



South Somerset  
District Council

Somerset West  
and Taunton

**DRAFT**

**Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy  
2019 - 2023**

**September 2019**

# SOMERSET HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

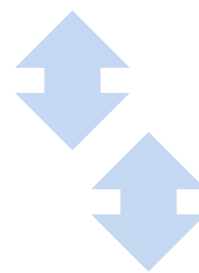
The 2002 Homelessness Act places a duty on Local Authorities to develop a homelessness and rough sleeper strategy and an obligation to renew it every five years. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, introduced new measures for dealing with homelessness including:

- Increasing the length of time a housing authority should treat someone as threatened with Homelessness from 28 to 56 days;
- The introduction of Personalised Housing Plans for clients to outline the circumstances of homelessness, the housing needs of the client, any support required to secure and sustain accommodation, steps that the client is required to take along with the steps the local authority is required to take to assist the client.;
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible households threatened with homelessness;
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants;
- A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The current interim strategy was developed by the four District Councils in Somerset and was adopted in 2018. Since the adoption of the Interim Strategy we have conducted a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment which has been used as the evidence base for the “Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2023” as well as considering the new requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The delivery of this Strategy will be monitored by the Homeless Managers Group (HMG). A full review will be conducted in 2023 when a new needs assessment will be carried out to guide development of a refreshed strategy.

## 2 HOW THE STRATEGY LINKS IN WITH OTHER STRATEGIES



In Somerset we have an overarching strategy, developed by the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board “Improving Lives in Somerset Strategy 2019 - 2028”, which details the County Vision which includes the following:

- A thriving and productive Somerset that is ambitious, confident and focused on improving people’s lives
- A county of resilient, well-connected and safe and strong communities working to reduce inequalities
- A county infrastructure that supports affordable housing, economic prosperity and sustainable public services

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- A county and environment where all partners, private and voluntary sector, focus on improving the health and wellbeing of all our communities

The “Somerset Housing Strategy 2019 – 2023” was launched in March 2019, covers the whole county and sits beneath the “Improving lives Strategy”. The Strategy sets out the following vision for the county:

- **Strong and effective strategic Leadership:**  
To deliver leadership across an integrated system that embraces communities, housing, health & wellbeing, social care and town & country planning
- **A local Economy that provides opportunity for all:**  
To increase housing supply across all tenures and maximise the proportion of affordable homes including within rural communities, to be constructed by a skilled local labour force
- **Homes in Somerset are good for your Health:**  
A healthy living environment with secure and decent homes that fosters independent living within strong communities
- **A Society that supports the vulnerable:**  
Coordinated support to individuals and communities to reduce the impact of Welfare Reform, to prevent homelessness, and to facilitate a balanced housing stock that meets the needs of all local people

The “Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2023” sits beneath the “Somerset Housing Strategy” and works to support the vision and priorities detailed in it.. The “Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2023” details what we know, what we are doing and what we will do to continue to improve the service we provide.

### 3 OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING IN MENDIP, SEDGEMOOR, SOUTH SOMERSET, SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON

There were 478 homeless applications decisions taken in Somerset during 2018/19. Out of these 218 were owed a homelessness duty<sup>1</sup>. The most common reason for initial contact throughout the county was the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy. The main reason for priority need was having dependent children, with the remaining factors covering the main criteria for a vulnerable individual.

58% of applicants owed a main duty were aged 25 – 44 years followed by the 16 -24 years age group, who made up 25% of the applicants. The younger bias of those in need of support is very clear.

A total of 1495 prevention and relief cases presented during 2018/19. Of this total, 133 were assisted to remain in their accommodation and 516 were assisted into alternative accommodation under the prevention duty (there were also another 251 that were assisted under the prevention duty but we were unable to break this down further)<sup>2</sup>, whilst 589 were assisted to relieve their homelessness under the relief duty<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 statutorily homeless households are referred to as ‘acceptances’.

<sup>2</sup> Homelessness prevention means providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness. - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions>. This could involve services such as debt advice, undertaking the Tenancy Accreditation Scheme, rapid response service, Intensive Tenancy Support, rapid support that is carried out jointly

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The use of temporary accommodation has been consistently low in Somerset over the last few years; we have accommodated 106 people, in such accommodation, as of quarter 4 (January – March) of 2018/19.

As a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) we are expecting demand for temporary accommodation to increase. This expectation stems from the fact that under this statutory provision we are obliged to help prevent an applicant becoming homeless, or relieve them of homelessness regardless of whether they are intentionally homeless. This requirement can mean that an applicant who is intentionally homeless will still need to be placed into temporary accommodation, if needed, whilst we try to relieve their homelessness during the 56 days' 'relief duty'.

We are also seeing an increase in the volume of approaches and the length of time staff are working on an individual case. This increase in volumes can mean that often cases where an applicant is likely to be intentionally homeless now remain with the officer concerned, as part of their casework, until a final decision is made.

We currently have approximately 568 armed forces veterans in the county who neither own nor rent a property and who could potentially become homeless. Homeless veterans have been found on average to be older and more likely to have alcohol-related problems. In considering the needs of homeless veterans, directing them to specialist advice can be as important as meeting their accommodation needs.

Pathways to Independence (P2i) is the commissioned service that deals with youth housing in Somerset. The highest proportion of youths needing help during 2018/19 were aged between 18-21 years, with the main reason for presenting being the threat of homelessness.

Positive Lives, which support adults with complex needs, supported 850 people during 2018. They provided other support too, such as helping 380 people to engage with education and training, 226 people to move into independent living and 47 people to gain employment.

We also saw the launch, in April 2019, of the 'Second Step' service which helps clients with complex needs to live fulfilling lives in their communities, thus retaining their tenancy and reducing repeated homelessness.

We continue to assess gypsy and traveller provision within the county to ensure that we have suitable sites for settled or settling gypsies and travellers as well as transit sites for those who are moving through the county.

Rough sleeping within the county is currently a challenge in the Taunton area of Somerset West and Taunton Council and for Mendip District Council, but is at low levels in the other Districts

## 4 GAPS IDENTIFIED IN CURRENT PROVISION:

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between CAB & LA, mediation, floating support, deposit schemes, rough sleeper outreach, direct access hostels, tech loan to enable support etc.

<sup>3</sup> Homelessness relief<sup>3</sup> is where an authority has been unable to prevent homelessness but helps someone to secure accommodation, even though the authority is under no statutory obligation to do so - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions>

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The Somerset Homeless Needs Assessment concluded that:

- 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.
- Whilst earnings have reduced, the average selling price of a house in Somerset has increased over the last five years, with a house costing typically close to eight times the earnings in the lowest quartile.
- There is a considerable gap in the affordability of homes for private rent in Somerset. The average rent currently accounts for 36% of the median gross monthly pay compared with 28% in 2015. Whilst the delivery of additional social housing may go some way to deal with the gap it will not resolve the entire issue for example affordable rents are not always affordable to all prospective tenants.
- The gap between the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and the 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.
- The need to keep pushing for access to more and better quality private, rented stock
- The wider roll out of Universal Credit will place further demands on homeless services; we should continue to track these demands and may need to increase the proportions of Homefinder applicants who present in the Gold Band.
- More work should be done to look at long-term vacant dwellings, mirroring good practice across the districts and stepping up our existing efforts so these dwellings may be brought into use.
- 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. This may point to the need for smaller shared units rather than larger multi occupancy dwellings. Stakeholders also point to the need for more access for single, non-priority households
- The highest proportion of homeless applicants are aged 25-44 years, with the most common reason for being made homeless being due to receiving a notice to quit from a landlord. Work could be undertaken to understand the reasons why notice was served and what we could do to reduce the occurrences of this happening. Support could be given to landlords facing difficulties to stay in the private renting market if they are finding it problematic.
- Whilst we have been successful with cases, preventing and relieving their homelessness, we continue to seek new ways to reduce the number of people approaching us needing temporary accommodation.
- We anticipate further demands on the time of service providers in dealing with cases and the volume of approaches following the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (namely, 56 days'

prevention duty and 56 days relief duty). We now have a duty to produce and agree a personal housing plan, support all clients for a longer period during the extended duty time, and including increased length of time in Temporary Accommodation.

- When working with veterans and their families, additional protocols may be needed to signpost to support with other factors, such as PTSD, alcohol or mental health problems exacerbating the situation.
- We have an ageing population in Somerset, especially in the 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 delivering more options to meet them.
- Rough sleeping is a challenge in two districts in particular, due to numbers and complexity of need, and 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 those sofa surfing, sleeping in vehicles hidden in rural areas.
- The need for increased collaborative working with partnership agencies especially to support the vulnerable and those with complex needs.
- We should continue to intervene where possible to help clients to remain in their existing homes to aid the prevention of homelessness.

## 5 WHAT WILL WE PRIORITISE?

Since the adoption of the Interim Homelessness Strategy we have seen the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018. A priority for the new strategy will be to review the impact of this Act over the term of the new strategy.

### **PRIORITY 1: Provision of adequate, affordable housing stock**

As a result of the widening affordability gap, it is important that we continue to press developers to deliver affordable homes of all tenures. We can also prop up the provision of appropriate housing through bringing existing vacant dwellings back into use and by supporting landlords to continue to make homes available for social rent. Finally, we should push for the continued improvement of the quality of private rented housing stock.

### **PRIORITY 2: Support clients to remain in their existing accommodation where appropriate.**

This priority involves looking at and improving the range of options, support and tools that can assist an individual in remaining in their existing accommodation. Needing to move accommodation can be hugely disruptive and costly for individuals and families; being able to sustain current accommodation can deliver cost savings for Local Authorities and their partner agencies. In particular, we need to reduce the incidence of those aged 25-44 years being given notice to quit. Understanding the detail behind this may require further engagement with this group.

This priority would help us to meet the 'prevention duty' detailed in the HRA 2017 which places a duty on us as districts to make available for all who are at risk of becoming

homeless and not just those individuals that are in ‘priority need’<sup>4</sup>. Prevention duty lasts for 56 days and is designed to reduce homelessness. If we are not able to prevent the individual becoming homeless they will then come under ‘relief duty’ which requires housing authorities to help those that are homeless to secure accommodation. This duty applies to individuals that are both homeless and eligible for assistance. The ‘relief duty’ lasts for another 56 days; during this time reasonable steps must be taken by the housing authority and the applicant to secure accommodation. These steps are set out in a personalised housing plan (PHP) which is drawn up with the applicant. The PHP is a new requirement to help the applicant take ownership and work with the housing advice team to relieve their homelessness.

### **PRIORITY 3: Support specific client groups to access suitable accommodation through effective support**

It may not always be possible for a client to remain in their current accommodation so where a move cannot be avoided, this priority will support and empower them to access suitable accommodation that is affordable to them in a timely manner. This priority looks at the options open to clients and considers the accommodation choices available such as the private rented sector and move-on options.

More specifically, we need to ensure that adequate housing is provided to help prevent youth homelessness, which may point to the need for smaller shared units rather than larger, multi-occupancy dwellings. We also have an ageing population, especially evident in the growing number of those aged 85 years or older, and we need to commit to understanding their needs to enable us to plan to meet their future needs.

### **PRIORITY 4: Support the government’s commitment to combat rough sleeping.**

All the district are committed to support the MHCLG commitment to combat rough sleeping. Whilst there will be common approaches within the county there will be targeted approaches to address specific needs within the district, such as:

Collectively being robust in our reconnection policies  
Effective emergency accommodation provision  
Cold weather provision and outreach service to support and empower individuals off the street

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<sup>4</sup> “The following have a priority need for accommodation:

- a pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.”

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/189>



## **PRIORITY 5: Maintain strong working relationships across partnerships.**

This strategy is a partnership approach between four Local Authorities as well as their partners. It cannot be delivered in isolation and this priority recognises the need for existing working relationships to be maintained and built upon. Effective partnership working brings a number of benefits including the sharing of best practice and effective use of resources to deliver cost savings to all working partners and, for this reason, it remains a priority.

We especially need to work together to ensure there is support for vulnerable individuals and those with complex needs.

Many of those sleeping rough will have complex needs, but there will be others across the District who are highly vulnerable, including those with dual diagnosis, where the only option is to work in partnership if we are to improve their outlook.

## **PRIORITY 6: Track and respond to the impacts of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The Act became effective from 3rd April 2018 and requires the expansion of existing homeless services. It presents a number of challenges due to the level of change it required and associated resource implications.

We need to:

- Continue to deliver prevention focussed housing options services in line with the HRA 2017
- Retain the staff we have to avoid recruitment due to the difficulty in obtaining experienced housing options staff
- Staff retention due to resilience of housing options staff.
- An increased number in temporary accommodation due to the length of time we now have to accommodate under the HRA 2017

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### 6 WHAT WILL WE DO?

The following actions relate to the conclusions identified in the ‘Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment 2019’. The priorities and actions relate to the county as a whole, if an action is just connected to a specific authority this will be detailed in the responsibility section so that this is clear. Each priority is detailed individually on the following pages with the relevant actions detailed below the priority for ease. The actions have been categorised as those which we can **deliver**, those which we will **enable** and those where the role of the council is to **support**:

#### PRIORITY 1: Provision of adequate, affordable housing stock

Our role	Action	Timescale (Importance)	Responsibility	Measure	Review date
Enable	Strengthen our relationships with registered providers and developers to increase the amount of new affordable housing provided within the county	Ongoing	Enabling Teams		
Enable	Maximise the provision of 1 bed affordable social housing accommodation across all areas by working with registered providers and new build developers		Enabling Teams		
Support	Work with P2i to look at the types of accommodation that is needed for dealing with youth homelessness and where these dwellings would be best located	ongoing	HMG		
Deliver	Look at the vacancies that have arisen on Homefinder for social housing supported accommodation for older people which have been difficult to let to try and establish the reasons why and look at what is needed to ensure that this accommodation is desirable to older persons		Homefinder Management and Monitoring Board		
Enable	Share best practice in bringing more private sector properties back into use to increase our success rate		Empty Homes Officers/Team		

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### PRIORITY 2: Support clients to remain in their existing accommodation where appropriate

Our role	Action	Timescale (Importance)	Responsibility	Measure	Review date
Support	Work with landlords to overcome barriers to keeping property on the private rented market.		HMG		
Deliver	Consider whether a Private Rented Officer is needed to work with landlords to overcome barriers such as: bonds not being accepted; Universal Credit applicants being rejected; finding solutions so that the applicant is accommodated and the landlord is reassured with any concerns they may have. This could also cover areas such as working with the applicants to get rent paid direct to the landlord if needed as there has been some movement on this since Universal Credit was first introduced		HMG		
Deliver	Continue to deliver “value for money” prevention schemes to support homelessness prevention, building on previous initiatives such as tenancy support; mediation and rent in advance for non-priority cases		HMG		
Deliver	Create a group with local authorities and registered providers across Somerset to highlight anti-social behaviour and rent arrears cases that are facing action as part of the prevention protocol		HMG		

### PRIORITY 3: Support specific client groups to access suitable accommodation through effective planning

Our role	Action	Timescale (Importance)	Responsibility	Measure	Review date
Deliver	To review how we deliver bespoke good quality and meaningful Personal Housing Plan tasks. Explore opportunities to improve and streamline the process as it is currently resource intensive		HMG		
Deliver	Look at joint training opportunities for staff to improve the quality of advice		HMG		
Support	Identify support schemes across the county and work in partnership to ensure clients can access effectively		HMG		

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### PRIORITY 4: Support the government’s commitment to combat rough sleeping.

Our role	Action	Timescale (Importance)	Responsibility	Measure	Review date
Deliver	Continue to monitor the extent of rough sleeping bi-monthly so that swift action can be taken when new rough sleepers are identified	Ongoing	HMG		
Enable	Work with partner organisations to ensure there are viable accommodation options and effective housing pathways to help new and longer term rough sleepers	Ongoing	HMG		

### PRIORITY 5: Strengthen working relationships across partnerships.

Our role	Action	Timescale (Importance)	Responsibility	Measure	Review date
Deliver	Monitor the Second step contract to ensure that positive outcomes are delivered for this client group		HMG		

### PRIORITY 6: Track the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on available resource

Our role	Action	Timescale (Importance)	Responsibility	Measure	Review date
Deliver	Monitor the volume and quality of cases following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017		HMG		
Deliver	Review the throughput of temporary accommodation given the increase in demand and length of time we now have to accommodate people under the act		HMG		
Support	Work with DWP to increase the advice and opportunities to our customers to maximise their income and skills		HMG		
Deliver	Review the process for dealing with homelessness and the Homefinder policy as some elements of the Homefinder policy can have a negative impact. Additionally review the quality and efficiency of advice given by the teams and make recommendations for improvement		HMG		
Deliver	Review the outcomes of the use of a hospital discharge worker in South Somerset		HMG		
Deliver	Review the outcomes of the use of a drug and alcohol worker in South Somerset		HMG		

## 7 HOW WILL WE BE MEASURED?

The 'Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023' will be implemented by each district through the Homeless Managers Group (HMG) who will be responsible for the day to day delivery of this strategy and actions contained within the action plan; including monitoring progress against actions and targets at the monthly HMG meetings. There will also be a link with the Strategic Housing Officers Group (SHOG) who are responsible for the delivery plan for the 'Somerset Housing Strategy 2019-2023' so close links will be maintained between both groups to ensure we keep track of progress on all actions overall.

Each district will also have their own additional measures in place to monitor the progress of the actions relating to their district as well as performance monitoring which covers things such as: number of households helped; number of households in temporary accommodation and average number of nights in bed and breakfast. These measures are normally reported on a quarterly basis so, can be evaluated at each quarter to assess if there is anything that needs to be looked at in more detail or actioned in addition to the action plan itself.