

# Maidstone Housing Strategy 2016 - 2020



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# 1. Introduction to the Strategy

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The Maidstone Housing Strategy is an overarching plan that guides the Council and its partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the borough. It sets out the priorities and outcomes that we wish to achieve and provides a clear strategic vision and leadership in an uncertain economic climate. The Strategy contributes to the Council's corporate priorities for Maidstone **'to keep the Borough an attractive place for all and to secure a successful economy'**. The Housing Strategy is also intrinsically linked with other plans and strategies of the Council, most notably the Strategic and Local Plan.

Maidstone has great opportunities for growth driven by our bold housing and regeneration ambitions. The ambition behind this strategy is to ensure that all people in the Borough have access to good quality homes that are affordable for them and meet their needs. Every Council has a responsibility to understand what matters most to its local communities and to respond to this through investment, service planning and delivery. The Council also has to take into account both national and regional aspirations and sometimes balance these against local priorities.

We have identified the following three Key Priority Themes that the Council and its partners need to address for the next five years:

- **Priority 1: Enable and support the delivery of quality homes across the housing market to develop sustainable communities**
- **Priority 2: Ensure that existing housing in the Maidstone Borough is safe, desirable and promotes good health and well-being.**
- **Priority 3: Prevent homelessness, secure provision of appropriate accommodation for homeless households and supporting vulnerable people**

The priorities contained in this strategy cannot be achieved without working in partnership with other areas of the Council along with statutory and voluntary organisations.

Whilst the primary focus of this strategy is housing, the scope reaches far beyond. Poor housing or lack of a home can have a detrimental impact on many areas including employment, crime, education, homelessness and health. Housing and support services provides valuable help to enable people to achieve increased independence at times of difficulty and can prevent difficulties becoming a crisis.

This strategy gives the Council an excellent opportunity to make a real difference for the residents of the borough. This includes working with partners to facilitate housing development, maximising investment opportunities, raising housing quality standards, promoting ways for residents to improve their health and well-being; preventative measures; and services for homeless persons.

## 2. Our Achievements 2011 - 2015

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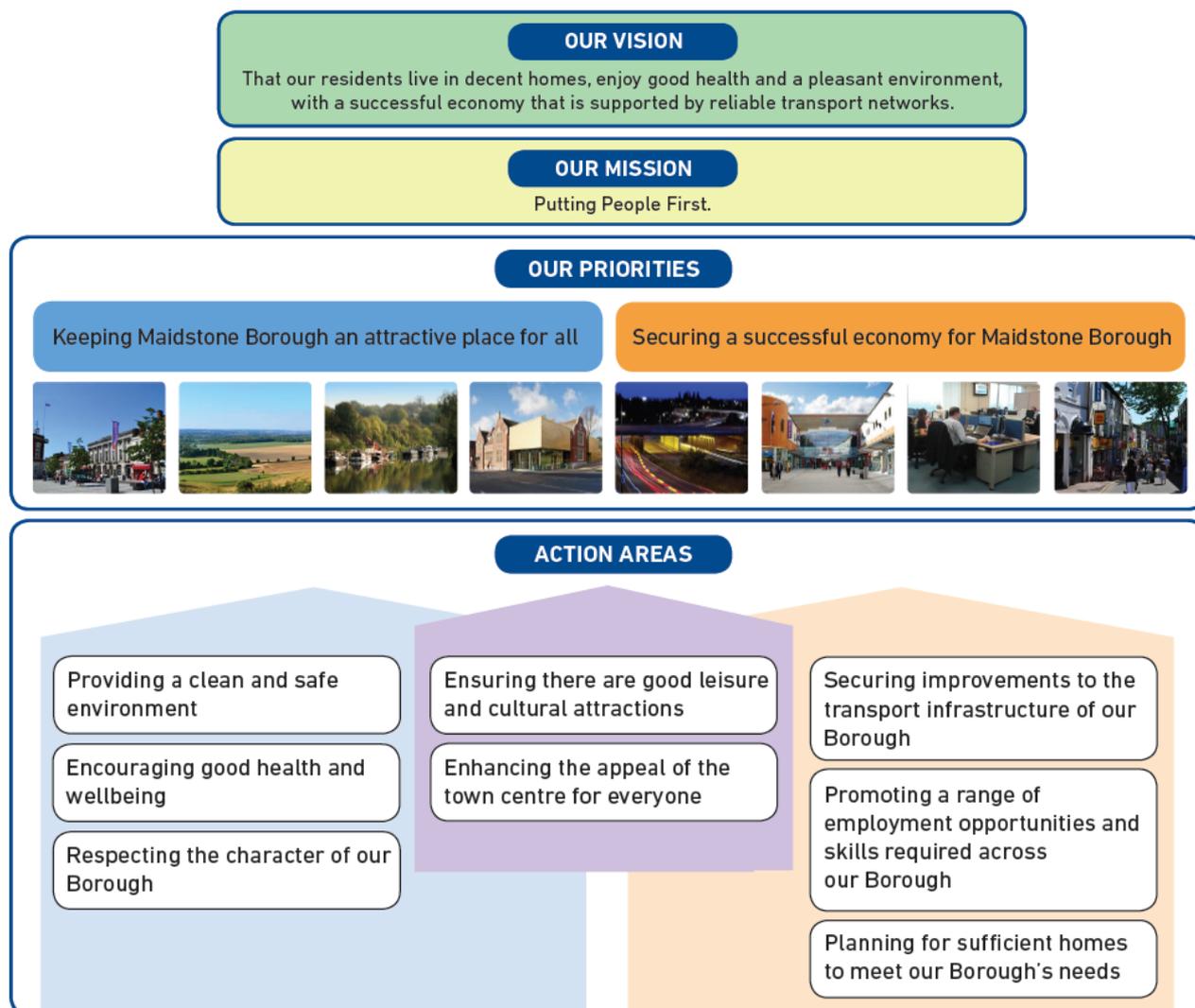
During the life of the previous Housing Strategy much was achieved which made a real difference to peoples' lives, including:

- Delivering 871 new affordable homes, of which 63 were delivered on rural exception sites for local needs housing.
- In excess of £6,930,000 of funding from the Homes & Communities Agency to help provide 553 affordable homes.
- Purchased and refurbished Aylesbury House and Magnolia House to provide 20 bed spaces as temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- Obtaining Investment and Registered Provider status with the Homes & Communities Agency.
- Receiving a grant allocation of £210,000 from the Homes & Communities Agency to bring 12 long-term empty properties back in to use as affordable housing.
- Completing the following policy and strategy reviews: Homelessness Strategy, Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Tenancy Strategy and Domestic Abuse Strategy, Empty Homes Strategy.
- Increased engagement with the private sector by hosting bi-annual Landlord forums and offering a new Homefinder incentive scheme to gain access to privately rented properties.
- Allocation Scheme implemented along with new eligibility criteria and 'banding' introduced to offer a fairer distribution of social housing properties to households on the housing register.

The Action Plan showing achievements against the stated outcomes from the previous Housing Strategy 2011 – 2015 can be found at Appendix A.

### 3. Maidstone Councils Strategic Priorities and Values

The Council has identified within the Strategic Plan the following two priorities and action areas to deliver the vision for Maidstone Borough over the next four years.



The Maidstone Housing Strategy is linked with the Strategic Plan and actively seeks to address the action areas of Encouraging good health and wellbeing and Planning for sufficient homes to meet our Borough's needs.

# 4. How the Maidstone Housing Strategy links in with other plans



## 5. National Context

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### Housing Strategy for England:

In November 2011, the Government published 'Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England'. It presents the Government's intended direction of travel for housing; its role in the wider economy and its contribution to social mobility. It sets out ideas on the shape of housing provision that the Government wants to see which involve the primacy of home ownership; social housing as welfare; and an increasing role for the private rented sector.

The strategy introduced new approaches and initiatives including:

- A mortgage indemnity scheme for purchase of new build property.
- Support for locally led large-scale development.
- Further efforts on public sector land release.
- Provision of development finance for stalled sites.
- Further support for custom build (self-build) housing.
- The next steps for Council housing finance reform.
- Intentions on reinvigorating 'Right to Buy'.
- Clarity on guidance on allocation of social housing.
- Support for investment in new private rented sector homes.
- Additional financial support for tackling empty homes.
- Consideration of ways to improve housing options for older people.

### Local Authorities Role in Housing Supply:

The Autumn Statement 2013 announced that the Government would launch a review into the role that local authorities can play in housing supply. The aim of the review was to explore the role Councils, both stock and non-stock holding, could play going forward in increasing supply of housing to help meet the housing needs of their local population.

Natalie Elphicke and Keith House were appointed as the reviewers in January 2014. Their final report, published in January 2015, highlighted that Councils could achieve much more by taking a more central role in providing new homes. The key recommendation is that Councils change from being statutory providers to being Housing Delivery Enablers.

In January 2016 the Local Government Association announced the launch of a Housing Commission to explore new routes to housebuilding so Councils can enable the building of more desperately-needed homes. The LGA said this is vital to building the 230,000 new homes the country needs each year as private developers have not built more than 150,000 homes a year for more than three decades.

The Housing Commission will focus on four themes:

- **Housebuilding** - new ways that Councils can enable investment in new homes;
- **Place making, community and infrastructure** - the role of Councils in shaping homes within prosperous places and communities;
- **Employment, welfare reform and social mobility** - the role of housing in supporting tenants to find and progress in sustained employment;
- **Health and quality of life for an ageing population** - the role of housing in adapting to an ageing population and preventing onward costs onto social care and health services.

Evidence will be sought from Councils, partners, organisations and individuals on the key issues and on good practice that has successfully addressed those issues and what is needed to build on those successes.

Findings will be brought together in a report in Spring 2016 and presented at the LGA Annual Conference in June 2016.

### Housing and Planning:

In October 2015, the Government published the Housing and Planning Bill, which sets out measures to boost house building and makes a number of changes to the planning system.

On publication of the Housing and Planning Bill the Government said it would kick-start a “national crusade to get 1 million homes built by 2020” and transform “generation rent into generation buy.” The supply-side measures in the Bill are primarily focused on speeding up the planning system with the aim of delivering more housing. There is also a clear focus on home ownership, with measures to facilitate the building of Starter Homes; Self/Custom Housebuilding; and the extension of the Right to Buy to housing association tenants following a voluntary agreement with the National Housing Federation.

**Starter Homes:** The Bill puts into legislation the Government’s commitment to provide a number of Starter Homes for first-time buyers under the age of 40. Starter Homes would be sold at a discount of at least 20% of the market value. Specifically, the Bill puts a general duty on all planning authorities to promote the supply of Starter Homes, and provides a specific duty, which will be fleshed out in later regulations, to require a certain number or proportion of Starter Homes on site.

In addition, the Homes and Communities Agency have recently announced that Affordable Rent will not be grant funded post March 2018. The Government’s approach to the delivery of affordable rented accommodation is now very different from previous grant funded programmes. The Government will now only be promoting Starter Homes and Shared Ownership products. The greatest demand for affordable housing identified by the Council’s Strategic Housing Market Assessment is for affordable rented accommodation.

**Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding:** The Bill adds to and amends the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, which requires local authorities to keep a register of people seeking to acquire land to build or commission their own home. The Bill specifically requires local authorities to grant “sufficient suitable development permission” of serviced plots of land to meet the demand based on this register.

**Rogue landlords and letting agents:** The Bill will give local authorities additional powers to tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector. They will gain the ability to apply for banning orders against private landlords. A database of rogue landlords and agents will assist authorities in England in carrying out their enforcement work. Landlords will benefit from a clear process to secure repossession of properties abandoned by tenants.

**Voluntary Right to Buy:** The Queen's Speech 2015 confirmed the Government's intention to take forward the extension of the Right to Buy for Housing Association Tenants. The Bill will not, as originally expected, introduce a statutory Right to Buy (RTB) for housing association tenants. Following the Government's acceptance of the National Housing Federation's offer to implement the RTB on a voluntary basis, the Bill provides for grants to be paid to associations to compensate them for selling homes at a discount.

**Reforms to the Planning System:** The Bill contains a number of different reforms to the planning system, with the aim of speeding it up and allowing it to deliver more housing. Powers are given to the Secretary of State to intervene in the local and neighbourhood plan making process. A new duty to keep a register of brownfield land within a local authority's area will tie in with a new system of allowing the Secretary of State to grant planning permission in principle for housing on sites identified in these registers.

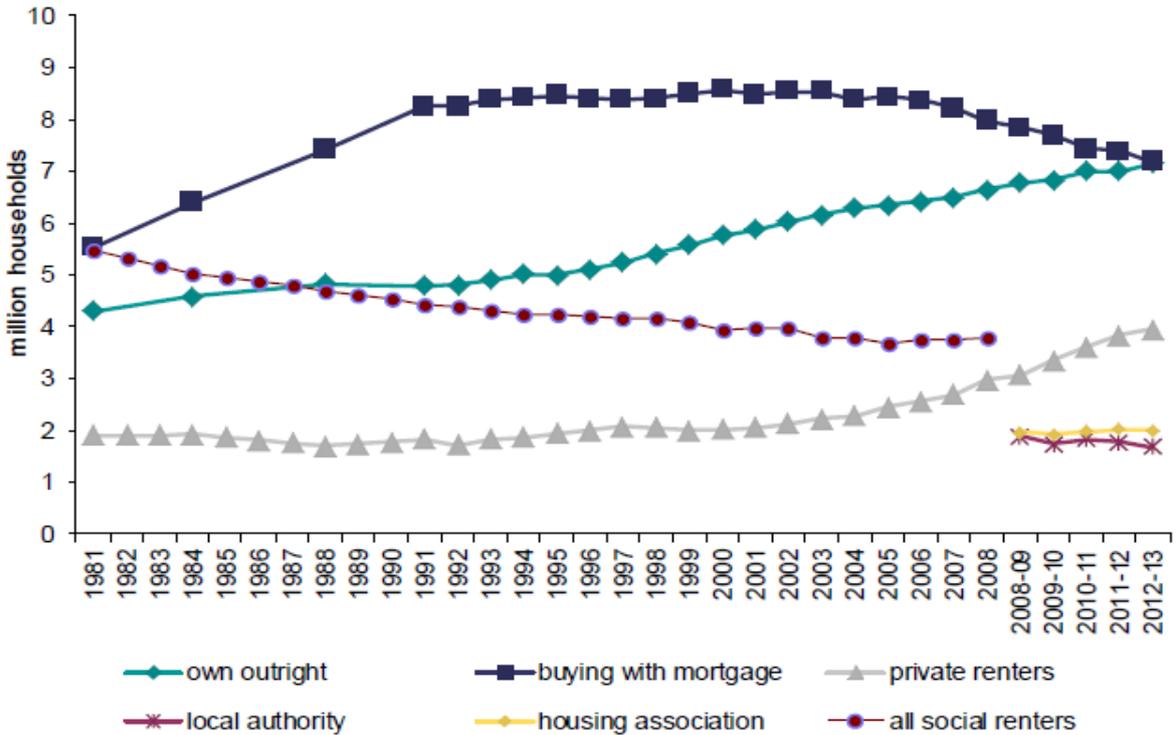
The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched a review of the building regulations framework and voluntary housing standards in October 2012. The review aimed to consolidate and simplify codes, standards, rules, regulations and guidance in order to reduce unnecessary costs and complexities in the house building process.

On 27th March 2015, the Government launched the new approach and published a new set of streamlined national technical standards. With appropriate evidence, local authorities can use the new space standards which make up the new national technical standards.

### Private Rented Sector:

The private rented sector is England's second largest housing tenure. The private rented sector has grown on average by 5.4% per annum since 1999 and now accounts for 19.4% (4.4 million) of households. In 1999 the private rented sector accounted for 9.9% (2.0 million) households. In 2012-13 the number of English households renting privately overtook households living within social housing for the first time since the mid-1960s.

**Figure 1.1: Trends in tenure, 1981 to 2012-13**



In November 2014, the property consultancy Savills forecast that the private rented sector would grow by another 1.2 million households by 2019. The Government is keen to see the establishment of a professional private rented sector which will be able to give tenants the quality and choice they are looking for.

The government published the guide: ‘Accelerating Housing Supply and Increasing Tenant Choice in the Private Rented Sector: A Build to Rent Guide for Local Authorities in March 2015 which outlines a series of practical options as to how local authorities can support the development of private rented sector homes and the benefits it can offer to local authorities.

Welfare reform:

The Welfare Reform Act introduces restrictions on how much Housing Benefit working-age households in social rented properties can claim from April 2013, based on the size of the household. The policy change is focused on reducing the Government’s benefit bill, increasing mobility in the social rented sector and making better use of the existing social housing stock.

The Local Housing Allowance has undergone many changes in the past 5 years - the reduction from 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of market rents to 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of market rents; an overall cap of £400 per week; increases linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the Retail Price Index (RPI) and single households under 35 years old restricted to the single room rate.

The spare room subsidy was introduced in April 2013. Working age social housing tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit with one spare room had their housing benefit cut by 14% and those with two or more spare bedrooms have seen a reduction by 25%.

An overall benefit cap was also introduced in July 2013, limiting total working age benefits to £26,000 per year. This is further being reduced to £23,000 in April 2016. This puts particular pressure on larger families who have much higher housing costs.

The introduction of universal credit, which is currently being rolled out across the country, will see all working age benefits, (excluding Disability Living Allowance and Carer's Allowance) made in one single monthly payment, paid directly to the tenant. Tenants will be responsible for paying their rent to their landlord themselves, with exceptions made for some vulnerable tenants on a case by case basis.

The government spending review in November 2015 proposed to cap the amount of rent that Housing Benefit will cover in the social sector to the relevant Local Housing Allowance, which is the rate paid to private renters on Housing Benefit. This will include the Shared Accommodation Rate for single claimants under 35 who do not have dependent children. This will apply to tenancies signed after 1 April 2016, with Housing Benefit entitlement changing from 1 April 2018 onwards.

The above benefit cap and the planned 1% reduction to social housing rent will potentially have issues for supported accommodation tenants along with the future viability of such schemes. It was announced in January 2016 that these proposals will be deferred for 12 months to consider the impact they would have on the supported accommodation sector. The National Housing Federation has expressed concern that the cap could force the closure of specialist homes, which cater for people such as the elderly, homeless, disabled and domestic violence victims.

#### Health & Homelessness:

Preventing homelessness has obvious benefits for people's housing outcomes, but a recent review, 'Preventing Homelessness to Improve Health and Well-Being' conducted on behalf of Public Health England by Homeless Link provides further evidence about how acting early also reduces health inequalities.

The review identifies prevention activity developed in response to health and wellbeing needs, delivered by or in partnership with the wider health workforce.

The review highlighted that for people experiencing homelessness or prolonged periods of rough sleeping, the rate at which health problems occur increases rapidly. People experiencing 'single homelessness' are particularly affected by poor physical and mental health.

The final report published in July 2015 recommended development in the following three key areas to help put homelessness prevention at the heart of our efforts to reduce health inequalities.

- Stronger leadership and joint strategic working.
- Access to advice and early intervention.
- Improved data collection and evaluation.

The 'Unhealthy state of homelessness: health audit results 2014' highlights the extent to which people who are homeless experience some of the worst health problems in society. The report uncovers the barriers many individuals face when it comes to getting treatment, as well as the impact of ill health on NHS A&E, hospital, mental health and substance misuse services.

The data also reconfirms the strong links between health and somebody's housing situation. The report makes a number of recommendations under the following themes of Better care; Better commissioning; Better policy and Stronger inspection and accountability to improve the commissioning and delivery of services that prevent and treat the poor health experienced by homeless people.

Homelessness decisions:

Nationally the overall numbers of those approaching local authorities as homeless has seen a small increase from 108,720 in 2011/12 to 111,019 in 2014/15.

In Kent, the increase has been significantly higher from 2,522 in 2011/12 to 3,723 in 2014/15.

## 6. Local Context

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### Maidstone the Place:

The Borough of Maidstone covers some 40,000 hectares, and is home to some 61,460 households. Located in the heart of Kent, Maidstone Town is the County Town, and is an administrative, retail and leisure hub, with a large night time economy. The Borough enjoys good transport links to the coast and to London, and has a high rate of employment. It has a very mixed business sector with a large number of small to medium sized employers, with particular strengths in law, accountancy and the media.

In the 2011 Census, it was estimated that there were 63,682 households living in the Maidstone Borough with 13.7% of households living in affordable housing and 86.3% being in the market sector.

### Population and Household change:

The table below shows projected population growth from 2011 to 2031 in Maidstone compared to the South East and England. The data shows that the population of Maidstone is expected to grow more strongly than seen across the region and nationally.

	<b>Population 2011</b>	<b>Population 2031</b>	<b>Change in population</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Maidstone	155,764	189,575	33,811	21.7
South East	8,652,800	9,979,900	1,327,100	15.3
England	53,107,200	60,418,800	7,311,600	13.8

Source: Office National Statistics (ONS)

With the overall change in the population will come changes to the age profile. A greater proportion of the population is expected to be in the age groups aged 60 and over (and even more so for older age groups) - in particular the oldest age group (85+) shows an increase of 142%.

### Affordable Housing:

The delivery of affordable Housing supports the Council's corporate priorities for Maidstone to keep the Borough an attractive place for all and to secure a successful economy.

The Maidstone Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2014) identifies the Council has a net affordable housing need of 5,800 households from 2013 to 2031 equivalent to 322 affordable homes each year (which is 35% of the Council's objectively assessed need of 928 dwellings p.a.).

Across the Borough as a whole, it is estimated that some 67% of need is for social or affordable rent tenures, whilst around 33% is for intermediate housing. Smaller (one and two bedroom) dwellings account for between 60% and 70% of the need with larger (three and above) dwellings accounting for between 30% and 40%.

## Local Needs Housing

Maidstone has a total of 41 Parishes in the Borough. Property within the villages and small towns of Maidstone are expensive; a reflection on the attractiveness of the Borough. This means that many local people are priced out of the housing market and unable to afford to live locally. The result is that many young couples and families have been forced to move away elsewhere in search of more affordable accommodation. This can have a detrimental effect on the balance and sustainability of the local community. Through the provision of affordable housing in rural locations we can help local people to remain in the village or town where they have strong family or employment ties.

### Entry Level Access to the Markets:

When assessing housing need, an important consideration is to establish the entry-level costs of housing to buy and rent.

The estimated average lower quartile property prices for purchases in 2013 were between £85,000 for a 1 bed dwelling in Maidstone Town Centre to £322,000 for a 4 bed dwelling in Maidstone Rural North.

The entry-level cost for private rented accommodation indicates that rents range from about £520-£575 per month for a one bedroom home up to around £1,250 per month for a four bedroom property depending on location.

As well as assessing the price of purchasing a property and renting, it is important to look at local income levels. This determines levels of affordability and also provides an indication of the potential for affordable housing to meet needs.

The Maidstone Strategic Housing Market Assessment (January 2014) showed that over a quarter of households have an income below £20,000 with a further third in the range of £20,000 to £40,000. The overall average income of all households in the Borough was estimated to be around £31,600 with a mean income of £42,000.

The table below shows across the Borough that it is estimated that around **43%** of households are unable to access market housing on the basis of income levels.

Area	Number unable to afford	Estimated households (2013)	% of households unable to afford
Maidstone Town	17,254	38,904	44.3%
Rural North	1,941	5,460	35.5%
Rural East	1,898	4,379	43.3%
Rural South	6,087	14,938	40.7%
<b>Borough</b>	<b>27,181</b>	<b>63,681</b>	<b>42.7%</b>

Source: Maidstone Strategic Housing Market Assessment (January 2014)

There is also a gap between what the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate is and what the rent is for private rented properties. LHA rates in Maidstone (the amount housing benefit will pay for a property per week) are shown below.

Size	LHA	Private rent *
Shared accommodation	£68.28	
1 bed	£123.58	£155
2 bed	£157.56	£200
3 bed	£180.45	£254
4 bed	£235.41	£316

\*[Home.co.uk](http://Home.co.uk) Maidstone market rent summary

Single people under 35 are only entitled to the shared accommodation rate, regardless of whether they live in something larger.

#### Housing Register Need:

The table below shows the number of applicants and those housed on the Housing Register during 2011 to 2015.

Housing Need & Lets		
	On Housing Register	Housed
2011 to 2012	3674	607
2012 to 2013	3187	703
2013 to 2014	1339	618
2014 to 2015	1461	624

Source: Locata / Housing Register

There was an increase in the number of people on the housing register between 2010 and 2012. This started to decrease in 2012/2013 and then dropped drastically in 2013/2014.

The reason for the large drop was the introduction of the new housing Allocation Scheme in April 2013. This new policy amended who could appear on the register, with applicants having to prove a housing need and a local connection.

The new Allocation Scheme replaced the previous points system with the introduction of a banding system as follows:

- Band A – Community Contribution
- Band B – Assistance
- Band C – Reasonable Preference
- Band D – Homeless Duty

A greater number of properties per applicant are allocated to Band A to support the aims and priorities of the Council's Allocation Scheme, which includes giving priority to applicants in work or who assist their local community in other ways, such as serving in the Armed Forces or undertaking voluntary work.

#### Shared Ownership Need:

Demand for shared ownership within Maidstone remains relatively strong. The table below shows the number of applicants registered with the Help to Buy Agent who wish

to live in Maidstone, broken down by bedroom entitlement and existing household status.

Existing Household Status								
Beds	Council Tenant	Private Tenant	Housing Association Tenant	With Family or Friends	Owner Occupier	Other	Total Applicants	%
1/2	3	181	19	269	5	2	479	57
2/3	2	101	14	70	6	4	197	23
3/4	5	71	16	23	5	2	122	15
4+	2	29	3	7	0	0	41	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Help to Buy Agent (Nominations Data)

### Housing Stock:

A detailed profile of tenure mix for Maidstone can be gleaned from the 2011 Census. Around 70% of households live in owner occupied accommodation, with around 13% social rented and 15% private rented. Like much of the country, the shared ownership sector is limited at only 1% of stock.

There are around 9,300 existing social homes within the Borough of Maidstone, of which roughly 93% are rented accommodation, with the remaining 7% low cost home ownership accommodation.

The table below shows the total social housing stock recorded for the Maidstone Borough, broken down by tenure and client group as at March 2015:

Tenure	Units	% of stock social housing stock
General Needs Self Contained	7,272	78%
Supported Housing	222	2%
Housing for Older People	1,147	12%
Low Cost Home Ownership	663	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,304</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Statistical Data Release 2014-15

### Emerging Local Plan:

Maidstone Borough's Local Plan, undertook public consultations in 2014, 2015 and 2016 and is on track to submit the plan to the Secretary of State for examination late May 2016. It is due to run until 2031, and contains four emerging policies within the plan that directly affect Housing:

- Housing mix.
- Affordable housing.
- Local needs housing.
- Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation.

Adoption of the Local Plan is expected in 2017.

An Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document is to be produced once the Local Plan has been adopted. This document will go into greater detail about the Council's affordable housing policy and requirements from developers.

### Self/Custom Build Housing

The Council is required under the National Planning Policy Framework to assess demand for self and custom build housing within Maidstone. The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 and the Housing and Planning Bill requires local planning authorities to operate a register of people interested in self build and to grant sufficient development permission for serviced plots of land to meet this demand.

### Maidstone Councils Role in Housing Supply:

The Council has developed a Local Plan with an objectively assessed need. The total figure can be broken down into sites already being built out, developments that have been granted planning permission but not yet commenced, and sites that are identified in the Local Plan for future development. The Housing Service will play a key role in ensuring that sites which have been granted permissions contribute to meeting housing demand at the earliest opportunity.

Starter homes are being promoted by the Government as an alternative to other affordable housing tenures. Maidstone Council is keen to support and promote home ownership including starter homes and will engage with developers about the supply and building of them within the borough.

However, there is a potential impact that the introduction of Starter Homes may have on the supply of traditional affordable housing. Wherever possible, they should be in addition to, not at the expense of much needed homes for affordable rent and shared ownership.

The Council will look to build new affordable and private homes to meet commercial and housing objectives. The Elphicke-House report commissioned by the Government which reviewed local authority's role in housing supply evidenced that Councils are most successful when working in partnership with others and where they actively use their own assets to promote housing development opportunities.

The Brunswick Street Car Park is viewed as an underperforming asset by the Council and its potential use is now under review for complete or partial redevelopment. The main objectives for the proposed development of this site is to maximise revenue income for the Council, regenerate the surrounding area and delivering affordable housing. This could be achieved by entering into a joint venture partnership with an existing Registered Provider partner.

### Maidstone Town Centre Strategic Development Plan:

This 5-year plan seeks to set out a vision, plan and programme of projects to develop and improve Maidstone town centre including enhancing the retail, leisure and business offer, stimulating enterprise growth along with encouraging more visitors to the town.

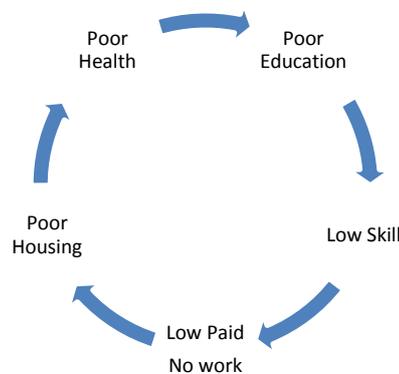
One of its aims is to 'Build and where appropriate convert offices to create more homes.' The introduction of permitted development rights to convert office use to residential without seeking full planning permission has seen over 50 such notifications received by Maidstone Council across the Borough.

The plan also identifies major development sites such as the Maidstone East / Royal Mail Sorting Office site which has been identified in the draft Local Plan for mixed use redevelopment including housing.

### Health and Well-being:

The right home environment is critical to our health and wellbeing; good housing helps people stay healthy, and provides a base from which to sustain a job, contribute to the community, and achieve a decent quality of life. Safe and suitable housing also aids recovery from periods of ill-health, and enables people to better manage their health and care needs.

Without good housing, we know health and wellbeing are affected: poor conditions and precarious housing impact on people's physical and mental health. Ill health also puts some households at a greater risk of housing need and can be a trigger of homelessness – for example, poor physical and mental health can make it harder to access and keep their home. The diagram below highlights the links between poor housing and wellbeing.



Levels of health and wellbeing in Maidstone are generally good, being largely above national and regional averages. This position, however, hides some pockets of deprivation and ill health. The difference in life expectancy at birth of our most affluent wards compared to our most deprived is 8.9 years.

Deprivation in the Borough is lower than average, however around 15% of children (under 16 years old) in Maidstone live in poverty. There is a larger difference in life expectancy of men and women; 7 years lower for men and 4 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Maidstone than in the least deprived.

Research has also shown that the stability of an affordable home can have profound effects on childhood development and school performance and can improve health outcomes for families and individuals.

Housing costs and affordability have been shown to be associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression.

Maidstone Council chairs the Maidstone Health & Wellbeing Board which meets quarterly. The group is made up of relevant local stakeholders and look at issues such as employability and skills, health issues and social justice.

### Fuel Poverty:

A household lives in fuel poverty when they cannot afford to heat their home to a comfortable level. Living in a cold home has a negative impact on the health of occupants of all ages. It may also reduce educational attainment in children and increase the number of absences from school and work.

Approximately 8% of households in the borough suffer from fuel poverty, similar to the average for Kent. However, fuel poverty is not evenly distributed through the Borough with some areas having just 2.2% of households in fuel poverty and others with 15.2% of households living in fuel poverty. Nationally fuel poverty is more prevalent in the private rented sector, followed by owner occupiers and lowest in the socially rented sector. The drivers of fuel poverty are;

- The energy efficiency of the home;
- The cost of the heating fuel; and
- The household income.

### Think Housing First:

The Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing) published 'Think Housing First' in 2013. It sets out the role of the housing sector; the relationship between health inequalities and housing; and what can be done in Kent in addition to current housing interventions.

The vision is to raise the profile of 'thinking about housing first' in addressing health inequalities in Kent. In doing so the aims are:

- To take advantage of the new opportunities, driven by the recent health reforms, for housing to strengthen collaboration and engagement with health.
- To maximise the contribution of housing in improving people's health and wellbeing.
- To raise awareness to health colleagues of the role of the housing sector.
- To reliably inform commissioning priorities and decisions, by demonstrating how investing in housing can save in health bills.

### Maidstone Health Inequalities Action Plan:

The Maidstone Health and Wellbeing Group has developed this plan that runs from 2014 – 2020. A series of priorities and action points have been devised that look at reducing health inequalities within the borough. These are based on the following:

- Continuing to develop a whole-system approach to health improvement by tackling the underlying causes of ill-health, through improving educational attainment, housing, getting local people into jobs and creating a safe and healthy, sustainable environment;
- Delivering of short, medium and long-term actions to create sustainable improvements in health. These are based on the evidence of what works to support lifestyle changes and improve the impact of health and social care services on reducing health inequalities; and

- Targeting areas / priority groups and empowering communities to improve their wellbeing.

### Empty Homes:

Maidstone Borough Council works with owners of empty properties to help bring them back into use. The Council offers advice on how an owner could sell/ and or rent their property and can refer these owners on to other relevant agencies. The Council also works closely with Kent County Council and their 'No Use Empty Scheme', which provides an interest free loan to owners of empty properties to carry out renovation works. Once the works are completed the property can either be rented or sold.

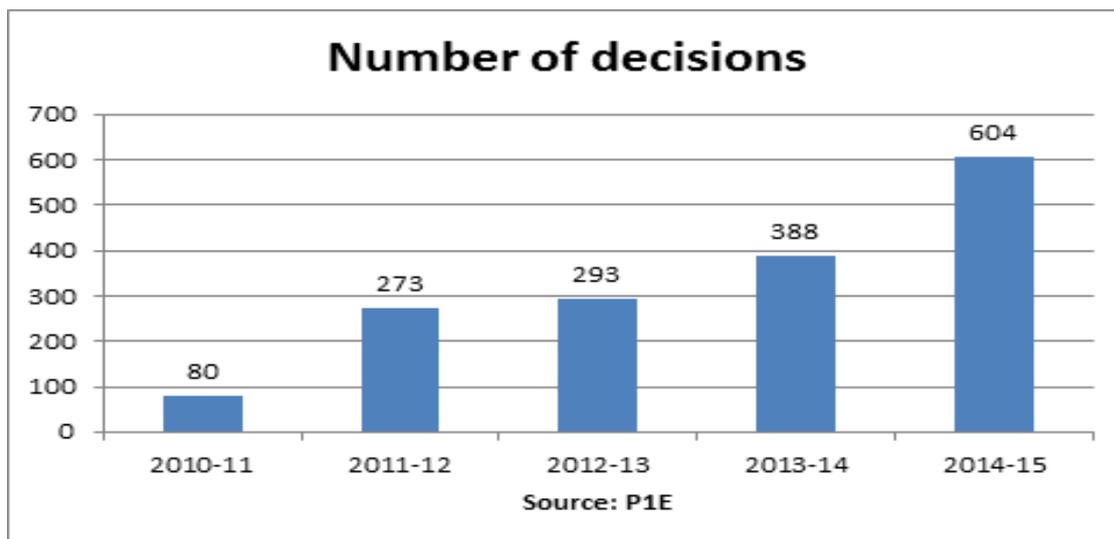
The Housing & Health Team will be exploring a new initiative to help people who have moved into care or nursing homes to achieve a regular income from their empty home. The initiative could help older people with meeting their ongoing care costs, which would otherwise be offset against the capital value of their home. This proposal brings empty homes back into use to help families without housing; and will help enable the homeowner to preserve the value of their home for whoever they bequeath it to.

Advice and guidance is often all that is needed to help owners bring their properties back into use; however where properties are empty for a long period of time and having a detrimental impact on the surrounding area enforcement powers can be used. During 2015, a combination of both approaches helped to bring back 70 long term (6 months+) empty properties across the Maidstone Borough back in to use.

### Homelessness:

The recession and the ongoing economic climate has resulted in a surge of homelessness in Maidstone. Due to the high demand for social housing, this has led on occasions to some homeless households having a significant wait in temporary accommodation until they receive an offer of social housing or a suitable private let is identified.

The overall numbers of those approaching the Council as homeless between 2010/2011 and 2014/2015 can be seen in the table below:



Source: Government P1E statistical return

Maidstone is above the national level of homelessness in relation to population; whilst the Kent average is 0.49 per 1000, compared to an England average of 0.59, Maidstone stands at 0.98, the second highest in Kent.

#### Temporary Accommodation:

The number of people in temporary accommodation continues to rise. This is due mainly to the number of duty accepted households for whom the Council has been unable to identify 'move on' accommodation.

<b>Number of people in temporary accommodation on last night of each Quarter</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>	<b>Quarter 3</b>	<b>Quarter 4</b>
<b>11/12</b>	34	44	46	49
<b>12/13</b>	38	27	37	36
<b>13/14</b>	39	47	31	42
<b>14/15</b>	49	40	43	52
<b>15/16</b>	63	87	109	

The use of temporary accommodation has resulted in a large increase in cost to the Council. The past five years have seen a near fivefold increase in the net cost of temporary accommodation.

#### Increasing the Supply of Accommodation for Homeless Households:

The Council in the last two years has purchased two properties (Magnolia House and Aylesbury House) to assist with reducing the rising cost of providing temporary accommodation for homeless households. The Council is keen to build upon the success of these schemes and will be looking to purchase further properties to increase the supply of accommodation for homeless households. In addition, we will also work with existing providers to negotiate access arrangements to properties to help maximise availability of suitable accommodation and reduce temporary accommodation costs.

#### Vulnerable People:

Kent County Council (KCC) published its 'Adult Accommodation Strategy' (Health and Housing Partnership) in July 2014, the purpose of which was to develop evidence to help shape the approach to the provision of housing and care homes within Kent.

The report estimates the need for, and availability of, accommodation for people with physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, learning difficulties, autism and people who use mental health services within Kent. The Adult Accommodation Strategy also demonstrates the need for accommodation for older people (aged 55/65 and over) in the County and the supply available.

The evidence in KCC's Adult Accommodation Strategy clearly demonstrates that:

- Whilst supply of specialist accommodation can target persons aged over 55/65, the majority of need arises from persons in older age groups: those 75-84 and particularly over 85;

- The needs of these groups include support needs which range from support in adapting properties to meet changing needs, provision of care in the home through to specialist accommodation and care/nursing home provision.

KCC's Supporting People programme has ended, although the services are very much still being provided and commissioned and KCC remains committed to providing housing-related support. A needs analysis was conducted in 2013 and the plan that arose from this suggests commissioning in a more holistic way, thinking about the pathways that service users need and simplifying the complex arrangements that service users have to navigate.

#### Specialist accommodation:

The Council want to support people to work towards independent living, helping them to participate in mainstream society and make a contribution to the local economy. The Council hope to achieve this by looking at a range of opportunities to help improve access to different types of housing and, where appropriate, developing purpose built specialist accommodation to meet needs.

The Council will work closely with the KCC Accommodation Solutions Team and social care to ensure that a choice of specialist housing and support is available to meet the needs of the elderly, disabled and other vulnerable people. The Council will undertake further research into the housing needs of vulnerable client groups and use this evidence to help focus our work on assisting people to live independently.

#### Specialist housing advice:

First Stop is a free independent service funded by government for older people and their families and carers which aims to help older people make informed decisions about their housing, care and support options for later life.

The service is provided by Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC) in partnership with a number of other national and local organisations, and brings together a wealth of expertise to help older people explore the options and choices open to them. They provide specialist help on any aspect of care, support or housing for elderly people, including financial issues as well as statutory rights and entitlements.

The Council will explore opportunities of working with First Stop to further develop our local advocacy and support service within Maidstone in respect of housing issues for older persons.

## 7. Emerging Challenges

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Following analysis of key data sources and a review of national, county and local policy, the key housing challenges in Maidstone are:

- The Council has a net affordable housing need of 5,800 households from 2013 to 2031 equivalent to 322 affordable homes each year (which is 35% of the Council's objectively assessed need of 928 dwellings p.a.).
- Across the borough as a whole, it is estimated that some 67% of affordable need is for social or affordable rent tenures, whilst around 33% is for intermediate housing.
- Across the Borough it is estimated that around 43% of households are unable to access market housing on the basis of income levels.
- The Government will reduce rents in social housing in England by 1% a year for four years from April 2016. This will apply to both social rent and affordable, and the Government indicates this will result in a 12% reduction in average rents by 2020/21, compared to current forecasts.
- The reduction in rents, along with the introduction of starter homes will potentially impact the number of affordable rented and shared ownership homes being developed.
- Access to alternative funding and delivery sources to help maintain supply due to reductions to capital subsidy is of high importance.
- Over 53% of applicants on the Council's housing register have a 1-bed need and around 24% have a 2-bed need. There is therefore a need to increase the delivery of new 1 and 2 bedroom affordable homes.
- The difference in life expectancy at birth in our most affluent wards compared to our most deprived is 8.9 years.
- Deprivation in the borough is lower than average, however around 15% of children (under 16 years old) in Maidstone live in poverty. There is a larger difference in life expectancy of men and women; 7 years lower for men and 4 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Maidstone than in the least deprived.
- The number of homelessness decisions made by the Council has increased significantly since April 2011 from 80 to 604, representing a 655% increase over the last 5 years.
- The use of temporary accommodation has resulted in a large increase in cost to the Council. The past five years have seen a near fivefold increase in the net cost of temporary accommodation.

- Projected population growth from 2011 to 2031 shows a greater proportion of the population expected to be in age groups aged 60 and over (and even more so for older age groups) - in particular the oldest age group (85+) shows an increase of 142%.
- Evidence in KCC's Adult Accommodation Strategy clearly demonstrates that the majority of need arises from persons in older age groups: those 75-84 and particularly over 85. The needs of these groups range from support in adapting properties to meet changing needs and provision of care in the home through to specialist accommodation.
- There is an estimated total need for 3,620 specialist accommodation units for older persons from 2011 to 2031.
- For those in receipt of Housing Benefit and therefore subject to the Shared Accommodation Room Rate, which limits how much housing benefit people under 35 can claim, access to shared accommodation in the private rented sector is proving very difficult. As the gap widens between market rents and shared accommodation room rates widens, people who are seeking rooms at housing benefit levels are finding themselves priced out of the rental market.

## 8. Key Priority Themes

### **Priority 1: Enable and support the delivery of quality homes across the housing market to develop sustainable communities**

#### **Outcomes – What we plan to achieve**

- a) Enable the delivery of homes as identified in the emerging Local Plan; and has an appropriate policy framework in place that delivers an appropriate mix, tenure and range of housing to meet identified need.
- b) Deliver a mix of homes of different types, tenure and size, via direct provision and in partnership with private developers, housing associations and other key partners, which meet the needs of the local population.
- c) Deliver new affordable homes that are designed to a high standard, energy efficient, accessible and respond to people’s changing needs.
- d) Maximise housing investment opportunities by seeking innovative funding and delivery options to support housing delivery within Maidstone.

#### **Actions – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
1b	Create a Local Housing Company to build/acquire new affordable and private homes to meet the commercial and housing objectives of the Council.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Property and Procurement, MBC Legal & Finance Consultants, Housing Developers, MBC Planning, Landowners, Homes & Communities Agency	April 2018
1a/b/c/d	Ensure the emerging Local Plan provides an appropriate policy framework for affordable housing, including the production of an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Spatial Planning Policy, Housing Developers, Registered Providers, Homes & Communities Agency	April 2017
1a/b/c	Promote home ownership products e.g. Help to Buy, Starter Homes, and Shared Ownership in Maidstone.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Landowners, Housing Developers, MBC Planning	Review annually

1a/b/c	Establish a register to gather evidence of demand for self and custom build within Maidstone and work with planning to identify serviced plots of land to meet this demand.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Landowners, Housing Developers, MBC Planning	May 2016
1b	Monitor and respond to the changing social housing market, including: Impact of the 1% annual reduction in social rents over the next 4 years; Impact of the affordable rent regime on affordability; Impact of the Allocation Scheme to ensure social housing is being allocated effectively and fairly.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Housing Developers, Registered Providers, Homes & Communities Agency, MBC Benefits	Review annually
1a/b	Enable the delivery of new affordable housing, particularly 1 and 2 bedroom homes to meet the identified need.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Planning, Housing Developers, Registered Providers	Review annually
1d	Explore opportunities for funding investment with a range of partners including the Local Enterprise Partnership, Homes & Communities Agency, institutional investors that will contribute towards the delivery of housing across the market.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Landowners, Housing Developers, Registered Providers, Homes & Communities Agency, DCLG, LGA, LEP	Review annually
1b/c	Consider on a site by site basis joint venture and partnership models to share expertise, income, resources and risk.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Property and Procurement, MBC Legal, Registered Providers, Housing Developers, Landowners, External Contractors / Consultants, Kent Housing Group, DCLG, LEP, KCC	Review annually

1a/b	Work with planning, the local and Gypsy Traveller and travelling communities to identify potential housing sites to meet identified need.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Planning, Gypsy and Traveller Community, Parish Councils, Kent County Council	Review annually
1b/c	Bring forward Brunswick Street car park to deliver a quality housing scheme to meet housing and commercial objectives	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Property and Procurement, MBC Legal, MBC Planning, Housing Developers, External contractors/consultants, Registered Providers, Landowners.	September 2018
1a/b/c	Continue to support Parish Councils in delivering local needs housing where this has been proven necessary.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Parish Councils, MBC Spatial Planning Policy, Action for Communities in Rural Kent	Review annually
1a/b/c/d	Contribute to the Local Government Associations Housing Commission on exploring new routes to housebuilding and seek good practice for delivery in Maidstone.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Housing Developers, MBC Planning, Landowners, Registered Providers, KCC, LGA	September 2016
1a/b/c	Promote the development of good quality homes that are energy efficient, meet the minimum guideline space standards and embrace the concept of Lifetime Homes	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Housing Developers, MBC Planning, Registered Providers	Review annually.

**Priority 2: Ensure that existing housing in the Maidstone Borough is safe, desirable and promotes good health and wellbeing**

**Outcomes – What we plan to achieve**

- a) To raise housing quality and standards across all tenures and improve the condition of existing homes to maximise health and wellbeing outcomes for all.
- b) To improve health outcomes for residents by reducing health inequality to ensure a healthy standard of living for all.
- c) Promote ways for residents to improve their health and wellbeing by tackling fuel poverty, energy efficiency advice and managing domestic bills.
- d) Bring empty homes back into use in order to increase the housing options available for local residents.

**Actions – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
2a	Improve the condition and supply of accommodation within the private rental sector by engaging with landlords to support good management and take appropriate enforcement action where necessary.	National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum, Landlords, Homeowners, MBC Housing & Health Team	Review annually
2a/b/c	Assist with delivery of the Health Inequalities Action Plan	Maidstone Health and Well-Being Group, MBC, KCC Children's Centres, West Kent NHS Trust – Midwives and Health visitors, West Kent CCG – Commissioners and GPs KCHT Registered Providers, Schools, Age UK, Youth Providers.	Review annually
2a	Review key strategic documents to ensure they remain relevant to today's market, including: The Council's Tenancy Strategy; Council's Housing	MBC Planning, MBC Housing, Registered Providers, Housing Developers, Private Landlords	September 2016

	Assistance Policy; The Council's Housing Standards Enforcement Policy.		April 2016 March 2017
2a/b/c	Address the needs of the ageing population, in particular the 85+ age group, including support needs such as adapting properties, provision of care in the home, providing specialist accommodation and care/nursing home provision.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Health team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Private Landlords, Registered Providers, KCC	Review annually
2a	Promote the review of the Disabled Facilities Grant to provide an efficient service that assists disabled residents to remain in their home.	KCC, MBC Housing and Health Team, Registered Providers, Private Sector Landlords, Homeowners	Review annually
2b/c	Initiate projects such as the Roseholme Healthy Homes Pilot, which will improve the health and well-being of residents within the Borough.	MBC Housing & Inclusion Team, MBC Housing & Health Team, Maidstone Health and well-being group, KCC, External businesses, Voluntary groups	March 2017
2b	Work with NHS Health trainers to support residents to achieve healthier lifestyle choices with issues such as Healthy eating, quitting smoking, exercise and emotional well-being.	Kent Community Health (NHS Health Trainers), MBC Housing & Health Team, GP's, Registered Providers, CAB	Review annually
2a/d	Work with owners of long term empty properties to bring them back in to use	National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum, Landlords, Homeowners, MBC Housing & Health Team	14 every quarter. Review annually.
2c	Promoting and delivering the affordable warmth strategy	MBC Housing & Health Team, Registered Providers, Home Owners, Landlords, Landlords Forum	Review annually

**Priority 3: Prevent Homelessness, Secure Provision of Appropriate Accommodation for Homeless Households and Supporting Vulnerable People**

**Outcomes – What we plan to achieve**

- a) Prevent and relieve homelessness amongst local residents who are at risk of homelessness by offering timely, expert advice that helps to prevent their homelessness.
- b) Increase the availability of suitable accommodation for homeless households via direct provision and the use of the private rented sector, to reduce temporary accommodation costs, length of stay and reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation.
- c) Support independent living and reduce risk of repeat homelessness for vulnerable residents by offering a range of housing options, advice and support to maintain or improve their health and well-being.

**Actions – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
3a/b/c	Deliver our existing Homelessness Strategy Action Plan	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Private Landlords, Registered Providers, Voluntary Groups, CAB, KCC Social Services, Schools, Supported Housing Providers	By March 2020
3b	To expand on the success of Aylesbury House by investing in the acquisition/purchase of additional temporary accommodation within Maidstone to house homeless and vulnerable households.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, Homes & Communities Agency, DCLG, Land owners, Property owners, Private institutional investors, Agents	December 2016
3c	Strengthen partnership working at local, county and national level and understanding of assistance and options available to homeless and vulnerable households.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, KCC, DCLG, KHOG, CAB, Voluntary groups, Registered Providers	Review annually
3a	Continue to support private sector landlords and tenants to maintain their tenancies by offering pre-tenancy training.	Private Sector Landlords, Registered Providers, Tenants, MBC Housing & Inclusion team	Ongoing monthly

3a/c	Provide specialist targeted information and advice that will enable people to improve their own housing and health circumstances, prevent homelessness and make best use of resources.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Health team, MBC Housing & Enabling Team, CAB, KCC, NHS Health trainers	Ongoing. Review annually.
3a /c	Promote closer co-operation with the Revenues and Benefits and DHP Team to assist customers in difficulty that require further support to help solve their financial issues.	MBC Housing and Inclusion Team, Registered Providers MBC Benefits, CAB	December 2016
3a/c	Support affected households to manage welfare reform changes to the benefit system.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Benefits, Registered Providers, CAB, Private Landlords	Ongoing. Review annually
3c	Ensure homeless households have access to volunteering, training and employment opportunities	Job Centre Plus, Voluntary groups, MBC Housing & Inclusion team, CAB	Ongoing. Review annually
3b	Secure shared housing for under-35s single homeless people.	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, MBC Housing & Enabling team, Private Sector Landlords, Agents	December 2016
3b	Expand the Homefinder incentive scheme to more landlords within Maidstone and neighbouring boroughs	MBC Housing & Inclusion team, Private Landlords, National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum, Agents	December 2016
3c	Work with supported housing providers to understand the potential impact of the Housing Benefit cap to supported accommodation tenants and how best to address it.	MBC Housing & Enabling Team, MBC Housing & Inclusion Team, Supported Housing Providers, KCC Accommodation Solutions Team.	March 2017

## 9. Delivery in Partnership

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Maidstone Borough Council is committed to working with key stakeholders to assist in meeting local housing needs. Partnership is the underlying principle of community planning and fundamental to the delivery of this strategy. Over the course of the strategy we will ensure that partnerships continue to be developed, that they focus on priorities and make effective use of resources.

The delivery of the actions set out in this strategy will rely upon the resources of the Council and its partners. To maximise combined resources it will be important to work together, sharing expertise and good practice, avoiding duplication, identifying and meeting gaps in service provision, jointly funding or procuring projects and making joint bids for any available funding streams to secure additional resources. We are clear that it is only by moving forward together, as one partnership, that we will be able to deliver on these promises.

Key partners include Registered Providers, the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and Housing Developers and regular forums will be undertaken with these stakeholders during the duration of the Maidstone Housing Strategy.

Other key partners include:

- The **Kent Housing Group (KHG)** is a forum for social housing organisations in Kent. KHG has representation from all 12 Kent local authorities, Medway Council, over sixteen housing associations and Kent County Council. KHG also has affiliated representation from the Homes and Communities Agency and when required other partner agencies.
- The **Kent Housing Strategy and Enabling Group** is a sub group of Kent Housing Group and officers from each of the 12 Local Authorities and Medway Council are represented on this group. At this group the officers consider key strategic housing issues across Kent.
- The **Maidstone Health and Well-Being Group** will be used to discuss health and wellbeing issues, using existing engagement mechanisms where necessary and linking in to the county level engagement work where established. Our local approach seeks to enhance how partners help to tackle and reduce health inequalities in housing, by engaging with residents, local businesses and staff.

- The **Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing (JPPB)** is a strategic partnership between Health, Housing and Social Care. The Board incorporates representation from the 12 Kent Local Housing Authorities, Kent Public Health, Kent County Council's Adult Social Services and Children's Services, Kent County Council's Commissioned Services (previously Supporting People) and KSS Probation. The JPPB provides the forum where strategic issues requiring joint working between Health, Housing and Social Care can be raised and measures to address them developed. The board also acts as the housing link to the County Health and Wellbeing Board.
- **Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK)** – A voluntary organisation which exists to improve the quality of life for local rural communities.
- **Maidstone Citizens Advice Bureau** – A registered charity which provides advice on a wide range of issues affecting people in the community.
- **National Landlords Association (NLA) / Private Sector Landlords** – The NLA works with local government to support a thriving private-rented sector. Many of our local Landlords are members of this association.
- **Kent County Council (KCC)** – The County Council that governs the county of Kent. There are 12 district Councils in Kent, Maidstone Borough Council being one of them.

## 10. Implementation and Monitoring

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The Maidstone Housing Strategy sets a clear focus on the key priorities to address within Maidstone. We envisage Maidstone as a thriving borough that maximises all its strengths and tackles the root causes of the social, housing, health and economic challenges which hold some of the borough and its residents back.

This strategy will drive the changes we need to make within the borough by providing a clear direction of travel for Maidstone. In addition, we have ensured our long-term outcomes are underpinned by clear priority areas of focus and targets. The work to achieve this will be challenging and will require the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to work together even more closely than before.

The Maidstone Housing Strategy operates within a performance management system which is structured around effective political and managerial leadership, a clear vision, action centred service planning, regular performance reporting and constructive challenge. To ensure that the Strategy is delivered, the Council will review and monitor the Action Plan through the following various methods:

- The strategy's action plan has been developed by Maidstone Borough Council and its partners and the delivery of the action plan will be shared by the partners. The Council will take responsibility for driving this work and for monitoring delivery. We will publish annual performance information - enabling members of the public to see the progress we are making throughout each year going forward.
- We will present an annual report and commentary on progress to achieve the key priority areas and deliver the strategy's action plan, using this as an opportunity to challenge partners, to renew commitment to the plan and to update and increase the ambition of the plan when opportunities arise. The report will enable partner organisations, Councillors and members of the public to see the progress we have made and challenge organisations on the work they have undertaken.
- Clear and effective communication with wider audiences who would be the future partners and stakeholders for delivery will increase the strategy's prospects for success. The strategy is a bold statement of intent and the foundation of a cohesive, partnership approach towards housing development in the borough. The action plan links directly to the Council's overarching Communications and Engagement Plan, providing common ground on which to build partnerships and will help all contributors to broker discussions with new partners.
- The strategy will be the Housing and Communities Service Plan and using the Council's internal performance monitoring system, progress on the action plan and relevant performance indicators will be reported quarterly to Senior Management Team.
- This strategy will be updated in 2018 to ensure any relevant changes at national or local level are taken into account and that the action plan is updated accordingly.

Publishing this strategy is not an end in itself; rather it is the start of our new journey forward. Maidstone Borough Council is confident that the time we have taken to work with the public, partner organisations, Councillors and central government has ensured that the direction we are taking to make improvements in quality of life is the right one.

## Appendix A

### HOUSING STRATEGY 2011 – 2015 ACTION PLAN

#### PRIORITY 1 – DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Priority 1a) A local development framework is in place that delivers a range of market and affordable housing to meet a spectrum of need.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Ensure LDF/Core Strategy provides an appropriate policy framework	Housing developers, land owners	2026. Reviewed on an annual basis to ensure progress is being made	Consultation with the Spatial Policy and Development Management teams and other stakeholders has resulted in the following policies being included in the Local Plan which is currently under consultation: DM11 – Housing Mix DM13 – Affordable Housing DM14 – Local needs housing DM16 – Gypsy, Traveller & Travelling Showpeople accommodation
Engage with the Spatial Policy and Development Management teams to bring forward the delivery of new housing	Housing developers, land owners	2026. Reviewed on an annual basis to ensure progress is being made	New email inbox set up to ensure that all relevant planning applications are notified from Development Management for Housing to make comments on. New affordable completions are: 2011/12 – 284 2012/13 – 244 2013/14 – 180 2014/15 - 163

Priority 1b) The long-term balance of the housing market in the borough is improved to reflect local need and demand including an increase in the supply of affordable rented and shared ownership homes.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Draft a Tenancy Strategy for the Borough in full consultation with partner Registered Providers(RPs) and other stakeholders	West Kent LIP Partnership, RPs, developers Action for Rural Communities in Kent	December 2011	The Council's tenancy strategy for 2011 - 2015 was published in December 2011 after consultation with stakeholders. The strategy is being updated to reflect the Council's position on the granting of non-secure tenancies, now that the Council have stock to accommodate homeless persons such as Magnolia House.

Bring forward LIP Phase 1 sites	HCA RPs West Kent LIP Partnership West Kent Development Forum	March 2015	The West Kent LIP was adopted in December 2010. A total of 7 of the 8 Phase 1 sites have been completed, delivering 128 affordable units, against an original target of 106.
Consider /research formation of housing delivery vehicle e.g. Local Housing Company link to Kent & Medway strategy	As above	December 2011	<p>Research has been undertaken into formation of such a vehicle and CLT have approved continued progress with respect to setting up a local housing company. Housing are working with colleagues in property, legal, economic development and finance on this.</p> <p>The Council now has Registered Provider and Investment Partner status with the Homes and Communities Agency and can apply for grant directly to enable the delivery of affordable housing.</p> <p>The Council has already purchased property such as Aylesbury and Magnolia House. Further property land/purchases are being explored to help meet strategic housing objectives. as possible further purchases. Also the potential to tap in to institutional investment is being explored with the LGA.</p>
Review the Affordable Housing SPD through the emerging Core Strategy	As above	September 2013	Work on the new draft Affordable Housing SPD will start during 2015/16. Key issues have already been identified which need to be covered within the document. Once the new Local Plan is adopted, consultation with stakeholders will be undertaken before the revised SPD is adopted.

Priority 1c) The housing and related needs of people in rural areas are addressed.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Ensure LDF/Core Strategy provides an appropriate policy framework for rural housing	Action for Rural Communities in Kent. Registered Providers. Parish Councils. HCA	10 affordable homes on rural exception sites by June 2013.	Schemes completed: 18 units – Ashford Drive, Kingswood – May 2011 12 units – North Street, Sutton Valence – Dec 2011 25 units – Grigg Lane, Headcorn – April 2013 8 units – South Street Road, Stockbury – Oct 2013
Ensure all rural parishes where a rural exception site is feasible and/or deliverable have had a rural housing needs survey completed.	As above	April 2015	Our service agreement with ACRK remains at 1 survey per year. A survey for Marden was completed in 2012/13 for Coxheath in 2013/14 and East Farleigh in 2014/15.

Priority 1d) The housing needs of the gypsy and traveller community are addressed.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Ensure LDF/Core Strategy provides an appropriate policy framework to address the needs of the gypsy and traveller community	Spatial Policy, HCA, RP's	December 2011	Policy DM16 in the emerging Local Plan highlights the needs for this section of the community and is currently under consultation

Start development of a rural affordable housing scheme.	As above	December 2013	A total of 114 sites went through a planning assessment process to determine their suitability for a public gypsy site. A shortlist of 11 sites were identified for further work/consideration. The favoured site fell through at the last moment due to the withdrawal of the site by the landowner. An alternative site has been identified and survey/design work has been completed to enable the submission of a planning application, following appropriate consultation.
Bid to the HCA's Traveller Pitch Fund	RP, HCA, KCC	September 2011	Successful bid submitted for £1,365,000 to deliver 15 units by March 15. Due to aforementioned loss of previous site, and ecology issues with new identified site, delivery by March 2015 was not possible. Grant allocation has been handed back to HCA. Funding options paper will be produced for Cabinet to consider alternative funding options going forward which will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Re-bid to the HCA</li> <li>b) MBC Capital</li> <li>c) Borrowing</li> <li>d) Institutional investment</li> </ul>

**PRIORITY 2 – INCREASE CHOICE AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

Priority 2a) The elderly and disabled are able to live in their homes for longer rather than being admitted to hospital or nursing care.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Review the role of the HIA in the delivery of Mandatory DFGs	HIA HCA Supporting People Team	October 2011	The HIA is procured by KCC supporting people. Maidstone Borough Council has no contractual obligation to provide the service.

## Priority 2b) Homelessness in Maidstone is reduced.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Work with Kent Social Services to jointly commission new forms of temporary accommodation and provide long-term solutions to youth homelessness	Joint Policy & Planning Board; KCC; housing providers	Review annually	<p>No joint working has achieved temporary accommodation for youth homelessness. Referrals made to Trinity Foyer or Lilysmith House are still the only available accommodation in Maidstone for this age group. Referrals also made for Infozone and Connexions to assist with applications for Job Centre, training opportunities and advice.</p> <p>Joint Assessments are carried out on every 16/17 year old that approaches as homeless, protocol is established with children's services to assist and advise and work with families where possible for them to return home but no wrap around service is available in Maidstone if a CIN is not established.</p> <p>Joint work with KCC had started; however, they are now undergoing a restructure so this work is on hold until later in the year. A meeting has now been set up later this month (Oct 15) with St Basils, who are funded by DCLG to reduce youth homelessness, KCC and us to look at renewing the joint protocol for care leavers.</p>

## Priority 2c) Housing solutions are implemented that help reduce incidences of offending and reoffending.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Work with the Offender Management Unit to implement their action plan to reduce reoffending	JPPB sub group on offenders & housing; Kent Probation; Youth Offender Service; outreach services	September 2012	<p>Ex offender funding available to allow access to the private sector market; deposit and 1 months' rent available. The funding is being utilised where appropriate.</p> <p>Referral to support services should there be a need with each case assessed individually.</p> <p>The Probation Service has just undergone significant changes</p>

			recently and meetings have been held with the two new area managers from the service to look at joint working.
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Priority 2d) The percentage of people suffering repeated incidents of domestic abuse is reduced.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Assist the SMP in developing and delivering an action plan to support victims of domestic violence	Safer Maidstone Partnership	March 2012	The Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan was introduced in April 2013 covering the period 2013 - 2018

### PRIORITY 3 – IMPROVE OUR EXISTING HOMES

Priority 3a) Homeowners and private landlords are encouraged and supported to maintain and repair their homes; the grant programme is targeted to achieve community benefit e.g. nomination rights.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Engage small landlords to work with the Council to improve the condition and management of their property through the accreditation scheme	MBC Change & Improvement Team KCC OT Bureau	October 2011	Landlords in the Borough are encouraged to join the Kent Landlord accreditation scheme. Discounts are given to accredited Landlords for licensing HMOs. The scheme is advertised on the Council's website and verbally by officers
Start an annual Landlords Forum	National Landlords Association	March 2012	Landlord forums are now held bi-annually

Priority 3b) Use of existing stock is maximised by empty homes being brought back into use.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Update the Empty homes strategy	No Use Empty initiative	March 2012	The Empty Homes strategy was updated in early 2013 for the period 2013 – 2015

#### PRIORITY 4 – IMPROVE ACCESS TO HOUSING ADVICE AND WORK TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING IN MAIDSTONE

Priority 4a) There is an improvement in the quality and range of information relating to advice services that result in more households being prevented from becoming homeless.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Review our use of IT in the provision of housing advice.	Kent Home choice Housing DCLG stakeholder	September 2012	Changes to Locata Systems Homeless Module enable applications to be processed and advice given face to face, in writing, by text message or email. On line Housing Register applications through Kent Home Choice. Home exchange service through Kent Home Choice for those currently housed in social housing; exchanges can be made across counties. Website updated and Home Guide being implemented this year which will provide information online.
Review how we can improve the accessibility of our housing options services.	Porchlight, Shelter, Connexions, Day Centre, Social services	December 2011	Providing improved IT services making assistance and advice accessible to all. Joint working with our statutory and voluntary partners. Partners working within the Gateway alongside our housing team. Housing team available to attend meetings for family assessments with our partners. The triage system was implemented in October 2014, meaning advisors have been seeing those in greatest need. The volume of homeless applicants has impacted the ability to undertake preventions and outreach work.

Priority 4b) Work to prevent homelessness and end the need to sleep rough in Maidstone.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Work with our partners to increase the effectiveness of the Rent Deposit Bond Scheme	Housing Benefit, CAB, National Landlords Association, Maidstone Landlords Forum	March 2012	Rent Deposit Bond scheme is now replaced by the Homefinder scheme which was launched in October 2013. This includes the Homefinder Bond and Homefinder incentive schemes.
Develop and promote a Private Homeowner Incentive Scheme	KCC, KHOG	December 2011	The Homefinder incentive offer was introduced in 2013 offering Landlords a payment of £2,500 in return for nomination rights for the property for a 3 year period. The offer is currently under review.

Priority 4c) Access to affordable housing is improved and the range of housing options available to applicants is increased.

What we plan to do	Key partners	Target date	Update
Review the housing allocation scheme	Kent Homechoice Housing stakeholders Service users	May 2012	New Housing Allocation scheme introduced in April 2013. Review of new scheme undertaken and updated in June 2014 and 2015.
Develop Maidstone's approach to the Kent-wide Single Assessment Scheme	As above	October 2011	This replaced the JARP that was previously used by West Kent Housing authorities. As the Council has moved to a banding system the use for this scheme is now rarely required. The Kent Agency Assessment document has now superseded this scheme and is used by all 12 housing authorities in Kent.
Review whether Choice Based Lettings is still the best way of people accessing social housing	As above	October 2011	Undertaken as part of the introduction of the new housing allocations policy that was introduced in April 2013.