



North Somerset Council

Homelessness Review 2016/17

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¹ Preventing Homelessness Strategy

Introduction

The purpose of the Homelessness Review (HMR) is to pull together and review relevant information to inform a new Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) for the district.

Health profiles for England report a statutory homelessness rate of 0.6 per 1,000 people for North Somerset, below the England average of 0.9 per 1,000. Our intention is keep this rate well below the national average.

The HMR collates information that is held (including by partners) about homelessness and related areas of activity and services. These facts and figures are one element of the HMR. A further element is information gathered from consultation with a wide range of North Somerset (NS) staff involved in tackling homelessness including housing advice staff and the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Forum (HHPF), which includes many external partner agencies.

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

Finally the HMR will decide on key findings and these will inform the priorities and Action Plan of the new Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS).

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; outreach surgery
- Consolidating, developing and continuing multi-agency² work around: tackling 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 16/17 year olds in 2016
- 95%+ homelessness prevented in four of the last six³ 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.
- 2010/11 to 2015/16 - Just over 1,300 households assisted to move into the private rented sector (PRS), of which 760 assisted financially
- Localpad website tailored and established for North Somerset - free advertisement for landlords

² 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

³ Lowest percentage for 'homelessness prevented in the period 2010/11 to 2015/16 was 93.5%

- Private sector leasing – 46 homes procured in 18 months, including empty properties brought back into use⁴
- Improved processes for housing hospital discharge 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 intention has been to learn from these achievements, but also learn from areas that have not been so successful. These areas feature in the ‘challenges’ section of this HMR.

Links to other North Somerset Plans and Strategies

This section outlines how the PHS which is informed by the HMR, aligns with a number of other crucial North Somerset plans and strategies. The PHS is one of a number of delivery plans which support our Housing Strategy and in turn our Corporate Plan. These delivery plans and a number of other NS policies and strategies are listed in Appendix 3 of the PHS.

Corporate Plan

In our Corporate Plan the council sets out its clear vision for North Somerset:

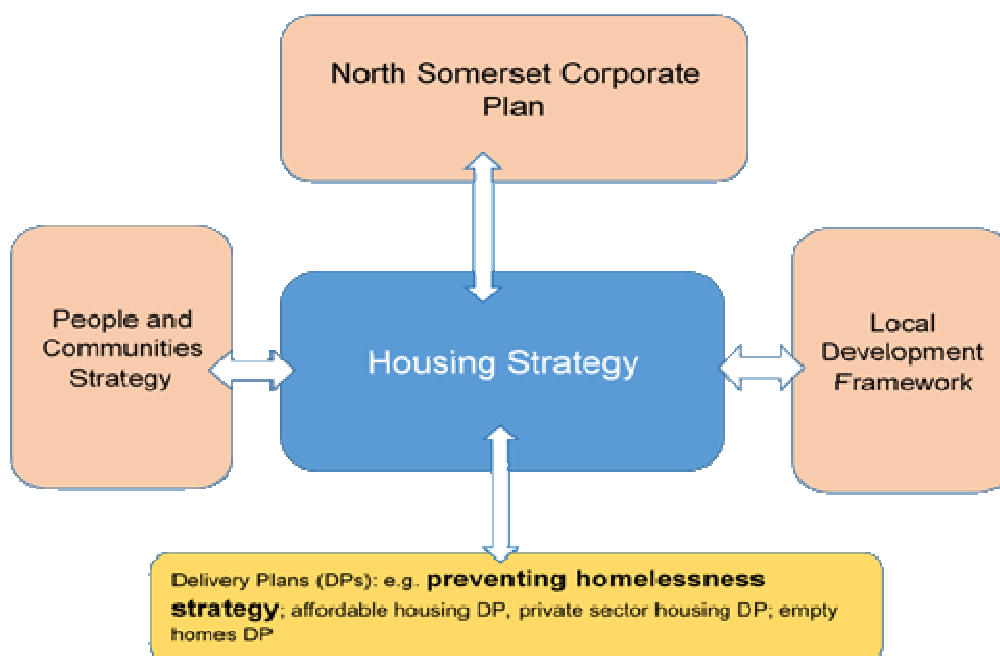
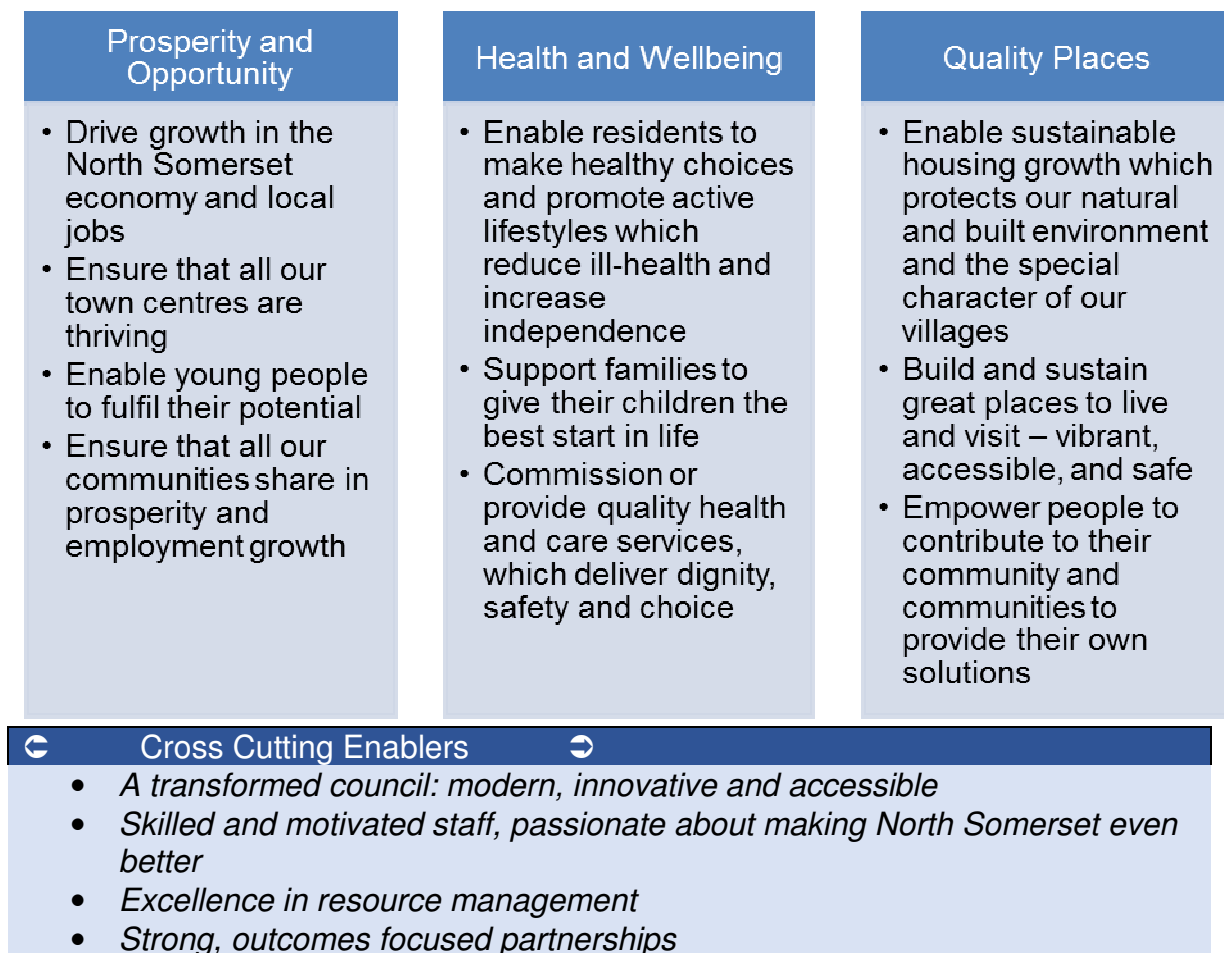
“A great place to live where people, businesses and communities flourish.

Modern, efficient services and a strong voice for North Somerset”

The Corporate Plan identifies three key outcomes which the council wants to achieve for local people: Prosperity and Opportunity, Health and Wellbeing and Quality Places.

Under each of these outcomes specific ambitions have been identified, together with four cross-organisational ‘enablers’, which are the characteristics the organisation will need to deliver its ambitions:

⁴ NSC published a new Empty Homes Delivery Plan in 2016, the district has a relatively low number of such homes. As part of our efforts to bring empty homes back into use we offer the option to landlords of re-use as private rented housing for homeless households via a partner agency.



As the diagram above shows our Housing Strategy and the PHS are designed to help support the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

The PHS strategy sets out three key themes and the links to the Corporate Plan outcomes are shown below.

PHS Themes⁵		Housing Strategy Aims		Corporate Plan Outcomes
Supply - improved and new accommodation solutions	<i>links to</i>	Increasing the supply of homes	<i>links to</i>	Quality Places
Support - sustain independent living / reduce risk homelessness		Improving homes		Health and Wellbeing
Prevention - prevent homelessness by enabling household to remain in their home or achieve planned move		Providing housing solutions		Prosperity and Opportunity

Housing Strategy

In our Housing Strategy (HS) which was approved early in 2016 there were 13 ambitions supported by 20 actions across three strategic aims. We have reproduced the 13 ambitions and 10 of the actions which are most relevant to homelessness, below. The actions and ambitions in *italics* are those most directly related to preventing homelessness.

Increasing the supply of homes

Ambitions	Actions
<i>Accelerating the delivery of homes in sustainable locations</i>	<i>Work with planning, registered providers⁶ and regional colleagues to establish and deliver new targets for affordable housing; maximise HCA⁷ and other investment</i>
<i>Making best use of existing housing stock</i>	<i>Note: See separate ambitions later for both supported housing and temporary/emergency housing</i>
<i>Contributing to the regeneration of our town centres</i>	<i>Our ambition for the regeneration of Weston Town centre is to increase the housing offer across the board</i>
<i>Increasing the supply of low cost, decent homes in the PRS for those in most need</i>	<i>Review strategic opportunities to increase supply, including through the development of a social lettings agency, joint work with the Impact Team and the provision of incentives. Implement delivery plan in this area</i>

Improving homes

Ambitions	Actions
Improving housing conditions in the private housing sector through assistance and loans / <i>Regulating housing conditions in the PRS</i> / Improving home energy efficiency (three ambitions combined)	Improve self-regulation of standards by landlords in PRS housing, including by implementing the West of England (WoE) Rental Standard
	<i>Improve PRS housing through the use of enforcement powers, including licensing schemes, targeted on the poorest housing conditions and management...</i>

⁵ For the full wording of these themes see the Introduction section of the PHS

⁶ 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.

⁷ Homes and Communities Agency

Providing support to maintain independent living	Note: in the Housing Strategy this ambition refers to our adaptations and aids service in the private housing sector, but the principle of independent living applies just as much to supported housing, social housing and temporary/emergency housing
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Providing housing solutions

Ambitions	Actions
<i>Improving housing options for vulnerable households and people with support needs</i>	<i>(Continue to) research and develop the evidence base for supported housing</i>
	<i>Work in partnership to deliver additional/remodelled supported housing schemes to meet identified needs</i>
<i>Working in partnership to tackle and prevent homelessness</i>	<i>Review, develop and implement a new Homelessness Strategy</i>
<i>Ensuring the provision of adequate accommodation for homeless people</i>	<i>Review temporary and emergency accommodation needs</i>
	<i>Delivery plans established with providers and commissioners including Supporting People</i>
<i>Ensuring that the allocation of social housing meets needs in the best way</i>	<i>Undertake a review of the HomeChoice policy</i>
Improving training and employment opportunities linked to the development of housing	Develop further train and build schemes for young/unemployed people to provide training and employment opportunities

We explore above how our PHS will link to our Housing Strategy (HS). The HS is designed to help deliver the council's Corporate Plan. This approach ensures we have a link running through our plans to ensure they help achieve the council's stated objectives.

Housing with Support Strategy (HWSS)

- The council's People and Communities Strategy Team are leading on a new strategy which seeks to predict current and future demand for housing with support from: Older people
- People with learning difficulties
- People with mental health needs,
 - People with physical and sensory impairment and
 - Young people

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 the council and partners plan for more independent living options and away from more institutionalised settings. The PHS will be aligned with this HWSS when it is developed.

Homelessness resources

Outlines the key agencies involved in tackling homelessness in North Somerset.

- Support Services

Somewhere to Go

Somewhere to Go is a support centre specially set up to help rough sleepers and disadvantaged vulnerable adults. The day centre provides the following:

- Housing advice including help finding accommodation
- Breakfast, also hot drinks and biscuits - free of charge; a hot meal for £1
- A chance to change clothes, wash and shower
- Someone ready to listen, direct and give appropriate advice
- Help with finding a doctor or dentist

Keysteps

Keysteps is a charity set up to help people on low incomes in North Somerset into suitable private rented accommodation by way of a bond guarantee. They offer advice on housing and also provide support for landlords and liaise with various other agencies on behalf of their bond-holders.

Salvation Army - Warmth, Comfort and Food and “Comfort at Christmas”

At various locations in Weston super Mare (hereafter Weston) they provide hot and cold food for people in need including homeless people. Comfort at Christmas is a 24 hour accommodation service over the Christmas period in addition to the food normally provided.

The Support Alliance - floating support services

The Support Alliance is a partnership of six highly experienced housing support providers. These are Alliance Homes, Second Step, Richmond Fellowship, Freeways, Chapter 1 and 7 HA⁸. The service is for people living in North Somerset and is funded by the council⁹. It provides help and support to help clients live safely and independently in their own homes, it is free for six months, it does not provide personal care.

Support staff use their knowledge and skills to give clients control, freedom and choice over their lives. They work with both young and older people, people with mental health and/or substance misuse problems, people with learning difficulties, ex-offenders¹⁰, care leavers¹¹, young families, Gypsies and Travellers and people who have experienced domestic violence. They also support people going into/from hospital, their carers and families, the Home from Hospital service (see page 10). The Support Alliance also provides a number of employment and training initiatives. There is normally around 500 clients in service at any one time. A ‘Skills for Life’ tenancy training course is delivered by Elim as part of the Support Alliance, this helps give tenants needing support the skills to sustain their tenancies.

Addaction

Support adults, children, young adults and older people to make positive behavioural changes. Whether that's with alcohol, drugs, or mental health and wellbeing, they work to help people improve their lives.

- Accommodation with support services

Curo homeless units

Curo has 14 units of supported accommodation specifically for single people who are referred by the council's Housing Advice Team (HAT) following a homelessness

⁸ housing association

⁹ From funding formerly known as Supporting People

¹⁰ The Early Intervention Accommodation Project helps ex-offenders

¹¹ The Step Up project helps care leavers

application. This is short-term accommodation whilst their homelessness applications are being investigated.

Alliance Homes Temporary Accommodation

Alliance Homes provides the HAT with 37 designated units of self-contained accommodation ranging from bedsits to two bed flats. These are for people whom the council have a homelessness duty towards.

YMCA Nightstop

Nightstop provides very short-term accommodation for young people who are homeless. Host families provide one or two nights' accommodation within their home. The aim is for the young person to be able to return home.

Other 'Supporting People' (SP) funded Services – includes emergency accommodation

SP budgets are gradually being assimilated into mainstream council budgets as ring fenced funding for SP ends. Many of the contracts for current SP funded services have a few more years to run. Going forward, as those services are re-commissioned and also as there are contract variations the council will seek to tailor and develop this accommodation to make it more responsive to the changing needs of the clients they help.

For example we have contracts with five housing associations to provide over 100 flats for vulnerable young people including young parents. Two of these providers are looking at providing 'crash pads'¹², other providers are piloting an emergency access room(s). These services are closely linked in with Nightstop, the YMCA, Weston College and the Job Centre among others.

Within the area of mental health, SP funded services have this year launched an additional 10 bed unit with Richmond Fellowship. This gives a total of 35 units, 17 with high support and 18 with low support.

There are ten low support units for the support of those with drug/alcohol misuse issues.

For people with learning difficulties Alabare are in the second year of a four year contract developing a 20 bed service for those with learning disability at risk of homelessness.

The range of accommodation funded by former SP programme cannot always keep pace with the current demands from the homeless households the HAT and other homelessness agencies are seeing. But with liaison between the HAT and 'SP Team' where possible services can be re-calibrated in situ, and as contracts for services come up for re-tendering they can be even better tailored to meet the needs of homeless people in a flexible and forward looking way.

Integrated Discharge Team

The discharge of homeless people from hospital has been an issue of concern and a working party of the council's Adult Services and Housing, Policy and Scrutiny Panel

¹² Very flexible, short-term, emergency accommodation

was established to encourage an integrated response from council and health services. An Integrated Discharge Team (includes the council, Alliance Living, health and mental health staff) now operates to ensure better outcomes for all those leaving hospital including those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Our partner Alliance Living delivers the Home from Hospital service with Weston General Hospital and has played a major part for some years in reducing unnecessary admissions and facilitating much timelier discharges than before. One of the main changes is housing and homelessness advice is taken to the patient in hospital rather than having to go to the town hall on discharge. There is sometimes a perception that all hospital discharge issues relate to older people, it affects younger homeless people too. For example Home from Hospital were able to arrange for an intravenous drug user to leave hospital and access supported housing and a rehabilitation, 'prep for change' course.

- Outreach services

YMCA outreach

The council commissions the YMCA to provide a rough sleeper outreach support service in North Somerset. Initially funded from a sub-regional grant, the council and the YMCA have continued to support the service since.

St Mungo's

Additional commissioned rough sleeper outreach services are being provided by St Mungo's following a grant to extend the work that they were already carrying out in Bristol. This service dovetails with the YMCA service.

Outreach community nurse

The nurses provide medical assessment and treatment to homeless people and those in temporary accommodation. They can also help to find a local GP. The nurses regularly attend the Somewhere to Go day centre and work in partnership with the outreach services. There is a very clear correlation between adverse health issues and homelessness and so addressing these health issues alongside housing ones is vital.

- Advice Services

North Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau

Provides independent, free, impartial and confidential advice on a range of issues including benefits, debt, employment, housing and consumer problems. Face-to-face sessions are held in Weston, Nailsea, Portishead, Clevedon, Yatton and Pill. Telephone advice line available. They are also commissioned to provide a debt and money advice service specifically for clients referred by the HAT. Details of these referrals are in Table 7 later in this HMR.

Housing Advice Team (HAT) – North Somerset Council

The Team's areas of responsibility are:

- Providing an effective homelessness and housing advice service, with advice available to all households
- Working with (often vulnerable) households and partner agencies to prevent homelessness
- Working with private landlords to increase the supply of PRS accommodation to house those in need

- Providing a tenancy relations service to resolve tenant/landlord disputes, but also leads on landlord recruitment
- Linking to the private sector housing services to improve standards for tenants and landlords (e.g. inspection, enforcement role)
- Helping to resolve Housing Benefit problems/rent arrears
- Mediating with parents/family/friends
- Supporting in court for possession claims
- Arranging tenancy support for people who are struggling
- Assessing whether homeless, eligible, priority need and has local connection
- Provide emergency and temporary accommodation for the most vulnerable and help to access secure accommodation (PRS, social or supported housing)

The HAT operates an appointment based service, however a client will always be seen the same day if they are homeless and there is a housing advice triage service daily from 9:30 to 3:30pm. There is also an out-of-hours scheme in operation for anyone who finds themselves homeless outside of normal office hours. Fortnightly homelessness surgeries are also held at the Somewhere to Go day centre.

In the last five years demand for the service has grown, from 1,764 households provided with housing advice and assistance (see more detail of what constitutes advice and assistance below) in 2010/11 to 2,253 in 2015/16, a growth of 28%.

All Agencies Above

The agencies are partners in tackling homelessness. This wider partnership and multi-agency approach ensures wider problems for homeless people such as health and employment issues can also be considered as well as immediate housing issues.

Headline Homelessness Figures

Housing advice, homelessness prevented, homelessness applications made and those accepted as homeless.

Most councils use the information in Table 1 below as a key indicator 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, applications as statutorily homeless and within that acceptances.

Advice and assistance is wide ranging and includes the following:

- Tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Illegal eviction and harassment
- Disrepair
- Rent and mortgage arrears
- Re-housing options in social and private housing
- Relationship breakdown and domestic abuse
- Neighbour disputes
- Family breakdown/parental evictions
- Looking at health issues that affect housing need

Table 1

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Households provided with housing advice and assistance¹³	1,764	1,507	2,477	2,300	1,600	2,235
Households where homelessness prevented	488	573	597	664	647	620
Homelessness applications received¹⁴	187	268	219	264	268	266
Accepted as homeless¹⁵	79	82	99	83	104	109
% of homelessness prevented¹⁶	95.4%	94.6%	96.0%	96.4%	93.5%	95.1%

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 before that time. 2014/15 did not represent a fall in demand, but a problem with our recording systems as new front of house procedures 'bedded in'.

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 having homelessness prevented per week in the last year. A more detailed breakdown of prevention methods is at Table 10.

Numbers of 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 for the foreseeable future that applications will go back to below 200 as 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. Table 1a shows this information as a graph with trend lines.

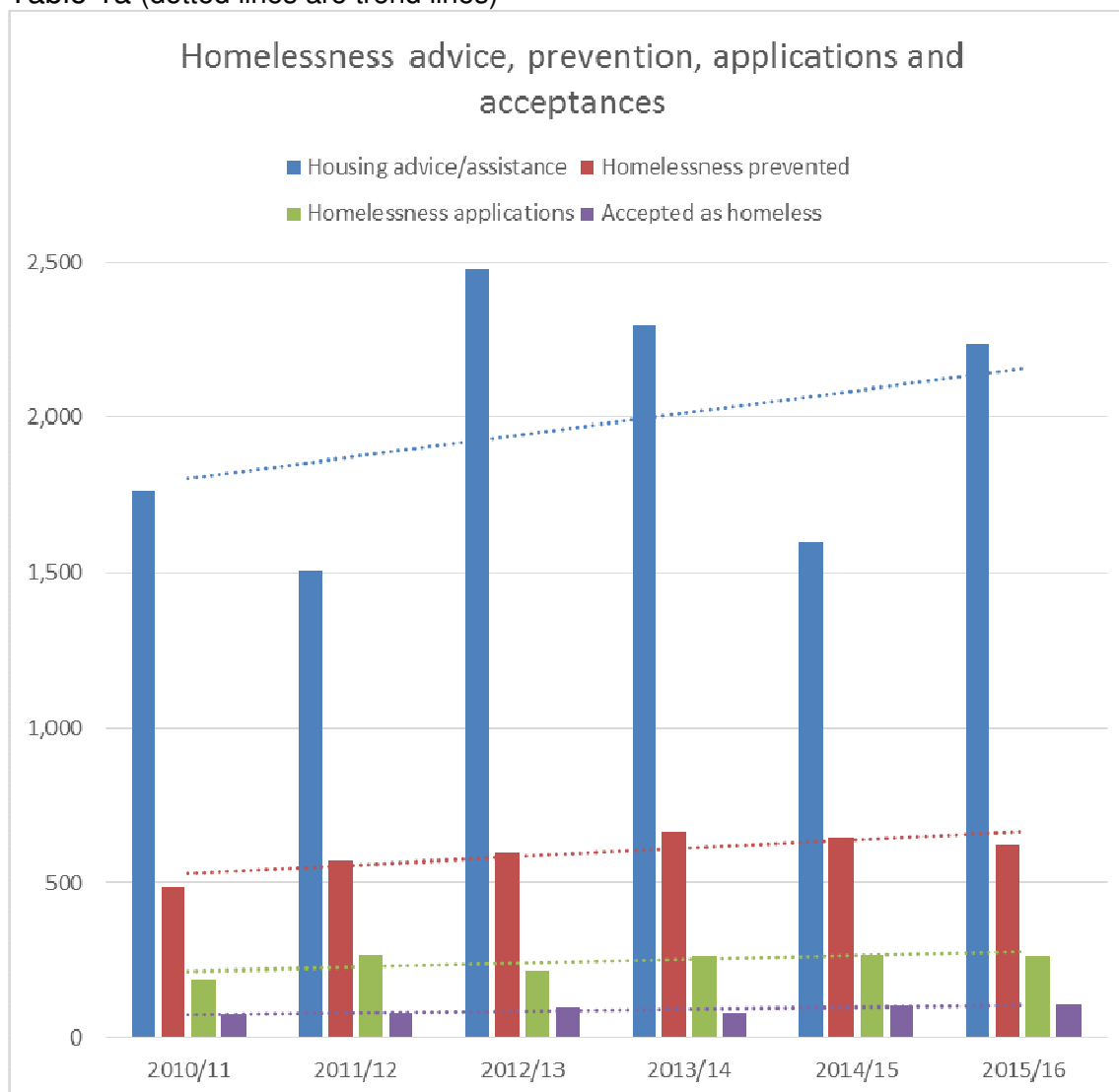
¹³ Indicates in-depth advice and casework

¹⁴ From P1E Section E10

¹⁵ From P1E Section E1

¹⁶ All households advised and prevented except those accepted as homeless

Table 1a (dotted lines are trend lines)



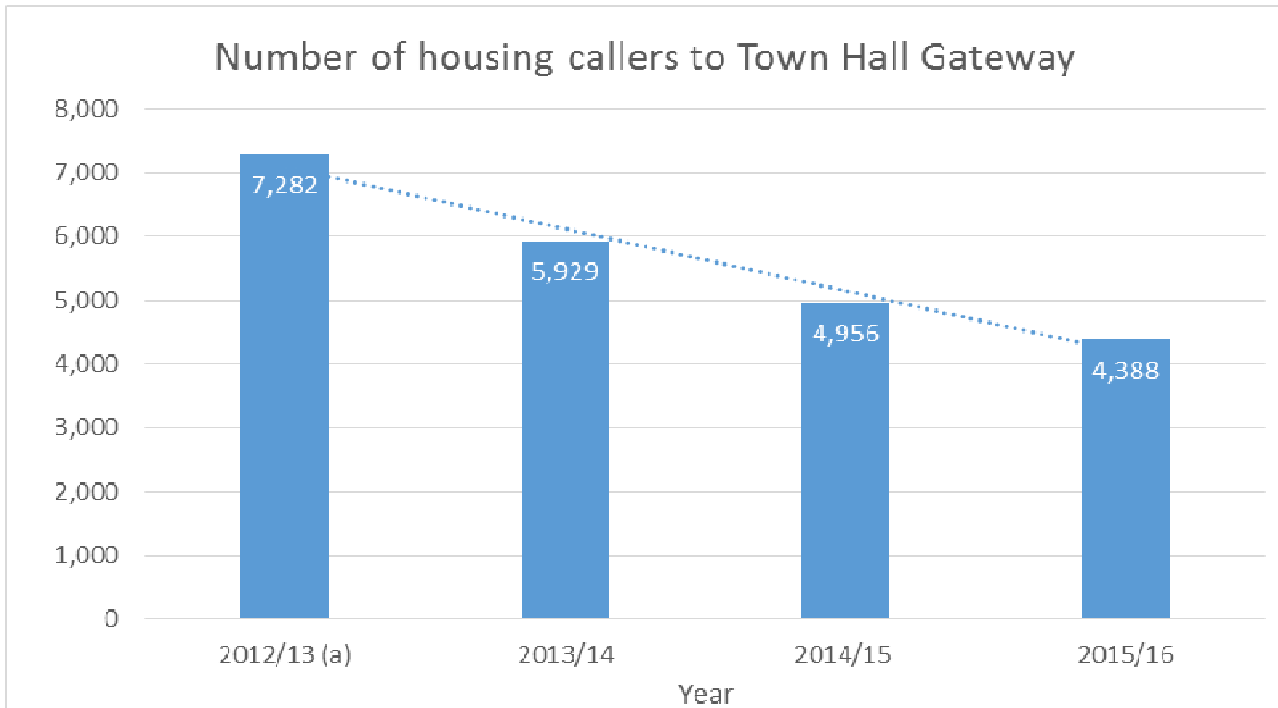
Analysis of homelessness data

As part of its statutory responsibilities, the council keeps comprehensive information about the homelessness applications it receives. It also records the number of cases where households are prevented from becoming homeless and the numbers of people approaching for housing advice. This information is used to identify areas and issues that need to be prioritised by the council and its partners.

Housing advice to Gateway callers

One major way in which people in North Somerset seek housing advice is by coming to the Town Hall Gateway. Housing related enquiries can be identified, but we cannot distinguish between the different types of housing enquiry e.g. about HomeChoice, housing conditions, housing advice or homelessness. At the time of this HMR we have records from October 2012 when the Gateway opened until the end of 2015/16. We have calculated the pro rata number of callers for the first year and included with the three full years 2013/14 to 2015/16 in Table 2 below.

Table 2



(a) caller numbers are pro rata based on the last six months of 2012/13, figures start from Oct 2012

The trend is for less housing callers to the Gateway. The number of housing related callers in 2015/16 represents a 26% reduction from the number in 2013/14. Likely reasons for this are the move towards more self-service options of accessing the council's services i.e. use of website, email especially for HomeChoice. By dividing the number of housing advice cases we dealt with each year into the number of 'housing'

Gateway callers we can infer that housing advice is becoming an increasingly higher share of the face to face cases we deal with.

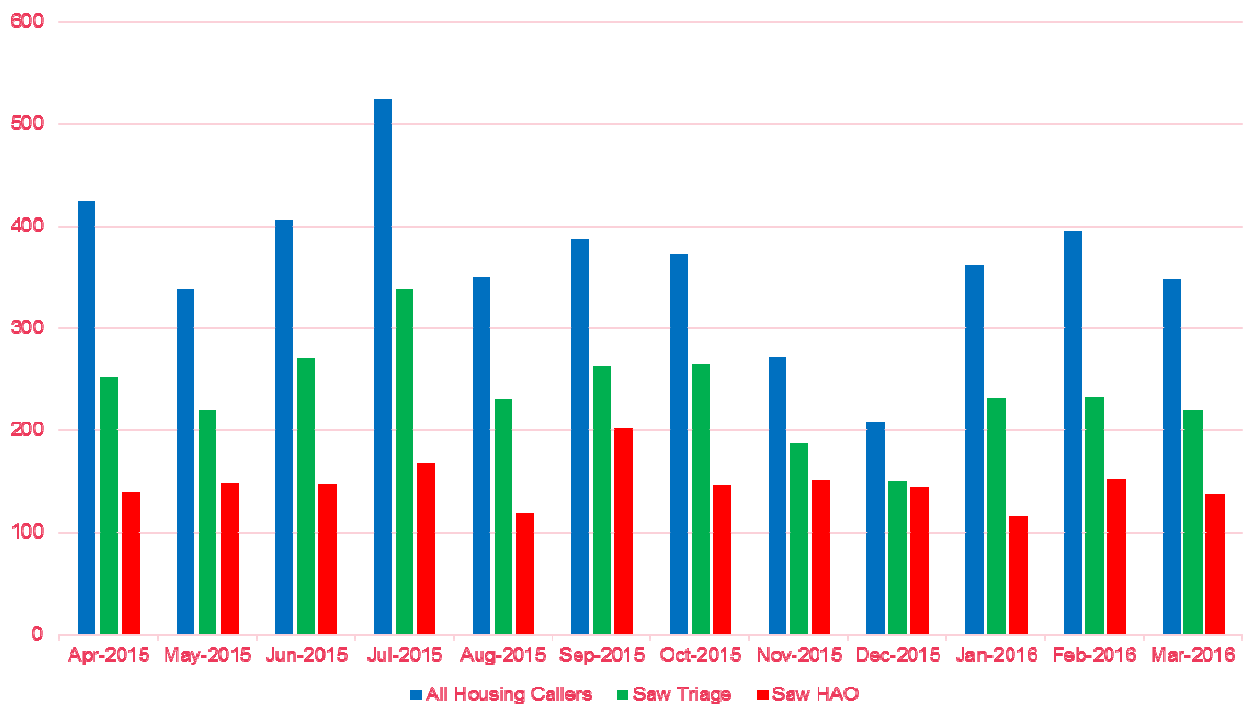
Table 2a

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Housing callers to Gateway (Table 2)	7,282 (est.)	5,929	4,956	4,388
Households provided with housing advice (Table 1)	2,477	2,300	1,600 (1)	2,235
Housing advice as % of all housing callers to Gateway	34%	39%	32%	51%

(1) Major undercounting due to new front of house procedures 'bedding in'

Table 2b below shows the number of housing callers broken down by month for 2015/16, it includes those that were seen by the triage service at which point it is decided who can best help them e.g. the private housing team, HomeChoice or the Housing Advice Officers (HAO) for cases of homelessness or threatened with homelessness. The number of advice cases dealt with was in the range 118 to 201 per month.

Table 2b



Telephone Callers

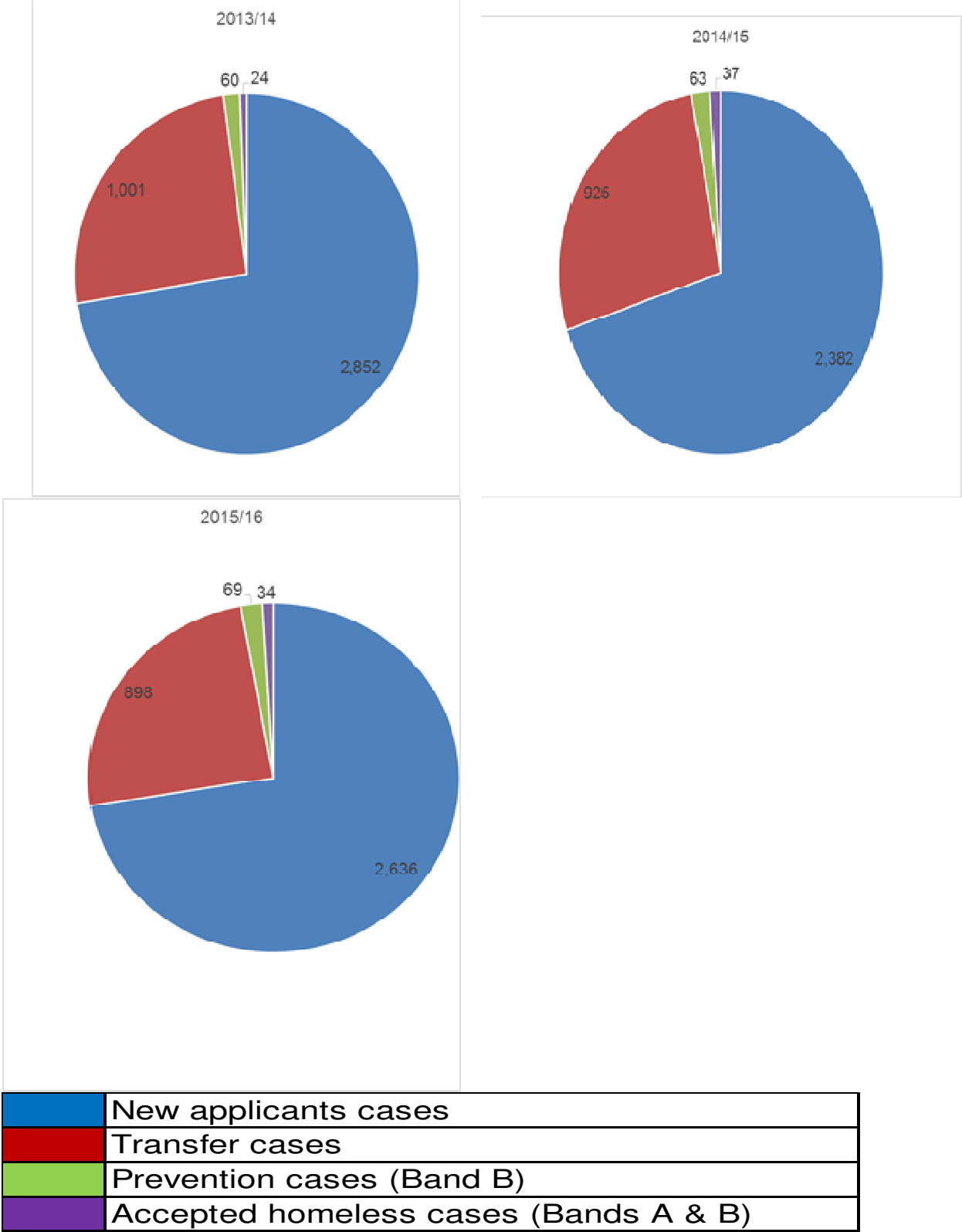
We have recently started to record the number of callers who phone the council about a housing issue. In April and May 2016 there was an average of 1,139 callers per month. Most are for very basic and general housing advice and can be dealt with by our call centre staff, but a number of more complex calls are received and referred to housing staff for more specialist housing advice and information. As more information is collected we will compare monthly records to discern any trends.

Government Form P1E

All councils in England submit figures quarterly around homelessness to central government on a form called the P1E. We have included a number of other tables with data derived from the P1E in this HMR, and others have put in the technical appendix (Appendix 4). The P1E covers mostly in-depth information about those households accepted as homeless, this is known as statutory homelessness. One notable exception is the prevention table (Table 10) which can also apply to households where a formal application of homelessness has not been made, but homelessness has been prevented.

Homeless and prevention households, their share of the HomeChoice register and of allocations

Table 3
New applicants, transfers, prevention and accepted homeless cases as % of the HomeChoice Register – years 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.



No equivalent figures held before 2013/14, all categories mutually exclusive

Homeless households and prevention households represent just a small percentage of all the households active on the HomeChoice register; in 2013/14 they were 2.1% of all households on the register, 2014/15 - 2.9% and 2015/16 - 2.8%. However Table 4 below shows that because of their acute housing need they make up a bigger percentage of those housed in social housing.

Table 4

Households housed in social housing during year	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16	
Banding	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Homeless duty	55	8	27	5	66	10	66	9	61	10	76	11
Prevention duty ¹⁷	125	18	131	22	145	21	143	19	174	28	205	31
Transfer					245	36	295	39	199	32	185	28
New applicant	522	74	433	73	234	34	247	33	196	31	199	30
TOTAL	702	100	591	100	690	100	751	100	630	100	665	100

Table 4a

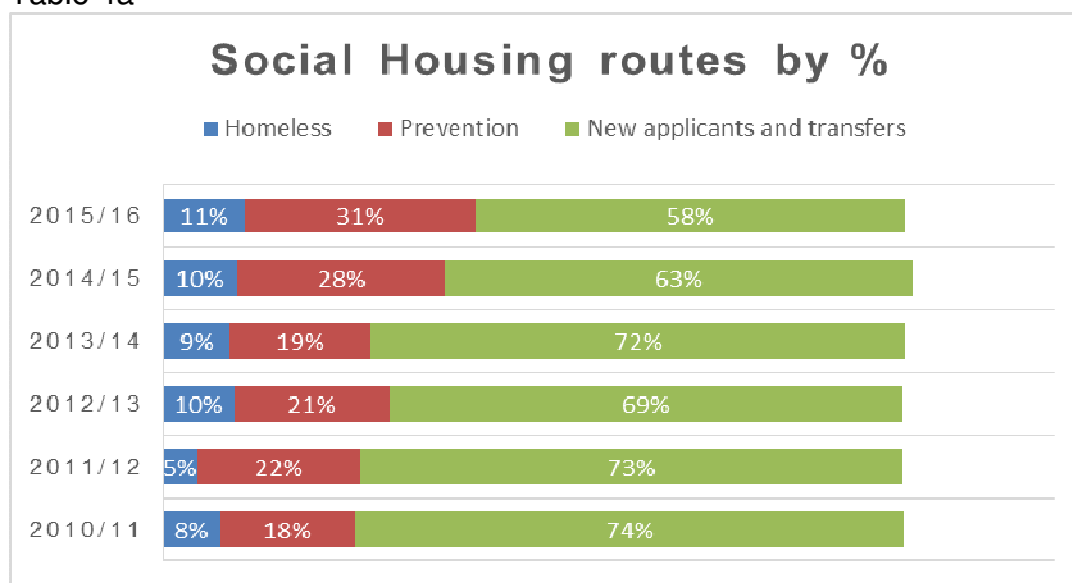


Table 4 shows the amount of social housing available for letting fluctuated from a low of 591 allocations in 2011/12 to a high of 751 in 2013/14 with an average of 672. Table 4a shows that the percentage of allocations to homeless and prevention households is on an upward trend from 26% of allocations in 2010/11 to 42% in 2015/16. For context around this, Table D in Appendix 4 shows the demand for social housing.

¹⁷ Please note prevention duty cases in Table 4 are a HomeChoice banding and there are cases housed as applicants in that table where we have also used prevention methods, but not accepted a duty as such. This accounts for the higher figure for prevention into social housing in Table 10 later in this Review and in the extract below

Performance Indicators reported Quarterly as at Quarter 3 (Q3) 31/12/16

		Q3	Target
H16 (KCPI 156)	Number of Households in temporary accommodation (Snapshot only)	63	59
H17	Percentage of young people who present as homeless and are prevented from needing to enter long-term LA care	100%	88%
H18 (DLT 562)	Average length of stay in temporary accommodation (weeks)	20	17
H19 (DLT 340)	No of homeless households in priority need who are prevented from being homeless.	92.50%	85%
H43	Total number of homeless seen	749	N/A
	Homeless	72	
	Prevention	167	
	Advice	510	
H23	Value of Bonds ended	£ -	17%
	Value of claims made	£ -	
	Claim Rate against Deposit Bonds	0%	

Prevention into the PRS Decreasing

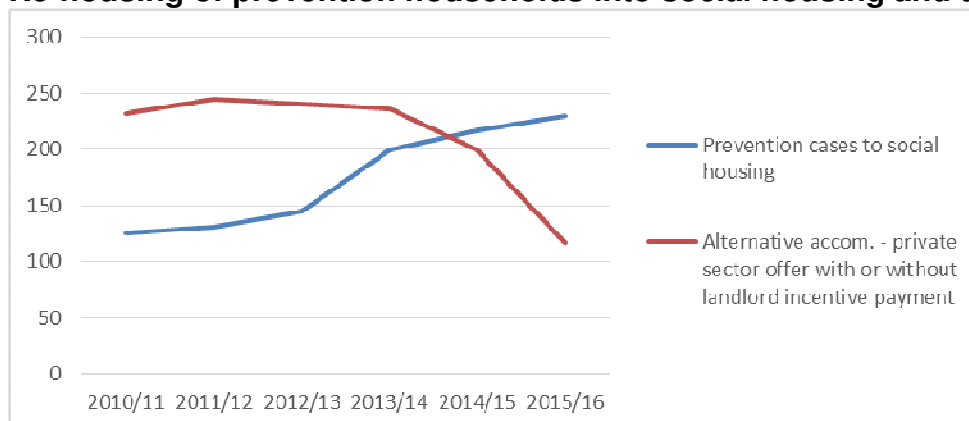
The extract below from Table 10 below shows that as housing into social housing has increased for prevention households, the number helped into the PRS has decreased. This has been shown as a line graph below.

Table 5 (the data in this graph is an extract from Table 10)

Prevention method	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Alternative accom. - private sector offer with or without landlord incentive payment	232	245	241	236	200	117
Alt. accom. - Part VI (social housing) offer	125	131	145	200	217	230

Table 5a

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



Reasons why households became homeless

Table 6 below shows the primary reason households accepted as homeless became homeless. The five most common reasons for homelessness in 2015/16 have been shaded.

Table 6 – Reason for Homelessness of Accepted Households

Reason	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Parents no longer able/willing to accommodate	19	19	14	7	15	9
Friend/Relative no longer able/willing to accommodate	6	9	6	6	5	7
Relationship breakdown - Violent	14	14	16	11	22	15
Relationship breakdown - Non-violent	3	8	13	10	4	5
Relationship breakdown – Violent and non-violent – 2 reasons above combined, not double counted below	17	22	29	21	26	20
Other violence	7	2	6	3	5	4
Mortgage Arrears	2	1	1	3	4	2
Social Housing Arrears	0	1	0	4	1	0
Private Rental Arrears	1	1	5	3	5	7
End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)	15	9	25	12	15	28
Other: loss of rental	4	5	7	0	1	4
Leaving Institution/Care	4	5	4	13	11	14
Other e.g. emergency, rough sleeping	4	8	2	9	15	14
TOTAL	79	82	99	81	103	109

From P1E Section E3

The most common **reason for homelessness** is ‘the end of AST¹⁸’. Anecdotal evidence is that some landlords do not renew ASTs rather than take action for rent arrears and other tenancy breaches. If you combine the ‘end of AST’ and ‘private rental arrears’ this means about a third (32%) of all accepted homelessness cases are a result of a private sector tenancy coming to an end.

‘Relationship breakdown- violent and non-violent’ was the second highest reason for homelessness in 2015/16. It has fallen slightly by around 23% from the previous year. However, it is still a major reason for homelessness and it is vital that our effective domestic violence (DV) services are in place.

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, Children’s Support and Safeguarding and other agencies. Liaison with, and support for carers is important for our housing advisers and the support agencies we work with.

The very small incidence of mortgage arrears cases and social housing arrears cases; no more than four cases for any one year over a six years period shows very few become homeless from these sectors. If the PRS could be made as ‘secure’ as the social housing sector then it would go towards preventing the almost a third of cases referred to above. Whilst fixed term tenancies are becoming more prevalent in the social

¹⁸ AST = Assured Shorthold Tenancy

housing sector¹⁹ 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.

West of England Dimension

In May 2016, the four West of England (WoE) LAs²⁰ compared some key homelessness indicators and where it is possible to compare and significant we have included the results at the appropriate point of the HMR with the symbol **WoE** next to it in the tables below. With regard to reason for homelessness the top reason for this was 'end of AST' in the three²¹ LAs who gave info on this topic. All four LAs said 'loss of AST' was the main reason for approaching the council for advice. So this problem is certainly not just a North Somerset problem.

Referrals to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Some specialist advice cases are referred to CAB. The council has commissioned a service from CAB whereby households needing in-depth money advice, debt or legal advice are referred to them. Table 7 below shows the number of households referred in 2015/16 and the main presenting issue. From now on we will collect such data annually to discern any trends.

Table 7

Referrals to CAB	
Main presenting issue (a)	2015/16²²
Housing	53
Debt	35
Benefits	15
Family	1
Employment	1
Failed to attend	12
Total	120

(a) There were several clients who had more than one issue i.e. housing and debt or debt and benefits

'Priority Need' category or 'types' of household which are accepted as homeless

In order to be entitled to a 'homeless duty'²³ a household must be in 'Priority Need' e.g. have dependent children or be vulnerable in some other way. Table 8 below shows the primary reason for this priority need. Housing advice staff have noticed that the number of people coming forward who have complex, multiple needs as a result of chaotic lifestyles is increasing. N.B. the table shows only the main reason for the homelessness and therefore does not identify where there are multiple needs.

Generally more advice The Homelessness Reduction Act which became law in April 2017 will introduce new duties which will extend the range of households to which the council will have a 'prevention duty' and 'relief duty'. There is more detail on the Act in this HMR and in the PHS.

¹⁹ Extended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016

²⁰ Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire councils

²¹ Bristol City did not complete this

²² The period 14/4/15 - 5/4/16

²³ As opposed to information and assistance

We have already mentioned that the number of households from which we have received homelessness applications is on an upward trend and within that the number of those households for which we have accepted a full homelessness duty for is also rising, see Table 1, 5th column. In Appendix 4 Tables A and A2 we have looked at decisions around this full homelessness duty to see if there are any other significant trends. The trends are somewhat mixed.

Next page landscape

Table 8 – Priority Need for Homelessness for Accepted Households

Priority Need	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dependent Children	43	54	36	44	54	53	38	46	54	52	48	44
Pregnant - no other children	5	6	11	13	2	2	7	8	2	2	6	6
Age 16/17	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2
Formerly in care aged 18-20	1	1	0	0	2	2	4	5	4	4	10	9
Emergency	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Adults vulnerable as result of:												
Old Age	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Physical Disability	11	14	12	15	8	8	3	4	14	13	9	8
Mental Health	14	18	18	22	22	22	20	24	17	16	23	21
Other special reason:												
Drug dependency and alcohol dependency	4	5	2	2	7	7	1	1	0	0	5	5
Been 'in care'	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	10	6	6	1	1
Served in HM Forces	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Been in custody/on remand	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violence/threats of violence	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	5	5	0	0
Domestic Abuse	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	3	3
No. of asylum seekers included	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	79	100	82	100	101	100	83	100	104	100	109	100

From P1E Section 2

Table 8a – Priority Need for Homelessness for Accepted Households - simplified

Priority Need	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dependent Children + Pregnant – no other children = With children	48	61	47	57	56	55	45	54	56	54	54	50
Formerly in care aged 18-20 / Been 'in care /Age 16/17 = Young people	1	1	1	1	2	2	12	15	11	11	13	12
Emergency	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Old Age	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Physical Disability + Mental Health = Health	25	32	30	37	30	30	23	25	31	29	32	29
Drug dependency and alcohol dependency	4	5	2	2	7	7	1	1	0	0	5	5
Served in HM Forces	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Been in custody/on remand	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violence/threats of violence + Domestic Abuse = Violence	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	0	5	5	3	3
No. of asylum seekers included	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	79	100	82	100	101	100	83	100	104	100	109	100

From P1E Section 2

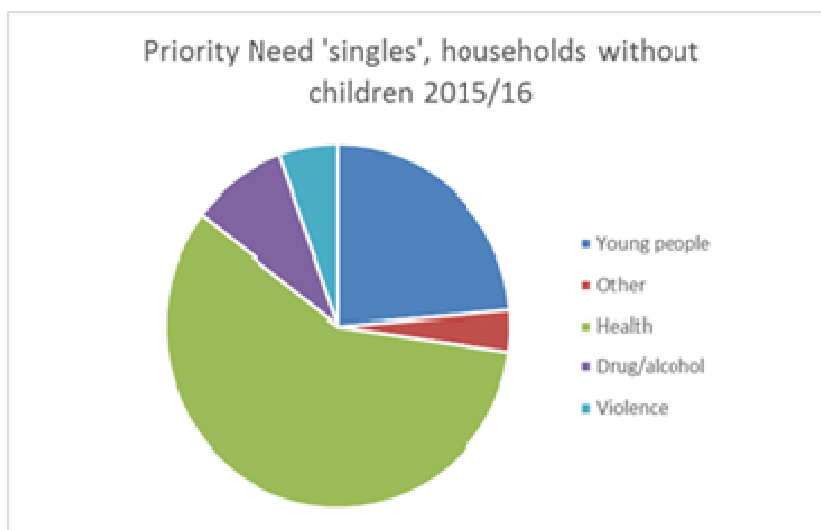
Commentary of Table 8 and 8a (previous page) – In Table 8 the four most common priority need groups have been shaded. Households with children make up around 44% of the households accepted in 2015/16, down from 54% of the total in 2010/11. This is part of a longer term trend where vulnerable single people are becoming a bigger proportion of those accepted as homeless. The next biggest priority need group is people with mental health needs. For the last six years this group have been in the range of one in five of all cases. The next biggest group is young people leaving care. In order to deal with the increasingly complex needs of young people and those with mental health needs, we will continue to work with 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 for this group.

Another priority need which is important to mention is physical disability²⁴, it represented as high as 15% of cases accepted as homeless in 2011/12 (and 10% of all cases over the last six years) and as with non-homeless physically disabled people on the HomeChoice (housing) register it can be very difficult to find accommodation which meets their needs.

In Table 8a we have ‘chunked’ together the priority need categories in a way which shows that:

- *Young people* including those leaving care has become a more significant category in the last three years 12-15%.
- *Health* issues, physical and mental have been 29% of priority need cases in the last two years.

However when it comes to discussing the combined *violence* category reference has to be made to a **general cautionary note** for all priority need data; a household could have more than one priority need e.g. a household with children may also have experienced some domestic violence, but the primary priority need which ‘triggers’ a homelessness duty is the fact that there are children in the household. The pie chart below shows the simplified priority need ‘chunks’ for households with no children, predominantly single person households, but may contain a few couple with no children for 2015/16.



²⁴ Households with a person with physical disability

Table 8b

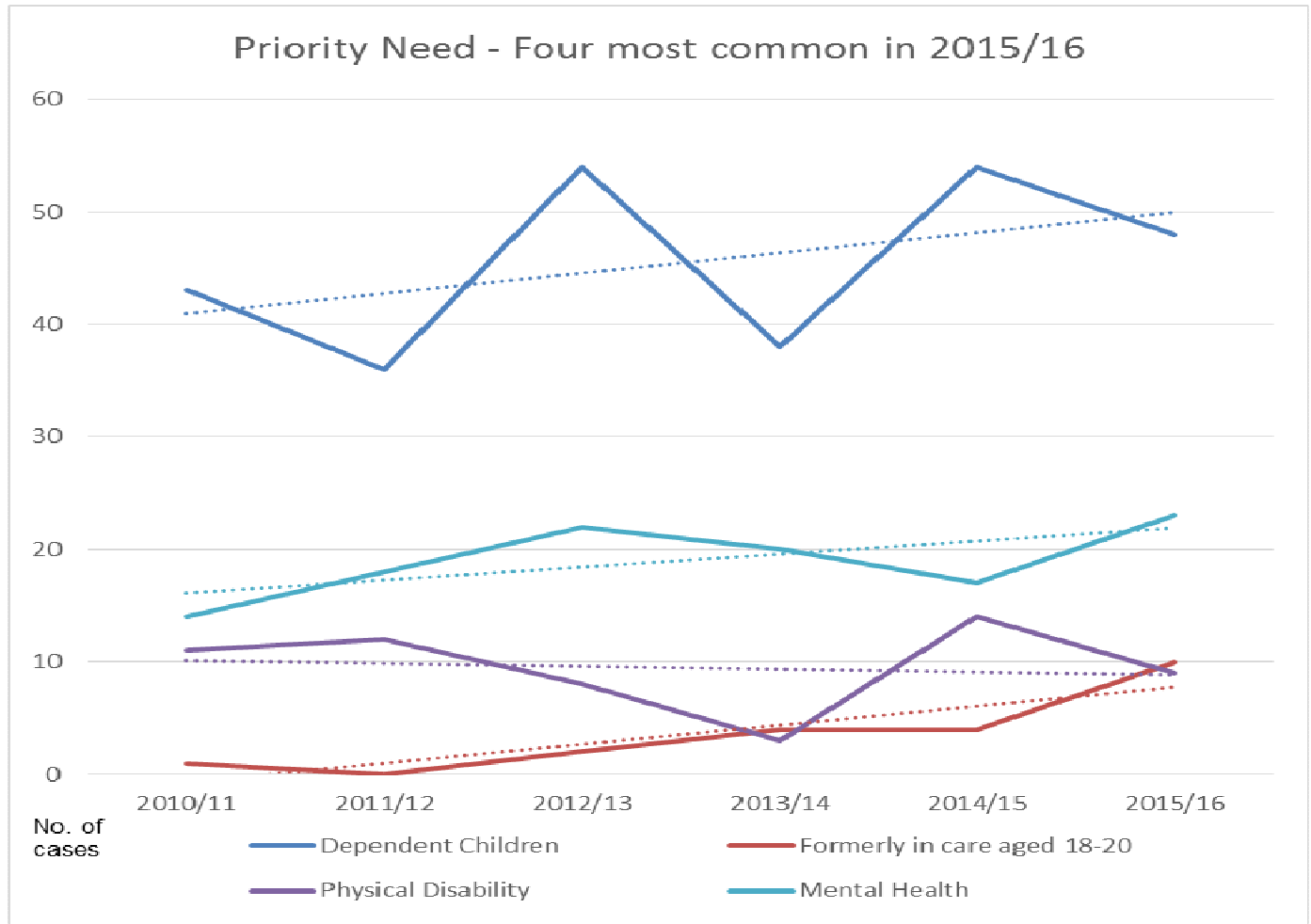


Table 8b above shows the trends for the top four priority needs types in 2015/16.

WoE –Dependent children, mental health needs and pregnancy are among the top three priority needs for the three WoE LAs who provided info²⁵. It is notable that of the four WoE councils North Somerset has the highest percentage of its' accepted households who are single people: B&NES 28%; Bristol 23%; **North Somerset 45%** and South Glos 11%.

Households Types - We do not have breakdown by household type for all the households seeking advice from the council, but we do have such a breakdown for those households accepted as homeless.

Table 9 – Age of head of household of accepted households

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
16 - 24	20	23	32	26	34	27
25 - 44	38	43	55	45	51	67
45 - 59	21	14	14	11	22	17
60 - 64	0	1	2	0	1	0
65 - 74	0	1	0	2	1	0
75+	0	0	0	2	0	0
TOTAL	79	82	103	86	109	111

²⁵ No info from Bristol

Table 9a

Age of head of household of accepted households (as percentage)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
16 - 24	25%	28%	31%	30%	31%	24%
25 - 44	48%	52%	53%	52%	47%	60%
45 - 59	27%	17%	14%	13%	20%	15%
60 – 75+	0%	2%	2%	4%	2%	0%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Households accepted as homeless are rarely over 60 years old, an average of 1.7% per year over the last six years. Whereas younger households under 24 have been an average of 28.2% acceptances, over one in four cases.

Table 9b

Ethnicity of those approaching the council as homeless

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
White	169	234	212	229	245	248
Black, Asian and Mixed	2	7	11	14	17	4
Black, Asian and Mixed as % of total	1.1%	2.6%	4.8%	5.5%	6.1%	1.4%
Other	0	0	2	1	1	0
Not stated	17	27	6	11	16	25
TOTAL	188	268	231	255	279	277

From P1E Section E1

We have combined the figures for Black, Asian and Mixed households because the numbers are so small. Approaches from these groups grew year on year from two to 17 households, but has now fallen back to four. For a table on nationality please see Appendix 4.

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 with private landlords, mortgage lenders or families, and liaison with colleagues assessing Housing Benefit. Whilst ‘staying put’ options have grown, Table 10 below shows clearly that helping people to move to more suitable housing rather than helping them ‘stay put’ is more prevalent.

Table 10 – Homelessness prevention methods in North Somerset

Prevention Method	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Alternative accommodation (alt. accom.) - friends/relatives	10	10	11	7	13	7
Alt. accom. - hostel	5	4	4	3	3	7
Alt. accom. - low cost ownership	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alt. accom. - other	5	2	10	9	12	14
Alt. accom. - Part VI (social housing) offer ²⁶	125	131	145	200	217	230
Alt. accom. - PRS offer with L/L incentive payment	201	176	151	114	80	38
Alt. accom. - PRS offer without L/L incentive payment	31	69	90	122	120	79
Alt. accom. - RP ²⁷ offer outside Part VI	1	0	0	0	5	4
Alt. accom. - supported housing	59	65	64	92	76	106
Alt. accom. - management move	0	1	1	1	1	4
Remain in home - conciliation including home visits for family/friend exclusion	22	27	16	32	19	22
Remain in home - crisis intervention support to keep existing tenancy	0	1	3	0	4	4
Remain in home - debt advice	5	0	2	5	3	4
Remain in home - financial payment from prevention fund	3	3	7	4	3	3
Remain in home - mediation	3	2	2	3	4	14
Remain in home - mortgage arrears	2	10	2	3	15	2
Remain in home - Other	10	24	22	24	25	31
Remain in home - resolve illegal eviction or reinstate illegally evicted occupant	2	16	15	0	0	6
Remain in home - resolving HB problems	3	30	26	25	26	30
Remain in home - resolving rent arrears	1	1	5	8	10	3
Remain in home – sanctuary scheme measures for DV	0	1	0	0	1	0
Relief of homelessness	No figures		21	12	10	12
TOTAL	488	573	597	664	647	620

From P1E Section E10

In Table 10 above we have shaded the seven areas of prevention which have occurred more than 20 times 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 biggest area of prevention is accessing 'supported housing'. This has fluctuated a little, but the trend is upwards and the increase is almost 80% since 2010/11. The third biggest area is 'private sector offer without landlord incentive payment', this is where households access PRS housing with advice, but without financial assistance from the council (e.g. they can afford their own deposit), and this has fallen 35% from its peak in 2013/14.

We discuss later in this HMR the current problems accessing the PRS, but it is worth noting over the six years covered by Table 10 our HAT helped house nearly 1,300 households into the PRS (with or without incentives).

A major concern is that the biggest area of prevention at the beginning of the six year period (i.e. 2010/11) was 'private sector offer with landlord incentive payment', some 201

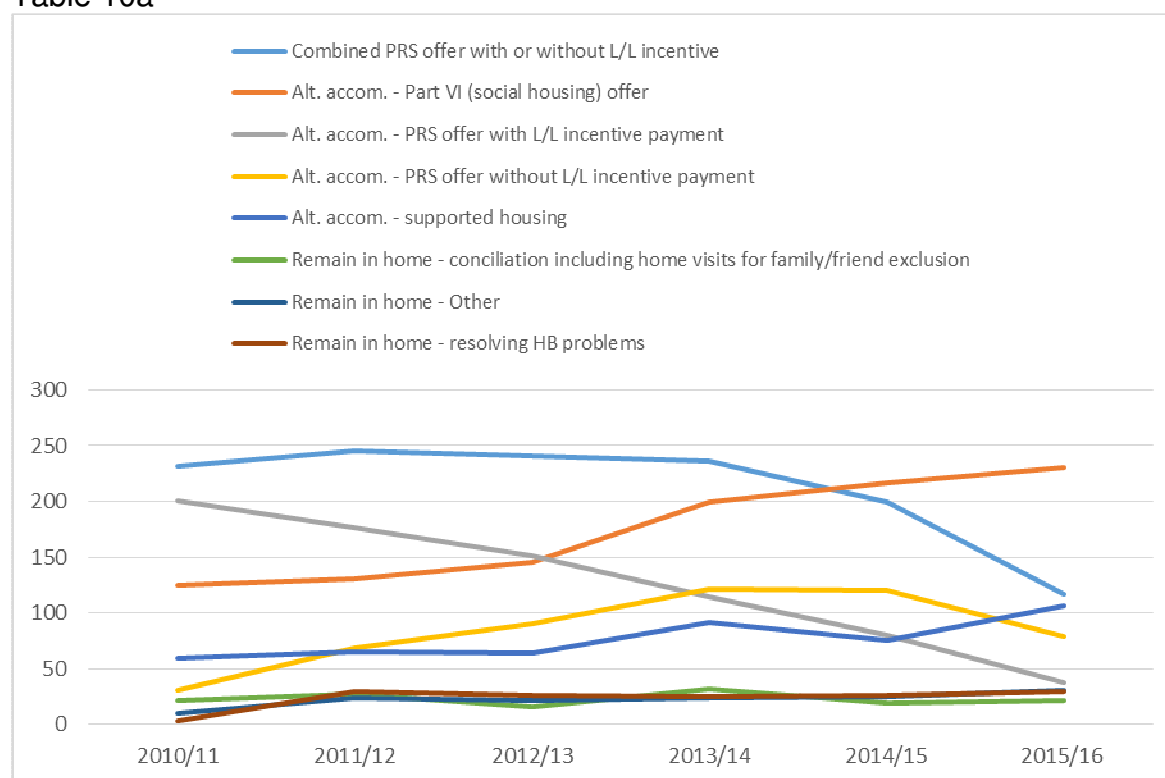
²⁶ Also includes some applicants who accepted a Part VI offer before their Band B Prevention status was applied to their HomeChoice application

²⁷ Registered provider (housing association)

cases, and combined with 'private sector offer without landlord incentive payment' cases this was a total of 232, 48% of all cases. A 'landlord incentive payment' case is where the council helps households to access PRS accommodation with assistance with costs such as the deposit or rent in advance²⁸. By last year, 2015/16 it was 38 cases 'with incentive payment' and 79 cases 'without landlord incentive payment', a total of 117 cases, 19% all prevention cases. This highlights how hard it is becoming for potentially homeless and homeless households on a low income to access PRS lets.

Table 10a shows the seven most common types of prevention as line graphs plus a combined (light blue) line for all PRS offers with and without incentive payment.

Table 10a



Whilst overall there has been a significant decline in PRS tenancies accessible to our clients already referred to, there is an interesting sub strand. The number of households able to access PRS accommodation without incentives from us is higher now than it was in 2010/11 albeit not at its' peak of 122 cases two years ago. This may indicate a degree of resilience is being established where we 'help people to help themselves'.

Allocations to supported housing have grown from 12% of all preventions in 2010/11 to 17% last year (numerically 59 to 106). Table 11 below shows how helping households to remain in their own homes has been established as a significant option within the range of prevention options.

The competition for PRS tenancies from other households, those who might in the past have been able to afford owner occupation plus those who cannot access social housing

²⁸ Such cases also benefit from free tenancy agreements, a dedicated HB officer, support officer and housing officer as necessary throughout the life of the tenancy and regular property inspections.

is outlined later in the HMR. At the same time Local Housing Allowance (LHA) restrictions and freezing of this allowance mean less and less of the PRS accommodation in the district is affordable to those reliant on benefits, which is usually the case with homeless households.

Table 11 below combines all the alternative accommodation prevention methods and all those where households are helped to stay in the existing homes into two totals to compare trends around 'moving on' and 'staying put' prevention methods.

Table 11

Homelessness prevention methods in North Somerset – 'alternative accommodation' ALL and 'remain in home' ALL

Prevention Method	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Alternative accommodation - ALL	437	458	476	548	527	489
Percentage of all preventions	90%	80%	80%	83%	81%	79%
Remain in home - ALL	51	115	100	104	110	119
Percentage of all preventions	10%	20%	17%	16%	17%	19%
Relief of homelessness	No figures		21	12	10	12
TOTAL	488	573	597	664	647	620

It is generally more advice intensive to help someone stay in their own home and avoiding the disruption of changing home can in many circumstances be the best option. 2011/12 saw a 'sea change' in the level of households helped to 'stay put'. Since then it has never fallen below 16%, which is about one in six cases and has been as high as 20% or one in five cases. Since 2011/12 having to move to alternative accommodation to prevent homelessness has averaged 80.6% (around four in five cases). It is crucial at a time when the pool of housing which can be afforded by those on lower incomes is shrinking that people are helped to stay in accommodation if they can afford it, and do not lose it for preventable reasons.

Housing and Homelessness Advice to Gypsy and Traveller Communities

In 2015, a new 24 pitch Gypsy and Traveller site opened in Weston.²⁹ Applications for the new site had to be assessed, including establishing whether there is local connection to NS. In 2017, we are changing our HomeChoice policy to better reflect the different circumstances of these communities informed by the experience of managing applications through the HomeChoice register. A new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment is close to adoption and will be recommending a number of new pitches to be provided over the period until the year 2036.

Fortunately we have not had a great number of homelessness cases from travelling communities. Where this does happen, the way our housing advice and homelessness services are delivered can be tailored to different cultural needs. If support is required the Support Alliance (who provide floating housing support) have the skills needed. Elim HA, one of the Support Alliance partner owns and manages the Weston site and manages the other non-private Gypsy and Traveller sites in the district. We are aware of the vulnerability of these communities for example in accessing services and look to respond the most appropriate and positive fashion.

²⁹ There are another seven publicly owned pitches in NS, but also a large, well established private site

Temporary and emergency access accommodation

Temporary accommodation within North Somerset for homeless people is made available by partner housing associations ensuring a good standard of accommodation is provided. The range of accommodation includes:

- Self-contained accommodation with Alliance Homes ranging from bedsits to two bedroom flats which are designated for temporary use. This is currently under review due to one of the blocks being decommissioned, however this will not mean a reduction in the number of units available.
- Six units within this Alliance Homes stock are designated for men or woman fleeing domestic abuse (fully furnished and equipped); there are four care leaver trainer flats and two young parent flats
- Two units of emergency access accommodation for 16/17 year olds. These units are within current supported housing projects.
- 14 units of emergency supported accommodation with Curo HA for single vulnerable people
- Emergency Bed and breakfast – 11 units

The district-wide focus on homelessness prevention and spend to save initiatives has proved very cost effective in relation to delivering savings for temporary accommodation and the administration of homelessness applications. Bed and breakfast (B&B) is provided by a private landlord and is only used in an emergency and then only for a short period of time. This is predominantly for single people pending a decision on their homelessness application. Each year approximately 80% of the cost of B&B is recouped through Housing Benefit and this trend has continued in 2015/16 with a recovery rate of 80.2%. B&B for families is only ever used in an emergency situation and the government's target of having no families in B&B for six weeks or more has never been exceeded. The council's net expenditure on B&B is in Table 12.

Table 12 - Net Cost of Temporary Accommodation (TA)³⁰

Financial year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Net B&B spend	£9,617	£30,219	£30,067	£17,176	£17,338	£10,393

³⁰ All our TA spend is B&B spend, other forms of TA are funded by the tenants themselves (with or without HB)

Table 12a

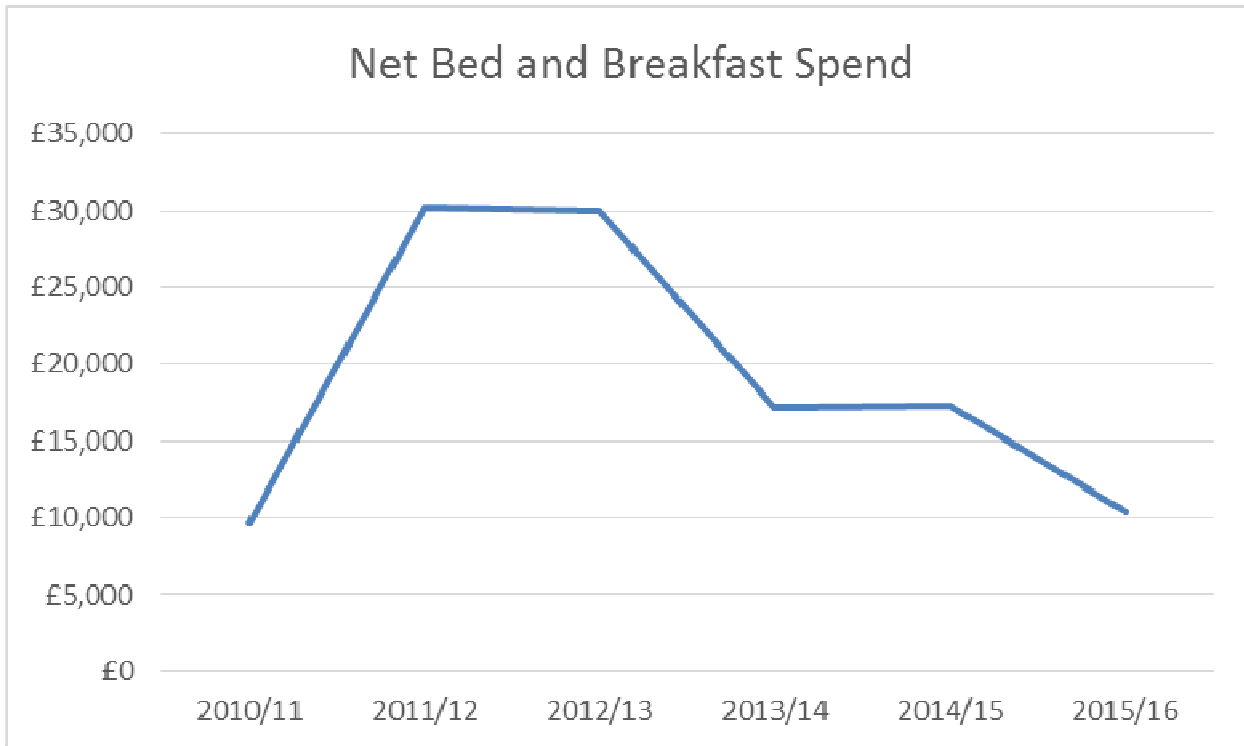


Table 13 below is information on a range of temporary housing options used to house those to whom we have homelessness duty. It demonstrates that NSC has used only RP (Registered Provider) TA and privately owned B&B. B&B has only been used for families with children three times, all in 2012/13. A range of supported accommodation is also used to house some households depending on their support needs (see Housing resources section).

Table 13

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Households in accommodation inc. temporary accom. (TA) arranged by the LA						
Helped to obtain private rented accommodation	1	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to shared ownership scheme	0	0	0	0	0	0
Offered private accommodation leased by the council	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referred for private accommodation leased by RP	1	0	0	0	0	0
Accommodation within Alliance TA Stock	49	54	53	57	50	53
Offered hostel accommodation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to Woman's refuge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arranged bed and breakfast accommodation	6	10	12	7	10	7
<i>Of which:</i>						
<i>Families (with children)</i>	0	0	3	0	0	0
<i>Singles and couples</i>	6	10	9	7	10	7
Arranged other temporary accommodation	0	3	0	0	0	0
Accepted as homeless at home	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	57	64	65	64	60	60

Snapshot at end of year From P1E Section E6

Length of stay in Temporary Accommodation (TA)

Table 14 below shows the average length of stay of all households in TA in weeks. At the beginning of 2014/15 the length of stay was increasing, so we took on an extra member of staff to work with our clients with the most challenging problems. As you can see the effect of this is that the numbers had reduced markedly by September 2014 and then stayed quite steady. However now due to the problems we have moving people on from TA the numbers have now increased again and are currently averaging 20 weeks. The PHS will look at whether additional resource is needed in this service area to improve the length of stay of households.

Table 14

	2014/15	2015/16
April	18 (no. of weeks)	16
May	20	18
June	21	17
July	15	17
Aug	17	17
Sep	14	16
Oct	15	16
Nov	15	15
Dec	16	15
Jan	14	17
Feb	15	19
March	15	20
Average of averages	15.2	16.9

Table 15 looks at where households leaving TA go.

Table 15

Households leaving temporary accommodation						
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Accepted permanent accommodation through allocation scheme	55	27	66	68	60	69
Ceased to be eligible for temporary accommodation	4	0	1	1	3	0
Became homeless intentionally	3	5	4	1	6	7
Voluntarily ceased to occupy accommodation	8	10	12	5	17	18
Accepted a qualifying offer of an AST	3	14	2	2	6	2
Refused an offer of permanent rehousing	4	1	4	1	2	4
Total	77	57	89	78	94	100

From P1E Section E71a

The findings from a council review of temporary and emergency accommodation needs are still awaited, but are likely to have recommendations about the need for more emergency housing for young people with chaotic lifestyles. A major part of the above review is agreement with Alliance Homes over replacement of a block of 20 flats in Weston currently used for TA. This block is to be gradually replaced with the equivalent number of properties (some furnished) spread throughout the district, but mainly in Weston and Worle. A range of needs are being considered including wheelchair access and those fleeing domestic violence.

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 population. It is vital to 'keep on top of this problem' as the table shows that relatively small numbers of rough sleepers can grow to big numbers if the issues are not tackled promptly. In Table 16 (below) are the rough sleeping counts/estimates for the last six years for the West of England and Somerset councils.

Table 16 - Rough Sleeping counts

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% per 1,000 h'holds ³¹ 2015	Ranking where 1= lowest % of rough sleepers
Bath + North East Somerset	4	22	33	27	22	*	0.29	6
Bristol	8	9	41	41	97	74	0.51	9
Mendip	21	19	16	20	20	16	0.42	7
North Somerset	2	2	1	6	7	8	0.06	2
Sedgemoor	9	5	2	4	6	*	0.12	4
South Gloucestershire	1	2	1	1	3	*	0.03	1
South Somerset	9	1	1	2	5	8	0.07	3
Taunton Deane	25	15	7	18	21	*	0.43	8
West Somerset	0	0	2	6	4	*	0.25	5
Source DCLG ³²	Numbers in red indicate without consultation with any external agencies. * indicates still awaiting these figures							

North Somerset Council (NSC) has been a member of the Avon and Somerset Rough Sleeper Group since its inception in 2011. Nine Local Authorities including NSC were provided with grant funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) specifically to tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness. This funding has helped to part fund the YMCA outreach service in North Somerset (NS). Further funding from the DCLG was also provided to St Mungo's to support the work being carried out by the YMCA by expanding their Bristol-based outreach services to NS. This funding has meant that outreach services have been available for rough sleepers in NS since 2011 and have helped ensure provision of appropriate support for rough sleepers. There are regular weekly outreach counts which included various agencies, the most recent count for NS (October 2016) was 12.

DCLG recently 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 now secured funding enabling St Mungo's to continue rough sleeper outreach activities in NS until March 2019.

³¹ households

³² Department of Communities and Local Government

Begging and Street Drinking

There has been targeted engagement work with the Police, Community Response and the Business Improvement District Team to seek to reduce begging. The perception of the public can sometimes be that the problem of rough sleeping is worse than it is, as people begging can be assumed to be rough sleepers or homeless. However as rough sleeper outreach workers and the Community Safety Team (which works to tackle anti-social behaviour) engage with people who are begging and street drinking, they find that the majority do have accommodation and that homelessness is not the issue. The minority who are rough sleeping are offered accommodation and help, and if they continue to rough sleep it is because they are not prepared to engage with efforts to help them solve their housing and any underlying support issues. Where homelessness is not the issue people are referred into the weekly multi-agency Street Community Forum co-ordinated by the Community Safety Team for consideration of appropriate

North Somerset has adopted the following approach:

- anyone genuinely rough sleeping is offered assistance to secure accommodation or a reconnection to their local area
- we encourage the public to give to charities that help rough sleepers and not directly to those who are begging
- we encourage the public to report anyone they think might be rough sleeping using a service called Streetlink (NSC uses and encourages the use of Streetlink, a service which allows anyone, including rough sleepers directly, to connect to services e.g. housing, health)
- anyone who is identified as begging or street drinking will be referred into the weekly multi-agency Street Community Forum for consideration of intervention

Challenges (forces) affecting homelessness

Welfare Reform

The period since the last Homelessness Review in 2011, has seen a period of significant welfare reform. This has coincided with a rise in those seeking housing advice and for the last three years prevention measures having to be put in place for over 620 households per year in our district. It is perhaps inevitable that some households adversely affected by the changes will fall into difficulty with their money management which in turn may lead to housing problems. Conversely many expected a greater correlation between welfare reform and homelessness than we have seen and there is evidence to suggest that measures such as the benefit cap have been an incentive for a significant number of people to get back into work and therefore reduce benefit dependency.

The coalition government of 2010-15, concerned about a rising HB bill, reformed the LHA (HB for private tenants). This restricted rents for those who receive LHA to a level within the bottom 30% of the rental market for 1, 2, 3 and 4 bed properties for those over 35 years of age, and in shared accommodation for those under 35. The intention was to stop PRS rents for those on benefits rising. In research published in April 2016³³ the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) concluded “tenants face an increasingly widening gap between the LHA they receive to help with their housing costs and the actual rent

³³ Mind the gap: the growing shortfall between private rents and help with housing costs

they pay". CIH's analysis "found that in some areas of the UK, people are only able to afford to rent in the bottom five or 10 per cent of the PRS market". This situation is set to worsen as LHA rates are frozen for four years from April 2016 at their 2015 level.

Research by the council into the PRS in 2015 revealed that in North Somerset the LHA is also not keeping pace with PRS rents. During May 2015 we reviewed HomeTrack³⁴ rent market data for lower quartile (LQ) rents (the bottom 25%) in the PRS in both Portishead and Weston and compared it with the local LHA rates (bottom 30%), called the Broad Market Rental Area (BMRA)³⁵. Table 17 below sets out these figures.

Table 17

£ monthly	1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom
Portishead LQ rents	625	725	850	1,150
Bristol BRMA	527	658	764	1,053
Weston LQ rents	425	550	675	895
Weston BRMA	425	532	652	800

With the exception of one bedroomed homes in Weston, all LQ average rents were higher than the BMRA and so we can safely say that even less than 25% of rents are affordable to those on HB in the district. Not surprisingly, the council is finding it increasingly challenging to persuade or find private landlords to let to those receiving HB at rents below the LHA level. The West of England region has had the highest PRS rent increases after London³⁶. This highlights that the PRS is becoming unaffordable for those on HB unless they use the rest of their benefits/income earmarked for living expenses to 'top up' their rent. This situation can lead to debt, rent arrears and homelessness.

In addition to the LHA freeze, in autumn 2016 the Government reduced the benefit cap outside London to £20,000 from its' previous limit of £26,000. North Somerset's response to this as before has been to identify the households who will be affected by these changes and with internal and external partners e.g. High Impact Families Unit, advice agencies, housing associations and HAT staff offer to work with these households to minimise the impact of the changes. Getting back into employment where possible is a major way to alleviate the effects, but also reducing unnecessary expenditure. As always there are exceptions to the rules, a significant one for agencies involved in homelessness is higher allowable rents for households in temporary accommodation.

Regular reports on welfare changes and how they affect NS residents are taken to the council's Community and Corporate Organisation (COCO) Policy and Scrutiny Panel with all councillors invited to attend. In the longer term the LHA and the benefit cap are paving the way for the gradual introduction of Universal Credit (UC). UC has been introduced in neighbouring Sedgemoor, but the timetable for North Somerset is to introduce it for new claims in 2019/20. Latest research into the HB caseload in North

³⁴ A company which specialises in providing data about the housing market

³⁵ The BRMA is the limit for the amount of rent the LHA will cover; it is higher for the Bristol area (which includes Portishead) than the Weston area

³⁶ NHF Home Truths

Somerset estimates 283 households will be affected by the latest benefit cap. The geographical split of this is shown in Table 18 below:

Table 18

Area	10 Weston wards	Four Portishead wards	Remaining wards of North Somerset	TOTAL
No. of h'holds affected by the cap	156	54	73	283
Percentage of all households	55.1%	19.1%	25.8%	100%

Table 18a - Types of household affected by the benefit cap:

H'hold type	Couple without children	Couple with children	Lone parent	Single without children	TOTAL
No. of h'holds	0	51	192	40	283

Table 18b - Once the cap has been implemented the losses for households per week are estimated to be as follows:

Expected financial loss (Post UC) per week	Less than £10	£10 to £49.99	£50 to £99.99	£100 to £149.99	£150 to £199.99	£200 to £299.99	Over £300	TOTAL
No. of h'holds	24	106	93	44	14	1	1	283

Clearly there are some very large financial adjustments to be made for some households. The estimates suggest at present only five households are in accommodation exempt from the cap.

Homelessness Reduction Act

This private members bill became law in April 2017. The Act amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and will extend the duties of local authorities to homeless and threatened with homelessness households. In brief it:

- Clarifies that free and detailed information/advice on preventing and relieving homelessness must be given to any person in the LAs district³⁷.
- Establishes that the first tranche of advice must be of a uniformly high standard regardless of factors such as 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 applicant are set out in writing in a personalised plan (PP). Steps must be reasonable and achievable.³⁸
- Sets out that failure to agree a PP must be recorded in writing and a household not in priority need who does not meet their PP actions would be issued with a warning. Priority needs are explained earlier in this HMR.

³⁷ Advisory service can be outsourced, but the underlying duty rests with the LA

³⁸ This is a key area where DCLG explanation of the Act says 'Government is committed to funding the cost of new burdens'

- Changes the point at which a (homelessness) 'prevention duty'³⁹ starts, from 28 days before someone is likely to be homeless, to 56 days⁴⁰; and extends the duty regardless of priority status, local connection and intentionality⁴¹.
- Confirms a 'prevention duty' on LAs is to take steps⁴² 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 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 41.
- Clarifies LA has 'duty to help to secure' which means 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 needs.
- Extends the applicant's right to ask for a review of a homelessness decision to these new duties.
- 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.

We welcome the Act and the opportunity to use the new powers to better assist households threatened with homelessness. It is likely though that these changes will come into effect from April 2018 and 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-visit our services as the full consequences of the Act's proposals become apparent.

The role of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is an annual budget provided by Central Government to help claimants affected by benefit changes with the housing element of their benefit. The amount varies each year depending on different elements of benefits change, see Table 19 below. This fund (which is means tested for each applicant) has been used in some cases to help households avoid homelessness. DHP has been around since 2002/03 when the annual amount awarded to the council was £31,422. By 2009/10 the DHP pot had grown to £136,423. Table 19 shows the amount awarded and spent in the last six years. DHP will still be available in 2016/17, the amount at £334,664 is up on 2015, but down from the peak at 2014. Central

³⁹ Either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live.

⁴⁰ 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

⁴¹ Broadly speaking the only people not eligible to the 'prevention duty' are persons from abroad not eligible under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.

⁴² E.g. provide a rent deposit, negotiate with landlord, mediation, debt advice etc.

Government have now decided the time period DHP can generally be awarded for is now limited to one year and that funding should gradually be withdrawn over that 12 month period. However an applicant could re-apply after that period had elapsed and would be re-assessed. DHP claims will be able to be made on-line by the end of 2016 and this will help households know earlier in the process if they can be helped. The table shows that in the last two years the council has been particularly effective at spending the DHP budget by identifying those whom it would help.

Table 19

Year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
A. Total DHP fund £'000	116	139	240	382	394	252
B. Total spent £'000	104	116	176	341	393	251
B/A %	89.6	83.4	73.3	89.3	99.7	99.6

Table 19a - We have information on the number of DHP awards made for the last four years.

Year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of awards	683	1,114	970	798

For those on means tested benefits moving into a new home with no furniture, white goods etc. there is the Welfare Provision Scheme which may be able to help with those 'setting up home' essentials. A new partnership is to be developed with charity Changing Lives to maximise the number of households that can be helped by this Scheme.

Increasing and competing demand for the PRS

The PRS is a rapidly growing market in part due to difficulties of many especially younger households accessing owner occupation as first time buyers and the low supply of social rented housing. At a later date further pressure on demand for private renting is expected when the construction of Hinkley Point C (HPC) power station begins. A sum of £700k in Section 106 funding has been negotiated by North Somerset and will be spent on a number of initiatives to help to ameliorate the effects of this market pressure. The PRS is growing nationally and in many local authority (LA) areas the PRS is overtaking the social rented sector. This happened earlier in North Somerset and the unitary authority's relatively low level of social housing means it is particularly dependent on the PRS to provide its' rental offer. The PRS in the NSC area grew by 79% (from 7,958 to 14,270 households) in the years between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. The PRS was 16.8% of NS's housing stock in 2011 and is anticipated to grow to be 22% by 2025. This will mean **over** one in five homes in the NSC area will be in the PRS.

Not surprisingly there is more PRS accommodation in North Somerset's larger towns with Weston having the biggest concentration. The next highest being Portishead, (see Table 17 above). Demand has reached a 'perfect storm' in some areas where those households on lower incomes find it extremely difficult to access the PRS because demand exceeds supply, and where poorer households can access the PRS there is strong likelihood that the part of the market within their price range are properties which are in the poorest condition or have inadequate management.

Resources

A key ongoing challenge is the delivery of the savings by the council which have been identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). In addition to the MTFP savings already identified the council will need to save a further £22M by 2018. Our council-wide transformation programme will help deliver these savings and will fundamentally change the organisational design of the council and the way we operate. We will need to manage these reductions carefully as our housing advice function is likely to be stretched with demand for advice, assistance and accommodation all increasing.

Consultation

See Appendix 2 for list of key consultees.

At the '**HMR stage**' 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. Internal council mechanisms were used to consult with other key internal 'partners' such as 'Supporting People', Liberata, public health, adult social care and children's services.

When we moved to developing the Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS), the '**PHS stage**', we carried out more extensive consultation, with an even wider group of stakeholders being sent a link to the council's Have Your Say webpage. On the webpage there was a draft of the PHS. This wider range of stakeholders included: elected Councillors, parish councils, HHPF partners and internal partners (again), the Housing Strategy database of consultees, equalities groups and the general public.

Summary of consultation responses at HMR stage:

Please note in this the main body of the report we have summarised consultation responses/comments, but more detailed comments will be considered as we move to the PHS stage. Full details of responses/comments are at Appendix 1 of this HMR.

Partner agencies

At the May meeting of the HHPF a presentation was given on the process of developing the HMR and PHS, plus an early draft of the HMR was provided alongside a short questionnaire. Four people from three different agencies made comments. Detailed responses at Appendix 1.

Q1. Generally, overall (see Q2 before answering this question), what do you feel are the (up to) 3 biggest challenges around preventing homelessness in North Somerset?

Summary of responses: the overwhelming feedback is the need for more accommodation especially smaller units, available quickly. Another issue is getting HB problems resolved more quickly.

Q2. More specifically, in your personal area of work (or specialism), what do you feel is the biggest challenge around preventing homelessness in North Somerset? (If not already covered in Q1 above)

Summary of responses: mismatch of benefit levels and rental costs are key issues; also the need for more prompt advice.

Q3. What action/s do you feel would improve the prevention of homelessness in North Somerset?

Summary of responses: The same as in summary for Qs 1 and 2.

North Somerset Council Staff

A short presentation was given to Housing Advice Team (HAT) and HomeChoice staff and there were 11 completed questionnaires. A draft of the HMR was also sent to a wide range of internal, NSC stakeholders for comment. A summary of the completed questionnaire responses is below. Comments were incorporated into the HMR.

Q1. **Generally, overall** (see Q2 before answering this question), what do you feel are the (up to) 3 biggest challenges around preventing homelessness in North Somerset?

Summary of responses: Staff concerns include the issue of affordability in the PRS, but also the issue of not enough housing which meets the needs of homeless households. Of course some issues such as the need for more disability adapted housing will also affect non-homeless households on the HomeChoice register and must be seen in that wider context.

Q2. **More specifically**, in your personal area of work (or specialism), what do you feel is the biggest challenge around preventing homelessness in North Somerset? (If not already covered in Q1 above)

Summary of responses: similar to Q1, but the problem of move-on from TA and supported housing was also a key concern.

Q3. What action/s do you feel would improve the prevention of homelessness in North Somerset?

Summary of responses: Some staff suggested that we could lease some properties from PRS landlords. This would transfer the risk of any vacant rental periods from landlords and guarantee them an uninterrupted cash flow. Given the throughput of clients we get there is no reason why a private leasing scheme should not be able to turn around properties quickly. Potential problem are if repairs are needed before a new household moves in and the expertise to manage such properties.

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 will be reflected in the PHS.

Summary of consultation responses at PHS stage:

In March 2017 a draft of both the Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) and the Homelessness Review (HMR) were placed on the council's 'Have Your Say' consultation webpage for period of six weeks. As well as being open to anyone accessing the council's website the consultation was drawn to the attention of a wide group of stakeholders e.g. members of the Housing and Homelessness Forum, parish councils, all elected members, housing associations operating in our district, all those invited to the North Somerset Homelessness Summit (see below); external partner agencies and NSC teams. The NS Homelessness Summit is to be convened after June 2017 to help establish the strategic partnership around rough sleeping, single homelessness, begging and street drinking that has been identified as an action in our PHS.

A total of five responses were engendered at this stage. We suspect this number may have been limited by the earlier consultation opportunities offered to a range of internal and external partners to shape the PHS and HMR, as outlined above.

We have set out the responses at the PHS stage in a table with the organisation making the comments, the comments they made and our response.

Organisation	They said	We did
A Parish Council	Voted in April 2017 to support the PHS	No action required.
An external partner 1	Some specific prevention projects not mentioned.	Reference now made to these in the HMR.
	PHS need more emphasis and priority on preventative services as opposed to accessing housing solutions (PRS and social).	We feel this is partly a matter of terminology, we refer to prevention as being all circumstances where because of early intervention a full homelessness duty has not been necessary. We feel the array of advice, outreach and support providers listed under Homelessness Resources are all preventative services as suggested by the respondent.
	Need to make link to empty homes (properties) agenda	A new footnote has been included showing the link to our Empty Properties Delivery Plan which seeks to reduce the number of empty homes in the district. One of the PHS actions is to explore whether Guardianship ⁴³ might work in NS. This is where empty commercial premises are used to house those threatened with homelessness.
	Not clear how actions (in action plan) will be delivered and read as aspirational	We have included some new text to explain that the PHS action plan, at this stage, sets out the 'broad headings' for the areas we and partners wish to improve and explore. In some cases, metrics on how we measure the success of actions will need to be added. The action plan is a 'live' document covering the five years of the PHS and actions will be enhanced, amended (with more detail) or even need to be replaced as circumstances change over this period. Finally the action plan will be monitored to

⁴³ Guardianship is where households threatened with homelessness live in empty commercial premises for low rents in return for keeping an eye on the property

Organisation	They said	We did
		ensure as much as possible is delivered.
	Felt HMR was quite wordy, move more of it in appendices.	We see the HMR as a more detailed, background document which can be used for reference and shows how we compiled evidence and came to the actions which are in the PHS. The PHS is the shorter more accessible way of seeing what the current position is and what is proposed. We will produce an Executive Summary version of the PHS once it is approved. On this basis we do not propose to change the format of the HMR.
	Unclear how the needs of Gypsies and Travellers are factored into the PHS	No specific homelessness services for Gypsies and Travellers are proposed because few members of these communities have presented as homeless historically and current services are able to respond well. We have explained some other changes which led to more engagement with these communities around the new site in Weston.
An external partner 2	Suggested amendments to the Support Alliance text in the HMR	Text updated - changes that happened since work on the PHS/HMR began.
	Suggested adding some more text to explain further and highlight better the improvements around hospital discharge	The text around hospital discharge has been expanded accordingly.
An external partner 3	Asked whether in the PHS Action Plan ST4 we meant by 'life skills training' the Life Skill tenancy training which Elim provides for the Support Alliance	We did mean to refer to this service and have amended the action accordingly.
An internal (NSC) partner	Limited reference to how this work contributes to the Corporate Plan	New text has been added to emphasise the links that exist from the PHS through to the Corporate Plan.
	Make explicit links to other areas of activity (e.g. Weston Town Centre regeneration, efforts to increase housing supply overall, the support we are providing to care leavers in the round to maintain their independence).	All these links are now included in the PHS as well as a number of others e.g. around the broader early intervention agenda, links between housing and employment.
Adult Services and Housing, Policy and Scrutiny Panel	There appears to be higher number of people begging, and whilst outreach work indicates most are not homeless, it is important to show in our PHS that	Some new text has been added to the PHS to explain how the council is working to tackle the adverse, anti-social effects of begging and street drinking as well as rough sleeping.

Organisation	They said	We did
	advice and support is on offer to anyone on the streets.	
	They wanted to see more emphasis on how engagement and partnership are being pursued in the PHS	We have revised the PHS to make clear our firm commitment to partnership and engagement.

Also significant in terms of consultation was taking the PHS and HMR to the **Adult Services and Housing, Policy and Scrutiny Panel** (ASH Panel) in March 2017. We have incorporated their major points in the table above. The ASH Panel noted some other key challenges already covered in the PHS notably, difficulties accessing homes in the PRS, the potential risk of more homelessness as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit and its link to rent arrears, a risk of homeless among care leavers, and the fact that the number of HomeChoice allocations was falling (hence less social homes available).

Key findings to inform priorities for the PHS 2017-22

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

The HMR highlights that welfare reform changes and high demand for PRS accommodation in North Somerset, means a key challenges are finding accommodation that the households we assist can afford and landlords willing to accept households in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB). 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 help to house. Dedicated staff work with both landlords and tenants to help find suitable accommodation at an affordable rent.

To help maximise supply 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/LHA⁴⁴ 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 pressure on social housing supply.

Table 20 (below) shows starkly how it has become much harder to tackle statutory homelessness and prevention cases with a home in the PRS, while reliance on the limited amount of social housing has grown. The table shows how the balance has shifted from 2010/11 when the majority of homelessness duty and prevention cases were helped with accommodation in the PRS. By 2015/16 the balance has shifted heavily in favour of social housing, and this is a key issue for the strategy.

⁴⁴ LHA = Local Housing Allowance, the name given to HB for private tenants

Table 20

Homeless and prevention cases housed in:	2010/11	% (1)	2015/16	% (1)
social housing		43%		72%
- discharge homelessness duty	55		69	
- prevention method	125		230	
TOTAL	180		299	
PRS housing with and without landlord incentives		57%		28%
- discharge homelessness duty	3		2	
- prevention method	232		117	
TOTAL	235		119	

(1) Percentage of all cases in this Figure

An additional issue is we can only discharge our homelessness duty to a household with a PRS tenancy if it is for at least 12 months. The majority of PRS landlords prefer the Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) with a term of only six months.

The HMR also shows that households 'falling out' of the PRS is major problem. The most common reason for presenting as homeless is 'the end of AST (Assured Shorthold Tenancy)'. There is a feeling that some landlords do not renew ASTs rather than take action for rent arrears and other tenancy breaches. If you combine the 'end of AST' and 'private rental arrears' as reasons for approaching the council as a homeless this represents about a third (32%) of all such cases (Table 6).

Pressure on temporary accommodation (TA)

The HMR found that due to decline in the availability of PRS accommodation and because RPs are becoming less likely to risk housing some very vulnerable people or people with a record of rent arrears; it is becoming harder to move households on from accommodation that was intended to be temporary. A new 'Finance and Support' model is being developed to give support to households in TA to help make them ready to take on more permanent tenancy. There is target in our Housing Strategy to review TA and emergency housing generally.

People with complex needs

The HMR confirmed the need to combat a 'perfect storm' of increased evictions and fewer accommodation options for this group. We are currently looking at ways to progress suitable and accessible housing options for those with complex needs. When we look at the priority need data (Table 8 and other commentary), 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. Complex needs can include a combination of mental health, alcohol, drugs and offending issues. Some of the small number of rough sleepers in our area also have complex needs.

Care leavers and vulnerable young people

The HMR explains how the council has a particular responsibility for ensuring care leavers and young people have suitable housing and support. Recognising this wider duty (corporate parenthood), 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 increasing (care leavers and

vulnerable young people were 1% of priority need cases in 2010/11, they are 11% in 2015/16) and this is a key issue for the strategy.

Partnership working

The HMR reaffirms our belief that homelessness is not something that can be tackled by one agency or service. Since our last Homelessness Strategy we have worked to improve multi-agency responses and partnerships. 'Working in partnership to tackle and prevent homelessness' is one of the 13 ambitions of our Housing Strategy. In particular where it is allowable we will seek to maximise where Housing Benefit and DHP can be used as a tool to prevent homelessness and mitigate any adverse effects of welfare reform.

An Appreciative Inquiry into homelessness by the People and Communities Board made a number of recommendations including to establish a new strategic partnership around rough sleeping and single homelessness, to bring key partners together to harmonise our efforts across stakeholders. The remit of this partnership will also include the issues of begging and street drinking which are often seen as associated with rough sleeping and homelessness.

Early intervention

The HMR also reaffirms the importance of preventing homelessness as early as possible to avoid more time consuming (and usually more expensive) interventions at a later date. We regularly review the way in which we deliver advice directly and in partnership. We will need to monitor trends to ensure our housing advice, engagement and homelessness services continue to meet needs and reflects our strong commitment to prevention. In our Housing Strategy is a commitment to achieve the Government's 'Gold Standard' for homelessness prevention (see Appendix 3). There will also need to be a review of how we deliver our prevention services in the light of the Homelessness Reduction Act which became law in April 2017, though its' major proposals are expected to come into effect in April 2018.

The analysis undertaken into repeat homelessness demonstrates the need to keep this issue under review. We looked at a large number of cases over three years where we accepted a prevention or homelessness responsibility (made a decision). Some types of cases such as those where there was multi-agency response have been excluded because ultimate resolution would not have rested solely with the HAT. Table 21 below shows our findings.

Table 21

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 results 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.

Developing housing solutions for disabled people

The HMR suggests that for disabled people experiencing homelessness the current range of housing on offer is not sufficient. Our PHS will aim to influence the housing available in the district so whether it be emergency, short-term or long-term housing it is suitable for disabled people and can help them work towards independent living. Our PHS will respond to information from the emerging Housing with Support Strategy (page 7).

Successes around housing for disabled people include our proactive approach to finding independent housing for people with learning difficulties (over 150 people moved to independent living since 2009). This approach is now being applied for those people with enduring mental health needs. In our Housing Strategy we have committed to continue to research and develop the evidence base for supported housing and then (in partnership) to deliver additional/remodelled supported housing schemes to meet the identified needs.

Hospital Discharge

The council and its partners continue to play our part in developing the very best possible services across housing, social services and the NHS to ensure a lack of housing options is not a reason why someone has to stay in hospital. We need to continue to build on the joint work we have undertaken recently to ensure there are effective arrangements in place to discharge homeless people from hospital and that the necessary support is available.

Rough sleeping

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.

'Family' Homelessness

As set 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. For families with children there is an opportunity to further develop links with other agencies such as children's centres to tackle to issues and impact of relationship breakdown.

The future of supported housing funding

As this PHS is being finalised central Government are intending to de-couple the rent and management elements of supported housing, and subject the rent part to LHA cap which applies to mainstream housing. Debate continues about how the remaining management part (which reflects the additional cost of managing specialist accommodation for vulnerable people) should be funded. There are concerns that if the amount allocated is too low some providers will leave the sector and it will be difficult to attract new providers to provide such housing.

Contact details and questions

For questions regarding the Homelessness Review (HMR) or Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) 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 – Consultation – detailed responses

Consultation responses at **Homelessness Review** stage:

Partner agencies

At the May meeting of the HHPF a presentation was given on this HMR plus an early draft of the HMR and short questionnaire. Four people from three different agencies had responses and comments and these are shown below. Comments made by more than one respondent are indicated with a number in brackets.

Q1. Generally, overall (see Q2 before answering this question), what do you feel are the (up to) 3 biggest challenges around preventing homelessness in North Somerset?

Lack of accommodation (3), especially smaller, one bed (2) whether Registered Provider⁴⁵ (RP) provided, PRS or supported housing (SH) (in particular SH for those with complex needs)

Shortage of reasonable accommodation that is genuinely affordable (2). The quality of the low cost, particularly one bedroom, accommodation is often very poor

There is very little shared room accommodation and with single, under 35 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) restrictions this is (all) they can afford

No 'urgent' facility with HB service to resolve issues that could prevent possession in PRS cases. Often agencies can sort out the problem, but private landlords are not always willing to wait before going to court

Lack of support/incentives for PRS landlords (either perceived or in practice) / having a support service for landlords - enabling landlords to have a direct contact who will assist with benefit problems, issues that jeopardise the maintenance of the tenancy. (Improve) NSC's relationship with the private rented sector as there is an overreliance on social housing

Need for a prevention fund (similar to the Welfare Provision Scheme)

Providing appropriate, affordable accommodation in a short period of time – and being able to access appropriate funds i.e. deposits, rent in advance and admin fees. Also sourcing landlords/letting agents who are willing to house those claiming HB

Being able to access support agencies / support workers who can help with benefit problems/applications immediately

Q2. More specifically, in your personal area of work (or specialism), what do you feel is the biggest challenge around preventing homelessness in North Somerset? (If not already covered in Q1 above)

Lack of reasonable quality, affordable, small accommodation

Introduction of LHA cap for social sector rents will lead to a need for different models to be developed i.e. shared housing and HMO's for under 35's

Increase LHA rates in line with current rent levels (includes rent control)

Providing affordable properties – i.e. reasonable top-up fees. NSC (Housing) used to say 'if

⁴⁵ AKA housing associations

someone has to pay more than £5 per week top-up, a property was deemed as unaffordable'. Some people are paying £60-100 per month top up from their benefit entitlement

Long-term, ring fenced funding for preventative services such as Supporting People type services / uncertainty of the future of supported housing

Easier access of direct payments to landlords

To get by financially, people take up loans and borrow from friends and family....this borrowing leads to debt, then rent arrears and will end up in an eviction notice

Tenants and Landlords need advocates who can support in sorting out problems and issues surrounding benefit applications

CAB drop in sessions are very busy and waiting times to see an advisor can be up to three hours. Tenants will not wait (and)...need easier access to info and advice advisors – maybe allocate one person to be on duty for a few hours each day at the Town Hall, Somewhere to Go etc. Signposting and networking information should be updated and circulated to all support agencies

An overreliance on social housing for discharging homelessness duty at a time that RPs are moving away from social rents and towards a more commercial market

Rent arrears and subsequent evictions caused by the introduction of the various strands of welfare reform

Cutbacks in Supporting People funding leading to a higher number of tenancy failures

(There is) less mental health support

(Problems with) affordability of RP accommodation

Q3. What action/s do you feel would improve the prevention of homelessness in North Somerset?

'Solutions'

Work with private landlords around shared accommodation, particularly with large properties that could be shared by four or five people. Give assistance with how to draw up tenancies and maintain these through some kind of incentive scheme. Manage expectations of those threatened with homelessness about what is likely to be available

Provide an 'urgent' email/telephone facility for agencies to use to contact HB service (Liberata) for those PRS cases where there is a HB issue and notice has been served due to this

Encourage landlords to improve the quality of accommodation they have.

Talk to owners of large vacant buildings e.g. old tax office to see if they would be willing to look at guardianship schemes and talk to other LAs, St Mungo's etc. to see if that can work in NSC

With the benefit cap changes coming and the risk of increased homelessness that will arise, do some preventative work with people at risk

There are a number of agencies providing advice and guidance in order to prevent homelessness and to sustain tenancies. However if ultimately there is no accommodation

provision there is no outcome other than well informed people who have explored all their options, but continue to be unable to source a safe, secure home. Providers will increasingly be forced to expect applicants to prove they are more 'vulnerable' than the next 'vulnerable' applicant as demand outstrips supply

Relaxation of planning restrictions, tax breaks, funding, grants and incentives for the PRS in the short-term, massive increase in state funding for social housing in the long-term

Landlords feel very vulnerable when rent payments made direct to the tenant. Under certain circumstances rent (paid by the HB contractor) will be paid direct, but only if supporting evidence is provided to support this action. With Universal Credit a landlord can still request direct payment via a form that needs to be completed. This is another process for the landlord to have to be involved in. It is much less hassle to let their properties to those who are working

Some clients are not good with paperwork – i.e. letters from the DWP⁴⁶, HB contractor etc. This paperwork needs to be responded to as quickly as possible in order that benefit delays or sanctions are not imposed. Paperwork should be shown to support workers (if in place) or be taken to the Town Hall. Many clients do not like accessing help in the formal surroundings of the Town Hall. Staff should be more aware that people are not always computer literate and their basic reading and writing skills are limited. ... clients having to wait at least a week before an office can assist them with form filling / processing. Trained staff (Alliance Living/YMCA) attend Somewhere to Go – some only once a fortnight – need more easily accessible staff available at different locations, on a regular basis - once a fortnight is not enough

Suitable, affordable accommodation needs to be provided – at present people are accepting properties and then finding that they cannot afford to pay their rent top-ups, living costs and utility bills. Many are getting into rent arrears and then being evicted and then they have to try and source alternative living accommodation – usually with no reference from their previous landlord and with a history of rent arrears

Improved communication between tenants and their landlords (either personally or via an advocate) – the landlord should feel able to contact any support worker etc. to advise them of any issues that could affect the tenant maintaining their tenancy. Support workers need to work on behalf of all parties i.e. landlord and tenant. Landlords have reported to me that they have felt 'let down' by some support agencies and then they will not consider tenants in the future who come with 'support packages'

More genuinely affordable housing options i.e. shared ownership / low cost shared ownership and private sector leasing schemes

RPs carrying out more stringent pre-tenancy sustainability checks for all new tenants. This would ensure fewer tenancies fail due to arrears, anti-social behaviour and a lack of appropriate support

More one bedroom accommodation for people looking to downsize due to bedroom tax

More shared accommodation for single people under 35 years old due to the introduction of the shared accommodation rate from April 2018

⁴⁶ Department of Work and Pensions

North Somerset Council Staff

A short presentation was given to Housing Advice Team (HAT) and HomeChoice staff and there were 11 completed questionnaires. A draft of the HMR was also sent to a wide range of internal, NSC stakeholders for comment. A summary of the completed questionnaire responses is below. Comments were incorporated into the HMR.

Q1. Generally, overall (see Q2 before answering this question), what do you feel are the (up to) 3 biggest challenges around preventing homelessness in North Somerset? Please number 1 to 3 in order of importance.

Shortage of PRS properties affordable for homeless households (7) inc. high rents (4), and PRS landlords not prepared to work with council (2), rent not below LHA rates (3)
Shortage of social housing properties (6)
Shortage of housing for households with complex issues that no accommodation provider inc. RPs is prepared to accept (4)
Shortage of suitable housing all tenures (3)
Not enough move-on housing for households in temporary or supported accommodation (2)
Bed spaces for people with mental health issues including those under 18 (2)
Lack of financial assistance to keep tenants in their PRS homes (rent arrears, HB issues, 'finder admin fees') (2)
Households in Band A/B for 1 bed general needs homes, not being housed quickly enough
Lack of accom. for under 35s
Shortage of supported housing
Shortage of properties for families with disabled children
Too much low level accom for young people (YP) when high support housing for complex needs (see above) needed
Shortage of emergency housing
Budget restraints, less services from provider agencies

Q2. More specifically, in your personal area of work (or specialism), what do you feel is the biggest challenge around preventing homelessness in North Somerset? (If not already covered in Q1 above)

Landlords unwilling to accept tenants on HB (3)
Lack of move-on from temporary accommodation (TA) and supported housing when ready to move on (3)
Complex needs not getting enough/right support (2) inc. RPs not always willing to house
High rents (2)
Need for guarantor in PRS, other PRS costs e.g. agency fees (2)
Shortage of social housing (2)
More supported accom. needed for high needs/chaotic clients (2)
RPs less likely to house tenants with any history of rent arrears, complex needs
Better joint working with relevant agencies to avoid ex-rough sleepers being evicted inc. from 'dry houses'
Landlords unwilling to accept tenants under 35
Lack of mental health support for YP
Need more accommodation for young offenders to avoid custody and on release
Getting more help from HB to keep people in their properties
Possible need to review banding
Shortage of properties with disabled families with children

Q3. What action/s do you feel would improve the prevention of homelessness in North Somerset?

'Solutions'

More incentives to/funding to access PRS (6) inc. rent in advance for several months (3) and

rent guarantees, insurance, cash deposits, pay above LHA, joint working with landlords (other PRS 'solutions' marked \$)
 More accommodation (4) inc. social housing suitable for disabled households, 1 and 2 bed social rent properties
 Education, stressing the lack of availability of (affordable housing), more joint working with education (2)
 Scheme to rent recover arrears (2)
 \$ Establish council Social Lettings Agency or private sector leasing (2)
 Free up housing by helping those who can buy outside social and PRS sectors (2)
 \$ Pay Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) much quicker, better liaison with HAT (2)
 More house-sharing for singles to make better use of the available accommodation (all tenures)
 Re-modelling 'hard to let' sheltered accom. for single people
 Slightly higher banding for prevention cases in Band B, 20 + 1 points to move them
 \$ Rent controls (would have to be national)
 \$ More realistic LHA rates (would have to be national)
 \$ More education for landlords to be more accepting of tenants receiving HB
 More high support units
 Make moving the last option, more resources into staying put
 More employment to get people off HB
 More mental health services e.g. complex needs, dual diagnosis

Consultation responses at **Preventing Homelessness Strategy** stage (generated by posting the draft PHS and HMR on the council's Have Your Say webpage):

Partner agencies

PHS/MHR underplays the importance of preventative services – e.g. in existing housing related (supporting people) support contracts ...(partners) deliver The Early Intervention Accommodation Project for ex-offenders, 'Skills for Life' training, 'Step Up' support for care leavers leaving care, the Home from Hospital service.
 Is the empty homes agenda relevant here?
 Generating more housing solutions (PRS or social) is not a quick fix...council needs to be doing everything possible to prioritise preventative services too
 Some of the actions read as 'aspirational' - it is unclear how they will be delivered e.g. 'work to increase affordable PRS supply...'
 The aspirations have been 'smartened' but it is still not overly clear how some of them will actually be delivered
 (PHS/HMR) quite wordy. Perhaps cut down the analysis and include as an appendix so it is easier to see the key issues, the actions required, and how they will be delivered Have the needs of Gypsies and Travellers been factored into the analysis?
 Recommend you speak with x about housing/hospital/social care partnerships, there's some good work being done
 Plexus aren't part of the Support Alliance, Chapter 1 are
 Alliance deliver the Home from Hospital service in partnership with WGH, which for some years have played a pivotal part in reducing unnecessary re. admissions and facilitating much timelier discharges then before, but aren't mentioned
 Skills for Life (should be) specifically referenced in this Strategy document

North Somerset

Strengthen reference to how this work (PHS) contributes to the Corporate Plan
 Make much explicit links to other areas of activity (e.g. Weston Town Centre regeneration, efforts to increase housing supply overall, the support NSC are providing to care leavers in the

round to maintain their independence).

Parish council

A parish council specifically voted to support this strategy.

Appendix 2 - Key stakeholders

Knightstone supported housing *
Sanctuary supported housing*
Health Trainers* INTERNAL
Gemini (DV Refuge and support)*
Supporting People* INTERNAL
Community Outreach Nurses/NHS*
Addaction (substance misuse)
Avon and Somerset Mental Health Partnership
NSC Health Trainer INTERNAL
Richmond Fellowship*
Curo HA*
British Legion*
Alliance Living*/ Alliance HA
Salvation Army*
Somewhere to Go*
Key Steps*
YMCA (Nightstop/rough sleeper outreach)*
St Mungo's*
Soup kitchen's rep*
NSC Housing Advice Service* INTERNAL
Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
PIPS
Alabare
Liberata INTERNAL⁴⁷
Plexus (formerly Chapter 1 HA)
Police
Probation
National Homelessness Advice Service
Adult Social Care inc. accommodation for people with learning difficulties and people with mental health needs INTERNAL
Children and Young People Services inc. leaving care service INTERNAL
Community Response and Community Safety⁴⁸ INTERNAL
Foodbank
Registered providers (some named individually above)
Supported housing providers (some named individually above)
Shelter
Integrated Hospital Discharge Scheme

* = members of the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Forum (HHPF)

⁴⁷ External contractor, but consulted via internal channels (a contractor for the council)

⁴⁸ Tackles anti-social behaviour

Appendix 3 – Progress towards the ‘Gold Standard’

We are committed to achieving the Government’s ‘Gold Standard’, which is a DCLG sponsored scheme for local authorities (LAs) to participate in and sets the bar for homelessness services, protecting the most vulnerable when they face homelessness. This is an on-going priority. To reach Gold Standard status, LAs will need to meet key commitments including:

- offering a comprehensive prevention service, with advice and support for single people as well as families in need
- working with local agencies to provide employment, education and training opportunities
- helping householders facing the threat of repossession by providing access to mortgage debt advice
- adopting a local No Second Night Out scheme to help prevent new rough sleepers from becoming entrenched into a street lifestyle

As part of our work to achieve the Gold Standard, we participated in peer reviewing two other LAs (Mendip and Bath) and have been reviewed ourselves. We scored 77% in this peer review which was the highest score in our sub region.

As a stepping stone to the Gold Standard we are aiming to achieve the Bronze level by December 2017.

Appendix 4 – Other Tables

Table A - Decisions made

	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Eligible, unintentionally homeless, and in priority need (1)	79	42	82	31	99	45	83	31	104	39	109	41
Eligible, in priority need, but intentionally homeless	7	4	29	11	10	5	9	3	9	3	9	3
Eligible, homeless, but not in priority need	36	19	74	28	26	12	62	23	54	20	59	22
Eligible, but not homeless	65	35	81	30	86	39	109	41	100	37	88	33
Ineligible household	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0.4	1	0.4	0	0
TOTAL	187	100	268	100	221	100	264	100	268	100	266	100

From P1E Section E1 (1) AKA full homelessness duty or accepted as homeless

Table A2 (dotted lines are trend lines)

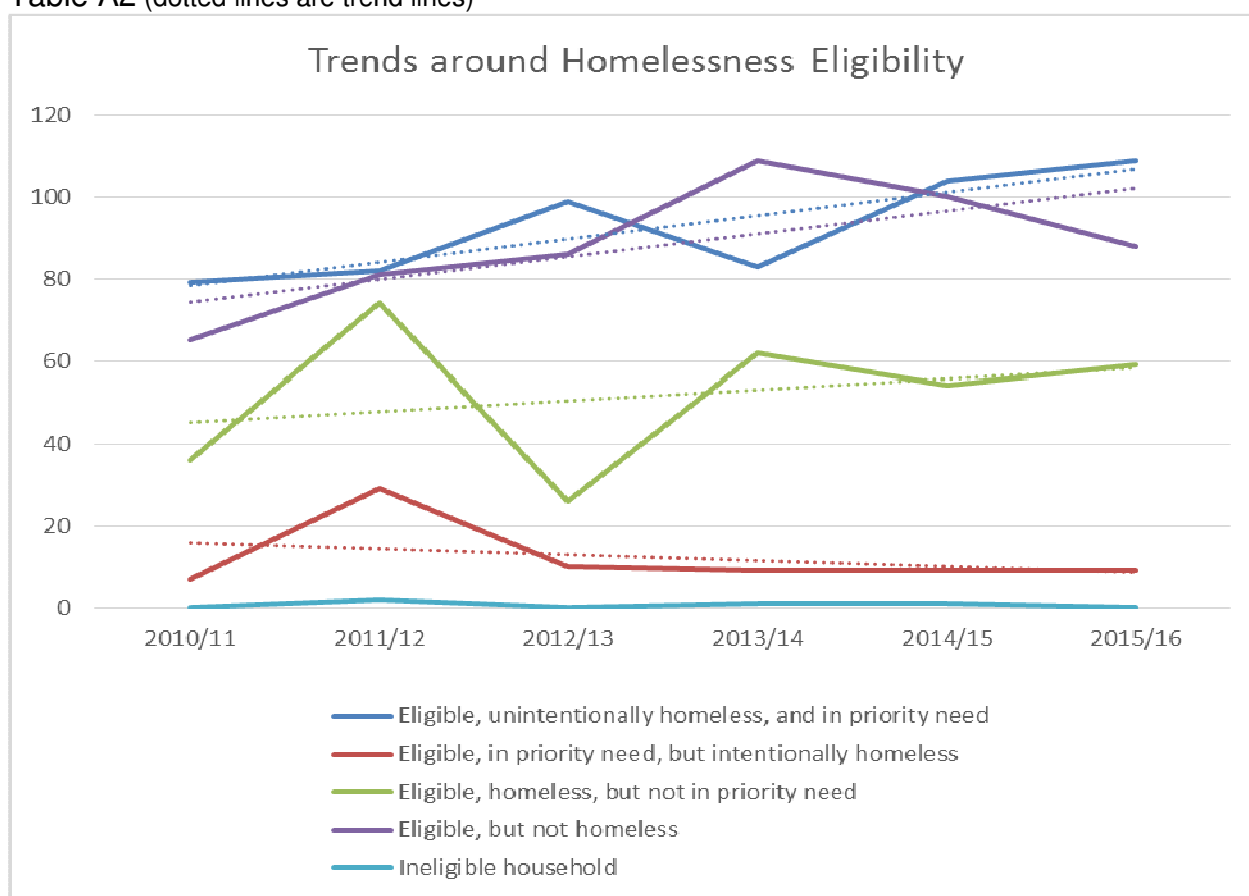


Table A is table which records the eligibility decisions made for all those households who applied to be accepted as homeless. One of the principles of dealing with homelessness is to prevent it as early as possible, therefore the need to minimise the number of full duty cases⁴⁹ is a consideration as the later households leave it to seek advice (i.e. are literally roofless) the more expensive the solution is likely to be. **The**

⁴⁹ As per Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended)

households in all the categories above will receive advice and assistance which might include accessing a long-term housing solution, but the absolute obligation to find a secure home is only to those accepted as homeless, those to which we have a full homelessness duty.

Table A2 gives a picture for the trends numerically for each category. We have already said in the main report that while the number of households 'accepted as homeless' has grown in line with the increase in overall homeless applications the percentage of those 'accepted as homeless' has fluctuated between 31% and 45% (between just over one in three and just over one in four cases) over the six years of our analysis. Despite a peak in 2011/12, since 2012/13 the number of 'intentionally homeless' households has plateaued. Households found 'not to be in priority need' have been on an upward trend numerically. In percentage terms (as a percentage of all homeless applications) this group has fluctuated from 12% (just under one in eight) to 28% (over one in four) of cases. This is the biggest percentage range, this category includes households without children and with no vulnerability or other priority need.

Households 'eligible, but not found to be not homeless' have also grown numerically on a very similar trajectory to overall applications. In percentage terms this group have been in the range of 30% and 41% (that's between just over one in three and one in every two and a half cases, a relatively small range). These are cases where mediation initiatives to help them remain in their own home are sometimes successful. Finally households found to be 'ineligible' have never been more than two cases and there have been none in three of the six years here.

Table B - Local Connection of those to whom full duty accepted

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Local connection with North Somerset	78	82	98	81	102	109
of which, accepted from other authorities	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referred to and accepted by other authorities	1	0	0	0	1	0
No connection anywhere	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	79	82	98	81	103	109

From P1E Section E4

Of those accepted as homeless in any one year between 98% and 100% have had a local connection to North Somerset.

Table C - Nationality of those approaching the council as homeless

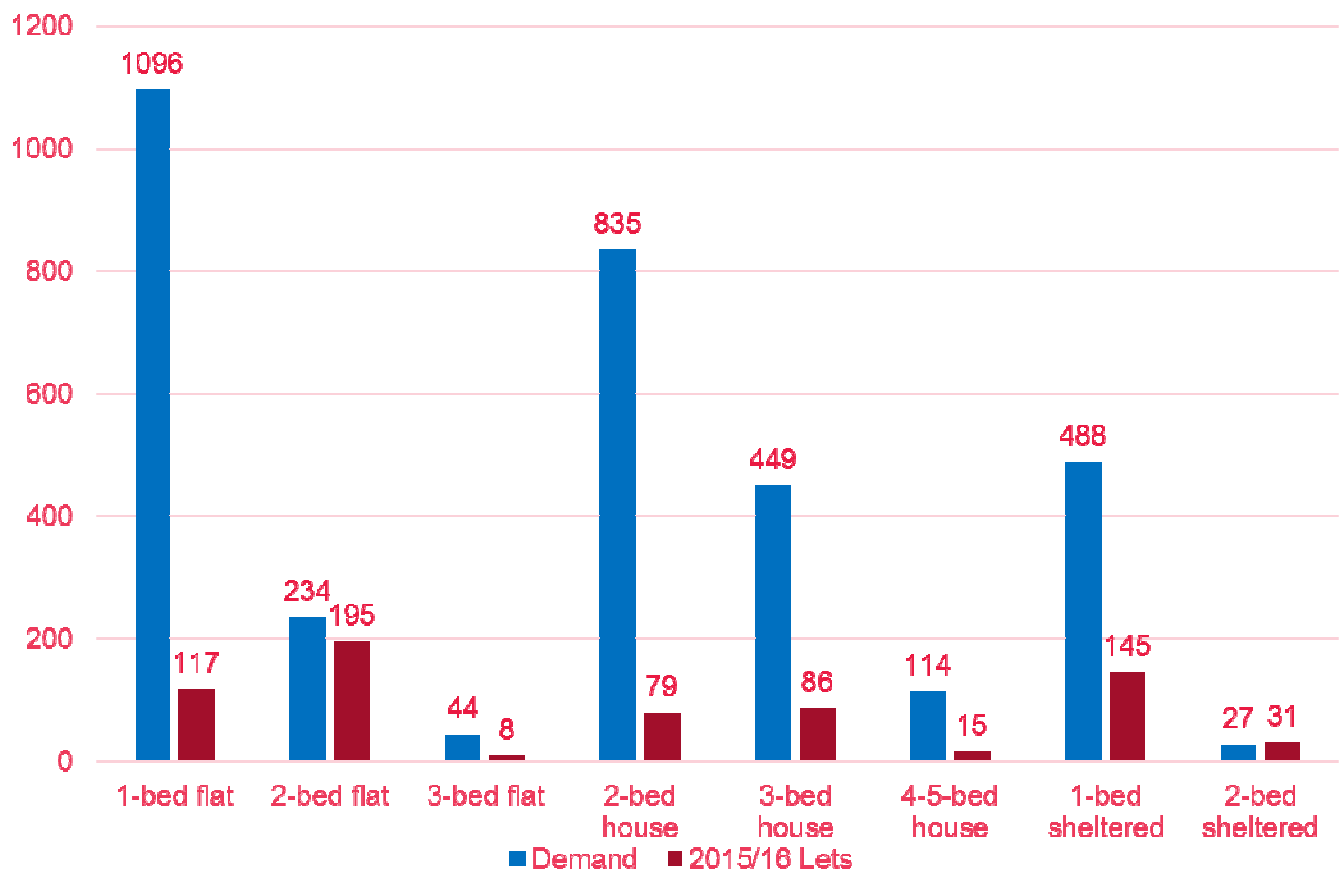
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
UK National (resident)	221	245	268	275
UK National (non dom)	1	0	0	0
European Economic Area (EEA) nationals from former Warsaw Pact countries and Croatia ⁵⁰	1	2	4	0
Other EEA nationals	1	3	3	1
Non-EEA nationals	7	4	3	1
Other	0	1	0	0
Not Stated	0	0	1	0
% non UK nationals of all approaches (1)	4.1%	3.7%	3.7%	0.7%
TOTAL	231	255	279	277

P1E Section E9

It became mandatory to record this information from 2012/13, before that most applicants did not provide this info. (1) Excludes other and not stated

The number and percentage of non UK national approaching the council as homeless is small in numerical and percentage terms.

Table D – Demand for social housing of different sizes compared to the lettings



⁵⁰ Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia