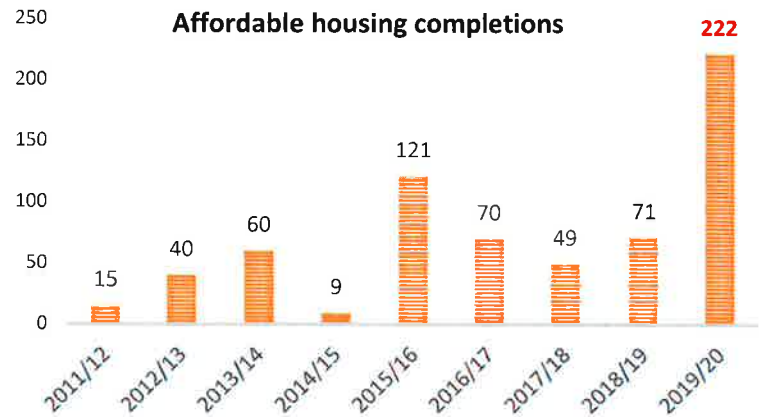


26 November 2019

Affordable Housing

The District Council is continuing to work up a number of new affordable housing developments in partnership with several locally-based housing associations. In 2019/20, it's anticipated that a further 222 new affordable homes will be completed and which will be, by far, the most completions in a single year since back in the 1990s.



Government is set to introduce a new shared-ownership model along with a planned package of measures to better help more low-income households onto the housing ladder. This will include revised rules on shared-ownership resales whereby shared-owners will no longer have to offer their homes to other potential shared-owners for an initial period before going to the open market. In addition, those in social/affordable rented housing will be given the option to buy shares as small as 10% in their existing homes and with the option of 1% stair-casing increments.

There continues to be an unprecedented level of interest in rural exceptions sites and we're currently working on nine separate projects - all at various stages of the process. In order to better manage the rural housing work programme in the future whilst also ensuring that all parishes are equally supported in this area of our work, a new system is to be adopted whereby a 5-year rolling programme will assess the need for rural housing in all parishes in the District.

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Example projects



- The Mallards, Swanley
- First affordable modular housing development



- Westerham House, Edenbridge
- 100% affordable housing development

Housing Policy and Strategy

The third progress report for the District Council's Housing Strategy (2017) presented to Housing and Health Advisory Committee (HHAC) and demonstrated significant achievements across all three key priority areas.

Originally introduced back in 2014, the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy is in the process of being updated and, once complete, this will be taken to the HHAC seeking support.

The Kent Social Care Accommodation Strategy is also being refreshed and the new strategy is to focus on: 1) Increase in housing with care schemes; 2) Increased capacity for specialist dementia care; 3) Increase in supported accommodation, including extra care housing; 4) Working with the market to foster continual improvement in the quality of nursing and residential care homes; and 5) Making best use of land for developments of housing that meets strategic priorities of the strategy. Once complete, again this will be taken to the HHAC seeking support.

Housing Advice and Homelessness

- We hosted the West Kent Landlord Forum on 28 October 2019 with over 40 landlords attended. This was a successful evening and with presentations from the National Landlords' Association (NLA), Zero Deposit (new tenancy deposit protection option) and Together Money (short-term finance options and buying properties at auction). These are held twice a year in partnership with Tunbridge Wells BC, Tonbridge & Malling BC as well as the NLA.
- We have been working to get Gladedale House fully occupied - all of the 14 flats are now let. Ainsley Dummer, Landlord Liaison Officer, has been working closely with Leaders (the managing agent).
- We currently have 84 households in emergency and temporary accommodation, of which 33 are in nightly paid accommodation outside the District and 51 are in properties provided free to this Council by housing associations.

Housing Register

- This Council is working with West Kent Housing (WKHA) to bring the Housing Register (waiting list for social housing) in-house from 1 January 2020, preparations to transfer this service from West Kent Housing to SDC are progressing well.
- There is currently 563 applicants on the Register with a further 275 pending and being processed, a recent Kent Live article reported that this Council has the lowest Register list across Kent. The operational processes will be streamlined with other Council functions to provide a smoother journey for the customer.
- The current average waiting time for a one bed property is 8 months and a two/three bedroom is around fourteen months.
- Since April 2019, 259 households have been housed into social housing from the Register.
- The Council has supported 14 applications from the Housing Register into private sector rented properties through our PSL scheme.

HERO Advice Service

The HERO Team are having a very busy year to date, they have had 198 referrals since April 2019 and have closed 170 cases. The Team have supported customers to reduce debt by over £30,000, arranged over £1,400 worth of crisis food deliveries and maximised benefits per week by a total of over £6,500.

Empty homes

We are carrying out a review of the empty homes vacant over two-years to identify which properties may have the potential for purchase by Quercus 7 or Quercus Housing. As at 29 October 2019, there are a total of 101 of these have been empty for over two-years, we are working with owners to bring at least 10% of these back into use through the companies or supporting owners to bring them into use for their own purposes.

Housing Standards

There has been a marked increase in service requests dealt with by the team compared to last year. Service requests can include such areas as; Property disrepair, Grant related enquiries, Freedom of Information requests and Public Health Act Funerals. Over 282 requests have been received so far.

For information we have received 22 property disrepair based service requests so far this year.

Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) - Since the change in Housing Legislation for the Licensing HMOs in October 2018, we have doubled provided HMO Licenses to an additional 15 properties. There are 11 properties that we are actively investigating within the district to establish if a licence is needed. In addition, we are proactively looking for unlicensed HMOs by working with other departments such as Council Tax and Customer Solutions and also by carrying out own investigations by monitoring the rental market.

Disabled Facility Grants (DFG's) - 54 have been completed so far this year, including works such as wet room conversions, stair lift installations and internal and external access adaptations.

