

17 March 2025

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**Quarterly report on planning service performance (Q3 report: Oct to Dec 2024/25)**

Chair of Committee: Councillor Tony Lock

Executive Member: Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets,  
Councillor Mike Rigby

Lead Officer: Alison Blom-Cooper, Chief Planning Officer

Author: Helen Vittery, Service Manager – Resources, Integration, Minerals and  
Waste

Contact Details: [alison.blomcooper@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:alison.blomcooper@somerset.gov.uk)

## Introduction

1. In line with the Council's constitution, quarterly officer reports are presented to the Strategic Planning Committee in order to monitor decision making and workload levels. This report covers the period up to quarter 3 (October – December 2024) of 2024/25 including the national statistics provided to MHCLG in February 2025.
2. Appendix 1 attached to this report sets out the performance data in detail, covering the volume of work received by each of the area teams and the minerals and waste team and the information published nationally on a quarterly basis on the meeting of the government targets. In addition, information is provided on the applications and other areas of work not reported in the national statistics, in order to provide a more rounded picture of the workload. Information is also included on enforcement complaints, appeals, five-year housing land supply and the Housing Delivery Test position.

## Recommendation

3. The Strategic Planning Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

## Reasons for recommendations

4. The report is brought to members to provide an understanding of the volume of work in the service and the performance of the Council in meeting the national targets.

## Financial and Risk Implications

5. The Government measures application performance on a quarterly basis. If the Council does not remain within the thresholds<sup>1</sup> for either speed or quality of decision-making set by Government, then it could be designated as a poorly performing authority and developers would then have the option of applying directly to the Planning Inspectorate for planning permission (referred to as 'designation'). The regular monitoring of performance will enable this risk to be actively managed.

## Legal Implications

6. There are no legal implications of the recommendation.

## Planning Performance

### Development Management

7. Section 1 of the Appendix sets out the number of planning applications received by Somerset Council, by area and for the Minerals and Waste team, and Section 3 sets out the performance against the nationally set targets, which are reported quarterly to MHCLG.

In addition to the quarterly returns which measure whether the Authority meet the national targets for Major, Minor and Other applications, MHCLG review the performance of Authorities to determine if they should be designated as poor performing. This assessment considers the speed of decision making, as well as the quality of decision making (appeal outcomes). Updated criteria for designation were published in December 2024 and detailed in the last report, delivered to committee in February 2025.

If Authorities fail to meet the thresholds set, they can be designated, which means that applicants can apply direct to the Planning Inspectorate for the determination of their planning applications.

Currently the Council is above the thresholds and is not at risk for speed of decision making or quality of decision making. These are being monitored closely. Given the recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which confirmed a new standard methodology for calculating the housing requirement and increased the Somerset requirement by 41%, the Council except in the former Sedgemoor District Council area no longer has a 5 year

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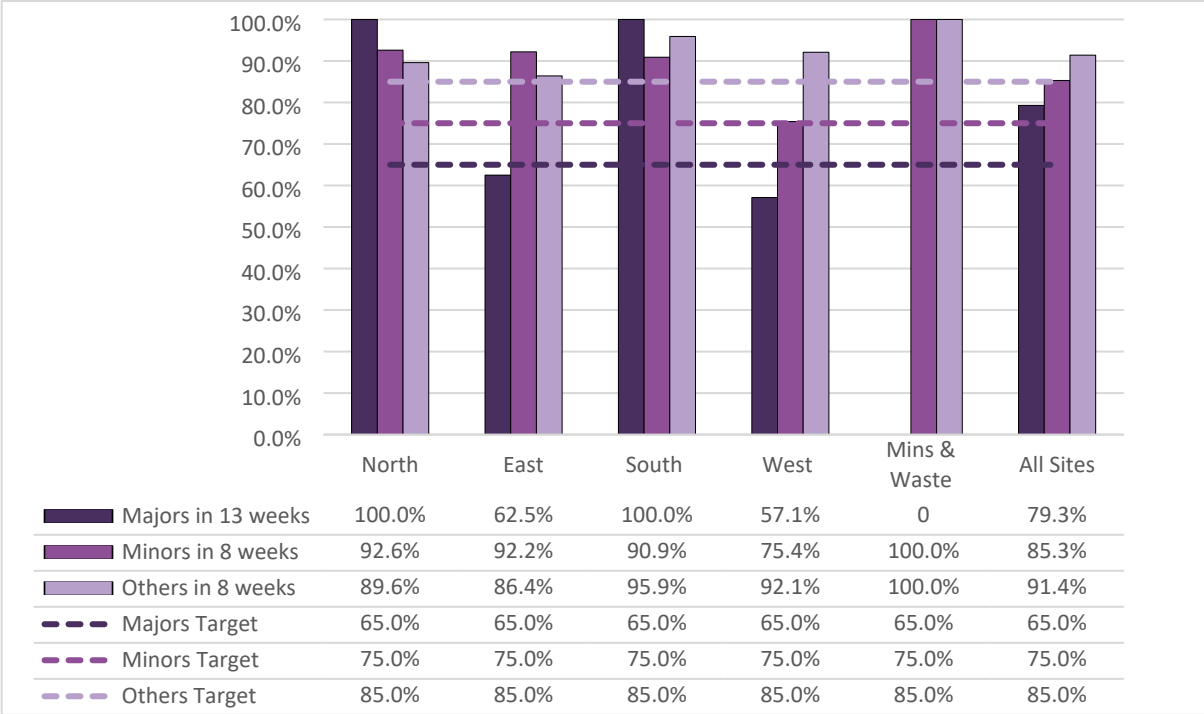
<sup>1</sup> Thresholds: The criteria for designation were updated in December 2024.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/674f2ec08b522bba9d991af9/Criteria\\_Document\\_2024.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/674f2ec08b522bba9d991af9/Criteria_Document_2024.pdf) This set designation thresholds for the speed of decision making if an authority made less than 60% of decisions for major development within the statutory period or such extended period as agreed and less than 70% for non major development with the assessment periods defined as between October 2023 and September 2024 and October 2024 to September 2025.

housing land supply and the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies.

- 8. Section 3 of each appendix shows the percentage of major, minor and other applications determined within the national target times of 13 weeks for major applications and 8 weeks for minor and other applications or where extensions of time or planning performance agreements are in place. These are measured against the nationally set targets of 65% for majors, 75% for minors and 85% for others.

*Chart 1 showing the latest quarter data (Q3 of 2024/25) for all teams showing percentage of applications determined in-time compared with the national targets*



The data above for the period Q3 of 2024/25 shows that for this period, for minor and other applications all areas have achieved the targets, but for majors, East and West have slightly fallen below the target set.

The reason for East and West not achieving their targets for major applications is due to the small number of applications within this category. Three of eight were not within time for East and three of seven were not within time for West. It should be noted however that for the Council overall (combined areas), all targets have been met.

Chart 2 Overall Performance for Somerset Council (combined) to show trend

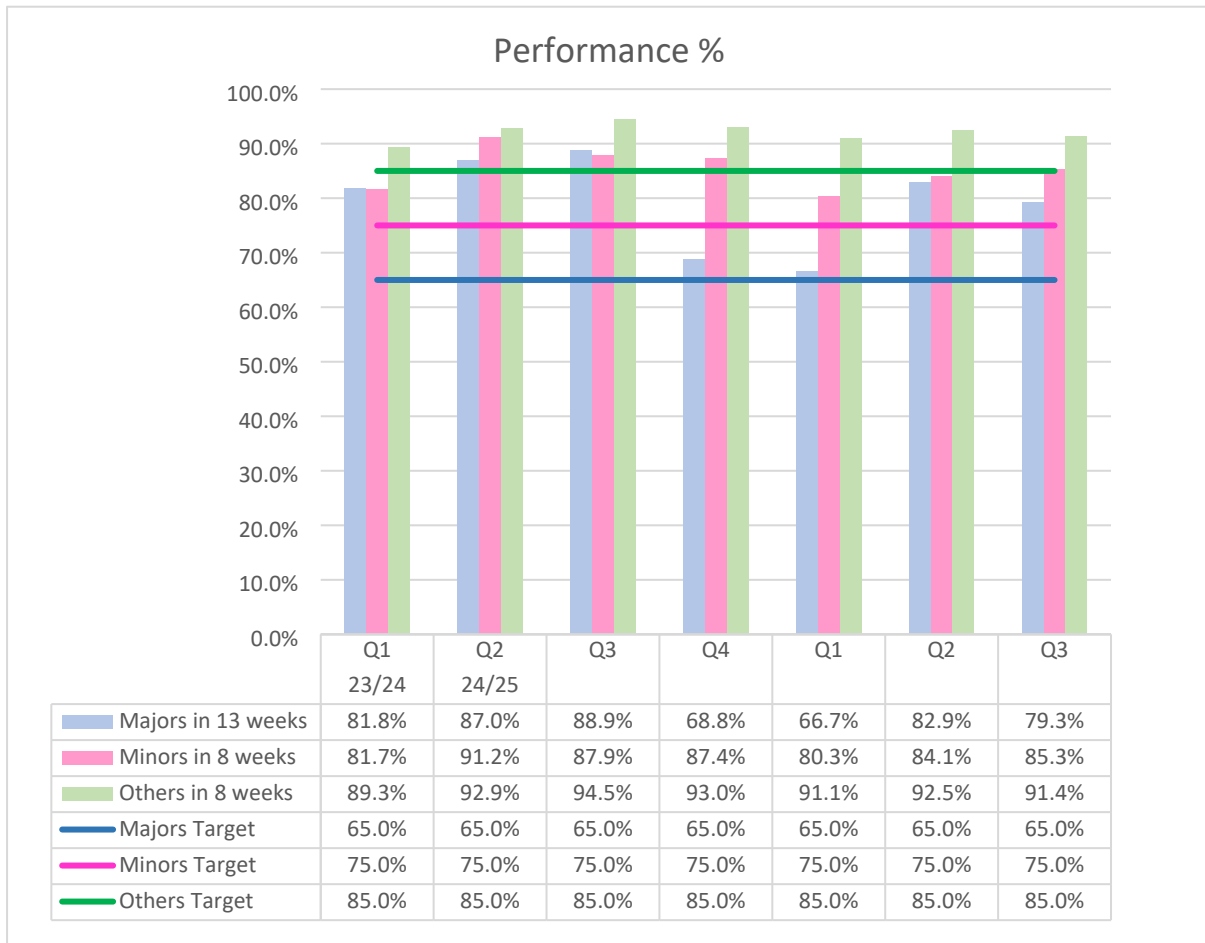


Chart 2 shows the trend data for the wider planning service since April 2023. Whilst chart 1 identifies the performance of the teams for this reporting period, chart 2 clearly shows that the Council has met all of the national targets over the last seven reporting periods for MHCLG data returns.

The Council is aware from the number of complaints that the service is not delivering a quality service. External consultants have been used to understand the position and to ensure that consistent information is available from the 6 inherited IT systems that are in use across the planning service. A business case has been prepared and agreed as part of the Councils budget set at Full Council 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 to help improve the service.

- Section 2 of the Appendix provides information on the number of applications on hand at the start, the number received during, the number determined and the number on hand at the end of the quarter. Noting that this is only those applications included in the national returns to government it is useful as a gauge as to the backlog of work in the system.

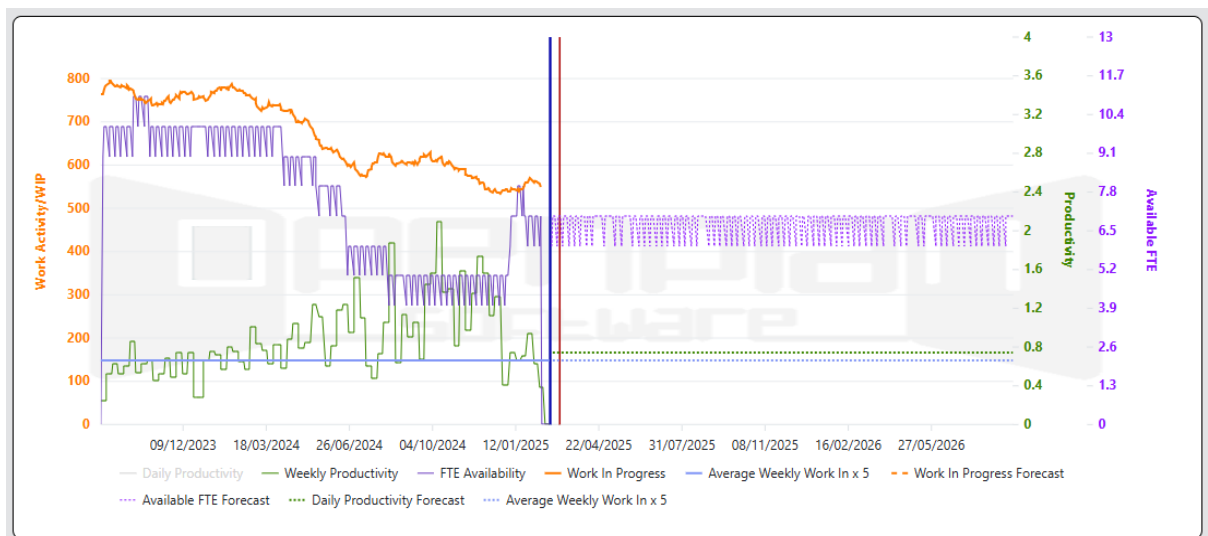
Where there are more applications on hand at the end of the period than determined during it, this is evidence of a building backlog and something that the service continues to monitor.

- Some teams were carrying a significant backlog of work on hand as a result of phosphates issues delaying the ability for Somerset Council to determine these applications. Phosphate solutions have been coming forward recently, gradually removing the block on stalled applications, but adding to the workload 'on hand' and increasing pressure within the impacted teams for applications needing to be determined. This has increased pressure within the teams and resulted in additional work (and has therefore impacted the capacity of other teams e.g. legal and ecology) needing to reconsider these historic/stalled applications, alongside the more recent application workload. Measures have been put in place to separate and reduce work on hand.

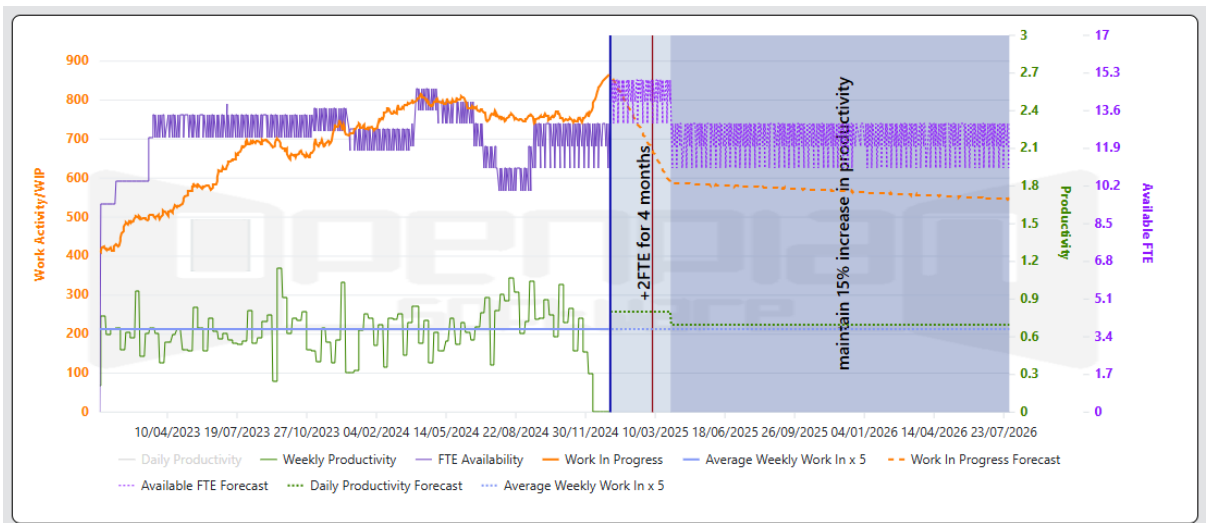
For most areas Q3 has seen a reduction in the backlog of applications on hand as shown in the images below by the orange line. Somerset (East) has seen an increase but this is the result of reduced resource within the DM team. There is external recruitment exercise underway to address this and agency support is being put in place in lieu of permanent staff.

Tables below show work 'on-hand' as the orange line

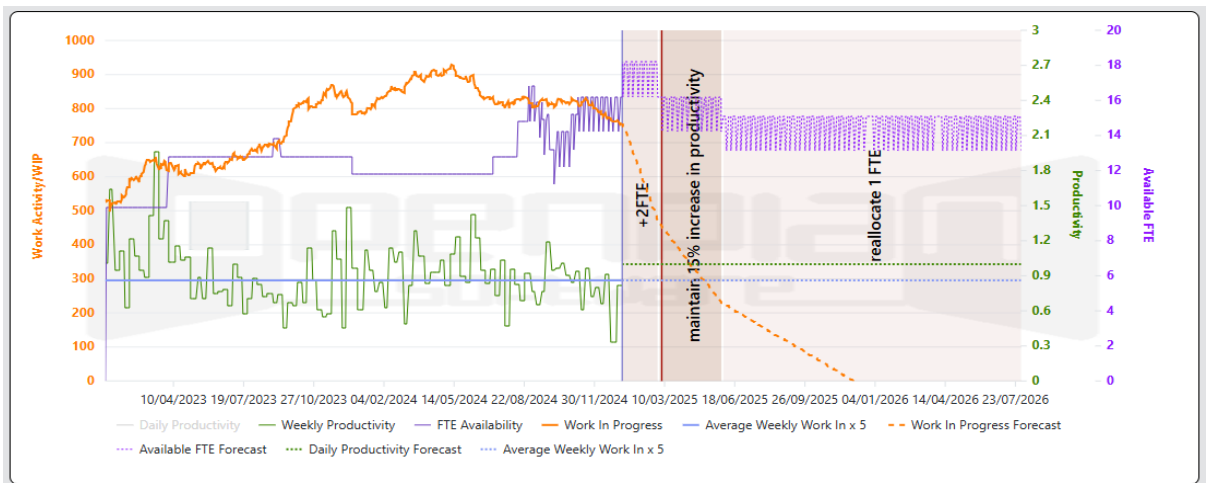
### Determination Somerset (North):



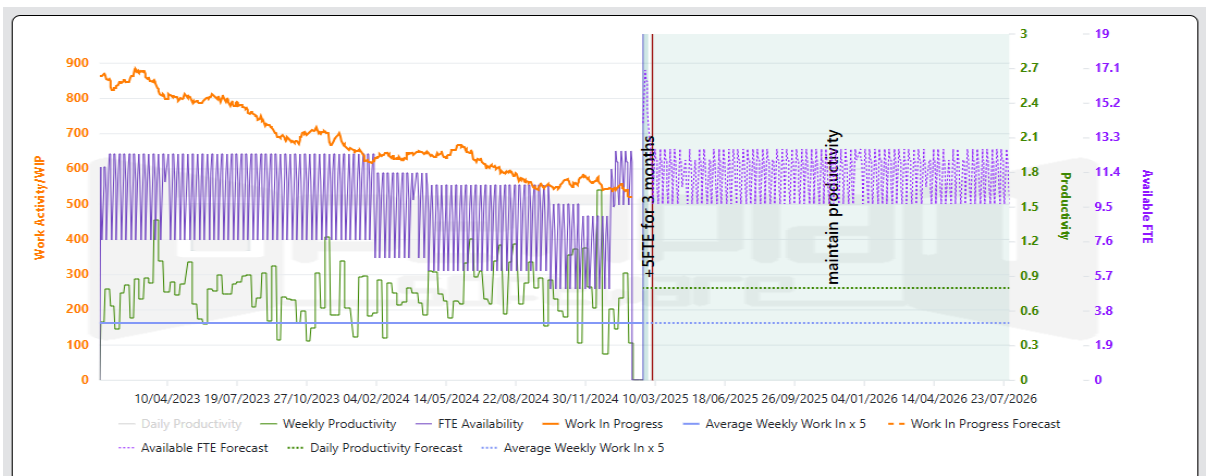
### Determination Somerset (East):



### Determination Somerset (South):



### Determination Somerset (West):



## **Other applications and pre application advice not included in the national data**

11. Section 4 of the appendix provides information on the other applications which are not included in the national statistics: these include prior approvals, adverts and tree applications. Due to differing computer systems in operation across the Council it has not been possible to include the discharge of conditions applications which make up a considerable volume of work. Section 4 also provides information on pre-application enquiries. This gives an indication of the other work that case officers are handling.

## **Appeal decisions**

12. Section 6 of the appendix provides information on the number of appeal decisions by area/minerals and waste team and the percentage of appeals where the decision was allowed by the Planning Inspectorate by year. The figures shown for the Legacy Authorities relate to those decisions prior to April 2023 and the figure for Somerset Council is the combined figure since April 2023.
13. The government uses the appeals performance as a proxy for the quality of decisions and for potential designation<sup>2</sup>. The calculation is based on the percentage of the total number of decisions made by the authority (including non determinations) on major and non major<sup>3</sup> decisions that are then subsequently overturned at appeal once nine months has elapsed following the end of the assessment period. The nine months specified in the measure enables appeals to pass through the system and be decided for the majority of decisions.

If the percentage overturned at appeal is more than 10% of the total number of decisions, then the authority meets the threshold for designation. The table below shows the figures for the most recent reporting period:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-planning-performance-criteria-for-designation>

For quality of decision making the measure used is the percentage of decisions that are overturned at appeals – the threshold set for major and non major development is 10% for the period

<sup>3</sup> Non major decisions include, minor dwellings, minor office and industry, retail and service, traveller caravan pitches, other minor developments, change of use and householder developments

*Most recent appeal data as published 13 June 2024 by MHCLG:  
P152 (majors) and P154 (non-majors) for the period July 2021 – Sept 2023*

	Major	Non-Major
<b>Somerset Council (combined data since April 2023 – 2 quarters)</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
East (Mendip)	2.1%	1.0%
North (Sedgemoor)	3.2%	0.1%
South (South Som)	0.0%	0.8%
West (Som West & Taunton)	2.6%	0.7%
Minerals & Waste (County)	0.0%	n/a

*Please note that the data for the legacy Authorities was prior to April 2023 and will eventually disappear, being replaced by Somerset Council data, as the rolling review period moves.*

14. For the last period for which published data is available which was up to Sept 2023 all area teams are below the current thresholds for potential designation. It is also worth bearing in mind that the number of majors determined can be relatively small so that one or two applications can make the difference between meeting or not meeting the threshold. 7.7% is an issue

## **Committees**

15. The Council undertook a review of the Committee arrangements, scheme of delegation and terms of reference, which was agreed by Full Council on 22 May 2024. This is now being used and will continue to be reviewed as requested by Full Council. The Government published a working paper on modernising planning committees on 9 December 2024.<sup>4</sup> This invites views on whether to introduce a national scheme of delegation which is likely to be introduced in the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill. Updates on this will follow in due course, once decisions are made.

## **Planning Enforcement**

16. Local Planning Authorities have a discretionary power to take enforcement action where unauthorised development has taken place and it is considered expedient to do so. The Government advice urges negotiation in the first instance to try to resolve enforcement issues except in the most serious cases and local planning authorities are advised to act in a proportionate way appropriate to the level of harm caused by the development. The Council recognises that effective enforcement is an important means of maintaining integrity and public confidence

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<sup>4</sup> [Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees - GOV.UK](#)



of the development management process. In February 2023 the Council adopted an enforcement policy. [SCC - Public - Somerset Planning Enforcement Policy.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#). This sets out the priority level (see page 10) that will be given to cases referred and is essential given the high number of allegations of breaches of planning control received each year. Some cases will require no further investigation because we identify that planning permission already exists for the work, that planning permission was not required or that enforcement action is not proportionate to the level of harm caused by the breach. Others will be resolved by way of negotiation in accordance with the government advice.

17. Section 7 of the appendix provides information for enforcement cases on hand and the number resolved/closed during this quarter.

### **Five Year Housing Land Supply and the Housing Delivery Test**

18. Section 8 of each appendix provides information on the Council's Five-Year Housing Land supply position and Housing Delivery Test results. This is by area with Area West split into the former Taunton Deane and West Somerset areas as the position relates to the relevant adopted local plans. The supply position in Areas East, West and South has been affected by the need to ensure developments are nutrient neutral in the Somerset Levels and Moors catchment areas and in the case of South and West the River Axe catchment area.

In summer 2024 Central Government consulted on a proposed new Standard Method for calculating Local Housing Need. The updated National Planning Policy Framework and revised standard method for calculating housing need was published on 12 December 2024. The standard method for calculating housing need has changed slightly from that consulted on in the summer. This is as follows:

**The Baseline:** 0.8% of the value of existing housing stock for the area of the local authority (Dwelling stock including vacants). Central Government have said that this provides a consistent base for growth. The housing stock baseline figure is then adjusted based on the affordability of the area.

**The Affordability Ratio:** The affordability data used is the median workplace-based affordability ratios, published by the Office of National Statistics at a local authority level. The mean average affordability over the five most recent years for which data is available is used. No adjustment is applied where the ratio is 5 or below. For each 1% the ratio is above 5, the housing stock baseline should be increased by 0.95%. An authority with a ratio of 10 will have a 95% increase in its annual housing stock baseline.

**The Buffer:** The NPPF of 12 December 2024 reintroduced a 5% buffer "to ensure choice and competition in the market for land", this applies to North, South and West areas. A 20% buffer applies where there has been

significant under delivery which is defined as delivery below 85% against the HDT, this applied to East area (Mendip).

Officers have looked at figures for each area and estimate the separate disaggregated figures would be:

	Previous Standard Method	Current Standard Method + 5YHLS buffer	Difference
Somerset	2,660	3,957	49%
Mendip	573	1,087	90%
Sedgemoor	737	867	18%
South Somerset	669	1,093	63%
Somerset West and Taunton	690	1,073	56%
Taunton Deane	579	817	41%
West Somerset	111	296	167%

*Five-Year Housing Land Supply by Area as a result of the new Standard Method*

<b>Combined Five Year Housing Land Supply Calculation</b>	<b>Previous YHLS</b>	<b>Current YHLS</b>
Area North (Sedgemoor) -	6.28	5.4 (provisional)
Area East (Mendip)	3.67	2.21
Area South (South Somerset)	3.44	2.11
Area West (Taunton Deane)	6.06	3.1 (Feb 2025)
Area West (West Somerset)	9.92	3.73

19. The Housing Delivery Test is an annual measurement of housing delivery in the area of relevant plan making authorities published by MHCLG. The latest test results for the Housing Delivery Test measurement were published on 12 December 2024 for the period up to 2022/23. These results show:

- Area South is at 143%,
- Area North is at 115%,
- Area West is at 121%,
- Area East is at 79%.

Data for the past 5 years is shown in Appendix 2 Section 8.4 and Tables 26-29.

20. From the day following the publication of the Housing Delivery Test measurement where delivery of housing has fallen below the housing requirement the following consequences apply:

Below 95% - publish an action plan,

Below 85% - 20% buffer on housing requirement in 5YHLS and publish an action plan,

Below 75% - application of presumption in favour of sustainable development, 20% buffer on housing requirement in 5YHLS and publish an action plan.

### **Background Papers**

22. None

### **Appendices**

- **Appendix 1: Q3 2024/2025 Planning Service Performance Data**