Swale BOROUGH COUNCIL

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2026-2031



Foreword by Committee Chair

In April 2024 we declared an affordable housing emergency, due to rising living costs and high private rents pushing more people towards homelessness.

In 2025/26, 699 households required full homeless assessments, and another 1,815 sought urgent housing advice.

A widening gap between stagnant Local Housing Allowance rates and surging private rents drives this crisis. Across all property sizes, residents face severe monthly shortfalls. Consequently, the end of private tenancies, family breakdowns, and domestic abuse now trigger 75% of our homelessness cases.

The crisis disproportionately affects single people, who make up 55% of all approaches. Yet, we face a critical shortage of one-bedroom homes and affordable shared accommodation. This means that when residents lose their homes, they hit a severe supply bottleneck. With 2,069 households on the housing register and only 382 social lets available last year, families cannot easily move on.

This places immense pressure on our temporary accommodation service. By March 2026, we housed 322 households, including 385 children. To manage the £2.04 million net cost, we took direct action and invested £11 million to buy 52 local properties, which saves us £257,000 annually on private rental costs. We are also directly building 51 new affordable homes to increase supply.

At the sharpest end, we successfully reduced rough sleeping from 35 individuals to 14.

This strategy sets out how we will move away from short-term fixes and towards investing our resources into intensive, year-round supported housing to break the cycle of homelessness as far as possible.

Introduction

Swale Borough Council is required to produce and publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy at least every 5 years. In December 2025 the Government published “A National Plan to End Homelessness”. In view of this we are updating our strategy 2023-27 early to align our strategy with the Government’s ambitions.

The “Plan” aims to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring through five core pillars. The Plan focuses on systematic prevention, targeted support for high-risk groups, immediate crisis intervention, improving temporary accommodation, and fostering recovery to prevent repeat homelessness. There is a cross government approach within the Plan with shared accountability across departments which we welcome.

Government had announced it’s decision on local government reorganisation although at the time of this strategy it has been temporarily paused. The reorganisation was due to take place on 1 April 2028, although this may now be delayed, but it is anticipated that it will have taken place before the end of the lifecycle of this strategy. The local authorities in Kent have a long history of joint working and sharing of best practice and protocols. We will work with our new partners to ensure a continued strong approach to homelessness delivery.

We agree with these aims for homelessness to be rare, brief and non-recurring. We will set our priorities to achieve these aims through early intervention, tailored support and strong partnership working.

This strategy has been produced after engagement and is informed by best practice and the wider policy and legislative environment. We carefully listened to staff and key partners to develop our priorities.

Over the past decade, several landmark pieces of legislation have fundamentally influenced the provision and delivery of homelessness services:

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was one of the biggest changes of rights to homeless services in England and introduced two new duties, the Duty to prevent homelessness and the Duty to relieve homelessness. This legislation was implemented on the 3rd April 2018 and placed new legal duties on local housing authorities which builds on the existing legislation of Part 7 Housing Act 1996.

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 has strengthened local authorities' ability to deliver services by expanding planning, regeneration, and data-sharing powers to support more coordinated and place-based interventions.

Care Act 2014 and Better Care Fund was a significant reform of care and support, including providing people and their carers with control over their care and support; a greater emphasis upon prevention; protection for the most vulnerable people in society and provision of clear advice and support by local authorities. Underpinned by the Better Care Fund, a programme that links both the NHS and local authorities to join-up health and social care services. The Disabled Facilities Grant is funded through the Better Care Fund.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 strengthened homelessness provision by granting automatic 'priority need' status to eligible applicants who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse increasing access to settled accommodation and support.

Renters' Rights Act 2025 was a significant overhaul of the private rented sector in England. It strengthens protections for private renters by ending Section 21 evictions which is expected to reduce flows into homelessness.

Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 is designed to tackle poor quality exempt accommodation and protect vulnerable residents.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 will prevent certain care leavers from being treated as intentionally homeless when applying for homelessness assistance. It has also introduced the temporary accommodation notification duty.

Our priorities

This strategy is organised around our four priorities:

- Early intervention to prevent homelessness
- Good quality, affordable temporary accommodation
- Access to appropriate accommodation
- Work to end rough sleeping

The Borough of Swale

Swale is one of 12 districts which make up the county of Kent. Located on the county's northern coast, the borough sits between Medway, Maidstone and Canterbury, around 37 miles (60km) from central London in one direction and 25 miles (40km) from the Channel Tunnel in the other. The borough covers an area of 139 square miles (360km2), roughly one tenth of Kent and is a remarkably diverse place, including the historic market town of Faversham, the traditional seaside resort of Sheerness, the more industrial market town of Sittingbourne and rural villages.

At the 2021 census Swale is home to 151,700 people and the population grew by 11.7% between the 2011 and 2021 census. In comparison, the population of the South East region increased by 7.5% over the same period, whilst the population of England grew by 6.6%.

The projected population for 2032 is 168,458.

The housing market in Swale

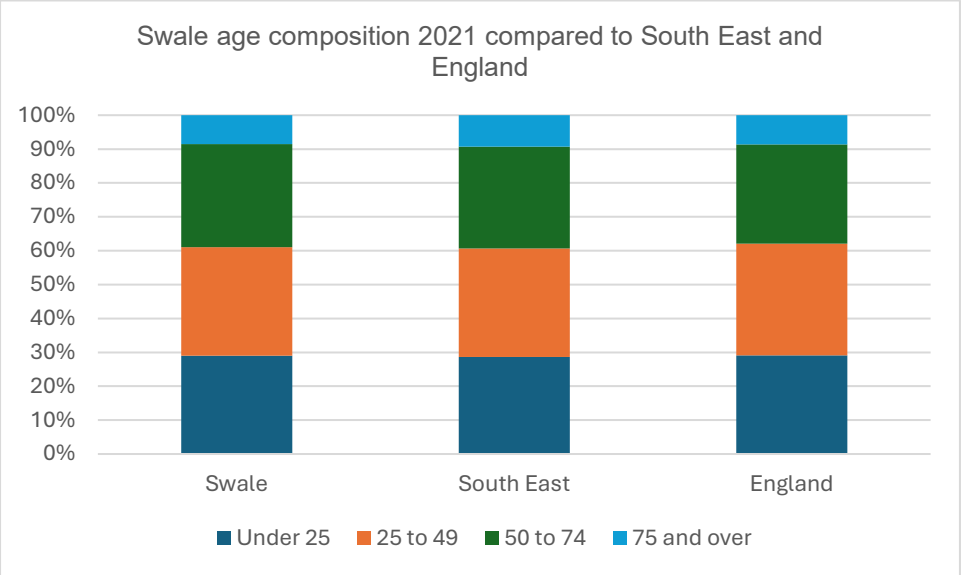
As part of the Local Plan review process a Swale Housing Market Assessment Update was undertaken in April 2026 and is the latest data available for this strategy.

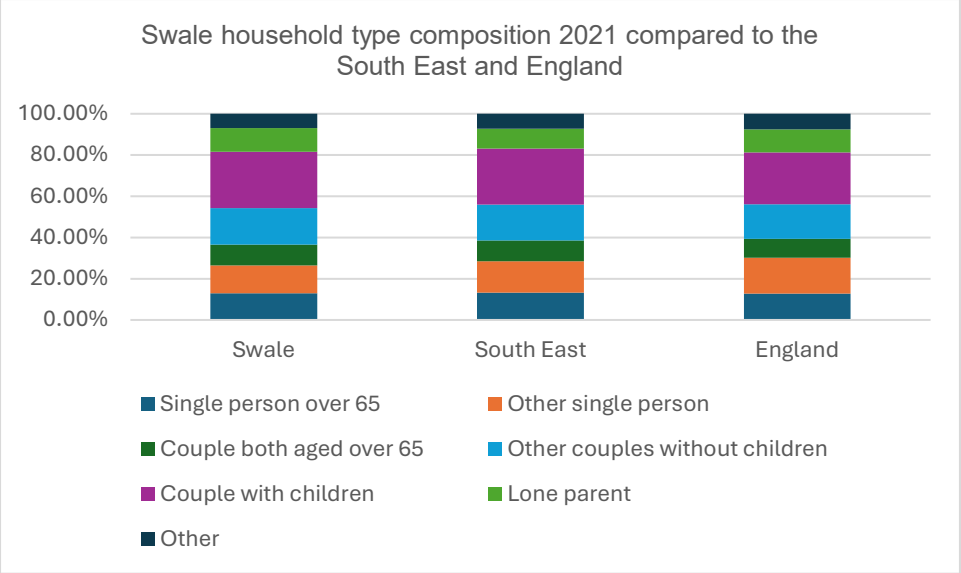
As this document explains that the main drivers of the housing market are the resident population and local labour market. Income has a core effect on the level of choice a household has when determining its future accommodation.

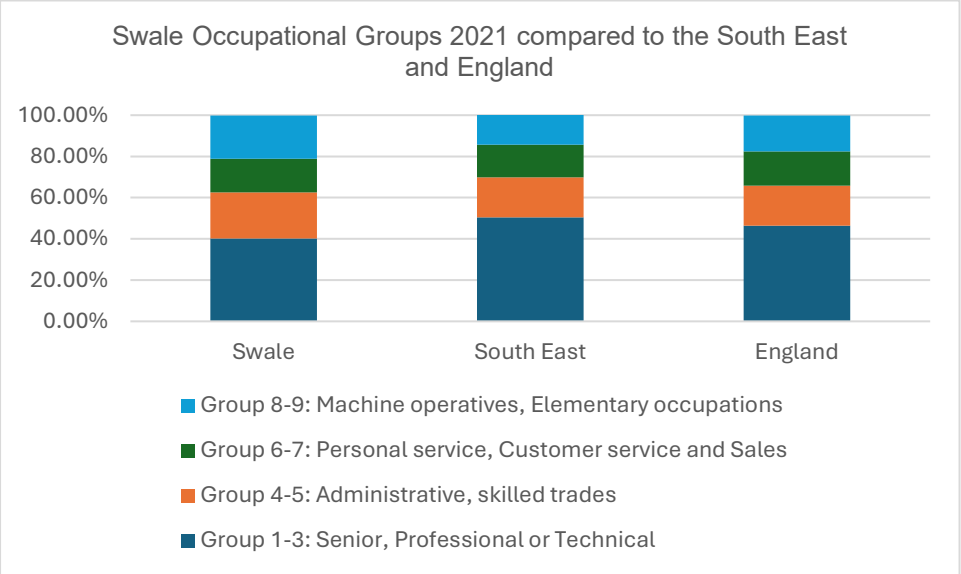
This document provides a detailed analysis of the current housing market and provides rich information and predictions on future needs for the borough.

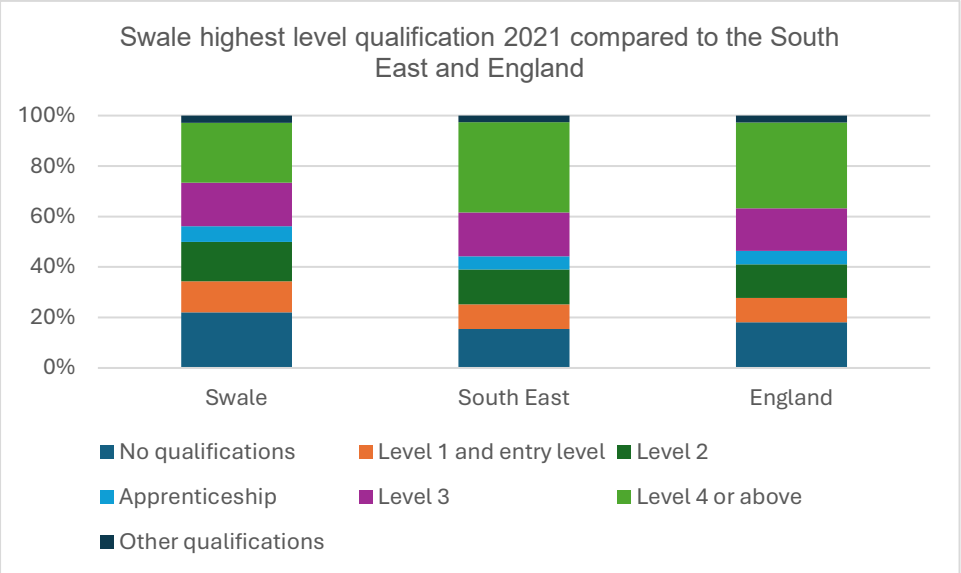
The assessment has concluded that there is a local housing need of 1071 dwellings per year, of which, 304 dwellings per year should be affordable.

The following graphs show the age, household type, occupation and education level profile as at the 2021 census.



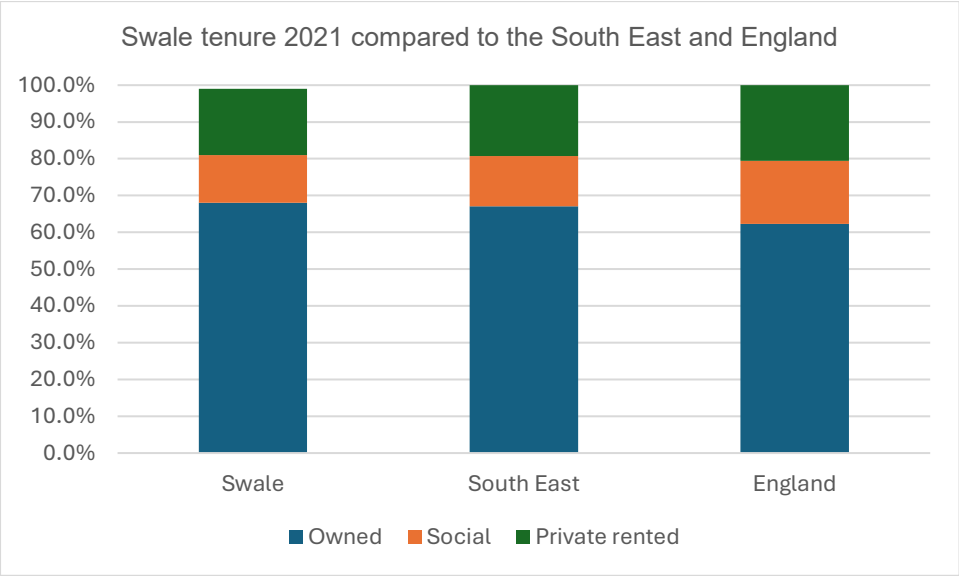

Swale household type composition 2021 compared to the South East and England
100.00%
80.00%
60.00%
40.00%
20.00%
0.00%
Swale
South East
England
Single person over 65
Other single person
Couple both aged over 65
Other couples without children
Couple with children
Lone parent
Other


Swale Occupational Groups 2021 compared to the South East and England
100.00%
80.00%
60.00%
40.00%
20.00%
0.00%
Swale
South East
England
Group 8-9: Machine operatives, Elementary occupations
Group 6-7: Personal service, Customer service and Sales
Group 4-5: Administrative, skilled trades
Group 1-3: Senior, Professional or Technical


Swale highest level qualification 2021 compared to the South East and England
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Swale
South East
England
No qualifications
Level 1 and entry level
Level 2
Apprenticeship
Level 3
Level 4 or above
Other qualifications

Tenure as at 2021 census

There were 60,495 dwellings, 41,335 were owner occupier, 8041 were social rented and 11,102 were in the private rented sector.



The Housing Market Assessment shows that Swale has less purpose built flats than the average for South East or England. Swale also has less 1 bedroom properties and less 4 bedroom or more when compared to South East and England.

The indices of multiple deprivation are calculated by government based on a range of measures of poverty and associated disadvantage and were last published in 2025. Swale was ranked 62nd out of 296 local authorities, with 1 being the most deprived and 296 being the least. Swale is the second most disadvantaged local authority area in Kent.

Local Housing Allowance Rates

	Shared room rate	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Sheerness and Sittingbourne	£410	£675	£850	£940	£1300
Faversham	£425	£675	£895	£1100	£1315

The average advertised rent for private sector for March 2026.

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Sheerness	£825	£1200	£1410	£1545
Sittingbourne	£940	£1235	£1455	£1680
Faversham	£950	£1250	£1440	£1800

Demands on our service:

Since the implementation of the last strategy homelessness has increased nationally. There have been significant events which have led to the increased cost of living. Housing affordability has worsened, private renting is more expensive and the gap between rents and the amount of benefit that can be claimed to cover housing costs has grown.

In October 2022 inflation reached 11.1% whereas the Bank of England target is 2%. This affects mortgage rates which increase the cost to purchase a property and the costs to landlords which increases rents. Inflation also affects new build construction due to cost of materials.

Registered providers are scaling back, or delaying, new housing development in order to prioritise investment in their existing homes. Recent government legislation and regulatory reforms have placed greater emphasis on housing quality, safety, decency and repairs. As a result, many registered providers are redirecting investment towards improving and maintaining existing homes, undertaking building safety and retrofit works and ensuring compliance with increasingly robust regulatory requirements.

Spending on councils in England on temporary accommodation reached £2.8 billion for 2024/25.

In Swale the total gross spend on temporary accommodation reached £4,085,190 for 2025/26. The net spend on temporary accommodation was £2,040,205.

The Affordable Housing Emergency declared by the Council on 3 April 2024 is not unique to Swale but reflects a growing national housing crisis affecting communities across the country. Rising house prices, increasing private sector rents, pressures on social housing supply and wider cost of living challenges have made it increasingly difficult for many households to access and sustain suitable, affordable accommodation. These pressures have led to increased levels of housing need, homelessness presentations and demand for temporary accommodation both locally and nationally.

Housing and homelessness are not solely housing issues, they are also significant health and wellbeing issues. Secure, affordable and good-quality housing is a key determinant of physical and mental health, educational attainment, employment opportunities and overall quality of life. Housing insecurity, overcrowding, poor housing conditions and homelessness can contribute to poorer health outcomes, increased demand on health and social care services and wider social and economic inequalities. Addressing housing need is therefore essential not only to meeting our statutory housing duties but also to supporting healthier, more resilient communities and reducing pressure on public services across the housing, health and care system.

The government funding has been reformed into a single multi year grant rather than multiple short term grants which local authorities had to bid for. The amount of the grant for prevention has been ringfenced so that local authorities can focus on prevention activity, ensuring that local authorities can maintain a strong focus on preventing homelessness. Whilst we welcome the longer term financial planning, overall the formula has resulted in Swale receiving less grant overall. This provides challenges to Swale in meeting the increased aspirations of the government's strategy.

The Council is operating under increasing financial strain with pressure on public sector budgets, demand for housing and homelessness rising due to economic instability, welfare reform and growing individuals with complex needs.

The “Plan” has provided investment but key welfare benefit policies like insufficient Local Housing Allowance rates, shared room rate for under 35s and the benefit cap have not been changed.

Summary of demand based on 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

699 households approached as homeless for an initial assessment. We had an additional 1815 households contact us for housing advice and assistance.

Our top three reasons for approaching as homelessness in 2025/26 were:

- End of private rented – 28%
- Asked to leave by family and friends – 27%
- Domestic abuse - 20%

These three reasons made up 75% of all homeless approaches.

This is consistent with 2024/25 where the same top three made up 72% of all homeless approaches.

- End of private rented – 30%
- Asked to leave by family and friends – 25%
- Domestic abuse - 17%

There were 322 statutory households and 385 children in temporary accommodation as at the 31 March 2026. 326 new households entered statutory temporary accommodation during 2025/26.

388 of the households who approached as homeless were single person households. This is 55% of all homelessness approaches. Of these 143 were under 35 so are subject to the shared room rate unless they meet an exemption. This is 20% of all of our applications with very limited options for move on due to affordability.

264 of the households had dependant children. This is 38% of all homelessness approaches.

47 households were household types such as couples and adult children and made up the remaining 7%.

The bedroom need of the households who approached as homeless were:

1 bedroom need	396
2 bedroom need	186
3 bedroom need	89
4 bedroom plus	28

This bedroom need reflects what we already know about Swale having less 1 and 4 bedroom properties than the average for the South East. As a comparison with other Kent Authorities, we had 43 licenced HMOs as at 31 March 2025, so we are the third lowest for licenced Houses in Multiple Occupation which is another factor which limits the options for those subject to the shared room rate.

The demand for our service is predominantly from Swale and Kent residents. A breakdown of where households have approached for assistance from are:

Swale	82%
Kent	9%
London	3%
Outside of Kent or London	5%
Outside UK	1%

For approaches due to domestic abuse – 63% are from Swale and 37% outside of Swale.

As at the 31 March 2026 there were 2069 households waiting on the housing register. Of these just over 25% are existing social housing tenants who have a need to move. For the financial year 2025/26 there were 382 lets from the housing register into social housing.

Households on register at 31 March 2026	2069
1 bed need	822
2 bed need	500
3 bed need	408
4 bed plus	339
Lets	382
1 bed	117
2 bed	155
3 bed	98
4 bed	12

Early intervention to prevent homelessness

We seek to fully understand the homelessness emergency and how it is experienced by different individuals and groups so we can develop informed, person-centred, targeted solutions and continually improve the quality of the services we deliver. Trauma-informed and empathetic approaches to dealing with homelessness are essential.

We will also seek to use the data we collect to inform good decision making. We will also look at how we can use all Council data to inform early intervention.

We recognise the importance of regularly engaging with residents with lived experience of homelessness to make sure that their feedback, and how homelessness is impacting them, is used to co produce services and improvements. We propose to establish a Lived Experience Engagement Working Group. This group will bring together individuals with direct experience of homelessness, rough sleeping and housing services to provide ongoing insight into what works well, where gaps exist, and how services can be improved.

We will ensure consistent information sharing between teams so residents only have to tell their story once.

We are focused on preventing people from becoming homeless. We offer people the right advice and support they need to ensure housing stability. We restructured the Housing Options Team in 2024 enhancing our triage services to ensure residents get clear and upfront advice on what that are entitled to.

We provide information on our website through Housing Advice Aid for residents in housing need who are able to self-help. We also provide residents with tailored advice and information to empower them to make informed decisions about their housing options.

To ensure we focus on early intervention we provide residents with a telephone line directly to the Housing Options Team, a face to face homeless assessment service and also carry out prevention home visits.

As a Council we have achieved Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation. DAHA accreditation demonstrates a clear organisational ambition to embed a culture that recognises, responds to, and prevents domestic abuse across all services. It goes beyond compliance with statutory duties by requiring a whole-organisation approach, including leadership commitment, workforce development, survivor-centred practice and robust policies and procedures.

We have specialist officers for domestic abuse and safeguarding in the organisation.

It is important to invest in our staff. We support staff with ongoing training, case supervision, wellbeing offers and promote a learning culture. The National Workforce Programme is to provide essential training, expert housing and homelessness advice and skills for the homelessness and rough sleeping workforce.

We remain committed to investing in our staff by ensuring they have access to and are able to attend all relevant funded training opportunities, supporting the continuous development of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

We have recruited a Service Improvement Officer to ensure our service learns from complaints and continually improves with emerging issues and trends.

We work together with partners and communities across the borough to ensure we are doing all we can collectively to address the homelessness emergency.

We recognise that homelessness cannot be tackled in isolation. Our partners play a vital role in supporting residents and delivering joined-up services.

We want to reestablish a regular homelessness and rough sleeper forum with our partners.

Strong community-based interventions are integral to achieving sustainable housing outcomes, as housing inequalities are often rooted in wider social, economic and health disparities. Our Empowering You in Swale strategy sets out what we want to achieve and how we will go about doing it, including working together with partners and other Swale services and creating and promoting initiatives within Swale. The council will work with, and help support, partners to achieve the best education outcomes for residents, improve and promote the health of the borough and support people through financial hardship.

The strategy aims to

- Create skilled, educated, and working communities by improving access to education and training, with a focus on helping young people get on track
- Grow healthy communities by reducing health inequalities in the borough by making healthcare more accessible and promoting healthy lifestyles through partnerships with local organizations
- Empower stronger, more sustainable communities by helping people struggling with day-to-day hardships, such as fuel poverty, through innovative and joint working solutions
- Develop strong partnerships that deliver for our communities by working with charities and other groups and creating a more resilient voluntary and community sector

The Duty to Refer places a legal obligation on specified public authorities to identify individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and, with their consent, refer them to a local housing authority for assistance. This duty is designed to intervene earlier in the housing crisis pathway and ensure that people access appropriate support before their situation worsens.

All of Kent use the same referral process so all agencies are aware and creates a consistent approach. We received 772 duty to refer referrals in 2025/26. This process has assisted to create the good working relationships that we have now.

The “Plan” has a commitment to ensure that no one leaves an institution as homeless. Our officers work closely with our partners to ensure that residents leaving hospital, children’s social care accommodation or prison are not leaving without accommodation arranged. We regularly attend joint meetings with our partners including adult social care, children’s social care, hospital discharge, probation, safeguarding adults board, community safety partnership.

Early intervention must focus on the importance of sustaining existing accommodation and ensuring residents and our partners are aware of the realistic accommodation options available to them.

Good quality, affordable temporary accommodation

The “Plan” has set out a clear expectation for local authorities not to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families. Swale does not routinely use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families. For the year 2025/26 two households with children were placed in Bed and Breakfast and these were booked through our out of hours service and the families were moved the next working day.

It has to be recognised that nationally the use of temporary accommodation has increased. Temporary accommodation has almost become a form of tenure and longer term than ever initially intended.

We will continue our work to support reforms to the temporary accommodation subsidy regime which are still linked to 2011 rates.

Our aim is to minimise the use of temporary accommodation, but where temporary accommodation is required we want to work to improve the quality of accommodation offered, reduce the cost and keep the stay as stable and as short as possible.

Nightly let accommodation is very costly to the Council and our overall aim is to reduce our reliance on using it. It should be recognised that it can have a benefit for households when they are first placed into temporary accommodation as this type of accommodation is furnished and some households will not have anything to furnish a home when they first need assistance.

We have employed accommodation officers to support our households in temporary accommodation. Their role is to assist a household to stay connected to their support services whilst in temporary accommodation and then to support them transition into settled accommodation.

Swale Borough Council sold all of its social housing stock in 1990, to our LSTV Southern Housing. We have completed our phase one temporary accommodation purchase programme and now own 55 properties. This was an important project to reduce our reliance on nightly let and out of area placements. The scheme has been evaluated and consideration on expansion is being considered.

Local authorities who do not have access to their own housing stock have fewer options for temporary accommodation. This has been recognised by central government in increasing the number of properties that a Council can own and use as temporary accommodation.

We need to continue our work to better manage expectations due to the limited availability of social housing and the importance of the need to move on into private sector.

We welcome the commitment in the “Plan” to introduce a temporary accommodation notification system require us to notify educational institutions, health visitors and GPs when a child is placed in temporary accommodation. We see this as a significant step to allow communication and ensure support a residents receive all the additional support needed from these agencies.

Access to appropriate accommodation

We will work to increase access to stable, affordable and quality homes. It is important to include all tenure types and not just focus on social housing. We also have to consider work to allow residents to remain in their current accommodation.

Offering residents a better choice of accommodation to suit their changing needs can help them live independently for longer, feel more connected to their communities and help reduce costs to the social care and health systems.

We use the Disabled Facilities Grant to help adapt properties so that residents can live safely and independently in their home. A limitation on the Disabled Facilities Grant is that it is set to a maximum of £30,000 which has not been increased since 2008.

Private rented accommodation:

Private rented accommodation can offer a flexible route into settled housing especially given the demand for social housing. We acknowledge there are barriers with affordability and the Renters' Rights Act has not addressed this but the government has tried to address the other barriers such as limits on rent in advance, a way for tenants to challenge rents above market rates and discrimination against tenants with children or in receipt of welfare benefits.

The Renters' Rights Act 2025 represents a fundamental shift in the private rented sector by significantly strengthening tenants' rights, most notably through the abolition of Section 21 'no-fault' evictions from 1 May 2026. This means landlords can no longer end a tenancy without providing a clear legal reason.

While these reforms are intended to reduce insecurity and prevent homelessness caused by sudden eviction, there is ongoing uncertainty about how the market will respond. Some landlords have expressed concern about increased regulation with suggestions that landlords are choosing to exit the sector or reduce supply. There is a risk in the short to medium term that reduced availability of private rented housing could place upward pressure on rents. In the longer term it is anticipated that there will be a more stable private rented sector with a more professional or investment based landlords.

Our Housing Standards Team will be delivering a robust response to any criminal offences to protect residents in this sector. They also carry out the inspections and ensure that the private sector is suitable and hazard free.

The private rented sector in Swale is larger than the social housing sector. We must work to reduce the misconception that residents cannot move into private rented as landlords will not accept households in receipt of benefits. Universal Credit caseload in November 2025 shows almost the same number of applicants in receipt of housing element in private rented (4899) as social housing (5142).

The Housing Options Team will negotiate with landlords to sustain existing tenancies. We can assist with loans or Discretionary Housing Payments to support with arrears or upfront payments to move to alternative accommodation.

Supported:

Following cuts in funding nationally there was a substantial reduction in the number of supported housing schemes in Swale that we could make referrals to.

Through our grant funding for rough sleeping, we have been able to continue to commission The Quays (84 bed hostel) that was due to be decommissioned several years ago.

Supported accommodation is an important form of accommodation to retain and promote. It allows residents to gain the necessary skills to then be able to move on and then sustain their own independent accommodation. Without it residents who have support needs, but who do not meet the thresholds of other statutory services such as adult social care are left without appropriate support and risk a cycle of repeat homelessness.

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 introduces a new framework to improve the quality, consistency, and oversight of supported housing. We will assess our supported housing need and develop and publish a local supported housing strategy by April 2027.

Floating support is available to residents of Swale through a service commissioned by Kent County Council. This can be one to one support for individuals with a mental health or wellbeing need who have an issue in relation to their existing tenancy.

Affordable Homes:

It is acknowledged that one of the first steps towards addressing the root cause of homelessness is to build more social housing.

Government launched a 10-year Social and Affordable Homes programme to accelerate the delivery of affordable homes. We work with registered providers (RPs) to maximise new development opportunities through both Section 106 (s106) developer contributions, all grant funding opportunities, and in partnership with the local planning authority enable modifications to s106's to increase affordable housing delivery in particular for social rent tenure homes and the application of grant to deliver additionality.

However, delivery of new affordable homes does not keep pace with demand the total number of new build affordable homes falling slightly year on year for the last three-years.

	Affordable Rent Tenure	Social Rent Tenure	Shared Ownership	First Homes	Total	s106	Grant	Sittingbourne	Sheerness	Faversham
2025/26	42	62	103	6	**213**	82	121	162	10	41
2024/25	151	2	73	2	**228**	79	149	189	0	39
2023/24	107	23	167	0	**297**	162	135	205	12	80

There is also a continued issue with registered providers unable to engage on new sites in Swale due to financial pressures across the sector, increased investment diverted into existing homes to meet regulatory standards, alongside higher construction and borrowing costs. As a result, some affordable housing schemes, particularly smaller Section 106 sites, are proving more difficult to progress despite the continuing housing need within Swale.

With the lack of affordable housing being delivered, the Council has begun to develop its own social housing and have secured funding and planning permission for 51 affordable homes. These homes will be available for occupation in 2028.

As at the March 2025 data there are 32 registered providers that own social housing properties in Swale. Between them they have 8284 general needs properties and 664 older person or supported accommodation.

Our housing register is a choice based lettings model. As we do not own any social housing we have nomination agreements with the registered providers to enable the Council to nominate residents on the waiting list to the homes that become available.

How social housing is allocated is also important. Government has announced plans to update the code of guidance on allocations to make the best use of the limited stock. We will carry out any updates required once this new guidance is published.

Government will be looking to reduce the time homes are empty and encourage greater movement within social housing. We are not able to influence these directly but our housing register scheme allows for those under occupying social housing to apply for smaller homes and free up the larger family homes for residents in need.

There is a need to set clear and realistic expectations around the limited availability of social housing and long wait times for it.

It is clear from the number of social housing lets and the number of homeless applications that homelessness duties cannot be resolved through social housing alone.

Work to end rough sleeping

In May 2023, DLUHC (now MHCLG) launched the Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework across all local authorities in England. This sets out a clear and defined vision for ending rough sleeping, which is that it is prevented wherever possible. The new Framework tracks progress about core indicators and the main aims are:

- Preventing people sleeping rough (indicated by number of new people sleeping rough and number of people seen sleeping rough after being discharged from institutions)
- Making rough sleeping rare (indicated by number of people sleeping rough)
- Making rough sleeping brief (indicated by number of people experiencing long term rough sleeping)
- Making rough sleeping a non-recurring experience (indicated by number of people returning to rough sleeping).

The “Plan” includes a commitment to halve long-term rough sleeping by 2030 and marks a shift away from traditional rough sleeper verification processes towards a more needs-led approach. This recognises that individuals should be able to access support before reaching crisis point rather than feeling they must sleep rough in order to receive assistance.

The “Plan” is increasingly focused on prevention and early intervention rather than reliance on short-term emergency accommodation. Whilst this approach aligns with our own aspirations, changes to national funding arrangements will affect the resources available locally. At the same time, significant pressures within the private rented sector continue to present barriers to preventing and resolving rough sleeping. Private rented accommodation is increasingly unaffordable for many households, including those seeking accommodation in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and shared housing. In many cases, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates do not reflect actual market rents, creating affordability gaps that leave people unable to access or sustain accommodation.

We also know that many people who are sleeping rough, or who are at risk of rough sleeping, can have multiple and complex needs. These can include substance dependency, mental ill-health, offending histories, experiences of trauma, and repeated loss of accommodation. Such challenges often make it harder for individuals to access and maintain housing and can require intensive, coordinated support from a range of agencies.

We will continue to work closely with housing providers, health services, criminal justice agencies and the voluntary sector to support individuals currently accommodated and ensure effective move-on planning. Partnership working will be critical in preventing repeat homelessness and helping people sustain long-term housing outcomes.

In response, Swale has integrated its homelessness prevention and rough sleeping services to strengthen early intervention, improve pathways into support and identify risks at the earliest opportunity. Whilst this will not prevent all instances of rough sleeping, particularly given ongoing pressures within the housing market, it will help ensure resources are used more effectively and that individuals receive the right support at the earliest opportunity. The service will seek to reduce the number of people who experience rough sleeping, minimise the time spent on the streets and improve access to sustainable housing and support options.

A dedicated Rough Sleeper Initiative Practitioner role has been established by Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust to work intensively with people experiencing rough sleeping and those who are vulnerably housed, particularly individuals

who have disengaged from services or struggle to access traditional support pathways. The practitioner can support up to 20 individuals at any one time, helping to address complex health, wellbeing and social care needs.

We also work in partnership with Forward Trust to provide specialist support for people who are experiencing rough sleeping alongside substance dependency issues. This dedicated support helps individuals access treatment, reduce harm and engage with longer-term recovery services.

Consideration has been given to provide a night shelter in Swale, however, it was agreed to not progress this due to utilising the funding to enhance supported housing services instead. We were also exploring the provision of a day centre, a bid was submitted to Ending Homelessness in Community Fund led by Citizen Advice. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful and therefore alternatives are being considered.

The “Plan” promotes the use of Housing First. Swale previously had a Housing First scheme operating in the borough in partnership with Southern Housing and Riverside, following an evaluation, the scheme could no longer be continued. We have adapted our approach to provide intensive support for existing clients and have a range of support services available for our entrenched rough sleepers.

In addition our Supported Housing review that will be undertaken will consider any gaps of provision for this group.

Conclusion

Homelessness can be prevented and reduced through effective prevention, suitable temporary accommodation, improved access to housing and sustained work to end rough sleeping.

Success will require more than responding at the point of crisis. It will depend on identifying risks earlier, using available housing effectively, providing support based on need and taking collective responsibility across service and listening to people who have experienced homelessness.

Action plan

Alongside this strategy there will be a separate action plan. The action plan which will be monitored annually to identify any new opportunities and ensure our approach achieves the most effective outcomes. An annual report will be presented to the Housing, Health and Communities Committee.