



Relocation of Emergency Accommodation

Executive Portfolio Holder:	Val Keitch, Strategy and Housing Portfolio Holder
Strategic Director:	Kirsty Larkins, Director Service Delivery
Lead Specialist:	Leigh Rampton, Lead Specialist Communities
Lead Officers:	Alice Knight, Specialist Housing Jo Calvert, Specialist Housing
Contact Details:	alice.knight@southsomerset.gov.uk jo.calvert@southsomerset.gov.uk

Purpose of the Report

1. This report recommends the use of £390,000 as a grant to Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) to contribute towards the purchase and refurbishment of a property, for the Council to use as emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness in South Somerset.

Forward Plan

2. This report did not appear on the District Executive Forward Plan but is required to secure the purchase of new emergency accommodation as an opportunity to secure a site and secure external funding has arisen to replace current provision.

Public Interest

3. South Somerset District Council has a statutory duty under the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 to provide people with emergency and/or temporary accommodation if they are homeless. We provide a range of accommodation to different customers based on their circumstances and needs.
4. SSDC has a contract with Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) to provide emergency accommodation in Yeovil to homeless single people in South Somerset. BCHA also provide support to break the cycles of behaviour, accessing support from specialist agencies and support workers. The existing building is no longer fit for purposes and an opportunity has arisen for BCHA to purchase an alternative property, more suited to the needs of the customers, staff and wider community.

Recommendations

5. That the District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive approve the use of £390,000 from the Affordable Housing Capital Programme Reserve to award a grant to Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) as a contribution towards the costs of the purchase and refurbishment of a property in Yeovil, to



South Somerset District Council

provide emergency accommodation and improved support for people who are homeless, rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in South Somerset.

Background

6. South Somerset District Council has a statutory duty under the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 to provide people with emergency accommodation if they are homeless.
7. In recent years, the Housing team has met this duty by providing a number of different types of temporary and emergency accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and successfully largely avoided placing people in Bed & Breakfast. This includes Council-owned properties as well as a range of other options provided and managed by our partners.
8. SSDC works closely with partners to minimise the numbers of rough sleepers in South Somerset and has managed this successfully through the provision of emergency accommodation and outreach support.
9. SSDC currently has a contract with BCHA to manage a 30-bed hostel at Newton Road, Yeovil, known as Pathways. The building is owned by BCHA.
10. It is widely agreed the current property and location are no longer suitable for emergency accommodation, and BCHA have been looking for alternative premises more suited to customers, support staff, local support agencies and the wider community. The Covid pandemic has accelerated the recognition of the need to identify alternative provision.

Homelessness in South Somerset

11. Following the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, the demand for emergency and temporary accommodation has risen as the Council has new duties to assist more people presenting to us as homeless and assess their wider support needs, including debt, benefits, drug & alcohol issues and family breakdown. The increase is not unique to South Somerset and it has been growing across the country.
12. If an individual or family is homeless, we have a duty to offer and place them in emergency or temporary accommodation for up to 56 days while their circumstances are being assessed and, if appropriate, help them find suitable accommodation.
13. In addition, we have a responsibility to support people who are rough sleeping, at risk of rough sleeping or are not eligible for temporary accommodation under our statutory duties. This group of people have very few options, are often unable to access private or social housing. This leaves them very vulnerable and their only option may be sofa surfing, staying in dangerous or precarious accommodation or sleeping on the streets. This in turn can create additional vulnerabilities, enable exploitation and creates a negative public perception.



South Somerset District Council

14. In general, we have managed to keep rough sleeping to a minimum in South Somerset through the proactive work of our team and working in partnership with local agencies through outreach, engagement and the provision of our current 30 bed facility at Newton Road.
15. In all circumstances, we work with local partners to deliver support to customers to help them move on from emergency/temporary accommodation and find suitable, more permanent homes and to meet their longer term needs. This 1-1, specialist tailored support is essential to helping people escape from the cycle of homelessness and rough sleeping and address the wider issues that have led them to homelessness and help them rebuild their lives.
16. Our multi-agency approach provides a range of options for people both through accommodation and support. This is acknowledged by MHCLG as successful and our good reputation has stood us in good stead throughout the Covid lockdowns in 2020 when we were able to respond to the Government's 'Everyone In' directive by providing emergency accommodation, in partnership with BCHA and others, with the intensive support attached.
17. The Government published its rough sleeping strategy in 2018 which sets out the government's vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027.

The Properties

18. BCHA currently own and manage 14-18 Newton Road ('Pathways'), as well as neighbouring number 20 Newton Road as emergency accommodation. A number of issues have led to BCHA and SSDC agreeing to explore an alternative site.
 - Our contract with BCHA was awarded in 2020 on the condition that the poor standard of accommodation was urgently addressed, as the building was seen as being no longer suitable for this service.
 - A redevelopment plan for Newton Road was proposed at a cost of over £5m; Homes England initially indicated support for this early proposal.
 - The Coronavirus pandemic has delayed these plans whilst simultaneously highlighting the structural problems with the building. So for example in line with Government guidelines, we had to remove any shared accommodation reducing capacity of the building from 40 beds to 30. Going forward the guidance is now for self-contained units with bathroom and kitchenettes; there is no scope for achieving this in the current premises.
 - Recently a condition survey was carried out and the building has been declared as "unfit for purpose".
 - The more proactive type of support which we wish to provide for our customers is not possible in the building due to the lack of communal, private or outdoor space and there is little scope for improvement given the inherent restrictions of the site.
 - The current poor state of the building and décor also makes attracting and retaining staff more difficult and limits the ability and willingness of other services to provide on-site which is a much more effective delivery model for many of the customers accessing emergency accommodation.



19. In April 2021 we explored options with BCHA to decant the existing customers and redevelop the building; this would involve finding an interim solution for 30 people for the next 12-18 months. Despite looking at a range of alternatives this has not been possible, so we have focussed on looking for a permanent alternative. An opportunity has now been identified to purchase a site on the edge of Yeovil with a vacant premises and opportunities for further development.
20. The proposed new site offers a wide range of benefits:
 - A large, purpose-built and contemporary care-based facility more suitable for our customers and staff.
 - Enables a rapid achievement of a Covid-safe standard with 39 en-suite rooms and an opportunity to install self-contained kitchenettes.
 - Allows for a more attractive and psychologically informed environment including large, bright and spacious communal rooms for group-work, proactive support, therapeutic rehabilitation work, medical treatment and opportunities for agencies to visit the hostel and provide more on-site support.
 - A better location out of the town centre which will assist in breaking the cycle of exploitation and ASB associated with the current site.
 - Outdoor space with opportunities for working more proactively with customers on health & wellbeing, gardening, exercise etc.
 - Potential for further development on site of additional move-on and supported accommodation units which are not only much-needed in South Somerset but could also potentially provide income from BCHA to further enhance the range of services they can provide for vulnerable people.
 - Opportunity to secure the majority of the capital costs from Homes England at a greatly reduced project cost from the original proposal to redevelop on the current site.
21. Our experience of working with many customers in emergency accommodation shows that the provision of on-site services greatly increases their engagement with the support services they need. Somerset Drug & Alcohol service, Second Step (Mental Health) services, the Police, community nurses/dentists amongst others all say it is very difficult currently to engage with this group at Pathways without adequate or suitable spaces to meet with customers on site.
22. Our experience during the Covid pandemic was, and continues to be, that we can engage much better with customers safely if services are provided on site. One recent example was the caution initially expressed by our customers in receiving the Covid vaccine in a community setting. However, when the local clinical team ran a 1 day vaccination session at Pathways, 27 residents got vaccinated on that day and the rest then followed their lead through attending the local drop-in sessions at the Gateway.
23. Our retained counsellor has also noted a significant increase in engagement if visits can be carried out on-site, and attendance at appointments for the HAP (Home Achievement Programme) and drug/alcohol appointments are much higher



South Somerset District Council

if customers can attend appointments at Pathways rather than in a community setting.

24. Feedback from the Police about the proposed new site has been very positive. Plans are now being discussed with BCHA and the Police to put in place measures from the outset to establish a more secure environment. There is also a real opportunity to work closely with BCHA as part of the Yeovil Refresh to redevelop Newton Road in a completely different way contributing to the regeneration of a vital area in the town centre.
25. In 2019, SSDC adopted the Somerset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023, which commits us to support clients to access suitable and affordable accommodation where appropriate, and we have agreed a target with MHCLG to reduce rough sleeping to zero by the end of 2021. Investing in and securing this new premises will help us deal with the immediate situation, but will also secure a more positive and effective facility that will contribute to reduced homelessness and rough sleeping in the district, particularly in Yeovil town centre.

Financial Implications

26. BCHA are currently in negotiations with the current owner over the purchase price. Initial discussions with Homes England are constructive and they will be considering a grant application later in May (the outcome should be known by the June District Executive meeting). A capital contribution from SSDC would significantly improve the chances of the Homes England Grant application being successful.
27. There is currently £1,660,000 available in the Affordable Housing (Unallocated) Capital Programme budget. If Members approve the proposed grant allocation of £390,000 this will leave a balance of £1,270,000.
28. If approved, Homes England and SSDC would place aligned conditions on the grant funding ensuring that if the building were no longer used after a specified time, monies would be returned to the relevant funders. Detailed conditionalities will be negotiated in line with advice of Homes England. In addition to the standard English Homes conditionalities any specific additional requirements from SSDC will be set out in the final grant letter and grant agreement.

Legal implications (if any) and details of Statutory Powers

29. The work of the Council on homelessness is carried out under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).

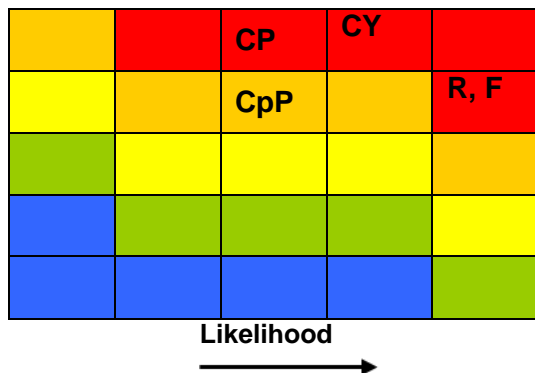


South Somerset District Council

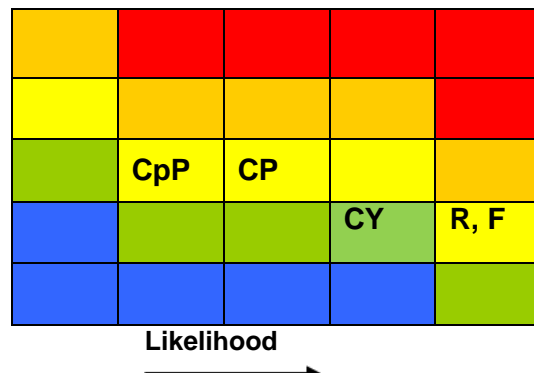
Risk Matrix

The risk matrix shows risk relating to the Council Plan headings.

Risk Profile before officer recommendations



Risk Profile after officer recommendations



Key

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R - Reputation	High impact and high probability
CpP - Corporate Plan Priorities	Major impact and major probability
CP - Community Priorities	Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY - Capacity	Minor impact and minor probability
F - Financial	Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

Council Plan Implications

- I. To enable housing and communities to meet the existing and future needs of residents and employers we will work to:
 - reduce homelessness and rough sleeping
 - prevent people losing their home and supporting people who are homeless to have a place they can call home
- II. To enable healthy communities which are cohesive, sustainable and enjoy a high quality of life we will:
 - support residents facing hardship
 - work with partners to support people in improving their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

30. The new premises will have a full conditions survey and additional energy efficiency improvements will be built into to the refurbishment plan to maximise a reduction of its carbon footprint and be in compliance with anticipated regulatory obligations.

Equality and Diversity Implications



31. Individuals facing homelessness and rough sleeping can be marginalised and face challenges accessing mainstream services and are more vulnerable to exploitation. By helping people off the streets and supporting people to secure and maintain emergency and temporary accommodation will also address other issues they face we can help make a difference to the lives of individuals and their families and particularly for those who face additional barriers such as poor mental health.
32. People who sleep rough experience some of the most severe health inequalities and report much poorer health than the general population. Many have co-occurring mental ill health and substance misuse needs, physical health needs, and have experienced significant trauma in their lives.
33. People who experience rough sleeping over a long period are, on average, more likely to die young than the general population. They also face a higher likelihood of dying from injury, poisoning and suicide. It has been estimated that around 35% of people who die whilst sleeping rough die due to alcohol or drugs, compared to 2% in the general population.
34. Life expectancy for people who experience rough sleeping in the UK is 44 for men and 42 for women, compared to 76 for men and 81 for women in the general population.
35. As a purpose built facility the new premises will be fully accessible for disabled customers.

Privacy Impact Assessment

Not applicable

Background Papers

- Somerset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-23
- MHCLG Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018
- Confidential BCHA Proposal to Homes England May 2021