



Making Homes Helping People Changing Lives

(Somerset Homelessness Review & Prevention
Strategy 2008-2011)

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

Welcome to 'Making Homes, Helping People, Changing Lives', (Somerset's Homelessness Review & Prevention Strategy 2008-2011)

This is a new sub regional homelessness strategy for Somerset and it has been developed in partnership with a range of agencies covering the five Somerset Districts; Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Taunton Deane and West Somerset. This Executive Summary will help to give a clear understanding of how we plan to continue to tackle homelessness in Somerset to 2011. A sub regional approach to producing a strategy and action plan has been taken in order to look at ways in which resources can be pooled, expertise shared and services co-ordinated across the County.

The Purpose of a Homelessness Review & Strategy

- Homelessness reviews must consider:
 - The levels and future levels of homelessness in the district;
 - The activities and services provided which help to prevent homelessness, help to find accommodation for homeless and potentially homeless people, or provide support for them, including support to prevent them from becoming homeless again;
 - The resources available to the authority and to social services, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other agencies for providing these services.

- Homelessness strategies must include plans for:
 - The prevention of homelessness;
 - Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless;
 - Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The Aims of the Strategy

- To achieve positive outcomes in the support for vulnerable people
- To tackle the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness
- To reduce rough sleeping
- To provide more settled homes
- To provide a context for tackling homelessness through joint working

Executive Summary

The National Influence on How Homelessness Services are Developed Locally

- The following Government publications have influenced this strategy:
 - *'Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives,'* 2005
 - *'More Than a Roof,'* 2003
 - *'Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities,'* 2006
 - *'Homelessness Prevention: A Guide to Good Practice,'* 2006
 - *'Expanding Choice, Addressing Need,'* 2008
 - *'No One Left Out, Communities Ending Rough Sleeping,'* 2008
- Local Authorities have been encouraged by Government to meet the following relevant objectives:
 - Halve the numbers living in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010 from the levels in December 2004
 - Examine options for making greater use of the Private Rented Sector to provide settled housing
 - Examine options for converting temporary accommodation into settled housing
 - Ensure homeless households have a choice about their housing options
 - Encourage better cross-authority and delivery of services to vulnerable groups
 - Bring around a quarter of usable empty homes back into use by 2010
 - Support the expansion of Choice Based Lettings to ensure it is an effective tool in tackling homelessness
 - Maintain the target set by March 2004 not to use Bed & Breakfast accommodation for families with children
 - Maintain reductions in the levels of rough sleeping
 - Plans to ensure that Bed & Breakfast accommodation is not used for 16/17 year olds by 2010 unless its an emergency
 - End rough sleeping by 2012

Key Points About Homelessness in Somerset

- The number of homeless applications across Somerset has fallen over the period 2005/06 to 2007/08 from 1151 to 892; this is a decline of 22.5%. This is in line with the Government's agenda on homeless prevention; however the decline in Somerset has not been as dramatic as that for England, a decline of 38.7% over the same period.
- England has seen a decline of 32.8% on the number of homeless cases accepted as "statutory homeless" between 2005/06 and 2007/08. Somerset has also seen a decline in the number of homeless cases accepted, from 599 in 2005/06 to 498 cases in 2007/08. This is a decline of 16.9%.
- The national average for the number of homeless acceptances as a proportion of homeless applications is 48.3% in 2007/08. Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Taunton Deane all have higher averages than this (79.7%, 57.6%, 77.9% and 65.7% respectively). West Somerset is far below the national average with 17.6% of homeless applications being accepted as statutory homeless.

Executive Summary

- Across Somerset, the highest proportion of acceptances were made to applicants aged 25 to 44 (45%) in quarters one to three in 2008. This reflects the average for England, which was 47.9% for the same period. The second highest proportions of acceptances were made to applicants aged 16 to 24 (44%). This is slightly higher than the national average, which was 39.8% for the same period.
- The highest number of homelessness acceptances across Somerset was made to households with dependent children (61%) in quarter two of 2008. This reflects the national average, which was also 61% for the same quarter.
- The largest numbers of acceptances were made to households who had lost their tenancy, either via the end of an assured shorthold tenancy or loss of other rented or tied accommodation (26%) in quarter two of 2008. The corresponding national average for the same quarter and category was 21%. The second highest reason for homelessness acceptance across Somerset was due to parents no longer willing to provide accommodation (22%). This reflects the national average for the same quarter, which was also 22%.

Consultation

- Over 1,000 questionnaires were sent out to stakeholders
- Over 50 individual responses
- Group stakeholder consultation meetings with over 150 attendees in total were held at each Somerset District Council twice, once to gain initial views/comments/wish lists and then again at draft strategy phase
- Over 60 service users were interviewed over the telephone
- One to one stakeholder meetings were held
- Two drafts of the strategy were produced prior to the final document and circulated to stakeholders for comment via meetings, e-mail and District Councils' websites

The Range of Actions that we will undertake to Address Homelessness

The action plan has five key priorities listed below with actions. Priorities and actions were chosen based on needs and gaps in service arising in the Homelessness Review and issues that arose after consultation with stakeholders and service users.

1. Floating Support Services

This section includes measures to:

- Address the support needs of young people
- Formalise floating support provision across the County

Executive Summary

- Review the support offered to households moving from Supported Housing to mainstream accommodation
- Ensure that Service Users are able to re-engage with support services
- Address the support needs of those over the age of 65

2. Homeless Prevention

This section includes measures to:

- Take steps to achieve the Government target of ending rough sleeping by 2012
- Reduce the number of care leavers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Reduce the number of young people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Reduce the number of households homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of mortgage repossessions
- Reduce the number of households made homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of rent arrears
- Improve support for intentionally homeless households
- Explore other options available for victims of domestic abuse
- Address the accommodation & support needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and migrant workers
- Ensure Housing Advice and Options services are more accessible
- Improve the quality of Housing Advice and Options services
- Improve the quality of Homeless Services
- Maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

3. Improved Access to the Private Sector

This section includes measures to:

- Improve relations with Private Sector Landlords and Letting Agents across the County
- Improve the support available to Private Sector Landlords and Letting Agents across the County

Executive Summary

- Review existing deposit/bond schemes in order to improve their appeal to Private Sector Landlords
- Improve the working relationship between deposit/bond scheme administrators and Housing Benefit departments
- Explore the potential of Private Sector Leasing to secure accommodation as settled rather than temporary

4. Improved Access to Appropriate Housing

This section includes measures to:

- Achieve and maintain the 2010 temporary accommodation target
- Maximise the provision of “move on” accommodation
- Address the needs of Gypsies and Travellers
- Address the needs of 16-24 year olds
- Maximise the number of affordable homes across the County
- Review the introduction of Countywide Choice Based Lettings
- Address the needs of those with high level support needs
- Use of Multi-Agency Assessment Panels (MAAP)

5. Improve Protocols and Partnerships to Tackle Homelessness

This section includes measures to:

- Ensure there is less duplication & that District level partnerships & forums adequately feed into those held at County level
- Engage with the Health Service to ensure early identification of patients likely to be homeless upon discharge
- Ensure there is mutual understanding between Local Authorities & Support Agencies
- Ensure that adequate referrals & protocols exist between partner agencies to avoid homeless households being passed from agency to agency without their problem being resolved
- Improve existing protocols & develop new protocols to aid partnership working

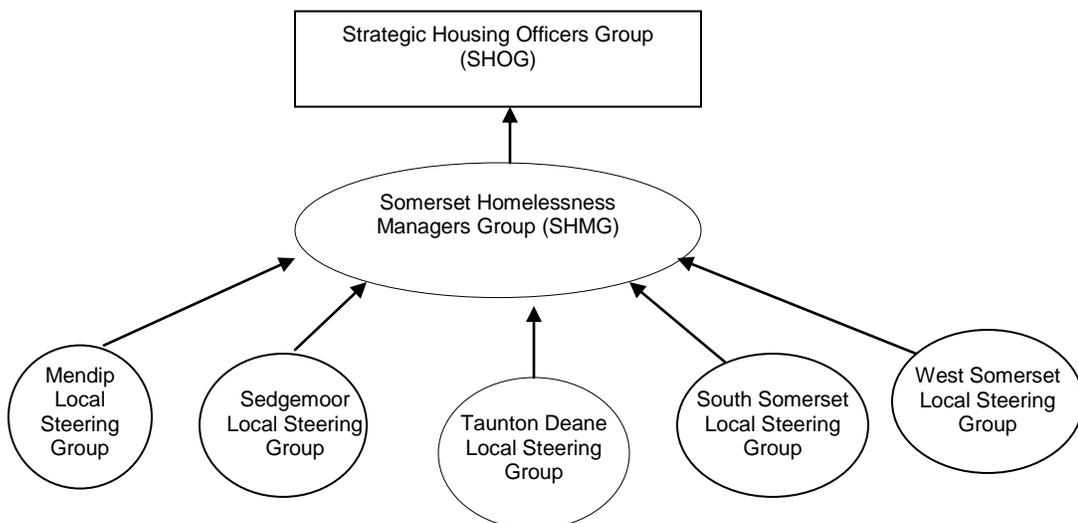
Executive Summary

Working in Partnership will Continue to be a Key Aspect of our Approach to Tackling Homelessness over the Next 3 Years

Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, South Somerset District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council and all their partners have a clear partnership commitment to tackling homelessness. We all recognise the need to have statutory and voluntary services working closely together in a co-ordinated manner to effectively prevent homelessness and provide a range of solutions to those households who do become homeless.

Monitoring & Evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy

Responsibility for monitoring the progress of the action plan rests with the Somerset Homelessness Officers Group and it is recommended that reviews are carried out every 12 months to ensure targets stated in the action plan are being achieved. In order to take forward the action plan, it is recommended that each District incorporate into an existing group/forum or develop a new steering group to take forward the action plan at a local level. Membership of this steering group should include all partner agencies at a local level. Progress at a local level should then be reported back to the Somerset Homelessness Managers Group (SHMG) who will then in turn feedback to the Somerset Strategic Officers Group (SSHOG). It is also recommended that where a particular local authority has expertise, it should lead on an action in the action plan, for example, Taunton Deane Borough Council and rough sleeping. There may also be merit in having an independent “critical friend” to review progress against targets annually. The diagram below illustrates how the action plan will be implemented.



If you would like a full version of ‘Making Homes, Helping People, Changing Lives’, please contact: