

## **5. Homelessness in Somerset and Taunton Deane**

The introduction of The Homeless Reduction Act in April 2018 has led to a significant increase (approximately 65% in Taunton Deane) through 2018/19 in the number of applications for interim domestic accommodation, as statutory thresholds have changed. Unsurprisingly, this has had a knock-on effect on demands on officer time as well as in the provision of such accommodation. Taunton has a team of 9 Housing Options Officers currently managing Homeless applications and, in addition to the statutory impacts driving up numbers, the service has also had to manage changes resulting from losing staff to other posts as a result of the Transformation project. Having to rely on agency staff would not normally have created significant challenges. However, given the current demand for experienced Housing Officers across England due to the recent legislation changes, we have experienced a relatively high turnover among our temporary staff and this in turn has led to cases taking longer to process as individuals and families change officers. The regrettable knock-on effect of this has seen users' time in temporary accommodation being prolonged.

Currently there is an interim management team in place consisting of 2 Senior Officers who have implemented new procedures to ensure consistency of approach and who are monitoring overall quality and performance. All placements have to be signed off, as do any 'Main duty' decisions – one where attempts at prevention and relief have not worked and so the affected individual or family is Temporary Accommodation. Focus has been put on prevention and making Personal Housing Plans more robust so as to reduce Bed and Breakfast placements. Currently we have 30 households in temporary accommodation, all self-contained units. With all of these, officers are currently working to find alternative, more permanent accommodation.

In Bed and Breakfast accommodation we currently have 8 individuals and 8 families. 1 family has been in B&B for longer than 6 weeks (the normal maximum) but the officer dealing with this case is being very pro-active in trying to find alternative accommodation. Wider influences have been rental prices in the District being significantly higher than Local Housing Allowance rates, meaning that many households are being priced out of the private rental market, and many do not have the guarantors required by landlords, which is excluding them. We are looking into finding some innovative incentives to help with this.

Social Housing is under immense pressure in Somerset. As of 31/12/18 the Homefinder register stood at 8,771, with 2,664 (30%) of these being registered in Taunton Deane. Numbers on the register have increased by 586 (7.2%) in the last year. Looking at this more closely, 1,339 are awaiting a 1-bed, 840 a 2-bed, 364 a 3-bed, 110 a 4-bed and 11 a 5-bed. 11% of accepted offers of accommodation went to households for whom we had accepted a duty to house.

These statistics readily show the pressure on single person households requiring accommodation, this is found in our homeless cases as part of the reason for increased single B&B placements is due to the increase in single people with multiple complex needs which is impacted by a reduction of provision by other service providers.