

North Somerset Council

Draft Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) 2017-22

DRAFT

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DRAFT **Foreword** (by Executive Member)

Not included at this stage

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1. Introduction

The purpose of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) is to set out our strategic direction, specific priorities and actions to prevent and respond to homelessness in the North Somerset (NS) area for the next five years. The PHS is informed by evidence from the Homelessness Review (HMR) undertaken in 2016.

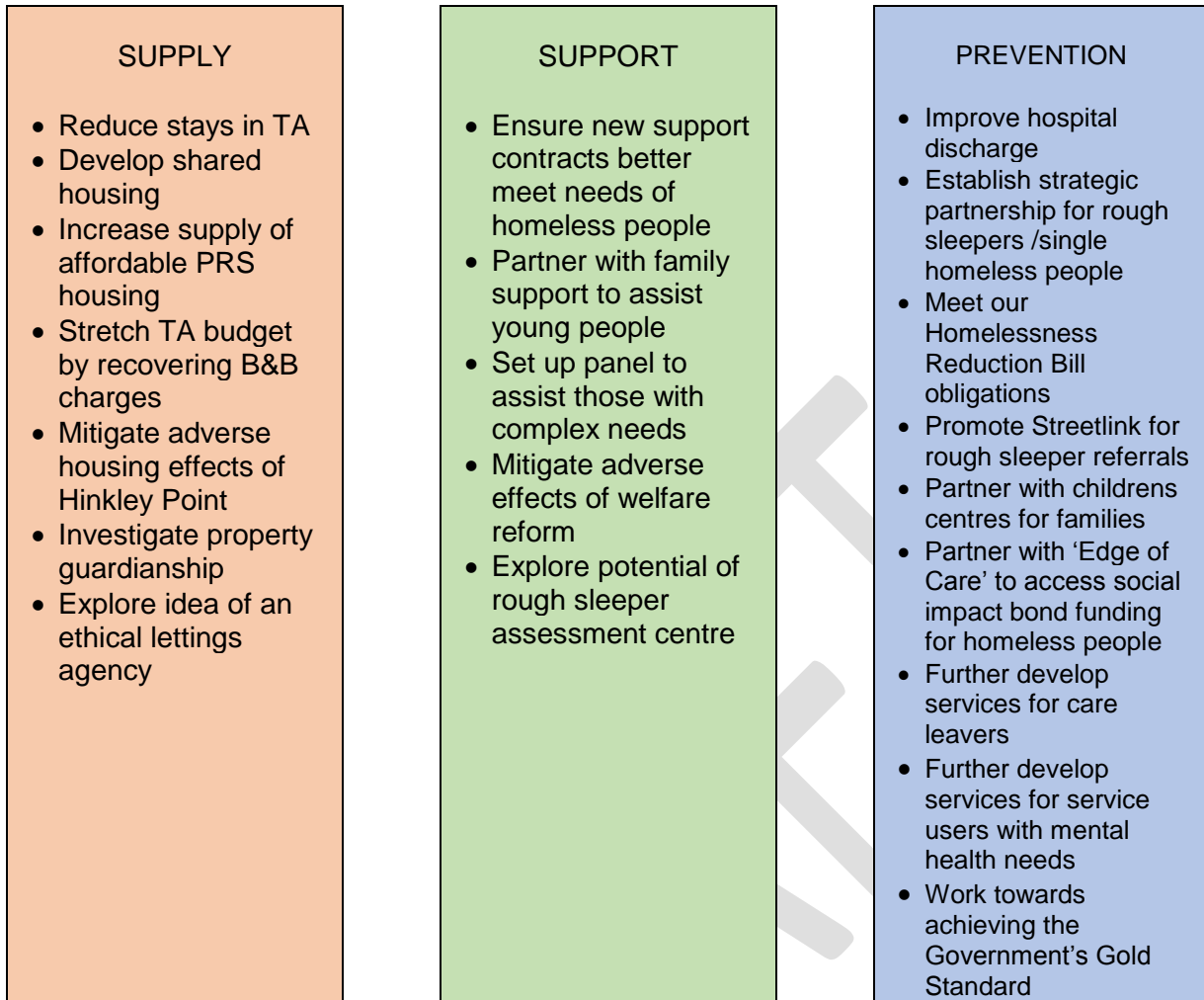
The HMR pulled together information we (or partners) hold about homelessness and relevant, related areas of activity and services. This included information gathered from consultation with housing advice staff, the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Forum (HHPF) (a network of external to the council homelessness service providers) and other stakeholders. If you are reading this on line you can link to the HMR here [\[Hyperlink to HMR\]](#).

The HMR also included a description of resources involved in combatting homelessness in the district, including the role of various partners directly providing services (e.g. advice, accommodation etc.) to homeless households in the district.

Three key themes for service development emerged from the HMR as set out below:

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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supply – work with partners to improve existing and develop/innovate new accommodation solutions to meet the need of homeless people |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support – provision of a range of support services that sustain independent living and reduce or avoid the risk of households becoming homeless |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevention – activities that prevent homelessness and help sustain independent living by enabling household to remain in their current home or a achieve planned move to new housing |

The actions we propose to implement in response are grouped under these themes. A summary of the actions is set out below with full details at Appendix 1. The rationale for the actions is set out in chapter 6.



The PHS recognises that homelessness is not something that can be tackled by one agency or service. We regularly review the way in which we deliver services to prevent and respond to homelessness directly and in partnership, and we will continue to strengthen and improve multi-agency responses and partnerships.

2. Links to other North Somerset Plans and Strategies

Our Housing Strategy, which was approved early in 2016, has the following ambitions relating to preventing homelessness and meeting housing need:

- *Improving housing options for vulnerable households and people with support needs by continuing to research and develop the evidence base for supported housing*
- *Working in partnership to tackle and prevent homelessness by reviewing, developing and implementing a new Homelessness Strategy*
- *Ensuring the provision of adequate accommodation for homeless people by reviewing temporary and emergency accommodation needs*

One of the actions from the Housing Strategy is to review, develop and implement this new Preventing Homelessness Strategy. This emphasises our commitment and approach, which is to intervene as early as possible to deal with potential homelessness, because we recognise the negative effects homelessness can have on people's health (including mental health needs), wellbeing and life chances (e.g. unemployment and drug/alcohol misuse).

In turn our Housing Strategy is designed to help deliver the council's Corporate Plan. In this way we have a clear link between actions to prevent homelessness in the PHS and our Corporate Plan ambitions.

Housing with Support Strategy (HWSS)

The council's People and Communities Strategy Team are leading on a new strategy which seeks to predict future demand for housing with support from a range of adult clients including people:

- with mental health needs,
- with learning difficulties
- with physical and sensory impairment and/or
- who are older and younger

This strategy will cover all tenures, long and short-term accommodation and will seek to identify and then address gaps in services. Information from this strategy will help to ensure provision best meets needs and enable the council and partners plan for more independent living options and away from more institutionalised settings. The HWSS will give us better information around the housing needs of vulnerable groups to improve services for them. Later in this PHS we explain which vulnerable groups are especially affected by homelessness. Every effort will be made to align the PHS with this HWSS when it is developed.

3. Key achievements from the last Homelessness Strategy

- Successful bid to regional Rough Sleeper Fund to support provision of rough sleeping prevention services
- Successful bid for single person homelessness funding with partner local authorities (LAs)
- Council services improved as result of mystery shopping
- Consolidating, developing and continuing multi-agency¹ work around: domestic violence; child exploitation; mental health; 16/17 year olds; hospital discharge; anti-social behaviour (ASB); rough sleeping; and physical and sensory impairment
- Minimised the number of 16/17 year olds that had to be taken into LA care by developing workable housing solutions and through joint work with Children's Support and Safeguarding service;
- New improved joint protocol with Children's Support and Safeguarding service for homeless 16/17 year olds
- 95%+ homelessness prevented in four of the last six² years
- 77% score for peer review - highest in sub region; this was part of progress towards achieving the Government's 'Gold Standard'. See Appendix 3 of the HMR
- 2010/11 to 2015/16 – Just over 1,300 households assisted to move into the PRS, of which 760 assisted financially
- Localpad website tailored and established for North Somerset - free advertisement for landlords
- Private sector leasing - 46 homes procured in 18 months, including some empty properties brought back into use
- Improved processes for the discharge of homeless people from hospital and training delivered for partners
- Progressed improved emergency housing options for young people
- Improved processes established for the recovery of Housing Benefit (HB) from Bed and Breakfast (B&B) placements

Our aim is to build upon these achievements and deliver further improvements to meet the gaps identified in the HMR.

¹ Extensive multi-agency liaison for these vulnerable groups plus the use of the MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) approach for domestic violence and ASB

² The lowest percentage for 'homelessness prevented in the period 2010/11 to 2015/16 was 93.5%

4. Homelessness Reduction Bill

A private members' bill is on schedule to become law in 2017. The Bill amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and will extend the duties of local authorities (LAs) to homeless and threatened with homelessness households. Major features of the bill include:

- Establishes that free, initial advice must be of a uniformly high standard regardless of e.g. priority need or household type.
- Changes the point at which a (homelessness) 'prevention duty' starts, from 28 days before someone is likely to be homeless, to 56 days; and extends the duty regardless of priority status, local connection and intentionality.
- Confirms a 'prevention duty' on LAs is to take steps for 56 days to relieve homelessness (to those in the bullet above) to secure accommodation; if the duty is not discharged then priority need applicants would potentially become statutorily homeless.
- Specifies that public agencies (e.g. Police, hospitals) should refer those who are either homeless/at risk of being homeless to LA homelessness teams.

This more comprehensive duty to assisting those threatened with homelessness has been welcomed by many agencies working with homeless people. North Somerset already gives advice to all those approaching it and welcomes the opportunity to further reduce homelessness. At the same time it is also recognised that these extra duties will have resource implications for LAs, and the DCLG has committed nationally to additional homelessness prevention funding of around £48m over the next four years to help meet the these costs. We are awaiting confirmation of the amount NS will receive and will then have an opportunity to assess the extent to which the funding will help mitigate the impact and enable the council to meet the new duties placed upon it. We have produced a more detailed summary of the Bill at Appendix 2.

Finding accommodation for additional households will be difficult in an environment where this is already proving hard. As with any major change we will re-model this PHS and the housing advice and homelessness services delivered in the district, as the full consequences of the Bill's proposals become apparent.

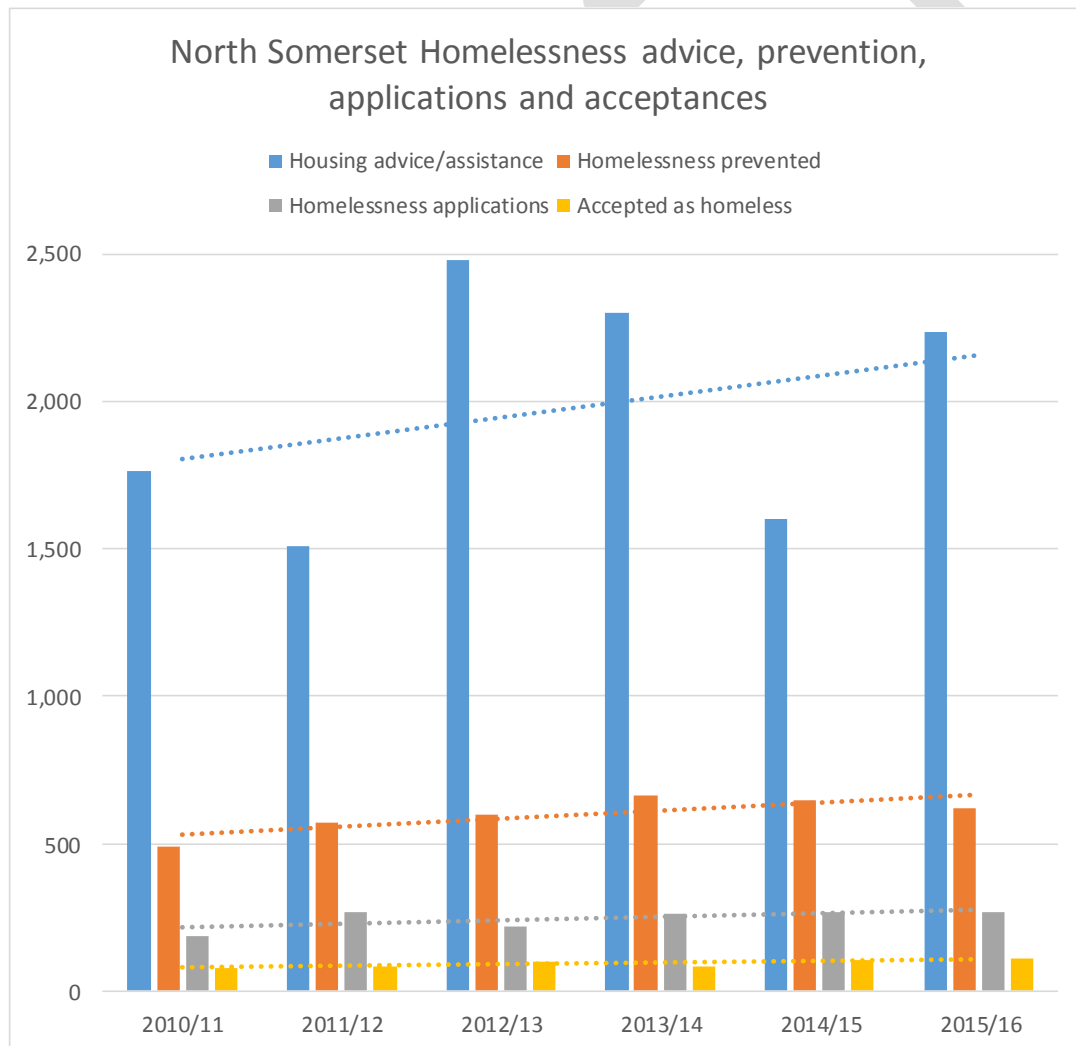
5. Homelessness Review (HMR) 2016 – Summary of Findings

We have included here information and data from the Homelessness Review (HMR) that we feel is the most significant. If you are looking at this document on line you can link to the HMR on page 4.

North Somerset - Headline Homelessness Trends³

Most councils use the information in Figure 1⁴ below as key indicators of trends around housing advice, homelessness and prevention of homelessness. It includes the level of demand for housing advice and assistance, the amount of homelessness formally prevented, formal applications as homeless, and acceptances. Advice and assistance is defined in the supporting document the HMR 2016.

Figure 1 (dotted lines are trend lines)



³ **Note on the figures in this PHS generally:** We have aimed to keep the Figures (i.e. graphs/tables) in this PHS as simple as possible. If you wish to look at the detailed numbers behind the graphs these are in the HMR

⁴ We have used the term 'Figure' in the PHS and 'Table' in the Review to avoid confusion

Figure 1 above shows that for all four measures the trend is upwards.

The demand for in-depth housing **advice** has remained at a high level, in excess of 2,200 cases per year in three of the last four years, which is an average of almost 43 cases per week in 2015/16. There was sharp increase in advice between 2011/12 and 2012/13 and it has not since returned to the lower levels experienced before that time. 2014/15 did not represent a fall in demand, but 'bedding in' new recording systems.

Instances of **prevention** have averaged 644 cases per year in the last three years, with a slight fall of 7% in 2015/16 from its peak in 2013/14. That is an average of around 12 households where homelessness is prevented per week in the last year. A more detailed breakdown of prevention methods is at Figure 5 below.

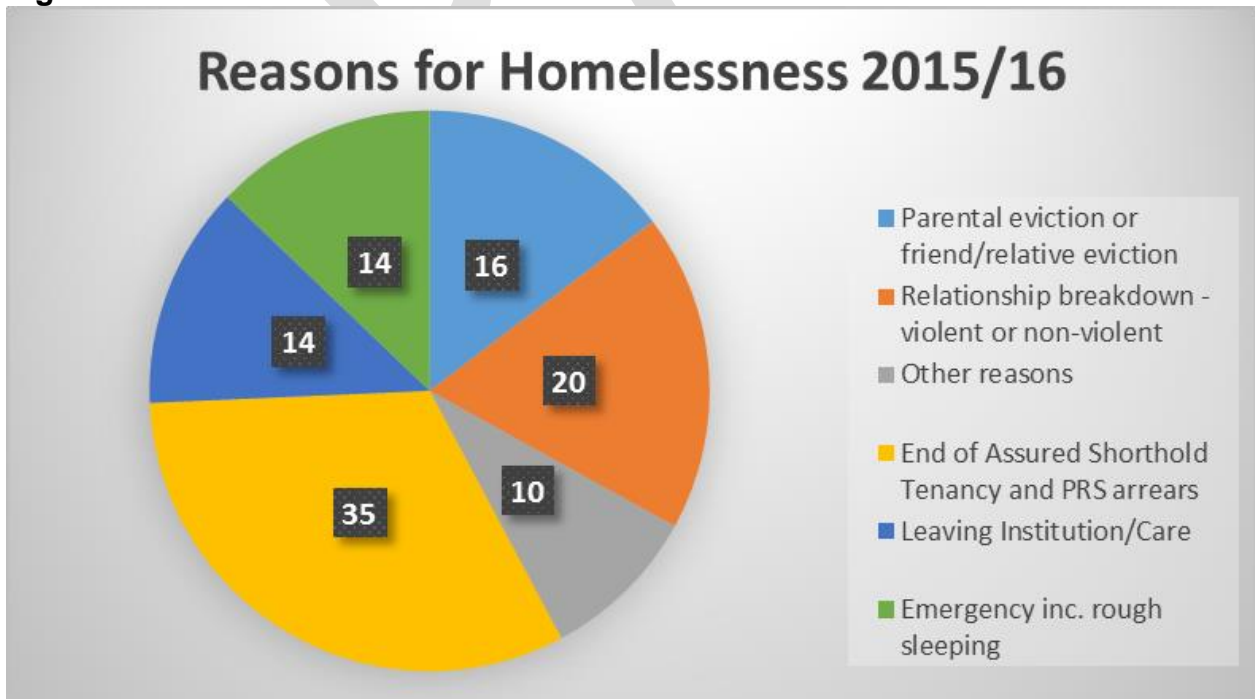
Homelessness **applications** have been in the range of 264 to 268 for four of the last five years, an average of five applications per week. It seems very unlikely applications will reduce for the foreseeable future to below 200 as they were in 2010/11.

Acceptances have moved above 100 per year in the last two years having been in the range 79-99 for the four previous years. That is two acceptances per week in 2015/16.

Reasons why households became homeless

Figure 2 below shows the primary reasons households accepted as homeless became homeless for 2015/16. The full six year picture is available in the HMR.

Figure 2



⁵ AST = Assured Shorthold Tenancy

The reason 'parents no longer able/willing to accommodate' appears to be on a downward trend which may be due to the success of mediation work by housing advisors and partner agencies. We have combined it above with 'friend/relative no longer able/willing to accommodate' which in any one year has accounted for between five and nine cases.

Young people leaving care and becoming homeless has grown as an issue (see also the Priority Need section), and as a primary reason for homelessness has been in the range 10-16% of all cases for the last three years. Children's Support and Safeguarding and housing advisors work very closely around such cases.

There is a very small incidence of mortgage arrears cases and social housing arrears cases; no more than four cases for each in any one year over a six year period which shows very few accepted homelessness people become homeless from these sectors. If the PRS could be made as 'secure' as the social housing sector then it might go towards preventing almost a third of all homelessness cases. Whilst fixed term tenancies are becoming more prevalent in the social housing sector⁶ we do not anticipate this will lead to a significant increase in evictions because social landlords have support mechanisms in place for issues such as arrears.

Priority Need categories or 'types' of household accepted as homeless

In order to be entitled to a 'homeless duty'⁷ a household must be in 'priority need' e.g. have a dependent child or children or be vulnerable in some other way. Of the 109 accepted homeless cases in 2015/16 54 (50%) were households with child/ren and the remaining 55 were households with no dependents, virtually all single people ('singles') with just a few childless couples. Figure 3 below shows how the priority needs for the 'singles' were broken down.

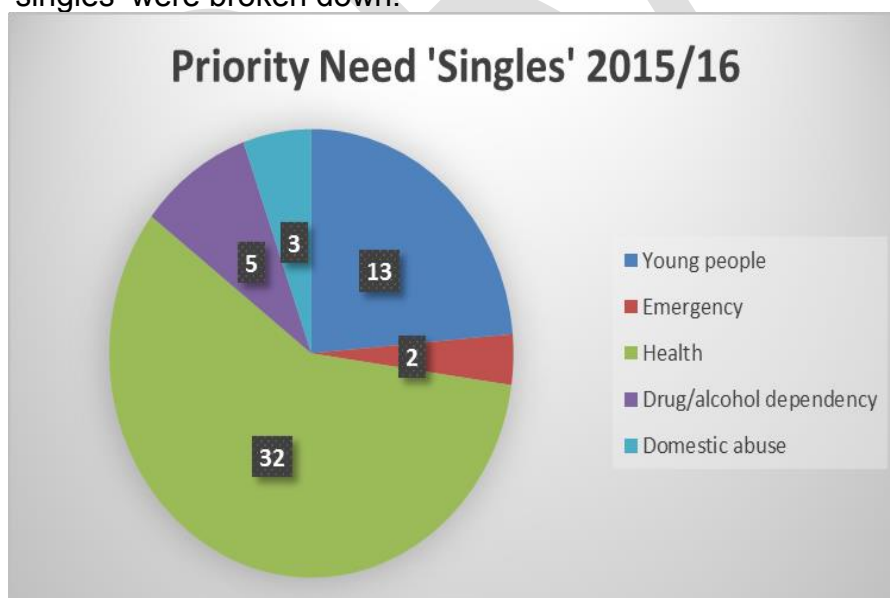


Figure 3

⁶ Extended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016

⁷ As opposed to information and assistance

Priority needs, key trends:

Households with child/ren make up around 54% of the households accepted in 2015/16, down from 61% of the total in 2010/11. This is part of a longer term trend where vulnerable single people are becoming a bigger proportion of those accepted as homeless. Households accepted as a result of relationship breakdown (both violent and non-violent) have averaged around 23 cases per year, 20 cases in 2015/16, just under one in five of all cases. This represents a fall from one in four cases last year, but it is still a very significant issue. We work closely with our domestic violence partner agency Gemini to get the right support to these households.

Young people, including those leaving care has become a more significant category in the last three years 12-15% of the total.

Health, physical and mental health issues – people with these needs represent 29% of priority need cases in the last two years.

Violence, households experiencing violence will be both single people and households with child/ren, though mostly the latter. The 'reason for homelessness' table above better captures the frequency of this issue.

Drug/alcohol dependency, whilst this may seem like a less common priority need housing advice staff have noticed that the number of homeless applicants who have complex, multiple needs as a result of chaotic lifestyles is increasing e.g. mental health needs and drug misuse. We discuss this in more detail in chapter 6 'Key issues and actions to be delivered...'

General cautionary note - for all priority need data we look at the primary priority need which 'triggers' the duty; a household could have more than one priority need e.g. a household with child/ren may also have experienced some domestic violence.

Homelessness prevention and related data

Homelessness prevention is defined as 'activities that enable a household to remain in their current home where appropriate, or that provide options to enable a planned and timely move to help sustain independent living'. North Somerset has a strong record in tackling and preventing homelessness, enabling people where possible, to remain in their existing homes using a variety of methods including negotiation, conciliation and mediation with private landlords, mortgage lenders or families, and liaison with colleagues assessing HB. Whilst 'staying put'/remain in home options have grown over the last six years from 10% in 2010/11 to 20% of all preventions in 2015/16, Figure 4 below shows clearly that helping people to move to alternative accommodation is more prevalent, accounting for 80% of all cases in 2015/16.

Figure 4

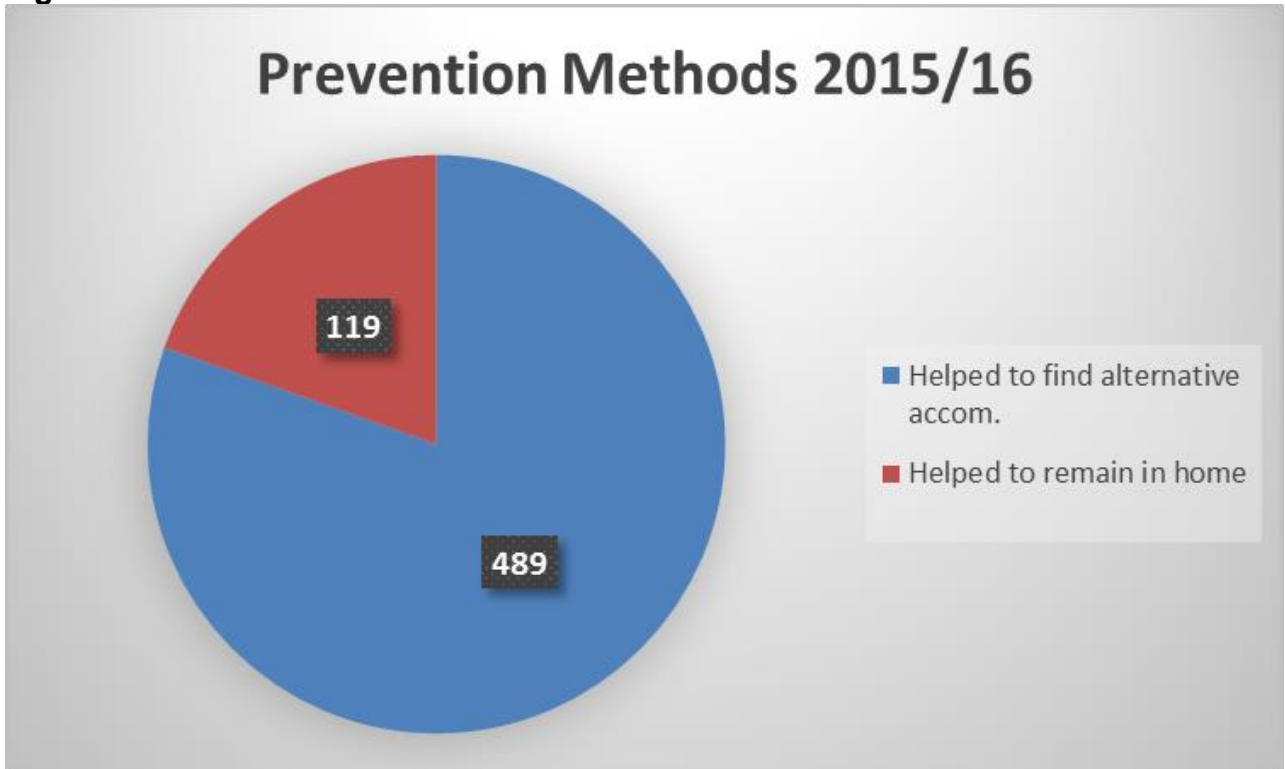
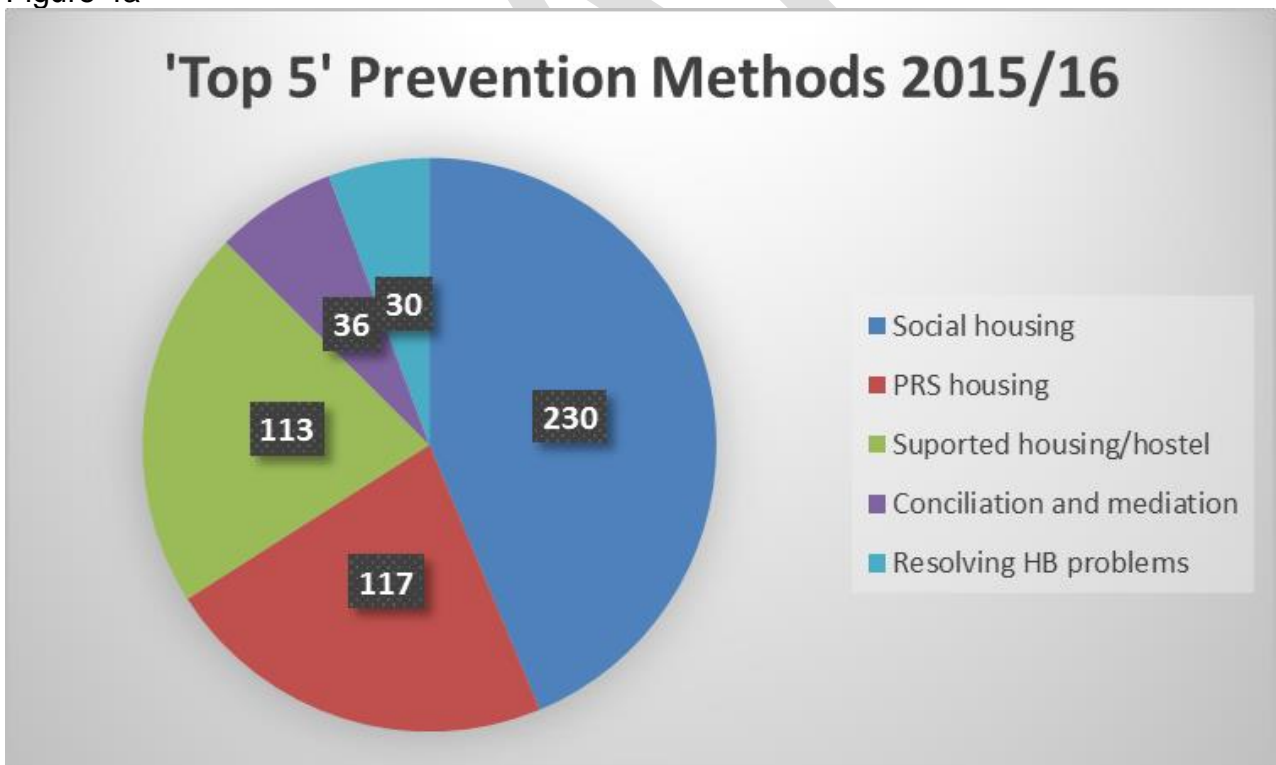


Figure 4a



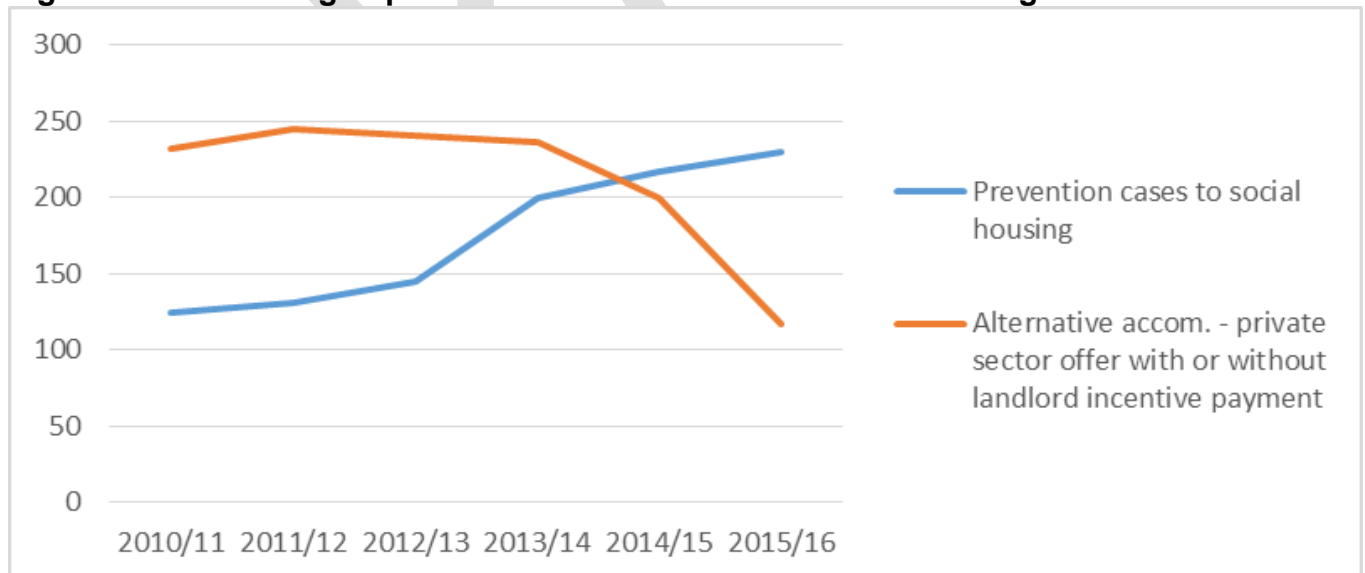
Both Figure 4 and figure 4a - data provided from P1E Section E10

In Figure 4a above we show the five main prevention methods which account for 85% of the preventions in 2015/16. The biggest of these is a 'social housing offer' which has grown every year for the last six years; an 84% increase in that period. The second largest prevention method is 'PRS offer'. There are two types of 'PRS offer' one is without financial assistance from the council (e.g. where household can afford their own deposit), and this has fallen 35% from its peak in 2013/14, but still represents six households helped per month. The other is with financial assistance where a landlord incentive payment is used e.g. guaranteeing the deposit or rent in advance; in 2010/11 this was 41% of all preventions, but has now fallen to 6%. We are currently helping almost three households per month in this way. The third highest prevention route is accessing supported housing or a hostel. This has fluctuated a little, but the trend is upwards and the increase is almost 80% since 2010/11.

We discuss in more detail later in the PHS and in our HMR the current problems with accessing the PRS for low income households/ those threatened with homelessness, but it is worth noting over the last six years our Housing Advice Team (HAT) helped house nearly 1,300 households into the PRS (with or without incentives).

A major concern is that the most frequently used preventative measure at the beginning of the six year period (i.e. 2010/11) was an offer of private sector accommodation **with or without** a landlord incentive payment', some 232 cases, 48% of all cases. By 2015/16 it was 117 cases, 19% all prevention cases. This highlights how hard it is becoming for potentially homeless and homeless people on a low income to access affordable, PRS lets (and for us to assist them to do so). Figure 5 below shows how the use of the PRS as a prevention route has decreased while social housing has increased.

Figure 5 - Re-housing of prevention households into social housing and the PRS



Finding Accommodation

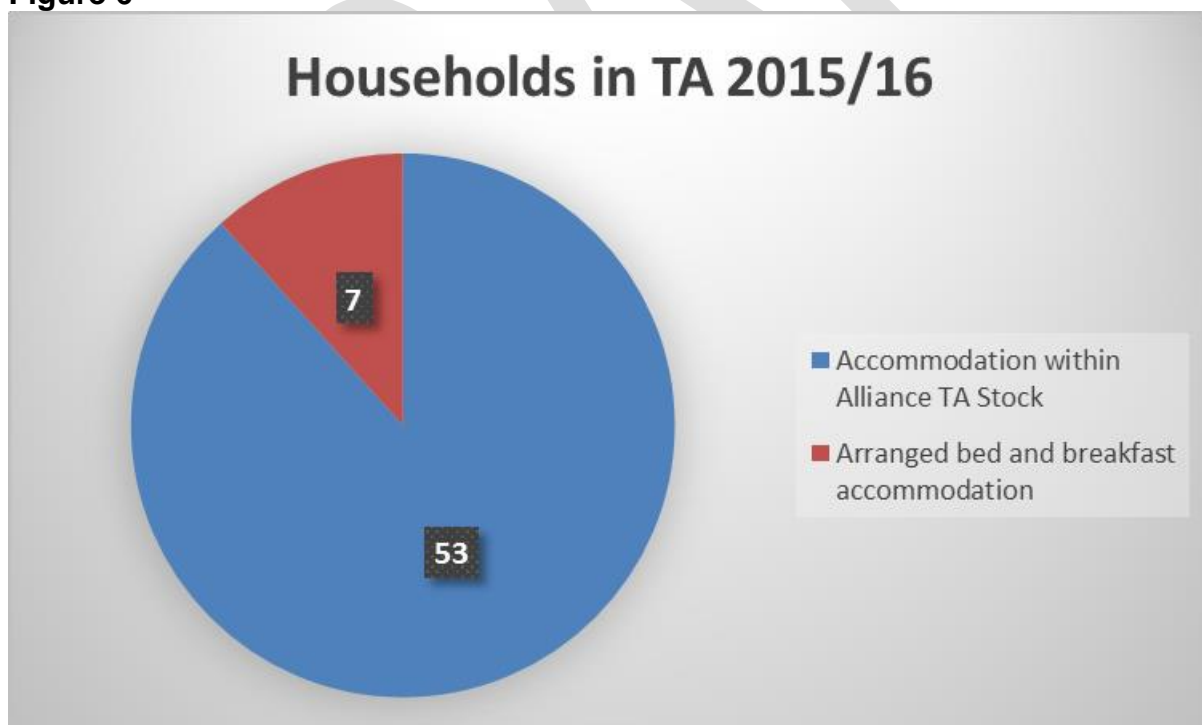
As set out above, major issue faced in preventing and responding to homelessness is that our ability to find affordable PRS accommodation is shrinking. This is due to the lack of PRS accommodation at rents below the HB Local Housing Allowance (LHA) threshold

and also because some landlords who will not let to those dependent or partly dependent on HB. As a result, often the only other option for alternative accommodation is social housing. Year on year, a higher percentage of social housing lettings are being made to prevention case households, from 18% in 210/11 to 31% in 2015/16. If the use of social housing continues to grow as a main response to preventing homelessness, then this will significantly affect the chances of those with a similarly pressing housing need (e.g. those with greater or equally poor housing conditions, those with a greater or equal level of vulnerability) on the HomeChoice (housing) register of getting access to social housing. In other words more people will be housed because of their very immediate housing need rather than longer term housing need.

Temporary and emergency access accommodation

In some pressing homelessness cases it is not possible to go into longer-term housing so temporary accommodation (TA) is required. TA within North Somerset for homeless people is made available by partner housing associations, ensuring a good standard of accommodation is provided. Figure 6 below provides information about the temporary housing options used to house those to whom we had a homelessness duty in 2015/16. The figure illustrates that NSC only used Registered Provider (RP)⁸ TA and a small amount of privately owned B&B. B&B has only been used for families with child/ren on three occasions recently, all in 2012/13. A range of supported accommodation is also used to house some households depending on their support needs (see the HMR for more detail on TA including the figures for the last six years).

Figure 6



Snapshot at end of year From P1E Section E6

⁸ The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the regulator, maintains a statutory register of social housing providers which lists private providers (not-for-profit and for-profit) and local authority providers. Most not-for-profit providers are also known as housing associations.

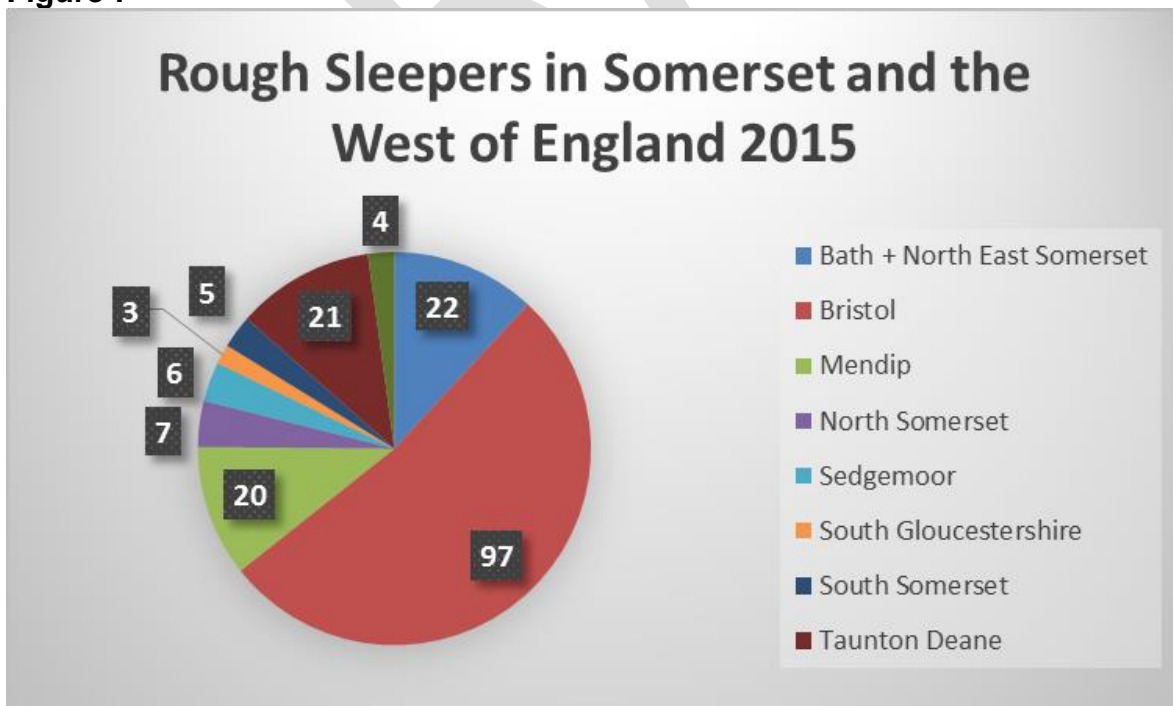
Rough sleeping

Of the nine councils within Somerset and the West of England, North Somerset currently has the second lowest percentage of rough sleepers per 1,000 population⁹. Figure 7 shows rough sleeping counts/estimates for 2015 for the nine councils, the most recent year we have figures for all nine. 2016 saw a small increase from seven to eight rough sleepers in our district. Please note figures are a snapshot and are verified using Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) methodology. The six year picture in the HMR shows how relatively small numbers of rough sleepers in an area can grow to big numbers and highlights the need for prompt and ongoing intervention.

NSC has been a member of the Avon and Somerset Rough Sleeper Group since its inception in 2011. The Group was provided with grant funding from the DCLG specifically to tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness. This funding has helped to part fund the YMCA outreach service in NS. Further funding from the DCLG was also provided to St Mungo's to dovetail with the work being carried out by the YMCA, by expanding their Bristol-based outreach services to our area. This funding has meant that outreach services have been available for rough sleepers in our district since 2011 and has helped ensure provision of appropriate support for this group.

In 2016 DCLG launched a £10 million rough sleeping grant fund to enable local areas to intervene early with rough sleepers before their problems become entrenched. NSC submitted a successful joint bid with Bristol City Council. This has secured funding enabling St Mungo's to continue rough sleeper outreach activities in NS until March 2019. NSC uses and encourages the use of Streetlink, a service which allows anyone (including rough sleepers themselves) to connect rough sleepers to the services available to them e.g. housing, health.

Figure 7



⁹ As at end of 2015

Repeat Homelessness

We looked at a large number of cases over three years where we accepted a prevention or homelessness responsibility. Some types of cases such as those where there was a multi-agency response have been excluded because ultimate resolution would not have rested solely with the Housing Advice Team. Figure 8 below shows our findings.

Figure 8 – Repeat approaches

Period covered: 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2016			
	Number analysed	Repeat approaches	Percentage re-approaching
Prevention and homelessness decisions	1,403	173	12.3%

These findings indicate that for those cases where a prevention or homelessness decision was made there was a just over one in eight chance of that household re-approaching the council. There is likely to be a connection here to PRS tenancies ending. **We will continue to monitor these figures on a rolling basis of three years and put into place actions if re-approaching increases**

6. Key issues and actions to be delivered by this Strategy

In this chapter based on our evidence and findings from the HMR (there is a link to the HMR on page 4), and consultation undertaken we present a summary of the key issues and the actions we propose to take in response. Some are thematic issues that need to be tackled, others relate to particular household types and their needs. We have placed these under the three thematic headings: Supply, Support and Prevention (see the action plan at Appendix 1 for further details). Actions arising from consultation (details included briefly in the next chapter of this PHS and in more detail in the HMR) include partner agencies wanting us to try new initiatives such as shared accommodation and guardianship and boosting supply generally, particularly in the PRS.

The action plan also responds to issues raised by staff, for instance responding better to complex needs and ensuring young people with high support needs are more effectively assisted.

Supply

Difficulty of access to, and insecurity of the private rented sector (PRS)

The HMR identified that in the light of the welfare reform changes and the high demand for private rented accommodation in North Somerset, a major challenge is finding accommodation that households can afford and landlords who are willing to accept households in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) and who have been homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The council relies on the PRS as a major source of accommodation for those we have a duty to house and as a prevention tool. We work closely with and incentivise private landlords and letting agents to secure accommodation for those we need to house. Dedicated staff work with both landlords and tenants to help find suitable accommodation at an affordable rent. To help address this we provide access to 'incentives' such as a deposit or rent in advance for prospective tenants, but there is often a shortfall between the amount PRS landlords charge and the level of HB/LHA¹⁰ available for the size of property. We regularly review our incentives to see what else we can do to persuade more PRS landlords to work with us. Failure to access the PRS can have a knock-on effect by increasing the number of households having to be placed in temporary accommodation and also places pressure on social housing supply.

The HMR also shows that households the most common reason for presenting as homeless is 'the end of AST (Assured Shorthold Tenancy) which represents about a third (32%) of all such cases.

The council is currently working to develop a 'Finance and Support model' which will assist applicants to cope with, and manage their own debt and tenancy and living costs and avoid eviction.

¹⁰ Housing Benefit is called Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for tenants in the PRS

ACTIONS

We will:

- *work to increase affordable PRS supply with longer term tenancies (action plan number SY3, Housing Strategy action 4.4)*
- *develop shared housing¹¹ options in both the PRS and social sector (SY2).*
- *explore the feasibility of property guardianship in our district (SY6).*
- *examine whether a new ethical lettings agency can help us access more properties to help fulfil our prevention role (SY7).*
- *meet any new demand for PRS housing and address any adverse effects on existing supply brought about by the Hinkley Point development through a number of initiatives (SY5, Housing Strategy action 4.4).*

Pressure on temporary accommodation (TA)

The HMR concluded that due to decline in the availability of PRS accommodation and RPs becoming more wary of housing very chaotic people or households with a record of rent arrears, it is becoming harder to move households on from accommodation that was intended to be temporary.

ACTIONS

We will:

- *continue our efforts to minimise the amount of time households spend in stay in TA (SY1).*
- *maximise the recovery of B&B charges, by ensuring this, we can ensure the budget for TA can be used most efficiently (SY4).*

Support

People with complex needs

When we look at the priority need data (Figure 4), we can see that one of the biggest groups is people with mental health needs. For the last six years this group have been in the range of one in five of all priority need cases. An analysis of the housing and support requirements of people with mental health needs has recently been undertaken. NSC will deliver the actions to address gaps identified in the analysis. This will involve a number of service areas and external agencies we work with.

The HMR also shows increasingly, many people who approach as homeless with mental health needs also have other presenting issues such as drug/alcohol or offending. These are some of the most complex and chaotic homeless people and there are currently not enough housing options available for them. All Supporting People commissioned accommodation services carry out their own risk assessments to ensure the best 'fit' for the accommodation and the safety of other residents. Commonly the accommodation is also targeted at one specific client group, therefore people with multiple needs can often be rejected. The same is also true of general needs accommodation as social housing providers and private landlords who are becoming more risk averse. Ultimately therefore, some of the most vulnerable and chaotic homeless people may only have recourse to unsupported hostel type accommodation

¹¹ Shared housing, particularly for young people was reflected in consultation

with very few move-on options. Floating support can be provided if people with complex needs are willing to engage.

In order to deal with the increasingly complex needs homeless people we will continue develop our multi-agency approach; working closely with e.g. Adults and Children's Support and Safeguarding and other partners e.g. Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership to ensure there is sufficient support and accommodation.

We are currently looking at ways to progress additional housing options for those with complex mental. This will not only benefit homeless households, but also those people with mental health needs who are housed, but where their current accommodation is inadequate.

Care leavers and Vulnerable Young People 16/17 year olds

The HMR explains in more detail how the council has a particular responsibility for ensuring care leavers and young people have suitable housing and support.

Recognising this wider duty, our housing advice service has specialist officers who work with Children and Young People's Services teams to commission tailored solutions to the housing needs of these young people. The need for emergency and supported housing solutions and move-on accommodation is a particular need and increasing. Whilst there is a good level of supported housing for younger people (120 units), the majority (74%) is low level support, whereas there is a considerable need for accommodation with higher levels of support. This also illustrates the need for the council to have nomination rights for those most in need. See prevention section for details of a care leavers' housing action plan that has being developed.

ACTIONS

We will:

- *make sure as housing support and supported housing is commissioned/re-commissioned it better meets the needs of homeless people including e.g. vulnerable young people, disabled people, people with complex needs and people with mental health needs (ST1, Housing Strategy action 6.1).*
- *set up a multi-agency panel to find appropriate housing and support services for people with complex and multiple needs (ST3).*
- *investigate whether an assessment centre for new rough sleepers would improve outcomes for this group (ST5).*
- *improve our ability to help vulnerable young people through more effective partnership working with Family Support services (ST2).*
- *deliver housing actions arising from the analysis of the housing and support requirements of people with mental health needs (ST6).*

Developing housing solutions for vulnerable and disabled people threatened with homelessness

Another issue identified by the HMR is achieving a better match between the type of housing available in North Somerset and the households needing and requiring it, and this is a challenge which our Housing Strategy is seeking to address. More specifically for disabled people experiencing homelessness there is a need for an improved range of options. We will work with partners to seek to increase the supply of suitable housing to meet the emergency and short-term needs of disabled people including as supported housing contracts are renewed. Through our Housing Strategy we will seek to deliver

with partners additional long-term adapted housing. Both strategies will respond to information from the emerging Housing with Support Strategy (page 6).

ACTION

We will:

- *make sure as housing support and supported housing is commissioned/re-commissioned it better meets the needs of homeless people including e.g. vulnerable young people, disabled people, people with complex needs and people with mental health needs (ST1, Housing Strategy action 6.1).*

Prevention

Early intervention

Preventing homelessness is a crucial element of our strategy as we recognise the importance of early intervention. The council expects to have new prevention duties placed upon it as result of the Homeless Reduction Bill.

Our Housing Advice Team (HAT) will continue to lead on work towards ensuring we achieve the Gold Standard above. We have given an update on our progress to achieve the Standard as Appendix 3 of our HMR. (Action P8)

The analysis undertaken into repeat homelessness demonstrates that for those cases where a prevention or homelessness decision was made there was a just over one in eight chance of that household re-approaching the council and as a result there is a need to keep this issue under review as we further develop prevention services .

ACTION

We will:

- *establish new systems to meet our obligations from the Bill and ensure we bid for extra resources in the context of this Strategy (P3).*
- *work towards achieving the government Gold Standard for Homeless Prevention*

Hospital discharge

It is important that we help ease pressures on the NHS by ensuring hospital discharge happens in a timely and efficient way and that appropriate support is put in place for homeless people. We work closely with a range of partners to achieve this and will continue to develop hospital discharge arrangements.

ACTION

We will:

- *Continue to improve the arrangements for the discharge of homeless people from hospital (P1).*

Rough sleeping

As our HMR explains in some detail, the numbers of rough sleepers in North Somerset are small compared to some 'local authorities, but each rough sleeper represents a challenge we need to meet. Rough sleeping is often the 'tip of the iceberg' in terms of

issues like hidden homelessness. We are not complacent about the problem and are making efforts to keep the number as low as possible.

ACTIONS

We will:

- *widely promote Streetlink.org.uk as the preferred referral route for rough sleepers and ensure a focus beyond Weston (P4).*

Our actions around improving the range of accommodation both temporary and long-term and our action to improve services for those with complex needs (all above) will also help rough sleepers. Note also the link to the consideration of a possible assessment centre for rough sleepers (ST5).

Partnership working

An Appreciative Inquiry into homelessness by the People and Communities Board made a number of recommendations and these are also reflected in our action plan. One key recommendation was to establish a new strategic partnership around rough sleeping and single homelessness, to bring key partners together to harmonise our efforts across stakeholders.

ACTIONS

We will:

- *establish a new Strategic Partnership to monitor and develop appropriate services for rough sleepers and single homeless (P2).*
- *work in partnership to tackle and prevent homelessness (HS 6.2).*

As is set out in our HMR, the majority of those threatened with homelessness will have some recourse to the welfare benefits system, which is undergoing major reform. The specific issue of how PRS rents are often higher than HB is covered earlier in this PHS. More generally if we are to support and empower homeless people and people threatened with homelessness we need to understand the effects of welfare reform on both the micro level (as we give face to face advice to a homeless household) and at the macro level (how it is reducing the supply of housing available to the poorest households).

ACTION

We will:

- *continue to work to work in partnership to mitigate any adverse effects of welfare reform relating to housing (ST4).*

'Family' Homelessness

As explained in the priority needs data above there is roughly a 50:50 split of homelessness into households with child/ren and 'singles'. We have already set out a number of actions for single people above. For families with children we will develop links with other agencies such as children's centres to tackle to issues and impact of relationship breakdown.

ACTION

We will:

- *explore the role of childrens centres in helping to prevent family breakdown - workers located in childrens centres already make contact with and support vulnerable families. (P5)*

Care Leavers' and Vulnerable Young Persons Services

As illustrated on page 20 getting services right for care leavers and other vulnerable young people is a significant challenge. A housing action plan is currently in development following a best practice review and is likely to be completed by the summer of 2017.

ACTION

We will:

Deliver the actions arising from the care leavers' housing action plan
NSC will deliver the tasks arising from that action plan (Action P7)

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7. Consultation

Approach to Consultation

As part of the development of the HMR, the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Forum (HHPF) was the main body for external consultation. This Forum has representatives of partner agencies involved in tackling homelessness. We also consulted with staff who work in the council's Housing Advice Team (HAT) and HomeChoice Team. In addition, with other key internal 'partners' such as 'Supporting People', Housing Benefit services, public health, adult social care and children and young people's services.

For the Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS), we consulted a wider group of stakeholders. This wider group were sent a link to the council's eConsult webpage on which there was a draft of this PHS, a draft of the HMR and a pro forma for comments. These stakeholders included: the general public, elected Councillors, parish councils, HHPF partners and internal partners (again), the Housing Strategy database of consultees and equalities groups.

Above paragraph written as if done, but subject to agreeing a final draft of this PHS

Summaries of consultation and full details

Please note that we have briefly summarised consultation responses/comments received as part of the earlier HMR consultation below with full details of those responses/comments at Appendix 1 of the HMR. Comments, ideas and input received on the HMR and PHS via eConsult are briefly summarised below with full details available in an Appendix 2.

[Summary of eConsult data will go here with more detail in Appendix 2)

Summary of HMR stage consultation

Partner agencies

At the May meeting of the HHPF a presentation was given on developing the HMR and PHS, plus an early draft of the HMR was provided alongside a short questionnaire.

The overwhelming feedback was for the need for more accommodation especially smaller units, available quickly. Another issue was getting HB problems resolved more quickly. In relation to their specialist areas of work a mismatch between Housing Benefit levels and rental costs was a key concern; also the need for more prompt advice.

North Somerset Council Staff

A short presentation was given to Housing Advice Team (HAT) and HomeChoice staff. Staff concerns include the issue of affordability in the PRS, but also the issue of not enough housing which meets the specific needs of homeless households. Another concern was the problem of move-on from temporary accommodation (TA) and supported housing. Some staff suggested that there should be more leasing of properties from PRS landlords. This would transfer the risk of any vacant rental periods from landlords to the leasing agency, and guarantee an uninterrupted cash flow to landlords.

Summary of PHS and HMR consultation from eConsult

To be written once the eConsult consultation period has ended

People and Communities Board Appreciative Inquiry

Because of the importance of homelessness to the North Somerset Partnership the People and Communities Board held an Appreciative Inquiry into homelessness. This yielded a stimulating and diverse set of suggestions reflecting the need to:

- Improve strategic co-ordination and focus,
- Identify further opportunities to prevent and reduce homelessness, and
- Predict and plan for changes, including legislative requirements

The most relevant actions needed to respond to the Inquiry have been merged into the PHS Action Plan at Appendix 1.

8. Contact details and questions

For questions regarding the Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) and Homelessness Review (HMR) contact the Housing Development and Strategy Team

Email: housing.solutions@n-somerset.gov.uk

Phone: **01934 427 487**

Write to: Housing Development and Strategy, Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road,

Weston super Mare, BS23 1UJ

Appendix 1 - PHS Action Plan As we are yet to consult on the PHS and HMR on eConsult these actions could be subject to change.

It is worth noting that a number of actions in our recently published Housing Strategy are highly relevant to preventing and tackling homelessness. However rather than repeating these here if you are reading this PHS on-line you can link to the Housing Strategy Action Plan here. [Hyperlink to HSAP]

We have put the actions in the PHS Action Plan under three broad headings:

- Supply
- Support
- Prevention

Glossary of abbreviations and terminology at the bottom of the table

Ref.	PHS Actions and performance measures	Target Date	Lead (and partners)
SUPPLY			
Work with partners to improve existing and develop/innovate new accommodation solutions to meet the need of homeless people			
SY1	Reduce length of stay in temporary accommodation (TA) to no higher than an average of 16 weeks ¹²	Mar 2018	Housing Solutions
SY2	Develop shared housing options for single people with private and social landlords	Dec 2019	Housing Solutions, partner RPs
SY3	Increase the supply of affordable PRS accommodation and encourage landlords to provide 12 month tenancies by developing an enhanced suite of incentives for landlords	June 2018	Housing Solutions
SY4	To make our TA budget stretch further, investigate recovery processes of B&B charges for those people in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) who are placed in emergency accommodation.	Mar 2018	HAT, NSC Finance
SY5	Plan to meet the housing needs and impacts on housing supply arising from the Hinkley Point development (mitigation funding provided through S106 agreement). Initial plan developed - to be reviewed and further developed over the lifetime of the project.	Ongoing or 2022?	Housing Solutions

¹² Responding to this issue specifically responds to issues raised in consultation

Ref.	PHS Actions and performance measures	Target Date	Lead (and partners)
SY6	Investigate the possibility of developing a 'Property Guardianship' (temporary housing solution) schemes for rough sleepers/homeless people in NS	2019	Housing Solutions, St Mungo's (subject to service funding), PSHT
SY7	Explore the feasibility of developing an ethical letting agency to increase the amount of PRS housing available to the council to fulfil its prevention role	Sept 2017	Housing Solutions
SUPPORT			
Provision of a range of support services that sustain independent living and reduce or avoid the risk of households becoming homeless			
ST1	As supported housing is commissioned/re-commissioned, seek to ensure it better meets the needs of homeless people e.g. higher support where required, especially for vulnerable young people (care leavers and 16/17 year olds), disabled people, people with complex needs/ mental health needs	2018	Housing Solutions, Adults and Children's Support and Safeguarding (CSS)
ST2	Develop partnership working with Family Support to support young people.	Ongoing	Housing Solutions
ST3	Set up multi-agency panel to manage and co-ordinate the response to homeless people with complex and multiple needs ¹³	Mar 2018	Housing Solutions, CCG, CSDAT
ST4	Continue to work in partnership to mitigate adverse effects of welfare reform relating to housing (e.g. benefit cap, UC); improve links with relevant agencies	Ongoing	HAT, DWP, employment advice, life skills training, Liberata (DHP)
ST5	Explore potential of assessment centre for 'new to the streets', rough sleepers for short-term placements which encourages engagement ¹⁴ . Continue to work with service providers to develop existing services that meet this need	Mar 2019	Strategic partnership, rough sleeper outreach
ST6	Deliver housing actions arising from the analysis of the housing and support requirements of people with mental health needs ¹⁵		
PREVENTION			
Activities that prevent homelessness and help sustain independent living by enabling household to remain in their current home or a achieve planned move to new housing			
P1	Continue to improve the arrangements for the discharge of homeless people from hospital.	Mar 2018 then review	HAT, AWP, NHS, CCG

¹³ E.g. combinations of issues such as mental health needs, misuse of alcohol, misuse of drugs i.e. dual diagnosis etc.

¹⁴ There may be insufficient number of potential service users who could benefit currently from the development of new provision.

¹⁵ Some changes to mental health provision have already been enacted as a result of this report

Ref.	PHS Actions and performance measures	Target Date	Lead (and partners)
P2	Establish a new Strategic Partnership to monitor and develop services for rough sleepers and single homeless people	Dec 2017	NSC Housing, CSDAT, St Mungo's
P3	Establish new systems to meet our obligations from the Homelessness Reduction Bill 2017 and monitor impact including on resource requirements	As Act is enacted	Housing Solutions
P4	Widely promote Streetlink.org.uk as the preferred referral route for rough sleepers and ensure a focus beyond Weston c/f ST5		New strategic partnership (at P2), all housing partners
P5	Explore the role of childrens centres to help to prevent family breakdown and homelessness	Ongoing	NSC CSS
P6	Work in partnership with Children's Support and Safeguarding to maximise the benefits from new 'edge of care' service (utilising social impact bond funding) to reduce and prevent homelessness		
P7	Deliver actions arising from the care leavers' housing action plan		CSS, HAT
P8	Continue to work towards the Government's 'Gold Standard' for homelessness prevention ¹⁶	Bronze by Dec 2017	HAT

Housing Solutions	Includes HAT, HomeChoice and Strategy and Commissioning Teams	RP	Registered Provider (usually a housing association)
PSHT	NSC Private Sector Housing Team	CSS	Children's Support and Safeguarding
HAT	Housing Advice Team	AWP	Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership
NS (C)	North Somerset (Council)	NHS	National Health Service
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group	CSDAT	Community Safety and Drug Action Team
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions	DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
HB	Housing Benefit	TBC	To be confirmed
PRS	Private Rented Sector	c/f	Cross reference (link to)

This Action Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and the latest version can be accessed via the contacts below.

¹⁶ Progress toward the Government's Gold Standard is included in Appendix 3 of the HMR

Performance Indicators (PIs)

In addition to the Action Plan there are a number of ongoing PIs which we monitor and report quarterly, listed below. You can see the latest results on in the HMR or access them via the contact details in this PHS.

- Number of Households in temporary accommodation
- Percentage of young people who present as homeless and are prevented from needing to enter long term LA care
- Average length of stay in temporary accommodation (weeks)
- Number of homeless households in priority need who are prevented from being homeless
- Total number of (potentially) homeless people seen divided by homeless; prevention and advice
- Value of Deposit Bonds ended; value of claims made; claim rate against Deposit Bonds

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Appendix 2 – Detail of Homelessness Reduction Bill

A private members' bill is on schedule to become law in 2017. The Bill amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and will extend the duties of local authorities to homeless and threatened with homelessness households. We have produced a short summary of the Bill below. In brief it:

- Clarifies that free and detailed information/advice on preventing and relieving homelessness must be given to any person in the LA's district¹⁷.
- Establishes that the initial advice must be of a uniformly high standard regardless of e.g. priority need or household type.
- Confirms the advice service should be designed with certain vulnerable groups in mind (such as care leavers and ex armed forces personnel).
- Requires LAs to carry out an assessment of all eligible applicant's needs, and the steps to be taken by both the LA and the homeless applicant are set out in writing in a personalised plan (PP). Steps must be reasonable and achievable.¹⁸
- Failure to agree a PP must be recorded in writing and a household not in priority need not undertaking their PP actions would be issued with a warning. Priority needs are explained on page 11 of this PHS.
- Changes the point at which a (homelessness) 'prevention duty'¹⁹ starts, from 28 days before someone is likely to be homeless, to 56 days²⁰; and extends the duty regardless of priority status, local connection and intentionality²¹.
- Confirms a 'prevention duty' on LAs is to take steps²² for 56 days to relieve homelessness (to those in the bullet above) to secure accommodation; if the duty is not discharged then priority need might potentially become statutorily homeless.
- Introduces a 'relief duty' for those actually homeless (regardless of status) and those that have not been helped by the 'prevention duty' above. At no stage are non-priority need homeless applicants entitled to emergency/temporary accommodation, but they are entitled to the sort of interventions listed at footnote 13.
- Clarifies LA has 'duty to help to secure', which means homeless applicants owed the 'prevention duty' or 'relief duty' can find their own accommodation, they might just need help with the deposit.
- Sets out the actions a LA may take to cease helping homeless applicants (usually following a warning) if they deliberately and unreasonably refuse to co-operate (for instance with their PP). This would exclude barring those not co-operating because of e.g. mental health issues.
- Applicants have a right to ask for a review of a homelessness decision to these new duties.

¹⁷ Advisory service can be outsourced, but the underlying duty rests with the LA

¹⁸ This is a crucial area where DCLG explanation of the Bill says 'Government is committed to funding the cost of new burdens'

¹⁹ Either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live

²⁰ The day a valid Section 21 notice expires or the day before a valid Section 8 notice expires and it is reasonable to think the landlord (L/L) will apply for a possession order

²¹ Broadly speaking the only people not eligible to the 'prevention duty' are persons from abroad not eligible under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.

²² E.g. provide a rent deposit, negotiate with landlord, mediation, debt advice etc.

- Specifies that public agencies (e.g. Police, hospitals) should refer those who are either homeless/at risk of being homeless to LA homelessness teams.
- Makes provision for certain care leavers, to make it easier for them to show they have a local connection with both the area of the LA responsible for them and the area in which they lived while in care, if different.

The proposals from the Bill will increase the number of households the council has a statutory duty to help. Finding accommodation for additional households will be difficult in an environment where this is already proving hard. As with any major change we will re-model this PHS and the housing advice and homelessness services delivered in the district, as the full consequences of the Bill's proposals become apparent.

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