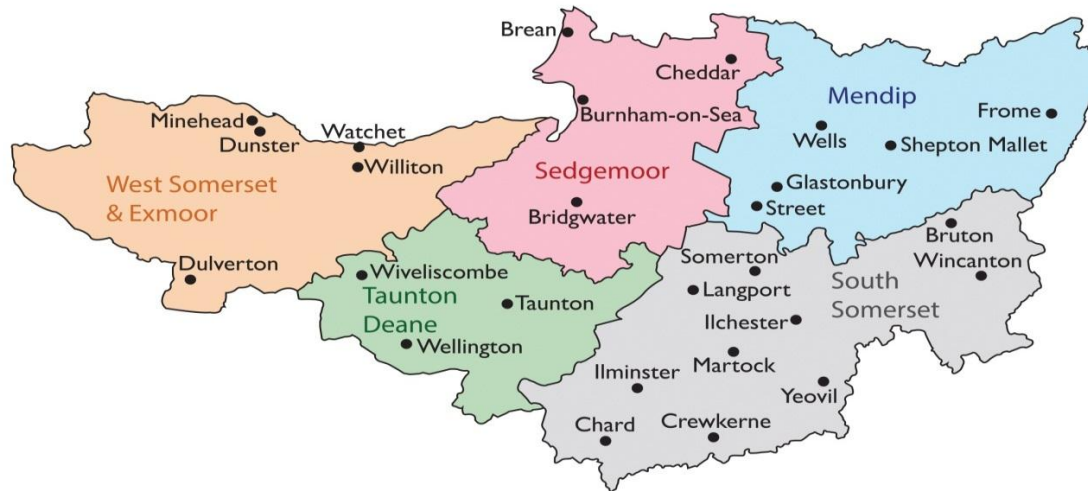


Somerset Homeless Strategy 2013- 2016

Introduction

This Homeless Strategy for Somerset sets out the strategic goals for the five Somerset Housing Authorities. Our ultimate goal is to ensure people have settled homes which enable them to build settled lives. The five local authorities are:-

- Mendip District Council
- Sedgemoor District Council
- South Somerset District Council
- Taunton Deane Borough Council
- West Somerset District Council



The 2002 Homelessness Act has placed a duty on Local Authorities to develop a Homeless Strategy and to renew this every five years. This is the second Somerset wide Homeless Strategy. This strategy covers the period of 2013 to 2016, and has been developed taking into account the national and local issues. The strategy identifies three goals that will drive forward the homelessness agenda in the coming years in Somerset.

The three goals are

Goals

- Goal 1 Reduction and prevention of homelessness
- Goal 2 Provision of appropriate advice, accommodation and support if a crisis occurs
- Goal 3 Maximising effective partnership working to provide cost effective and responsive services

What is Homelessness?

Homelessness covers a wide range of circumstances. You do not have to be sleeping on the streets to be classed as homeless. You might also be homeless or threatened with homelessness if you are:

- Temporarily staying with friends or family
- Staying in a hostel or bed and breakfast
- Living in very overcrowded conditions
- At risk of violence or abuse in your home
- Living in poor conditions that affect your health
- Living somewhere that you have no legal right to stay in e.g. a squat
- Living somewhere that you cannot afford to pay for without depriving yourself of basic essentials
- Forced to live apart from your family because your accommodation is not suitable

Current Situation

The Government's desire to reduce public spending has resulted in major changes to welfare benefits and has ended the offer of permanent social housing tenancies for some new tenants. All of these changes are likely to have a major impact on homelessness.

Public Spending Cuts- local authority funding is being reduced with all Councils in Somerset planning and implementing cost cutting measures. However, although the Homeless grant funding will remain stable during the spending review it is no longer ring fenced. This may mean not all individual Housing Options Services will receive the full amount of the grant from their own Local Authority.

Welfare Reform-

- **Uprating and increasing the non-dependent rate** from April 2011 is likely to place pressure on households with adult children still living at home who cannot contribute towards household expenses
- **Capping the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** is likely to make applicants looking for private sector letting less attractive to landlords.
- **Capping the total benefits** to a household at no more than the national average wage is likely to impact on larger families and any reduction in benefit will be removed via a reduction in housing benefit leaving a potential shortfall in rent.
- **Limiting Housing Benefit (HB) payments for single people under 35** to the shared room rate. This means they will be required to share accommodation. (Up from 25 will make it harder to place young single people in private rented accommodation).
- **Under Occupation for Social Housing Tenants.** The Government has introduced size limit rules into Housing Benefit for working age people renting from a registered housing association or other registered social landlord. The rules restrict the size of accommodation you can receive Housing Benefit for based on the number of people in your household. Tenants will be expected to find the additional money or be encouraged to downsize by their landlords. This is leading to an increase in housing need for one and two bedroom properties
- **The move towards Universal Credit (UC)** will end Housing Benefit payments being made directly to landlords, making benefit claimants potentially less attractive as tenants and making it harder for socially excluded applicants to gain private sector tenancies.
- **Abolishing Council Tax Benefit (CTB)** this means a large number of households in Somerset who have never had to pay towards their Council Tax will now be expected to make a contribution.

Changes to homeless duty- In addition to the current ways of discharging duty Local authorities can now fully discharge their duty into the private sector providing the tenancy is for a minimum of 12 months. This does not require the applicant's agreement.

Changes to Housing Allocation- the Localism Act now gives local authorities more say in who is able to join the housing register. There is also a need to give certain groups higher priority for social housing. The five local authorities in Somerset are working together to update the current Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy to take into account these changes.

Housing Need

The table below shows the number of applicants on the housing register in Somerset and the band they have been placed in. Data from 31/3/2013:-

	Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Mendip District Council	8	293	1879	1320	3500
Sedgemoor District Council	3	333	2387	2084	4807
South Somerset District Council	6	515	1964	1665	4150
Taunton Deane Borough Council	1	411	1438	1739	3589
West Somerset Council		119	453	601	1173
Grand Total	18	1671	8121	7409	17219

The table below shows the bedroom size that applicants need (as at 31/3/2013):-

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	6 bed	7 bed	8 bed	Total
Mendip District Council	1989	962	430	101	16	1	1		3500
Sedgemoor District Council	2600	1398	607	170	26	6			4807
South Somerset District Council	2262	1284	467	116	18	2		1	4150
Taunton Deane Borough Council	2119	982	375	94	17	1	1		3589
West Somerset Council	677	309	146	31	8	2			1173
Grand Total	9647	4935	2025	512	85	12	2	1	17219

Affordability of Purchase- the ratio of house prices to earnings is higher in Somerset than the national average. In West Somerset house prices for first time buyers are almost nine times the average earnings making it very hard for first time buyers to get onto the property ladder.

New forms of Tenure- Registered providers are being encouraged to move away from offering tenancies for life and instead offer fixed term tenancies (normally a minimum of five years). This may lead to a slower turnover of social housing as existing tenants may be reluctant to move as they could lose their life time tenancy and it be replaced with a fixed term tenancy The aim is to reduce the gap between social tenancies and the private sector.

Changes to the way affordable housing is delivered- The Affordable Homes Programme (2011-2015) aims to increase the supply of affordable homes. However, the majority of these homes will be provided at the new affordable rent level. These changes will increase rents for new tenants. These changes also impact on registered providers to deliver the financial requirements of the new model. The increase in rent could make social housing unaffordable to some homeless households. We may see a decline in the supply of new homes meaning longer time on the housing register and an increase in the use of temporary accommodation.

Social Care Funding (previously known as supporting people)- Funding is no longer ring fenced and Somerset County Council has had to make 18% spending reduction in this area. Support will now only be available to households who have a substantial need for help.

Social Fund- The social fund has now been replaced by the Local Assistance Scheme. Unlike the social fund it does not provide cash or loans, but it can help people to get basic essentials. For example food or, essential items of bedding or furniture. Households who did not qualify for rent in advance or a bond from their Local Authority could apply to the social fund for a loan to help them secure privately rented accommodation. Without the social fund it may be harder for some households to secure privately rented accommodation.

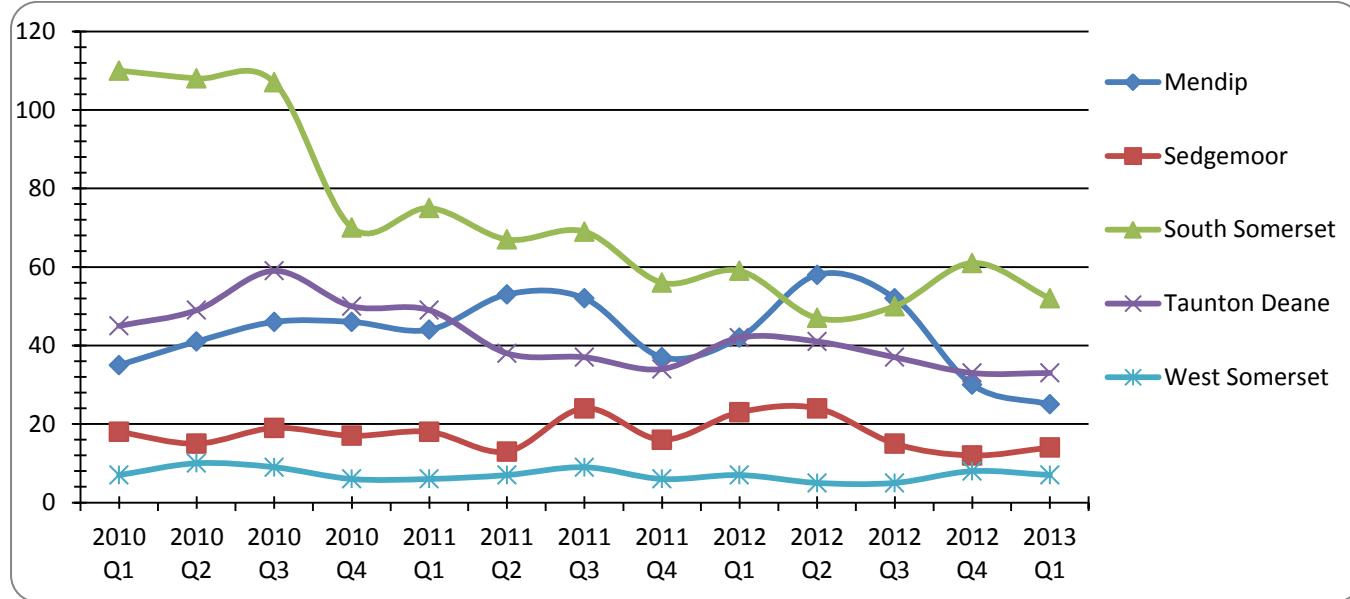
Main causes of homelessness

The top ten causes of homelessness in Somerset are summarised in the table below (taken from P1E statistics for 2011/12)

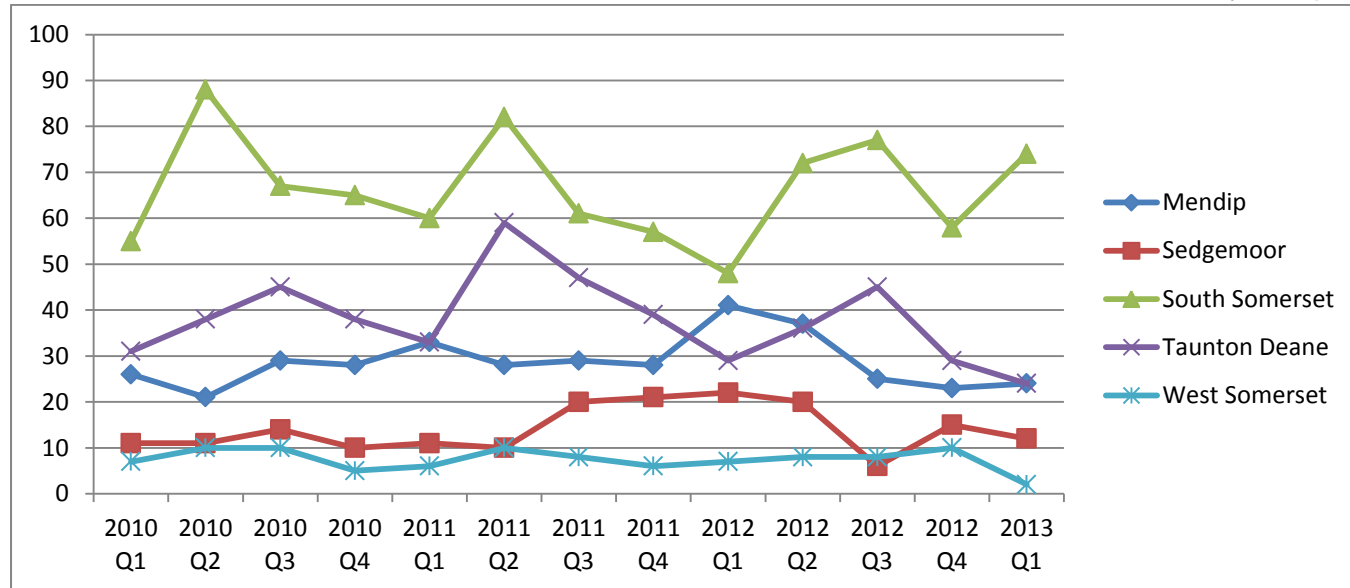
	SSDC	MDC	SDC	TDBC	WSC	TOTAL
08a. Loss of rented or tied accommodation: Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	63	33	20	42	6	270
01. Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	48	22	10	43	3	209
04a. Violence: Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	23	18	7	23	10	110
03. Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	33	10	6	6	0	109
11. b. Other reason (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad)	24	12	6	10	1	89
02. Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	17	8	7	14	0	73
08b. Loss of rented or tied accommodation: Reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	7	10	2	12	9	55
06. Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	15	3	6	5	0	52
05b. Harrassment, threats or intimidation: Other forms of harassment	6	2	2	4	0	25
07c. Rent arrears on: Private sector dwellings	4	0	1	8	0	21

The main causes of homelessness in Somerset are the ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) and parents/relatives/friends no longer able or willing to accommodate.

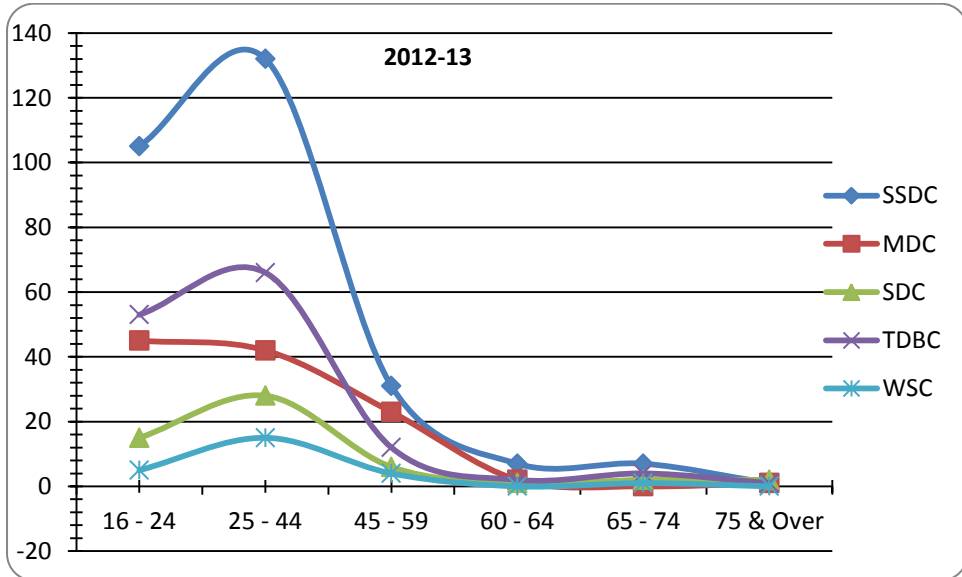
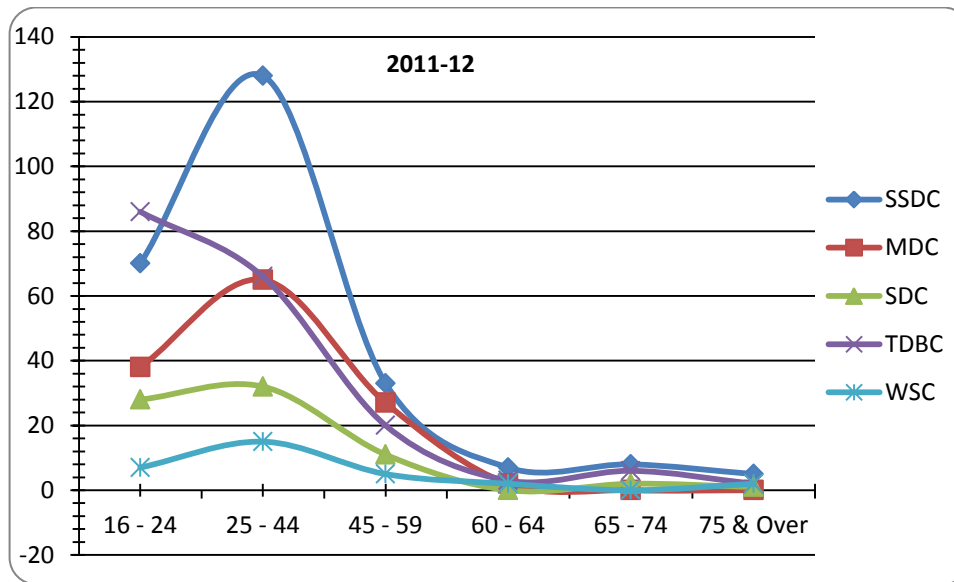
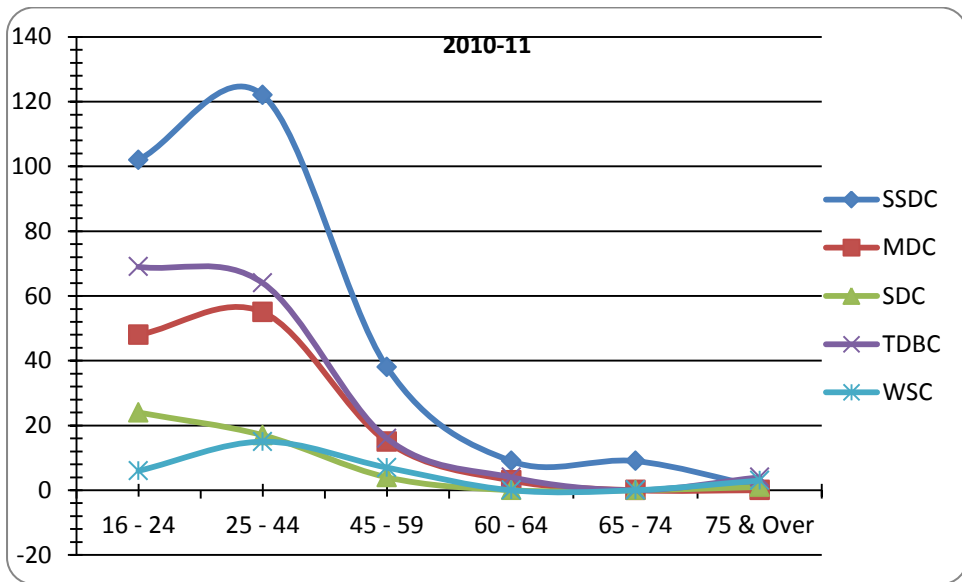
The table below shows the number households in temporary accommodation for the last three years



The table below shows the number of homeless households that have had a full homeless duty accepted to them in the last three years



The table below shows the age of accepted homeless applicants for the last 3 years. In each year the highest number of cases accepted as homeless are in the 25-44 age group.



Goal 1

Reduction and prevention of homelessness

It is crucial for the Local Authorities across Somerset to reduce and prevent homelessness. The main way of preventing homelessness is to maintain existing accommodation. If this is not possible homelessness can also be prevented by securing accommodation in the private sector, via Homefinder Somerset or by the Pathway to Independence (P2I), or Pathway for Adults (P4A).

There are many ways to reduce and prevent homelessness including:-

- Continued use of the Homeless Prevention Fund- proactive use of funds to reduce homelessness using innovative solutions
- Bond/Deposits schemes and rent in advance - helps homeless households secure privately rented accommodation
- No Second Night Out - All five authorities have signed up to deliver the Governments 'no second night out vision'. We are also part of the Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Group which aims to prevent rough sleeping and improve the advice given to single non-priority homeless.
- Provide support and incentives to private sector landlords to encourage them to let their properties to homeless or threatened with homelessness households.
- Ensure households threatened with homelessness are given the right advice as soon as it is needed
- Work with registered providers to maximise the number of properties let through Homefinder Somerset
- Mediation especially when relationships have broken down at home and young people are asked to leave their accommodation
- Provide good quality advice to landlords, people threatened with homelessness and the general public

Goal 2

Provision of appropriate advice, accommodation and support if crisis occurs

When a household is homeless or threatened with homelessness it is important they receive the right advice, information, support and accommodation if needed. It is also important the right groups are targeted with the right information at an early stage this includes the following steps:-

- Ensure staff have up-to-date training to give the correct advice and information to applicants
- To facilitate grants to bring empty homes back into occupation
- To facilitate grants to improve the standard of private sector accommodation
- Continue to work with Somerset County Council and the providers to deliver P2I, which includes providing educational work at schools and colleges.
- Continue to work with Somerset County Council and the provider to deliver P4A
- To support where appropriate the Family Focus Programme
- To provide a tenant accreditation scheme so households are equipped with the right skills to sustain their tenancy.

Goal 3

Maximise effective partnership working to provide cost effective and responsive services

With increasing pressures on resources in the public sector it is crucial we work with partners to provide cost effective and responsive services. We can do this by:-

- Create a protocol with the Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) and hospitals to ensure patients are not discharged from hospital without suitable accommodation.
- Create a protocol with the local Prisons and Police to ensure people are not released from prison/custody without suitable accommodation.
- Work with Registered Providers to maximise the creation of appropriate new properties.
- Work with Partners to give advice e.g. debt advice, mortgage repossession to households threatened with homelessness to ensure their long-term stability.
- Work with Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Steering Group to ensure there is adequate provision for single homeless and rough sleepers in each District.
- Work collaboratively with partners to deliver value for money services and maximise funding opportunities.
- Work with Housing Benefits to maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to prevent homelessness.
- Continue to work together to administer Homefinder Somerset
- To ensure District Planning authorities are made aware of the appropriate size and type of accommodation that is required using evidence from Homefinder Somerset.

Future Risks

Homeless Grant- the Homeless Grant is only guaranteed until 2014/15 and it is unclear if any further funding will be available after this. The loss of Homeless Grant could result in a reduction of services provided by the Local Authorities, which in turn could lead to increases in homelessness.

EDF/ Hinkley Point C- If full planning permission is granted the housing markets across Somerset will be affected. This development may have a detrimental impact on the availability of private sector accommodation. for homeless households. This may cause an increase in homelessness as private sector tenants are given notice by landlord's wishing to let their properties to EDF workers

Welfare Reform- the imminent introduction of UC could result in increase in evictions, as has been evidenced in the pilot areas which have seen large increases in rent arrears and evictions from social housing.

West Somerset District Council/ Taunton Deane Borough Council merging services-Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council are currently working on a project that may lead to the sharing of some services across both districts. A business case is being prepared to clarify not only the financial impact of such a change but to explore the impact on service delivery and organisational issues.

Action Plan

Action No	Action	Outcome	Performance Measure	Timescale	Responsible organisation	Related Goal(s)
1	West Somerset District Council and Mendip District Council consider a scheme for non-priority bonds	Every LA has a scheme that offers a non-priority bond.	Creation of a non-priority bond scheme	Jan 2014	West Somerset DC & Mendip DC	1
2	To consider a rent in advance scheme for non-priority homeless households	Every LA has a rent in advance scheme for non-priority applicants	Creation of a rent in advance scheme for non-priority homeless households	Jan 2014	5 LAs	1
3	To create more direct access services and facilities for rough sleepers in areas of Somerset where this is lacking.	An increase in the number of direct access facilities and support services for rough sleepers in all areas across Somerset.	Facilities and support in place for rough sleepers	June 2016	All 5 LA Partners in-conjunction with the Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Group SCC through the delivery of the P4A	1,2
4	To attend The Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Steering Group	Working with Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Steering Group action plan is supported by LAs	The number of actions achieved or in progress from the Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Group where they are related to the Local Authority	On-going	5 LAs	1,3
5	To ensure Tenant Accreditation Schemes (TAS) are available across Somerset and the outcomes are broadly the same	Effective and consistent accredited schemes across Somerset.	Monitor the number of TASs achieved by each LA Number of actions taken to raise awareness of TAS	Jan 2014	5 LAs	2

Action No	Action	Outcome	Performance Measure	Timescale	Responsible organisation	Related Goal(s)
		Private and social landlords are aware of TAS Each District offers a TAS which has a Somerset Kite mark.	with private and social landlords.	Jan 2014		
6	To provide clear information to private landlords and applicants on the incentives available to them for private sector housing Where possible offer consistent incentives across Somerset to make access easier for private landlords	A directory of incentives including eligibility criteria is launched. Links on the 5 Local Authority websites to all Local Letting Agency's across Somerset Consistent incentives offered to private landlords across Somerset	Number of applications for the incentives Links placed on LA websites at launch of LLA Regular assessment to ensure incentives are similar	Jan 2014 and annually updated Jan 2014	Private sector teams in all 5 LAs and housing options/housing welfare teams in all 5 LAs where applicable.	2
7	To consider creating an empty homes action plan which sets out how the LA will bring empty homes back into use to help those on the housing register or threatened with homelessness	Every LA has an empty homes action plan.	The number of empty homes bought back into use in each Authority	Jan 2014	Empty Homes Officers across 5 LAs	2
8	To ensure staff have relevant and consistent training across Somerset	Staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills	Review of case work.	Ongoing	All 5 LAs	2

Action No	Action	Outcome	Performance Measure	Timescale	Responsible organisation	Related Goal(s)
9	To identify the type and location of temporary accommodation within each LA. Findings to be passed to Strategic Housing.	Up-to-date register of temporary accommodation created. Issues identified and addressed by Strategic Housing	Production of a register of temporary accommodation	On-going	5 LAs	2
10	Preventing young people from becoming homeless by creating a single point of access (HUB). Work within schools and colleges to provide young people with information on what to do in a housing crisis (including how to access Homefinder Somerset)s	Single point of access (HUB) established in each LA area Working with schools and colleges via P2I	HUBs delivered in each LA area The number of P2I advice sessions delivered to schools and colleges	Dec 2013 Jan 2014	All 5 LAs and SCC	2,3
11	To review the DHP policy. To ensure DHP is being utilised in the best way for each Authority	DHP policy reviewed and where appropriate changes implemented.	The number of awards of DHP to households threatened with homelessness	February 2014	5 LAs Housing Teams and Revenues and Benefit Teams	3
12	To create a protocol with private sector landlords to ensure early intervention to prevent tenants being evicted	A private sector pre-eviction protocol	The number of private sector landlords that have signed up to the protocol.	June 2014	HMG to co-ordinate	3
13	To consider introducing a policy to prevent illegal evictions	Every LA to have a policy that prevent illegal evictions.	Creation a policy that prevents illegal evictions The number of illegal evictions	Sept 2014	5 LAs – coordinated by HMG.	3

Action No	Action	Outcome	Performance Measure	Timescale	Responsible organisation	Related Goal(s)
14	To review Somerset pre- eviction protocol for registered providers and re launch.	Launch revised pre- eviction protocol	Review completed by each LA. The number of evictions (this is not necessarily an indication of the performance of the protocol)	December 2013	5 LA partners HMG to coordinate	3
15	To ensure planners and enablers are aware of lack of 1 /and2 bedroom properties by providing evidence from Homefinder Somerset.	Increase the provision of 1 and 2 bedroom social housing properties by the end of 2016.	That evidence from Homefinder Somerset has been taken into consideration by planners and enablers	Ongoing annual review	5 LAs coordinated via HMG	3
16	To encourage shared applications to Homefinder Somerset enabling single people to make joint applications to improve their opportunity to secure social housing. To encourage landlords to take a flexible approach when providing accommodation for single person people.	Improved opportunities for single people on the housing register to access social housing accommodation Registered Providers (RPs) taking a flexible approach to letting accommodation to single people wishing to share accommodation.	The number of shared applications to Homefinder Somerset The number of shared applicants housed through Homefinder Somerset	Jan 2014 Jan 2014	Homefinder Somerset partner RPs and 5 LAs Raise via CBL WG and also at HFS Monitoring Board	3
17	To ensure registered providers are not skipping applicants for anti-social behaviour when it occurred more than two years ago.	Homefinder Somerset Monitoring board to review data on a regular basis and take any necessary action	Review conducted and action taken where relevant The number of cases reviewed	Oct 2014	CBL WG and Mon board	3
18	To create a protocol with hospitals and the Community Mental Health Team to ensure	Launch protocol	Reduction in numbers of clients discharged hospitals presenting to	Jan 2014	HMG to coordinate 5 LAs, Taunton CAB	3

Action No	Action	Outcome	Performance Measure	Timescale	Responsible organisation	Related Goal(s)
	patients are not discharged from hospital without suitable accommodation		homeless departments without prior warning.		and CMHT Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Steering Group	
19	To create a protocol with the Prison and Police to ensure people are not release from prison/custody without suitable accommodation	Launched protocol	Reduction in the number of clients released from prison/custody presenting to homeless teams without prior warning	June 2015	HMG to co-ordinate with Police and prison services	3

Related Documents

This Homeless Strategy is one of several documents that fit with the housing strategy framework. The other related documents are

Somerset Youth Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2014

Housing, health, care and support strategy for older people in Somerset

Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Group Action Plan

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment

Somerset Financial Inclusion Strategy 2011-2013

Somerset Tenancy Strategy 2012

Armed Forces Covenant

Review of Homeless Strategy and evidence

Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix A

Our Partners

Housing

Housing Benefit

Public Health and protection

Supporting people

Adult Social Care and Support

Children Social Care and support

Community Mental Health Team

Drug and Alcohol Action Team

Turning Point

Registered Social Landlords

Private Sector Landlords

Housing Standards

CAB

Welfare Benefits

Service Users

Somerset Racial Equality Council

District Planning Authorities

Somerset County Council

Age UK

Lords Larder

Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers group

Avon and Somerset Police

Glossary

CBL WG- Choice based lettings working group. This group is made up registered providers and local authority frontline staff who deal with lettings and the housing register known as Homefinder Somerset.

Council Tax Benefit

DCLG- Department of Communities and Local Government

DHP- Discretionary Housing Payment

Homefinder Somerset- Partnership of the five Somerset LA's and registered providers working together to administer the housing register and let social housing using a choice based lettings scheme

Homeless Duty- A homeless duty is only accepted if a household is:-

- Eligible for public funds
- Is homeless or threatened with homelessness in the next 28 days
- Unintentionally homeless
- In priority need
- Has a local connection to the area covered by the LA

Housing Benefit - a regular payment made by councils to help people on low incomes or receiving welfare benefits to pay their rent.

HMG- Homeless Managers Group made up of the five Local Authorities in Somerset

Housing Options Services-

LA- Local Authority

LLA- Local Lettings Agency

Non-priority- single people and couples who have no dependent children and do not meet any of the other criteria defined under priority. This group can also include families with older children who are no longer dependent.

P1E- statistical returns about homelessness submitted to DCLG on a quarterly basis

Priority- A Homeless household may be classed as priority need if they meet one or more of the criteria below:-

- Pregnant
- Dependent Children
- Vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or physical disability
- Someone who has become homeless as a result of an emergency e.g. floods, fire or other disaster
- 16 and 17 year olds
- Applicants under 21 years old who were in LA care between the ages of 16 and 18
- Applicants aged 21 and over who are vulnerable as a result of leaving LA Care
- Applicants who are vulnerable as a result of leaving armed forces
- Applicants who are vulnerable as a result of leaving prison
- Applicants who are vulnerable because they are fleeing domestic violence or the threat of domestic violence

P2I- Pathway to Independence- a pathway through which early intervention services can be provided to 16 to 25 year olds seeking housing related support services.

P4A- Pathway for Adults as service commissioned by Somerset County Council to assist over 25 who may be socially excluded to access housing related support services.

Registered providers- general name for not-for-profit housing providers approved and regulated by Government. Register providers are also known as housing associations and/or registered social landlords.

TA-temporary accommodation. This is accommodation used for homeless households on a short term basis until more permanent accommodation can be found

Universal Credit- Single payment of benefit that will be paid once a month direct into a bank account. Applicants receiving income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, income support, child tax credit, working tax credit and housing benefit will receive a single universal credit payment.