

Somerset Council

Full Council

- 27 September 2023



Annual Report of Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture

Executive Member(s): Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture

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1. Summary

1.1 This report is the annual report for the Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture.

2. Background

2.1 Culture

Cultural Services comprise a variety of services delivered to the residents and visitors of Somerset on behalf of Somerset Council, the service provided by the cultural directorate aim to be preventative and promote health, wellbeing and independence.

Services include:

- Somerset Libraries
- Arts, Cultural Development and Entertainment Venues/Theatres
- Sport and Leisure (Centres, Facilities, Partnerships and Services).
- Tourism Facilities, Services and Development
- Heritage and Museums

Somerset Libraries

The Library Service is a statutory service, which provides free access at point of use to a wide range of digital and physical reading and study materials, information resources and IT facilities, as well as a range of specialist resources (e.g. blood pressure monitors). It also delivers a wide range of cultural, health, lifelong learning, digital inclusion, economic and children's activities and events, alone and in partnership. This

enables the Library Service to support the delivery of a very wide range of council and other partners' services and outcomes.

The service consists of 32 libraries (19 in-house and 13 community led partnerships), a mobile library service to rural communities, a Home library service (which takes library services to the housebound in their own homes) outreach and development services, a Performing Arts Library and is the Lead Authority for the LibrariesWest consortium (which supports 7 Local Authority Library Services in the SW). Somerset Libraries have ~1million visitors per year and loan ~1.5 million items per year.

Since Vesting Day, the Service has continued to deliver its statutory duties and full range of activities, partnerships, community events and outreach initiatives. We have also developed further bespoke services including Customer Access Points in all libraries, the loaning of activity trackers to promote active living, innovative events to encourage fostering, increased number of interactive projector locations to support Adult and Children social care and a number of new partnerships and events to support employability and business start-up, as well as a successful campaign to encourage more children from deprived families to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge.

Our partners include the NHS, Sparks, SASP (Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership), Arts Council, adult social care, Gamechangers, GoodNewsFoundation, SW Heritage, Libraries Connected, SWRLs, fostering team, ABRI, Young Somerset, Police, various Parish and Town councils, DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) (Department for Culture, Media and Sport), Childrens Services, Friends of Somerset Libraries and many more.

Arts, Cultural Development and Entertainment Venues/Theatres

Entertainment Venues:

Somerset Council operates two in-house delivered entertainment venues and one tenanted venue.

The Council owns the freehold for Taunton Brewhouse operated on the Councils behalf by tenants. Taunton Brewhouse is the largest theatre and arts centre in Taunton. It is a multi-purpose arts centre, catering for professional arts organisations, community groups, schools and businesses.

The Octagon Theatre is Somerset Council's principle (in-house) theatre and performing arts venue selling around 125,000 tickets a year and achieving an industry leading 83% capacity across 240 performances. It is owned, managed and funded by Somerset Council. The Theatre present a diverse range of performances from ballet to drama, musicals, live music comedy, with a range of high-profile artists visiting each season,

pantomime and is the home to large range of community companies and productions. In addition, the venue is home to a popular participatory programme with around 18 classes attracting over 400 people per week to take part in classes.

The venue attracts users from across Somerset and beyond – largely a 45min drive time from the venue.

The venue closed at the end of April to enable survey works to inform the viability of a capital works programme.

The Octagon works with numerous partners across Somerset from national producers artists, many local community groups, schools/colleges/groups attending performances, businesses especially around Yeovil Literary Festival. The venue is also an important contributor to the local economy from catering suppliers, hotels. Taxi, restaurants to print and media firms.

Westlands Entertainment Venue is Somerset's premier entertainment and conference facility. It hosts hundreds of meetings every year alongside large conference, banquets, balls, parties and other non-ticket events that attracts tens of thousands of visitors. The venue manages the wider Westlands site that includes gym and fitness centre sports hall, cricket and bowls pavilion and spaces, allotments, model engineering railway and rifle range. The site is owned by Leonardo Helicopters. The venue is managed and funded by Somerset Council. It stages performances of comedy, live music, talks and film screenings selling around 50,000 tickets across 50 live performances and around 250 screenings. While the Octagon Theatre is closed many productions have moved to the venue to seek to retain their audience (and income). As a multipurpose venue every day is different from holding wakes, election counts and council meetings to wrestling, college graduation, weekly ballroom dancing sessions and annual festivals (Yeovil Together run by Somerset Diverse Communities). The venue attracts users from across Somerset and beyond – largely a 45min drive time from the venue.

Since vesting day, the venue continues to stage and host events. It has become increasingly busy with the closure of the Octagon meaning all activity that can go ahead has transferred to the venue including increased classes taking place.

The venue is gaining popularity with the public (we have been operating since 2017 and the reputation was previously poor). The venue is widely used by the community, business sector, Somerset Council, community groups and is a contributor to the local economy for catering suppliers, print and media firms, taxis etc.

Arts Engagement and Outreach / Arts Development

Arts is made up essentially of the services that were previously delivered in the West and South of Somerset. The teams from the two former District Councils have joined to form one team for the wider Somerset Council and continue to grant fund smaller projects and initiatives particularly around visual arts events.

What the team are working on currently:

- Knife Angel Event Planning
- Public Art initiatives – Cotford St Luke, Taunton High Street Benches, Castle Green in Taunton
- Cultural Assets Mapping
- Cultural Forum Design Work
- Arts Council and Local Government Association Leadership Course
- Heritage Members Update and Review
- Leisure Members update and Review
- Tacchi Morris Discussions
- Music Hub with Education
- Yeovil Triangle – July 2024 – involvement with launch
- Glastonbury Festival pitch for 2024
- Potential bid for National Armed Forces Day 2025/26
- Staplegrove Railway Bridge Public Art
- Taunton High Street Benches
- Cotford St Luke Public Art/S106
- Gaia Earth installation at Taunton Minster
- Somerset Armed Forces Day and support for Taunton Pride
- Public Art S106 projects – commenting on planning applications with conditions involving Public Art.
- Providing business support to cultural partners and administering grants where applicable.

The South of Somerset has been designated a 'priority place' by Arts Council England and granted National Portfolio Organisation status as of 1st April 23. The team are delivering a South Somerset Arts Strategy and have been awarded £760K funding over three years from Arts Council England. The programme will see the delivery of funded activity by appointed officers to enrich the lives of residents with creative arts activity particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with limited opportunity to benefit from the arts. There is a vast range of projects and initiatives programmed for the next three years that will support the councils priorities and reach thousands of residents working with local, regional and national artists, freelancers and arts organisations that will benefit the community and support the local economy. The service has also provided funding for arts organisations, projects and artists.

Somerset Council's Cultural Strategy

External funding was received from Arts Council England (ACE) in 2022 to develop a cultural strategy for Somerset, which:

- voices the priorities of the community
- promotes the cultural identity of Somerset
- ensures arts and culture is embedded at the heart of the new Somerset Council's strategic plans
- Raises awareness and promote the role culture can play in enriching our communities and improving the quality of life, health and wellbeing and local economy for Somerset residents, visitors and local businesses.
- Establish and realise Somerset's potential as a cultural destination, serving to protect, capitalise and unlock potential opportunities for Somerset's creative sector that unifies place-based priorities

The project also received financial contributions and the full support of all five of the former Somerset councils. Initial background and stakeholder / public consultation work was completed by external consultants between August 2022 and January 2023; however, this on-going project is now managed by staff within the Council's Cultural Services team. It is expected to be completed with adoption of the strategy by the Council's Executive late 2023.

The Strategy defines 'culture' and explains that the council's cultural services include: theatres and arts; libraries; sports and leisure; tourism services; and heritage and museums – all contribute to enriching lives and improving prospects. Libraries are however the only 'statutory' function for the council.

External and internal (i.e., all other council directorates and services) partners and stakeholders continue to be engaged with as the final draft strategy is refined. Once the strategy is adopted, the work will evolve as future governance, partnership working, and stakeholder engagement arrangements are developed – and implementation plans for the strategy are agreed, delivered and monitored. The strategy makes it clear that the Strategy is owned by Somerset, and not the Council, and its vision and goals can only be realised through collaboration and partnerships. Our intention is to work in an interconnected way across Somerset, working with key external specialists and experienced creative and cultural partners, including the existing six National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), accessing existing networks and creating new interconnected working.

Sport and Leisure (Centres, Facilities, Partnerships and Services)

The leisure service comprises contract management of 16 leisure facilities operated by four different leisure providers, in the form of three contracts and one lease.

The Council operate and deliver and in-house leisure and sport facility in Yeovil - Yeovil Recreation Centre.

The team oversee the contract management of all outsourced and in-house delivered services and are the source of all information regarding sport and leisure for Somerset Council, with the aim for the Council to provide services that actively promote and improve health and wellbeing for the communities of Somerset.

Projects ranging from small tennis refurbishment projects to the creation of multi sports facilities using S106 funds are also delivered by the team.

The service applies for external funding, provides advice to clubs and organisations, and liaises closely with the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) to deliver complementary outcomes.

The leisure contracts are complex and specialised but have a varying net income to the Council each year, the total depends on the income/expenditure profiles of each contract.

The volume of partners is significant – potentially all sports clubs in the County (several hundred potentially but generally up to 10 at any one point), many Town and Parish Councils, Sport England, SASP and internally assets colleagues, the S106 team, legal and finance on an ongoing basis. National Governing Bodies, consultants such as the STRI {sports Turf Research Institute}.

In financial terms the service is responsible for significant project funds – up to £1m (external funds or S106 funds) in 2023/24.

Since vesting day, the team has been busy ensuring the continuity of service provision across Somerset - liaising with all leisure operators on an ongoing basis regarding kpi's, performance, building issues and acting as client for the large-scale decarbonisation projects in the south and west.

Other projects delivered or ongoing since vesting day:

- Delivery of a large coastal protection project at Blue Anchor (supporting Climate and Place with continuity)
- Refurbished tennis court projects at Taunton Green and Vivary Park and at Yeovil Recreation Ground and setting up the court payment system.
- Refurbish Tennis courts at Blackbrook Pavilion.
- Concluding the project work at Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field using S106 funding.

- Negotiating a settlement with Freedom Leisure regarding contract changes and limiting the financial impact of the contract clauses as far as possible.
- We have submitted stage 1 of the application for funding from the Swimming Pool Support Fund – stage 2 will be done by end of October.
- Considering how best to deliver new playing fields at Wellington using S106 funding. We are exploring funding for a Built Facilities Needs Assessment and Playing Pitch Assessment for the ‘east’ using external funding.
- Planning for the refurbishment of facilities at Yeovil Recreation Ground.
- In discussions with SC (Somerset Council) colleagues concerning the re-procurement of the leisure contract in the ‘north’.
- Liaising with SLM (Sports and Leisure Management) and Freedom concerning loss of income claims relating to decarbonisation projects

Tourism Facilities, Services and Development

The council operates two Visitor Centres – Taunton Visitor Centre, and South Somerset Tourist Information Centre (Yeovil), where a small team of dedicated and highly knowledgeable staff help visitors, every day find places to stay and eat, and provide a wealth of information on local events and attractions. Taunton Visitor Centre welcomes over 100,000 visitors and locals through its doors every year.

Located at Cartgate Picnic site and the gateway to the South West, the South Somerset Visitor Information Centre has seen a huge surge in visitor numbers and income. With over 25 overseas Coach trips in June and 24 within the UK visiting and the giftshop operated by the Council experiencing 218% increase in takings compared to pre covid levels in June 2019.

These centres are highly valued by the communities and visitors of Somerset.

The Council’s Tourism team supports the promotion of the area and our events and attractions by working closely with the Destination Management Organisations (DMO) - Visit Somerset and Visit Exmoor. The cultural services team have been working with the Economic Development team to ensure a closure partnership is formed with VisitSomerset in delivery of the Councils Corporate Priorities.

Heritage and Museums

The Cultural Services team are responsible for delivery of Heritage services and Museums across Somerset, the Council own and run an in-house museum in the South of Somerset with the remainder of the Heritage and Museum services outsourced via contract to the South West Heritage Trust.

Heritage broadly covers those assets of historical importance within the remit of the Council, its arts, artefacts, and structures, ensuring:

- Somerset residents, visitors and other people understand, experience, and enjoy the county's heritage, including Schools.
- Somerset's heritage is protected, conserved, and enhanced.
- Somerset's heritage contributes to a sense of place, to health and wellbeing and to the cultural economy.

On behalf of Somerset Council South West Heritage Trust deliver:

- Management of the Museum of Somerset and Somerset Rural Life Museum in accordance with the agreements with the Heritage Lottery Fund;
- Deliver heritage learning activities;
- Deliver archaeological outreach and training projects;
- Provide exhibitions and events;
- Provide an archive service;
- Operate Local Studies Service;
- Provide archaeological and conservation advice
- Act for the Council in providing heritage advice on agri-environment schemes;
- Take part in consultations in respect of heritage matters related to works proposed by statutory undertakers and statutory agencies;
- providing and maintaining a Somerset Historic Environment Record for the Council
- Fulfil the historic environment/heritage requirements of agreements between Somerset Council and developers.

The SWHT (South West Heritage Trust) discharges Somerset Council's statutory responsibilities under the Treasure Act 1996"; the statutory archive responsibilities; "the Local Studies libraries form part of the statutory provision of SC, under the PLMA 1964.

- Adjutant contracts/ arrangements in place for further services:
 - Legacy County Council dormant record storage.
 - Registrars' records storage
 - Museum of South Somerset
- The Transfer Agreement is the transfer by the Council to the Trust of the 'Undertaking', which comprises:
 - the Museum of Somerset, Somerset Rural Life Museum and the Somerset Brick and Tile Museum;
 - the Archive and Local Studies Service;
 - the Museums Service;
 - the Historic Environment Service;
 - the Somerset Heritage Centre, and any other premises mutually agreed between the parties;
 - historic land assets belonging to the Council, amounting about 400 acres;

2.2 Regulatory and Operational Services

Our open spaces team continue to manage our much loved parks to an excellent standard, with 10 Somerset Council parks being awarded Green Flag status for 2023.

This international award, now in its fourth decade, is a sign to the public that the space boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained, and has excellent visitor facilities. Two of the ten parks have also retained their Heritage status.

The parks and greenspaces awarded Green Flag status are:

- **Ham Hill Country Park** near Yeovil
- **Chard Reservoir Local Nature Reserve**
- **Yeovil Country Park**
- **Apex Park** and **Marine Cove** in Burnham on Sea.
- **Swains Lane Nature Reserve** near Wellington
- **Vivary Park** in Taunton
- **Blenheim Gardens** in Minehead.
- **Wellington Park**

Both Ham Hill Country Park and Wellington Park retained their Green Heritage Site Accreditation, supported by Historic England, for the management of their historic features. Ham Hill is an ancient Iron Age hillfort and Wellington Park is a grade II listed former Edwardian Park established in 1927. There are only 5 Green Flag Heritage Sites in the South West, and 2 of them are owned by Somerset Council.

A further 3 former Somerset Council parks, now owned by Taunton Town Council but maintained the Somerset Council grounds team, also received Green Flag Awards.

Minehead, Taunton, Wellington and Yeovil have again entered the famous gardening competition, South West in Bloom, part of the Britain in Bloom campaign established by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS).

In July, the Somerset towns welcomed judges of the awards on tours of the many parks, gardens, green spaces and RHS's 'It's Your Neighbourhood' groups (IYNs) that have entered the contest.

In Somerset, the Bloom initiatives are jointly managed by the town councils and Somerset Council respectively, whilst local community groups and individuals support with the design and maintenance of the floral displays and green spaces.

This year, Minehead In Bloom has entered the Sargent Cup, Taunton in Bloom has entered the Tesco Cup, Wellington in Bloom has entered the Portman Cup and Yeovil in Bloom has entered the St. Bridget Cup.

And of course, none of our parks and town centres would be able to do this without the support of our Council nurseries in Lufton and Taunton, which produce hundreds of thousands of plants a year.

The grounds teams continue to integrate nature friendly maintenance regimes into our open spaces as part of the Council's ecological emergency declaration. We are now in the third year of our successful grassland management strategy within Taunton and the west of the district, which was produced in partnership with the Somerset Wildlife Trust. Training with the Trust has taken place this month to ensure the programme is rolled out across the whole of the county for next cutting season.

Our grounds team at Yeovil Rec won the Best Environmental and Sustainability Impact Award at the Grounds Management Association Awards for the way in which biodiversity is encouraged in a sports facility. A huge congratulations to Rodney, Jamie, Callum, Jordan and Mick.

The Regulatory Services team of Somerset West are in the midst of a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) consultation for the control of dogs in the West Somerset side of the County. The control of dogs was previously under Dog Control Order which lapsed in 2021. It is proposed to reintroduce a seasonal dog ban on Minehead beach and all-year restrictions in places like children's play areas, amongst other things. Getting to this point could not have been achieved without the support of the wider County team such as Communications and Legal along with our Councillors and town/parish councils.

The Regulatory Services team have been spending time in Minehead to ensure the residents, holiday makers and businesses are fully informed and have an opportunity to have their say on the proposed dog restrictions. It is estimated that over 500 people have been spoken to so far, which has resulted in 334 responses, with 2 weeks to go! Which is an amazing! This piece of work has been a real team effort so thank you to all that has been involved.

As part of the Unitary authority a lot of work has been going on across Regulatory to align how our teams work so that we are providing a consistent service to businesses and the public across Somerset. As part of this alignment work our licensing team have been reviewing a number of policies. This has been a major piece of work and is now reaching conclusion in a number of areas. The Statement of Licensing Policy is a statutory policy which supports and guides our administration and enforcement of the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003. This policy has been out for consultation and a

total of 52 responses were received. These are now being presented in a report to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee which has been asked to recommend any amendments they feel are required and to recommend the final draft for approval by Full Council. The draft Gambling Policy is also now currently out for consultation.

2.3 Customer Services

Customer Services provide the first point of contact for Somerset Council, as well as providing the Lifeline and Out of Hours services for our most vulnerable customers in emergencies. The service deals with 3,000 customers face to face in our customer service points and takes 67,000 calls a month, currently resolving 96% and 74% respectively without having to pass them onto a service for resolution. Customer Services undertook significant preparations for Vesting Day providing customers with a single number 0300 123 2224, single website and a new award-winning Welcome BOT which continues to direct over 85% of calls to the right place and where needed, advisers will triage in 7 12 seconds.

The team champions good customer service and established a new Customer Panel made up of residents from across the authority to listen to what they have to say and help shape and co-design our services. We were also proud to see the adoption of a new Customer Strategy for Somerset Council which sets out our commitment to customers and the culture we want to promote. We also established 19 new Face to Face customer Access Points in each Local Community Network area, trialling new software 'Attend Anywhere' enabling customers to connect with the service through virtual agents.

Complaints handling is also a key role for the team, with a new policy and targets for performance. In the first quarter of 23/24 62% of complaints were answered in 10 working days. We try extremely hard to deal with more complex complaints within 20 and are establishing mechanisms to ensure we reflect and learn from them. This year our focus is to drive digital customer transition and transformation through our Customer Engagement Platform Programme and work with partners to explore locality models of delivery.

2.4 Housing

HRA (Housing Revenue Account) Landlord Function

The council has c10,000 homes with services delivered by an Arms Length Management Organisation (Homes in Sedgemoor c4000 homes) and the Council's in-house service (c5700 homes). In 2022/2023 the two services were under two District Councils and Sedgemoor DC and Somerset West and Taunton DC. The two services delivered their services according to the performance and policies set by those

authorities and both services had to operate within the same compliance and regulatory environment. This report provides a snapshot of the performance of the service 2022/2023 and the annual reports for last year will shortly be available for both services. Here are some highlights:

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken within appropriate timescales with performance peaks.
- All emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- Performance levels for responsive repair requests (now being taken by a cohort of specialist repair call-handlers within the Corporate Customer Service team) has recently been challenged by maternity leave and sick leave within that team. This has led to a reduction in the previously improved performance levels reported, albeit there still remain less abandoned calls, faster answering, and more accurate detailed work orders being raised than was being achieved prior to the change in approach. We are reviewing this position carefully, including evaluation of required staffing levels, and introducing 'overflow' of calls to repairs schedulers when available.
- Our Repairs Service Improvement Plan (RSIP) has been further developed and many activities are being progressed. However, progress to improving ICT (Information and Communications Technology) systems (e.g. job diagnosis and appointments, trades scheduling, contractor portal, etc.) and further review of available reporting functionality have been hampered by a corporate 'change freeze' to existing IT systems prior to LGR (Local Government Reorganisation) Vesting Day on 1st April 2023.
- We continue to undertake void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard and are seeking to streamline external contractor support to meet property performance turnaround targets.
- Following an external Materials Supplies Audit, we have progressed with implementing an updated imprest van stock and have also undertaken a stocktake of our stores.
- We are progressing with implementation of an improved materials supply chain process, although again this has been affected by the current corporate 'change freeze' to existing IT systems.

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken. These include gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works, fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works.

- The new contract to undertake outstanding electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works is progressing well. We have streamlined the process to make appointments and have increased focus on 'hard to access' properties.
- We have implemented new iAuditor software to assist with compliance data collection for emergency lighting visual inspections, fire door inspection, fire safety housekeeping 'sterile communal area' checks (flat block inspections), water risk assessments in dwellings and fire risk assessments.
- Additional procurement has taken place, including air source heat pump (ASHP) servicing, and extension of our stair-lift contract.
- We have mobilised a new radon monitoring contract.
- A street lighting safety assessment survey programme has been undertaken.
- Installation of alarms as required under the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022 has been completed.
- We have appointed Savills to undertake an independent review of our compliance activities, together with helping us develop a Building and Resident Health and Safety Strategy for the new Council.
- Weekly compliance meetings continue to carefully monitor and manage all of these safety critical areas, and an update report has recently been presented to the Audit Committee.

Housing Enabling

Through the Affordable Housing delivery programme, Somerset Council is embracing its vision to build a fairer, greener, resilient and more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.

More than 2000 affordable homes have been delivered across Somerset over the past three years. The housing enabling teams works closely with a range of affordable housing delivery partners, including the Council own direct delivery to overcome the increasing challenges of housing development and provide new high quality, energy efficient homes people can afford.

We are acutely aware of the requirement for affordable housing to meet a range of needs across the area. Work is continuing to grow the pipeline further providing affordable options for rent and low-cost purchase to support our local communities. The team are actively increasing the provision of larger homes, fully adapted wheelchair

accessible homes and working in partnership within our parishes to satisfy the identified housing need.

Affordable Housing Completion Summary					
	Somerset North	Somerset East	Somerset South	Somerset West	Total
2020/21	169	66	100	106	441
2021/22	290	96	307	219	912
2022/23 - estimates	235	79	161	277	752
	694	241	568	602	2105

Development highlights include:

Cornhill, Wellington saw the development of 26 homes for rent and 16 for shared ownership by LiveWest on a brownfield site within the centre of the town. The 42-home development included the repair and conversion of a listed building.

Rainbow Way, Minehead has started on site to deliver the Council's first scheme of 54 net zero carbon affordable homes for rent. The scheme includes a broad range of house types including fully adapted wheelchair homes and bungalows.

Neat Lane, Pilton (phase 2, Maggie's Farm) residents in the village of Pilton are set to benefit soon from a further 20 x new affordable high-quality homes, all for social rent and for local people. This unique second phase rural development is situated next to an existing rural exceptions site on land gifted to the Housing Provider by Michael Eavis as a legacy to the village, which handover and celebrations will coincide with the Glastonbury Festival. The second phase development will be managed by Guinness Partnership and consist of 8 x 1 bed flats, 6 x bed houses, 4 x 3 bed houses and 2 x 2 bed bungalows, designed for older people.

Housing Options

Households registered with Homefinder Somerset

The number of households registered with Homefinder Somerset increased by 2,325 (24%) to 11,903 between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. This includes households with a Live application and those who are being considered for a property (with the status of 'Offered').

The proportion of households in Gold Band varied from 7% in Mendip and Sedgemoor to 10% in South Somerset. The proportion of households in the Silver Band ranged from 32% in Somerset West and Taunton to 53% in Mendip. The proportion of households in Bronze Band ranged from 40% in Mendip to 60% in Somerset West and Taunton.

Table 1: Number of households registered with Homefinder Somerset by local authority and Band as at 31 March 2023

	Emergency		Gold		Silver		Bronze		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Mendip	1	0%	153	7%	1,200	53%	889	40%	2,243	19%
Sedgemoor	8	0%	193	7%	1,095	39%	1,505	54%	2,801	24%
Somerset West and Taunton	4	0%	303	8%	1,253	32%	2,299	60%	3,859	32%
South Somerset	9	0%	306	10%	1,047	35%	1,638	55%	3,000	25%
Total	22	0%	955	8%	4,595	39%	6,331	53%	11,903	100%

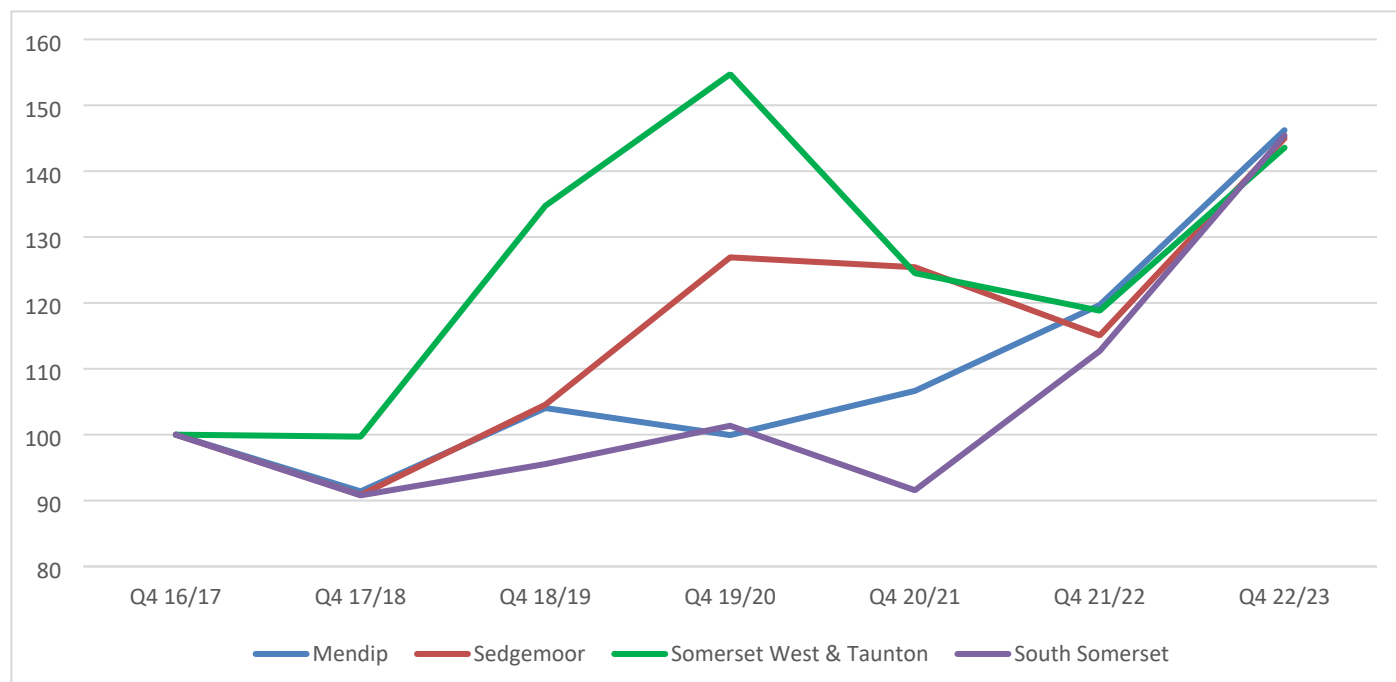
Note: The percentages refer to the proportion of households who are in that Band (e.g., 8% of all households are in Gold Band). The percentage given for the total refers to the proportion of all households registered with a particular local authority (e.g., 24% of households are registered with Sedgemoor DC).

Table 2 and Chart 1 show that the number of households registered with Homefinder Somerset increased by 45% since Q4 2016/17. Except for Somerset West and Taunton, which saw its highest number of households in 2019/20, this increase has been particularly marked in the last year. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors, including the cost-of-living crisis and because the normal renewal process only kicked in from February following the transfer to the current IT system in August 2021.

Table 2: Number of households registered with Homefinder Somerset by local authority

	Q4 16/17	Q4 17/18	Q4 18/19	Q4 19/20	Q4 20/21	Q4 21/22	Q4 22/23
Mendip	1,534	1,402	1,596	1,533	1,636	1,836	2,243
Sedgemoor	1,932	1,755	2,020	2,452	2,423	2,223	2,801
Somerset West and Taunton	2,688	2,680	3,622	4,159	3,347	3,194	3,859
South Somerset	2,063	1,873	1,971	2,091	1,889	2,325	3,000
Total	8,217	7,710	9,209	10,235	9,295	9,578	11,903

Chart 1: Number of households registered by local authority. Q4 2016/17 as the base



Just over half (52%) of all households registered with Homefinder Somerset need a 1 bed home, whilst 28% need a 2-bed home.

Table 3: Size of home needed. Households registered as at 1 April 2023

	1 Bed		2 Beds		3 Beds		4+ Beds		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Mendip	1,179	53%	630	28%	336	15%	98	4%	2,243
Sedgemoor	1,348	48%	802	29%	493	18%	158	6%	2,801
Somerset West and Taunton	2,173	56%	994	26%	498	13%	194	5%	3,859
South Somerset	1,473	49%	873	29%	480	16%	174	6%	3,000
Total	6,173	52%	3,299	28%	1,807	15%	624	5%	11,903

Bidding Analysis

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, a total of 231,175 bids were placed on homes across Somerset. This was an increase of 35% from the previous year. Chart 2 shows the number of bids placed each month has been on an upward trend (shown by the blue dotted trendline), even taking into the big falls in the number of bids due to the 2 national lockdowns and the IT transfer.

Chart 2: Number of bids 1 January 2019 – 31 March 2023

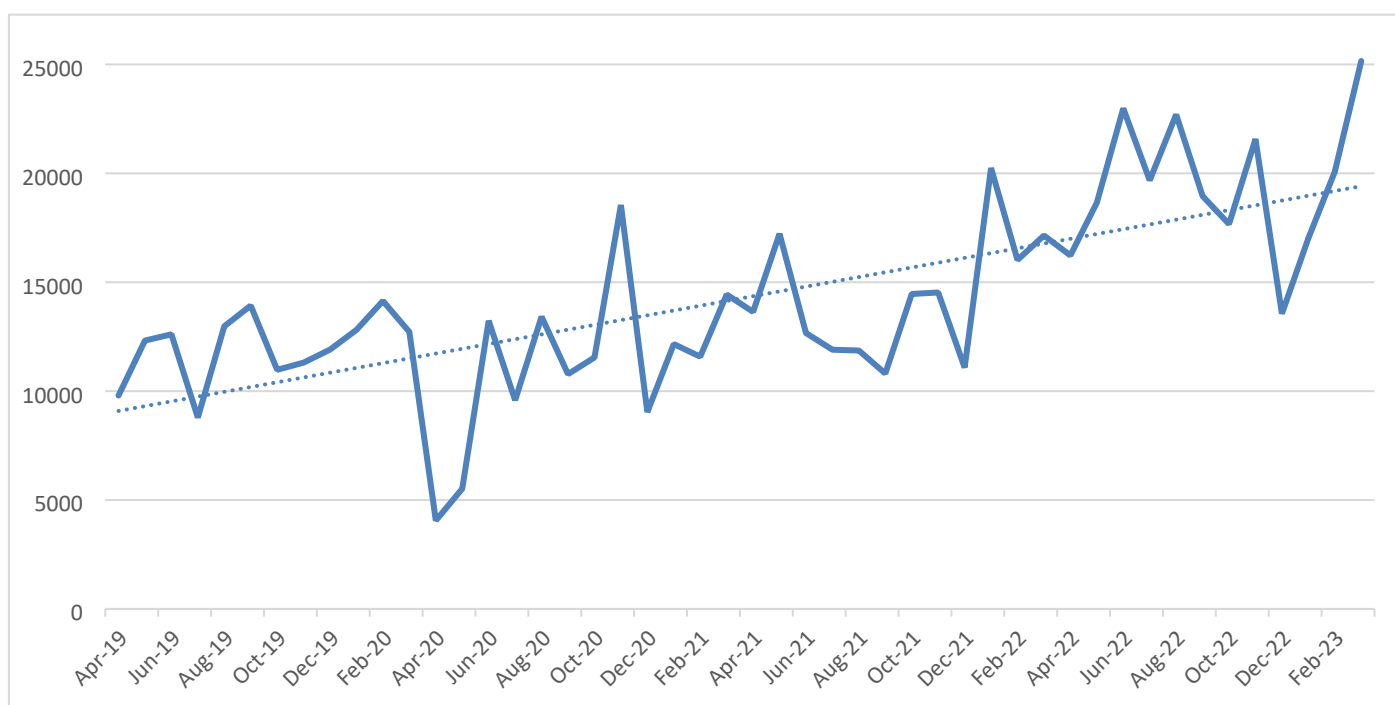


Table 4 below shows the proportion of households by local authority and Band who can be considered as inactive (e.g. they have not bid or logged onto the Homefinder Somerset website in the last 6 months).

The table reveals that 22% of households registered with Homefinder Somerset have not bid or logged into the Homefinder Somerset website in the last 6 months. As would be expected, the proportion of inactive households increases as their Band reduces (e.g., 14% of households in Gold Band were inactive compared to 26% in Bronze Band).

Table 4: Percentage of households with Live applications who have not bid or logged into the Homefinder Somerset website during the last 6 months as at 31 March 2023

	Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Mendip	0%	20%	18%	28%	22%
Sedgemoor	0%	15%	16%	24%	20%
Somerset West and Taunton	0%	14%	21%	29%	25%
South Somerset	0%	9%	15%	24%	19%
Total	0%	14%	17%	26%	22%

Table 5 reveals that an average of 109 bids were placed for the 2,116 homes advertised between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. This is an increase from an average of 73 bids in the previous year, and an average of 64 bids in the year before that. This is

perhaps unsurprising given the evidence above which reveals that there has been in an increase in the number of bids placed over the last 4 years.

The average number of bids varied considerably between local authority areas, property type and size. The average number of bids for houses (150) was again much higher than that for flats (83). This difference can be even more marked. For example, in Somerset West and Taunton there was an average of 203 bids for the 116 x 2 bed houses that were advertised compared to an average of only 49 bids for the 102 x 2 bed flats.

The average number of bids for homes advertised during the year ranged from 86 bids in South Somerset (635 homes advertised) to 127 in Somerset West and Taunton (613 homes advertised).

Table 5: Number of homes and average number of bids by type, size and local authority (letting cycles ending between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023)

	Mendip		Sedgemoor		Somerset West and Taunton		South Somerset		Total	
	No. of homes	Average no. of bids	No. of homes	Average no. of bids	No. of homes	Average no. of bids	No. of homes	Average no. of bids	No. of homes	Average no. of bids
Bungalow	82	89	56	103	106	114	136	66	380	90
1 Bedroom	61	96	45	109	56	109	75	67	237	92
2 Bedroom	21	70	11	80	50	120	60	64	142	86
4 Bedroom							1	110	1	110
Flat	163	86	199	81	261	98	285	70	908	83
1 Bedroom	94	119	133	95	158	129	190	89	575	106
2 Bedroom	69	40	65	54	102	49	95	34	331	44
3 Bedroom			1	10	1	60			2	35
House	125	149	212	162	238	166	205	121	780	150
1 Bedroom	5	233	4	279	1	245	8	249	18	251
2 Bedroom	70	160	76	180	116	203	92	131	354	171
3 Bedroom	42	133	119	149	113	133	98	104	372	131
4 Bedroom	7	93	13	137	6	96	7	86	33	109
5 Bedroom	1	15			1	23			2	19
6 Bedroom					1	7			1	7
Maisonette	7	120	24	70	8	99	9	85	48	85
1 Bedroom	3	240	8	160	3	192	8	92	22	151
2 Bedroom	4	29	12	27	4	49	1	32	21	32
3 Bedroom			4	19	1	18			5	19
Total	377	108	491	118	613	127	635	86	2,116	109

Note: This data excludes homes set up for direct match

933 homes (44%) advertised during the year received 100 bids or more. The highest number of bids received was 489, for a 2-bed house in Yeovil.

Homes Let

2,185 homes across Somerset were set to let¹ between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. Tables 6 and 7 set out the profile of the homes let over the year by size, local authority, and landlord. 40% of homes let were 1 bed and 41% were 2 bed homes. South Somerset accounted for the highest number of homes let (739).

Table 6: Homes let between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 by property local authority

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	6 Bed	Total	%
Mendip	159	174	44	7	1		385	18%
Sedgemoor	182	152	115	11	1		461	21%
Somerset West and Taunton	210	271	111	6	1	1	600	27%
South Somerset	315	289	126	8	1		739	34%
Total	866	886	396	32	4	1	2,185	
% of total	40%	41%	18%	1%	0%	0%		

Abri (27%), LiveWest (12%), Somerset West and Taunton (12%), Aster (11%), Homes in Sedgemoor (10%), Stonewater (9%) and Magna (8%) together accounted for 89% of homes let over the year.

Table 7: Homes let between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 by landlord

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	6 Bed	Total	%
Abri	256	218	112	9			595	27%
Alliance Homes	9	2	1	1			13	1%
Aster	110	91	28	1	1		231	11%
Clarion Housing	2						2	0%
Curo	2	1	2				5	0%
Falcon Rural		4	5				9	0%
Flower and Hayes	1						1	0%
Guinness	4	1	2				7	0%
Habinteg		4					4	0%
Hastoe		7	1				8	0%
Homes in Sedgemoor	123	61	42	1	1		228	10%
LiveWest	92	121	50	2	1		266	12%
Magna	55	84	34	3			176	8%
Places For People			7	3			10	0%
Sanctuary	20	31	6	1		1	59	3%
Selwood Housing	16	20	6	3			45	2%

¹ This figure includes homes let by direct match.

SHAL Housing	12	16	11	2			41	2%
Somerset Council	123	93	42	1	1		260	12%
Southwestern HS	1	11	3				15	1%
Sovereign HA	2	3	4	1			10	0%
Stonewater	35	115	37	4			191	9%
Tamar Housing		3	1				4	0%
White Horse Housing	3		2				5	0%
Total	866	886	396	32	4	1	2,185	

Tables 8 and 9 show that 45% of homes were let to households in the Gold band, a very similar proportion seen in the last 2 years (44%). This proportion varied from 41% of homes let in Somerset West and Taunton to 50% of homes in Sedgemoor. 43% of homes were let to households in the Silver band. This ranged from 39% of homes in Sedgemoor to 48% in Mendip. The Band is not recorded for 26 homes let by direct match.

Table 8: Homes let between 1 April 22 and 31 March 23 by property local authority and Band

	Emergency		Gold		Silver		Bronze		Not known		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Mendip	10	3%	170	44%	186	48%	17	4%	2	1%	385
Sedgemoor	15	3%	230	50%	179	39%	36	8%	1	0%	461
Somerset West and Taunton	14	2%	245	41%	265	44%	74	12%	2	0%	600
South Somerset	17	2%	347	47%	317	43%	37	5%	21	3%	739
Total	56	3%	992	45%	947	43%	164	8%	26	1%	2,185

The proportion of homes let to applicants in Gold Band amongst the 7 landlords who let the most homes also varied, from 40% for Magna to 48% for Abri (Table 9). Magna also let 6% of homes to households in Emergency Band.

Table 9: Homes let between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 by landlord and Band

	Emergency		Gold		Silver		Bronze		Not known		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Abri	19	3%	287	48%	242	41%	26	4%	21	4%	595
Alliance Homes			7	54%	6	46%					13
Aster	5	2%	107	46%	110	48%	8	3%	1	0%	231
Clarion Housing			1	50%	1	50%					2
Curo			2	40%	3	60%					5

Falcon Rural			1	11%	4	44%	4	44%			9
Flower and Hayes					1	100%					1
Guinness			1	14%	6	86%					7
Habinteg			3	75%	1	25%					4
Hastoe			2	25%	5	63%	1	13%			8
Homes in Sedgemoor	5	2%	100	44%	102	45%	20	9%	1	0%	228
LiveWest	5	2%	119	45%	118	44%	23	9%	1	0%	266
Magna	10	6%	71	40%	79	45%	16	9%			176
Places For People	2	20%	8	80%							10
Sanctuary	1	2%	25	42%	26	44%	7	12%			59
Selwood Housing	2	4%	19	42%	19	42%	5	11%			45
SHAL Housing	1	2%	16	39%	15	37%	9	22%			41
Somerset Council	2	1%	120	46%	104	40%	32	12%	2	1%	260
Southwestern HS	2	13%	10	67%	3	20%					15
Sovereign HA			6	60%	3	30%	1	10%			10
Stonewater	2	1%	84	44%	95	50%	10	5%			191
Tamar Housing			1	25%	2	50%	1	25%			4
White Horse Housing			2	40%	2	40%	1	20%			5
Total	56	3%	992	45%	947	43%	164	8%	26	1%	2,185

Just over 36,000 homes have been let through Homefinder Somerset since 2009. The total number of lets per year and by size is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Number of properties let

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	6 Bed	Total
2009	968	1,063	477	42	2	0	2,552
2010	967	1,078	576	52	4	1	2,678
2011	981	1,381	635	56	6	0	3,059
2012	990	1,358	717	55	3	1	3,124
2013	1,019	1,264	588	49	8	0	2,928
2014	989	1,148	547	48	4	0	2,736
2015	1,071	1,294	605	36	4	2	3,012
2016	875	1,065	446	31	3	0	2,420
2017	884	953	365	27	2	0	2,231
2018	901	791	333	34	1	0	2,060
2019	937	913	376	38	2	1	2,267
2020	828	872	376	27	3	0	2,106
2021	910	840	309	51	2	0	2,112
2022	856	954	416	39	4	0	2,269
2023 to date	210	175	78	10	0	1	474
Total	13,386	15,149	6,844	595	48	6	36,028

In the year 22/23 (April 22 – March 23) we had 5452 individuals/households approach Somerset Council (previous district councils) in need of assistance regarding homelessness or the risk of homelessness. Out of those approaches we started a homeless application (prevention or relief duty) for 3,141 cases. 140 cases were individuals/households who were assessed as homeless having been assessed as homeless within the previous year (repeat relief duty). 88 cases were individuals who presented as homeless after leaving hospital, care, asylum or other institutions.

At the end of the year, we had 188 clients in Temporary accommodation across the county. The average duration of B&B placements was 21 days and households in temporary accommodation (excluding B&B) the average duration was 64 days (based on placements that ended during the year).

In November 2022 the annual rough sleeper count recorded 30 individuals sleeping rough in a single night (annual count) per 100,000 population.

Indicator	Qtr. 1	Qtr. 2	Qtr. 3	Qtr. 4
Number of Overall Approaches (includes those who had advice only)	1312	1254	1312	1574
Number of Homeless cases	784	722	840	795
% successful preventions (Average for all districts)	43%	35%	50%	42%
Number of people in Temporary Accommodation	174	177	54	188
Number of acceptances of main housing duty by the Council	106	134	137	143
Average time spent by homeless households in B&B (Average for all districts)	16	25	15	26
Average time spent by homeless households in Temporary Accommodation (Average for all districts)	42	90	54	72
Number of households assessed as homeless having been assessed as homeless within the previous year (repeat relief duty)	21	25	51	43
Number of people leaving hospital, care, asylum or other institutions who present as homeless	22	20	17	29
People sleeping rough in a single night (annual count) per 100,000 population	24 2021	-	30 2022	-

Homes in Sedgemoor

Repairs and Maintenance

We always work hard to maintain customers' properties to a great standard to ensure they have good quality, safe homes. We are proud to work closely with customers and partner contractors to carry out responsive repairs safely and efficiently, which is evident in customers' positive feedback of our service.

We carried out 5331 same-day repairs, 99% of same-day repairs were completed on time. We carried out 4437 routine repairs, 92% of routine repairs were completed on time. We carried out 782 emergency repairs, 99.5% of emergency repairs were completed on time.

Last year, we spent £2.4m on repairs and maintenance with MD Group;

- Repairs and maintenance (emergency, same day and routine) - £1,224,600
- Small works (planned) - £420,900
- Voids (standard) - £770,800

We tendered the repairs and void contract last year and MD were successful in retaining the work. We strive to provide great services for our customers and to give our customers a strong voice. We were pleased to be able to involve customers directly in the procurement process, which included the selection of the winning bidder.

We have carried out 236 damp and mould treatments and 47 damp remedial works.

We are aware that many of the homes we manage are of an age and structure that can be prone to excessive condensation, leading to mould growth.

Therefore, we have now developed a Damp and Mould Policy to ensure that we are adhering to all guidance and legislation and adopting best practice.

For all reports of damp and mould we arrange for a surveyor to attend and inspect within two working days. Remedial works are booked to clean and treat mould, and for items such as extractor fans to be repaired/replaced/installed.

During their inspections, our surveyors will offer advice and guidance to customers on how they can minimise condensation within their homes and steps they can take to manage this. All initial contacts for damp and mould are logged on our CRM system and captured within our monthly compliance report.

Home Safety

New fire safety measures at Westfield House:

Westfield House, in Bridgwater, the tallest high-rise housing in the county of Somerset, has been fitted with a new state-of-the-art fire protection system.

Working in partnership with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue and residents, we installed the new system, which directly alerts the fire service, to bring fire safety up to the highest possible standard.

Fire Safety	Fire risk assessments completed	Target 100%	Actual 100%	Fire actions completed	Target 100%	Actual 98.81%	Fire system testing	Target 100%	Actual 100%
	All relevant sites to have a risk assessment		Target 100%	Actual 100%	Legionella actions completed		Target 100%	Monthly water temperature checks	
Water Safety	Blocks to have a management survey		Target 100%	Actual 100%	Garages to have a management survey		Target 100%	Actual 100%	
	All homes to have an electrical installation condition report (5 yearly)		Target 100%	Actual 98.83%	All blocks to have an electrical installation condition report (5 yearly)		Target 100%	Actual 100%	
Asbestos Safety	Properties with a current gas safety certificate		Target 100%	Actual 99.67%	Commercial properties with a current gas safety certificate		Target 100%	Actual 100%	
	All lifts to have been inspected (6 monthly/annual)		Target 100%	Actual 92.75%					
Electrical Safety									
Gas Safety									

Supporting Customers

Our Neighbourhood Team works closely with a range of different agencies and charities across the district to make sure customers receive the correct support and continue to love where they live. As well as working collaboratively with organisations across the district, we are also proud to have launched our new way of working through Project Matrix to ensure customers receive a great service from their Neighbourhood Team. The new structure offers a localised way of providing our services. Instead of multiple parts of the organisation working separately, four new teams now provide a 'one-stop shop' for everything customers need.

Independent Living Service

We work hard to provide great services for our customers. Our Independent Living Service provides access to a team of staff who provide tenancy sustainment, support and the reassurance of a 24/7 alarm system in the event of an emergency.

The Independent Living Team helps customers to maintain their independence, sustain their tenancy, and provides extra support if needed through a Bronze, Silver and Gold service level system.

Voicescape was introduced in February 2023, and in the period since, all customers received an automated call each month of which 32 people requested to speak to an Officer. All queries raised were dealt with on the day, without needing a visit.

Income and Rent Collection

We collect rent and pay it to Somerset Council. The council then gives us some of the rent back as a Management Fee so we can look after customers' homes, carry out repairs and do work in the neighbourhood. Last year, rent was charged over 50 weeks.

Income

<p>99.1% of rent charged in 2022/2023 successfully collected</p>	<p>0.91% current tenant rent arrears for 2022/2023</p>	<p>4 tenants evicted due to rent arrears</p>	<p>£10,098 reduction in former tenant arrears</p>
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Welfare and Benefits

Average Rents		
Bedrooms	Affordable rent	Social rent
0	-	£65.40
1	£100.48	£79.02
2	£129.74	£87.27
3	£157.71	£97.45
4	£209.29	£105.41
5	-	£110.77
6	£212.61	-
Total	£131.03	£88.19

<p>We made 23 employment, benefit and welfare referrals to support partners</p>	<p>We supported 304 new Universal Credit claims</p>	<p>£30,680.65 of Discretionary Housing Payments awarded in total</p>	<p>We have issued 83 Foodbank vouchers</p>
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