

# 5 Appendix A: National and regional policy context

The Strategy is informed by a wide legislative and policy context, with many changes to the national policy framework for housing and planning since the previous West Kent Housing Strategy 2016 – 2021 key areas are outlined in this section.

## Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 took effect on 3 April 2018, placing new duties on councils to work with homeless families to prevent or relieve homelessness before a main homeless duty is accepted. The main changes brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are as follows:

- Work to prevent homelessness of all eligible applicants likely to be homeless in 56 days
- Work to relieve homelessness of all eligible applicants who become homeless
- Take reasonable steps to secure accommodation for those who approach for assistance
- New 'Duty to Refer' for public bodies working with homeless households to the Council homelessness team.

The Government announced a new [Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018](#), with the aim of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027, now brought forward to 2025. Funding has been provided through the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway for Councils to reduce rough sleeping.

The Government announced the 'Everyone In' initiative in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, instructing local authorities to bring rough sleepers in from the streets and give them access to emergency accommodation.

The [Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016](#) introduced welfare policy reforms building on the [Welfare Reform Act 2012](#) including:

- Restricting Local Housing Allowance rates; including changing the basis LHA rates are set on from the median to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of market rents within a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA), applying national caps to LHA rates and abolishing the five bed rate
- Benefit cap reduction, from £26,000 per year to £23,000
- A 1% reduction in social rents for 4 years from 2016.

## Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) includes measures to promote awareness of domestic abuse, protect and support victims (including a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Order), transform the justice response by helping victims give evidence through screens and other special measures, and improve performance with a Domestic Abuse Commissioner to help drive improvements in the responses to domestic abuse. Under the Act all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have a priority need for homelessness assistance. The Council has received funding to assist in us fulfilling our new duties under the Act and are working in partnership with other local authorities and Kent County Council to develop and deliver our response.

## The Social Housing Green Paper 2018: A new deal for social housing and Social Housing White Paper 2020: The Charter for Social Housing Residents

[A new deal for social housing proposes](#) a rebalancing of the relationship between residents, addressing stigma associated with social housing, the need for landlords to listen to residents and the desire for a culture of accountability and respect.

Five principles underpin the new deal for social housing residents:

- a safe and decent home which is fundamental to a sense of security and our ability to get on in life;
- improving and speeding up how complaints are resolved;
- empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account;
- tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities, challenging the stereotypes that exist about residents and their communities; and,
- building the social homes that we need and ensuring that those homes can act as a springboard to home ownership.

The Social Housing White Paper provides a framework for reform, setting out how ‘transformational’ change for social housing residents will be achieved through a new Charter for social housing residents and changes to the regulatory regime. The new Charter sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect:

1. **To be safe in your home.** We [*the Government*] will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
2. **To know how your landlord is performing,** including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
3. **To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,** with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. **To be treated with respect,** backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. **To have your voice heard by your landlord,** for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
6. **To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in,** with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. **To be supported to take your first step to ownership,** so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

## The Energy Act 2011

The Energy Act has three principal objectives:

1. Tackling barriers to investment in energy efficiency
2. Enhancing energy security
3. Enabling investment in low carbon energy supplies.

The Act includes key provisions relating to the Green Deal, the private rent sector and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO). The Green Deal created a new financing framework to enable the provision of fixed improvements to the energy efficiency with improvements funded by a charge on energy bills, avoiding the need for consumers to pay upfront costs.

The Act includes provisions to ensure private residential landlords are unable to refuse a tenant’s reasonable request for consent to carry out energy efficiency improvements from April 2016 where a finance package (such as the Green Deal or the Energy Company Obligation) is available. The Act also meant it became

unlawful for landlords to grant a new tenancy or renew existing tenancies for properties that do not meet the minimum energy efficiency standard (MEES) of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating E from 2018, extending to all domestic rented properties from April 2020.

The Act amends existing powers enabling the creation of a new Energy Company Obligation to:

- Take over from existing obligations to reduce carbon emissions that expired in 2012
- Work alongside the Green Deal finance offer by targeting measures to households likely to need additional support, including vulnerable people on low incomes.

### Heat and Buildings Strategy (October 2021)

The [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#) sets out government plans to decarbonise homes and commercial, industrial and public sector buildings, towards achieving net zero by 2050. The Strategy outlines five core principles to guide action over the next decade and longer-term transformation to Net Zero:

1. A whole buildings and whole-system approach needs to be taken to minimise costs of decarbonisation
2. Innovation is essential to driving down costs, improving options and informing future decisions
3. 'No- and low-regrets' action need to be accelerated now – prioritising actions to improve the energy performance of buildings, including retrofitting, fabric first approach for improved building thermal efficiency and build the market by developing technical expertise, growing the workforce and the UK's manufacturing capacity and capability. This includes building the market for hydronic heat pumps
4. Balance certainty and flexibility to provide stability for investment and an enabling environment for different approaches to be taken to address different buildings
5. Government will target support to enable action for those most in need.

The Strategy confirms additional funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (investing £800 million over 2022/23 to 2024/25) and Home Upgrade Grant (investing £950 million over 2022/23 to 2024/25) to improve the energy performance of low income households' homes, support low-carbon heat installations, help reduce fuel poverty and build the green retrofitting sector.

The [Housing and Planning Act 2016](#) introduced legislation for a number of measures intended to promote home ownership and boost housebuilding in England (such as the sale of higher value local authority homes, starter homes, pay to stay) along with measures to help tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector.

The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Prescribed Description) (England) Order 2018 reformed the mandatory HMO licensing regime, applying mandatory licensing to HMO properties which are less than 3 storeys high.

### Regional policy context

The [Kent and Medway Housing Strategy 2020-2025](#) 'A Place People want to call Home' sets out key housing related ambitions for Kent and Medway focused across five themes to compliment and support the work of Kent Housing Group members to meet their local and countrywide objectives through a collective voice and ambition. The themes are:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Working Together for Safer Homes
- Infrastructure First
- Accelerating Housing Delivery
- Affordability.

A key message throughout the Strategy is that access to decent, safe, secure, warm, healthy and affordable homes across all tenures should be possible for everyone in Kent and Medway.

[Delivering Affordable Warmth: A Fuel Poverty Strategy for Kent](#), developed by the Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership (KEEP), sets out a commitment to reduce the negative impact of fuel poverty and cold homes upon the health and wellbeing of the County's residents. Fuel poor households are more likely to live in energy inefficient homes and this is not tenure specific, it's a problem across all tenures that include social housing, private rented and owner-occupied properties. Just over 64,000 households in Kent and Medway were affected by fuel poverty in 2013. The Strategy highlights national targets and identifies local targets set out in the Kent Environment Strategy and Climate Local Kent, which partners will work to achieve, through the four key priorities of the Strategy:

Priority 1: Information gathering and sharing

Priority 2: Improving energy efficiency

Priority 3: Reducing fuel costs

Priority 4: Increase income – support vulnerable households to maximise income.

The [Kent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy: outcomes for Kent](#) outlines the priority areas and how we would like to work together to improve people's health and reduce health inequalities in the county, with a vision "To improve health and wellbeing outcomes, deliver better coordination quality care, improve the public's experience of integrated health and social care services, and ensure that the individual is involved and at the heart of everything we do." The Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board and Transformation Partnership has agreed the [Case for Change](#) plan about how services need to change to focus on the priorities in the Strategy and achieve the right care for people.