

# STRATEGY *for* Private Sector Housing



(Including Private Sector Housing Grant Policies)  
2007-2012



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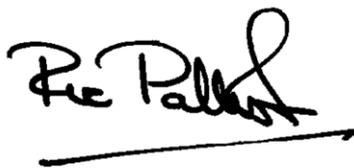
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## FOREWORD

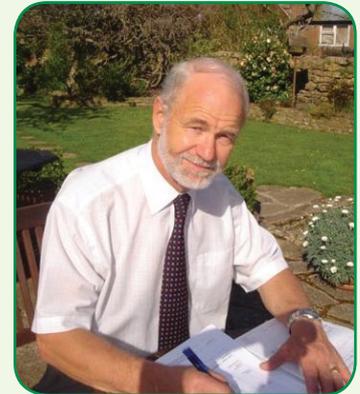
There are two priorities in life after our Health – a job with a basic income and a decent roof over our heads. As we live in a state where we are protected from the very worst aspects of poverty the roof becomes the most important. In South Somerset achieving that priority is daily becoming more of a challenge. Rising house prices, scarcity of accommodation and high rents make it increasingly difficult for people, particularly the young and those on low income, to access suitable accommodation. The number of people looking for housing is increasing year by year and current projections suggest that this trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. With house prices in our area running at up to nine times gross income, affordability is at a critical level. In the past we relied on the Council and other social housing providers to build houses to meet housing need but changing policies from successive Governments has reduced levels of investment in affordable housing and not enough social housing is being built to meet demand. The Government has promised more money for new affordable housing but even this will leave a significant deficit. It is not an overstatement to say that Housing in the South West is in crisis and we must increasingly look towards the private sector to play its part, particularly in Homeless prevention. This strategy has been drawn up to show how we intend to work with the private sector to increase the availability of affordable housing and to improve the existing housing stock to ensure that everyone has a decent home in which to live. The strategy is also aimed at dealing with other issues that are relevant to the private sector such as global warming and social cohesion. The future success of our community and society depends to a large part on the provision of adequate housing. This document lays out how we intend to achieve success through a clear commitment and focus on action from the Council and its partners.



**Councillor Ric Pallister OBE**

Deputy Leader of the Council

Portfolio Holder – Housing, Health and Social Inclusion



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The condition and use of the private sector housing stock has moved up the agenda both locally and nationally. Increasing housing pressures in the form of homelessness, lengthening housing waiting lists and overcrowding, coupled with issues of affordability and the lack of green field sites for new build has meant that greater use must be made of the existing private sector stock. The Government in the form of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) says it has a vision of prosperous and cohesive communities, offering a safe, healthy and sustainable environment for all.

To achieve this vision the DCLG is now encouraging local authorities to work in partnership with the private sector to try and develop new and innovative solutions to local housing needs and problems. Additionally new legislation has been introduced to ensure the attainment of the “*decent homes standard*” across the private sector as well as new licensing powers to control the management of houses in multiple occupation. Separate to these initiatives many of the Council’s own Corporate Objectives also relate to the condition of the private sector housing stock (see [appendix 1](#)).

This strategy has been developed with this in mind and covers both these issues and a range of other issues including empty property, fuel poverty and the accommodation needs of young people.

The purpose of the strategy is to address all these issues in a structured way so as to support and link with other corporate aims and objectives.

The strategy is intended to explain:

- **Our understanding of issues affecting the private sector**
- **Our overall objectives and priorities**
- **How we propose to tackle problems in the private sector**
- **Our action plan and performance targets**

Key to delivering any such strategy is the financial resources that the Council and Government is prepared to provide. In the second part of the strategy there are details of the Council’s private sector housing grant and loan policy. This revised policy builds on the existing grant policy and aims to deliver financial assistance in a focussed and effective manner.

*“Putting affordable housing within the reach not just of the few but the many is vital both to meeting individual aspirations and a better future for our country.”*

**GORDON BROWN,  
PRIME MINISTER**



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# **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2007-2012**

## **Section 1**

## INTRODUCTION

This document is designed to complement the Council's Housing and Accommodation Strategy 2004-2007. Readers are advised to refer to that document to appreciate the Council's overall Housing Strategy and where the private sector strategy fits in. Developing and improving the private sector is one of the key parts of the overall strategy. The purpose of this document is to provide more information about the private sector strategy and in particular to provide details of the financial assistance available from the Council to help meet the aims of the strategy. In addition the strategy is intended to support and contribute to the South West Regional Housing Strategy (see [appendix 2](#)) and to the Somerset Private Sector Housing Strategy (see [appendix 2](#)).

Housing has always been an important issue for the Council and features prominently, directly and indirectly, in the Council's activities. With increased pressure due to high demand for affordable social housing, high property prices and a shortage of available accommodation, the need for a well thought out private sector housing policy is all the more important. The need for good housing in the private sector underpins many of the corporate priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan 2005-2012 (see [appendix 1 – The Corporate Context](#)) and is also featured in the *South Somerset Together – Local Strategic Partnership document: Key Issues for the Future in South Somerset* (see [appendix 2](#)).

The Government accepts that poor housing can have a direct impact on the health of the occupants and on the quality of life in an area and states that it is committed to improving the housing quality in all tenures, including the owner-occupied sector. The Government's aims include the wish to provide better opportunities to home owners to repair and maintain their homes using their own resources and to target help through grants or other financial assistance at poorer home owners, particularly the elderly and disabled. In addition the Government wishes to improve the private rented sector by increased regulation and by encouraging Local Authorities to work in partnership with private landlords to provide good quality affordable accommodation.



Nationally the Government has set priorities, which it expects, local authorities to deliver on; these include:

- Making greater use of the private rented sector to secure access to affordable housing for the homeless and low income households.
- Moving towards a *'housing options'* approach so that households in need are not all directed into rented social housing.
- Ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Tackling anti-social behaviour.
- Implementing new tools introduced by the Housing Act 2004 (particularly HHSRS-see [page 20](#)).
- Delivering the Decent Homes target for the private sector (see [page 12](#)).
- Bringing empty property back into use (see [page 18](#)).
- Ensuring standards in houses in multiple occupation are met (see [page 19](#)).

These national priorities are reflected in the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry, which are used to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a local authority's performance. (See [appendix 2](#) – Key Lines Of Enquiry private sector housing functions).

In the following sections are listed the various areas of policy that cover these and other issues as well as practical areas of financial and other assistance that is and will be provided by the Council to support and regulate the private sector.

*There is now a general acceptance that not having a home, or not having a suitable home, can mean more overcrowding, poorer health, lower educational attainment and restrictions on social mobility and employment prospects. All of these factors can adversely affect not only people's individual quality of life, but also economic growth. A decent home is a foundation stone for people to be able to fulfil their potential in society.*

SOURCE: NATIONAL  
HOUSING FEDERATION

## 1. KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

The Council serves 156,000 people across an area of 370 square miles with an annual gross revenue budget of approx £19,000,000. The District has a varied mixture of rural and urban housing. It has more conservation areas than any other district in the country, the second highest number of listed buildings and a high proportion of interwar housing. The following issues have been extracted from local and national surveys.

- There are nearly 64,000 homes in the district, of which just over three quarters (74%) are owner occupied, approximately 10,000 are owned by Registered Social Landlords (15%) and the remainder privately rented (9%).
- South Somerset has a relatively old population partly as a result of people moving to the South West to retire. Many elderly residents are on low fixed incomes and a significant number have homes in disrepair. Many are said to be *'asset rich but income poor'*.
- Nearly 25% of the population are aged between 60 and 85 and this proportion is expected to increase to nearly 36% by 2011. This will result in continuing demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) as well as the Home Aid service.
- There are an estimated 10,000 adults with mobility difficulties in South Somerset, and this number is expected to rise to 13,000 by 2011.
- There is an increasing need for home care with disabled adaptations due to more rapid hospital discharge and the lack of alternative housing options.
- 2.1% of homes in the private sector are estimated to be empty.
- The high demand for and the lack of affordable rented accommodation in the private sector leads to sharing and overcrowding and places increased pressure on the regulatory framework. There are estimated to be 600 houses in Multiple Occupation in the District.



- Low average income levels mean that many residents live in fuel poverty and cannot afford essential repairs to their homes. This issue affects not only the elderly but also young families and particularly single parents.
- Just over 4,500 (10%) of privately owned homes in the District fail to meet the decent homes standard, of which some 1,000 are unsuitable for habitation (for further details on the condition of the stock see [appendices 4 & 5](#)).
- The overall population grew by 16.4% between 1981 and 1999 and was expected to increase by only 3.8% between 2001 and 2011. This is likely to change due to recent immigration trends.
- By 2026 South Somerset will need to accommodate 19,000 more households.
- There has recently been a large influx of migrant workers from the EU into the District many from Portugal and Poland. This has put extra demands on the rented sector. In the last 5 years the Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) population has increased significantly in the District.
- The new Housing Act has introduced new powers and responsibilities for the Council concerning the licensing of certain Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- Homelessness continues to be a major cause for concern in the District and there are approximately 7000 people on the Housing Register.

Further information on housing in South Somerset can be found in the South West Housing Body report: Housing in the South West – Overview Report South Somerset February 2005 or on their website [www.southwesthousingbody.org.uk](http://www.southwesthousingbody.org.uk).



*Decent, affordable and sustainable homes are fundamental to improving people's health outcomes. Factors such as dampness and cold, fire and accidents, poor indoor air quality, pest infestation, noise and overcrowding have been shown to contribute to poor physical and mental health.*

**SOURCE: 'ASPECTS OF HOUSING AND THEIR IMPACT ON HEALTH' SUMMARY EVIDENCE REVIEW SERIES: NO 10, FACULTY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL WORK AND EDUCATION, NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY.**

## 2. AIMS OF STRATEGY

*The aims of the Strategy are to:*

- Tackle unfitness, disrepair and non-decent housing.
- Increase stock available for letting by conversions, flats over shops and by bringing back empty property into use.
- Improve standards in houses in multiple occupation.
- Help low income/disabled homeowners to remain in and maintain their own homes.
- Improve domestic energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty under our HECA programme.
- Contribute to Care in the Community, the Community Safety Strategy and other market town and urban regeneration initiatives.
- Develop partnerships with other Local Authorities, housing providers and agencies so as to work together in a cost effective and efficient manner via Local Area Agreements etc.
- Respond to national initiatives such as the Decent Homes Standard and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- Work with landlords and the private sector to improve the availability of good quality affordable accommodation.
- Ensure that what is proposed integrates with other areas of the Council's Housing Strategy to tackle homelessness and other Council priorities such as anti social behaviour.
- Provide a firm basis from which to influence Regional and National policy on private sector housing to the benefit of South Somerset.
- Contribute to the Public Health Agenda and work with the Somerset Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Somerset Social Services over the well established link between health and housing.



The financial assistance provided under the Private Sector Housing Strategy is designed to link to other objectives as follows:

- Home Repairs Assistance Grants provide home security measures, linking to the community safety and crime reduction agenda. These grants also help the Council to meet the statutory Decent Homes targets by repairing and improving non-decent homes.
- Grants for energy efficiency contribute to the Council's sustainability and poverty objectives and Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) targets.
- Focusing grant aid on essential repairs for vulnerable homeowners assists the Somerset Health Improvement Plan and in meeting health promotion targets, as there is a well established link between poor housing and ill health.
- Empty property and home maintenance programmes link into our market town regeneration, crime reduction and social inclusion policies. They also provide extra accommodation for homeless people.

*“Local authorities’ work in producing housing strategies has been a lever for economic and social change in many areas, reflecting a shift towards ensuring local housing markets meet local demands, rather than a narrower focus on directly providing social housing. This strategic housing role is at the heart of achieving social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create a sense of place.”*

**SOURCE: PAGE 41 PART 2  
STRONG AND PROSPEROUS  
COMMUNITIES**

### 3. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The capital used for funding private sector renewal and disabled facilities grants comes partially from the Council's own capital resources and partially in direct grant aid from the Government. Capital for expenditure on private sector housing has been agreed by the District Executive for the next five years. In 2006/07 SSDC was awarded £272,000 in subsidy to offset the cost of disabled facilities grants and this level of funding is expected to continue for the next five years. In 2006/07 SSDC was also allocated £737,931 in direct grant aid by the South West Housing Body for private sector renewal activities which improve the quality of private sector homes owned by vulnerable households. For the five years 2007-12 we are planning to provide approx £260,000 a year in financial assistance to the private sector in the form of grants and loans. We don't know what level of funding we will receive from the South West Housing Body to assist with this expenditure but anticipate that it should remain broadly at it's current level, however the South West Housing Body is currently reviewing the way it allocates funding for housing in the South West and there could be changes in the funding formula that affect SSDC.

The table below outlines the main areas of private sector expenditure.

*Brief outline of private housing capital programme 2006 – 2011.*

| Budget                        | £,000<br>2006/07 | £,000<br>2007/08 | £,000<br>2008/09 | £,000<br>2009/10 | £,000<br>2010/11 |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Disabled Facilities           | 611              | 631              | 580              | 580              | 580              |
| Empty Property                | 85               | 91               | 100              | 100              | 100              |
| Home Repair                   | 96               | 82               | 100              | 100              | 100              |
| Houses in Multiple Occupation | 30               | 77               | 60               | 60               | 60               |
| Home Loan Scheme              | 70               | 60               | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| Total                         | 892              | 941              | 840              | 840              | 840              |

In addition to the funding provided by the Council it is hoped that the Home Loan Scheme run by the Wessex Reinvestment Trust will over time lever in substantial private finance to tackle poor housing (see [Home Loan Scheme on page 29](#)).



## 4. PRIVATE SECTOR STOCK CONDITION SURVEY

In late 2003 we commissioned the Cambridge Housing Environmental Consultants (CHEC) to carry out a private sector house condition survey of the District. They published the results of the survey in early 2004. CHEC was used by three of the Somerset housing authorities. The results and recommendations from the survey are shown in **appendices 4 & 5**. The results of this survey and the recommendations have been used in formulating the policy in this strategy document. The survey report, that can be viewed on the Council's website, [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk) has provided us with sound information on which to base our strategy.

We have recently commissioned another stock condition survey based on computer modelling. This modelling information is provided by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) and will enable us to update our information database and further refine and direct our private sector strategy. We hope to receive the results of this survey by August 2007. This is a Somerset wide survey that has been jointly commissioned by five local authorities in Somerset. It will enable us to further improve our knowledge of the prevailing housing conditions.



*The rate of unfitness in private sector dwellings in the district is 2.1% - half that of the national figure of 4.2%.*

**SOURCE: SSDC HOUSING  
CONDITION & ENERGY  
SURVEY 2004 BY THE  
CAMBRIDGE HOUSING  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONSULTANTS**

## 5. THE DECENT HOMES STANDARD

In July 2002 the Government extended the decent homes standard that had previously applied to the social sector to the private sector. Local authorities have been set a statutory target of increasing the proportion of vulnerable households who live in decent housing. “*Vulnerable households*” are those in receipt of means tested benefits and decent housing is defined by the existing decent homes standard. A decent home is one that meets all of the following criteria:

- It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing (the fitness standard)
- It is in a reasonable state of repair
- It has reasonably modern facilities
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Nationally the proportion of vulnerable households living in decent housing is put at 57% and the Government has set targets of increasing that proportion to 70% by 2010 and to 75% by 2015. Our most recent private sector house condition survey suggested that there may be 4,500 non-decent homes in South Somerset. This will have implications for both the department’s workload and the grant budget. Working with the other local authorities in Somerset we have agreed a joint decent homes policy document that outlines the procedures to be followed when dealing with decent homes (see [appendix 2](#)).



*Around 9.5 million people cannot afford to keep their homes adequately heated, free from damp or in a decent state of decoration – the housing conditions that most people regard as ‘adequate’.*

SOURCE: JOSEPH  
ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

## 6. TARGETING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AT VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Following the publication of the Regulation Reform Order in 2002 the Council revised its grant policy to target grant aid towards those most in need. Whilst a lack of resources has meant that Renovation Grants have been phased out, funding for Home Repairs Assistance (HRA) has been retained with grant aid being directed towards people in receipt of income related benefit whose properties need essential repairs for wind and weatherproofing. To encourage take up, we have carried out direct mail shots to people in receipt of benefits advising them of the availability of grant aid as well as publicising the help available through DSS and Community Offices, Parish and Town Councils. We also targeted the work of our Home Aid Team to specific wards, which were highlighted by the Health and Social Needs Analysis (see [appendix 2](#)) as being most likely to have residents in need of assistance. Apart from HRA grants, financial assistance in the form of Houses in Multiple Occupation Grants, Empty Property Grants, Disabled Facilities Grants and soft loans are also provided (see [Section 2 on grant policy](#)).

The rationale for providing financial assistance to vulnerable people is that it enables them to continue living independently in their own homes. If their homes become unfit and they have to be re-housed it becomes much more costly to the public purse.



Mr. B.

*“It is much better now that I can put the heating on and the house warms up quickly. Without the loan I wouldn’t have had the work done, just bits and bobs would have been no good to me”*

SOURCE: MR. B – WESSEX  
HOMES IMPROVEMENT LOANS

## 7. HELPING DISABLED PEOPLE

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) fund adaptations and alterations, ranging from small scale works such as replacing baths with showers through to large scale alterations to meet complex needs. This can prevent unnecessary moves for individuals, enabling the maintenance of family and community support links. It is also very important in preventing “*bed blocking*” by allowing patients to be rapidly discharged from hospital. New Government targets have been set to ensure that patients are rapidly discharged from hospital. The Supporting People Agency has been allocated funding to achieve this aim and it in turn helps to fund our Home Aid Service to achieve this (see [page 21](#)).

We work closely with Somerset Social Services Occupational Therapy team to assess individual need and prioritise cases with joint decision making. Grants range from £1,500 to £25,000. Expenditure is currently running at about £600,000 per year, representing the largest portion of our total grant expenditure and making us the third highest spending authority in the region.

In 2001 we took part in research with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) assessing the effectiveness of DFG related work. The results were published in a JRF report called “*Money Well Spent*” and confirmed that we were applying best practice.

The trend for DFG expenditure appears to be moving slowly upwards. Changes in the means testing regulations concerning children in 2006 helped to push up the expenditure rate, as did a reduction in funding for DFGs by South Somerset Homes the previous year. We currently receive a subsidy of £272,000 a year from Central Government to offset our expenditure but the cost of DFGs to South Somerset is still expensive. It is difficult to predict demand as we are dependent on disabled people coming forward and asking for grant aid but it is unlikely that expenditure will reduce.

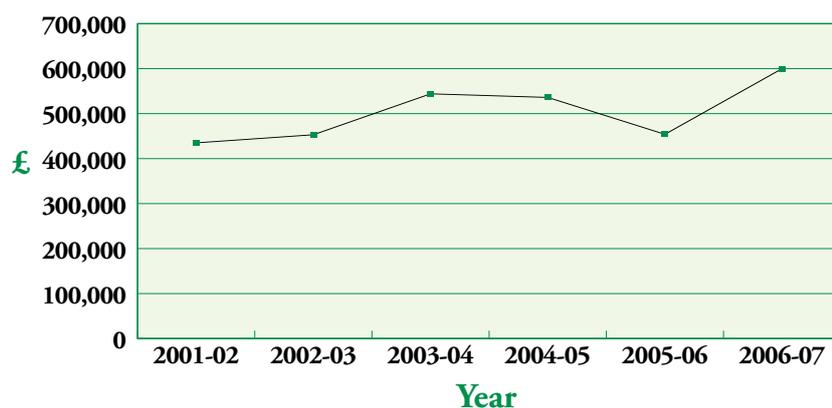


*“Thank you to SSDC for their great kindness in giving me a wet room for my bungalow, it is so lovely and has lifted a great worry for my Husband”*

WINCANTON RESIDENT

Disabled grants are mandatory and the Council is obliged to pay them. The Government recently reviewed the DFG system and little change has been suggested (see [appendix 2](#)). The Government has said that it intends shortly to increase the maximum DFG limit from £25,000 to £30,000 and in the future to possibly increase it to £50,000. This will further increase costs to SSDC.

### DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT OUTTURN



## 8. ACCOMMODATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

One of the emerging issues in recent months is the accommodation needs of young people. Whilst many of our policies such as those on HMO inspections cater for younger people it is seen that this is a group with special and increasing needs. With the reduction in the amount of affordable accommodation – especially in rural locations young people are finding it increasingly difficult to access suitable accommodation.

Often landlords prefer to house older people and young people can often be unfairly labelled as irresponsible and troublesome. There is presently on-going work with various parties to see what can be done to address the situation. Issues currently being examined include:

- What can be done to encourage landlords to house more young people especially those on DSS?
- What are the housing aspirations of young people? Are they realistic and achievable?
- Can we develop a tenant's passport scheme? Would it work?
- Can discretionary housing benefit be used to top up the rents of young people?
- What is the most satisfactory form of housing for young people? How can we provide it?
- How can we use Housing Corporation funding to create good quality shared accommodation for young people?
- How is it best to provide "Floating Support" to help young people? This is often needed for young people with alcohol/drug and other high support needs.
- What help can our Registered Social Landlords (RSL) partners provide in addressing the needs of young people?



*England's countryside will become a "theme park for the rich" unless the Government, local councils and other public bodies raise their game on tackling the rural housing shortage.*

**SOURCE: THE NATIONAL  
HOUSING FEDERATION  
JUNE 2007**

The Foyer Project that has been running successfully in Yeovil for several years provides accommodation for young single homeless. In recent months we have been working with landlords to try and provide suitable 'move on' accommodation from the Foyer, as this is an area that has proved quite difficult.



*The Foyer, Yeovil*

*Homelessness means not having a home. Even if you have a roof over your head you can still be homeless. This is because you may not have any rights to stay where you live or your home might be unsuitable for you.*

**SOURCE: SHELTER**

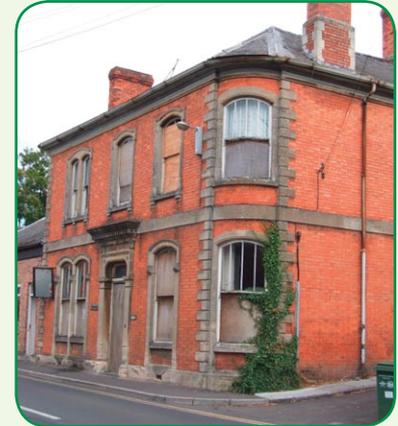
## 9. THE EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

The Empty Property Strategy was launched in 1995 and has achieved many social, environmental and economic benefits. Empty properties are often a focal point for anti-social behaviour, crime, vandalism and drug abuse.

By improving empty properties we help reduce the need for building on Greenfield sites, produce good quality affordable homes and help breathe life back into town centre locations. When deciding to provide empty property grants we link into other Council regeneration initiatives. For instance we have given several empty property grants in the east end of Yeovil as part of the Yeovil East Regeneration Project as well as in town centre locations in Chard, Wincanton and Langport. As part of this strategy we have also carried out several surveys of town centre locations to try and identify properties suitable for empty property grants.

In the past twelve months 12 new homes have been created from empty and derelict properties using a combination of Empty Property Grants (EPG). Where Empty Property Grants are provided, the properties created must be let to Council nominated tenants at an agreed fair rent for five years. This is a relatively quick and cost effective way of providing homes for homeless people.

It is recognised that in some cases long term empty properties present particular problems. Whilst extra enforcement powers were introduced in the Housing Act 2004 to deal with long-term empty properties, including Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO's), efforts to bring back empty property into occupation can often be slow. Recently we have been working with the planning service and are trialling the use of 'Section 215' notices to try and bring back empty properties into use. This method has been used successfully elsewhere in the country. 'Section 215' notices made under the planning acts allow local authorities to take action against properties that are run down and detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood.



## 10. THE HMO STRATEGY/MANDATORY HMO LICENSING

There are about 600 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in South Somerset providing much-needed accommodation (for example young single people) but often suffering from under investment. We have a separate HMO strategy document and are signed up to a countywide HMO policy that sets out standards, targets for inspection and enforcement as well as advice on meeting management standards (see [appendix 2](#)). We work closely with landlords and use our HMO Grant funding to help upgrade substandard HMOs particularly to improve the means of escape in case of fire.

With increasing housing pressure and lack of affordable housing for young people, shared accommodation will probably become more prevalent. Continued works will be required to ensure this housing sector is properly regulated and that standards are kept up. In June 2006 the mandatory licensing of HMOs of three storeys or more and with five or more tenants was introduced. It has involved a considerable amount of work to issue licences, collect fees and inspect HMOs etc. This is an on-going process and it is not expected to fully licence all HMOs for some time yet.

Whilst all the good landlords have co-operated fully in this process we are aware that some landlords prefer not to be licensed and avoid paying the fees. This involves staff having to track down unlicensed but licensable HMOs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some properties occupied by immigrants are often overcrowded and need to be licensed.

The reason for licensing HMOs is to ensure that they meet standards for repair, amenities, overcrowding and means of escape in case of fire. The definition of what constitutes an HMO is open to legal interpretation but our policy is that we will take enforcement action and apply the relevant standards to all licensable HMOs and to any rented property with more than four individuals sharing.

*People living in bedsits are six times more likely to die in a fire than those in houses.*

**SOURCE: SHELTER**



## 11. HOUSING HEALTH & SAFETY RATING SYSTEM (HHSRS)

The housing fitness standard set out in the Housing Act 1985 has now been replaced with an evidence-based risk assessment procedure, the Housing Health & Safety Rating system (HHSRS) set out in Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004. The Council now has to base enforcement decisions in respect of residential property on assessments made under the HHSRS.

*Any action by the Council will be based on a three stage consideration:*

- a) The hazard rating determined under HHSRS
- b) Whether the Council has a duty of power to act, determined by the presence of a hazard above or below a threshold prescribed by the regulations (category 1 and category 2 hazards) and
- c) The authority's judgement as to the most appropriate course of action to deal with the hazard.

The Act contains new enforcement options, which are available to the Council. The choice of the most appropriate course of action will be decided having regard to statutory enforcement guidance and to the Enforcement Concordat.

Under Sections 49 and 50 of the Housing Act 2004 the Council has the power to charge and recover reasonable costs incurred in taking the most appropriate course of action. The Council will reserve the right to make such a charge where:

- a) A formal notice is required to remove a serious threat to health and safety unless the threat arose because of circumstances outside of the control of the person receiving the notice, order or action, and /or
- b) There is previous evidence of non-compliance with statutory provisions made under the Housing Acts or other housing related legislation, and/or
- c) No adequate action has been taken in response to informal requests from the Council to take action or do works.



## 12. THE HOME AID PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

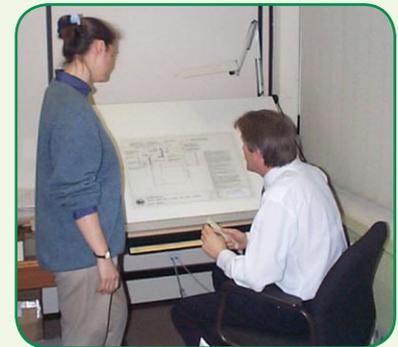
Our in-house home improvement agency called the Home Aid Partnership Scheme now jointly run with Taunton Dean Borough Council has been one of the most cost effective and efficient in Somerset. Set up over 10 years ago the agency has enjoyed great success and has attracted considerable external funding. The Home Aid Partnership Scheme provides help to elderly and vulnerable people by:

- Establishing what work needs to be done in consultation with the client, Occupational Therapy Service etc.
- Drawing up plans and specifications.
- Selecting builders.
- Helping with grant applications.
- Liaising with Building Societies, Banks, Charities etc to raise funds in addition to grants.
- Seeing the building works through from start to finish.

Two years ago in recognition of the useful role played by Home Improvement Agencies it was decided to develop an agency service across the whole of Somerset. The main reason for this is to provide more assistance to elderly and vulnerable clients and relieve pressure on the Occupational Therapists service and the NHS, thereby saving money and other resources. In our case it was decided to make a joint bid with Taunton Deane Borough Council to form a new combined agency.

Working with Foundations (the national co-ordinating body) and with support of the Supporting People Team, a successful bid was made to the Government for extra funding to expand the service. Following confirmation of funding a new joint agency was set up with Taunton Deane and a new Steering Group was formed. The new combined agency has been up and running for two years and new systems have bedded in well. The new agency benefits from the sharing of staff and other resources such as training to provide a more cost effective service to the public. Increased monitoring demanded by the funding bodies ensures a high quality service. A full time caseworker is being employed to help clients establish their needs and to provide advice on grant aid, loans and charitable funding for clients.

An annual review is published on the work of the agency and a business plan outlines plans for future development (see [appendix 2](#)).



*Occupational Therapist working with  
Home Aid Officer*

*“Thank you for your help  
over the replacement of our  
upstairs windows. The old  
house looks so much better  
with the new windows”*

**MONTACUTE RESIDENT**

## 13. THE HANDYMAN SCHEME

In the last three years the Handyman Service has become an integral part of the Home Aid Partnership Scheme. The Handyman visits people in their homes carrying out small essential repairs. The positive impact on the lives of disabled people of having apparently minor works carried out, such as easing jammed windows, replacing fuses and light bulbs, etc, cannot be underestimated. The Handyman also fits locks and other security devices for vulnerable people, which helps reduce the fear of crime. Last year the Handyman did over 350 jobs and positive feedback from clients has been exceptional. This year extra resources have been found to employ another part-time Handyman to meet ever increasing demand.



*Handyman Bruce Denney*



*“How wonderful to get some  
help at an affordable price”*

**TINTINHULL RESIDENT**

## 14. THE HOME MAINTENANCE SCHEME

The home maintenance scheme is a project based scheme aimed at developing one-off area based projects to improve neighbourhoods or streets or blocks of houses.

This initiative encourages homeowners to carry out home repairs with limited grant aid. By working together in groups, with advice and assistance from Council officers, it is hoped that homeowners will be able to improve streets or terraces of houses themselves. Joint repair schemes for roofs, gutters and the facades of buildings do much to improve the living environment. We have published material and set up a website with information on approved building contractors, a concessionary tool hire scheme and other practical advice.

Following the initial success of a pilot scheme in Area West, we are now seeking to develop other schemes across the District.



## 15. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995 (HECA)

The UK Government is committed to reducing the level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the country by 20% from 1990 levels by 2010. This is in addition to our legally binding target under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol of reducing greenhouse gases as a whole by 25% by 2012. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Control (IPCC) have recommended a reduction of 60% in the 1990 levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050.

Under HECA the Council has a statutory duty to achieve a 30% improvement in energy efficiency by 2011. We achieved an overall improvement in energy efficiency of residential accommodation of 3.9% in 2005/2006, bringing the cumulative total to 16.02% since 1996. We have worked in partnership with the other four District Councils in Somerset as part of the Somerset Energy Group. This group in turn has commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy in Bristol to work on its behalf in promoting energy efficiency initiatives.

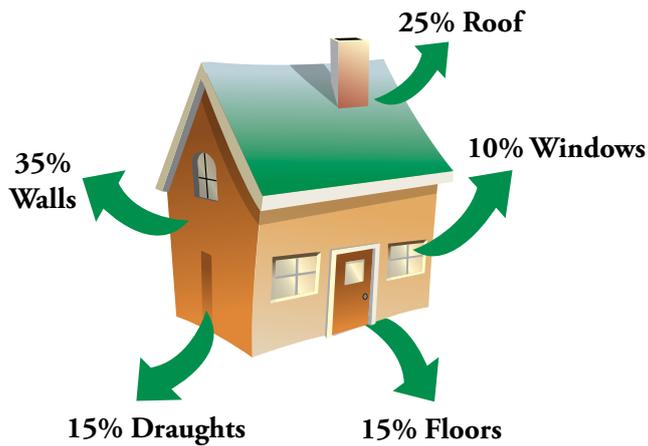
Work so far has included:

- Creating a free energy efficiency advice line for the public.
- A Warm Front grant referral scheme for householders in need.
- A Warm Front grant mail shot to 13,000 housing benefit recipients across the District advising them of help that is available to insulate their homes.
- An energy efficient display bus visiting the District to carry out promotional work on four separate occasions.
- The distribution of 3,000 low energy light bulbs to warden assisted accommodation.
- A Council Tax rebate scheme of £80 per household with British Gas to pay for energy and efficiency measures.
- Setting up of the Somerset Warm & Well Scheme to provide insulation grants for those on low income who miss out on income benefit related assistance.
- Presentations to Somerset residents.



In addition we provide grant assistance to improve energy efficiency through our grants programme and have continued to play an active part in the South West HECA Forum.

### WHERE DOES THE HEAT GO?



*“Nothing is of greater importance to all of us today than the environment and the future of our planet. As councils and national governments we need to work together with citizens and businesses to provide a clean and green local environment and make sure that we are all tackling climate change and making best use of the world’s limited resources.”*

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENT  
SECRETARY HILARY BENN  
2007

## 16. FUEL POVERTY

A fuel poor household is one that cannot afford to adequately heat its home at reasonable cost. The most widely accepted definition of a fuel poor household is one that needs to spend over 10% of its income on fuel. Whilst fuel poverty is addressed as part of our HECA programme it merits separate consideration because of its importance. There is a clear link between fuel poverty and ill health.

The Council has helped shape and has signed up to a Somerset-wide strategy called Somerset Energy West to tackle fuel poverty. This strategy is aimed at providing low cost solutions for the provision of heating and insulation. The Council is also a founder member of the Affordable Warmth Partnership, which aims to promote action with a wide range of partners including Somerset PCT, Age Concern and various utility companies and other organisations.

Tackling the problem in South Somerset will require a broad approach but the main emphasis is seen as the improvement of energy efficiency in the home. Our aim is to:

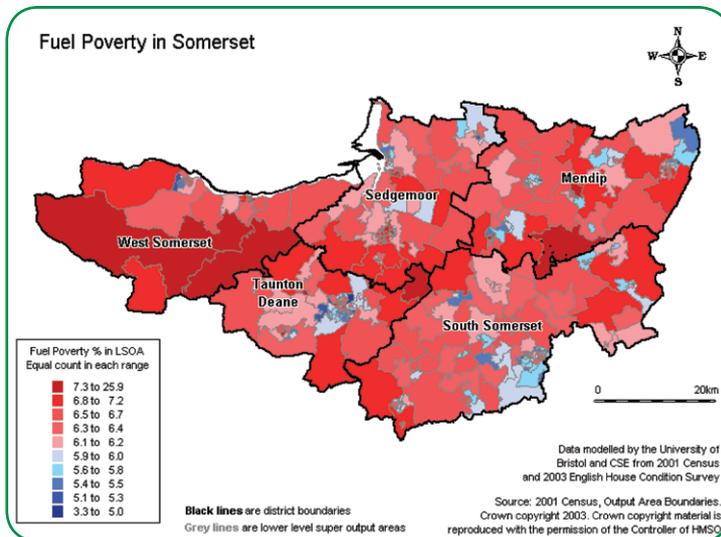
- Optimise the use of Warm Front grants and other such Government schemes to enable improvement work to be carried out.
- Promote the Somerset Warm and Well grant scheme and the British Gas Council Tax back insulation scheme.
- Arrange awareness training for a range of staff from different organisations who visit people in their homes so that they can give advice to homeowners on help available to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
- Utilise Home Repairs Assistance Grants for energy efficient measures where appropriate.
- Promote the free phone energy advice line



The main target groups fall into the following broad categories, as they are unlikely to have much disposable income:

- The elderly
- The disabled and the chronically sick.
- People on low income, particularly those with young children.

In order to reach these vulnerable people, who may be hard to reach by conventional methods, we are improving links with as many services and organisations as possible that might come into contact with them.



Source: Centre for Sustainable Energy

## 17. RADON

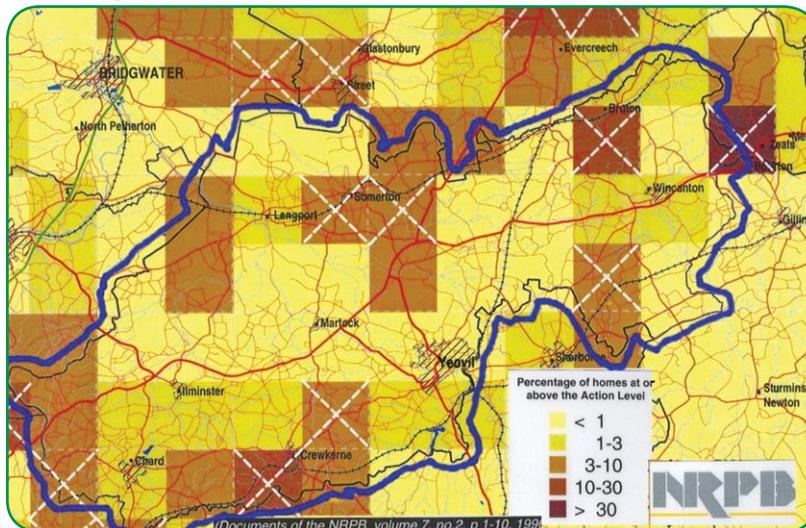
Radon is a naturally-occurring radioactive gas. It is produced by the decay of small amounts of uranium in rocks deep underground. It can migrate through the soil and enter buildings through minute cracks in the structure. Expert advice is that exposure to high levels of radon over long periods can increase the risk of lung cancer. The Council gives advice, and, in some cases grant aid, to help people reduce high levels of radon in their homes.

The Health Protection Agency (formerly known as the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB)) has set an “*Action Level*” of 200 Becquerel’s per cubic metre of radon in air which should not be exceeded. More information can be found on their website [www.hpa.org.uk/radiation](http://www.hpa.org.uk/radiation).



### *Estimated proportion of homes at or above the Action Level in each 5 km grid square in South Somerset*

(Axis values are the coordinates of the national grid. The Action Level is 200 Bq m<sup>3</sup>. 5 km with a 5% risk or greater are marked with a dashed-white cross)



*Health Protection Agency grid map of radon levels within the South Somerset district*

## 18. HOME LOAN SCHEME

**W**ith ever reducing resources for grant aid and with ongoing increasing demand it has become necessary to look elsewhere to fund home repairs and improvements. Over the past 3 years we have worked in partnership with the Wessex Reinvestment Trust and a consortium of nine other local authorities in the South West to develop a home loan scheme.

By working with Wessex Reinvestments it is possible to lever in private finance to fund home loans. This coupled with ongoing financial support from the local authorities enables a far greater number of unsatisfactory properties to be made decent than would otherwise have been the case. The scheme has the support of the DCLG and the South West Housing Body, which has given £2.65 million towards its development. The scheme has been slowly developing and the number of referrals has been picking up.

It is not intended to replace the grant regime with loans but rather to use loans as an extra tool to tackle disrepair and unfitness. Loans are primarily intended for people who are above benefit levels on low incomes who would not ordinarily be able to access High Street loans. See [Grant Policy 8 on page 49](#) for details of loan eligibility.

We are at the forefront of development nationally with the introduction of this scheme.

This is an exciting area of development for local authorities with the potential to save the Council considerable amount of money in the long term by recycling funds available.



## 19. WORKING WITH LANDLORDS

In the last two years we have re-launched the private sector landlords forum known as the Supported Landlords Network. We have held meetings with landlords to discuss matters such as housing benefits, energy efficiency and other grants for landlords as well as tax issues for landlords. These meetings have been very successful and have helped us to build a positive relationship with our local landlords. We intend to hold future training events for landlords in the coming months on the latest changes to landlord and tenant law.

Working closely with landlords is crucial in our strategy to improve and develop the private sector. We recognise that landlords have considerable skill and experience in developing and letting out property. From our previous experience in working with the Landlords Forum we see the need to focus on the factors that make it commercially attractive for landlords to work with us. Loss of privately rented accommodation is a common reason for homelessness and we have employed a Private Sector Tenancy Sustainment Officer who will work with private landlords and tenants to resolve problems and maintain tenancies in the private sector. By ensuring for instance that landlords are paid their rent on time we hope to be able to avoid evictions and reduce homelessness.

Using examples of *'spend to save policies'* such as that piloted by Colchester Borough Council we have developed pro-active policies to tackle homelessness. We recognise the need to create incentives for landlords to work with us and we are developing mutually beneficial schemes. This opportunity for creative working has the potential to help contribute towards tackling our homelessness problems.



*Meeting of the Landlords Forum*

## 20. MOBILE HOMES

The Council is responsible for the licensing and inspection of residential and touring mobile home sites across the District. There are twenty two sites in the District which can cater for over 300 mobile homes. Such things as the number and type of mobile homes, fire fighting equipment and the condition of general amenities are all controlled by the site license conditions. All sites are regularly inspected based on a priority based inspection system to ensure they comply with relevant standards. Most of the sites in the District are occupied by retired people and are generally in good order. In recent years however we have seen a trend for some mobile homes to be occupied by migrant and seasonal agricultural workers. We will however be monitoring the situation to ensure that overcrowding or a reduction in standards does not occur.



## 21. MIGRANT WORKERS/ASYLUM SEEKERS/ BLACK & MINORITY ETHNIC

In recent months we have seen an influx of migrant workers into the District – many from Portugal and Eastern Europe. Concern has been expressed about the housing of these and other migrant workers. We have in place a pro-active programme to inspect the accommodation of such workers to see that it is up to standard and ensure that they are not overcrowded. Migrant workers often do not understand their rights and due to language difficulties could be exploited. It is our policy to ensure their rights are fully protected. Likewise the number of Black & Minority Ethnic residents in the District has substantially increased in the last five years.

The Council has recently contributed towards the development of a welcome pack and a website [www.newtosomerset.com](http://www.newtosomerset.com) for migrant workers that will provide useful information to enable them to settle into the community.



It is likely that in the future more migrants/asylum seekers will be seeking accommodation in the District and we need to be certain that they are housed in satisfactory conditions. The Council has a newly revised Equalities and Diversity Policy and it is intended that everyone in housing need is dealt with in a fair and equitable manner. Unrestricted migration however, is putting pressure on the housing market and will inevitably require more Council resources.



*Portuguese Café, Chard*

*A lack of practical information on arrival left many migrants ignorant of the conditions attached to their immigration status, how to access health care, where to obtain advice and their rights at work.*

**SOURCE: JOSEPH ROWNTREE  
FOUNDATION**

## 22. GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

The District has always had a resident gypsy population and we often get visiting gypsies travelling through. The Council was recently awarded funding by the DCLG towards the cost of refurbishing the gypsy and traveller sites controlled by the Council at Ilton and Tintinhull, which will include 4 further long-term residential pitches at Ilton, an addition to the 14 pitches already provided on the two sites. We now have some of the best permanent sites in the South West. We are currently looking at the feasibility of expanding our facilities for transient travellers and gypsies and would like to develop some small transit sites across the District in the near future.

Any proposals put forward however would be subject to full consultation with all involved and would only proceed if broad agreement could be reached. We shall also be talking to our partners elsewhere in the county and region about the wider issues associated with transit sites and will be responding to the latest Government initiatives on this matter.

Apart from the residents of the Council sites, there are seven privately funded family sites with planning permission and two unauthorised family sites without planning permission as well as one New Traveller unauthorised encampment, as of the July 2007 Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Count. There are also many housed gypsies and travellers living in South Somerset.



*SSDC Residential Gypsy &  
Traveller Site*

*At any one time there are likely to be around 5,000 Gypsy or Traveller Caravans on unauthorised encampments in England.*

**SOURCE: TRAVELLER HEALTH  
IN SOMERSET-JOAN BATSTONE,  
HEALTH VISITOR (2002)**

## 23. ACTION PLAN AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS

|   | KEY TASK   | TARGET         | KEY ACTION  | RESPONSIBLE OFFICER | OUTPUT   | PERFORMANCE MEASURE  | RESOURCE   | RELEVANT POLICY RECOMMENDATION (SEE SECTION 2) |
|---|--|----------------|---|---------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | Produce Revised Private Sector Housing Strategy including Grant Policies     | September 2007 | Agreed by Management Team – July 2007                                   | Alasdair Bell       | Production of Private Sector Housing Strategy including Grant Policies | Strategy and Policies adopted by District Executive – September 2007 | Deputy Head of Service. Research & Support Officer             | All grant policy recommendations               |
| 2 | Improve the energy efficiency of at least 300 private sector homes per annum | March 2008     | Deliver fuel poverty publicity programme across District by July 2007   | Julia Cordy         | The energy efficiency of 300 homes improved                            | Results published in the annual HECA report – September 2008         | Environmental Health Officer and capital investment of £40,000 | Grant Policy 1                                 |
| 3 | Expand the Handyman Service  | 31 March 2008  | Handyman Service expanded to include 2 fulltime Handymen by August 2007 | Martin Chapman      | Assist at least 400 clients by March 2008                              | High level of service satisfaction achieved via survey               | Handymen   | Grant Policy 1                                 |
| 4 | Publish the Home Aid annual review   | 31 July 2007   | Publication of the Home Aid annual review                               | Alasdair Bell       | Review published and circulated to stakeholders                        | Annual Review published on the Website                               | £1,500 plus Officer time                                       | None   |
| 5 | Deliver Empty Property Strategy  | 31 March 2008  | Approve 12 empty property grant applications                            | Alasdair Bell       | Re-house 12 homeless families  | 12 properties brought back into use                                  | £100,000 plus Officer time                                     | Grant Policy 3                                 |
| 6 | Develop Landlord's Forum (Supported Landlord's Network)                      | 31 March 2008  | Hold 2 meetings of the Landlords Forum by March 2008                    | Martin Chapman      | Work with Landlords to tackle homelessness                             | 90% of all Landlords invited in attendance                           | Officer time   | Grant Policy 3 & 4                             |
| 7 | Deliver HMO inspection programme   | March 2008     | Inspection of 50 HMOs to be carried out by March 2008                   | Martin Chapman      | Improvement in condition of 50 HMOs                                    | 50 HMO's inspected   | Officer time and £60,000 capital in HMO grants                 | Grant Policy 4                                 |

| KEY TASK   | TARGET         | KEY ACTION  | RESPONSIBLE OFFICER | OUTPUT   | PERFORMANCE MEASURE                                      | RESOURCE                             | RELEVANT POLICY RECOMMENDATION (SEE SECTION 2) |
|--|----------------|---|---------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| 8 HMO's, where applicable, to be licensed                              | March 2008     | All license applications sent out by July 2007                      | Martin Chapman      | 30 HMO's to fully meet licensing conditions                        | 30 HMO's to be licensed by March 2008                    | Officer time plus publicity expenses | Grant Policy 4                                 |
| 9 Expand the Home Loan scheme in conjunction with Wessex Reinvestment  | March 2008     | Carry out publicity initiatives to promote scheme by September 2007 | Alasdair Bell       | 10 non decent homes improved by use of loan                        | 10 loans approved and relevant work carried out          | £70,000 and Officer time             | Grant Policy 8                                 |
| 10 Complete county-wide B.R.E. House Condition Survey.                 | October 2007   | B.R.E. House Condition Survey commissioned                          | Alasdair Bell       | Better targeting of resources based on latest Stock condition data | Stock condition survey of District produced              | £40,000 and Officer time             | None   |
| 11 Implement Housing Health & Safety rating system                     | On going       | Housing Health & Safety rating system being used by Officers        | Martin Chapman      | Health needs of tenants more effectively dealt with                | All relevant non-decent homes inspected using HHSRS      | Officer time                         | Grant Policy 1                                 |
| 12 Further develop the Home Aid Partnership Scheme with Taunton Deane  | On going       | Agree contracts for continuation of Scheme with Funder's            | Martin Chapman      | Expansion and continuation of the Home Aid Partnership scheme      | 300 clients assisted (see Home Aid annual report)        | £50,000 and Officer time             | Grant Policy 1, 2, 3, 7 & 8                    |
| 13 Deliver the disabled facility grants programme                      | On going       | Approve/organise 200 grant aided DFG adaptations                    | Martin Chapman      | Improve the living conditions of 200 people                        | 200 DFG's delivered                                      | £580,000 pa plus Officer time        | Grant Policy 2                                 |
| 14 Ensure all homes in the private sector meet the decent homes target | On going       | Inspect and upgrade 50 non-decent homes                             | Martin Chapman      | 50 non-decent homes to be brought up to standard                   | 30 HRA grants delivered                                  | £100,000 pa plus Officer time        | Grant Policy 1                                 |
| 15 Produce revised HMO policy document                                 | September 2007 | Agreed by EH&CP Management Team – September 2007                    | Martin Chapman      | Production of HMO Policy document                                  | New policy adopted and Landlords informed – October 2007 | £1,000 plus Officer time             | Grant Policy 3 & 4                             |



# PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANT POLICIES

## Section 2

**Grant Policy – Detailed provisions of the financial assistance to be provided by South Somerset District Council for the repair and maintenance of private sector housing**

## INTRODUCTION

The following policy describes the purpose for which grant aid and other financial assistance will be provided by South Somerset District Council for private sector housing. Grant aid and other financial assistance is awarded under the provision of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002. In awarding grants the detailed policy provided in the Department of Environment circular 17/96 would be followed unless otherwise stated in this policy. Grant aid will be available for the provision of Home Repairs Assistance Grants, Disabled Facilities Grants, Empty Property Grants and HMO Grants. In addition to this subsidised home loans will be provided.

## GRANT POLICY 1: HOME REPAIRS ASSISTANCE - DEALING WITH ESSENTIAL REPAIRS

**H**ome Repairs Assistance grants are available to provide grant aid to enable vulnerable people keep their homes wind and weather-proof and meet the *'Decent Homes'* standard.

To be eligible for this type of assistance an applicant must:

- a) Be an owner or legal occupant of a dwelling who lives in the dwelling as his/her only or main residence.
- b) Be aged 18 or over on the date of application.
- c) Have an owner's interest in the dwelling, alone or jointly with others, or be occupying the dwelling under a right of exclusive occupation granted for life with at least five years to run.
- d) Have a legal duty or power to carry out the works in question.
- e) Be in receipt of one of the following income related benefits; income support, income based job seekers allowance, working tax credit with a total annual income of less than £14,600 (this figure subject to an annual review) or equivalent, housing benefit, Council Tax benefit or disabled persons tax credit.
- f) As an alternative to c) above, an applicant may be an occupier of a mobile home, who has lived in it for at least three years and is presently living on a permanent licensed residential site and is liable to pay Council Tax.

The grant will be up to a total maximum of £5,000 in any three year period. This grant will be entered as a charge on the Land Charge Register. The grant shall be repaid in full if the house/mobile home is sold within ten years.

**NOTE:** If another Council grant such as a listed building grant is awarded, the total amount of grant aid given is not to exceed £5,000.

When offering grant aid an initial grant offer of only £2,500 will be made. The client will be offered a loan to pay for any outstanding work costing more than this. Only if the grant applicant cannot obtain a loan will the full £5,000 grant be offered.

The purposes for which Home Repairs Assistance can be used are outlined below. All applications would be prioritised with those with the most pressing needs being dealt with first.

**a) General Repairs**

For urgent and essential repairs to keep properties wind and weatherproof and prevent them from becoming unsuitable for habitation. To deal with other repairs and improvements concerning matters that could adversely affect the health and safety of the occupant (as defined under the HHSRS system), such as serious rising damp, the renewal of old lead pipes, dangerous electrics and gas fittings or missing standard amenities. To also deal with any other matters to enable the home meet the 'Decent Homes' standard.

**b) Radon Remediation**

For works to reduce radon levels in domestic property where it exceeds the radon action level (200 Bqm<sup>3</sup>).

**c) Energy Efficiency**

To contribute towards the making of properties more energy efficient where cost effective to do so in situations where full funding from other sources is not available.

This form of grant aid would allow people to apply for the cost of gas condensing and other energy efficient boilers, cavity fill, solar panels or double glazing as well as more usual things, such as loft insulation, lagging of cylinder tanks, thermostatic radiator controls and energy saving light bulbs, etc.

**d) Home Security Grants**

To pay for works to improve the security of homes not covered by other Home Security Schemes. This could include the following items such as:

- deadlocks to front and rear doors
- patio door locks
- window locks
- security spy holes
- strengthening substandard doors
- the installation of smoke alarms

**e) Relocation Grants**

Funding would be provided with the cost of moving house if this was the most cost efficient option for the client and the Council. This could also include the cost of providing temporary mobile home accommodation in situations where someone's house was beyond the cost of economic repair.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

*It is recommended that:*

- *Home Repairs Assistance be made available to applicants described in (a) to (f) and generally for the purposes outlined in (a) to (e).*
- *A limit of £5,000 per grant be set and that a total maximum of £5,000 in grant aid be given per property every three year period. The three year period to run from the certified completion date of the first grant arranged. This fact to be recorded as a charge against the property on the Local Land Charges Register.*
- *Any grant aid awarded must be repaid in full if the property is sold within ten years of the certified completion date.*
- *An initial Home Repairs Assistance grant of only £2,500 will be offered to all applicants. The grant applicant will be expected to apply for a loan for all works costing more than £2,500. Only if the applicant cannot obtain a loan will the full £5,000 grant be offered.*

## GRANT POLICY 2: DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS - HELPING DISABLED PEOPLE IN NEED

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are awarded to disabled applicants to provide specialist facilities to enable them to remain in their homes. Typically these include stair lifts, handrails, bathroom adaptations and heating as well as larger scale extensions for more complex needs. In the last three or four years demands for these grants has steadily increased, due to the expansion of the Care in the Community Programme, an increasing elderly population and to increased expectations from the public. These days a lot of grants tend to be awarded to elderly people who, due to general infirmity associated with old age can no longer use their baths or climb stairs and consequently have a need for replacement showers or stair lifts. In all cases we act upon the recommendations of Occupational Therapists employed by the Social Services Department of Somerset County Council. It is arguable that by providing such facilities the need for re-housing, particularly into warden controlled accommodation is reduced.

We enjoy a good working relationship with the Occupational Therapists and have an agreement by which all DFGs are prioritised according to a points rating system and thereafter placed into categories A, B and C. We have regular bi-monthly meetings with the Occupational Therapists to agree how the available budget will be spent. By involving the Occupational Therapists closely in the budgetary process it is intended that expenditure will be contained within budget. DFGs continue to be mandatory for approved works under the new legislation and the existing mean testing procedures continue to apply.

Currently the limit for mandatory DFGs is £25,000.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:

*It is recommended that:*

- *Mandatory DFGs of up to £25,000 be awarded with the discretion to pay grant aid up to £30,000. Any requests for funding other than this should be referred to the Exceptions and Appeals Panel.*
- *DFGs should be available to the occupants of mobile homes as well as ordinary houses.*
- *DFGs should be available to adapt a dwelling to enable a disabled person who lives or proposes to live in the dwelling as his or her only or main residence to be cared for (this allows for a situation where someone wishes to bring an elderly disabled relative to come and live with them).*

## GRANT POLICY 3: EMPTY PROPERTY GRANTS – CREATING AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION

The Empty Property Grant Scheme has been running for some time now and has proved to be very successful in bringing back empty property into use. Several high profile schemes in town centre locations have enabled unoccupied accommodation above shops and offices to be brought back into use. This has both helped provide much needed accommodation as well as assisting in town centre regeneration. It is therefore recommended that the existing scheme be continued and that total grant aid of up to £12,000 per unit (£11,000 for renovation works plus £1,000 for energy efficiency works) be awarded to create flats or other accommodation in property that has stood empty for at least six months. To be eligible for an empty property grant the landlord will be required to give the Council nomination rights for five years to re-house tenants from the South Somerset Housing Register. The property will also be let at an agreed fair rent.

The maximum figure of £11,000 for renovation works will only be available for a full size two bedroom flat or similar and lower figures will be negotiated for smaller units of accommodation. In addition to the £11,000 grant for renovation works an extra £1,000 will be allocated for energy efficiency work.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

*It is RECOMMENDED that the Committee agree to the continued awarding of Empty Property Grants of up to £12,000 to owners of empty properties for conversions and for flats over shops, subject to:*

- 1) The amount of grant being based on the cost of the works. A grant of 80% of the cost of the agreed works will be awarded until the maximum amount is reached (e.g. to achieve a grant of £11,000 for renovation works, £13,750 of renovation work must be carried out).*
- 2) Prior to the making of the grant application, it can be clearly demonstrated that the property has been stood empty for at least 6 months. Where property has been empty for less than 6 months applications can be referred to the Exceptions and Appeals Panel where they will be considered.*
- 3) Agreement that rents charged during the five-year letting period would not exceed a level as being eligible for the payment of housing benefit.*
- 4) That the property is let to a tenant nominated by the Council from the South Somerset Housing Needs Register for five years from the certified completion date of the grant.*
- 5) That all of the other regulations in the Department of the Environment circular 17/16, that apply to renovation grants hereby apply to Empty Property Grants.*
- 6) That in addition to this grant being awarded in 1 above, up to an extra £1,000 be awarded for energy efficiency measures at 100% of the agreed cost.*

## GRANT POLICY 4: HMO GRANTS – IMPROVING RENTED ACCOMMODATION

HMO Grants are grants designed to upgrade facilities and the means of escape in case of fire in houses in multiple occupation (legal jargon for bed sit type accommodation). It has been recognised elsewhere in this Strategy that HMOs are key providers of rented accommodation for single people, often housing the young and vulnerable.

With recent changes in housing benefit regulations they will continue to meet an essential and increasing need. HMOs are in fact the main type of accommodation used to deal with single homelessness, and the rent deposit scheme has been used to help young people gain access to HMO accommodation.

Recent surveys of HMOs have shown that they tend to be the poorest form of any housing tenure. In recent months increased efforts have been made via enforcement work to upgrade substandard HMOs. The Council has a published HMO Strategy Document 2002-2007 that outlines the standards expected and the steps being taken to upgrade HMOs (see [appendix 2](#)).

In the Housing Act 2004 the licensing of HMOs over three or more storeys with five or more tenants was introduced.

Experience has shown that when trying to upgrade substandard HMOs, it is best to develop a policy of combining firm enforcement action with the provision of grant aid where appropriate. It is therefore proposed that our existing policy be continued whereby the Council gives HMO Grants as an incentive to assist good landlords to improve substandard HMOs.

*The level of HMO grant to be awarded.*

To enable the upgrading of HMOs it is proposed to continue with the following grant policy. The grant aid offered will enable the upgrading of existing HMOs but could also be used towards the creation of new HMOs. The policy will be that:

1. Grant aid will be available to fund up to 60% of the cost of providing adequate means of escape in case of fire in HMOs.
2. Grant aid will be available to fund up to 40% of the cost of providing necessary amenities and of carrying out other essential repairs in HMOs.
3. The limit for grant aid be set at £11,000 plus an energy efficiency contribution (see 4 below). Applications for grant aid in excess of £11,000 will be considered by the Exceptions and Appeals Panel if exceptional circumstances apply.
4. That up to £1,000 is awarded to pay for energy efficiency measures.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

*It is RECOMMENDED that paragraphs 1-4 is adopted as future policy for determining the level of HMO grant aid.*

## GRANT POLICY 5: EXCEPTIONS AND APPEALS PANEL

In framing any grant policy there will inevitably be exceptions to the rules and it is likely that there will be appeals made against officers decisions concerning grants. It is proposed that the Health & Housing Portfolio Holder, the Deputy Head of Service for Environmental Health & Community Protection and two elected members make up the Exception and Appeals panel and be given delegated authority to deal with any exceptions to the agreed policy and deal with any appeals concerning grants made by the public. It is also recommended that the Housing Portfolio Holder be given delegated authority to select new members for the Exception and Appeals Panel as and when members retire from the panel.

Whilst the Council will have an agreed policy in place, it is suggested that the Exceptions and Appeals Panel be given the authority to consider any grant applications that falls broadly in line with the policy. This would allow grant aid to be given in exceptional circumstances where it is clearly to the benefit of the Council and the applicant to do so.

### RECOMMENDATION 5:

*It is recommended that the arrangements outlined for the operation of the Exception and Appeals Panel be adopted.*

## GRANT POLICY 6: CLAW BACK PROVISIONS

The Council currently has a policy of demanding the repayment of grants where the future occupation and/or associated conditions of the grant are breached. It is intended that this policy should generally continue with any requests for the waiving of repayment conditions being referred to the Exceptions and Appeals Panel. The agreement to waive such conditions only being given in exceptional circumstances.

### RECOMMENDATION 6:

*It is recommended that the policy relating to the claw back provisions for grants be agreed.*

## GRANT POLICY 7: REUSE OF SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT

Where grant aid is provided for specialist medical equipment (e.g. stair lifts etc) and it becomes surplus to the needs of the client during the claw back period the Council will exercise its right to reclaim the equipment and allocate it for the use of another needy individual.

### RECOMMENDATION 7:

*It is recommended that this policy be agreed and that any grant awarded be made conditional upon this fact.*

## GRANT POLICY 8: HOME LOAN POLICY– ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR HOME LOANS

The Council has been running the Home Loan Scheme in partnership with the Wessex Reinvestment Trust (WRT) for the last three years. Under the contractual arrangements with WRT, they will provide loans to any clients we refer although it should be borne in mind that the Council is paying to subsidise the loans given. As such the Council must continue to have a policy over whom we are prepared to refer (WRT is only allowed to take referrals directly from the Council). It is therefore recommended that loans are made available in the following situations for the following clients:

1. For individuals or couples with an individual or joint income after expenses of less than £125 per week
2. For people living in non-decent homes
3. For vulnerable people

This policy has been deliberately set in a flexible manner, as this is a relatively new scheme, which is still developing. It is likely that the policy will need to be revised and amended in the coming months. It is suggested that the Exception and Appeals Panel be given authority to make minor amendments to the scheme.

### RECOMMENDATION 8:

*It is recommended that home loans be made available in the situations described in 1-3 and that the Exceptions and Appeals Panel be given delegated authority to make minor amendments to the scheme.*



# **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING APPENDICES**

## **Section 3**

## APPENDIX 1: THE CORPORATE CONTEXT

In 2005 the Council published its Corporate Plan 2005-2012. This includes a number of corporate aims and objectives that relate to the Private Sector Housing Strategy. The most relevant ones are as follows:

**Aim 1:** Deliver well managed cost effective services valued by our customers.

**Objective 2:** Maintain above 75% the people satisfied with the way the Council runs the district (demonstrated by public consultation/feedback on grant policy etc).

**Aim 2:** Increase economic vitality and prosperity.

**Objective 8:** Work in partnership with the public and private sector in developing and delivery of Market Towns Vision (empty property grants to help improve town centre locations as does the home maintenance scheme).

**Aim 3:** Improve health and well being of our citizens.

**Objective 10:** Prevent homelessness by 10% (home repair work etc enables people to remain in their own homes).

**Objective 11:** Work in partnership to improve health prospects for all (work to improve housing conditions that result in improved health).

**Objective 13:** Achieve appropriate balance of new housing provision (HMO and EPG grants).

**Aim 4:** Ensure safe sustainable communities.

**Objective 14:** Maintain above 10% the people who generally feel safe in their communities (grants for locks/home safety devices etc).

**Objective 16:** Maintain above 80% the people satisfied with their neighbourhoods as a place to live (work to inspect HMOs carry out home maintenance schemes etc).

**Aim 5:** Promote a balanced natural and built environment (home repairs assistance, loans and empty property grants all contribute towards an improved built environment).

**Aim 19:** Have SSDC as one of the top exemplar Councils in the country reducing CO2 emissions by 2012 (The Home Energy Efficiency scheme as part of our HECA programme with projects like British Gas Council Tax Rebate Scheme for Energy Efficiency).

## APPENDIX 2: BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- All SSDC Committee reports referred to in this document are available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The Somerset Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy – available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The SSDC Houses in Multiple Occupation Policy – available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The SSDC Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 2006 – available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The Somerset Together Community Strategy – available on the internet at: [www.southsomersettogether.org.uk](http://www.southsomersettogether.org.uk)
- The South West Regional Housing Strategy 2005-16– available on the Internet at: [www.gosw.gov.uk](http://www.gosw.gov.uk), [www.housingcorp.gov.uk](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk) and [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk) also on SSDC website [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The Home Aid annual Review available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The Home Aid Business plan available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Health & Well-being Strategy – available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- *‘Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All’* – available on the Internet at: [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)
- The Decent Homes guidance document available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The Somerset policy for houses in multiple occupation available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Migrant workers in Somerset available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Report on ethnicity in Somerset available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- The HMO fire Service agreement-working protocol regarding fire safety enforcement- available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Local authorities work on the private sector-DCLG and IDEA publication-available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Somerset Supporting People Strategy 2002 – 2005 – available on the Internet at: [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)
- Key Lines of Enquiry private sector housing-available on the Internet at: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)
- Disabled Facilities grant programme the governments proposals to improve programme delivery available on the Internet at: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Housing and Social Needs Analysis Data – available from the South West Strategic Health Authority at Wellsprings Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7PG
- Key Issues for the Future of South Somerset – South Somerset Together, Local Strategic Partnership – available on the Internet at [www.southsomerset.gov.uk](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk)
- Traveller Health in Somerset – A Multidimensional Approach – available from Paul Goltz, Community Liaison Officer, South Somerset District Council, Petters House, Petters Way, Yeovil BA20 1EA
- South West Housing Body – Housing in the South West – Overview Report South Somerset February 2005 – available on the internet at [www.southwesthousingbody.org.uk](http://www.southwesthousingbody.org.uk)

## APPENDIX 3: POINTS AT SOUTH SOMERSET DISTRICT COUNCIL

|   |                             |   |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Benefits – Council Tax and Housing Benefit        | Benefits Unit               | Please telephone<br>01935 462462<br>for all staff listed. |
| Choice Based Lettings                             | Kim Close                   |   |
| Community Safety; Crime and Disorder              | Steve Brewer                |   |
| Complaints/enforcement                            | Martin Chapman              |   |
| Council finance and financial strategy            | Donna Parham                |   |
| Disabilities – grants for aids and adaptations    | Paul Rees                   |   |
| Home Aid partnership scheme                       | Barry Cullimore             |   |
| Economic Development and Regeneration Initiatives | Gerard Tucker               |   |
| Environmental Protection                          | Vicki Dawson                |   |
| Empty Homes strategy/grants                       | Alasdair Bell               |   |
| Ethnic Minorities                                 | Paul Goltz                  |   |
| Gypsies and other Travellers                      | Paul Goltz                  |   |
| Handyperson Scheme                                | Gill Wood                   |   |
| Health & Well-Being                               | Stuart Brock                |   |
| Head of Service                                   | Laurence Willis             |   |
| Home Energy Conservation                          | Julia Cordy                 |   |
| Home Maintenance Project                          | Paul Rees                   |   |
| Home Loans  | Paul Rees                   |   |
| Home Repairs Assistance                           | Paul Rees                   |   |
| Homelessness and Housing Advice                   | Kirsty Jones                |   |
| Housing – conditions in private sector;           | Martin Chapman              |   |
| Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)              | Martin Chapman              |   |
| Housing- Strategic Housing                        | Colin McDonald              |   |
| Mobile Homes                                      | Roger Corbett               |   |
| Private Sector Housing Policy                     | Alasdair Bell               |   |
| Social Housing Development                        | Lynne Axford                |   |
| Supporting People; Strategic Housing              | Sally McCarthy              |   |
| Tenancy Sustainment                               | James Clark/Bridget Gloyens |   |

E-mail addresses: to e-mail any of the above people please use the following format  
**forename.surname@southsomerset.gov.uk** for example **colin.mcdonald@southsomerset.gov.uk**

## APPENDIX 4: KEY FINDINGS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE CONDITION AND ENERGY SURVEY BY CHEC

- 1.1 The rate of unfitness in private sector dwellings in the district is 2.1%.
- 1.2 The cost of immediate repairs to make the unfit dwellings fit for habitation in South Somerset District Council is **£14.3 million**. The cost of putting the unfit dwellings into reasonable repair (carrying out immediate repairs to make fit, and renewing elements which need replacement within 10 years) adds a further **£12.3 million**.
- 1.3 4,554 (8%) of the dwellings were found to be in **substantial disrepair**. The cost of repairs to those dwellings that were not unfit but were in substantial disrepair (i.e. needing works worth more than £2,500) up to a reasonable standard is over **£52 million**.
- 1.4 The total cost of bringing the private sector dwellings in South Somerset District Council up to a reasonable standard is almost **£79 million**.
- 1.5 The Council faces a **potential grants demand** in excess of **£19 million** for means tested grants that are only targeted at bringing the unfit properties up to a state of reasonable repair.
- 1.6 26% of the private sector households are aged over 60, and **20%** of unfit housing is occupied by households aged **over 74**.
- 1.7 **70%** of households with residents over 60 years of age need immediate repair works carrying out to their homes. The majority of those dwellings require works costing up to £5,000, which could possibly be aided by a Home Repair Assistance Grant. The cost of these repairs is estimated at almost **£3 million**.
- 1.8 **7.8%** of households contain at least one **disabled person**. A Disabled Facilities Grant Requirement of **£4.3million** has been forecast from the survey results. The information gathered is purely from the respondent to the survey, and would need verification by the Social Services prior to Grant aid being made available.
- 1.9 The percentage of **unfit dwellings within the private rented sector** is **7%**; this is lower than the national figure of 10.2%
- 1.10 The total costs to bring the unfit and substantial disrepair dwellings in the private rented sector to a reasonable standard (urgent repairs plus renewal of elements which need replacement within 10 years) is estimated as **£8million**.
- 1.11 **None** of the **HMO's** inspected in the survey by CHEC were **unfit for habitation**.
- 1.12 Over **£½ million** needs to be spent on repairs to HMO's in substantial disrepair in South Somerset District Council, excluding any fire precaution works.
- 1.13 The average **SAP (energy efficiency) rating** for the private sector dwellings in South Somerset District Council is 54, higher than the average SAP rate in the UK, which is 51.

- 1.14** 19% of properties have a SAP rating less than 40, and 81% above 40.
- 1.15** The number of **vacant dwellings** identified in the survey is estimated at **2.1%** (1,162). It is estimated that **10%** (97) of the vacant dwellings are unfit, and the total cost of repairs to deal with the unfitness and repair the dwellings for the next 10 years would be £1.5 million.
- 1.16** Almost 90% of the private sector stock have secure doors and windows, and 19% have burglar alarms fitted.
- 1.17** **Summary of dwelling tenure and unfitness in the private sector within South Somerset District Council**

| Tenure                 | Total number of dwellings | % of private sector stock | Number of unfit dwellings | % of unfit dwellings of total no. of unfits | % of tenure of unfit dwellings |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Owner occupier         | 53386                     | 94.4%                     | 872                       | 75.0%                                       | 1.6%                           |
| Private rental         | 2035                      | 3.6%                      | 0                         | 0.0%  | 0.0%                           |
| Other rental agreement | 484                       | 0.9%                      | 194                       | 16.7%                                       | 40.1%                          |
| Tenure unobtainable    | 677                       | 1.2%                      | 97                        | 8.3%  | 14.3%                          |
| Total                  | 56582                     | 100%                      | 1163                      | 100%  | 2.1%                           |

**1.18** **Summary of dwelling stock**

| Dwelling type         | Number of dwellings | % of private sector stock |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Detached              | 19959               | 35.3%                     |
| Semi Detached         | 17052               | 30.1%                     |
| End Terrace           | 5813                | 10.3%                     |
| Mid Terrace           | 9398                | 16.6%                     |
| Mid terrace + passage | 872                 | 1.5%                      |
| Flat                  | 3391                | 6.0%                      |
| Maisonnette           | 97                  | 0.2%                      |

## APPENDIX 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY BY CHEC

1. These policy recommendations are made in the light of the findings of the survey and are meant to be realistic in terms of the resources likely to be available and the statutory duties of the Council.
2. The ageing population in the district indicates the need for an effective housing agency service to assist the less able with grant applications and obtaining a range of benefits. This alleviates extra pressure on grant personnel and provides a higher level of customer service. The Council should further develop its existing agency services to include a mobile outreach service for the rural areas of the district. This would be of considerable benefit to disabled people.
3. Consideration should also be given to providing 'surgeries' staffed by either internal or external agencies. Not only can the surgeries deal with immediate problems and queries in all spheres of housing and Environmental Health, but they can also monitor the effectiveness of the (agency) services provided, and provide a source of information for future policy decisions.
4. The Council should (continue) its internal and external agency services and monitor its effectiveness in delivering the service required to resolve the housing problems, particularly of the elderly, and disabled identified in the district by this report.
5. The Council should prioritise its grant funding into the most vulnerable groups, including carers.
6. Wherever possible, the Council should continue to encourage the owners of properties that are being renovated with grant aid to install the most practical energy efficient measures possible, and security measures for elderly people and vulnerable groups where necessary.
7. The survey demonstrated that there is a need for education of householders in various aspects of energy awareness, including efficiency and conservation. The high number of centrally heated houses contrasts with those that have carried out additional insulation work. The Council should encourage householders by grant aid to carry out additional insulation, draught proofing and improved heating control systems. This will also assist the Council in meeting its obligations under the Home Energy Conservation Act.
8. The survey demonstrated a proportion of properties with items of disrepair, which if not dealt with could cause those houses to develop major problems, leading to unfitness. The Council should implement a programme to educate and inform property owners on the benefits of proper maintenance. This policy could also be targeted at private landlords.
9. At a corporate level the Council should consider the long-term problems caused by home maintenance issues and low pay. The Council cannot influence pay but can encourage better maintenance. Home maintenance courses could be established so that residents can take better care of their homes and help relatives and neighbours, and also consider other approaches, for example "*tool libraries*", "*Local Exchange Trading Scheme*" (LETS), and "*handy persons*" - schemes for exchange of services rather than cash.
10. The survey shows that many older people require a small amount of work doing to their home. National experience has shown that intervention with a small financial investment can affect simple repairs or adaptations that encourage householders to stay put in their own homes. In many cases the key to this problem is finding suitable contractors who are willing to carry out the small jobs for a realistic price. The Council should therefore consider establishing a handy persons scheme to bridge this gap.

11. The Council may wish to consider a non-confrontational approach when dealing with landlords in the private sector, and develop links by promoting the use of (the existing) “*Landlord Forum*”, or discussion groups advising landlords of their responsibilities under current and proposed legislation.
12. The Council should consider the use of an accreditation scheme for rented properties, by certifying that a dwelling available for rent has reached certain pre – determined standards, and that the letting arrangements will also follow a standard set down by the Council. This can be incorporated and discussed in the landlord forum, and agreement obtained on the standards to be measured.
13. Further work is required to locate more precisely unfit properties. This will assist in developing future housing policy, particularly on an area basis. Analysis of the data by Geographical Information System (GIS) would help in identifying areas and wards where unfit housing is most prevalent and assist in targeting resources. The targeting of areas of unfit housing and housing in disrepair should be used as a basis for leveraging additional funding for community development and wider regeneration. The Council’s Housing Strategy should adopt an integrated approach to link with national programmes, including:
  - Single regeneration budget
  - New Deal
  - Community safety partnerships
  - Strategies on social exclusion
  - Health Improvement Plans

Local initiatives based on the above national programmes must include housing issues as part of their integrated approach.

14. A detailed survey of caravans and mobile homes in the district should be considered in order to provide comprehensive information on the conditions of these dwellings.
15. Demographic evidence and information on house conditions suggest that the demand for Home Repairs Assistance and Disabled Facilities Grants will increase. Resources will be needed for these forms of assistance in the short and medium term. In the longer term, consideration should be given to encouraging property owners on the benefits of proper, regular maintenance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

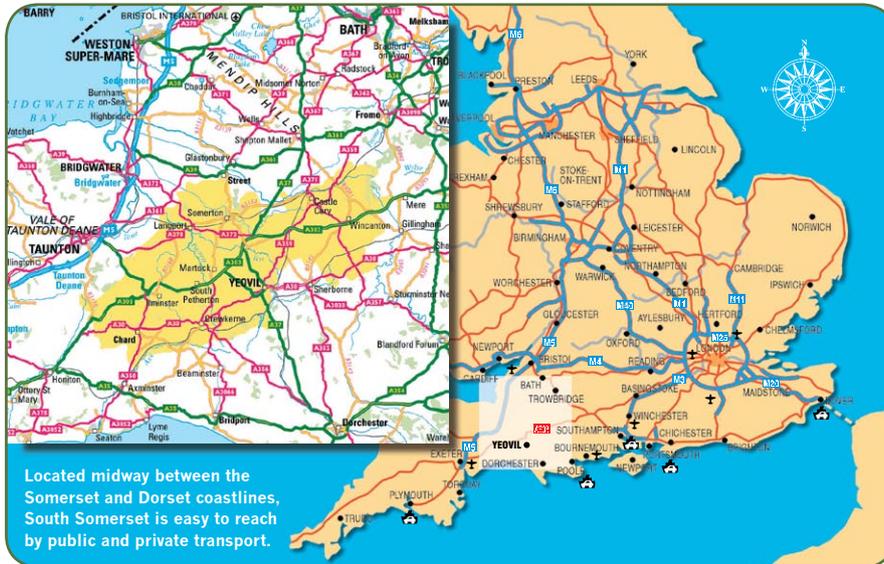
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*The Wessex Reinvestment Trust*

**ALASDAIR BELL**

Deputy Head of Service – Environmental Health and Community  
Protection



Located midway between the Somerset and Dorset coastlines, South Somerset is easy to reach by public and private transport.



**2007-2008**  
Neighbourhood and  
Community Champions:  
The Role of Elected Members

**2006-2007**  
Improving Rural Services  
Empowering Communities

**2005-2006**  
Getting Closer to Communities



South Somerset District Council