remain in their current home or by finding them alternative accommodation.

6.29. One of the key priorities identified in the 2007 Joint Homelessness Strategy was the provision of housing options and advice. Approaches to homeless prevention have evolved over the last five years and all three authorities have developed considerable expertise and skills in this area. As a result, they have been very successful at prevention, as shown by the downward trend in homelessness applications and acceptances from 2005 until 2010. Table 9 provides an overview

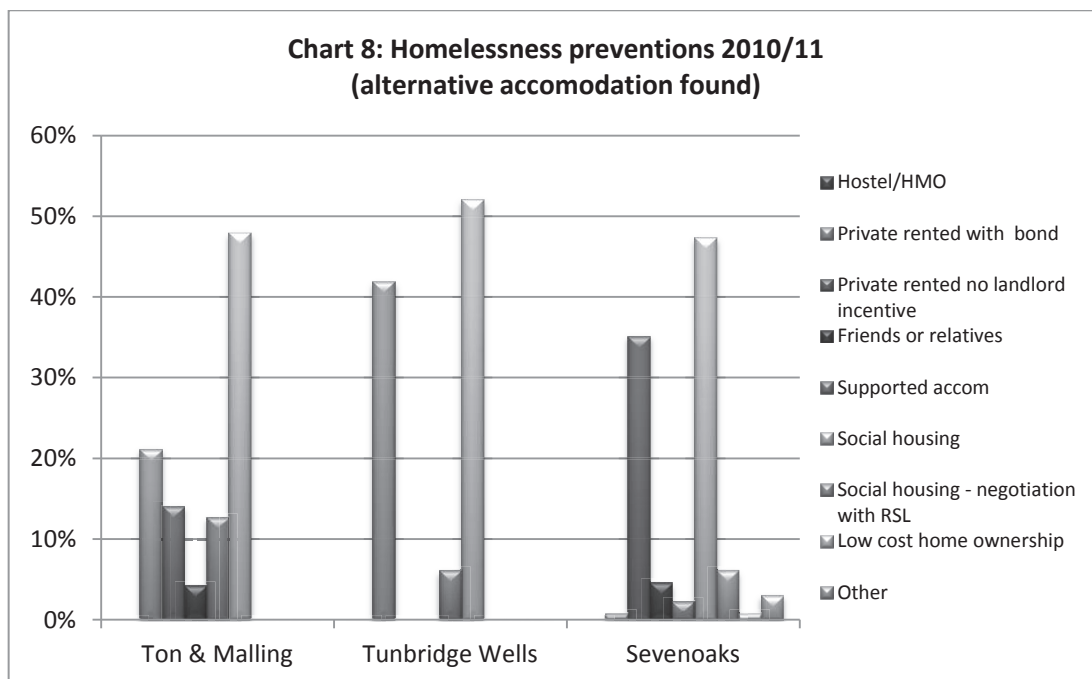
⁷ Ashford, Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling & Tunbridge Wells Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2005/6

of the preventative approaches used during the first half of 2010/11⁸ when over 550 people were assisted.

6.30. Again the data shows interesting differences in practice with Sevenoaks’ prevention work focusing on keeping people in their existing home whereas Tonbridge & Malling are more likely to place people in alternative accommodation. The figures for Tunbridge Wells are the result of recording issues (which have now been resolved), rather than differences in practice.

Table 9: Homelessness Preventions	2010/11			
	Ton & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Total West Kent
Preventions (remained in the home)	26	-	226	253
Preventions (found alternative accom)	71	98	131	300
Total	97	98	357	553

6.31. Where people are assisted to remain in their existing home, it is usually through mediation, conciliation or advice to resolve arrears or benefit problems. Where alternative accommodation is found, it is most usually within social housing (around half of all cases) though all councils make extensive use of the private sector, usually with some form of rent deposit or guarantee (see Chart 8).



6.32. Across all three local authorities, the use of temporary accommodation and bed & Breakfast has reduced considerably over recent years with all three ahead of their target to cut the numbers in TA by half by April 2010. At the end of Quarter 2

⁸ The data for Tunbridge Wells BC is somewhat unreliable due to recording issues which are currently being rectified.

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2010/11, Sevenoaks had a total of 20 households in temporary accommodation (3 in B&B); Tonbridge & Malling had 13 (8 in B&B); and Tunbridge Wells had 18 (2).

6.33. Preventing homelessness: what works?

- 6.34. All three Housing Options teams use a variety of preventative tools and techniques and each team prides itself on delivering advice that is specific to the needs to the client. The most commonly used types of intervention are described here.
- 6.35. **Mediation or conciliation** - given that parental eviction is the most common cause of homelessness among young people, mediation can be a very useful prevention tool. Most commonly used when young people are being evicted by their family, informal mediation to allow the young person to stay in their home or give them more time to find suitable accommodation is offered by all three authorities. Sevenoaks carry out a home visit in every case of threatened parental eviction while Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling undertake mediation face-to-face or over the phone. Informal mediation is successful in up to 80% of cases and was described, in some cases, as a 'reality check' in managing the expectations of families who may have benefited from social housing in the past and have similar expectations for their children.
- 6.36. Formal mediation has been tried in the past but was less successful, mainly because the intervention of a third party was felt to be less effective than informal mediation provided as part of an overall 'package' of advice offered by the Housing Options Teams.
- 6.37. **Supporting victims of domestic violence** – Tunbridge Wells fund Intouch to operate the Sanctuary scheme. This offers victims of domestic violence advice and practical support to make their home safe and secure, so they are able to remain in their home (through additional security measures such as extra locks, gated security, emergency lighting etc.). Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks operate a similar scheme called 'Safe Haven' while housing association partners have also contributed by making security improvements to properties where necessary.
- 6.38. **Rent in advance and deposit guarantees to private sector landlords** – given the importance of the private sector as a long term housing solution – and with many landlords reluctant to let to tenants on benefits - effective rent deposit schemes are key to the successful use of the private sector in homeless prevention. All three authorities offer private sector landlords rent in advance plus some form of cash deposit or guarantee/bond covering any damage to the property. These schemes (usually funded through Homelessness Grant) are seen as highly effective examples of "spend to save" and a key prevention tool, giving landlords assurance in case of damage and overcoming any delays in the first payment of Housing Benefit. In most cases, rent deposits are only available to priority homeless.
- 6.39. Each authority operates a different scheme with varying degrees of success:
- **Sevenoaks** have a dedicated Private Sector Lettings Scheme officer to work directly with people looking to rent privately and also with landlords who have vacant homes to rent. The Private Sector Lettings Scheme acts as an introduction agency putting landlords in touch with those looking for a home, providing deposit bonds (backed up by an inventory carried out by the Council) and rent in advance loans to enable those eligible for assistance to secure a private tenancy. To qualify for assistance under the scheme those looking for a home must be either homeless or threatened with homelessness, on a low

income and have a connection with the Sevenoaks District. The scheme is linked with the Council's Accreditation Scheme which provides advice and grant funding to private landlords to bring their properties up to the Decent Homes Standard. Preventing Homelessness Grant has been used to supplement the funding available for loans under this scheme.

- **Tonbridge & Malling** offer a deposit bond (where landlords can claim against a bond in the case of any damage), or a cash deposit where a landlord is not prepared to accept a bond. In exceptional cases, one month's rent in advance can also be paid to the landlord. Payments made to landlords are repayable by the tenants over an agreed period at an affordable amount. In 2009/10, 48 customers were assisted with rent deposits/bonds and/or rent in advance payments and a further 36 in the first three quarters of 2010/11.
- **Tunbridge Wells** operates a rent deposit guarantee (bond) scheme, which provides landlords with a guarantee equivalent to up to 1 ½ months' rent. The housing options team also has limited funds available to provide, in exceptional circumstances, cash deposits or rent in advance. During 2009/10, the Council provided deposits and deposit guarantees to a total of 69 households. So far during 2010/11, over 60 households have already been assisted through the scheme. The Council also operates a successful property-based accreditation scheme, which helps increase the number of good quality private rentals available to the Housing Options Team. Once a property has been accredited, the landlord is given the option of advertising their vacant rental properties free of charge on Kent Homechoice. The Council is able to assist non-priority need customers with a rent deposit guarantee at their discretion.

Case Study

Ms X was living in a women's refuge with her 2 young children, having fled from her violent partner.

She approached the Council for advice about housing and subsequently applied to the PSL scheme. The application to the scheme was accepted.

A landlord with a property to let contacted the Council. The Council had previously assisted the landlord bring the property back into use by giving an Empty Homes Grant, following which the property was registered on the Council's Accreditation Scheme, confirming the home was of good quality and complied with the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard. As the landlord was happy to accept a tenant who would be claiming LHA and using a Deposit Bond & Rent-in-Advance loan, arrangements were made for Ms X to view the property.

Both landlord and Ms X were happy to proceed with the tenancy and the tenancy recently commenced.

As there is to be a shortfall between the LHA rate and the contractual rent, the Council's Benefits Team have agreed to award some DHP towards some of the shortfall.

6.40. **Negotiating with lenders/landlords** - mortgage companies do, in some cases, advise councils of repossessions, giving the authorities the opportunity to negotiate over mortgage arrears in order to keep people in their home. Authorities will also intervene with private/social landlords over rent arrears or where eviction is treated for other reasons.

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Case Study:

Mr & Mrs A approached Tunbridge Wells BC in March 2010. Mr A had broken his back in a building site accident 10 years previously. He had started his own business as he could not work for anyone due to the accident but the business collapsed.

Mr & Mrs A have seven children and were living in a 5 bedroom house. The mortgage outstanding was £161,000 and the property value was £230,000; there were mortgage arrears of over £7,000K as well as four loans secured on the property totalling £37,500. All of these loans were in arrears and the loan companies were also attempting to repossess the property whilst the mortgage rescue case was going through.

At the repossession hearing in March, the court was contacted by the Housing Options Adviser, who explained that the Government Mortgage Rescue Scheme was being pursued. As a result, possession was not granted and the Court allowed the Council and Moat Housing Association time to process the application for mortgage rescue.

During the legal process, it came to light that the family did not have the appropriate planning permission and building regulations certificates for works that had been completed on the property. This could have derailed the process. However, effective liaison with Planning, the housing options adviser managed to get this permission quickly in special circumstances.

Mr & Mrs A's mortgage rescue completed in September 2010.

- 6.41. **Providing advice or assistance through other organisations** – all three authorities use the Citizen's Advice Bureau to carry out homeless prevention and organise regular joint training and liaison. All three authorities have referral arrangements with Porchlight for the rough sleeper and outreach services, funded by the Supporting People Programme.
- 6.42. The **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)** is a key resource for rough sleepers in time of severe weather and has been successfully used in West Kent in recent years. However, the temporary accommodation can be located away from any support links that the individual may have and, in some cases, may not be practical to travel to or from at times of severe weather.
- 6.43. There are a number of other initiatives included within the previous strategy that have met with more limited success. These include:
- **Schools projects** – all three local authorities have worked with Porchlight to go into schools to advise young people of the realities of homelessness (though funding is due to expire in March 2011). Access into schools has not always been easy though progress has been made recently in Tunbridge Wells.
 - **Supported lodgings** – the idea of supported lodgings is to place a young person with a host family who can support them pending a move to independent accommodation. A project with the Bridge Trust did not however take off due to problems recruiting host families and concerns over health and safety. With the economic downturn, however, the scheme may now be more attractive to host families and there are examples from elsewhere of successful supported lodgings schemes
 - **Crash pads** – these provide a space for a (usually) young person to 'cool off' after family disputes that could lead to eviction. Lack of funding and suitable premises has prevented this idea being developed in the past though the three local authorities still see a need for this service and would support a cost-effective solution
 - **Direct access shelter** – the three authorities have run seasonal shelters in the past though demand for this service has reduced since Colebrook Road opened.

Although agencies have indicated a desire for a permanent facility in each district, in the absence of identified suitable locations and external capital funding, this looks unlikely to be a priority in the foreseeable future. Revenue funding to support accommodation-based supported housing for young people at risk (aged 16-24) has been agreed through the Supporting People Programme. Currently the funding is used to provide floating support to this client group in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells.

6.44. Tackling issues beyond homelessness

6.45. **HERO project** – in recognition of the fact that local authorities need to look beyond the accommodation needs of homeless people and address underlying issues such as debt, long term unemployment and lack of educational opportunities, Sevenoaks DC has attracted external funding to develop this trailblazer enhanced housing advice project. Through a specialist advisor, they provide holistic advice on housing, debt, welfare benefits, saving money on fuel bills, retraining and further education options, getting back to work and business start-up. The project has been very successful and has helped many clients since it was set up. Although funding for the project is due to expire in June 2012, Sevenoaks is determined to use the lessons of the project to evolve its housing options service into a more holistic service.

Case Study

Mrs L. recently moved into the Edenbridge area. She was lacking in self- confidence and did not know anyone in the area. She had not worked for over a year and came to the HERO project needing debt and employment advice.

HERO worked very closely with the volunteering centre, getting her working in a retail environment in order to build up her confidence and work experience. Her confidence grew and within 4 months of Mrs L.'s coming to the HERO project, she had found volunteering work in the public and private sector.

Mrs L also referred her 17-year old daughter to the service and she is now in a volunteering work placement as well as in fulltime education studying to be a carer.

6.46. Tunbridge Wells and Rother Councils jointly secured Government Trailblazer funding in 2008 which has helped deliver debt and employment advice over the last two years, alongside housing options advice. Both Councils are now considering how to maintain key elements of this service in the future, in the context of continuing economic uncertainty. Tunbridge Wells are optimistic that funding to continue the housing and debt advice service, through the local Citizens Advice Bureau, will be secured for the immediate future.

6.47. Choice based lettings

6.48. The launch of the Kent-wide Choice Based Lettings scheme has brought many advantages including more mobility across the county, more transparency and improved cost effectiveness. CBL has also been a useful preventative tool with the authorities using the Register in such a way as to encourage applicants to work with them to resolve their housing situation, either by the way points are allocated or by proactively bidding on behalf of applicants.

6.49. Inevitably however, some applicants find the system quite hard to understand. This was shown in the service user consultation where many people said that they found the system quite complex. The scheme is now looking to move to a

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Common Assessment Framework and a Working Group has also been established to explore other future options for the register.

6.50. Accommodation and services for homeless people in West Kent

6.51. **Partnership working with other agencies** - in addition to the housing options and advice provided by the local authorities, there are many agencies working across West Kent providing generic or specialist housing advice and assisting in homeless prevention. These include:

- **Connexions** - assists 14-19 year olds who are homeless and estranged from their families to access benefits
- **Crisis Recovery Day Centre** - help people who are homeless or those with alcohol or drug addictions
- **HOPE** - provide supported accommodation throughout Kent for homeless ex-offenders or those at risk of offending
- **Kent Police** – through MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) assist with high risk domestic abuse victims with re-housing or securing existing accommodation.
- **Moat HA** – run Colebrook Road hostel
- **Platform 51 (YWCA)** – provide support to young women; have done pre-tenancy training courses
- **RSLs** - prevent homelessness through the provision of affordable housing, including social housing, intermediate rent and shared ownership
- **Salvation Army** - provide hot meals and clothing to homeless people
- **Shelter** – provide free advice on housing, debt and welfare benefits issues to people across Kent

6.52. The following partners also provide services funded through Supporting People:

- **The Bridge Trust** – single homeless hostel for homeless young men and women in Tunbridge Wells
- **Catch 22** - supports 16/21 years leaving local authority care, supporting their move into independent living.
- **Chapter One** - supported accommodation for homeless young women in Tunbridge Wells
- **Porchlight** – focus on street homelessness, rough sleeping and non-priority single homeless households. Also offer floating support for individuals with drug or alcohol-related issues.

6.53. There are also many successful partnerships with public sector bodies, including Health, Social Services and Offending. These relationships are enshrined in a series of protocols setting out responsibilities and key procedures. Feedback from staff suggests that some of these work well, others less so.

6.54. Supporting People commissions a variety of supported accommodation and services across West Kent. West Kent has a limited amount of accommodation for homeless people and, as such, demand always exceeds supply. The current facilities funded by Supporting People are listed in Table 10. A new scheme for young people at risk has come on line in Tonbridge & Malling. It is revenue funded by Supporting People. Needs analysis carried out by Supporting People has identified need for further supported accommodation for young people in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, as well as women's refuges in both those authorities and a scheme for people misusing alcohol in West Kent. Until those services can be delivered, the programme delivers floating support in West Kent.

Table 10: Short term (up to 2 years) accommodation based supported housing funded by Supporting People

Scheme	Bed spaces	Location	Client Group	Description
Colebrook Road	13	Tunbridge Wells	Single homeless with support needs	Maximum stay 13 weeks. Operated by Moat
Chapter 1	17	Tunbridge Wells	Single homeless women and families with support needs	Shared facilities
West Kent YMCA	24 s/c	Tunbridge Wells	Single homeless with support needs	A further 15 units are to open shortly. Shared among 3 West Kent Authorities
Women's Refuge	6	Tunbridge Wells	Women fleeing domestic abuse	Access is shared with Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and Malling
Bridge Trust	22	Tunbridge wells/Tonbridge and Malling	Single homeless with support needs	Shared facility
Richmond Fellowship	15	Sevenoaks	People with mental health problems (dual diagnosis)	Greensands scheme. Shared house.
Richmond Fellowship	6	Tonbridge and Malling	People with mental health problems	Dispersed s/c supported accommodation
Vine Court Road	9	Sevenoaks	People with mental health problems	Shared house.
HOPE Tonbridge	6	Tonbridge and Malling	Offenders or at risk of offending	Shared facilities
New Wharf	9	Tonbridge and Malling	Young people at risk (aged16-24)	Self-contained accommodation.

6.55. Supporting People also currently provides generic floating support for a range of vulnerable people and specialist floating support for people at risk of offending, with mental health problems, fleeing domestic abuse and misusing substances. The programme also funds rough sleeper and outreach services. All these services are accessible to the vulnerable people of West Kent.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Homeless prevention has been very effective in West Kent over recent years and the teams have developed effective toolkits for prevention**
- **Approaches differ between the three authorities and there are opportunities to better share 'what works', particularly around rent deposit schemes which will become increasingly important to prevention in the future**
- **Accommodation for homeless people is in short supply and demand always exceeds supply**
- **There is a need for additional accommodation for young people at risk in Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling, women's' refuges in Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling and for people misusing substances in West Kent**
- **Strong partnerships between local authorities, agencies, housing associations and other public sector bodies exist across West Kent**

PART TWO: THE STRATEGY

7. LESSONS LEARNT

7.1. During the course of consultation with partners, stakeholders and staff, a number of themes emerged that have informed the strategy going forward (see Appendix 2 for summaries of the consultations). These were:

How things work

- a desire for more commonality in how the three authorities work and in their processes and procedures and for existing protocols to be better understood and enforced
- an appetite for more shared services across West Kent or county-wide
- an appetite for more innovation, moving away from “the way things have always worked” to exploring more radical solutions
- a feeling that there is some duplication and overlap between some services and therefore an opportunity to streamline
- an appetite for more sharing of knowledge, information and good practice amongst the authorities and partner agencies
- a need to streamline how some processes and procedures work so they do not get in the way of delivering effective services
- more ‘joined up’ and effective referral processes
- the importance of effective partnership working
- the need to involve service users in designing procedures and protocols

New services and ideas

- build on the existing relationships with private sector landlords, to understand their issues and overcome the barriers they have to letting their properties to people on benefits
- the importance of robust, cost-effective rent deposit schemes to successful prevention
- support for schemes that would allow people who had not been tenants before to become “accredited” through a course in how to manage a tenancy
- the need for tenancy sustainment when people need specific support to help them keep their tenancy
- the need for more preventative work with young people and in schools
- the need for more floating support, particularly for new tenants
- the need for more direct access accommodation for non-priority homeless

7.2. The key themes that emerged from service user consultation were:

- **Staff** – The quality of interaction with staff within the Housing Options Teams was often cited as the best or worst part of users’ experience with the common themes around quality of staff, empathy and communication skills. In many cases, households felt listened to, were kept informed and felt very positive about their experience. However, others were less positive, saying that they felt ‘judged’ by staff who lacked empathy with their situation.
- **Realistic advice** – several households said that they needed more advice about their likely success bidding on properties, the amount of accommodation available and on what they might expect from the council. One household in particular said they would not have come to the area if they had known beforehand how difficult it was likely to be to find a new home. The feedback showed that expectations are, in some cases, high. Several said that they

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would have liked more information from the outset and that this would have empowered them to make better choices and so take control of their own situation.

- **Rent deposits** – received positive feedback, but there was a feeling that the cap should be raised on the monthly rent you can access through this scheme. Several users struggled to find accommodation at rent levels under the cap.
- **Private Accommodation** – the lack of availability of private accommodation for people receiving benefits was mentioned with people wanting more help accessing landlords willing to accept them. Several users reported, once they had found a home, that they were happy with the quality of accommodation
- **Temporary Accommodation** – this was a worry for some households in terms of being able to maintain employment and family contact when placed long distances from their communities. There were also a number of concerns about poor quality, cleanliness and, in one case, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse in TA which the user found highly intimidating
- **The HERO project** received very positive feedback.

8. OUR VISION AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

8.1. We have used the following guiding principles in developing the strategy and action plan:

- they should build upon evidenced need of homeless people
- they should contain specific, actionable objectives rather than aspirations
- they should be aligned to the objectives of related national, regional and local strategies
- they will be delivered through partnership working between the three authorities, local agencies and the voluntary sector

8.2. The overall vision of the West Kent Homelessness Strategy is to:

“proactively support and empower people to plan their own futures so that homelessness within West Kent is significantly reduced”

8.3. Responding to the consultation with stakeholders, partners and service users – and building on the successes over the last five years, we have defined five strategic priorities. These are:

- 1. Maximising homelessness prevention through the provision of appropriate housing options and choices**
- 2. Maximising resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective**
- 3. Working effectively with private sector landlords**
- 4. Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness**
- 5. Meeting the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness**

8.4. Despite such uncertainty in the economic, funding and policy situation, we are confident that these broad strategic priorities will provide a sound framework for the next five years. However, given the current uncertainty and pace of change nationally and regionally, the detailed Action Plan covers the period to June 2013. We will review the Action Plan at that point to ensure that it remains relevant and up to date as things evolve.

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8.5. Strategic Priority One: Maximising homelessness prevention through an enhanced Housing Options service - by 2016, our goal is to develop a highly effective, personalised housing options service that empowers customers to make the best choices for themselves

- 8.6. All three authorities have been very successful at preventing homelessness. However, with proposed changes to benefits, reduced investment in social housing and uncertain economic times ahead, there is a wide consensus that the services will be put under considerable pressure in the coming years and that demands on the services will increase. The teams will have to understand, and plan for, these changing demands as the situation evolves – including from non-priority homeless who are less visible in the homelessness statistics and from young people on low incomes who are no longer able to access the housing market.
- 8.7. The current preventative tools will come under increasing pressure, so it is important that the teams use the coming months to ensure that processes and protocols are working well, being exploited to the full and that any barriers to their use are removed where possible. There is scope for the three teams to share best practice more effectively and to work together more closely and, through the development of the strategy, have identified an appetite – and opportunities – for this. At the same time, the Housing Options Teams will be tested through increased pressure on services and skill sets will need to evolve, with more emphasis on negotiation and mediation skills, detailed benefits advice and employment and training.
- 8.8. At the same time, there will be a significant task in managing customers' expectations. Service user consultation revealed that many applicants already have unrealistic expectations about their future housing prospects, while proposed changes to waiting lists, the allocation of social housing, social housing tenancies and the use of the private sector will need to be communicated, with messages to customers being clear and upfront. Improved advice and information will need to be made available through the internet (with more self servicing), as well as new and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. It could also involve more creative ways to reach the 'front line' of homelessness with advice available in doctors surgeries, support centres for mental health clients, schools etc. The need for more co-ordination of information, advice and guidance was identified throughout the consultation in order to reduce duplication.
- 8.9. In order to deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:
- ensure that we fully understand and analyse emerging trends in homelessness and that changing demands on the service are understood and planned for
 - ensure that the impacts of cuts to support and other services are understood by Housing Options Teams, customers and other stakeholders and prioritise resources accordingly
 - hone our 'prevention toolkit', ensuring that we are maximising the options that are available and making best use of available techniques and resources
 - provide clear and timely information to people threatened with homelessness so that they are fully aware of their options and can make realistic choices
 - building on the HERO project, develop more holistic approaches to prevention that tackle the underlying causes of homelessness

8.10. Strategic Priority Two: Maximising resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective - by 2016, our goal is to deliver more effective services using fewer resources

- 8.11. At the same time as this anticipated increase in homelessness, local authority and Supporting People funding is facing significant reductions. There is a real pressure not just to 'do more for less' but to think – and act - radically about how services can be delivered more cost effectively in the future. The three West Kent local authorities have a long and successful history of working together and, in developing the strategy, have demonstrated an appetite to take partnership working further. There may be opportunities to share staff and expertise, either between the three authorities or with other teams and partners (including housing associations and voluntary agencies) and identifying such opportunities is a key priority for the next two years.
- 8.12. Teams could also develop shared processes and procedures, learning from the best within West Kent as well as more widely. The consultation revealed clear scope for reviewing processes and procedures in order to cut out any duplication and this exercise could usefully be completed with partner agencies to make sure that the best use is being made of all available resources. There is a link here with the service mapping exercise identified in Priority 4, which will give opportunities to review exactly how homelessness services can best be delivered across agencies and local authorities.
- 8.13. Finally, with resources so scarce the authorities will need to maximise any funding that is available. This will mean having an eye to central and local government priorities and thinking and ensuring that the profile – and successes - of the homelessness services is maintained. This will particularly be the case when Homelessness Grant loses its ring-fenced status in 2013. The authorities will also need to ensure that benefits are maximised, with improvements to procedures and expertise a priority.
- 8.14. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:
- identify opportunities to share resources, services and expertise across the three authorities, and more widely
 - maximise the external resources available to tackle homelessness
 - with other Kent authorities, develop and implement a common Assessment Framework across Kent
 - make best use of existing housing stock, in partnership with housing associations
 - maximise the availability of accommodation for people threatened with homelessness, both in the social and private rented sectors

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8.15. Strategic Priority Three: Working effectively with private sector landlords
– by 2016, our goal is to understand and overcome the barriers to increased private sector lettings

8.16. The private rented sector is already central to successful prevention and will become even more so when local authorities are able to fully discharge their duties into private rent. At the same time, many private landlords are wary about accepting tenants who may be vulnerable and/or on benefits and, in what is an affluent commuter area, are under little pressure to do so. With changes to benefits on the way, persuading landlords to accept benefit claimants will become an even greater challenge.

8.17. All three authorities work with private landlords and have had varying degrees of success in forging links with the sector and in understanding and removing the (real and perceived) barriers. A key priority for the future strategy is therefore to improve these links, ensure that the priorities and motivations of private sector landlords are understood and that the authorities develop an 'offer' to landlords that meets the needs of both parties.

8.18. This could include looking at rent levels (perhaps trading certainty for price), preferred options for rent in advance and deposits, whether tenants could achieve 'accreditation' that would provide reassurance to landlords and a package that would help more vulnerable residents sustain their tenancy. It may also mean ensuring landlords have access to a package of grants or loans to improve their properties so they meet Decent Homes and affordable warmth standards.

8.19. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- work with private sector landlords in order to understand their priorities, perceived barriers to letting to tenants on benefits and to develop a 'win-win' culture that offers reassurance to both parties
- develop a Tenancy Sustainment programme that will enable vulnerable residents maintain their tenancy
- work with landlords to improve property standards in private sector through Accreditation Schemes

8.20. Strategic Priority Four: Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness - by 2016, our goal is to strengthen existing partnerships, maximising synergies to meet the needs of homeless people

- 8.21. Strong and effective partnerships already exist between the authorities and the many voluntary agencies and housing associations that work in West Kent. These provide a firm basis for what will need to be even closer partnership working in the future.
- 8.22. At this time of real pressure on resources, it is vital that every organisation with a role in tackling homelessness in West Kent is clear about the contribution they make to the overall vision and delivery of this strategy. The consultation identified that there is some duplication between agencies and services as well as some gaps. An important early task therefore is to understand the resources available through joint service mapping with partners to identify roles, client group(s), expertise and resources. This need not necessarily be started from scratch – where mapping has already been carried out (for example The Bridge Trust has undertaken some mapping as part of their Homelessness Survival Handbook), this should be used as the starting point and built upon. This information will need to be accessible and web-based and data kept updated every 18 months - two years. A useful additional feature would be a 'share point' to share information, customer feedback and policies.
- 8.23. By bringing together this information and filling in any gaps, the authorities can facilitate a conversation with partners about the best way to deliver a joined-up service across West Kent. This may mean radically reviewing how these partnerships work in practice and whether there is further scope for services to be delivered in different ways, by different organisations. For example, organisations such as Porchlight and the Citizen's Advice Bureau may be best placed to lead on making contact with hard-to-reach groups while the CAB and Shelter could best provide advice and guidance to people with no recourse to public funds. Clarifying and formalising these relationships and roles would mean better use of resources, with the most appropriate agencies delivering services in the most appropriate way at the 'front line'.
- 8.24. Again, building on existing relationships, improved links will be made with a range of public sector bodies who play a part in delivering the strategy such as Housing Benefit, Job Centre Plus (maximising the use of existing 'back to work' schemes), Children's Trusts and the Kent-wide and local Learning Disability Partnership Boards. New relationships will need to be forged with Health, with PCTs being abolished in 2012 and new bodies such as the Swanley, Dartford and Gravesham Pathfinder formed. Links with Young Persons' Services need to be strengthened, in particular to focus on issues of throughput and move-on. Where protocols currently exist, these will be monitored to check that they are working effectively. Given the proposed benefit changes, links will be made with London Boroughs to address the potential increase in homelessness resulting from displacement of families from London.
- 8.25. With regard to rough sleepers, Tunbridge Wells has agreed that the needs of this group will be discussed at the JARS panel which will give an opportunity to discuss cases with agencies such as mental health teams, ensuring that the appropriate support is available.
- 8.26. Homeless prevention could also benefit from improved information sharing across organisations and the authorities have identified a need to work together with housing association partners on evictions and on difficult-to-house people.

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8.27. The Homelessness Strategy Group is the body which brings together all of the agencies in West Kent working with homeless people and which monitors the delivery of the strategy. Building on the work already done, this group will refocus how it operates by establishing a series of sub-groups which bring together cross-sector partners to concentrate on key themes such as crime reduction, health and vulnerable people, developing knowledge and relationships across sectors. These groups would have clear accountability for focusing on, and working towards achieving, relevant strategic priorities in the Action Plan and report back to HSG on a regular basis. Members of HSG will also share resources and expertise through committing to a programme of joint training, shadowing and knowledge sharing. They will also better co-ordinate information, advice and guidance with no duplication of information and a mechanism for sharing legislative and other good practice updates.

8.28. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- undertake a mapping exercise of homelessness organisations and services across West Kent, creating a shared, updatable resource
- work more closely with RSL partners
- improve links with public sector bodies
- increase the effectiveness and accountability of the Homelessness Strategy Group

8.29. Strategic Priority Five: Meeting the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness - by 2016, our goal is to understand and meet the needs of the diverse range of groups affected by homelessness

8.30. Homelessness affects a broad range of people, as illustrated by the case studies in this strategy. The relatively affluent nature and geography of West Kent mean that people threatened with homelessness face specific challenges of accessing accommodation and services while pressures on funding are already impacting on support services that enable people to sustain their tenancies. At the same time, homelessness is affecting a broader range of households, and local authorities are seeing an increase in approaches from owner occupiers hit by the recession.

8.31. While the P1E data enables the authorities to undertake some analysis of who is becoming homeless and their needs, more detailed information and research is needed. This will enable the authorities to gain a fuller insight into the experiences of customers, better understand the complex patterns of 'pulls and pushes' that can cause homelessness and so better tailor services to individuals' needs.

8.32. To deliver against this strategic priority, over the next two years, we will:

- gain deeper insight into the customer experience to help us to achieve personalisation in service delivery to fully address equality and diversity matters

8.33. **Young People** – young people are particularly affected by homelessness and authorities have a particular duty to consider the interests of children (16-18 year olds). Going forward, the definition of young people will be expanded to 16-35 year olds and will cover those classed (in terms of the legislation) as low priority with limited support needs (though the definition in terms of SP funded accommodation will not change). The priority here will be for early intervention to avoid homelessness arising. Research⁹ has shown that young people value information, advice and guidance (including through schools) as their preferred support options while new and social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) offer opportunities to interact with young people in ways that suit them. We will:

- using the Kent-wide Young Homeless Persons' Protocol, ensure we work effectively with Children's Services departments to assist homeless 16/17 year olds
- signpost young people to literacy and numeracy classes where appropriate
- promote and support young people to access tenancy sustainment courses
- support the commissioning of supported accommodation for young people in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks

8.34. **People experiencing domestic violence** (both women and men)– we will:

- Where funding permits, extend the use of and promote the Sanctuary scheme to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their home
- support the commissioning of refuges in Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks
- following on from the successful MARAC training in 2010, ensure that staff receive on-going training on domestic abuse (resources to be identified)
- continue joint working with other agencies such as the Police through, for example, MARAC meetings

⁹ On the Right Track? Consulting young people about the National Youth Homelessness Scheme (YMCA, 2007)

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8.35. **People with disabilities** (including learning disabilities) – we will:

- audit existing supply of temporary accommodation to ensure that there is provision to meet the needs of people with disabilities
- with Private Sector Housing colleagues work with housing association partners to implement the Kent Housing Group standard for funding disabled adaptations in housing association stock

8.36. **People with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse** – we will:

- seek advice from health services and other specialists about the specific needs of this group and how best to engage with them and provide appropriate training for staff (may require additional resources)
- work more closely with adult Social Services and KDAAT and explore the possibility of joint assessments to identify the housing and support needs of this group

8.37. **Gypsies and travellers** – we will:

- work with the KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit to better understand the housing and support needs of the gypsy and traveller community

8.38. **Older people** – we will:

- provide training for staff on the risks of financial and domestic abuse among older people
- develop an information pack for older people facing homelessness

8.39. **Rough Sleepers** – we will:

- with other Kent authorities and partner agencies, develop joint initiatives for rough sleepers using funding allocated by DCLG
- identify options for sourcing accommodation that can be used as temporary winter shelters to support the Severe Weather Policies of each authority

8.40. **Offenders** – we will:

- implement and monitor the Protocol for the Resettlement and Housing of Offenders

8.41. Finally, service users have important knowledge about their experiences of the Housing Options Services that can be used to improve and shape services in the future. In order to use this valuable resource, we will:

- develop a co-ordinated approach to service user consultation and involvement, including minority groups e.g. gypsies and travellers

PART THREE: DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

9. RESOURCES AND FUNDING

- 9.1. Financial resources for tackling homeless are limited and are likely to come under significant pressure in the coming years. Funding to deliver this strategy comes from a number of sources:
- 9.2. **General Fund** - each local authority funds the majority of their revenue expenditure on homelessness and related activities through their General Fund. This includes the costs of providing a housing options and advice service, grant funding to voluntary partners that provide services to homeless people, and the cost of providing emergency accommodation to homeless households. Government grant to each of the three authorities has been cut by around 25% in the next two years, creating huge challenges in delivering services at affordable levels.
- 9.3. **Homelessness Grant** – this is specific Government funding based on the level of need identified in each area, intended to fund the development of preventative initiatives, such as mediation services and outreach and resettlement services. The Government has recently confirmed that Homelessness Grant will continue to be available and has increased funding for 2011/12 in anticipation of increasing pressures on services (see Table 11), though funding for 2012/15 has not yet been identified. Funding is ring-fenced only for 2011-2013: after then, the grant will not be specifically tied to homeless prevention.

	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks
2009/10	£41,050	£63,000	£46,000
2010/11	£41,050	£62,000	£46,000
2011/12	£57,470	£88,000	£92,000

- 9.4. **Supporting People funding** - Supporting People funding is allocated through the Kent Supporting People Team and provides the revenue funding for services that support homeless people across West Kent. This includes temporary accommodation such as direct access hostel provision, women’s refuges and accommodation-based support for people with specific needs, such as alcohol or drug dependency. Supporting People also funds the countywide Outreach and Resettlement Service that is delivered by Porchlight.
- 9.5. Supporting People resources are limited and under considerable pressure. Commissioning decisions are made by the Commissioning Body of which the three authorities are members. The Programme’s agreed priorities for new service development are enshrined in the Kent Supporting People Strategy 2010-2015 and include services for young people at risk. The 2010/11 Supporting People budget is just in excess of £32 million for Kent. The current distribution funding supported housing across West Kent is shown in Table 12 below.

Total West Kent	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge & Malling
£6,093,696	£1,918,898	£1,499,726	£876,195

The data only includes district specific distribution. However, as identified elsewhere, vulnerable people across the three authorities can also access a range of floating support services delivered across six districts/boroughs in west Kent and countywide.

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- 9.6. **Funding for voluntary sector organisations** - the majority of voluntary sector organisations that provide services to homelessness people across West Kent are funded by grants and donations.
- 9.7. **Discretionary housing payments (Housing Benefit)** - Discretionary Payments are housing benefit payments made to people who are experiencing housing difficulties and can help them to access and retain accommodation. With proposed change to affordable rents (moving to 80% of market rents) the Housing Benefit bill will come under pressure
- 9.8. **Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding** - the main source of capital funding for new accommodation based services for homeless households and new affordable housing. Budgets from 2011/12 have been drastically reduced with an expectation that, in future, new schemes will be funded through charging rents of up to 80% of market rent levels.
- 9.9. **Other funding** - from time to time additional grant resources are made available for new accommodation based initiatives and/or to improve existing accommodation. These resources are generally bid for by each authority or with partners where practical.
- 9.10. The other main resource available to the local authorities is, of course, their staff and profiles of the Housing Options Teams in each of the three local authorities are shown at Appendix 6.

10. MONITORING, REPORTING AND REVIEW

- 10.1. The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan contains detailed individual objectives for delivering this Strategy. Performance will be monitored in various ways:
- the Homelessness Strategy Group will be the main monitoring mechanism, with reports made to HSG by the authorities and partner agencies on a quarterly basis
 - progress against each objective is continuously monitored at both a district/borough and sub-regional level
 - through the internal audit process within each authority, which undertakes audit reviews of specific services to ensure that they are being delivered appropriately.
 - by Central Government, through the quarterly P1E return.
- 10.2. Clients' views will be obtained regularly through the service user group which will be established to facilitate service user input.

11. ACTION PLAN 2011-2013

- 11.1. The detailed action plan to deliver the strategy accompanies the strategy (see Appendix 7). Despite such uncertainty in the economic, funding and policy situation, we are confident that the five strategic priorities will provide a sound framework for the next five years. However, given the current uncertainty and pace of change nationally and regionally, the detailed Action Plan covers the period to June 2013. We will review the Action Plan at that point to ensure that it remains relevant and up to date as things evolve.

Appendix One: West Kent Homelessness Strategy Project Team

Helen Clarke, Housing Needs Manager (Tunbridge Wells DC) (until 30/11/10)

Jane Ellis, Housing Manager (Sevenoaks DC)

Jane Rogers, Housing Options Manager (Tunbridge Wells BC) (from December 2010)

Janet Walton, Chief Housing Officer, (Tonbridge & Malling BC)

Lynn Wilders, Housing Needs Manager (Tonbridge & Malling BC)

Pat Smith, Head of Housing and Communications (Sevenoaks DC)

Rav Kensrey, Housing Options Team Manager (Tonbridge and Malling BC) (from December 2010)

Appendix Two: Summary of Homelessness Strategy Group Consultation Events

Event One: July 2010	
<p>Addressing the needs of Young people 16-25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More preventative work in education around housing and mediation services ▪ More supported accommodation from low support to high support ▪ More floating support services to reduce waiting lists ▪ A much more clear protocol with regards to crisis situations around housing services ▪ Clearer information and improved communication on services and signposting ▪ Emergency Housing such as Nightstop or Open House. ▪ Preventative education - leaflet/booklet for Young Persons and agencies? ▪ Housing Awareness for young people to dispel myths
<p>Non Statutory homeless - maximising the use of the private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Same rent deposit scheme for all local authorities ▪ More direct access accommodation e.g. Colebrook Road ▪ More early intervention ▪ Expanding information provided in Gateways ▪ Raising awareness –expand available information ▪ Allocation pointing system to recognise those in supported accommodation ▪ maximise use of DHP payments ▪ Non priority applicants to be able to access Rent Deposit schemes ▪ Maximising benefits
<p>Maximising the Use of the Private Sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting People banding – can those about to move into a private rental get prioritised for support so they receive help when they need it? ▪ People housed into tenancies from supported accommodation should be entitled to a run on of support from accommodation provider for 4 weeks ▪ Can LA housing options teams provide an in house tenancy support service to help sustain tenancies? Pooled across West Kent? ▪ Robust rent deposit schemes – strong relationships with landlords ▪ Housing options teams make full use of DHP funds ▪ Private sector leasing scheme that is attractive to landlords – e.g. rent at LHA rate, not below, guaranteed rent even when property is void?
<p>Assisting vulnerable people with a high support need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training of staff – education on what is available across sectors ▪ Comprehensive advice from organisation such as the CAB ▪ Access to expertise on managing challenging behaviour ▪ Financial encouragement to landlords to work with high support clients ▪ Effective joint working protocols ▪ Producing a directory of services ▪ Involving clients in producing protocols and making them work. ▪ Gap in provision between supported accommodation and needs for residential care/provision. ▪ Need for high support scheme that will work with clients with complex needs
<p>Best Practice/Provision for those affected by</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Sanctuary Scheme - better promotion required ▪ Quantifying demand– monitoring demands/more data collection. ▪ Consistent training & increase ease of access to information – same standard/level across all areas of local

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Domestic Abuse	<p>authorities/RSL's/other housing providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All RSL's to introduce Domestic Abuse as a breach of tenancy. ▪ Ensure a consistent approach to out of hours housing advice and response. (Contact Centres to have at least one person with DA specialist knowledge) ▪ Widen reciprocal arrangements between local authority areas; ▪ Have joint policies and procedures; ▪ Provide more refuge accommodation in each borough ▪ To have early intervention in schools
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Event Two: December 2010			
	Aims	Tasks	Barriers
Working Effectively With Private Sector Landlords	<p>Increase the number of private sector landlords</p> <p>Ensure rent gets paid on time</p> <p>Tenancy sustained</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LHA Direct ▪ Tenancy sustainment resource ▪ Evidence of failures in the rent system ▪ Tenant training and accreditation ▪ Review rent deposit schemes ▪ Establish a Steering group of landlords to work with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reluctance to take LHA tenants ▪ Resources
Maximising Resources (Efficiency & Effectiveness)	<p>Make best use of stock across all sectors</p> <p>Transparent policies</p> <p>Work 'smarter' – avoid duplication of services</p> <p>Include accredited private rented sector in CBL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop under occupation schemes ▪ Bring back into use empty/in disrepair properties ▪ More cohesive thinking across organisations ▪ Promoting the needs of local people ▪ Joined up, efficient referral processes ▪ Share knowledge, expertise and best practice ▪ Explore new technologies ▪ Promotion of self-help measures ▪ Streamline processes ▪ Explore councils managing private lets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HB changes ▪ Financial incentives ▪ Support with the logistics of moving ▪ Flexible tenancies ▪ Managing aspirations ▪ Resources ▪ Smaller associations find this difficult ▪ National policies ▪ Culture ▪ Negativity of agents ▪ Prejudice against HB ▪ Payment for advert
Meeting The Diverse Needs Of The Community	<p>Helping young people more effectively</p> <p>Gypsy & traveller community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forum for young people and agencies working with this age group ▪ Engaging/reaching them – are we doing this effectively? ▪ Providing facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geography – hard to get around the WK area ▪ Cultural difficulties and

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	People with mental health problems	Getting provisions for 17 year olds	geographic
Homelessness Prevention	<p>Management of expectations</p> <p>School lessons in financial literacy</p> <p>Improve mediation</p> <p>Widen scope of rent deposit scheme</p> <p>Better use of stock – use empty homes above shops Decent Homes Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communication – seek advice early ▪ Legal advice ▪ Education in schools/at Sure Start ▪ Adult numeracy and literacy ▪ Partnership with the private sector 	<p>District Council’s cost</p> <p>Social exclusion/ mental illness</p> <p>ASB by tenants Landlords are anti-benefit clients</p> <p>No policy yet</p>
Creating Strong Partnerships	<p>Pooling resources</p> <p>Develop Kent-wide protocols</p> <p>Explore options appraisals for shared working</p> <p>Sharing knowledge/avoid overlapping and duplication</p> <p>Challenge of district/borough boundaries</p> <p>Getting local agencies to work together effectively</p> <p>Ensuring there is no duplication of advice services</p> <p>Looking at co-location and pooling budgets (e.g. minibuses)</p> <p>More effective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share best practice (e.g. HERO project) ▪ Joint training ▪ Building relationships ▪ Better communication of WNK of JPPB with strategy ▪ Procurement of shared services e.g. mediation ▪ Expanding the employment and training ▪ Understanding the local area ▪ Logical steps through supported to permanent/independent living ▪ Improved communication between agencies ▪ Discussion between relevant agencies 	<p>Capacity to develop staff – outsourcing work</p> <p>Fear of the loss of control</p> <p>Agreeing clear requirements HB changes</p> <p>Talk to each other! Flexibility Limited finance</p> <p>Logistics need to be resolved and fear of financial risks worked through</p> <p>Accepting need for</p>

	<p>advice and referrals</p> <p>Telephone conferencing advocacy</p> <p>LA fund more preventive homeless advice</p> <p>Work with landlords forums and letting agents</p> <p>Get social services and LAS to work together on under 18s</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Test efficiency of referral process (secret shopper) ▪ Co-ordinate housing advice ▪ Work with e.g. CAB ▪ Communicate and encourage a more proactive approach to accept benefit claimants <p>E.g. Connexions in schools and colleges</p>	<p>change by service providers</p>
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Event Three: January 2011

This event focused on the draft strategy with attendees giving comments on the draft document. The session also looked at the draft action plan (Strategic Priorities 4 &5), with outcomes of which were incorporated into the final draft of the action plan.

Organisations represented in consultation meetings

- Tonbridge CAB
- NHS Capital Planning
- Sevenoaks DC
- Age UK – Sevenoaks
- The Bridge Trust
- Shelter
- Sevenoaks Seniors Action Forum
- Porchlight
- Tunbridge Wells CAB
- KCC Children’s Services
- Moat Housing
- Catch 22 Housing
- Sevenoaks CAB
- Kent CC 16 Plus Services
- Kent CC Supporting People Team
- Hope Kent
- Connexions
- KCC St Johns Community Mental Health Centre
- TMBC Community Safety Manager
- YWCA
- Kent Youth Offending Services
- MIND Sevenoaks
- DGS Mind
- SDSAF
- YOS
- Catch22
- Probation
- KMDASG
- NHS West Kent
- West Kent YMCA

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Appendix Three: Summary of Service User Consultation

1. In order to seek the input of service users into the strategy, detailed telephone interviews were carried out with a total of 12 services users. These were selected at random from a list of contacts supplied by the three local authorities.
2. The interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes each, were semi-structured and asked a series of questions:
 - Household details
 - How did you first come into contact with the Council's housing service?
 - Ease of accessing information and advice?
 - What they expected before they turned up?
 - Good things about the service?
 - What could have been better?
 - How did advice etc. help change their situation?
 - Name one thing that you would have wanted the Council to do differently?
3. The household characteristics of the interviewees were as follows:

Household composition	No. Households
adult, 1 child	5
1 adult, 2 children	2
1 adult, 3 children	1
2 adults, 1 child	2
2 adults, 3 children	1
2 adults, 4 children	1

4. The reasons for homelessness were varied with two households suffering domestic violence, two being evicted from the family home having had a child, three leaving private sector rented properties, two relationship breakdown and one an owner occupier whose home was repossessed.
5. Overall, the feedback about the service was generally positive. Most households found it easy to contact the Housing Options Team and several mentioned how helpful they found them (this is particularly noticeable at Sevenoaks DC where several applicants praised the clarity of advice and information given). A small number of interviewees found staff attitudes towards them somewhat unsympathetic and expressed the view that they would have liked staff to be more understanding of their situation.
6. Expectations of the service were mixed. In some cases, applicants expected to be housed by the local authority quickly whereas others had much lower expectations, anticipating little assistance or a negative experience.

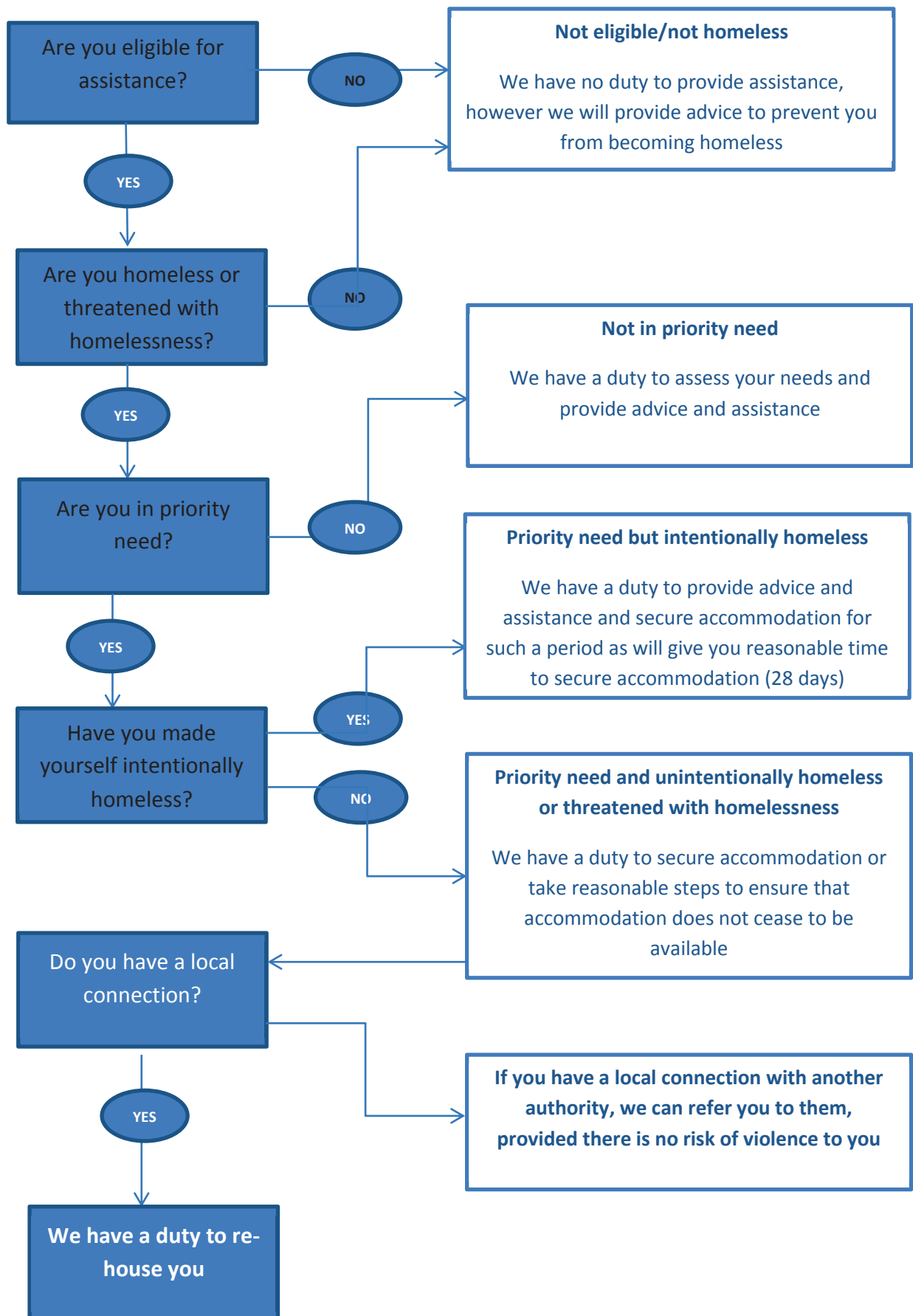
7. Positive aspects of the service were felt to be:

- The quality of the service, especially helpful staff
- Being kept informed and not making false promises
- The HERO project received particular praise
- Rent deposits (though there was a feeling that the caps were too low to find an acceptable property)
- Sensitive to family history of domestic violence

8. Aspects of the service felt to be less effective included:

- concerns about poor quality and cleanliness in temporary accommodation
- temporary accommodation was a worry for some households, in terms of being able to maintain employment and family contact when placed long distances from their communities
- what were perceived to be complexities of the points systems and of bidding for properties under Choice Based Lettings
- several people would have liked more help and guidance completing forms
- the difficulty of securing decent quality private rented accommodation

Appendix Four: A summary of the Housing Options Process



Eligibility

Applicants are not eligible for housing assistance if they...

- do not have full rights to live in the UK because of their immigration status
- are not considered to be 'habitual' resident in the UK, even if a British citizen

Homeless/threatened with homelessness

Applicants are classed as homeless if they...

- have no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere that is available for occupation and that they have a legal right to occupy
- have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it
- have accommodation but it is a moveable structure, for example, a caravan or houseboat, and have no place to put it or moor it, where it can be lived in
- have accommodation but it would not be reasonable for them to occupy it

Applicants are classed as being threatened with homelessness if they...

- are likely to become homeless within the next 28 days

Priority Need

Applicants are in priority need if...

- they are pregnant or if dependent children live, or might reasonably be expected to live with them
- they have become homeless or are threatened with homelessness as a result of a flood, fire or other disaster
- they are aged 16 or 17
- they are 20 or under and a former relevant child (see below for definition)
- they are over 21 and are **vulnerable** as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered at some time in their life
- they are **vulnerable** due to 'old age, mental illness, handicap, physical disability or other special reason
- they are **vulnerable** as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular navy, military or armed forces
- they are **vulnerable** as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence or harassment from another person or threats of violence from another person that are likely to be carried out

The only exceptions to these are, if they are a:

'Relevant Child' - if they are 16 or 17 and were in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and were looked after on their 16th birthday.

'Relevant Student' - a former relevant child in full time education and their term time accommodation is not available to them during a vacation.

'Child in need' - if a duty is owed to them under the Children Act 1989.

Intentionality

Applicants are considered intentionally homeless if they...

- a) deliberately did or did not do something
 - b) which caused them to leave housing which they would otherwise have stayed in
 - c) and it would have been reasonable to stay there
- All these points must apply.

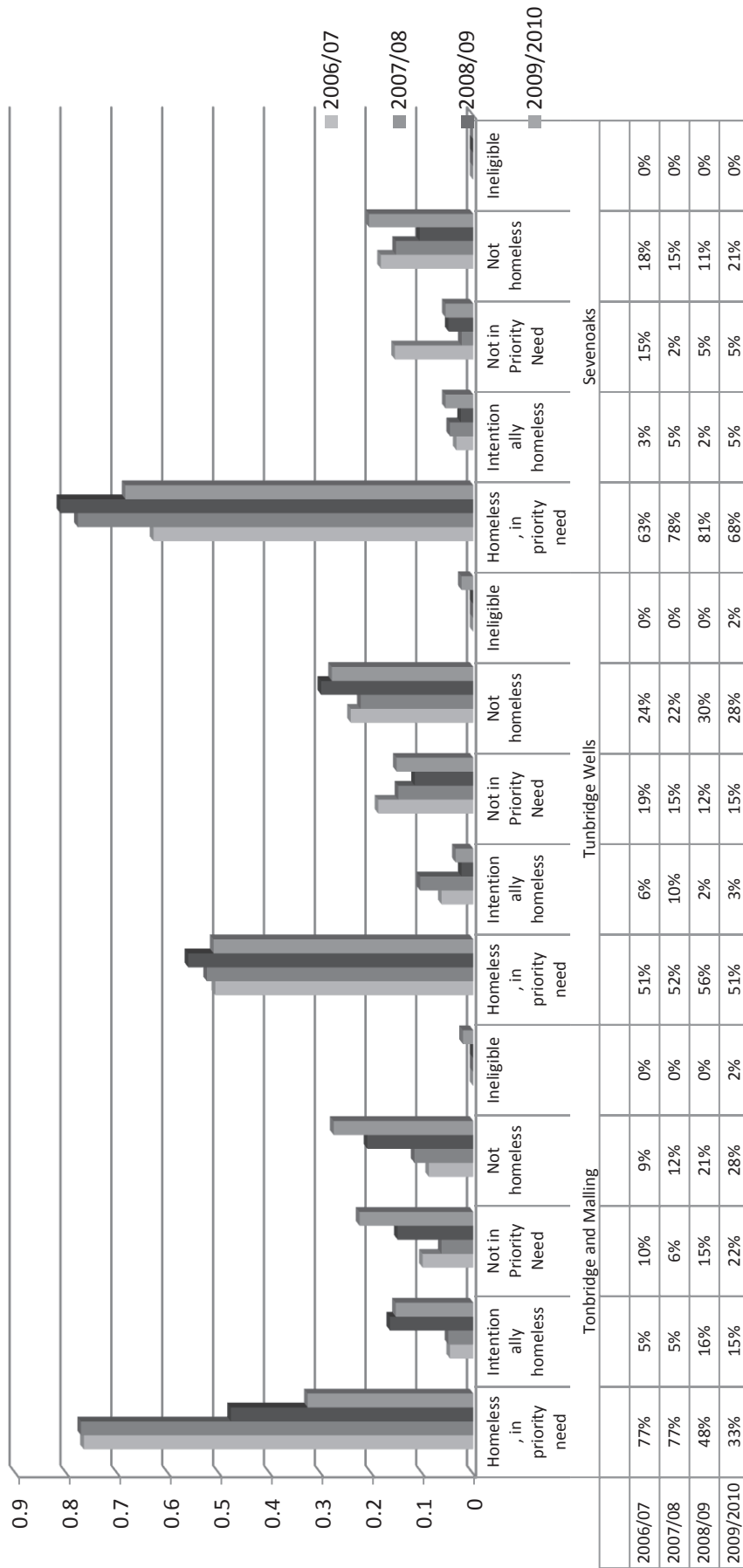
Local Connection

Applicants have a local connection if they...

- have lived in the area by choice for a certain time (usually for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years)
- have a family connection in the area
- work in the area
- have a connection with the area for 'another special reason'

Appendix Five: Key data and trends in homelessness by local authority area

Appendix 5a: Outcomes of decisions 2006-2010



Appendix 5b: Reasons for homelessness 2007-2011 by borough

	Tonbridge and Malling				Tunbridge Wells				Sevenoaks			
	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*
Parents unwilling/unable to accommodate	60	7	11	20	21	23	11	8	38	45	18	18
Relatives/friends unwilling/unable to accommodate	11	5	4	4	5	11	1	6	9	12	4	6
Non-violent relationship breakdown	25	1	6	16	5	3	2	2	3	3	1	2
Violent breakdown of relationship	16	6	5	12	14	8	7	6	7	6	5	10
Other forms of violence/harassment	3	1	2	6	8	4	7	4	3	1	1	0
Mortgage default	9	3	0	2	1	1	1	2	3	9	2	0
Rent arrears	0	1	0	0	3	1	1	2	0	5	0	6
Termination of assured short hold tenancy	38	3	2	10	13	9	9	8	19	9	7	4
Reasons other than termination of AST	6	4	0	2			2	2	9	2	0	4
Left hospital	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0
Left other institution or LA care	2	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	3	1	2
Other	3	1	0	0	11	10	2	0	7	4	0	4
Total	173	32	32	72	85	73	44	40	102	100	41	56

* figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures

Appendix 5c: Age of applicants accepted as homeless

		Tonbridge and Malling						
	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+	Total	
2007/08	76	77	14	1	1	4	173	
2008/09	16	14	1	1	0	0	32	
2009/2010	15	14	2	0	0	1	32	
2010/11*	28	32	10	0	0	2	72	

		Tunbridge Wells						
	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+	Total	
2007/08	35	37	8	0	0	5	85	
2008/09	29	36	3	1	0	4	73	
2009/2010	19	16	6	2	0	1	44	
2010/11*	18	14	8	0	0	0	40	

		Sevenoaks						
	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+	Total	
2007/08	51	39	11	0	1	0	102	
2008/09	55	33	9	3	0	0	100	
2009/2010	27	16	4	3	0	0	50	
2010/11*	24	30	2	0	0	0	56	

* figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures

Appendix 5d: Priority Needs Group 2007-2011

	Tonbridge and Malling				Tunbridge Wells				Sevenoaks			
	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11*
Emergency	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dependent children	99	18	15	48	47	33	27	22	56	49	30	38
Pregnancy	38	6	5	2	13	12	5	2	24	23	10	10
16-17 year old	5	1	2	4	6	7	3	4	5	7	3	0
Care leaver 18-20	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	2	2	1	0
Old age	2	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	3	3	1	2
Physical disability	8	4	2	4	3	3	3	4	5	8	4	4
Mental illness or disability	6	2	6	10	9	6	2	6	4	5	1	2
Other (drug/alcohol dependency)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Vulnerable = care leaver	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0
Vulnerable - HM forces	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vulnerable - custody/remand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Vulnerable - violence	14	0	1	2	6	7	2	0	1	0	0	0
Of which: a. domestic violence	12	0	1	2	6	7	2	0	1	0	0	0
Total	173	32	32	72	85	73	44	40	101	100	50	56

Data source: P1E forms

*** figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures**

Appendix 5e: Household Type, applicants accepted as homeless

Year	Tonbridge and Malling						
	Couple with dep children	Lone parent with Dep children (male)	Lone parent with Dep children (female)	1-person household (male)	1-person household (female)	All other households	Total
2007/08	23	13	101	13	9	14	173
2008/09	10	1	13	5	2	1	32
2009/2010	6	1	12	5	5	3	32
2010/11*	10	6	34	4	8	10	72

Data source: PFE forms

* figures for 2010/11 projected from Q1/2 figures

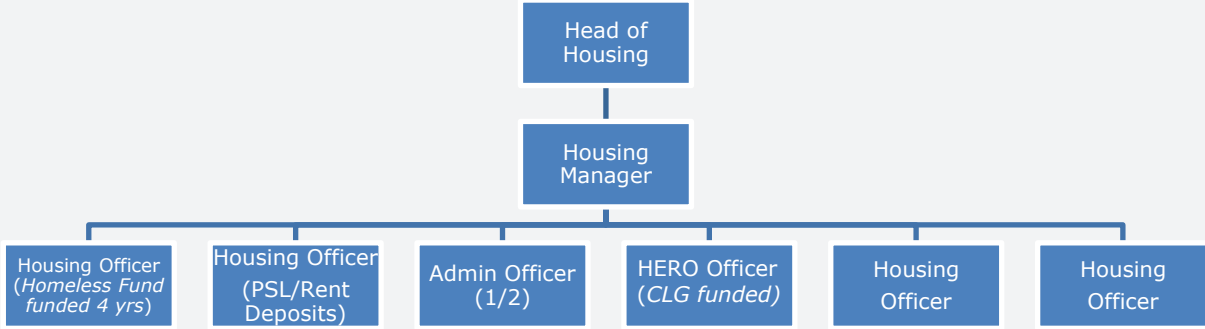
Year	Tunbridge Wells						
	Couple with dependent children	Lone parent with Dep children (male)	Lone parent with Dep children (female)	1-person household (male)	1-person household (female)	All other households	Total
2007/08	19	5	34	13	11	2	84
2008/09	17	3	25	20	8	0	73
2009/2010	13	1	18	3	5	4	44
2010/11*	10	2	12	6	6	4	40

Year	Sevenoaks						
	Couple with dependent children	Lone parent with Dep children (male)	Lone parent with Dep children (female)	1-person household (male)	1-person household (female)	All other households	Total
2007/08	24	1	53	13	7	4	102
2008/09	24	3	41	15	11	6	100
2009/2010	14	1	24	3	5	3	50
2010/11*	28	2	18	2	2	4	56

Appendix Six: Overview of the West Kent Homeless Teams

Sevenoaks District Council

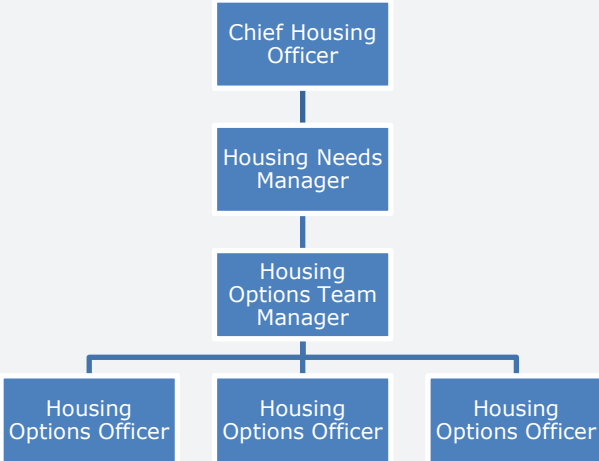
The Social Housing Team is led by a dedicated Service Manager. There are 3 Housing Officers responsible for delivering the Homelessness Prevention and Advice service (one a temporary, externally funded post) while a further Housing Officer delivers the Council’s Private Sector Lettings Scheme which offers rent in advance, loans and deposit guarantee bonds to help people secure private lets. The team is supported by one shared administrative officer.



SDC attracted external funding to the HERO Project which employs 1 specialist worker to provide holistic advice covering housing, saving money on fuel bills, debt, welfare benefits, retraining and further education options, getting back to work, business start up.

Tonbridge & Malling BC

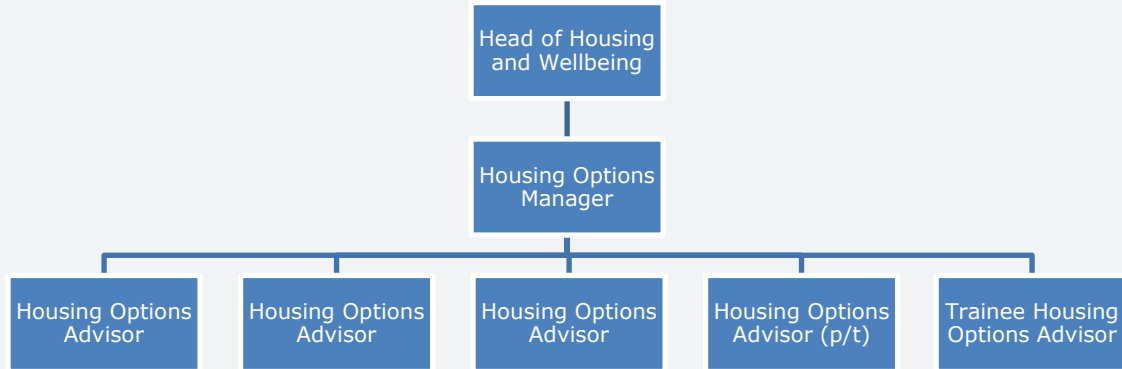
The housing options service was brought back in house in April 2008, having previously been managed by Russet Homes. The Housing Options Team is led by a dedicated Housing Options Team Manager (a post shared with a neighbouring authority) and consists of three Housing Options Officers responsible for delivering the Homelessness Prevention and Advice service, plus administrative support. The recruitment of a fourth Housing Options Officer for a period of 12 months was approved at the end of 2010.



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Tunbridge Wells BC

The team operates from the Town Hall in Tunbridge Wells and is led by a Housing Options Manager and consists of 4 Housing Options Advisors and one trainee delivering the Homelessness Prevention and advice.



APPENDIX 7: ACTION PLAN: July 2011-June 2013

STRATEGIC PRIORITY ONE: MAXIMISING HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION THROUGH AN ENHANCED HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

By 2016, our goal is to develop a highly effective, personalised housing options service that empowers customers to make the best choices for themselves

Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To ensure that we fully understand and analyse emerging trends in homelessness and that changing demands on the service are understood and planned for	1. Develop a format and timetable for undertaking joint customer surveys, including a Rough Sleeper count	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	2. Using the Homelessness Prevention and Advice Manager module, develop format for collection of data on non-priority homeless cases	September 2011	
	3. Review format for collecting customer feedback, developing a standardised approach across the three authorities	September 2011	
To ensure that the impacts of cuts to support and other services are understood by Housing Options Teams, customers and stakeholders, and prioritise resources accordingly	4. Monitor changes in legislation and emerging Government policy, analysing impacts on West Kent	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers/Strategy & Enabling Managers
	5. Work closely with statutory and voluntary agencies to minimise the impact of savings to be made	Ongoing	Homelessness Strategy Group
To hone our 'prevention toolkit', ensuring that we are maximising the options that are available and making best use of available techniques and resource	6. Review and expand our prevention toolkit	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	7. Improve mediation services for people facing eviction from the family home (NB: Additional training resources may be required)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	8. Identify opportunities for the three teams to share best practice more effectively and develop the skill sets within the Housing Options Teams	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	9. In appropriate cases, promote the take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants to adapt properties and prevent homelessness	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers & Private Sector Housing Teams
	10. Promote the use of court desks to advise/assist customers	Ongoing	Housing Needs

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	attending possession hearings		Managers & Homelessness Strategy Group	
To provide clear and timely information to people threatened with homelessness so that they are fully aware of their options and can make realistic choices	11. Continue to refer people to CAB for assistance with debt advice so they can receive specialist assistance with debts 12. Finalise draft Rent Arrears Protocol and secure the commitment of partners to implement in all relevant cases 13. Provide housing options training to staff from the Welfare Advice Service to enable them to provide a combined housing and benefits surgery to customers at the Tonbridge Gateway (NB: funded to March 2012)	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers	
	To build on the HERO project, develop more holistic approaches to prevention that tackle the underlying causes of homelessness	14. Monitor the success of Porchlight's county-wide education project to raise awareness in schools of the realities of homelessness and the housing market 15. Review and update the content and format of information that is provided to customers (via websites, leaflets & general correspondence), ensuring all written documents have a fog index readability of between 8 and 12 16. Encourage local employment for low-paid workers so that young people are able to stay in the districts for work (NB: Additional funding in place for the twelve months to June 2012)	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
			(NB: funded to March 2012)	July 2011
		Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers	
		September 2012	(Tonbridge Wells BC to lead on the development of information for young people)	
		Ongoing	Sevenoaks District Council	
	17. Extend the HERO model to offer advice on jobs, benefits and skills	June 2012		

STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO: MAXIMISING RESOURCES ACROSS WEST KENT (BECOMING MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE)			
By 2016, our goal is to deliver a more effective service using fewer resources			
Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To identify opportunities to share resources, services and expertise across the three authorities, and more widely	18. Identify options for sharing good practice and developing shared initiatives across the three authorities (or more widely)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	19. Via the Kent Housing Options Group, establish regular 'good practice' sessions between the Housing Options Teams	From September 2011	Housing Needs Managers
To maximise the external resources available to tackle homelessness	20. Improve cross-borough reciprocal arrangements and referral procedures between authorities for urgent cases	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
	21. Maximise the availability of benefits through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ early notification of changes to individuals' circumstances; ▪ access to a specialist Benefits Advisor to act as champion for residents; ▪ having effective procedures in place to maximise Discretionary Housing Payments within budget ▪ provision of in-house verification training for staff in benefits, customer services and housing needs Teams. 	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers/ Housing Benefit Mangers
With other Kent Homechoice partners, implement a common assessment framework across Kent	22. Evaluate the implications of a shared housing register across West Kent	September 2011	Housing Needs Managers
To make the best use of existing housing stock, in partnership with housing associations	23. Develop an under-occupation strategy with RSL partners based on DCLG revised policy on under-occupation	TBC	Housing Strategy & Enabling Sub-Group (part of Kent HG)
	24. Improve the condition of the existing housing stock and bring back long term empty properties back into use	Ongoing	Private Sector Housing Teams
To maximise the availability of accommodation for people threatened with homelessness, both in the social and private rented	25. Make links with London Boroughs to address the potential increase in homelessness resulting from displacement of families from London	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	26. Identify a partner to evaluate the provision of a direct access 'crash pad' facility to manage crisis homelessness and allow 'cooling off' space for young people (NB: It is likely that the evaluation will identify that additional resources will be required before any facility can actually be delivered)	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers

sectors			
<p>STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE: WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PRIVATE SECTOR LANDLORDS <i>By 2016, our goal is to understand and overcome the barriers to increased private sector lettings</i></p>			
Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To work with private sector landlords in order to understand their priorities, perceived barriers to letting to tenants on benefits and to develop a 'win-win' culture that offers reassurance to both parties	27. Establish a Steering Group with private sector landlords in order to understand their priorities, understand and overcome barriers and develop a 'win-win' approach 28. Develop and promote the West Kent Private Landlord Forum	June 2012 Ongoing	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Private Sector Housing Teams
To develop a Tenancy Sustainment programme that will enable vulnerable residents maintain their tenancy	29. Develop a West Kent Landlord Information Pack 30. Develop a common/shared rent deposit scheme between the three authorities 31. Explore the development of a tenancy sustainment package to support tenants to sustain their private sector letting 32. Where tenancies in the private sector are at risk, link vulnerable tenants to floating support services	March 2012 June 2013 June 2012 Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers Housing Needs Managers Housing Needs Managers
To work with landlords to improve property standards in private sector through the Accreditation Schemes	33. Maximise participation in Landlord Accreditation Schemes 34. As part of the review and expansion of our prevention toolkit (see strategic priority 1), provide fuel poverty advice as part of housing options work	Ongoing December 2011	Private Sector Housing Teams Housing Needs Managers

STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOUR: CREATING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS By 2016, our goal is to strengthen existing partnerships, maximising synergies to meet the needs of homeless people			
Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To undertake a mapping exercise of homelessness organisations and services across West Kent, creating a shared, updatable resource	35. Undertake joint service mapping to identify role, client group(s), expertise and resources among all agencies working in homelessness in West Kent	June 2012	The Bridge Trust
To work more closely with RSL partners	36. Improve partnership working around hard-to-house tenants including vulnerable groups with complex needs	June 2012	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
To improve links with public sector bodies	37. Monitor existing Kent-wide protocols (e.g. mental health discharge, care leavers and prison discharge)	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	38. Build relationships with the health sector including the Swanley, Dartford and Gravesham Pathfinder	June 2012	
	39. Improve joint working with Job Centre Plus in order to maximise the use of existing 'back to work' schemes	June 2012	
	40. Assist vulnerable people through either the JARS Panels (TWBC) or the Kent Assessment Process (SDC and TMBC)	Ongoing	
Increase the effectiveness and accountability of the Homelessness Strategy Group	41. Review the operation of HSG, increasing its accountability for delivery of the strategy	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	42. Establishing themed sub-groups with responsibility for delivering strategic priorities		
	43. Undertaking shared training and sharing of good practice		

STRATEGIC PRIORITY FIVE: MEETING THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE			
By 2016, our goal is to understand and meet the needs of the diverse range of groups affected by homelessness			
Objective	Actions	Time scale	Lead & key partners
To gain deeper insight into the customer experience to help us to achieve personalisation in service delivery to fully address equality and diversity matters	44. Investigate the potential for, and means of, using the Kent and Medway MOSAIC classification to target groups with advice and information about preventing homelessness	March 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	45. Identify staff within the West Kent authorities and partner agencies who are able to assist with translation services for people whose first language is not English	June 2012	
	46. At six monthly intervals, analyse reasons for homelessness against protected equality characteristics	September and March	
To understand and meet the needs of young homeless people	47. Using the Kent-wide Young Person's Protocol, work with Children's Services departments to assist homeless 16/17 year olds	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	48. Signpost young people to literacy and numeracy classes where appropriate	Ongoing	
	49. Promote and support young people to access tenancy sustainment courses	Ongoing	
	50. Support the commissioning of supported accommodation for young people in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks	TBC	
To understand and meet the needs of people experiencing domestic violence	51. Where funding permits, extend the use of and promote the Sanctuary scheme to allow people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their home	Ongoing	Housing Needs Managers
	52. Support the commissioning of refuges in Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks	Ongoing	
To understand and meet the needs of homeless people with disabilities	53. Following on from the successful MARAC training in 2010, ensure that staff receive on-going training on domestic abuse (NB: Resources to be identified)	December 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	54. Continue joint working with other agencies such as the Police through, for example, MARAC meetings	Ongoing	
	55. Audit existing supply of temporary accommodation to ensure that there is provision to meet the needs of people with disabilities	December 2011	
	56. With Private Sector Housing colleagues work with housing association partners to implement the Kent Housing Group	Ongoing	

	standard for funding disabled adaptations in housing association stock		
To understand and meet the needs of people with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse	57. Seek advice from health services and other specialists about the specific needs of this group and how best to engage with them; and provide appropriate training for staff (NB: May require additional resources)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	58. Work more closely with adult Social Services and KDAAT and explore the possibility of joint assessments to identify the housing and support needs of this group	September 2011	
To understand and meet the needs of the Gypsy & Traveller community	59. Work with the KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit to better understand the housing and support needs of the gypsy and traveller community	December 2011	Housing Needs Managers
To understand and meet the needs of older people	60. Provide training for staff on the risks of financial and domestic abuse among older people (NB: May require additional resources)	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	61. Develop an information pack for older people facing homelessness	March 2012	
To understand and meet the needs of rough sleepers	62. With other Kent authorities and partner agencies, develop joint initiatives for rough sleepers using funding allocated by DCLG	June 2012	Housing Needs Managers
	63. Identify options for sourcing accommodation that can be used as temporary winter shelters to support the Severe Weather Policies of each authority	October 2011	
To understand and meet the needs of ex-offenders	64. Implement and monitor the Protocol for the Resettlement and Housing of Offenders	Ongoing	
To involve service users in shaping services	65. Develop a co-ordinated approach to service user consultation and involvement, including minority groups e.g. gypsies and travellers	June 2012	Porchlight

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Item 5(a) – West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016

Cabinet’s Recommendation to Council

At its meeting on 15 September 2011, the Cabinet considered the matter as follows:

“The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities introduced a report which recommended that the Council should be asked to adopt the West Kent Homelessness Strategy as Council Policy. The report explained that although authorities which had achieved “excellent” status had been relieved of the duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy, which had been introduced by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Department for Communities and Local Government still recommended that authorities should have one. The draft Strategy had been developed in consultation with a wide range of service users and partners across various sectors and updated the Joint Homelessness Strategy 2007, although the new draft Strategy was significantly different from the 2007 document. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities explained that Equalities issues had been fully considered during the development of the Strategy. Key themes that had emerged from consultation included a desire for more commonality in how the three West Kent local authorities (Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) worked. This included a need for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice, and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information. The draft Strategy provided the national, regional and local policy context, methods of consultation and key findings along with the five key strategic objectives and conclusions. Members were informed that the Strategy had already been adopted as policy by Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council’s which was the reason that the Strategy had been brought directly to Cabinet.

The Leader of the Council sought clarification on the likely impact of the change to limit payments for people under 35 (up from 25) to the shared room rate, how many people would be affected by the change and whether there were sufficient Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) to cope with the demand for housing. The Head of Housing and Communications explained that this data was not available yet but that the Council would be looking at HMOs to help to meet demand along with other initiatives. The Leader of the Council also asked what the anticipated impact of direct payments was likely to be and how many people currently defaulted on rent payments. The Head of Housing and Communications explained that currently around 3% of tenants in social housing were in arrears but that it was anticipated that this could rise to 6% or more. The Leader questioned the impact of the new levels of benefit payment and how these would enable people to secure housing given the vibrant private housing rental sector in Sevenoaks and how many single people were likely to be in housing need. The Leader raised concerns about

providing sufficient affordable housing and the Head of Housing and Communications explained that the Council had several initiatives to maximise the private sector provision and would be working in partnership with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells District Council and Maidstone Borough Council and the Homes and Communities Agency to maximise funding to provide affordable housing as well. This would include measures to bring empty properties back into occupation.

The Cabinet congratulated the Head of Housing and Communications and her team for an outstanding piece of work to tackle homelessness across West Kent.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Improvement informed the Cabinet that the Council would be sharing a consultant with Maidstone Borough Council to develop a brief on provision for gypsy and travellers.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that the West Kent Homelessness Strategy be adopted as District Council policy.”

Text in bold relates to the Cabinet recommendation to the Council.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO STAFF TERMS AND CONDITIONS

COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2011

Report of the: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources

Also considered by: Cabinet - 15 September 2011

Services Select Committee - 20 September 2011

Status: For Decision

This report supports the Key Aims of the Community Plan

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming and Cllr. Brian Ramsay

Head of Service Head of Finance and HR – Tricia Marshall

Recommendation: It be resolved that:

- a) the changes to staff terms and conditions set out in Appendix A be implemented from 1 April 2012; and
 - b) the 10-year budget be amended as shown in Appendix B, to take account of the phased introduction of these changes.
-

Background

- 1 Members will be aware that the 10-year budget includes a saving of £370,000 from staff pay and conditions, with £320,000 planned for delivery in 2012/13 and a further £50,000 in 2013/14. The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions have been agreed by Cabinet but Council is required to approve the financial change to the 10-year budget.

Introduction

- 2 Appendix A sets out changes to terms and conditions proposed to achieve the required savings. The proposal requires Council to approve amendments to the 10-year budget to allow the changes to be phased in over a longer period than originally planned, but over the life of the 10-year budget the total savings required would still be achieved.
- 3 The proposal has been subject to extensive consultation with staff and the feedback from them is broadly supportive of the proposals, though a number of concerns have been raised about the impact of the proposals on staff pay, motivation and morale. SDC has been recognised nationally for its achievements in staff motivation and empowerment, leading to high levels of productivity. This proposal is designed to mitigate the impact on productivity

and should ensure residents continue to receive high quality, value for money services.

- 4 The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions have been considered in depth at the Cabinet meeting on 15 September and 13 October, as well as Services Select Committee on 20 September. Extracts from the minutes to these meetings are attached to this agenda. More in depth analysis and comments from staff are set out in the report to Cabinet and Services Select Committee.

Key Implications

Financial

- 5 The 10-year budget assumes that £320,000 a year will be saved from 2012/13 onwards, and a further £50,000 will be saved from 2013/14 onwards. Under the proposal above, initial financial modelling (set out in Appendix C) suggests that the majority of the savings will not be achieved until 2016/17 onwards but, over the period of the 10-year budget, the cumulative savings will be fully achieved. The reason for this is that the savings will be achieved through holding pay at existing levels for staff affected for a number of years instead of reducing pay levels from next year.
- 6 In practice the Budget Stabilisation Reserve will fund the shortfall in earlier years with repayments being made to the Reserve in later years. The budget already assumes that there will be no national pay award from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

Staffing

- 7 The proposals above, together with extensive consultation with staff should mitigate the impact on staff morale and motivation (and hence potentially the quality of service to residents) of changing staff terms and conditions. Although unemployment levels are high nationally, the Council is experiencing difficulties recruiting to certain posts within the organisation and has found it difficult to retain others; a phased approach such as that proposed should minimise the risk that staff are dissatisfied and leave the organisation.

Equality

- 8 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. The proposed changes will reduce the risk of discrimination of age grounds, as pay levels will vary less with length of service, but on the other hand those affected by the changes are more likely to be older; however there are extended protection arrangements proposed that mitigate the impact.

Community Impact

- 8 The proposals should have a positive impact as they ensure that in the long term the required savings are achieved as well as protecting high quality service delivery for residents.

Risk Assessment Statement

Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Recruitment and retention of staff more difficult due to changes to terms and conditions, with adverse impact on service delivery due to vacancies.	SDC recognised as a good employer through Investors in People Gold and Champion status, top placed local authority in Times 'Best Public Sector Organisation to work for' awards	Medium – staff still continue to want to work for SDC
Morale and motivation reduced as a result of these changes to terms and conditions in addition to previous changes, leading to reductions in productivity (through loss of loyalty and goodwill) with an adverse impact on service delivery.	Extensive consultation with staff to develop a scheme that most staff support.	Low/Medium
Some staff refuse to accept the proposed new terms and conditions, leading to service disruption.	Continue with approach of consultation, feedback and 1-1 meetings for those most affected.	Low – generally staff have given positive responses to the consultation process
Proposal may not deliver required savings, leading to the need to generate additional savings to balance the budget.	Financial modelling has been carried out at a detailed level. Continue to monitor position through monthly budget monitoring and check assumptions on an annual basis.	Low
The amendment to the 10-year budget is not approved, resulting in a requirement to make the saving from 1 April 2012. This would cause considerable anxiety and uncertainty for staff and the need to develop and consult on an alternative solution at short notice. Impact on service delivery would be adverse due to loss of	Members briefed fully on the proposal, including the implications for the 10-year budget, in that by the end of the 10-year period the cumulative savings achieved would remain unchanged. Members also briefed on staff comments and concerns.	Low

motivation and staff goodwill.		
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Conclusion

- 9 The Council’s success and national reputation has been made possible by the people it employs, their hard work and commitment and desire to deliver the highest quality of service to the community. It is therefore not easy, having already asked them over recent years to reduce their pay and conditions, to once again make that request. However, the Council has been faced with unprecedented challenges requiring more difficult solutions.

- 10 The proposed changes to terms and conditions aim to strike a balance between the need to deliver savings for the Council against the potential impact on staff recruitment, retention, motivation and morale, and hence productivity levels. The proposed changes meet the Council’s financial targets over the period of the 10-year budget and also offer staff substantial protection from reductions in pay.

Sources of Information: Staff consultation on proposed changes to terms and conditions papers

Contact Officer(s): Tricia Marshall – Ext. 7218
tricia.marshall@sevenoaks.gov.uk

Pav Ramewal
Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources

Appendix A

Proposed changes to staff terms and conditions

1. The current bands are reduced from 11+ spinal pay points per band to four points, by removing the top two points (the 'starred area') and the lower five points; this also removes the current overlap between bands;
2. Officers who are on a point below the new top spinal point, subject to performance, carry on progressing one spinal point each year until they reach the new top point of the band;
3. Officers who are currently on the top two points (12% of staff) will continue to receive national pay awards for five years from when national pay award are reintroduced. After that period expires, their pay will revert to the new top spinal point.; and
4. Officers can still be rewarded via the appraisal scheme with one-off payments for outstanding performance.

The attached salary band table shows the proposed new bands in bold.

Under this proposal staff would stay on national terms and conditions.

Band A		Band B		Band C	
SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary
4	12,145	12	15,039	18	17,161
5	12,312	13	15,444	19	17,802
6	12,489	14	15,725	20	18,453
7	12,787	15	16,054	21	19,126
8	13,189	16	16,440	22	19,621
9	13,589	17	16,830	23	20,198
10	13,874	18	17,161	24	20,858
11	14,733	19	17,802	25	21,519
12	15,039	20	18,453	26	22,221
13	15,444	21	19,126	27	22,958
14	15,725	22	19,621	28	23,708
15	16,054				
16	16,440				
17	16,830				

Band D		Band E		Band F	
SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary
23	20,198	29	24,646	35	29,236
24	20,858	30	25,472	36	30,011
25	21,519	31	26,276	37	30,851
26	22,221	32	27,052	38	31,754
27	22,958	33	27,849	39	32,800
28	23,708	34	28,636	40	33,661
29	24,646	35	29,236	41	34,549
30	25,472	36	30,011	42	35,430
31	26,276	37	30,851	43	36,313
32	27,052	38	31,754	44	37,206
33	27,849	39	32,800	45	38,042
34	28,636	40	33,661	46	38,961
		41	34,549		

Band G		Band H		Band I		Band J	
SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary	SCP	Salary
42	35,430	47	39,855	53	45,112	59	50,800
43	36,313	48	40,741	54	46,019	60	51,818
44	37,206	49	41,616	55	46,934	61	52,855
45	38,042	50	42,499	56	47,880	62	54,173
46	38,961	51	43,363	57	48,822	63	55,528
47	39,855	52	44,234	58	49,808	64	56,914
48	40,741	53	45,112	59	50,800	65	58,340
49	41,616	54	46,019	60	51,818	66	59,791
50	42,499	55	46,934	61	52,855	67	61,290
51	43,363	56	47,880	62	54,173	68	62,825
52	44,234	57	48,822	63	55,528	69	64,398
		58	49,808	64	56,914	70	66,009

Appendix B

Impact of proposals on current 10-year budget

Ten Year Budget - Revenue

	Budget 2010/11	Plan 2011/12	Plan 2012/13	Plan 2013/14	Plan 2014/15	Plan 2015/16	Plan 2016/17	Plan 2017/18	Plan 2018/19	Plan 2019/20	Plan 2020/21
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Expenditure											
Net Service Expenditure c/f	16,711	16,711	13,771	13,162	13,223	14,200	14,789	15,379	15,971	16,565	17,158
Inflation		442	507	547	611	589	590	592	594	593	593
Pension Fund deficit: actuarial increase		(220)	0	0	520						
Net savings (approved in previous years)		(71)	34	(25)	(75)						
Concessionary Fares reduction		(699)									
Expenditure previously classified as capital*		100									
Net savings (NEW)		(2,492)	(1,150)	(461)	(79)						
Net Service Expenditure b/f	16,711	13,771	13,162	13,223	14,200	14,789	15,379	15,971	16,565	17,158	17,751
Financing Sources											
Government Support	(6,348)	(5,358)	(4,632)	(4,251)	(3,870)	(3,986)	(4,106)	(4,229)	(4,356)	(4,487)	(4,622)
Govt Support - Conc. Fares reduction		446	446	446	446	459	473	487	502	517	533
Govt Support to offset C Tax freeze	0	(229)	(229)	(229)	(229)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Council Tax	(9,172)	(9,199)	(9,199)	(9,475)	(9,759)	(10,149)	(10,555)	(10,977)	(11,416)	(11,873)	(12,348)
Interest Receipts	(192)	(153)	(289)	(594)	(714)	(662)	(596)	(529)	(462)	(397)	(353)
Contributions to Reserves	716	471	330	430	330	330	330	330	330	330	330
Contributions from Reserves	(1,715)	(14)	(645)	(645)	(645)	(645)	(645)	(645)	(645)	(645)	(645)
Total Financing	(16,711)	(14,036)	(14,218)	(14,318)	(14,441)	(14,653)	(15,099)	(15,563)	(16,047)	(16,555)	(17,105)
Contribution to/(from) Stabilisation Reserve		265	1,056	1,095	241	(136)	(280)	(408)	(518)	(603)	(645)
Budget Gap	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Cumulative 10 year position (surplus)/deficit: (66)

Effect of Terms & Conditions Savings Changes											
Effect of changes			320	370	405	288	145	(17)	(318)	(504)	(693)
REVISED Cont to/(from) Stabilisation Reserve		265	736	725	(164)	(424)	(425)	(391)	(200)	(99)	45
Cumulative 10 year position (surplus)/deficit: (68)											

Item 5(b) – Proposed Changes to Staff Terms and Conditions

Cabinet’s Recommendation to Council

At its meeting on 15 September 2011, the Cabinet considered the matter as follows:

“The Cabinet considered a report which set out proposals to achieve the savings included in the 10 Year Budget arising from changes to staff terms and conditions. The changes would be introduced on a phased basis to mitigate the impact on productivity and to ensure that residents continued to receive high quality, value for money services whilst delivering the level of savings required over the life of the 10 Year Budget. The proposals had been subject to extensive consultation with staff who had broadly understood the need for savings to be made and were supportive of the proposal as the “least worst option”. However a number of concerns had been raised about the impact of the proposals on staff pay, motivation and morale. The report outlined the consultation timetable and briefings which had begun in April 2011 with a view to the changes being introduced in April 2012. The proposed changes came in addition to earlier savings identified which had included the removal of market supplements, no national pay awards from 2010/11 to 2012/12 and the removal of a leased car option. It was noted that in addition to briefings the staff most directly affected by the proposals had received one-to-one meetings.

The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions were outlined in Appendix A to the report and attention was drawn to the comments received from staff in response to the consultation process which ended on 6 September, which were summarised in Appendix B to the report along with the management response to those comments. The Head of Finance and Human Resources informed Members that two further comments had been received after the agenda had gone to print which related to how the changes would affect career progression and incremental progression through the salary scales in April 2012.

The Cabinet noted that the proposals had been developed by staff with the savings target in mind and had been subject to widespread consultation with officers at different levels across the Council. Members particularly welcomed the opportunity to read the detailed comments from staff and the general support for the proposed changes. It was felt that it would be important to ensure that there was clarity about the impact of the changes and how they would impact upon career and salary progression. Members noted that the proposals would deliver the savings required in full over the 10 year period of the budget but provided some protection for affected staff up-front whilst giving greater flexibility in terms of the delivery of the 10 Year Budget.

Resolved: **That it be recommended to Council that:**

- (1) The changes to staff terms and conditions set out in the report and in Appendix B be implemented from 1 April 2012; and**
- (2) The 10-year budget be amended as shown in Appendix C to the report to take account of the phased introduction of these changes”.**

Text in bold relates to the Cabinet recommendation to the Council.

Services Select Committee’s recommendation to Cabinet on 13 October 2011

At its meeting on 20 September 2011, the Select Committee considered the matter as follows:

“The Committee noted the tabled minute extract from Cabinet which considered the report on 15 September 2011. The Head of Finance and Human Resources introduced the report which set out proposals to achieve the savings included in the 10 Year Budget arising from changes to staff terms and conditions. The proposals had been subject to extensive consultation with staff who had broadly understood the need for savings to be made and were supportive of the proposal as the “least worst option”. The report outlined the consultation timetable and briefings which had begun in April 2011 with a view to the changes being introduced in April 2012. The proposed changes came in addition to earlier savings identified which had included the removal of market supplements, no national pay awards from 2010/11 to 2012/12 and the removal of a leased car option. It was noted that in addition to briefings the staff most directly affected by the proposals had received one-to-one meetings.

The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions were outlined in Appendix A to the report and attention was drawn to the comments received from staff in response to the consultation process which ended on 6 September, which were summarised in Appendix B to the report along with the management response to those comments. Comments from this Committee would be fed back to the meeting of Cabinet on 13 October 2011 and then be submitted for consideration at full Council.

Members were impressed with the amount of work carried out, and the result was a credit to all the officers involved in the process. Members were very impressed with the reaction of the Staff and appreciated their input and consideration of this matter, and were particularly impressed with by the petition received in favour of the proposals from staff working at Dunbriek. It was noted that although there had been a two year freeze on the national pay award, other pay increases such as pay scale increments had still been

awarded. The Head of Finance and Human Resources clarified Members queries on the figures set out at Appendix C.

A Member expressed concern at Staff perception of Member Allowance increases in comparison to these proposals. He was advised that the recommendations of increases in Members' Allowances were made by an Independent Remuneration Panel, and that Members had actually accepted a significantly reduced amount than that recommended by the Panel. This had also been frozen for the past year.

Members were concerned as to the possible effect on staff of the removal of the leased car option, especially for those that might not be able to afford the car loan. The Head of Finance and Human Resources advised that as well as the car loan scheme they were speaking to local car leasing companies, and staff were being met on a one to one basis to explore all their options. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources advised that Cabinet had looked at this very carefully and had also been concerned by the effect and possible loss of the 'best performers' due to the proposed changes. In response to a question on recent staff turnover and whether it was noticeably increased since the proposals were put forward, the Head of Finance and Human Resources advised that during the last couple of years turnover had been lower. However, it was noticeable that in the last few months three Service Managers had left and it had been difficult to recruit suitable applicants to the vacant posts. One post was being delivered in an alternative way, one had been filled and efforts to recruit to the third had been ongoing since June. With reference to concern expressed on losing potential pay savings from the removal of the lower banding, she advised that each vacancy would be reassessed as it arose, and that there were still enough options to remain flexible.

Resolved: That the proposed changes to staff terms and conditions to meet the saving included in the 10-year budget be noted and that the Committee feedback its comments to the 13 October 2011 Cabinet meeting".

REVIEW OF IT ALLOWANCES/PROVISION OF COMPUTERS FOR MEMBERS

COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2011

Report of the: Corporate Resources Director

Status: For consideration and decision

Also considered by: Modern Local Government Group – 6 October 2011

This report supports the Key Aim of effective management of Council resources

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming and Cllr. Ramsay

Head of Service Head of Legal and Democratic Services – Christine Nuttall and
Head of Finance and Human Resources – Tricia Marshall

Recommendation: That Council in giving consideration to the Report and recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) as included within Appendix A, and the comments of the Modern Local Government Group on 6 October 2011, it be recommended to:

- (a) adopt the allowance as set out in paragraph 7 as recommended by the JIRP, with minor changes recommended by the Modern Local Government Group on 6 October 2011, and be met from within budget for 2011/12 and as a growth item for future years;
- (b) update Appendix G Clause 3.7 of the Constitution in its entirety as set out within the Appendix B incorporating the allowance as set out in (a) above; and
- (c) formally record thanks to Barry Cushway, Sue Holes, Simon Knott, Jean Selmes and Colin Wilby for their work in preparing the review of IT allowances and provision of computers for Members.

Background

- 1 The Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) were requested by Officers of Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) in July 2011 to give consideration to the addition of an IT allowance to the Members' current allowance scheme.
- 2 Laptops had been provided to SDC Members in 2004 under a central government funded scheme whereby funding of £60,000 was secured which equipped all 54 Councillors with a basic laptop computer.
- 3 By the time of the May 2011 elections many of the original laptops had become obsolete or required disproportionate support from the IT Department and the central government funding had ceased.

- 4 In preparation for the above changes the Council had been developing a simple approach to Members' access to Council information and communications via a new Members' Electronic Portal which is an extranet which enables web-based access to the e-mail system and all the necessary information systems and databases.
- 5 The advent of the Members' Portal means that Members are now able to access securely everything they need to perform their duties from any internet access point including a home computer. This, coupled with a background of an approximate 23% reduction in IT budgets in recent years, meant that there is little scope for the Council to supply computer equipment for all Members.

The JIRP's Recommendations

- 6 The JIRP carried out research and were briefed by Officers at SDC where it became clear that the use of computer based information and communications is now essential for Councillors to be able to fulfil their responsibilities. Their Report is set out as Appendix A to this report.
- 7 The JIRP's recommendations were as follows:
 - (a) An allowance of £120 per annum to be available to councillors paid monthly and separately from the Basic and other allowances. This allowance would be available to Members who use their own IT resources to undertake their council duties.
 - (b) Where a Member has been provided with a Council funded computer, no allowance should be paid.
 - (c) In exceptional circumstances where a Member is unable to afford the purchase cost of a suitable computer, the Council should consider assisting the Member, possibly by advancing a lump sum which would then be recovered via repayments from this allowance.
 - (d) This new allowance would replace the entirety of Clause 3.7 of the SDC Members' Allowance scheme which currently provides for fax machines and Council supplied laptops to Members.
 - (e) The allowance should be reviewed three years after adoption to evaluate relevance at that time and, in any event, the allowance should lapse once the Council is paying the appropriate level of Basic Allowance recommended by JIRP in their full review published in late 2008, this being £5754.
- 8 With regard to recommendation (c) above, it should be recognised that Officers have no power to means-test Members.
- 9 It must be stressed that any allowance will be subject to tax, dependent on the individual Member's circumstances.

Key Implications

Financial Implications

- 10 The JIRP states in their report that “the increasing use of computer based communications and transmission of documents should enable the Council to make significant progress towards paperless meetings and in due course there will be cost savings in staff time, printing, photocopying and postage which will help to offset the cost of this allowance.
- 11 In the light of these comments Members may wish to give consideration to reducing the level of paper Agendas and Reports that are produced.
- 12 In reality the adoption of the proposal will have an immediate financial impact of some £7,000 including oncosts. This could be met from within budget in 2011/12 and be considered as a growth item for future years.

Legal, Human Rights etc

- 13 Section 20 of The Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 requires each authority to establish an Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 14 Section 19 of the 2003 Regulations state that before an authority make or amends a scheme, the authority shall have regard to the recommendations made in relation to it by the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 15 Section 16 of the 2003 Regulations places a duty on the Council to publish as soon as reasonably practicable after making any amendments to the current Members’ Allowance Scheme a notice in one or more newspapers circulating in its area. The Council must also ensure that copies of the scheme are available for inspection by members of the public at the principal office of the authority, at all reasonable hours.

Equalities

- 16 Equality Impact issues have been considered as part of the proposals. The scheme applies equally to all Members and, for this reason, it is not considered appropriate to complete a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Impact on and outcomes for the Community

- 17 The changes envisaged will enable Members to use computer based information and communications in order to fulfil their responsibilities as Councillors.

Risk Assessment

- 18 Remuneration for Members is intended to ensure that there are not available obstacles preventing Members from taking part in the work of the Council.

Conclusions

- 19 The funding that initially allowed the Council to provide a laptop to each Member in 2004 was a one off Government funding initiative where £60,000 was secured which equipped all 54 Councillors with a basic laptop computer. By the time of the May 2011 elections many of the original laptops had become obsolete or required disproportionate support from the IT Department and central government funding had ceased. This was against a background of an approximate 23% reduction in IT budgets in recent years.
- 20 The recommendations of an allowance would compensate Members who use their own IT resources to undertake their council duties. Where a Member has been provided with a Council funded computer, no allowance should be paid and no provision will be made to purchase any additional computers for Members. The few remaining computers have been allocated to Members that either do not have personal IT equipment, access to other IT equipment or the ability to obtain such equipment. The Modern Local Government Group considered these recommendations at its meeting on 6 October 2011 and broadly accepted the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel with the exception of minor changes to the wording of the recommendations in paragraphs 7(a) and 7(c) of this report which have been reflected in the proposed changes to paragraph 3.7 of Appendix G in the Constitution, (Appendix B) to this report.

Background Papers:

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances)
(England) Regulations 2003

JIRP's Report for Sevenoaks District Council Re:
IT Allowances/Provision of computers for
Members

Members' Allowance Scheme (2011/12) set out in
the Council's Constitution

Contact Officer(s):

Christine Nuttall – ext. 7245

Tricia Marshall – ext. 7205

Dr. Pav Ramewal

Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Resources Director

Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

Report for Sevenoaks District Council

Re: IT Allowances/Provision of computers for Members

Summary

We understand that access to computer-based communications and information systems is now an essential requirement for the role of an elected councillor at Sevenoaks District Council.

The current system of Council-provided laptops is no longer tenable due to the withdrawal of central government funding and reduced capacity in the Council's IT Department to support them. The new web-based Members' Portal enables councillors to access all the necessary internal systems via standard domestic computer equipment.

The Panel recommends that Sevenoaks District Council adopt a supplementary allowance of £120 per annum payable to elected Councillors as a contribution towards the costs of purchasing and maintaining suitable computer hardware to enable them to access the Council's systems via the Members' Portal.

Background

The Panel was requested by Officers of Sevenoaks District Council in July 2011 to give consideration to the addition of an IT allowance to the Members' current allowances scheme.

A background paper highlighted that laptops were provided to SDC Members in 2004 under a central government-funded scheme called *Implementing Electronic Government*. At that time funding of £60000 was secured which equipped all 54 Councillors with a basic laptop computer with the expectation that Members would increasingly utilise electronic information and communications to carry out their council responsibilities. These laptops had to be specially configured to enable secure access to a number of separate council systems in compliance with corporate IT security policies and the *Government Connects* code.

By the time of the May 2011 elections many of the original laptops had become obsolete or required disproportionate support from the IT Department and central government funding had ceased. In preparation for this the Council had been developing a simpler approach to Members' access to Council information and communications via a new Members' Portal. This is an extranet which enables web-based access via one log-in to the e-mail system and all the necessary information systems and databases.

Against a background of c.23% reduction in IT budgets in recent years there is little scope for the Council to supply computer equipment for all Members. Besides, the

advent of the Members' Portal means that specifically-configured equipment is unnecessary and Members will be able to securely access everything they need to perform their duties from any internet access point including a home computer.

Evidence & Research

The Panel were briefed by Officers and given a demonstration of the Portal. We met with Councillors Bracken, Parkin and Gaywood and a subsequent telephone meeting was held with Cllr Fleming in his capacity as Cabinet lead for IT. The Panel met separately to consider their findings and to agree this recommendation.

For background and guidance we consulted the Councillor Commission Report on *Members Remuneration* (2007). However, it is clear that there is no consensus on the provision of information technology to Councillors: *"Panels are increasingly being asked to provide advice upon such matters. The current guidance gives little help"*

A review of other Council allowances schemes in the South East again gave few pointers. Very few councils currently pay an allowance specifically targeted at information technology and those that do have adopted different approaches specific to their circumstances.

We are advised by SDC Officers that the indicative purchase cost of a basic laptop with the necessary software (basic anti-virus, Microsoft Office Home Use Program) would be in the region of £550 at current prices. From our own knowledge it is clear that the cost of computer consumables such as printer ink differ widely, as does the cost of domestic broadband (which is often tied in with other supply i.e. satellite TV).

Panel Recommendation

On the basis of our briefings from Members and Officers at SDC it is clear that the use of computer-based information and communications is now essential for Councillors to be able to fulfil their responsibilities. There are facilities available for Members at the Council offices in Sevenoaks, but these are only accessible on working days and are not convenient for Members who live some distance from the town. Therefore, personal access to a computer is a pre-requisite of the role.

We recommend an allowance of £120 per annum to be available to councillors, paid monthly and separately from the Basic and other allowances.

The above allowance would be available to Members who use their own IT resources to undertake their council duties. Where a Member has been provided with a Council-funded computer, no allowance should be paid. As with all allowances, Members can choose to opt out of receiving the allowance if they so wish. It is important to stress that this is intended as a contribution towards the cost of computer equipment and clearly does not cover the full cost, given that it would be available for private use.

In exceptional circumstances where a Member is unable to afford the purchase cost of a suitable computer, the Council should consider assisting the Member, possibly by advancing a lump sum which would then be recovered via repayments from this allowance.

We consider that the increasing use of computer-based communication and transmission of documents should enable the Council to make significant progress towards 'paperless' meetings and in due course there will be cost savings in staff time, printing, photocopying and postage which will help to offset the cost of this allowance.

This new allowance would replace the entirety of Clause 3.7 of the SDC Members' Allowances scheme which currently provides for fax machines and Council-supplied laptops to Members.

The Panel recommends that this allowance should be reviewed three years after adoption to evaluate relevance at that time and, in any event, the allowance should lapse once the Council is paying the appropriate level of Basic Allowance recommended by the Panel in our full review published in late 2008.

Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

The Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council was originally established in 2001 and now operates under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The function of the panel is to make recommendations to Council in accordance with Statutory Instruments (primarily 2003 No.1021 and No.1692).

The JIRP is appointed jointly by the three Councils but considers each Council individually and makes separate recommendations for each according to the particular structures and requirements of the organisation.

Panel Members are:

Barry Cushway
Sue Holmes
Simon Knott
Jean Selmes
Colin Wilby

1 September 2011

APPENDIX G: Members' Allowances Scheme (2011/12)

3.7 ICT and other equipment

~~The Council will provide, install and maintain a fax machine at a Member's home, upon request of leaders of political groups and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees. In these cases, the Council will provide replacement print cartridges and parts. The facsimile machine will be returned to the Council at the end of a Member's term of office.~~

~~The Council will provide and maintain a laptop computer to assist with Council work at the request of a Member. The laptop will be returned to the Council at the end of a Member's term of office.~~

Members are able to securely access all Council information and communications from any internet access point, including a home computer, through the Members' Electronic Portal. In order to recognise that part of the cost of provision of such equipment is for the performance of Members' duties, Members may make claim for the following financial support:

- (a) an allowance of up to £120 per annum is available to councillors paid on a yearly basis and separately from the Basic and other allowances. This allowance is available to Members who use their own IT resources to undertake their council duties;
- (b) In exceptional circumstances where a Member is unable to afford the purchase cost of a suitable computer the Council would consider assisting the Member by advancing a lump sum which would then be recovered via repayments from this allowance;
- (c) where a Member has been provided with a Council funded computer, no allowance will be paid; and
- (d) all such allowances are subject to tax along with Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances in the normal way

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Item 5(c) – Review of IT Allowances/Provision of Computers for Members

This item was considered by the Modern Local Government Group on 6 October 2011. The minutes of that meeting were not available at the time that the Council agenda went to print. An extract of the minutes will be available at the Council meeting.

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Item 5(c) – Review of IT Allowances/Provision of Computers for Members

Modern Local Government Group’s Recommendations to Council

At its meeting on 6 October 2011, the Modern Local Government Group considered the matter as follows:

“REVIEW OF IT ALLOWANCES/PROVISION OF COMPUTERS FOR MEMBERS

Members considered a report which reviewed whether an IT allowance should be added to the current Members’ Allowance Scheme. This issue had been considered by the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) following a request by Officers of Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) in July 2011 and the report included the JIRP’s recommendations. The report explained that laptops had been provided to SDC Members in 2004 under a central government funded scheme whereby funding of £60,000 was secured which equipped all 54 Councillors with a basic laptop computer. However by the time of the May 2011 elections many of the original laptops had become obsolete or required disproportionate support from the IT Department and the central government funding was no longer available.

The accessibility of information by Members had also changed in the intervening years and the Council had developed a simple approach to Members’ access to Council information and communications via a new Members’ Electronic Portal, an extranet which made it possible to have web-based access to the e-mail system and all the necessary information systems and databases. As a consequence Members could access all of the information that they required to perform their duties securely from any internet access point including a home computer. Coupled with the approximate 23% reduction in IT budgets in recent years this meant that there was little scope for the Council to supply computer equipment for all Members or to continue to provide the level of ongoing support needed.

Members discussed the background to the initiation of the review. It was noted that by the May 2011 elections only 12 Members had been active users of the Council laptops out of the much larger total number allocated. After the elections 8 new laptops had been purchased with remaining money from the original funding and had been allocated to the 8 Members who had responded to an emailed offer to be provided with a laptop. 1 Member had already returned their new laptop. There had been some concern from Members that new laptops were not available for all Members, some Members had obsolete laptops and others none at all which was considered confusing and possibly unfair. In these circumstances it was decided to refer consideration of the matter to the JIRP.

The Chairman welcomed Colin Wilby, the Chairman of the JIRP, to the meeting. Mr Wilby explained that the JIRP had carried out a full review which had included briefings from officers, meetings with Members and research into the practices of other local authorities in terms of provision of IT allowances and computing equipment for Members. Although it had been clear that few Councils currently provided a specific IT allowance and practice differed widely the Panel had concluded that the use of computer based information and communications was essential for Councillors to be able to fulfil their responsibilities. However the Panel had also recognised that other authorities paid a higher level of basic allowance which could be used by Members to meet their IT requirements if they so wished whereas Sevenoaks had previously rejected the Panel's recommended level of basic allowance in favour of a lower allowance. In view of this the Panel made a number of recommendations:

- (a) An allowance of £120 per annum should be available to councillors paid monthly and separately from the Basic and other allowances. This allowance would be available to Members who used their own IT resources to undertake their council duties;
- (b) Where a Member has been provided with a Council funded computer, no allowance should be paid;
- (c) In exceptional circumstances where a Member was unable to afford the purchase cost of a suitable computer, the Council should consider assisting the Member, possibly by advancing a lump sum which would then be recovered via repayments from this allowance;
- (d) The new allowance should replace the entirety of Clause 3.7 of the SDC Members' Allowance scheme which currently provided for fax machines and Council supplied laptops to Members; and
- (e) The allowance should be reviewed three years after adoption to evaluate relevance at that time and, in any event, the allowance should lapse once the Council was paying the appropriate level of Basic Allowance recommended by JIRP in their full review published in late 2008, this being £5754.

The Panel recognised that this was an attempt to provide a contribution towards meeting Members IT requirements rather than meeting the full costs. They had also considered it to be important that the proposed allowance could be rolled-up to allow a Member to purchase computing equipment if they were unable to afford to do so.

Members had regard to the review carried out by the JIRP and sought clarification on whether the proposed allowance could only be used to purchase computer hardware or for maintenance and consumables. Mr Wilby said that the Panel had considered that the allowance should be used for the purchase and maintenance of computer hardware rather than to meet the cost of broadband or consumables. Members also questioned how the Panel had arrived at the level of the proposed allowance and were reminded that the

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allowance was to be viewed as a contribution to meeting their IT requirements and had not been determined by seeking to establish a benchmark figure for the provision of specific hardware but was considered to be realistic given the Panel members own experience of the costs of purchasing equipment.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources reminded Members that the reason for the review was to come up with a clear and fair scheme to assist Members in accessing the information they needed in their roles against the recognition that the Council could not afford to supply computers to all Members and provide the support that those computers would require. Members also questioned the position with regard to tax payments if a Member opted for the new allowance or was provided with a laptop by the Council. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that if a Council provided laptop was used solely for Council purposes this would not be a taxable benefit but was likely to become one if it was also used for personal use. In terms of the allowance the Council would be under a duty to tax at source but if this was used to purchase equipment solely for use on Council business it would be possible to claim back the tax or to adjust the tax code for the following year. It would only be possible to establish the position for each Member by writing to ask them about usage each year.

A Member noted the Panel's recommendation that the allowance should lapse if the level of Basic Allowance reached the level recommended by the Panel in its Review of the Scheme of Allowances in 2008 and wondered when Basic Allowance might reach this level. The Leader of the Council advised that because of the lower levels of allowances adopted by the Council this level was not likely to be reached imminently.

Members discussed the merits of the Panel's recommendation contained in paragraph 7(c) of the report and decided that it was important that this provision would be considered in exceptional circumstances. It was felt that this should be included in the proposed changes to the Members Allowances Scheme in paragraph 3.7 of the Scheme in the Constitution. It was noted that if a Member had been provided with a new Council laptop they would not be entitled to the proposed IT allowance and that the allowance should be an annual contribution towards the cost of purchasing or maintaining computer hardware. It was suggested that the recommendation in paragraph 7(a) should provide for the allowance to be paid on a yearly basis rather than monthly.

Members felt that it was important for the purpose for which the IT Allowance could be used to be clearly stated in the revised Scheme of Allowances. It was also confirmed that if the Modern Local Government Group's recommendations were agreed by the Council then the payment of the new allowance to those Members who wished to claim it would be paid in the current financial year. Members also briefly discussed the JIRP's suggestion that the increasing use of computer based communications and transmission of documents could enable the Council to make significant progress towards paperless meetings. Members had conflicting views of the merits of this, especially in areas where internet access was poor, but recognised that this

might have to be revisited during future budget discussions.

Resolved: That

That Council in giving consideration to the Report and recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) as included within Appendix A to the report, be recommended to:

- (a) adopt the allowance as set out in paragraph 7 of the report, as recommended by the JIRP, with minor changes of wording to recommendations (a) and (c) suggested by the Modern Local Government Group, and be met from within budget for 2011/12 and as a growth item for future years;**
- (b) update Appendix G Clause 3.7 of the Constitution in its entirety as set out within Appendix B to the report incorporating the allowance as set out in (a) above; and**
- (c) formally record thanks to the members of the JIRP, Barry Cushway, Sue Holes, Simon Knott, Jean Selmes and Colin Wilby for their work in preparing the review of IT allowances and provision of computers for Members”.**

Note: Text in bold constitutes the MLG’s recommendations to the Council

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APPOINTMENTS TO THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY NETWORK FOR COUNCILLORS

Report of the: Director of Finance and Corporate Resources

Status: For Decision

This report supports the Key Aim of the effective management of Council resources.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. P. Fleming

Head of Service Mrs Christine Nuttall - Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Recommendation:

(1) That Councillors Mrs Stack and Raikes be appointed to serve on the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

(2) That appointments to the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Officers be made at the discretion of the Chief Executive.

Introduction and Background

1. The Council has been approached by South East Employers to see whether Sevenoaks wishes to appoint two Members to serve on the new Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors.
2. There will also be a new network for Officers and it is suggested that appointments to the Officer Network should be made at the discretion of the Chief Executive.
3. The two new networks replace the former Democratic Services Officers Network and the Joint Scrutiny Network.
4. The draft terms of reference for the new Councillor and Officer Networks are attached at Appendix A.

Appointing Council Representatives to the Local Democracy and Accountability Network

5. The Leader of the Council has been approached and has nominated Councillors Mrs Stack and Raikes to serve on the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors for the remainder of the Municipal Year. The Council is asked to approve the nominations.

Key Implications

Financial

6. None.

Community Impact and Outcomes

7. None.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

8. None

Value For Money and Asset Management

9. None

Conclusions

10. The Council is asked to agree to the appointment of Councillors Mrs Stack and Raikes to serve on the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Sources of Information: Draft Terms of Reference for the Local Democracy and Accountability Network

Contact Officer(s): Alan Twyman – Democratic Services Manager
Ext. 7247

Dr Pav Ramewal

**Deputy Chief Executive and
Director of Corporate
Resources**



Draft Terms of Reference for the Local Democracy and Accountability Network

Our current Democratic Services Officers Network and the Joint Scrutiny Network are changing. From mid 2011, there will be a Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Officers and a Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors.

Aims and Objectives

Both Councillor and Officer networks will meet to consider key localist issues affecting local authorities in the south east region, for example, the Localism Bill, new governance arrangements, opportunities for shared services, and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Networks will give particular attention to those issues which may impact on engagement and transparency, and their impact on governance arrangements, with regard to both the relationship between the local council and the community it represents, and the relationship between the executive and non-executive within the council.

Network meetings will comprise presentations from guest speakers, the sharing of innovative ideas and good practice from around the region, networking opportunities with peers, and a Continuing Professional Development session – a practical “workshop” session aimed at developing specific skills. The meetings will be underpinned by facilitated discussion.

Representatives

Every local authority in membership of South East Employers will be invited to nominate two people to each network. *For the Councillor Network, all elected members are welcome, but it may be of particular interest to Chairs of Scrutiny Committees, Executive Members and Backbench Members. For the Officer Network, again, all officers welcome, but in particular those officers based in Democratic Services and/ or Scrutiny, and Policy Development.*

Meetings

Meetings are biannual for both networks – approximately March and September. Attendance at these networks is free of charge to SEE member authorities. If the representatives cannot attend, we welcome substitute nominations. If you do not cancel your place, non-attendance on the day will incur a charge of £50 per delegate to cover costs.

Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

- There will be a Chair and Vice Chair appointed to each network.
- A Chair and Vice Chair will be nominated by network members.
- The Chair and Vice Chair will serve for a two year period of office.
- The Chair and Vice Chair will oversee the network meetings, assist SEE formulating the agenda for each meeting, and maintain regular contact with SEE between meetings.

Submission of business

Network members may put forward matters for inclusion, by:

- emailing the contacts below, or
- including suggestions on the evaluation form provided at the end of each meeting.

Contacts

Helen Looker, Business Support and Communications Assistant - helen@seemp.co.uk
Susie Bonfield, Policy Officer, Democracy and Governance – susie@seemp.co.uk

SEE

Newfrith House
21 Hyde Street
Winchester
Hampshire
SO23 7DR
01962 840664

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Report by Leader of the Council

This is my report to Council on the work undertaken by the Leader and the Cabinet in the period 8 July to 5 October 2011. I am listing below the agenda items discussed since Members will have received the minutes of those meetings.

Cabinet – 21 July 2011

- Property Review – Disposal of Public Toilets (Ide Hill, Lemsing, Leigh, Swanley)
- Argyle Road Offices – Accommodation for Moat Housing
- Progress with Improvement Initiatives in Development Services
- Big Community Fund
- 2011/12 Performance Indicator targets
- London 2012 Olympic Games

Cabinet – 15 September 2011

- West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-16
- Proposed changes to Staff Terms and Conditions

The work of the Leader – Meetings held and attended:

July 2011

- Bentley Kent - invite to launch of new partnership with local charity Voluntary Action Within Kent (VAWK)
- Induction Service for new Minister of Bessels Green Unitarian Church, Reverend Daniel Costley
- Meeting with Locate In Kent
- South East England Councils (SEEC) Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- Leeds Castle Leadership programme Alumni summer event
- Local Government Association (LGA) Councillors' forum
- LGA Improvement Board
- Meeting with Graham Gibbens - Ambition Board 2 focus
- Knole Academy - Celebration of Achievement Ceremonies - year 7
- West Kent Partnership
- Kent Forum – Kent Leaders and Chief Executives
- Sevenoaks Chronicle Briefing – Big Community Fund article

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- National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) Local Government Group (LGG) Creative Councils Selection panel meeting
- Sevenoaks Town Partnership meeting
- Vine magazine business networking event

August 2011

- Strategic Communications Group
- Swanley Town Council liaison meeting
- Edenbridge Town Council liaison meeting
- BBC Radio interviews regarding council owned assets
- Sevenoaks Town Council liaison meeting
- Cycling Strategy meeting
- Local Government Chronicle - James Illman & Jim Dunton
- Assessors Team meeting
- Cycling Strategy route planning
- Control Team Meeting
- Moat Housing Group – Sheltered Housing in Kent
- Design Council Meeting
- Fly Tipping Crew – Full day
- Refuse Collection Crew – Full day

September 2011

- LGG Councillors' Forum
- District Council Network (DCN) Assembly
- NESTA/LGG Creative Councils Steering Group meeting
- Ambition Board 2 meeting
- LGA Improvement Programme Board
- NESTA Event – Creative Councils Camp
- LGG Councillors' Forum
- Revenues Team Meeting
- Derek Allen - Senior Associate Improvement & Efficiency South East (IESE)
- Institute of Revenues Ratings and Valuations (IRRV) Conference – Speaking commitment
- HR Manager Interviews
- NESTA local authority project steering group
- West Kent and East Sussex mini Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
- Performance and Governance Committee
- IRRV Roundtable
- Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) visit to SDC Benefits
- Staff Briefing at Dunbrik
- Universal Credit, Briefing meeting for Lords
- Business Breakfast, Swanley
- Staff Briefing

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- Edenbridge Community Centre, Briefing
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Ministerial Briefing

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REPORTS OF SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

a) Environment Select Committee – 6 September 2011

Carol Valentine, Kent Highways Service Highway Manager for West Kent, gave a presentation on the Winter Service policy. This covered the salting of roads, snow clearance, and salt bins. Questions from Members addressed liaison with district and parish councils, schools, bus routes, and neighbouring county authorities.

The Committee received a report on business support within the Sevenoaks District. The District Council works in partnership with several other organisations to support local businesses. One current focus of attention was improving broadband services in parts of the District. Although the staff resources available within SDC for business support were very limited, a team reorganisation was helping the Council devote additional officer hours to the service.

The Committee received an update briefing from the Planning Services Manager on the Local Development Framework. This covered where the Council currently was in the process, and what would happen in the future. Issues arising from the current consultation on Development Plan Documents were highlighted. The impact of the government's Localism Bill was examined. Gypsy and traveller site policy was discussed. Proposals for the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans were explained.

Updated Conservation Area Appraisals for Chipstead Village and Brittain's Farm were reviewed and the Committee recommended to Cabinet that they be adopted as informal planning guidance.

John Grint, Vice Chairman
6 October 2011

b) Social Affairs Select Committee – 8 September 2011

Community Safety, Helping Communities to feel Safe and be Safe, was the first of the Council's key criteria to be examined by Social Affairs using its new format. Prior to the meeting various Members had made visits to the Police Command Centre at Maidstone, had sat in on one of the daily Community Safety Unit Tasking meetings and had accompanied PCSOs on their rounds. The reports were both interesting and informative and are attached to the minutes of the meeting.

1. There were detailed presentations from the new District Chief Inspector, Peter Steenhuis, Amanda Bell, the Service Manager from West Kent Mediation, and from the Community Safety Co-ordinator reporting on PACTs. The Chief Inspector informed Members of the changes which would result from the New Policing Model when it comes into effect on the 16th of November.

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Under these proposals there would no longer be separate divisions; instead the most appropriate, available response unit would deal with an incident, regardless of artificial geographical boundaries. The initial officer would then see the case through to its conclusion.

Between 7am and 1am, 7 days a week, there would be 5 teams deployed in neighbourhood policing, a slight increase on the current position and in future all response officers would come out from the Tonbridge Police Station. However as this district had the lowest crime figures in the County for burglary and vehicle theft the overall cover was likely to be reduced.

2. The West Kent Mediation service covered a wide area including the districts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells and offered a range of interventions from mediation in neighbour disputes to anger management and from restorative justice to peer mediation. Demand for its services had never been higher but, as with many charities, funding was a major issue making long term planning difficult. The main funders in addition to the three district councils were Kent Probation, some town/parish councils and the various housing associations plus several grant giving bodies.

There have been close links with the Charity since its inception and, courtesy of the District Council, its office is based in Swanley. There were 3 full time and 2 part time staff who, together with 35 volunteers, (who all undergo regular, rigorous training) make up the team.

Earlier this year WKM gained PQASSO accreditation without any amendments or recommendations, the only mediation service to have gained this to date.

3. Kelly Webb, the Community Safety Co-ordinator informed Members about the work of PACTs, how and why they are set up, their priorities, membership and actions. Currently there are 9 in operation with another 4 having completed their remit. It is important that when a PACT has completed its objective it is disbanded, although it can always be reconstituted if necessary.

Where young people are concerned it is especially important that they get involved in the process and take ownership of the resolution. Typical issues have included speeding, litter, anti-social behaviour and cold-calling.

There was some debate about attendance at these meetings especially in Swanley and it was suggested that both the times of the meetings and the venues might need to be revisited. It was pointed out that the Partnership held community days in the 3 towns giving the public the opportunity to speak to any of the partners directly.

Alison Cook.
Chairman, Social Affairs Select Committee.

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c) Services Select Committee – 20 September 2011

The committee held a meeting on 20th September at which the Kent Waste Partnership Annual Report was discussed together with the consultation on the proposed refreshing of the Kent Joint Management Strategy. The committee made a number of general points on the two documents and it was agreed the Chairman and the Head of Environmental and Operational Services should collate the responses and reply to the questions set out in the refresh document. The committee received a presentation from the Head of Housing and Communications on a number of housing issues.

The in-depth scrutiny sub-committee would be progressing the issue of under occupation of social housing and would report to the next committee meeting. The committee considered the report on the 10 year budget and staff terms and conditions. Members were impressed with the amount of work carried out and how positive the result was in view of the current circumstances. The comments will be fed back to the Cabinet for their meeting on 13th October.

R.J.Davison
Chairman, Services Select Committee

