

Cllr Kevin Maskell, Housing and Health
Report to Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday 8 November 2022

Housing

Service highlights

- The refreshed Housing Strategy (and Action Plan) and Allocations Policy were approved by Council.
- Numbers in temporary/emergency accommodation reduced from 139 (March 2022) to 98 (October 2022) as a result of successful homeless prevention interventions and an increase in affordable rented properties coming forth through Quercus Housing, partnership working and our Landlord Incentive scheme.
- Quercus Housing, the Council's affordable housing company completed 15 new homes at 11-13 High Street, Swanley, which were fully occupied from May 2022. The homes were made available as affordable rent and allocated to local people in temporary accommodation or placed on the Housing Register.
- The Council provided Quercus Housing with a loan facility of up to £15million over the next 10 years to support the delivery of affordable rented housing in the district.
- Quercus Housing is progressing the purchase of Council developed site at 27-37 High Street, which would bring forward 17 additional units of affordable rented accommodation, with an emphasis of supporting local essential workers.
- Working in partnership with West Kent Housing Association, 7 units of supported accommodation for rough sleepers/single homeless were provided at Vine Court Road, which took its first tenants in September. A further 4 units of accommodation at Orchards Close have been provided for single homelessness and fully occupied from August. DLUHC awarded funding of £350k towards both refurbishment projects as part of its Rough Sleeping Accommodation Fund.
- The Council has worked in partnership with charity, HfT, to progress a lease arrangement for Stay Green House in Edenbridge, providing 6 units of move on accommodation for single women and single mothers. The property is due to go live in late October/early November.
- Since April 2022, we have worked with 26 landlords and agents, securing 32 properties and offered 9 landlord incentives.
- In acknowledgement of the Council's successful work through Covid-19 to support rough sleepers and single homeless, Government awarded the Council £677,230 via its Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund for 2022-2025 to support staffing, emergency accommodation, support and a social prescribing pilot.
- The Council received funding of £700k from BEIS to deliver a programme of various green retro-fit measures. The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG1) scheme provides energy efficiency upgrades and low-carbon heating solutions to low-income households living off the gas grid in the district.
- A £1 million funding bid has been submitted to Government's Traveller Site Fund to make improvements to the design and layout of the Hever Road Gypsy and Traveller site. We are currently awaiting the outcome of the bid.
- The Council is working in partnership with KCC and Xantura to deliver a 1-year pilot project, using a software system 'One View' to identify those at risk of homelessness at the earliest possible stage and provide support and assistance.
- Over 200 host property checks undertaken by the Private Sector Housing team as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Health

Service highlights

- The Council adopted the Sevenoaks District Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan 2022-23, bringing together partners to deliver health priorities for the district.
- The Council received £1.148m funding from the Better Care Fund to support Disabled Facilities Grants, Safe and Secure Grants, a Hospital Discharge scheme and hoarding support programme.
- During Covid-19, Care for our Community approached the Council to help roll-out its local volunteer scheme, with more than 1,500 volunteers providing local support in their community. Several ward, town and parish councillors signed-up to volunteer as part of the scheme. One of the most important mental health benefits of volunteering is the impact it can have on your sense of connectedness. Many volunteers wished to continue supporting their local communities and the Council has worked with Kent-based charity, Imago, which has an existing volunteer framework in place, to promote opportunities across the district. The Council recently delivered a Volunteers Fair at The Stag Theatre on 20 October in partnership with Imago. Over 250 people attended the event.
- The Council achieved the Bronze and Silver Awards as part of the Kent & Medway Health in the Workplace Awards.
- The Why Weight and Healthy Walks programmes are fully operational and engagement with GP referrals have increased by 25%.
- The Council secured KCC 'Reconnect' funding to deliver a summer programme in its leisure centres to engage more children and young people in exercise and healthy activities.
- Sevenoaks Primary Care Network and the One You team hosted drop-in wellbeing information events at local GP surgeries as part of Silver Sunday.
- We commissioned West Kent Mind to deliver Mental Health First Aid training to frontline staff and partners. Mental health support training was delivered to hosts and guests as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- We organised the Walk Push Run for Dementia community event in May 2022, which attracted more than 300 attendees. Age UK's Dementia day care is running at Hollybush Day Centre two days a week. We supported Age UK (Sevenoaks and Tonbridge) with its launch a Memory Loss and Dementia Pack <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/bp-assets/globalassets/sevenoaks--tonbridge/original-blocks/our-services/local-information-packs/memory-loss-and-dementia-sevenoaks.pdf>
- The Council has been responding to the challenges of the rising cost of living and planning for the months ahead. We have worked closely with our partners across the district to respond to significant changes, especially working on how we can support our residents. The 'Here to Help' and 'Warm Spaces' campaigns have been launched to support residents. The Council's 'Here for You' information leaflet provides households with information on the rising cost of living and local community support.
- The One You team delivered a healthy cooking on a budget project for families in September and October.
- Compaid was commissioned to deliver a programme of digital training, providing devices and data to support customers with limited digital access, as part of a partnership project with West Kent Housing Association. Over 110 residents have benefited to date.

- The Council successfully utilised its allocations of the Household Support Fund. The HERO and Benefits teams worked together to administrate the fund, which supported over 450 residents, including pensioners in the district who were in receipt of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction and vulnerable households to support utility bills and food costs.

Service pressure points

- The rising cost of living and Homes for Ukraine host placements ending after the initial six months, may increase homelessness approaches to the Council, exacerbating temporary accommodation pressures on the Council.