

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOMELESS
STRATEGY 2018-
2023

March 2018

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Foreword

Dartford Borough Council's Homeless Strategy 2018-2023 identifies the actions required by the Council over the next five years to tackle homelessness in the Borough.

The Strategy has been developed at a challenging time both locally and nationally. The lack of suitable housing and a range of welfare reforms has increased the financial pressures on both households living within our community and the Borough Council.

In addition, the Council's Housing Options Team will need to use its resources more effectively to meet the increase in housing enquiries and applications that may be caused by the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

The team will work closely and pro-actively with stakeholders to prevent homelessness, provide timely and appropriate advice and support to people in housing need and ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is available if required.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all Councils to formulate a Homeless Strategy at least every five years. Councils are also required to carry out a homelessness review of their area and produce a strategy to:

- Address the causes of homelessness in the area;
- Introduce initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible;
- Provide sufficient temporary accommodation for those households that are, or may become, homeless; and
- Ensure that appropriate support is available for people who have previously experienced homelessness in order to prevent it happening again.

1.2 This new Strategy has been developed in response to a review of homelessness carried out in 2017, sets out a plan of action to enable the Council to deliver a robust response to its responsibilities to homeless households in the Borough, and defines the strategic approach to homelessness in the Borough for the next five years. The Strategy has been condensed from previous versions to concentrate more fully on key facts and robust actions to deliver it more efficiently and effectively.

1.3 The **key findings** of the homelessness review were:

- Despite a long period where the number of homeless decisions and acceptances were generally decreasing, this trend is showing signs of shifting, as there were twice as many applications and acceptances made in 2014/15 than the previous year; although this mainly stabilised in 2017.
- 781 decisions were made in the period 2014 to 2017. Of these 498 households were accepted under the main homelessness duty (they were eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need).
- The primary priority need category for applicants accepted under the main homelessness duty continues to be because the applicant has dependent children, mainly in a lone parent household. This is followed by the applicant being vulnerable because of mental illness and vulnerable because of a physical disability.
- The majority of applicants accepted the main homelessness duty were from a white ethnic group and aged between 16 and 44 years old.
- The main reason for homelessness is loss of tied or rented accommodation in the private rented sector, mainly because of the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. This cause of homelessness has increased significantly since the last review. Parents, relatives or friends no longer willing to accommodate is now the second highest cause of homelessness followed by violent breakdown of a relationship.
- A total of 189 homelessness preventions and relief took place outside of the

statutory homeless framework. The number of homelessness preventions and relief has remained relatively stable over the last three years.

- The levels of homeless households placed into temporary accommodation is steadily increasing with more households in temporary accommodation at the end of quarter 4 in 2016/17 than previous quarters. This increase in the use of temporary accommodation is mainly due to the lack of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Factors surrounding rising housing costs and the difficulty of procuring private rented accommodation, have contributed to the rising numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation. A lack of available private sector accommodation in the borough has resulted in a growing proportion of homeless households being accommodated in another borough.
- There were 9 rough sleepers identified on a given night in 2017/18 and 2016/2017, compared to 10 in 2015/2016 and 19 in 2014/2015.
- Resources for funding the Council's approach towards preventing and tackling homelessness through the Homelessness Prevention Grant and New Burden's funding has been agreed up to 2020.

1.4 The Government, in response to concerns about increasing homelessness nationally, has introduced a number of measures over the last few years to tackle homelessness including:

- **No second night out** – which includes funding to prevent rough sleeping and encourage reporting.
- **The Localism Act 2011** – introduced the ability for local authorities to discharge the homelessness duty in the private rented sector.
- **Making every contact count** – outlining a series of commitments from across Government departments to prevent homelessness.
- **The Homeless Reduction Act 2017** – The Act 2017 will place new legal duties on English councils so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance.

1.5 Alongside this framework, the Government is also implementing widespread and significant welfare reforms, including the roll out of Universal Credit.

1.6 With an emphasis in the draft Housing and Planning Bill on home ownership and with a Right to Buy for housing association tenants there is a significant challenge ahead to ensure there is provision for those who are struggling to pay high rent in the private sector and who are not able to afford to get on the homeownership ladder.

2 Local Context

2.1 The Council's vision is to make Dartford "the place of quality and choice, a place where people choose to live, work and enjoy their leisure time".

2.2 The Council's corporate priority for housing is:

'TO FACILITATE QUALITY, CHOICE AND DIVERSITY IN THE HOUSING MARKET, TO CREATE STRONG AND SELF RELIANT COMMUNITIES AND DELIVER HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO SERVICE USERS'

2.3 By tackling homelessness in the Borough, this Strategy aims to improve the quality of life for its most vulnerable residents thus meeting the Council's aims and objectives.

3. Homeless Prevention

3.1 The Council tries where possible to prevent homelessness with the main prevention activity being assistance in the private rented sector. Spend in this area includes deposits and rent in advance, loans and the Deposit Guarantee Scheme. Spend so far in 2017/18 is £84,407.

3.2 The Council has developed an innovative Homeless Prevention Hub that will be sited within the Council Offices by the time the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is implemented in April 2018. The Hub will be made up of a number of agencies to ensure that homelessness is prevented as far as possible by providing a joined up approach to each homeless situation. The agencies that are to be included in the Hub are:

- Department for Work and Pensions
- Revenues & Benefits
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Porchlight
- Mental Health (primary & secondary)
- Specialist Children's Services & Early Help
- Housing Options Team.

3.3 Some examples of homeless prevention initiatives and outcomes that have been implemented or achieved are:

- No 16/17 year olds placed in bed and breakfast accommodation since 2011
- 189 cases where positive action was successful in preventing or relieving homelessness
- Introduction of Joint Housing Panels with KCC and relevant providers to enable faster access into supported accommodation in Dartford
- Introduction of a dedicated homeless service, in partnership with Porchlight, which enables single homeless persons to consider a wide range of housing options at a weekly drop in based at the council offices.

- Provision of funding to a winter shelter, based in the borough, to enable homeless persons to access warm and secure accommodation in the winter months.

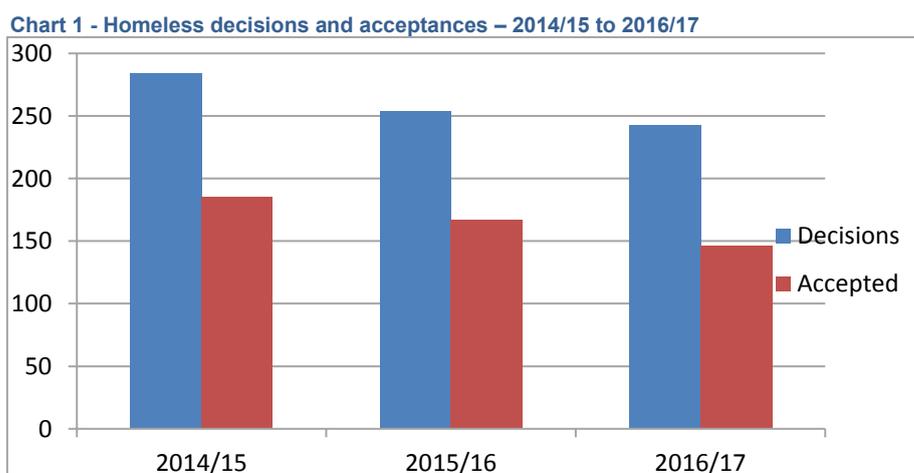
3.4 A full list of achievements since the last Homeless Strategy was published can be found in the Homelessness Review document in the updated action plan. A copy of the full Homelessness Review report is available to view on line at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/by-category/housing2/housing-strategy-and-policy-documents>

4. Homelessness in Dartford – Key Facts

Below are some key facts relating to homelessness in Dartford. A full profile can be found in the Homeless Review document that is available on request or on the Council’s website at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/by-category/housing2/housing-strategy-and-policy-documents>

4.1. Homeless Decisions and Acceptances

The number of homeless decisions and acceptances in the last three years is shown in the chart below. Decisions generally followed a declining trend until 2014/15 where a clear increase can be seen; with twice as many decisions made in 2014/15 than the previous year. Acceptances also increased, however, the increase in decisions and acceptances may be partly due to new case management software, which has resulted in improved recording mechanisms. However, as can be seen, decisions and acceptances have started to decline in recent years.

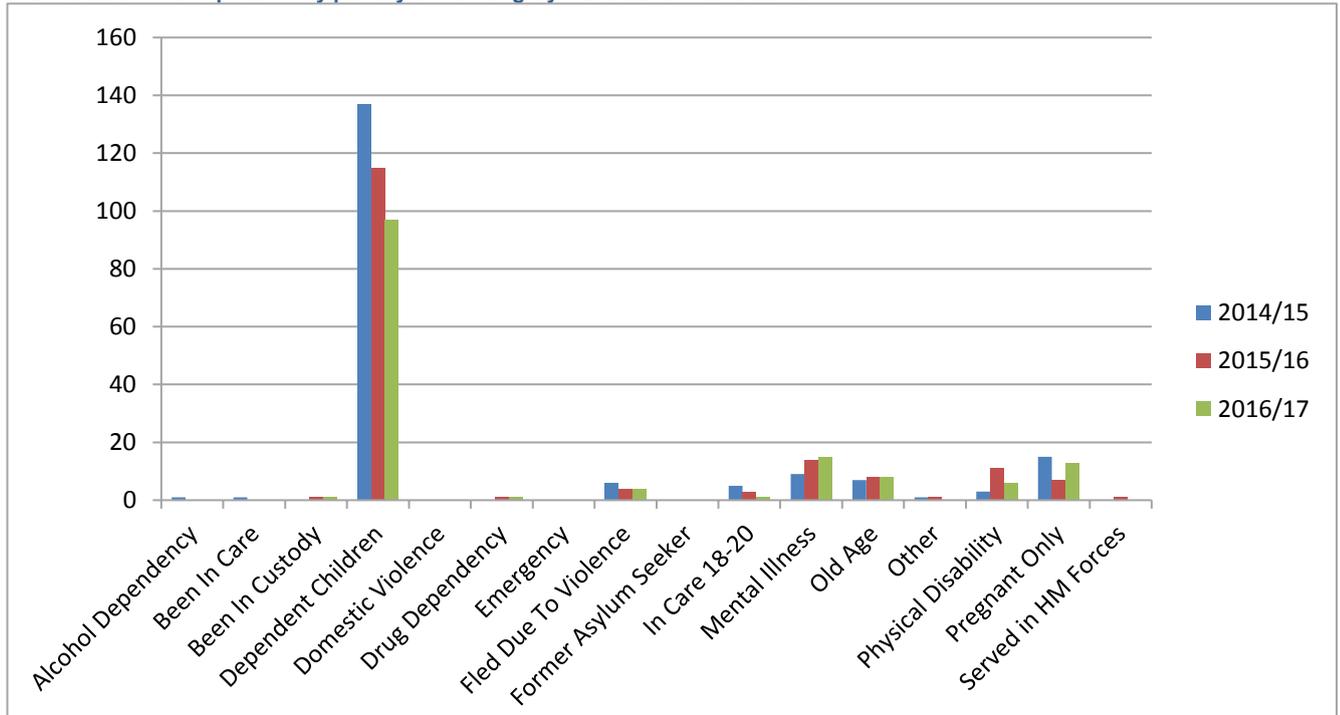


4.2. Homeless acceptances by priority need category

Between 2014 and 2017, the main priority need category for applicants accepted a full homelessness duty was households with dependent children. This category represented just over two thirds of cases, which is consistent with previous reviews and reported nationally.

The second highest priority need category was households who were vulnerable because of mental illness followed by households vulnerable because of a physical disability.

Chart 2 - Homeless acceptances by priority need category – 2014/2015 – 2016/2017

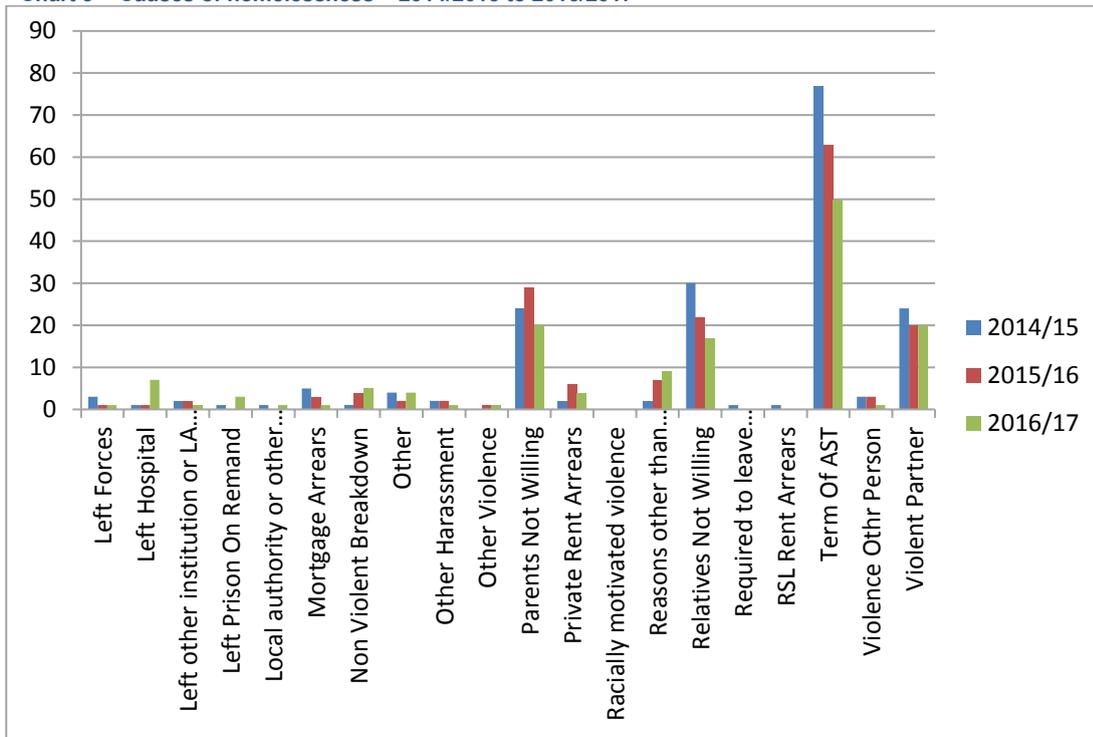


4.3. Causes of Homelessness

The main reason for homelessness for households owed a main homelessness duty over the last three years is the loss of rented or tied accommodation in the private rented sector. Nationally this is also the most frequently occurring reason for the loss of last settled home. The main cause of the loss of private rented accommodation is the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST). The main reason for termination is usually that the landlord wants the property returned. Only a small proportion of terminations are due to rent arrears.

The second highest reason for homelessness is that parents, relatives or friends are no longer willing to accommodate. The third highest is violence. This can involve a partner or associated person, be racially motivated or other forms.

Chart 3 - Causes of homelessness – 2014/2015 to 2016/2017



4.4. Numbers in Temporary Accommodation

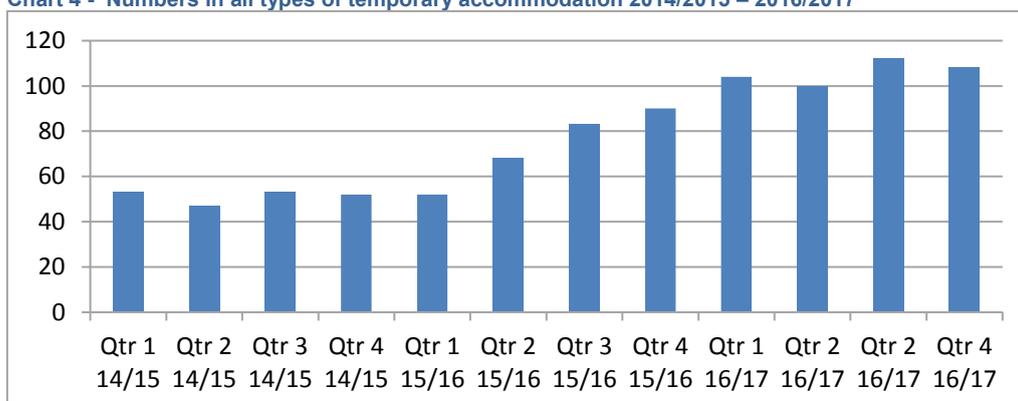
If a main homelessness duty is owed, the applicant may have to be placed into temporary accommodation before an offer of settled accommodation is made.

The local authority may also place applicants into temporary accommodation under an interim duty to accommodate, (pending a decision as to whether a main homelessness duty is owed); if they have reason to believe the applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need.

The definition of TA includes nightly paid accommodation (Bed & Breakfast, privately managed accommodation with shared facilities or self-contained accommodation), hostels, local authority/private registered provider stock, leased properties and other stock.

The number of households placed in TA has steadily increased since 2014 the main reason being the lack of suitable move-on accommodation in the private rented sector. At the end of quarter 4, 2017 there were 108 households placed in TA, compared to 52 in the same quarter in 2014.

Chart 4 - Numbers in all types of temporary accommodation 2014/2015 – 2016/2017



The Council does not place homeless households into shared accommodation unless it is absolutely necessary. The types of temporary accommodation used are either nightly paid, privately managed accommodation (either self-contained or with shared facilities) or accommodation within the Council’s own stock.

The length of time spent in temporary accommodation largely depends on the availability of suitable accommodation in the borough. The aim is to minimise the length of time spent in temporary accommodation, particularly for households with dependent children/pregnant women and 16/17 year olds. During the review period, there has only been one case each of a household with dependent children/pregnant woman and a 16/17 year old being in temporary accommodation for longer than six weeks.

4.5. Single Homeless/Rough Sleepers

The Council carried out a rough sleeper count in November 2017. There were an estimated nine people sleeping rough in Dartford on the night surveyed. This will continue to be monitored annually.

5. The Findings of the Housing Options Review 2017

- 5.1. The Council carried out a review of the service in 2017. Associates visited the Council, met with a number of staff, carried out a desktop review of strategic documents and provided a summary report for the Council.
- 5.2. The key areas identified by the service review as they relate to homelessness were:
 - To consider restructuring the Housing Options team to better deliver the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.
 - To implement a recovery plan to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation
 - To introduce a triage system to manage the flow of enquiries into the housing options team.
- 5.3. The Council is currently considering these options.

6. The Objectives for the Strategy

6.1. This Strategy has taken into account the national context and the findings and recommendations of the 2017 Service Review. Wider consultation with partners will take place during 2018 following adoption of the draft Homeless Strategy by the Council.

6.2. The vision for the Homeless Strategy remains the same:

To proactively prevent homelessness through strong partnership working and provide an inclusive and accessible service to all

6.3. The Council's Homeless Strategy strategic priorities are as follows:

- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE - PREVENTION & RELIEF**
To prevent and relieve homelessness wherever possible in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017).
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO - ACCOMMODATION**
To provide a range of accommodation for homeless households, making innovative use of solutions in the private sector.
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE - PARTNERSHIP WORKING**
To work with local organisations to provide a coordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness.
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR - MONITORING**
To keep up to date with homelessness trends, customer satisfaction, Government policy, legislation and good practice.

6.4. These objectives are especially relevant in the current climate. The provision of proactive services to help households avoid homelessness altogether or minimise the detrimental effects, should homelessness be unavoidable, remain at the heart of what the Council aims to achieve for the residents of the Borough.

6.5. The challenge going forward will be to continue the successful homeless prevention measures, especially for households dependent on welfare benefits who find it more difficult to afford private rents or access home ownership. There is a need to adapt existing homelessness prevention measures and create new responses to meet the increased need, especially in light of the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

6.6. The Council recognises the social hardship that homelessness has on the households affected. It also recognises that there is a monetary cost to households as well as to the Council via its statutory duties towards the homeless.

6.7. Many of the services and initiatives provided by the Council can offer better value for money in terms of preventing homelessness compared to dealing with the aftermath of actual homelessness.

7. Resources

- 7.1. At the current time, the cost of the service is approaching a net cost of £150,000 for temporary accommodation, being paid from the Council's General Fund.
- 7.2. A Homelessness Grant of £106,500 is received from central government each year. This Strategy will be resourced by using this grant in a more pro-active approach to deliver the initiatives proposed.
- 7.3. The Council was allocated £139,239 of New Burdens Funding ahead of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018.

8. Action Plan

- 8.1. The Action Plan developed to deliver this Homeless Strategy is attached at Annex A. The actions for the first one to two years are included. It is expected that during year three (2021/22) a review of progress on these actions will be undertaken and fresh actions added in line with the over-arching objectives of the Strategy.

9. Monitoring and Review

- 9.1. Dartford Borough Council will deliver this Strategy in partnership with a number of partner organisations including housing associations, Kent County Council, Shelter, the YMCA and Porchlight etc.
- 9.2. Monitoring will take place quarterly by senior officers, in collaboration with partners, as part of the council-led Homeless Strategy Implementation Group.

Annex A – Dartford Homeless Strategy Action Plan

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE - PREVENTION & RELIEF		
To prevent and relieve homelessness wherever possible in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017)		
No	Task	Target
1a	Review the website to ensure that advice and information is available on housing and preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, the help that is available and on the rights of homeless persons	May 2018
1b	Produce information leaflets that can be sent to customers or downloaded from the website for specific client groups at risk of homelessness, in line with s179 of the HRA 2017	May 2018
1c	Develop packs for customers that provide comprehensive information on their housing options including rental market data.	May 2018
1d	Develop a triage system that will manage the demand on the service and ensure that applications are proactively responded to that will maximise prevention opportunities	June 2018
1e	Review the structure of the Housing Options & Private Sector Team to ensure that it is in a position to meet the demand as a result of the HRA 2017 and to maximise prevention opportunities	April 2018
1f	Implement new IT systems that can assist with meeting the requirements of the HRA 2017.	June 2018
1g	Review all outgoing correspondence to ensure it meets the requirements of the HRA 2017	June 2018
1i	Develop a referral mechanism so all relevant partners and agencies can refer in customers that may be at risk of homelessness	September 2018
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO - ACCOMMODATION		

To provide a range of accommodation for homeless households, making innovative use of solutions in the private sector		
2a	Develop a new Rent Guarantee Scheme to support low income households to access the private rented sector	December 2018
2b	Review the current Deposit Guarantee Scheme and implement any improvements identified through the review	December 2019
2c	Develop a landlord package and options to support low-income households to access the private rented sector and encourage partnership working with private sector landlords.	December 2018
2d	Ensure there is a regular agenda item at the Landlord Forum to develop relationships with local landlords	On going
2e	Explore maximising the use of Housing Association properties to discharge functions under the HRA 2017	On going
2f	Work proactively with the YMCA to explore opportunities to maximise access to suitable housing for local people	December 2018
2g	Review the Housing Allocations' Policy to ensure that the Council's duties are met under the HRA 2017	June 2018
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE - PARTNERSHIP WORKING		
To work with local organisations to provide a coordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness		
3a	Implement a multi-agency hub, based in the Council offices, to mitigate the impact of the HRA 2017	June 2018
3b	Facilitate regular meetings with Dartford Revenues & Benefits team to make use of the Discretionary Housing Payment pot	Quarterly
3c	Ensure that the pre-eviction protocols are being utilised by the Housing Management team and partner Housing Associations	On going
3d	Look for more affordable and cost effective housing solutions to the use of temporary accommodation	On going
3e	Lead on the steering group for the One Stop Shop for Domestic Abuse and ensure there are regular reviews	On going

3f	Attend the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to ensure high risk victims of domestic abuse are appropriately housed and supported.	Bi-weekly
3g	Attend the North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum to ensure a joined up approach for victims of domestic abuse.	Bi-monthly
3h	Attend relevant Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and MAPPA Housing Panel meetings to identify and minimise potential risks to the authority	On going
3i	Review the Young Person's Team processes with Kent County Council and YMCA, including the use of the crash pad based at the YMCA.	December 2019
3j	Participate in Joint Housing Panels (KCC and relevant providers) to enable access to supported accommodation in the district	Monthly
3k	Develop an accessible Referrals Module on Locata and maximise participation from partner organisations to prevent homelessness	January 2020
3l	Attend the Kent Housing Options Group (KHOG) and continue to look at opportunities for partnership working across Kent	Quarterly
3m	Continue to work with the Winter Shelter in Dartford to look at housing solutions for rough sleepers in Dartford	On going
3n	Review the Porchlight Service Level Agreement for the single persons' service and ensure it meets the demands of the HRA 2017	June 2018
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR - MONITORING		
To keep up to date with homelessness trends, customer satisfaction, Government policy, legislation and good practice		
4a	Keep up to date with government policy, legislative changes and good practice in the area of homelessness and disseminate this to partners	On going
4b	Use new Homelessness Case Level Information Classification (H-CLIC) data to monitor and analyse homeless trends in the district. (new system to replace Government P1E statistical returns).	Quarterly
4c	Review the Housing Options service following the implementation of the HRA2017	September 2019
4d	Monitor out of London placements and participate in meetings with London Boroughs, KCC and other relevant organisations to discuss any ongoing issues	On going

4e	Annually evaluate the extent of rough sleeping in Dartford by carrying out a rough sleeper estimate.	Annually
4f	Collect satisfaction feedback from service users	Annually
4g	Carry out a mystery shopping exercise on the homelessness service	January 2019