



South Somerset
District Council

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment 2019

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Introduction

This document forms the evidence base for the Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan. It outlines the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping across Somerset at the level of a district authority. It takes into account the characteristics of those who find themselves homeless and the reasons for their homelessness. This assessment of need can be evaluated against existing provision and can assist in identifying gaps. Throughout this document, we will clarify the differences that arise within the county and understand these differences to assist in the development and delivery of plans that meet local need.

This information will inform the development of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Somerset, accompanied by an action to overcome the issues and gaps identified in the needs assessment.

The Somerset Districts

There are currently 4 districts in Somerset. In April 2019, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council, combined to form Somerset West and Taunton Council.

NB: For the purposes of this document some information from these councils will be considered separately if this is how the evidence is presented, based on the date the data/information is available at.

The districts and their boundaries are as follows:



Population

The ONS release mid-year population data for the prior year in September/October every year. The population for each districts in 2018 is as follows:

Table One: District size and population

District	Population
Mendip	114,900
Sedgemoor	122,800
South Somerset	167,900
Taunton Deane	119,000
West Somerset	34,900
Total	559,500

Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates 2018

Geographically South Somerset is the largest of the districts as well as the highest population. West Somerset is the most rural district as it encompasses parts of Exmoor and the Quantocks, both of which have low population density.

Population projections give a good overview of expectations over future population size. The ONS released new population estimates projected to the year 2041 in May 2018. The projections are based in the 2016 mid-year estimates.

Table Two: Population projections by district, 2016 to 2041

	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	% change 16-41
Mendip	113,100	116,600	120,300	123,300	126,000	128,200	+12%
Sedgemoor	121,300	127,000	132,200	136,600	140,400	143,700	+16%
South Somerset	166,500	170,300	174,000	176,900	179,300	181,500	+8%
Taunton Deane	116,000	120,800	125,300	129,100	132,300	135,200	+14%
West Somerset	34,500	34,600	34,900	35,400	35,800	36,200	+5%

Source: ONS population projections

Between 2016 and 2041, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane are projected to experience the highest growths in percentage terms, 16% and 14% respectively.

The population projections will impact in the need for additional affordable housing.

Age range of the population in Somerset

The table below shows the number of people in each age bracket for the 4 district councils

Table 3 – Population by age

Age range	Mendip	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Somerset West and Taunton	Total
Under 15	19,300	20,500	28,000	24,700	92,500
15 to 24	11,900	12,400	16,300	14,700	55,300
25 to 44	24,000	26,000	35,500	32,300	117,800
45 to 59	26,200	26,700	35,000	32,400	120,300
60 to 64	7,500	7,900	10,700	10,300	36,400
65 to 74	14,600	15,900	23,000	20,800	74,300
75+	11,600	13,300	19,100	18,700	62,700

Source: ONS Mid-Year population estimates 2018

Data relating to age can be helpful in explaining the differences that are seen in requests for specific types of accommodation, for example bungalows or assisted living accommodation. Across the County the 2 biggest age ranges are 25 to 44 and 45 to 59. Both South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton show high numbers of people in the 75+ age group.

Employment in Somerset

Overall about 82.3% of Somerset’s residents aged 16-64 are economically active, compared to 78.9% in Great Britain.

Table 4: Labour Market profile

	Economically active – in employment Jul 18 to June 19	Economically inactive Jul 18 to June 19	Out of work benefits claimant count - October 2019
Mendip	59,500	9,800	1605
Sedgemoor	63,300	13,000	1970
South Somerset	81,700	16,400	1870
Somerset West and Taunton	73,800	17,000	1900

Source: NOMIS Labour market profile July 2018 to June 2019

Table 5 - Annual Gross Pay – median 2018/2019

District	Median 2018	Monthly average	Media 2019 (provisional)	Monthly average (provisional)
Mendip	£30,517	£2543.08	£29,201	£2433.41
Sedgemoor	£26,981	£2248.42	£27,468	£2289
South Somerset	£27,406	£2283.83	£29,213	£2434.42
Somerset West and Taunton	£25,832	£2152.67	£29,648	£2470.67

Source: ONS – people in work dataset – table 8

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is the new single benefit payment that was introduced in 2013. It replaced income-based Job Seekers Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits and Housing Benefit. Whilst the introduction of a single benefit was significant, the other change was the introduction of claiming Universal Credit online and maintaining that claim online.

The initial phases of introduction saw new claims for benefit being made as Universal Credit in specific areas. This has since been rolled out across the country, with Somerset going to full service in 2017/2018. The transfer of current benefit claimants on the legacy benefits to Universal Credit has started and will continue over the next few years.

There has no doubt been teething troubles which such a large change and whilst there were concerns about rent arrears, debt and people managing their finances, reports from the Registered Providers within the area in 2019, have shown that a lot of these initial problems have been ironed out, and arrears remain at a level prior to the introduction.

Universal Credit statistics are based on statistics issued by local Job centres. Within Somerset there 6 job centres. However, Wells and Frome will probably cover areas outside of Somerset, the statistics below give a good understanding of the number of households claiming Universal Credit.

Table 6: Number of UC claims by job centre

Job Centre	Numbers claiming UC as at October 2019
Taunton	7396
Minehead	1498
Bridgwater	6538
Wells	3331
Yeovil	6625
Frome	2210

Source: UC Statistics October 2019

Housing Market, demand and supply

The Somerset Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 (SHMA) , states ' A household is considered to be able to afford to buy a home if it costs less than four times the gross household income. It is assumed that a household would have a 10% deposit'.

Table 7 below, shows the ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile gross annual (where available) residence-based earnings (residence-based earnings refer to the median or lower quartile earnings based on the area in which an individual lives, whereas workplace-based earnings refer to earnings based on the area in which the individual works) by local authority district since 2013.

The lower quartile is the value determined by putting all the house prices or earnings for a given area and year, in order of value, and then selecting the value of the house prices or earnings that fall three-quarters of the way down the list, such that 75% lie above and 25% lie below that value. These ratios are particularly useful for assessing housing affordability to indicate the entry level for first time buyers. Affordability ratios are calculated by dividing house prices by gross annual residence-based earnings (Source ONS)

Table 7 – House price to residence-based earnings ratio

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Mendip	8.37	8.73	8.77	8.75	10.23
Sedgemoor	6.87	6.98	7.64	7.74	8.04
South Somerset	7.16	7.33	8.19	7.89	7.61
Taunton Deane	7.83	7.94	8.06	8.04	7.97
West Somerset	9.17	10.09	9.02	10.09	10.25
South West	7.78	8.03	8.27	8.50	8.75
England	6.57	6.91	7.11	7.16	7.26

The data in table 7 highlights that households would require more than 7.6 times their earnings to afford a home in Somerset, although there is a wide disparity in affordability across the Somerset districts. The highest ratio is in Mendip and West Somerset where in 2017 a household would have required more than 10 times their earnings to afford a home. Sedgemoor has also seen a sharp ratio increase.

This affordability is hindered further by the national employment shift to zero hour contracts rather than traditional employment contracts. This change can prove a barrier to accessing rented accommodation and in meeting any affordability tests of income and expenditure, thus obstructing the ability to become an owner-occupier. Mortgage lenders can be reluctant to lend against uncertain income stream. ONS figures show that in 2017, 16% of the UK workforce, aged 16 and over, were a zero hour's contract and in 2018, this rose to 16.4%.

The graph below shows how the lower quartile income in the area compared to the lower quartile house price over time since 2013. Taunton Deane is the only district to have maintained its ratio; in all other districts, the situation has been worsening, with house prices in the lower quartile typically being at best close to eight times earnings in the lowest quartile. This starkly illustrates the difficulty of housing affordability across Somerset when considered against the accepted standard for affordability (four times earnings)

Chart One: House prices to earnings

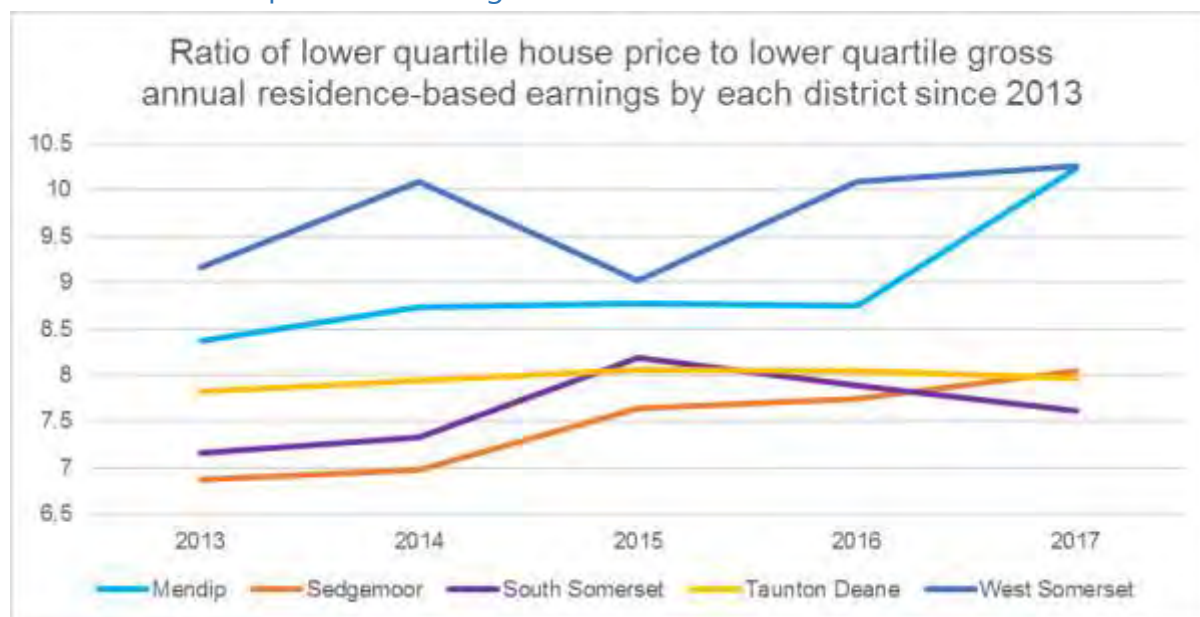


Table 8: Depicts the mean price paid for homes by local authority area

District	House Type	March 2015	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018	% difference in last 12 months
Mendip	Detached	370,165	359,622	419,599	419,056	-0.13%
	Semi Detached	211,331	221,067	244,488	260,846	6.69%
	Terraced	200,878	204,863	229,472	236,333	2.99%
	Flats/ Maisonettes	132,419	129,404	142,117	141,464	-0.46%
Sedgemoor	Detached	290,487	295,959	321,511	342,483	6.52%
	Semi Detached	177,000	194,351	204,238	215,171	5.35%
	Terraced	148,281	151,945	166,763	169,213	1.47%
	Flats/ Maisonettes	101,548	107,430	119,328	125,382	5.07%
South Somerset	Detached	310,574	324,102	345,141	367,622	6.51%
	Semi Detached	199,106	198,188	210,990	215,951	2.35%
	Terraced	165,312	171,053	183,227	186,697	1.89%
	Flats/ Maisonettes	108,275	109,226	110,009	118,113	7.37%
Taunton Deane	Detached	312,756	322,739	348,318	355,424	2.04%
	Semi Detached	200,648	209,542	213,849	232,881	8.90%
	Terraced	171,784	175,888	184,398	190,153	3.12%

District	House Type	March 2015	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018	% difference in last 12 months
	Flats/ Maisonettes	159,275	139,241	143,009	143,912	0.63%
West Somerset	Detached	318,137	315,281	336,123	361,327	7.50%
	Semi Detached	209,765	218,966	222,072	236,534	6.51%
	Terraced	172,906	182,168	177,088	195,998	10.68%
	Flats/ Maisonettes	159,970	128,097	133,442	130,037	-2.55%

Source: ONS

The evidence shown in the table demonstrates how the mean house price has changed over the last 4 years, moving house purchase further beyond the reach of many residents.

Table 9 – Private rental market statistics - 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 for the districts in the South West

	Mendip £	Sedgemoor £	South Somerset £	Taunton Deane £	West Somerset £	South West £	England £
Room	357	412	368	433	-	413	411
Studio	400	400	375	375	410	500	668
One bed	495	460	450	485	495	584	731
Two bed	635	600	625	625	600	726	800
Three bed	800	750	750	768	700	883	916
Four or more beds	1200	995	1100	1100	965	1509	1611

Source: VOA Admin dataset as at 31/3/2019

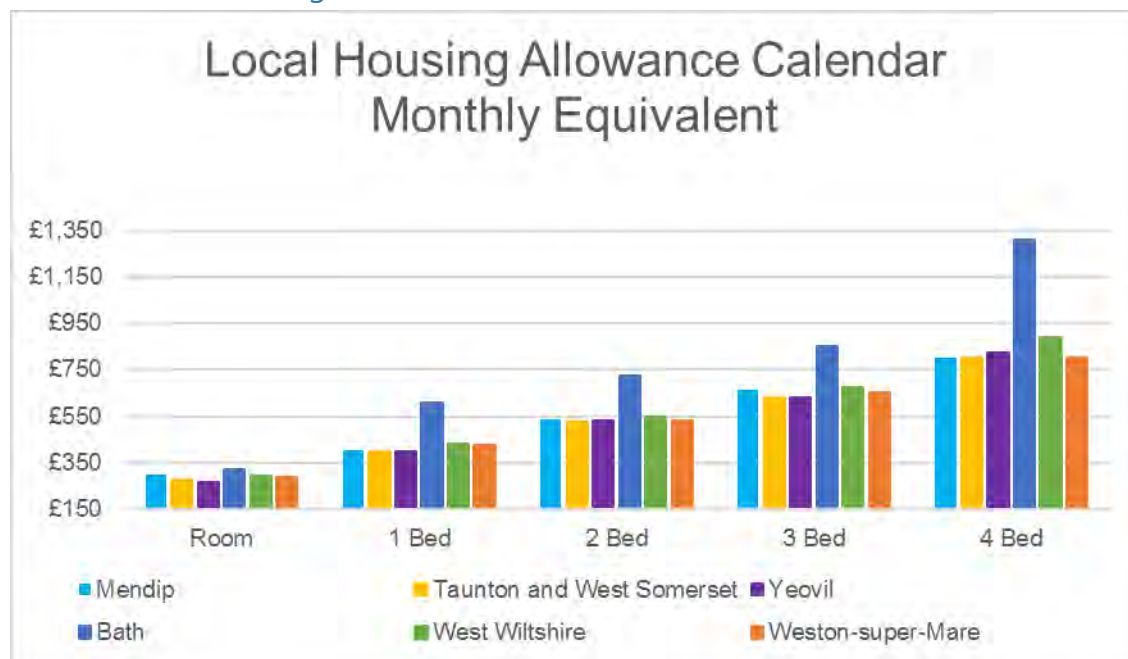
In the majority of cases the district rent levels are below both the South West average and the England average.

The figures in Table 7 and Table 8 indicate a widening gap in affordability to rent. A family renting a 3 bedroom house in the South Somerset area, would pay approximately 30% of their income would be taken up paying rent.

Local Housing Allowance

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) are the rates used to calculate housing benefit and the Housing Element of Universal Credit for tenants renting from private landlords. The LHA rates relate to the area in which you make your claim. These areas are called Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMA). A BRMA is where a person could reasonably be expected to live taking into account access to facilities and services.

Chart 2: Local Housing Allowance



The LHA boundaries do not mirror the district council boundaries. Therefore, more than one LHA rate may apply to different locations within a single district. Of the six BRMAs, Bath receives the highest LHA across all housing types. When comparing Yeovil, Mendip and Taunton Deane, it can be seen that Mendip has the highest LHA for all property sizes except 4-bed accommodation, where this is higher for Yeovil. Taunton Deane and Yeovil have very similar LHAs across all property types; however, Taunton Deane has a higher rate for rooms.

Holiday Lets

There is a perceived growing trend for new to the market and existing private sector landlords to opt for letting their properties as holiday lets including airbnb rather than renting them out to tenants. This may be adversely affecting the availability of rentals within the private rented sector; however, there is no data available to track.

Affordable Housing

The evidence suggests that there is a considerable gap in the affordability of homes either to purchase or to rent privately in Somerset (tables in this report demonstrate). This is due to low earnings relative to house prices and rental values. The need for affordable housing is evident.

Table 10: Estimated Annual Affordable Housing Need

	Current need* (annualised)	Newly forming households	Existing households falling into need	Total need	Re-let supply	Net need	Net need % of Total need
Mendip	17	351	191	559	319	240	43%
Sedgemoor	15	408	232	655	354	301	46%
South Somerset	20	466	379	865	659	206	24%
Taunton Deane	17	363	393	774	613	161	21%
Somerset	74	1665	1274	3013	2058	955	

Source: SHMA 2016

Table 10 above also included within the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2016, demonstrates the estimated annual need for affordable housing by location. There was no data available for West Somerset as they were not part of the SHMA. However, the need for West Somerset is shown as information has been taken from Homefinder Somerset.

Current affordable housing need is defined as the number of households who lack their own housing or who live in unsuitable housing and who cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market. Current need reflects the annual number of households already expressing a need for affordable housing and includes households without housing and concealed households. Concealed households are family units or single adults living within 'host' households.

Table 10a below details the gross need for intermediate and affordable/social rented housing taken from the SHMA 2016. The SHMA also mentions other factors that should be considered when looking at the table below such as the savings an applicant may have, access to a deposit and the supply of intermediate housing.

Table 10a: Gross need for Intermediate and affordable/social rented housing

Component of need (all per annum)	Intermediate Housing	Affordable rented	Social rented	Total
Current need	3	5	66	74
Newly forming households	234	244	1187	1665
Existing households falling into need	105	115	1054	1274
Total	342	364	2307	3013
Percentage of Total	11%	12%	77%	100%
Mendip	12%	14%	75%	100%
Sedgemoor	12%	13%	75%	100%
South Somerset	11%	10%	79%	100%
Taunton Deane	11%	13%	76%	100%

Source: SHMA 2016

The figures above show the suggested percentages of need for the different tenures provided as affordable housing. It is clear in all districts that the highest need is for social rented dwellings which account 70-80% of the need overall whilst intermediate housing and affordable rented housing account for 10-15% each.

Homefinder Somerset

Homefinder Somerset is the countywide housing register for people needing social housing. Registered households are placed in four bands – Gold, Silver and Bronze plus a separate Emergency banding. The banding determines the urgency of their affordable Housing need.

Table 11: Households with active applications as at 6th December 2019

	No. of bedrooms needed						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Mendip	791	511	220	51	4	0	1,577
Emergency	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Gold	44	34	11	13	2	0	104
Silver	347	231	149	28	2	0	757
Bronze	398	246	60	10	0	0	714
Sedgemoor	1,138	794	343	92	7	2	2,376
Emergency	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Gold	77	42	24	12	7	2	164
Silver	313	319	178	59	0	0	869
Bronze	747	432	141	21	0	0	1,341
Somerset West & Taunton	2,148	1,215	528	151	22	1	4,065
Emergency	6	4	1	0	0	0	11
Gold	203	75	32	23	14	1	348
Silver	575	453	307	103	7	0	1,445
Bronze	1,364	683	188	25	1	0	2,261
South Somerset	978	632	319	84	10	2	2,025
Emergency	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Gold	97	49	27	13	6	2	194
Silver	258	207	170	64	3	0	702
Bronze	622	375	121	7	1	0	1,126
Total	5,055	3,152	1,410	378	43	5	10,043

Source: Homefinder Somerset




NB: The figures for Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) reflect that there is work to do to cleanse the information held on Homefinder, something they will do when the resources are in place to allow this to happen. Therefore the current figures suggest that SWT have a higher housing need than the other councils in Somerset.

The table above sets out the number of application on Homefinder Somerset as at December 2019. From this there are just over 10,000 householders registered in Homefinder. The majority are in the bronze category although there are 18 applications in the emergency banding. The figure for December and from the past suggests that there has been and remains strong demand, and that demand which outweighs supply.

Registered households are placed into four bands – Gold, Silver and Bronze plus a separate Emergency banding – to determine the urgency of their affordable housing need. Somerset West and Taunton has the highest level of households in gold band. There are currently (December 2019) 18 in emergency banding.

The banding criteria for each band are shown at Table 12. The Emergency Band is for those applicants that require an ‘urgent’ move to ensure their safety and welfare.

Table 12: Banding criteria for Homefinder Somerset

Gold Band – High need	Silver Band – Medium Need	Bronze Band – Low Need
		
Homeless households who are owed a main homeless duty by a Homefinder Somerset partner authority.	Where the applicant lacks 1 bedroom in their current home.	Where an applicant is adequately housed.
Applicants who lack 2 or more bedrooms or have been confirmed as overcrowded by a Local Authority officer.	Applicants who can demonstrate a need to move for employment reasons or to give or receive support where significant harm would result if this was not provided.	Where applicants own their own property but whose home is not suitable for their needs but they have sufficient equity to address their housing needs.
Current supported housing residents or care leaving applicants who are assessed as ready to move on to independent living.	Where there is a medium medical need. Medium welfare need	Applicants with a low medical need. Applicants with a low welfare need.
High disrepair for people living in the private sector.	Medium disrepair for people living in the private sector.	Applicants living in short term supported housing or are care leavers prior to being ready to move at which stage they will move up to the gold band.
High medical need High welfare need	Applicants with dependent children and are lodging with friends or family or in accommodation with shared living facilities.	Applicants with no dependent children and are lodging with friends or family or in accommodation with shared living facilities.
Applicants awarded a ‘medium’ medical priority, combined with ‘medium’ disrepair award from the silver band.	Other homeless (where Homefinder Somerset partners do not owe an applicant a full homeless duty).	Applicants are assessed as having adequate financial resources to address their housing needs.
Victim of harassment or violence at their current property within the Homefinder Somerset area.	Applicants of split families who not by choice are living separately.	Applicant has no housing need.
Applicant awarded 4 or more silver band housing needs with the exception of applicants found to be intentionally homeless.		Applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances or made use of the under occupation band before, or has accepted an offer that doesn't meet their needs previously.
Social housing tenants whose homes are subject to major works for rebuilding/renovation or re-designation.		Applicants with low disrepair needs living in private sector rented property.
Where the Local Authority receives written support from a Homefinder Somerset landlord that an applicant has no legal right to succession and the landlord will pursue possession.		Applicants that have no local connection applying for extra-care or sheltered properties.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is best described as housing provided at prices below the prevailing market value for people who are unable to find a suitable home on the open market (primarily due to its price). Affordable housing can be provided on a rental or home ownership basis.

The SHMA 2016 set out the estimated size of dwellings needed for affordable housing 2014 to 2039 by Local Authority area

Table 13: Estimated size of affordable dwellings needed 2014 to 2039

	One bedroom	Two bedrooms	Three + bedrooms
Mendip	48.2%	31.5%	20.2%
Sedgemoor	43.3%	28.4%	28.3%
South Somerset	44.6%	37.3%	18.2%
Taunton Deane	47.5%	32.3%	20.2%

Source: SHMA 2016

Affordable housing is provided in a number of different ways as follows:

Affordable rented housing	Affordable rented homes are provided by the both the Council (where they still have their own housing stock) and Registered Providers (Housing Associations). For the rent to be classified as affordable, it must be no more than 80% of the market rent (including service charge)
Social rented housing	Social rented homes are provided the Council (where they still have their own housing stock) and Registered Providers (Housing Associations)
Shared ownership	Shared ownership properties can be both new and re-sale properties and are provided by Registered Providers (Housing Associations). With shared ownership you buy a proportion of the property and rent the other proportion. Over time you can increase the proportion that you own by buying additional percentages. Re-sales – these are properties that have already by been bought through shared ownership in and the owners are now looking to sell their % share.

Table 14: Number of affordable homes delivered

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19*	Estimated Annual Affordable Housing Need
Mendip	120	38	189	100	240
Sedgemoor	98	147	65	130	301
South Somerset	128	48	86	122	206
Taunton Deane	222	284	92	218	161
West Somerset	21	40	21	3	47
Total	589	557	453	573	955

Source: Local Authority information

Although the number of affordable homes delivered has increased, the area is still around 40% short of what is needed, annually, in order to meet need.

Empty Homes

Long term vacant dwellings mean 'dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over 6 months'. In October 2018 there were just over 2000 long term vacant dwellings within the County, the highest proportion being within South Somerset.

Table 15: Number of long term vacant dwellings

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Mendip	470	439	404	460	479	332
Sedgemoor	390	277	269	335	325	376
South Somerset	470	636	739	595	643	657
Taunton Deane	428	473	464	456	388	453
West Somerset	211	224	202	224	241	223
Total	1969	2049	2078	2070	2076	2041

Source: Local Authority data

All districts work within their Authority area to identify empty dwellings. They proactively work with the owners to understand the reasons the dwelling is empty to enable collaborative working with partners to help the owners access low cost loans and advice and guidance on repairs and leasing.

Sedgemoor has secured funding to develop empty properties through the Hinkley Point C development agreement. The project to bring empty homes back into use, works with Somerset Care and repair who lease the property from the owner, bring the property back in use and subsequently manage the property. The project has been phased as money has been released. To date phase one to three of the project has delivered 121 bed spaces against a target of 115 bed spaces.

Due to recent changes in legislation under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, local authorities now have the discretion to increase the council tax charges in empty dwellings. This is in addition to the existing 150% council tax on all dwellings that are empty for 2 years or more.

All districts either have already introduced increases in council tax charges for empty properties or are looking to do so in line with the new legislation. The charges range from a total of charge of 200% to 300% for dwellings vacant dwellings for longer periods. This will help the districts in their commitment to encouraging empty properties back into use.

In certain circumstances if a dwelling remains empty the relevant district can take enforcement action. This can be in the form of enforced sale, compulsory purchase order (CPO) or an empty dwelling management order (EDMO).

It is imperative that all districts monitor the benefit realisation of each targeted action to help inform future strategies.

Homelessness in Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton

A **main homelessness duty** is owed where the authority is satisfied that an applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group. Such statutory homeless households are referred to as 'acceptances'.

The MHCLG's Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities identifies the following categories of applicant as having a priority need for accommodation:

1. A pregnant woman or person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
2. A person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside
3. A person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, learning disability or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
4. A person aged 16 or 17 who is not a 'relevant child' or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under section 20 of the Children Act 1989
5. A person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a relevant student)
6. A person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a 'relevant student')
7. A person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces
8. A person who is vulnerable as a result of
 - a. Having served a custodial sentence
 - b. Having been committed for contempt of court, or any other kindred offence; or
 - c. Having been remanded in custody
9. A person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out
10. A person who is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster

Table below shows the outcome of homelessness applications by district for the year 2018/19

Table 16: Homelessness application decisions

	Mendip	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Somerset West and Taunton
Eligible, unintentionally homeless & in priority need	10	84	83	62
Eligible, homeless, in priority need but intentionally Homeless	4	7	9	0
Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	18	38	25	7
Eligible but not homeless	2	14	2	2
Lost contact prior to assessment	2	3	0	0
Withdrew prior to assessment	1	0	1	89
Not Eligible for assistance	0	1	4	10
Total	37	147	124	170

Source: Local Authority data

NB: When the Homeless Reduction Act was introduced in 2018 any approach, regarding homelessness, including those who approached via email and telephone, were recorded onto the system and taken through an initial triage. Out of the 1170 approaches, 89 either failed to continue to engage to enable an assessment to be carried out or did not meet the criteria to continue with an assessment (i.e. they were not homeless/threatened with homelessness or ineligible for assistance)

The top 5 reasons why an individual contacts the local authority with a threat of homelessness are set out in the table below.

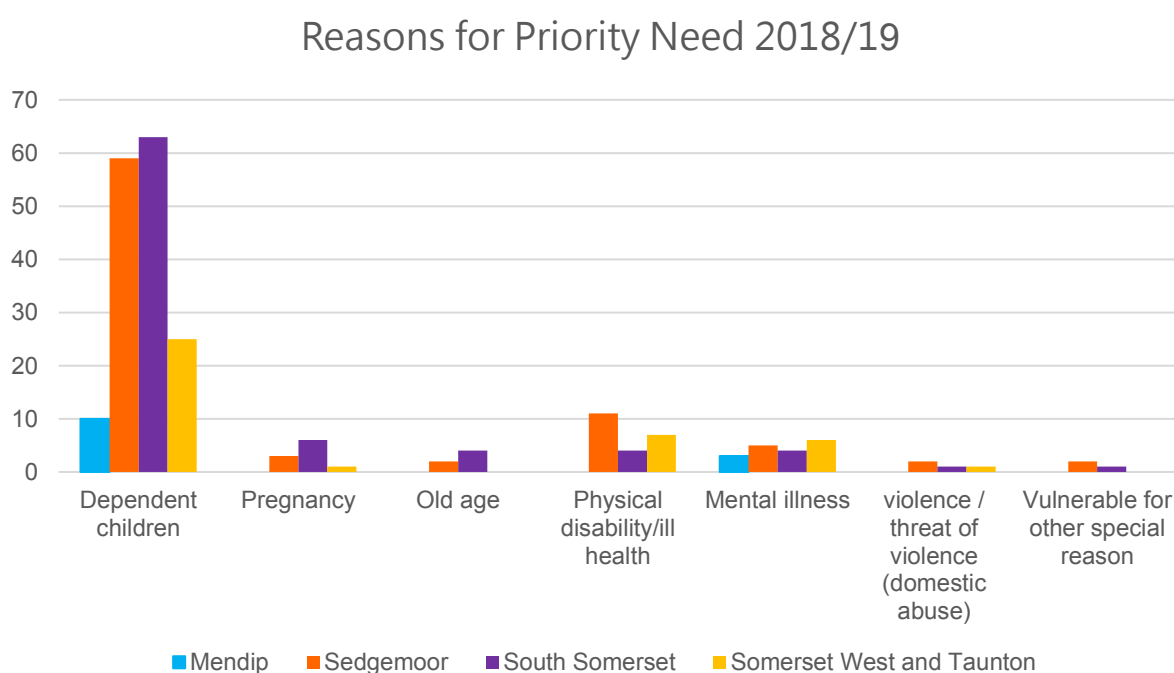
Table 17: Top 5 reasons for initial contact

Mendip	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Somerset West and Taunton
Loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	Loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	Loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	Loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy
Family no longer able/ willing to accommodate	Family no longer able/ willing to accommodate	Non- Violent breakdown of relationship	Family no longer able/willing to accommodate
Non- Violent breakdown of relationship	Non- Violent breakdown of relationship	Family no longer able/ willing to accommodate	Non- Violent breakdown of relationship
Domestic abuse	Domestic abuse	Domestic abuse	Rough Sleeping
End of Social Rented Tenancy	End of Social Rented Tenancy	End of Social Rented Tenancy	Domestic Abuse

Note: End of social rented tenancy would normally be because the tenant has failed to adhere to their tenancy agreement such as anti-social behaviour, failing to adequately maintain the dwelling or garden, or rent arrears.

The chart below shows the 'Applicant households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during the financial year 2018/19, by priority need category'. Please see page 18 for definition of priority need.

Chart 3: Reasons for priority need



As can be seen above having dependent children, is the main reason priority determined. The other reasons cover the main criteria for a 'vulnerable' individual.

58% of the applicants to whom we owe a main housing duty are aged 25-44, this compares with 20% incidence in the general population. 16-24 year olds follow, who make up 25% of the applicants, but only around 10% of the general population. This figure supports the work the councils in Somerset do through P2i which is a service designed to prevent youth homelessness.

Table 18 below shows the breakdown of homelessness duty by age, the information has been provided direct by each of the local authorities.

Table 18: Households accepted by LA as owed a main homelessness duty by age of applicant

2018/19	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75 & above	Total
Mendip	3	2	5	0	0	0	10
Sedgemoor	13	53	11	1	6	0	84
South Somerset	23	48	6	0	3	3	83
Somerset West and Taunton	7	27	6	0	0	1	41
Total	46	130	28	1	9	4	218

Source: Local Authority data

Temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation is offered if a person or family is already homeless and the council is considering a homeless application.

The table below shows the number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation within each District since 2014 as a snapshot in time on the last day of the end of quarter 4 (January to March) each year.

Table 19: Number of applicant households accommodated in temporary accommodation since 2014 as at 31st March each year (as a snapshot in time)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Mendip	19	5	7	6	3	8
Sedgemoor	9	17	23	23	32	37
South Somerset	34	36	31	37	39	35
Taunton Deane	34	31	34	18	23	37
West Somerset	6	6	2	3	9	3

The Hinkley Point C Impact

The Hinkley Point C project, will see the construction of the new nuclear reactors on the West Somerset coast, next door to the current Hinkley Point B station currently in operation.

During the planning stages, the impact on housing was investigated and it was clear that there would be an impact, and therefore through the S106 agreement monies were allocated to increase bedspaces within the areas that were identified as being most affected by the build and the increase in workers.

Inevitably the housing picture has changed particularly in Bridgwater and the villages closest to site. Changes include:

1. Increase in caravan sites where workers have been living in rented vans or where they bring their own
2. Increase in people buying to let and in some cases turning these properties into houses of multi occupation
3. Increases in rent, in some cases impacted in existing tenants
4. People renting out spare rooms to one or two workers

These changes have been offset by the S106 monies and the initiatives that have been put into place. As at November 2019, about 1400 extra bedspaces have been created within Bridgwater and the surrounding area to overcome the impact of the changes in the housing market.

Homelessness Prevention & Relief

Assessments and Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs)

Housing Authorities have a duty to carry out assessments (section 189A of the Housing Act 1996) in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness. This will identify what has caused the homelessness or threat of homelessness, the housing needs of the applicant and any support they need in order to be able to secure and retain accommodation. Following this assessment the housing authority must work with the person to develop a written *“personalised housing plan (PHP) which will include actions (or “reasonable steps”) to be taken by the authority and the applicant to try to prevent or relieve homelessness”*. The introduction of PHPs was as a result of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 which came into force from April 2018. This has increased the volume of work for Local Authority housing teams given that everyone applying for assistance from a housing authority stating they are homeless or threatened with homelessness will require an initial assessment where they are eligible and homeless / threatened with homelessness and provide written personalised housing plans for all.

Homelessness prevention means that we work with people to assist them to remain in their present home either permanently or temporarily whilst they secure alternative housing which in turn avoids homelessness. This could involve services such as debt advice, undertaking Tenancy Accreditation Scheme, rapid response service, Intensive tenancy support, rapid support carried out jointly by Citizens’ Advice (CAB) and the Local Authority, mediation, floating support, deposit schemes, rough sleeper outreach for example.

Homelessness relief is where an authority has been unable to prevent homelessness, Section 189B of the Housing Act 1996 requires housing authorities *“to help people who are homeless to secure accommodation”* and applies when the housing authority is satisfied *“the applicant is both homeless and eligible for assistance”*. Where the LA has *“reason to believe the applicant may be eligible, homeless and in priority need they must also provide interim accommodation”* (temporary accommodation) whilst fulfilling the relief duty.

Ending the relief and prevention duty – the Local Authority can only bring to an end the prevention or relief duty in several specified ways (for more details please refer to the MHCLG Code of Guidance). In addition, the prevention duty will end where the applicant has become homeless and the relief duty will end when 56 days has passed and the housing authority is satisfied that the applicant has a priority need and is homeless unintentionally or on refusal of a final accommodation offer or Part 6 offer.

If prevention or relief were unsuccessful the applicant will be owed the Main Housing Duty to applicants who are eligible, have a priority need for accommodation and are homeless unintentionally. This is explained earlier at page 17.

Table 20: Successful homeless prevention and relief cases

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	% Change since 2012/13
Mendip	222	295	192	263	313	324	377	69.81%
Sedgemoor	483	797	1089	747	498	526	272	-43.6%
South Somerset	260	219	172	190	201	201	206	-20.76%
Taunton Deane	204	306	187	248	289	156	640	171.18%
West Somerset	32	97	46	85	94	68		

Source: Local Authority data

The number of homeless prevention and relief cases can be further broken down to allow analysis of how many households were assisted to remain in their accommodation, how many households were assisted to move to alternative accommodation and how many homeless cases were effectively relieved. The breakdown of these figures for 2018/19 is shown in Table 23 by district.

Table 21: Breakdown of homeless prevention and relief cases 2018/19

	Prevention		Successful homelessness relief	Total
	Assisted to remain in accommodation	Assisted into alternative accommodation		
Mendip	77	251	49	377
Sedgemoor	32	161	73	266
South Somerset	24	104	78	206
Somerset West and Taunton	251*		389	640

Source: Local Authority data

*Breakdown unavailable

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force on the 3rd April 2018. It was a big change for local authorities and since its introduction, the impacts have been:

1. There has been increased pressure from a range of sources, including
 - a. Increased pressure on resources, some council have taken on additional staff to deal with the additional workloads, this put pressure on them to find additional funds
 - b. Length of time a member of staff is working on a case as the applicant remains with the case officer longer due to the 56 days we must now keep them 'under relief' until the final decision is made or duties are discharged
 - c. Lack of accommodation and affordability
 - d. Landlords being more risk adverse
 - e. Increased number of applicants with complex needs making it challenging to rehouse
 - f. Burden to accommodate for longer in temporary accommodation during relief stage, e.g. intentionally homeless, now accommodate for 56 days before can make an intentionally homeless decision
2. Personal Housing plan production and monitoring, requiring additional staff time and resource
3. H-CLIC administration and process requirements have increased administration for officers (H-CLIC is the government statutory returns)
4. Incredibly challenging to recruit experienced, professional housing options officer staff – a challenge for all local authorities in the South West England (and further afield) meaning often Las are operating with vacancies or with inexperienced staff or have resorted to taking in costly temporary agency staff

Armed Forces Veterans and homelessness

The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge to ensure that we will do all we can to ensure that veterans are treated fairly and not disadvantaged in their day to day life. Somerset collectively signed the pledge in 2012 and has since that have formed the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership to ensure that the pledge is honoured and delivered upon.

In October 2017, the MOD produced figures based in data from the Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey 2016. The study estimated that 75.64% of the veteran population in Great Britain own a house outright, or with a mortgage and 23.19% rent or part rent their property. This would therefore imply that 1.17% of veterans are potentially homeless.

MOD provides the numbers of current armed forces pension and compensation recipients at different geographic levels. It does not show those entitled to deferred pension payments (minimum eligibility criteria is 2 years of service). Data is separated into three main datasets:

- Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS).
- War Pensions Scheme (WPS)
- Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)

Table 23: Location of Armed Forces pension, war pension and compensation recipients 31/3/2019

	Veterans	AFPS	WPS	AFCS
Mendip	980	881	236	31
Sedgemoor	986	868	258	52
South Somerset	3334	3025	686	292
Taunton Deane	1270	1044	352	235
West Somerset	333	289	92	18
Total	6903	6107	1629	628

The vulnerabilities and support needs of homeless ex-Service personnel are, overall, very similar in nature to those of other non-statutory homeless people, but a greater proportion of ex-Service personnel have alcohol, physical and/or mental health problems.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been found among a small number of homeless veterans although other non-military related mental health problems were more common.

A 2013 study conducted by York University (commissioned by the Centre for Housing Policy) identified several key reasons why veterans experience housing difficulties. These include:

- A shortage of affordable accommodation
- Problems sustaining a tenancy
- Relationship breakdown
- Inadequate transition planning from the Armed Forces

Other factors that may contribute to homelessness amongst single veterans include their experience of service, e.g. unfamiliarity with civilian life (e.g. housing market, the welfare system and budgeting) making it difficult for them to secure housing and to manage tenancies.

Homeless veterans have also been found on average to be older, have slept rough for longer, be less likely to use drugs and more likely to have alcohol-related problems.

In considering the needs of homeless veterans, addressing the wider and contributory factors through informed advice and referral to specialist military support services can be, therefore, as important as the meeting the accommodation needs.

The Royal British Legion is currently supporting a campaign 'No Homeless Veteran' to raise the profile of veterans who are currently homeless.

Housing for Young People in Somerset

Pathways to Independence (P2i) is a commissioned service, by the county council, supported by district councils, that deals with youth housing in Somerset.

Somerset County Council and the four districts across Somerset commissioned the setting up of the Pathways to Independence (P2i), during 2012/13 as a response to the escalating issues around youth housing in Somerset. P2i was launched in May 2013 and is the multi-agency homelessness prevention service for young people aged 16 to 25 who reside in, or have a local connection to the Somerset area.

Primarily, the service was designed to prevent homelessness by providing targeted prevention measures. If prevention was not possible the service allows young people with housing related support needs to progress along a pathway of outcome focused needs led provision, until they are able to sustain independent living without the need for support.

Whilst P2i has achieved its objectives and has provided a good service over the past three years there are some key areas of service delivery that were not considered as part of the original specification and as a result have arisen in gaps in provision for some of the most vulnerable young people. To understand these identified gaps, a comprehensive needs analysis was undertaken and informed the new specification which was launched on the 1st January 2017. For example there is a need for smaller properties rather than larger multi occupancy dwellings such as a Foyer provision. The current contract is due to end in September 2021 and aims to create an outcomes focussed service.

Table 24 shows the age demographic of P2i for all districts, it shows that the largest proportion of individuals are aged 18-21.

Table 24: P2i age demographics as of 28th March 2019

	16/17	18/21	22 and over
Mendip	4	30	5
Sedgemoor	10	19	9
South Somerset	5	17	9
West Somerset and Taunton	2	22	12
Total	21	88	35

Chart 4 shows the number of contacts that staff have had with individuals when an assessment of need has been completed. Please note that one person could have had contact on more than one occasion. The reason for contact is largely being threatened with homelessness.

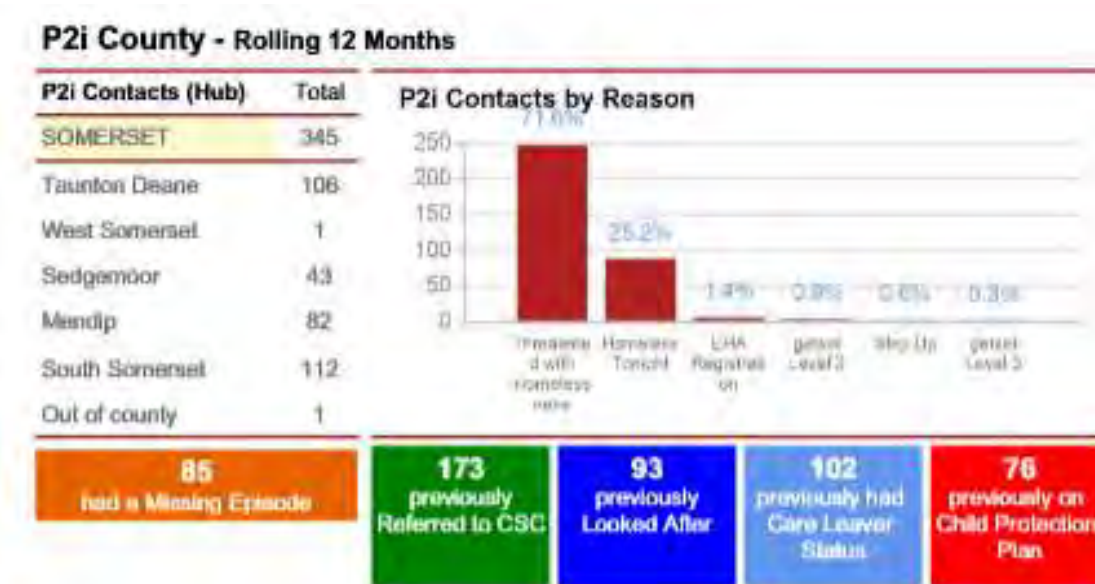
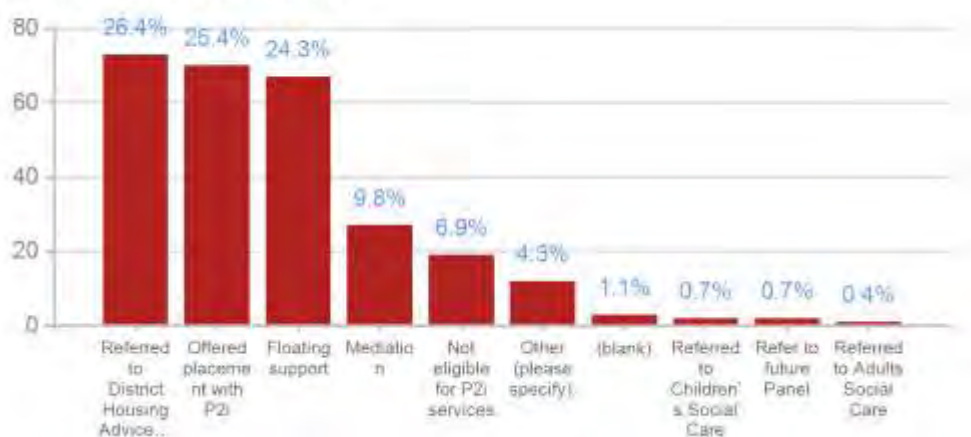


Chart 5, below, shows that just over a quarter of all cases are referred to the local authority for housing advice with another 25% being offered a placement, there is also just under 25% that need floating support. This highlights the need for adequate housing to be provided which is suitable and available to prevent youth homelessness.

Panel Outcomes Decisions



Housing and support for vulnerable adults and people with complex needs

In May 2015, following budget cuts for adults with complex needs, it was agreed that a countywide approach was needed and a multi-agency, cross sector alliance was formed. It championed a new approach that innovated and delivered creative solutions for the most entrenched adults with complex needs. It offered greater flexibility and commitment around multi-agency working as well as a strategy to deliver effective ongoing support.

Positive Lives was initiated through the Local Government Association (LGA) sponsored Design in Public Services programme undertaken in 2015. It has since then developed into a broad multi-agency, cross sector coalition of partners.

Positive lives has focused on the following objectives:

- To strengthen positive family and supports objectives
- To promote physical and emotional health as part of a positive life
- To reduce or avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital/care/prison
- To help maintain stability of tenure
- To provide the right support at the right time – least intervention first
- To reduce unnecessary financial burdens on agencies

Over the last year Positive Lives have

- Supported 850 people
- Supported 400 people at any one time
- 380 people engaged with education or training
- 226 people moved into independent living
- 47 people obtaining employment
- 38 very vulnerable/high risk people moved into independent living
- 20 people engaged in formal volunteering as a preparation for work
- 262 people from local communities have provided voluntary support

Step Together is a new support service commissioned by Somerset County Council for adults in Somerset who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and also have a mix of mental health needs, drug and alcohol problems, behavioural issues, debt or have been involved in the criminal justice system.

The service is provided by 'Second Step' whose clients have complex needs and often find it extremely hard to sustain positive change in their lives. Their service is primarily about helping people to live fulfilling lives in their own communities, retain their tenancy and reduce repeated homelessness.

The contract will be closely monitored to ensure that positive outcomes are delivered for this client group.

Income Maximisation, Debt and Money Management

Citizens Advice are funded by all districts to provide budgeting, money and debt advice to individuals and warrant schemes across the county linked to local needs. These services are integral to helping many households keep their homes or access a new home if they cannot stay, and importantly help to prevent future homelessness through tenancy sustainment.

Gypsy and Travellers

For the purposes of planning policy for Traveller Sites, travellers means gypsies and travellers and travelling show people.

Gypsies and Travellers means 'persons of a nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such'.

Travelling show people means 'members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows'.

When considering the needs of Gypsy and Travellers who travel through and temporarily settle in the county, it is very unusual for members of the community to come into the housing office and present as homeless. Instead, their needs are normally assessed when we visit any unauthorised encampment and appropriate advice is given at the time.

The Somerset Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was originally produced in 2010 and updated in 2013. It currently runs to 2032 and sets the number of pitches required in each district, together with transit requirements and showman yard requirements. The GTAA is being reviewed in 2020.

Gypsy and Travellers are not homeless simply because they live in accommodation that is moveable or impermanent nor because they travel; however, like any household they may become at risk of being homeless and in need of advice and assistance. Under the Housing Act 1996, section 175 (2) (b) ' A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but – (b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it'.

Somerset, Mendip in particular, has seen a large increase in a caravan dwellers, where caravans pitch at the side of road, or on local authority or Somerset County Council land and live there.

Rough Sleeping in Somerset

Rough sleeping is defined as 'People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or 'bashes' which are makeshift shelters, often comprised of cardboard boxes). The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest squatters or travellers (this includes new age/van dwellers).

Rough sleeping within the county is currently challenging. Living on the street is detrimental to mental and physical health and wellbeing. People sleeping rough develop chronic health problems and die younger, and are more at risk from violence. Rough sleeping also has an impact on local residents and visitors. Any rough sleeping is a concern and we aim to find ways to alleviate, reduce and ultimately end all rough sleeping across the county.

Reconnections is making sure that homeless people are reconnected back to home area where they have a connection. This is an area that will continue to need to be reviewed to ensure we have effective mechanisms to address robustly and swiftly.

Mendip and Taunton Deane councils were identified by the Government as having high numbers of rough sleepers and through the Governments Rough Sleeper Initiative, funding was given to create a coordinated strategic approach along with joined up front line services to tackle the issues head on.

It has become evident recently that a significant number of Rough Sleepers from the Sedgemoor area were historically utilising Rough Sleeper Services within the Taunton area which effectively masked the Rough Sleeper issue in the Bridgwater and surrounding area. This shift explains the sharp rise in Rough Sleeper numbers in Sedgemoor from 2019 onwards (as seen in Table 25 below).

As a result, Somerset West and Taunton Rough Sleeper services have commenced positive partner relationships with Sedgemoor focussing on effective reconnection of Rough Sleepers back to Sedgemoor in a timely manner. It will be important moving forwards that all districts continue to liaise and monitor rough sleeper trends and encourage effective partnership working to support people within their home area avoiding drift into other Local Authority areas which puts pressure on services in those areas and masks issues at source.

The following services and features are helping to reduce the numbers of rough sleepers in these districts and enable individuals to engage in alternative safer and healthier options than rough sleeping, with a view to tackling the root of the problem and longer term recovery:

- Increased focus with a multi-agency partnership approach with monthly strategic pathways meetings of key professionals and weekly task and targeting meetings between staff on the ground
- Rough sleeper co-ordinator
- Housing coaches x 2 (Mendip)
- Assertive coaching
- Streetwise Officer (Taunton)
- Personal budgets to make a difference in engagement, preventing further nights outs
- Shared house for those who are new to the street (SWT)
- Housing First pilot schemes
(Housing First model is designed to help individuals who have complex needs who have been unable to access and sustain housing with an opportunity to move forward and recover by providing non-conditional independent accommodation with quality, intensive, open-ended wrap-around support services)
- Funding for reconnections
- Psychologically Informed Environment approach with clinical psychology input for hard to engage rough sleepers with complex needs (Mendip)
- Landlord Liaison Officer for Keyring Lettings (Mendip)
- Additional drug and alcohol workers dual diagnosis workers (SSDC)
- Reconnection Officer (SWT)
- No Second Night Out Officer (SWT)

All districts commission direct access accommodation, drop-in and outreach, access to sheltered and single homeless supported accommodation and additional shelter in cold weather through Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

The Severe Weather Protocol sets out the type of arrangements that local authorities have in place to ensure people are not at risk of dying on the streets during cold weather. SWEP arrangements are triggered when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights. Authorities make arrangements with local providers to open up more temporary shelter in these circumstances which are usually communal areas and halls. It is designed to protect rough sleepers from risks to health and life from the cold.

Table 25 below shows the extent of rough sleeping by District since 2012. This information is based on a single snapshot carried out on one night in the autumn every year using street counts and intelligence driven estimates.

Table 25: Extent of rough sleeping on one night in Autumn since 2012

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Mendip	19	16	20	20	16	19	14	13
Sedgemoor	5	2	4	6	2	7	3	25
South Somerset	1	1	2	5	8	4	3	8
Taunton Deane	15	7	18	21	20	23	14	25
West Somerset	0	2	6	4	2	4	2	

Using the quarter January to March 2019, further analysis of rough sleepers by characteristics

Table 26: Rough Sleeping by age, nationality and gender – January to March 2019

	Total	UK	EU	Non EU	Not known	Under 18	18-25	26 and over	Not known	Male	Female
SDC	3	1	1	0	1			3		3	
MDC	14	11	2	1	0			13	1	9	5
SSDC	3	3						3		3	
Taunton	14	13	1				1	12	1	14	
West Somerset	2	2						2		2	

Voluntary and Faith Groups

There are a number of voluntary and faith groups that provide valuable support to those in need within the county, for example, drop in sessions for social support, Health and Wellbeing related activities, volunteers, and opportunities for getting out of the cold in severe weather. There are also potential opportunities for the Local Authorities to work more closely with these groups so that they can help support the multi-agency approach to tackling rough sleeping by encouraging individuals to engage with services which will help them reconnect to their own area, engage with relevant support services and work towards accessing suitable accommodation and avoid unintentionally sustaining rough sleeping.

Consultation

A homelessness Survey was available throughout November and December 2018. The survey was sent to a sample of homeless applicants and all stakeholders. The number of responses received for each district is shown below. There were also consultation events across the County in December 2018

	Applicants	Stakeholders
Mendip	7	32
Sedgemoor	12	22
South Somerset	11	12
Taunton Deane	11	4
West Somerset	2	3
Total	43	73

Amongst applicants, there was only 19 of the total who found the Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) and referred to it again. Some of the comments attached to this referred to the fact that it did not feel personalised to them/their family. Perhaps more should be done to work with applicants to determine how to improve the PHP.

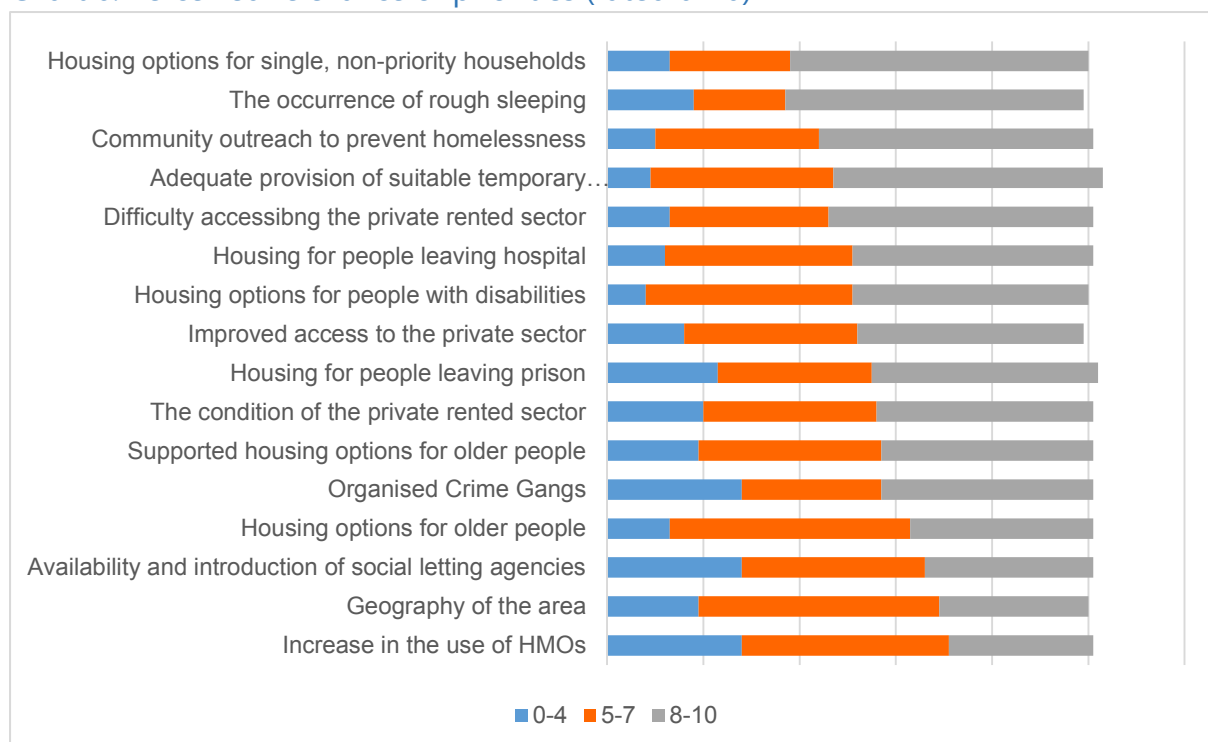
Those who had been offered temporary accommodation commented on the accommodation that they had been offered and, whilst some accepted this accommodation, several clients felt the accommodation was not suitable. Sometimes it felt unsafe because of the other tenants, or was unsuitable because of the applicant's specific needs around disability or because they were asked to share with a teenage child of the opposite sex. There were also comments more generally, that clients offered private rented accommodation felt they could not afford the accommodation proposed.

Stakeholders were asked how relevant a number of issues were to them in their roles. Shown in chart 6 are the priorities that were assigned the highest relevance. Those above the horizontal line are those that generate the highest scores for relevance; housing options for single, non-priority households and rough sleeping are deemed to be the most relevant priorities.

Participants at events highlighted that individuals with complex needs find it hard to engage with services; some are unable to cope with application and support process and some choose alternative lifestyle due to their detrimental life experiences. As well as difficulties in accessing accommodation there is often not enough specialist support available to enable those with complex needs to sustain accommodation. Those with complex needs can be a concern for those with lower needs, when placed together. This necessitates a review of gaps in service provision and the identification of alternative accommodation options (e.g. housing first initiatives) alongside necessary resourcing. However there are other pressing needs, as shown.

Improved access to the private rented sector and better quality of provision here, is a relatively high priority. It is also clear that there are groups with particular needs who remain a key priority; those with disabilities, older people or those leaving hospital or prison. There is also a clear need for accessible suitable temporary accommodation for those with complex needs and / or disabilities.

Chart 6: Perceived relevance of priorities (rated 0-10)



The responses to the survey shown above are supported by verbatim comments made as part of the consultation:

'Challenge to prevent homelessness and work together creatively in this respect. There is a huge gap in accessible temporary or longer term temporary accommodation to help move ons from hospital, repossessions etc. for people with complex medical needs for whom B&B simply is not an option'

'Suitable and adequate housing choices. Affordable rents. Encouraging new and good quality landlords in the private sector to work with us. Prevention/Intervention Support after accommodation is found'

'There is a huge gap for those who have a dual diagnosed with mental health and drugs misuse. The homeless rate for individuals within this category is on the increase. Accommodation officers are housing individuals who fall out of their sector because they have no option. It is a huge concern for many agencies at this present time, especially with the weather turning'

Conclusions

The assessment has identified the following areas of concern that need to be considered further in the new Somerset homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023.

Areas that need to be considered further

1. Population projections show that the population is due to grow faster than anticipated, especially in the former Taunton Deane area and in Sedgemoor. The challenge to deliver sufficient affordable homes and to support the tenure needs of our residents will become more pressing, not less
2. The gap between the local housing allowance and market rent for private lets is a significant barrier in allowing applicants to secure a private rented property because they cannot secure financial support to make the home affordable. This can force people to make a difficult choice and move away from support, e.g. to move away from their family.
3. Bringing empty properties back into use is always a challenge. There is value in exploring and sharing best practice to increase the numbers brought back into use

4. When assessing what housing is needed in the county we need to ensure that adequate housing is provided which is suitable and available to help prevent youth homelessness.
5. In particular we need to work with enablers to encourage increased numbers of single social rented accommodation units being bought forward on developments to meet the needs of the majority of people who are seeking single unit accommodation via Homefinder.
6. There is a need to recognise the need for smaller units rather than larger multi-occupancy dwellings, to allow single and couples and non-priority households the ability to access housing. Working with planners to reflect housing needs in what is built could support this need.
7. Educating young people whilst they are at school about homelessness, to educate them with the aim of helping alleviate future youth homelessness, although funding will need to be considered to support this
8. Whilst we have been successful with cases in preventing and relieving their homelessness, we continue to seek new ways to reduce the number of people approaching us needing temporary accommodation in crisis
9. The Homeless Reduction Act 2017, brought in the need to produce a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) for clients. The consultation information identifies that further work is needed to in respect of PHP and the processes and systems needed to empower and enable customers to find solutions
10. Work with veterans and their families to put in place any additional protocols that could be needed to signpost to support with other factors, such as PTSD, alcohol or mental health problems which can exacerbate the situation
11. We have an ageing population in Somerset, especially 85 years and older group. The future needs of older people need to rise up the agenda and more energy given to understanding their requirements and future housing options.
12. Rough sleeping is a concern for all and a challenge in much of the county, in particular, due to higher numbers and complexity of need. It will continue to demand sustained focus and resource with additional interventions, strategies and coordinated partnership working. It's likely that there is rough sleeping which is 'unseen', which would include sleeping in vehicles and tents hidden in rural areas. It is key that we also ensure we address reconnections robustly and swiftly.

13. Feedback from the consultation events about key issues expressed the need for more suitable, affordable sustainable accommodation. To achieve this there needs to be:
- A continued need for increased collaborative working with partnership agencies where homelessness is an issue or risk, especially to support the vulnerable and those with complex needs. Resources are limited and in many cases, different agencies hold a different part of the jigsaw
 - Continued intervention where possible to help clients to remain in their existing homes to aid the prevention of homelessness. It is well recognised that homelessness costs individuals in terms of their mental and physical health as well as the cost to their finances and local service resources.
 - A review of relevant county-wide and local strategies, policies and practices support homelessness prevention and fair access to social and affordable housing and do not discriminate against those most in need
14. Consultation also highlighted concerns about vulnerable individuals with complex needs who find it hard to engage, access, navigate services and sustain accommodation without specialist support. Those with complex needs can be a concern for those with lower needs, when placed together. This necessitates a review of gaps in service provision and the identification of alternative accommodation options (e.g. housing first initiatives) alongside necessary resourcing.