

**SWT Community Scrutiny
Committee**

**Thursday, 29th July, 2021,
6.15 pm**

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

**The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House**

Members: Libby Lisgo (Chair), Dave Mansell (Vice-Chair), Simon Coles, Kelly Durdan, John Hunt, Dawn Johnson, Richard Lees, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Andy Pritchard, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Ray Tully and Sarah Wakefield

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 30 June 2021

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 30 June 2021.

(Pages 5 - 12)

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

4. Public Participation

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak

before Councillors debate the issue.

Temporary measures during the Coronavirus pandemic

Due to the temporary legislation (within the Coronavirus Act 2020, which allowed for use of virtual meetings) coming to an end on 6 May 2021, the council's committee meetings will now take place in the office buildings at the John Meikle Room, Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton. Unfortunately due to capacity requirements the Chamber at West Somerset House is not able to be used at this current moment.

Following the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), the council meeting rooms will have very limited capacity. With this in mind, we will only be allowing those members of the public who have registered to speak to attend the meetings in person at the office buildings, if they wish. (We will still be offering to those members of the public that are not comfortable in attending, for their statements to be read out by a member of the Governance team). Please can we urge all members of the public who are only interested in listening to the debate to view our live webcasts from the safety of their own home to help prevent the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

- 5. Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers** (Pages 13 - 14)

To update the Community Scrutiny Committee on the progress of resolutions and recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee.
- 6. Community Scrutiny Forward Plan** (Pages 15 - 16)

To receive items and review the Forward Plan.
- 7. Executive and Full Council Forward Plans** (Pages 17 - 22)

To review the Forward Plans of the Executive and Full Council.
- 8. Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy & Delivery Plan** (Pages 23 - 68)
- 9. Access to Information - Exclusion of Press and Public**

During discussion of the following item it will be necessary to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 13 13.02(e) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public

may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Community Scrutiny Committee will need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Recommend that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

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| 10. Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper
Accommodation Strategy & Delivery Plan - Confidential
Appendix 2. | (Pages 69 - 82) |
| 11. Executive Cllr PFH Session - Cllr Fran Smith (Housing) | (Pages 83 - 96) |



**JAMES HASSETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded and webcast. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chair will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate. Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chair will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room. Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

The meeting room, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room, is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

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SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 30 June 2021

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Simon Coles, John Hunt, Dawn Johnson, Richard Lees, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Andy Pritchard, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Sarah Wakefield and John Hassall

Officers: Andrew Randell, Marcus Prouse, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard and Tracey Meadows

Also Present: Councillors Marcus Kravis, Derek Perry, Mike Rigby, Nick Thwaites and Brenda Weston

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

10. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Trollope-Bellew, Tully and Durdan.

Councillors Thwaites, Hassall and Whetlor attended as substitutes.

Councillors Ellis, Darch, Sully and Tully attended remotely

Stuart Noyce attended remotely.

11. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 30 June 2021.

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021 were approved.

12. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Pilkington and Prior Sankey made declarations of personal interest having known Lori Busch who was attending the meeting to make a statement under Public Question Time.

13. Public Participation

The following statement from Lori Busch was read out on behalf of the Mankind initiative:-

I would like to thank the scrutiny committee for once again considering the issue of the historic property Flook House. I am grateful that the strong feelings of the scrutiny committee members in December have led to the development of a working committee which has put forward other options for the building.

It is unfortunate that the timing of the formation of the committee meant that it missed the deadline for some funding that could have been very useful.

I represent a national charity supporting victims of domestic abuse. We choose to base our national charity in Taunton, employing Somerset staff and the only statutory funding we receive is the charity rate relief thanks to the Taunton councillors who support our application.

As a tenant of Flook House, a building of significant historic importance dating back well into the 1700's with features such as a first floor overmantle dating back to 1652 documented in books, I wish to once again put on record my formal objection to the proposal for demolition of this historic asset and the implications of combining it with a toilet block to just cast its history aside. It is an insult to the building, the Town and the residents to put the worth of this historic building with a toilet block in your plans .

Flook House is mentioned in historical documents stating that John Trenchard MP resided there during the election of 1715. It was where he wrote "The Whig" and it was the site of many weddings, and registrations of births and deaths while it was the registry office. I have also had people mention to me their fond memories of the 1960's when they used to have their school lunches there while attending North Town School. It still surprises me that this historic building is not listed.

It is amazing that this lovely "quirky" (a word used by a member of the December 2020 scrutiny committee) building of significant historic interest that is over 300 years old survived the historic floods of 1889 and 1960, only for a proposal for it to put forward in December of 2020 for it to be bulldozed and grassed over. I am new to Taunton, having only lived here for 19 years, but this building is older than my birth country, Canada and I am disappointed that its history is seemingly so undervalued.

I do believe there are other options for this building of significant historical interest that should be explored and am pleased to see in the report that the tenants have the ability to extend their leases to give them some security and the council the security of the income. It is unfortunate that this decision comes after two of the other tenants departed due to the insecurity.

I am pleased to have the support of some of the councillors regarding the future of the building. I have also had discussions with a councillor about how public access could be facilitated to areas such as the former marriage room and am happy to have those same discussions with others should they wish to contact me for my views.

I do however disagree with section 9.1 which states "There are community safety and antisocial behaviour issues that occur in and around the property. " There are to my knowledge no community safety or anti-social behaviour issues that occur in the property. The issues in the grounds around Flook House are not caused by the building and to intimate that the removal of the building would solve them is false. No one that I am aware of objects to the demolition of the decommissioned toilet block and the proper maintenance and lowering of the raised flower beds would remove a lot of the unacceptable behaviour that goes on within them.

I wish to again thank the Scrutiny Committee for allowing me to be heard on this important issue of a building of cultural and heritage significance.

14. **Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

Following an update the recommendation tracker was noted.

15. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

A request was made for an item of the Unitary Council to be added to the forward plan once a decision had been made.

The Community Scrutiny Forward Plan was noted.

16. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Executive and Full Council Forward Plans were noted.

17. **Future of Flook House, Belvedere Road**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report

The report of the Member Working Group which was created by the Executive to consider options for Flook House, it provides feedback on their considerations and puts forward a recommendation to progress these further.

Following on from the report to Executive in December 2020 the portfolio holder agreed to set up a Member Working Group (MWG) to consider the future of Flook House and the immediate surrounding area. During this time expenditure on compliance matters has continued.

The report does not make a specific, costed recommendation, instead it identifies preferences from the Member Working Group. A key recommendation being to retain the Flook House building, this is a significant diversion from the previous report.

The MWG had no budget to engage specialists or architects and this has hampered their ability to create a shortlist of costed options.

A number of decisions we made by the portfolio holder during the term of the group, these include a decision to demolish the old toilet block, and a decision to offer up lease extension of up to 12 months for new or existing tenants that don't currently claim a protected status.

Considerable discussion on the future of the Flook House building was held at Scrutiny and Executive committees with a Member Working Group being created as a result. The challenge faced by the group was to consider the future of the building and the immediate surrounding area against the backdrop of rising capital costs, the maintenance needs of the building and reducing tenancies and therefore income. The original report was brought at a time when a decision was needed to invest £22,000 on compliance works. These compliance works had now been commissioned.

As a result of the pandemic and the closure of Somerset West and Taunton Council offices, the parts of the building used by SWT had been empty throughout lockdown. At the same time improved technology had been implemented for employees making the transition away from that space for the Council's own requirements easier.

The group set out to establish how the building might be used to increase income and make it self-financing. Whilst there are many options for the space the ability to make it self financing are reduced by the standard of that space and the costs of operating within a building of that age. Tenants paid a below market rate for their space and future tenancies are unlikely to change that position.

There had been government grant opportunities for public buildings over the time of the groups operation, however it was not considered that Flook House met the criteria for these grants. Whilst the building was in public ownership was not a publicly accessible building, and to make it one for the purposes of the grant would be difficult and pose issues for existing tenants.

The group established early on that they wished to see the Council retain Flook House and in order to do so there would need to establish other income streams within the surrounding land (although this isn't necessarily the only option) to fund both the capital improvements and the revenue costs.

The high level options for Flook House considered by the group were: Demolish – not supported
Dispose – not supported
Convert for housing – not supported due to complexities of the building
Continue to let – supported

The preference to continue to let Flook House was supported on the basis that the group wanted to keep the building and the other options to do so would be difficult and costly to implement. There was considerable discussion regarding the use types sought, and the tenants and tenancies that would be preferred as there are a range of options including the current use types through to a community hub, Town Council offices, art gallery / studio space, etc. It would be for the portfolio holder with the views of the MWG to consider the uses of the Flook House space based on the interest received.

The group recognised that further work would be needed to establish which uses would bring value to the Council in terms of social benefit as well as finance. Marketing of the space would also be needed to establish the demand and assess income expectations for the Council. It was decided that lease extension and new leases would be offered whilst a more in depth review is carried out as per the recommendations. It is for this reason that short term leases and extension are to be offered whilst a further review is underway.

Members of the group identified that financial support may best be achieved by developing the land around Flook House for housing. The budget requested would allow officers, with the ongoing support of the group, to engage architects and take pre planning advice on the type and density of scheme that might be supported. Without this information it is difficult to establish likely construction cost and resale values to cover the capital works, or rental values to cover the ongoing revenue costs of Flook House.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Whilst the building had some historical significance, it was in doubt that the Council could afford the ongoing maintenance, let alone the cost of a full refurbish or refitting of the building. It was considered that there was sufficient space at The Deane House which could be let out to the charities who were the existing tenants at Flook House.
- Value for money for taxpayers needed to be taken into account in respect of the future uses of the building.
- Keeping the building was thought to be worthwhile and keeping it for its historic value and restoring it had some support from committee members.
- Full costings needed to be drawn up to understand what the ongoing liability would be to preserve it for future use. It was recognised whatever solution there were costs involved.
- It was questioned if the recommendations were those of the working group, it was confirmed that they were supported by the working group and endorsed by the Portfolio Holder.

- Developing the surrounding area of the building as part of any solution was supported.
- It was questioned what type of housing was considered for the building.
- Bringing it back to a reasonable standard for the required capital work to ensure that its fit for use was encouraged, the capital sum was considered a reasonable amount.
- The survey costs would be included in the £125k. This would form part of the budget setting process and resource allocation process.
- Retaining the building was the popular view from elected members, although there had been no consensus reached in relation to the future use of the building.
- Concern was expressed over the makeup of the working group and lack of officer involvement along with Portfolio Holder involvement.
- The working group was a mix of Councillors from all parties with the membership provided to the committee.
- It was questioned what parcel of land across Flook House was included.
- The feasibility study considered developing the area, not the internal works addressing the building.
- The challenges the member working group tackled was the area surrounding the building and not just the future of the building itself.
- Exploring the idea of a foyer housing project was encouraged in enabling young people secure supported housing.
- YMCA could bid for financial support from Homes England which was worth investigating and considering.
- The historic and heritage value was reiterated, better short term use was encouraged with the potential for better public use. Decarbonisation funds could be applied for and help secure its long term future for the community.
- It was recognised there could be a range of future uses to save the building.
- It was questioned if the rent would cover the yearly maintenance of the building.
- Future use of the building and site would be part of the feasibility study.

Community Scrutiny supported the following recommendations proposed by the Working Group to the Executive:-

1. That the Executive retain Flook House for its historical interest and potential future social value.
2. That the Executive establish a new project as part of the business planning process for 2022/23. Taking forward the feasibility works for potential development of the area including the retention of Flook House as part of the longer term solution.
3. That Executive support a new budget of £125,000 as part of the business planning process for 2022/23 to provide project management resource, engage architects, and the other necessary specialists to produce a costed business case.
4. That Executive continue the Member Working Group to support the project and Portfolio Holder, if 2 and 3 are approved.

18. **Verbal Update - Executive Cllr PFH Session - Cllr Derek Perry (Sports Parks and Leisure)**

The Portfolio Holder for Sports, Parks and Leisure introduced the report setting out an update in relation to work in the Council across this area..

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Complaints around Vivary park paths and resurfacing issues had been made, an update was requested in relation to this.
- Outreach from the leisure contract beyond central towns was questioned.
- Developing outreach work was part of the contract and further work around this was ongoing.
- Adding an everyone active update at a future Scrutiny Committee was requested
- It was questioned if more could be done to support youth activities
- Costs for play park equipment remained high. It was recognised that more was needed to be done to supply leisure and play equipment for more remote areas.
- Adopting approaches for grass cutting using geofencing technology and digitally marking using satellite technology was used, to ensure areas that require cutting are scheduled alongside areas where due to the natural habitat the grass could be left to grow.
- The committee requested future emphasis on ensuring sports facilities using section 106 funding could be built for communities.
- Increased grounds maintenance and public seating provision across the West Somerset area was requested.
- Officers were thanked for the recent Councillor tour of the Crematorium.
- Improving and updating parks across the district was encouraged by Councillors.

The committee noted the update

19. **Verbal Update from PFH on the Introduction of Parking Electronic Permits & P&D - Cllr M Rigby**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation provided the verbal update in relation to the Introduction of Electronic Parking Permits and recent developments in parking payment provision.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Concerns were expressed in relation to digital by default solutions being applied to parking without consultation with communities and stakeholders.
- The transition and introduction of new payment methodology was considered too soon for users of car parks in the old West Somerset area, due to technical issues, the poor mobile phone coverage and ageing population.
- No consultation with Councillors or members of the public was a key concern with the new car parking system. The committee were of the view that trials should have been made to new technologies before implementation.
- Councillors encouraged consultation with elected members and members of the public as part of the parking review.
- Systems enabling all members of the public to operate this was encouraged to ensure a smooth implementation.
- It was acknowledged that testing was required before new car parking technology was introduced in the future. The committee were thanked for their feedback and views on the future of car parking across the district.

The Committee noted the update.

(The Meeting ended at 9.03 pm)

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2021/22

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date response of	Scrutiny Officer Comments/Update
30/06/21	- Q) to Cllr Perry PFH - Why are the fountains not on in SWT Parks?	Cllr Perry – Parks and OS			
	Cllr				

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY

Meeting	Draft Agenda Items	Lead PFH/ Lead Officer	Executive Report?
29th July 2021	Single Homelessness Accomodation Strategy	Cllr F Smith/ M. Leeman	Yes
Report Deadline	Executive Cllr PFH Session - Cllr Fran Smith (Housing)	Cllr Fran Smith	
19 July 2021			
26th August 2021	Possible cancellation		
Report Deadline			
16 August			
30th September 2021			
Report Deadline			
20 September			
28th October 2021	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review	Cllr C. Booth / S. Weetch	Yes
Report Deadline	Executive Cllr PFH Session - Cllr C Booth (Community)	Cllr C Booth	
18 October	<i>Avon and Somerset Police</i>		
24th November 2021	CNCR Plan (to incorporate ecological emergency)	Sue Tomlinson	
Report Deadline	Housing Retrofitting Task and Finish Group		
12 November			
6th January 2022	Car Parking/ Introduction of Parking Electronic Permits and Pay & Display	Cllr M. Rigby / S. Noyce	No
Report Deadline	HRA Budget Report	Paul F/ Emily C/ James B	
23 December			
27th January 2022			
Report Deadline			

Executive Meeting	Draft Agenda Items
21 July 2021	Belvedere Road Public Space
venue =	2020/21 Financial Outturn
Exec RD = 9 July	Financial Strategy 2021-2023
Informal Exec RD = 8 June	Corporate Performance Report
SMT RD = 26 May	Corporate Volunteering Policy and Procedures
18 August 2021	Single Homeless accommodation strategy and delivery plan
venue =	Employment Land Feasibility Study in West Somerset
Exec RD = 6 August	Levelling Up Bid
Informal Exec RD = 6 July	
SMT RD = 23 June	
15 September 2021	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q1
venue =	Corporate Performance Report
Exec RD = 3 September	Longforth Masterplan
Informal Exec RD = 3 August	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan
SMT RD = 21 July	
20 October 2021	Tower Street
venue =	
Exec RD = 8 October	
Informal Exec RD = 7 September	
SMT RD = 24 August	
17 November 2021	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review
venue =	General Fund 2022/23 Draft Budget Update

Exec RD = 5 November	Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 Draft Budget Update
Informal Exec RD = 5 October	Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town – Feedback
SMT RD = 22 September	Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide
15 December 2021	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q2
venue =	Corporate Performance Report
Exec RD = 3 December	
Informal Exec RD = 2 November	
SMT RD = 20 October	
19 January 2022	CCTV
venue =	Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 Budget
Exec RD = 7 January	
Informal Exec RD = 30 November	
SMT RD = 17 November	
Budget - 9 February 2022	General Fund 2022/23 Budget
venue =	Council Tax Resolution 2022/23?
Exec RD = 28 January	
Informal Exec RD = 4 January	
SMT RD = 8 December	
16 February 2022	
venue =	
Exec RD = 4 February	
Informal Exec RD = 4 January	
SMT RD = 8 December	

16 March 2022	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q3
venue =	Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategy 2022/23
Exec RD = 4 March	Corporate Performance Report
Informal Exec RD = 1 February	
SMT RD = 19 January	
20 April 2022	
venue =	
Exec RD = 8 April	
Informal Exec RD = 8 March	
SMT RD = 23 February	
Items to be Confirmed	

FULL COUNCIL

Meeting	Report Deadline	Draft Agenda Items
27 July 2021	15 July 2021	Review of the Commercial Property Investment Activity and Performance Report
		Skatepark Petition Update (within PFH report)
		Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton - Publication of Terms of Reference - DEFERRED
		Decisions taken under the urgency rules
		Motion from Cllr Wakefield
		Future High Street Fund Award
		Political Allocations (after by-elections)
		Cultural Strategy
		Outside Bodies Update
		NO MORE ITEMS
7 September 2021	25 August 2021	Single Homeless accommodation strategy and delivery plan
		Employment Land Feasibility Study in West Somerset
		Financial Strategy 2021-2023
		Corporate Volunteering Policy and Procedures
		Levelling Up Bid
		Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton - Publication of Terms of Reference
		NO MORE ITEMS
7 December 2021	25 November 2021	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review
		Tower Street
		Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town – Feedback
		Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide
		Annual Review of the Commercial Property Investment Strategy
		Longforth Masterplan
		Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan
8 February 2022	27 January 2022	CCTV
		Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 Budget

24 February 2022	14 February 2022	General Fund 2022/23 Budget
Budget Only		Council Tax Resolution 2022/23
		NO MORE ITEMS
29 March 2022	17 March 2022	Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategy 2022/23
10 May 2022	28 April 2022	Annual Council Meeting
		Council Committees for 2021/2022 and their Terms of Reference
		Appointment of Representatives on Outside Bodies
		To authorise the sealing or signing of documents to give effect to any decisions taken

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Community Scrutiny – 29th July 2021

Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy & Delivery Plan

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Fran Smith (Housing)

Report Authors: This report has been prepared by the following:

Single Homelessness and Rough sleeper Accommodation Strategy: **Mark Leeman** (Strategy Specialist, Housing) and **Simon Lewis** (AD – Housing and Communities)

Delivery Plan and Funding Request: **Chris Brown** (AD – Strategy, Development and Regeneration)

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 SWT has a significant challenge in meeting the accommodation needs for single homeless customers. This challenge will be exacerbated by both the need to decant Canonsgrove (homeless campus) by 2023, and the expected general increase in homelessness that is forecast as a result of the easing of Lockdown restrictions (i.e. end of furlough, end of the ban on evictions and the end of the uplift on Universal Credit payments).
- 1.2 To meet this challenge, SWT has prepared the following:
 - Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy
 - Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation – Delivery Plan
- 1.3 The Strategy identifies the demand, splits this down by specific need, and puts in place an end-to-end process of interventions, from early help through tenancy support. SWT and provider partners have significant control over much of the strategy, although we are reliant on strong partnership working to deliver the necessary support services
- 1.4 The delivery plan looks at the accommodation and support requirements and identifies how these may best be delivered, whether that is through partner providers (preferred) or whether this is through direct intervention by SWT. The delivery plan makes specific request for additional capital (£1.55M) and revenue expenditure, both of which are necessary to enable the effective delivery of the strategy.

2 Recommendations

2.1 The recommendations to be considered by Full Council will be:

- a) Adopt the Single Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy (SHRSAS) (Appendix 1) and associated Delivery Plan (Confidential Appendix 2).

- b) To approve a supplementary General Fund capital budget of £1.55m as set out in section 6 and Confidential appendix 2.
- c) To delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to make the final funding decision for any capital budgets used in the GF or HRA, including any reallocation of part of the capital budget (b) from the General Fund to the HRA.
- d) For members to note the predicted increase in revenue costs 2022-2025, and to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to agree the revenue funding allocations 2022-2025 through a combination of homelessness earmarked reserves, future successful bids for government grant, and Better Care Fund grant (subject to Health and Wellbeing Board approval on 16th September 2021).

3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

- 3.1 There are no corporate risks that are directly relevant to this proposal. However, it should be noted that the implementation timeframe (2021-2027) is within the period for the establishment of a Unitary Authority.
- 3.2 Housing Directorate risks HC39 and Corporate Risks CR28 are directly relevant i.e. failure to deliver a prevention-based homelessness service and providing alternative provision to Canonsgrove.
- 3.3 Significantly, if successful, the strategy and delivery plan will help us move to a position of more financial stability within the Housing Options Service, as we become less reliant on the need for costly B&B accommodation and are able to invest in prevention based services such as floating support. Collectively this will help reduce the risks that we currently face around spend and improve the safety/health outcomes for our vulnerable customers.
- 3.4 There are several risks associated with the delivery of the strategy:
- 3.5 We need to act quickly to facilitate the decant of Canonsgrove and find/deliver alternative accommodation options. This needs to be done by Spring 2023, which is significantly in advance of the end date of strategy that is set at 2027. Elements of the strategy, such as changes to strategic commissioning arrangements, are likely to take longer to deliver than the end date of 2023. The debate around strategic commissioning will take place within multi-agency partnerships such as the Homelessness Reduction Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board. Such conversations will also be an integral component to the Unitary debate. Maintaining good partnership working is essential.
- 3.6 Whilst delivering a successful decant of Canonsgrove by March 2023 officers are considering how demand would be managed should sufficient alternative new supply not be achieved in time. Alternatives will include selective use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, new lease arrangements and a return to streets.
- 3.7 Providing additional 'move-on' accommodation is essential to the delivery of the strategy in the short, medium and long term. Supported accommodation becomes 'silted' without 'move-on' options. However, move-on accommodation (often 1 bed units/shared facilities) are not always easy to provide. Nor are they very popular within the financial portfolio of registered providers. The lack of 'move-on' could present a significant risk and work with the council's housing service, emerging corporate company, housing association partners and the private rented sector will need to be an ongoing activity.
- 3.8 Financial risks are in respect of projected reductions in B&B costs through the planned intervention being successful, and securing funding as identified in this report across

the period 2022-2025 to mitigate the additional costs of this expanded discretionary service provision.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy

4.1 The draft Single Homelessness Accommodation Strategy was previously considered by Scrutiny on 3rd March 2021, and by Executive on 17th March 2021. The draft was then presented as a background paper to inform the options appraisal for delivering future single homeless and rough sleeper accommodation in SWT. The expectation was that the draft accommodation strategy should be brought back for full consideration and approval.

4.2 A link to the previous report to the Executive can be found here:

[Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset .pdf \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/Options%20Appraisal%20for%20Delivering%20Future%20Single%20Rough%20Sleeper%20and%20Homeless%20Accommodation%20in%20Somerset.pdf)

4.3 That report (Executive – March 2021) explains the reasoning for and purpose of a single homelessness accommodation strategy for SWT.

4.4 The basic premise of the strategy remains unchanged:

- To reduce the Council's dependency on Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- Provide directly or through partners the accommodation required to support the Council's statutory obligation and any additional voluntary obligation to support single homeless
- Provide accommodation which will maximise the opportunities for complex single homeless to stabilise their lives and present the opportunity for them to sustain a tenancy or other form of settled accommodation. This will mean a potential change for elements of the current supply of accommodation, and the use of new and existing investment and support models
- Identify investment models which are sufficiently flexible to manage the scale and the fluid nature of homelessness. This is essential to ensure the Council de-risks its own investment and critically, partners feel able to participate and invest their funds appropriately to support the Council's strategy
- Work with the Homeless Reduction Board to progress their commissioning role to enable commissioning partners to bend their revenue spend to improve the support to homeless customers. Success in this area should allow confidence for partners to invest capital but also reduce the concerns raised by MHCLG in relation to SWT's housing benefit levels for complex need single homeless households.
- To help facilitate the successful decant of Canonsgrove over the next 18 months
- To end rough sleeping across SWT by 2027

4.5 Since initial consideration by Scrutiny and the Executive, the SHRSAS has been refined to now include the following:

- Amended *vision statement* to reflect the essential emphasis on early help and prevention
- *Objectives* have been refined and sharpened
- Calculations relating to *demand* have been updated

- A clearer picture of *demand, broken down by levels of need* (i.e. none, low, medium and high)
- More detail on the work required to develop future *commissioning* arrangements
- More clarity on the *accommodation options* that we are currently considering
- *Finances* – more clarity on sources of capital and revenue funding

4.6 A Delivery Plan to support the early implementation of the Strategy is attached at confidential Appendix 2. The Delivery Plan sets out a route to achieving the Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy ambition by 2027. However, the loss of bedspaces at Canonsgrove by March 2023 means new supply is front loaded in the delivery plan and changes to the Council's and partners services needs to be embedded early. The repurposing and/or redesign of some accommodation is also front loaded to help ensure the current accommodation supply is being used to its optimum to support the wide range of customer needs efficiently. These often complex actions mean significant resources in personnel and finance are required up to March 2023. The Plan provides a timeline, financial requirement and milestones whereby the progress of the strategy can be measured.

4.7 The delivery plan is proposing to work with a number of small voluntary organisations to provide some of the new supply. This include exploring new models of delivery such as Malachi project with Citizens Somerset and Green Pastures funding model with Canon Street and Trull churches. Officers are recommending to the Council the lease of a meanwhile site to Citizens Somerset/Salvation Army for a 10year period with the opportunity for additional extention periods of five years subject to mutual agreement. A meanwhile site is a site which is awaiting development and can be put to a meanwhile use. The meanwhile site will be a HRA underused garage site. The properties will be removed by the Salvation Army when the lease ends. This project is subject to grant support and if progressed the council will carry out consultation and preparatory works ready to hand over the site. Officers are requesting delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer, Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Director of Housing to lease HRA land (garage site). The approval of the portfolio holder will only be sought after consultation with local members. See section 14.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

5.1 The report and its recommendations strongly support our 'Homes and Communities' corporate priority and in particular the Council's ambition to "work to end homelessness and rough sleeping in the District."

6 Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 The Single Homeless Accommodation Delivery Plan aims to reduce the Council's dependency on bed & breakfast accommodation currently funded by the General Fund Homelessness budget, to facilitate the successful decant of Canonsgrove over the next 18 months, and to end rough sleeping across the District by 2027.

6.2 The successful delivery of the Single Homeless Accommodation Delivery Plan is dependent on financial support being provided by SWT, by both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Given the existing financial pressures recognised in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), affordability is a real challenge. Significant investment is also required by partners and/or increased government funding for the plans in this report to be affordable.

- 6.3 Members should note that possible impact on the MTFP in respect of this Plan, however the intent is to fund the additional costs through a combination of Better Care Fund grant income, homelessness earmarked reserves (in 2022/23), and will pursue successful bids for further government grant funding. This should provide sufficient funding, but represents a risk for current MTFP projections if not successful.

General Fund Capital Budget:

- 6.4 The Single Homeless Accommodation Delivery Plan aims to increase single homeless bedspace capacity through the provision of an additional 54 bedspaces over the 18 months ending March 2023. This will require an estimated total capital investment of c£5m. The intent in this Plan is that the property assets will be purchased and owned by the individual partners and not SWTC. This will need to be financed through a combination of capital grant contributions received from MHCLG, other associated partners and has been modelled on the basis of some capital subsidy from SWTC.
- 6.5 The proposal is for SWTC to provide a one-off General Fund capital grant contribution to the lesser of (up to) 31% of partners' capital costs or a maximum of £1.55m in total. The current proposal is for this to be financed through commuted sums S106 capital grants, Better Care Fund capital grant, and Hinkley Point C capital grant as shown in table 1 below. As with other capital financing arrangements it is proposed to delegate authority to the S151 Officer to determine the final financing mix for each scheme on its own financial merit and will approve on a scheme by scheme basis.
- 6.6 It is believed sufficient funding has been identified to remove any borrowing requirements. The capital funding approach has prioritised options to support investment by partners over direct investment, avoiding the need for borrowing as this would add further cost into the MTFP for debt repayment and interest costs, further exacerbating the Council's existing budget gap.
- 6.7 The Single Homeless Delivery Plan seeks to increase the supply of accommodation primarily through partners purchasing bedspaces or through leases. The Council will only increase its assets if it directly invests in place of partner investment. This is considered only beneficial where partners are unable to deliver certain types of accommodation or where the Council is more appropriate as a landlord to manage properties, and would likely require an increase in the level of the Council's proposed capital investment.

Table 1: Financing of Capital Grant (indicative funding split)

Source of Finance	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
	£k	£k	£k	£k
S106 Commuted Sum Capital Receipts	300	0	0	300
Better Care Fund	350	790	30	1,170
Hinkley Point C S106 Funds	50	30	0	80
Right to Buy Capital Receipts	TBC	0	0	TBC
Total Financing	700	820	30	1,550

- 6.8 The estimated total cost of capital investment is uncertain and the financing of this is dependent on the success of the Council and partners accessing capital grants and partnership contributions to complete the necessary funding. Total costs are also based on reasonable estimates but are not certain with properties to be bought on the open market.

General Fund Revenue Budget:

- 6.9 The Single Homeless Accommodation Delivery Plan is a voluntary adoption by the Council to enhance its core service provision to support and provide accommodation for the additional homeless client group across SWT in order to achieve the Government’s ambition to end rough sleeping by 2027.
- 6.10 The expectation by the service is that demand on the homelessness statutory service, including the voluntary adoption of the homeless client group, will increase over the next 5 years. The Single Homeless Accommodation Delivery Plan aims to mitigate the increased financial impact on SWTC of this projected increase in demand through partners providing more accommodation and support and through better care funding.
- 6.11 Financial modelling undertaken by the housing service to estimate the projected costs suggest that the future mitigated additional revenue budget requirements are as per table 2 below. The service is requesting the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board at their meeting on 16th September to support SWT utilise better care funding to support the revenue element to complement the use of the fund to contribute to capital costs. The service will continue to seek other grant funding and service efficiencies to remove or minimise any additional funds through the General Fund revenue budget.

Table 2: Estimated additional revenue budget requirements over the next five years

Financial Year	Amount (£)
2021/22	0
2022/23	113,000
2023/24	255,000
2024/25	73,000
2025/26 (+)	0
Total	441,000

- 6.12 The current financial position of the Homelessness Service and planned spend for 2021/22 is summarised in table 3 below. The General Fund Homelessness base budget in 2021/22 is £1.378m. This budget covers the costs of staffing, bed & breakfast accommodation costs, third party payments to partners and other operational costs. The Homelessness service also receives ringfenced funding from MHCLG in for the form of the Homeless Prevention Grant (£443k in 21/22) and Rough Sleepers Initiative Grant (£660k in 21/22). These annual allocations are not guaranteed and are also not known in advance. The service is also awaiting approval by the Executive for a carry forward request of £320k. Table 3 below shows a predicted net budget surplus 2021/2022 of £253k. This net surplus prediction is anticipated to reduce due to a number of factors including the ending of the landlord ban on evictions and additional lease costs for Canonsgrove and other properties.

Table 3: Current Financial Position of the Homelessness Service for 2021/22

	2021/22 £000
Sources of Revenue Funding	
Base Budget – Staffing	736
Base Budget - Operational	642
Base Budget - Housing Options	48

Earmarked Reserves (RSI, NSAP & Positive Lives) – ring fenced and to be allocated	246
Earmarked Reserves – not ring fenced	163
Carry Forward Request - to be added to above EMR	320
Homeless Prevention Grant	443
Rough Sleepers Initiative Grant	660
Sub Total Income	3,258
Expenditure	
Staffing	916
B&B, Third Party Payments and other Operational Costs	860
Grant Spend - Homeless Prevention	443
Grant Spend - Rough Sleeping	786
Sub Total Expenditure	3,005
Net Surplus / (Deficit)	253

Housing Revenue Account Capital Budget:

- 6.13 As mentioned above, the provision of an additional 54 bedspaces over the 18 months ending March 2023 is hoped to be delivered through the partners. However, there may be a need to obtain approximately 5 bedspaces within the near future. Whilst other avenues are being explored to deliver this, the HRA may be asked to purchase (and own) additional temporary accommodation. If this is the case, this is expected to cost in the region of £0.5m and met from existing HRA capital budget (financed through RTB Capital Receipt and HRA borrowing). Whilst we aim for partners to purchase the accommodation the HRA could also be used to speed up delivery through purchasing new supply or repurposing a small number of existing properties to support homelessness. Should the HRA increase its role in increasing new supply the intension would be to manage this within the total capital allocation and utilise where possible Right to Buy Receipts. However, the HRA will not have access to the revenue streams identified in table one above and therefore the Director of Housing and Communities would need to consult with the S151 Officer on a scheme by scheme proposal.
- 6.14 The delivery plan also refers to the HRA providing a garage site to a partner to utilise. This may require the purchase of up to three individual garages within a site that is otherwise fully owned by SWT, although garage swaps are being offered. Therefore there may be a capital cost required to purchase up to three individual garages. If this is required, then this is expected to cost in the region of £12k per garage and would be financed through a HRA revenue contribution to capital via the social housing development earmarked reserve. Strategically this would provide the HRA with block ownership and provide more options for future utilisation of the site such as re-development.
- 6.15 The request is to provide delegated authority to the Housing & Communities Director to vire HRA capital funds if required to finance the purchase of additional temporary accommodation bedspace and the garage sites, and to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to agree on the final financing of this.

Housing Revenue Account Revenue Budget:

- 6.16 The Single Homeless Accommodation Delivery Plan includes leasing 'meanwhile' HRA garage sites at peppercorn rent for the next 10 years. This would be a rental income loss

of £5k per year (assuming full capacity for 10 units at 21/22 weekly private tenant rates) however these are currently under-occupied, and the actual rental loss is significantly lower.

- 6.17 If the HRA does purchase additional temporary accommodation and/or garages then the financial impact on revenue in relation to the cost of financing and the repayment of debt will need to be taken into consideration.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 The following legislation and legal obligations are relevant:

- Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 to deal with homelessness and the prevention of homelessness; and in particular the statutory assessments around priority need (of which being 'single' is not of itself a qualifying criteria)
- Part VI of the same Act dealing with allocation of accommodation
- The need to ensure that all allocation decisions are taken in compliance with the Homefinder Somerset policy, having particular regard to the duties around reasonable preference

7.2 The council needs to be aware of these duties when creating, approving or operating any strategy focused on one particular type, or element, of homelessness.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications

8.1 The Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy has included a low carbon requirement on homeless accommodation.

8.2 The Delivery Panel includes sustainability as one of the measures of accommodation suitability including access to public transport routes, facilities, green space, walkways and cycle ways.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

9.1 The Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy provides an ambition to provide sustainable accommodation and support for rough sleepers. This will enhance our ability to safeguard a group of very vulnerable adults. The average life expectancy of a rough sleeper is 47 which indicates the extent of risks faced from living on the streets which this strategy will help mitigate. The strategy greatly promotes the welfare of adults at risk.

9.2 Any accommodation that hosts a number of rough sleepers can expect some level of noise nuisance and related anti-social behaviour, particularly where tenants have poor mental health, learning difficulties and addictions. The impact of this and measures to mitigate this will need to be considered as part of any long-term proposal.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

10.1 Comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA) were recently completed to inform the development of the Somerset Housing Strategy (2019) and Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019). And EIA was also undertaken to inform the Canonsgrove Options appraisal.

- 10.2 These EIA illustrate that it is the vulnerable who are often disadvantaged in relation to housing conditions and housing circumstances. The following are presented as examples in relation to single homeless and rough sleeping:
- Age: For the elderly - dementia, cold homes, lack of accessible/adapted properties, rising incidence of homelessness. For the young – increasing incidence of homeless, care leavers and access to supported accommodation and move-on accommodation, overcrowding, rising incidence of case complexity, ‘sofa surfing’, reluctance to use/lack of awareness of Homefinder;
 - Armed Forces Veterans: case complexity, need for support services, access to Homefinder;
 - Race and Ethnicity: language barriers, exploitation, overcrowding, hate crimes, failure to meet the housing and health needs of the gypsy and traveller community;
 - Disability: increasing complexity of mental health problems for rough sleepers/complex homeless, lack of accessible/adapted properties for physical and mental disabilities;
 - Rurality: social isolation, distance from services, lack of transport options.
- 10.3 The accommodation options, improved support services and enhanced collaboration proposed by the SHRSAS will help address the issues highlighted above.
- 10.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 3.

11 Social Value Implications

- 11.1 We are working with partners to jointly commission support services for our rough sleeping and single homeless community. This will deliver clear social value benefits, not only socially but also economically for this group. We shall co-design and coproduce solutions with our partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). We shall also be working with our VCS partners to help them explore accommodation options, this includes financial support drawn down from MHCLG or via SWT. Our approach will place our partners within the VCS in a position to better work with this client group, and so maximise the efficiency of their service. This will be good for the VCS and also for the client group who will experience improved health related outcomes. We have engaged with the DWP to see how they can support our work so that not only can we help people address social and health issues, but can help move them ultimately to greater independence with a focus on improving skills and ideally accessing employment opportunities.

12 Partnership Implications

- 12.1 The success of any future accommodation proposal will require strong partnership working with accommodation providers such as the YMCA, Arc and others as well as a wide range of support services partners including SCC (Social Care, Public Health), NHS, Somerset Partnership, Turning Point (drug and alcohol service), Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Second Step, Salvation Army, Probation, Open Door and local church and voluntary and community groups.
- 12.2 The principle approved through the Health and Wellbeing Board (and to be delivered through the Homelessness Reduction Board) is that we should develop a joint commissioning approach for support services and we will continue developing this approach alongside the work we do on accommodation.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 13.1 The strategy's vision and objectives align themselves with the aspirations of the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board as expressed in Improving Health and Care Through the Home in Somerset – a Memorandum of Understanding (2020). This includes the proposal to create a Homelessness Reduction Board that will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board. The HRB will be critical to the delivery of the SHAS. There are clear links between people being health and being suitably accommodated with the correct support, so there is a strong alignment between the objectives of this report and improving health and wellbeing. One of the three Health and Wellbeing priorities for Somerset is "Somerset people are able to live independently" and therefore this strategy and delivery plan will be key to enabling this.

14 Asset Management Implications

- 14.1 The Single Homeless delivery plan seeks to increase the supply of accommodation primarily through partners purchasing bedspaces or through leases. The Council will only increase its assets if it directly invests in place of partner investment. This is considered only beneficial where partners are unable to deliver certain types of accommodation or where the council is more appropriate as a landlord to manage properties.
- 14.2 The delivery plan is proposing to lease one underused garage site to Salvation Army/Citizens Somerset to use on a meanwhile basis at a peppercorn rent. The garage site will be a meanwhile site (site with development potential for the Council). It will be leased on a 10 year initial lease with 5 year review periods thereafter subject to mutual agreement. The properties will be removed by the Salvation Army when the lease ends. the council will carry out consultation and preparatory works ready to hand over the site.

15 Data Protection Implications

- 15.1 None at this stage. We will require information sharing agreements between the Council and any providers and support services that we use

16 Consultation Implications

- 16.1 The development of the strategy has been an iterative process, involving regular dialogue with local accommodation providers, and prospective providers of accommodation.
- 16.2 The framework to the strategy is provided by the Better Futures programme, which underwent extensive consultation with the commissioners and providers of support services (among many others)
- 16.3 As the Council identifies new sites to support single homeless accommodation requirements consultation will take place at the appropriate time.

Democratic Path:

- **Community Scrutiny – Yes**
- **Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – Yes**

List of Appendices

Appendix 1	Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy
Appendix 2	CONFIDENTIAL - Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy – Delivery Plan
Appendix 3	Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy – Equality Impact Assessment

Contact Officers

Name	Mark Leeman (for strategy)
Direct Dial	
Email	m.leeman@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk
Name	Simon Lewis (for strategy – demand and need analysis)
Direct Dial	
Email	s.lewis@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk
Name	Chris Brown (for delivery plan)
Direct Dial	
Email	c.brown@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy – 2020 to 2027

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Introduction

Accommodating single homeless is a significant challenge for any locality, especially when seeking solutions for individuals with multiple/complex problems. Over recent years this challenge has increased due to the repercussions of the recession and austerity. This has resulted in ongoing funding pressures, changes to benefit regimes, and worsening case complexity. The pressures across SWT are significant. SWT has a high number of complex homeless and rough sleepers. The ongoing Covid emergency, and the government's 'Everyone In' initiative, shined a spotlight on the challenges of accommodating and supporting complex clients. It also presented opportunities to find lasting solutions to this difficult problem.

To plan a way forward, multi-agency workshops (on-line, facilitated by Ark Consultancy) were held during the during Summer 2020. A range of partners were involved, from district councils, housing providers, and the commissioners and providers of support services. These workshops highlighted several important contextual considerations. These include:

- Locally, we have strong partnership arrangements (strategic, tactical and operational)
- There are not enough units of accommodation both in the social rented and private rented sectors
- The opportunity to improve commissioning and support arrangements through the Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board
- Increasing case complexity and the threat of Covid to worsening the current levels of homelessness

Partners agreed that now is the time to build on the pace and good will generated by the Covid response/'Everyone In'.

Commonly agreed ambitions are to:

- End rough sleeping
- Develop a prevention approach that is client centred
- Provide flexible pathways within a range of accommodation options
- Provide quick and easy access to support services
- Facilitate timely move on to secure and affordable accommodation

The strategy that follows reflects these ambitions. It is also informed by *Better Futures for Vulnerable People in Somerset (Better Futures Programme – Somerset Strategic Housing Group (SSHG)/Ark Consultancy - 2020)*. This is a Local Government Association (LGA) sponsored multiagency programme that seeks to provide appropriate support to the most vulnerable in society. It also seeks to close the 'revolving door' that often traps customers in a perpetual 'toing and froing' between services. Ark have recently been re-appointed (July 2021) to help with the delivery of this programme.

Vision

Rough sleeping in Somerset West and Taunton will end by 2027. An active programme of Early Help and prevention will be established to proactively reduce the chance of homelessness and escalating need. For those requiring support, all single homeless people shall have access to a client centred service that will provide excellent coordinated support within a range of appropriate accommodation options that can flex according to changing demand

Objectives

The objectives for the Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy (SHRSAS) are grouped under four themes: Accommodation, Support, Cost and Commissioning

Theme 1: Accommodation options will be improved:

- Suitable by reason of size, affordability, and accessibility
- Self-contained wherever possible
- Flexible
 - between level of need
 - between singles and families where appropriate
 - between licence and tenancy where appropriate
- In locations consistent with demand and access to services
- Sufficient by reason of numbers, including an availability of accessible units and move-on options

Theme 2: Support services will be enhanced:

- Early Help – a neighbourhood approach that includes 'no wrong door'
- Prevention first – seeking to stop the escalation of problems
- Improved working between housing options, the providers of accommodation, and support services to provide:
 - Improved initial assessment and placement
 - Person centred approach – right client, right place
 - The right level of support (wrap-around)
 - Timely and effective move on
- Provision of floating support – a service that goes with the client on their journey
- Working together to ensure tenancy sustainment
- Working together to develop customer skills and access to training and employment

Theme 3: Costs will be managed, and as far as possible:

- Ensuring affordability for the client
- Ensuring affordability for SWT and providers (accommodation, management, and support)
- Reducing the use of enhanced Housing Benefit
- Eliminating the need for Bed & Breakfast accommodation and other expensive leasing arrangements

- Working with partners on joint funding proposals to maximise the opportunities for collaboration

Theme 4: Commissioning will be enhanced:

- Support the Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board to
 - Develop strategic integrated commissioning arrangements across health, care and housing
 - Improve multi-agency tactical and operational delivery
- Local (SWT) Service Level Agreements and associated partner performance will be improved by
 - Co-production
 - Flexible use of budgets
 - Focus on client wellbeing –physical and mental
 - Monitoring the right things e.g. client wellbeing, duration of stay, move on, nomination rights

The strategy that follows explains how the above will be delivered. However, it is important to note that a significant proportion of this requires a multi-agency response. Much of this is being coordinated through the *Better Futures* programme (BF) that sits within the remit of the Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board. The BF programme can be viewed here:

[Housing Advisers Programme - Better futures for vulnerable people, Somerset | Local Government Association](#)

Equalities considerations

Equalities considerations are important to the provision of new accommodation options and support services. The recently adopted Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2020) is supported by a comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment which highlights a range of issues. These are highlighted below, together with a comment on how the delivery of the SHRSAS will help.

Gender

- Currently no specific accommodation / service for females

SHRSAS: There is a need for female only provision. This matter will be actively explored with providers and appropriate provision will be made

Age

- Significant issues for under 35s and young adults – rising incidence of case complexity, care leavers and access to supported accommodation and move-on accommodation, overcrowding, sofa-surfing, reluctance to use / lack of awareness of Homefinder
- Need to consider ageing population. We are seeing more presentations from older homeless clients with age related health issues

SHRSAS: The provision of more supported accommodation, together with additional move-on facilities, will actively help both young and elderly. As will

enhanced support services including importantly) tenancy support. Outside the remit of the SHAS, other work such as the regulating HMOs and improvements to Homefinder (digital access) will also help

Disability

- increasing complexity of mental health problems for rough sleepers/complex homeless, lack of accessible/adapted properties for physical and mental disabilities

SHRSAS: A key requirement is to improve the provision of support services, including mental health and drugs/alcohol. In addition, we understand that we require 8 units of accessible accommodation. We are working with providers to enable this provision.

Armed Forces Veterans

- Case complexity, need for support services, access to Homefinder

SHRSAS: The accommodation requirements for armed service veterans are currently met at Victory House, East Reach (10 bed spaces). We consider that, at present, there is no need to increase this provision.

Race and ethnicity

- Gypsy and traveller community: There is no transit facility within Somerset, and there is a shortage of permanent accommodation.
- BAME: Language barriers and a lack of understanding of the housing system are potential challenges in accessing support. BAME community are over-represented in the rough sleeper community (15%)

SHRSAS: Consideration of accommodation matters for the gypsy and traveller community is to be addressed within the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment that is due for completion later in 2021. The districts and the county council currently fund Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers (GLO) that are available for advice and assistance. For the BAME community, we need to ensure that data is being captured within appropriate risk assessments, and that this information is used to identify appropriate accommodation and associated support

In addition to the above, SWT also recognises the following characteristics when developing policy: - Carers, Rurality, Low income, Economic and Social Disadvantage, Digital Exclusion. The people we are seeking to support with this initiative will all have one or more of these characteristics. All will benefit from the enhanced provision that the SHRSAS will deliver

Client Groups and accommodation options

Client groups can be distinguished by their level of need. Each level of need often requires bespoke accommodation solutions.

Low Needs

Description: Periods of rough sleeping and homelessness. Some needs that require support. Can move to independent living accommodation in 6-11 months

Accommodation: Private Rented Sector (PRS), Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), social housing, temporary accommodation (TA)

Support: Floating support, some support services

Medium Needs

Description: Require intervention of 1+ statutory service, inconsistent engagement, with sustained support could move to independence in 12+ months

Accommodation: Low to medium supported accommodation

Support: Intensive Floating Support, coordinated and sustained support service engagement

High Needs

Description: Entrenched rough sleepers, revolving door clients, multiple statutory services involved, minimal or no engagement, never/rarely been independent

Accommodation: Highly supported accommodation

Support: Intensive, coordinated and sustained support service engagement

The accommodation options as stated above need to be understood, as there is a need for nuanced provision:

- Short-term assessment accommodation for those believed to be in priority need including emergency assessment accommodation for rough sleepers
- Temporary self-contained accommodation for those owed a statutory duty
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Accommodation for high risk offenders approved by police and probation
- Accommodation for those new to the streets
- Supported short/medium-term accommodation for medium/high risk individuals
- Trainer flats – to prepare individuals for independent living
- Accommodation for those escaping domestic violence
- Female only provision
- Veteran (armed forces) Accommodation

- Dry house / abstinence house
- Under 25's with additional support needs, including crash pads – P2I service
- Move-on (shared and self-contained)

In meeting the housing needs of young people (aged 18-25) we work closely with Pathways to Independence (P2I). P2I is a Somerset County Council commissioned service that provides 48 bedspaces across SWT (based in Taunton and Minehead). The service is provided by the YMCA Dulverton Group. SWT employs a P2I coordinator that is based within the Housing Options service. Their role is to work with statutory services and the YMCA (multi-agency panel) to identify the best option for the individual, including seeking (where possible) a return to their family. The contract for the P2I service has been extended until April 2023.

There are other accommodation providers that we work alongside to help support vulnerable customers – some of these are listed below:

- Rethink – mental health support
- Second Step – mental health & drug and alcohol
- Women's refuge – for victims of domestic abuse (often out-of-area placements)
- Life Project – 6- 8 units available for vulnerable women (pregnant and/or with children under 5 years of age)
- Julian House – 8 units for high risk offenders

Overall Demand

Demand for a single person homeless accommodation by client group is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Single homeless and rough sleepers Headline summary of demand for units of accommodation	
All demand	374
Current provision	287
Current provision - unsuitable*	74
Gap	87
Need (unsuitable + gap)	161

*Some of which can be reconfigured into more suitable accommodation

Assumptions

We have modelled future need on the current need at May 2021 (i.e. after lockdown starting to ease). There are downward and upward pressures that we expect in the future:

- Downward – reducing demand: There will be a significant cultural shift in the Homelessness Service with a greater emphasis on early engagement

and prevention. We shall also work collaboratively with partners to deliver neighbourhood based early help services

- Upward – increasing demand: Covid will have impacted the economic fortunes of many, as well as people's mental health and relationships. We can expect to see upward pressures on demand through job losses, affordability and debt; evictions due to arrears and Section 21 (eviction) backlog being tackled, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse etc; plus reduced availability of B&B accommodation as normal client groups return

The above assumptions and figures have been tested and verified in consultation with local providers.

The analysis of demand includes those whom the council has a 'statutory duty' to support, together with those the council may offer a 'voluntary duty'. Those for which we have a 'statutory duty' include those with dependent children, pregnant women, homeless in emergency, prison leavers, members of the armed forces, and those who are vulnerable by reason of age (young and elderly), domestic violence or mental/physical disability.

The analysis indicates that there is demand for 374 units of accommodation for people who fall into the single homeless category of whom 287 have their accommodation needs met through the council or its partners.

There is an accommodation gap of circa 87 units for this client group. This gap is largely accounted for by the chronic shortage of move-on accommodation (see item j) below.

The analysis also identifies that some of the single homeless are housed in accommodation which is unsuitable for one of the following reasons:

- Bed and Breakfast – which is not ideal for the customer due to its very temporary nature, also the high cost to the Council
- Shared accommodation – which is unsuitable in some circumstances e.g. single people with complex needs, or when mixing different levels of need
- Accommodation where management practice and support services do not appear to be helping customers stabilise their lives and develop skills to sustain tenancies
- Accommodation which insufficiently reflects the diversity of the client group i.e. low, medium and high support needs, female and male customers, arson risk, registered sex offenders, drug and alcohol, mental and physical health needs
- Accommodation location that does not sufficiently match locations of need of customers
- To reflect anticipated loss of accommodation currently available (such as temporary units in Sneddon Grove, Taunton due for regeneration).

It is estimated that there are 74 units of accommodation that are deemed 'unsuitable' and that need to be decommissioned / considered for alternative use. See section g) below

In addition to the above, it is also recognised that there is often a failure of partner services to provide the necessary support to the customer. This impacts on the ability of the housing provider to stabilise and work with vulnerable clients. This is an issue for all accommodation settings, although good progress has been made at Canonsgrove and Lindley House with the development of hub arrangements. There are also good practices being developed where the service can flex and come to the client (physically/digitally).

Existing Breakdown of Need

We have sought to assess current provision against whether clients have low, medium or high needs. For this exercise, we have discounted those currently in P21 provision, mental health provision and move on accommodation (94 units). The analysis looks at the occupants of 193 units of accommodation (i.e. 287 units [table 1]- 94 discounted units = 193 units)

Table 2: Existing breakdown of need					
Location	Total clients	No or very low needs	Low needs	Medium needs	High needs
SWT B&B	17	0	2	7	8
SWT TA	7	1	3	2	1
At home	1	1	0	0	0
Lindley House	39	0	5	15	19
Arc Satellite inc Norie House	76	7	50 (inc: Norie 4)	19 (inc: Norie 6)	0
Veteran's house	8	0	5	3	0
The Beach Hotel	12	5	1	4	2
Canonsgrove	51	13	15	15	8
No First Night Out	4 (1 void)	0	3	1	0
RSI	5 (3 void)	0	3	2	0
Total need	220	27	87	68	38

Meeting the demand

Below are described the essential elements that comprise this Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy. The *Better Futures Programme* is an important reference point, as is the work of the *Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board*. Both will complement and support our local aspirations

The key components of the BF programme are shown below, and illustrate a solution that starts with early help and prevention, before moving to considering how we are to commission services, before then ensuring that clients are placed in the correct accommodation with appropriate supports. We then must consider access to more stable accommodation, and then understand how we can work with customers and landlords to deliver sustainable tenancies. All the while, we must continue to learn and provide leadership. All of these components can be developed simultaneously within an overall project framework.

Figure 1: BF programme – key components



(note: top left icon missing)

We have used the above as a framework. Below you will find the detail of how we intend to meet demand.

a) *Early help*

Early help means taking action to support a person or their family as soon as a problem emerges. It can be required at any stage in a person's life and applies to any problem or need that the family can't deal with alone. It requires agencies (health, housing, education, social care, DWP, police etc) to be linked and to understand each other's role, and to understand the valuable contribution that can be made by the local community and voluntary sector assets, including sports,

leisure and recreation. The Better Futures Programme has established a working group that will define the approach, set direction, influence others and monitor impact. This early help initiative is critical. It will eventually work to stem the flow of people falling into homelessness

b) Commissioning

By commissioning we refer to the process of analysing a problem, agreeing solutions, and identifying those who can provide or deliver the solution. The commissioner can also be the 'provider', or (more likely) this role is taken by a third party/parties. In this section we are concerned with our working relationships with the commissioners and providers of accommodation and support services.

Commissioning operates at three levels, strategic, tactical and operational

Strategic commissioning: The challenge here is to bring together the commissioners of support services (health, care and housing) to develop integrated commissioning arrangements. Often, these services work in silos and as services we are all dealing with the same customers, whether that be A&E, mental health services, drug and alcohol teams, social care, GPs and housing. As a result, customers often bounce around the 'revolving door' or service provision. This must change. And there must be a greater focus on early help and prevention – intervening before problems escalate.

This issue is now recognised and will be addressed at a strategic level:

- Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board – resounding commitment to bring together health, care and housing
- Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board – recently established. This is the forum that will seek to drive the integration of health, care and housing (as well as other partners such as Probation, DWP)
- NHS Systems Leadership – recently agreed to adopt 'complex homeless/rough sleepers' as one of its pilot projects for the Integrated Care System leadership programme
- Better Futures Programme – the action plan for seeking the integration of health, care and housing

Tactical and operational commissioning: Coordinating and directing operational working arrangements. This is currently undertaken via:

- Positive Lives Operational Board (multi-agency)
- Covid Homelessness Cell (multi-agency – and will soon merge with the Positive Lives Operational Board)
- Local assessment and referral panels (including that for the P2I service)
- Contractual arrangements between SWT and local providers of accommodation and support

Within this area of work, it is important to build on lessons learnt. E.g. the committed multi-agency approach at Canonsgrove allowed us to transition 22 high needs clients down to 8 (their needs lessened, or they moved to more independent accommodation). Lindley House has not had sustained support from agencies and has 17 clients that have been revolving door for between 3 and 7 years. Commitment from support services to work alongside housing providers is key to the success of individual clients.

The HRB is committed to delivering the following

- Pilot work (delivered at pace) to explore and deliver the necessary inter-agency working arrangements required at operational level
- Longer term work to bring together (integrate) the commissioning of services between health, care and housing (bringing together strategy, budgets and workforce). Commissioning arrangements that allow flex at operational level are essential, given the rapidly changing dynamic of this complex cohort. This longer-term piece of work will be a necessary aspiration of a Unitary council.

Going forward, contractual arrangements must be flexible, seeking to break down barriers between commissioners and providers. Co-production is essential, as is listening to the client voice. The metrics around contract management must be based on the client – their personal journey, their needs, and their aspirations. Again, the Better Futures programme is highly relevant (alongside best practice from Homeless Link / St Mungos). The Better Futures programme has devised a set of metrics that have been agreed among partners (see the diagram below). These are a key reference point, in helping to shape and monitor contracts.

Figure 2: Suggested individual and community metrics for future commissioning



c) Creating a robust referral and allocation process

Notwithstanding the Early Help project, there will be those who will be unfortunate enough to fall into homelessness and/or rough sleeping. For these individuals, it is essential that we develop an informed and consistent process of referral and allocation. Through the *Better Futures Programme* it has been agreed that the most effective way of ensuring that customers obtain the most appropriate accommodation and support is to form an allocations panel comprising of representatives from housing providers, social care providers and support providers. This panel will assess a person's needs and identify the most appropriate accommodation solution having regard to the level of support required.

d) Units of accommodation - flexible approach

There is a limited supply of accommodation and, at present, clearly not enough. Adopting a flexible approach (flexing to client needs dependent on changing demand) is essential to meet the demand. This includes flexibility within the current stock, even that which is defined as 'suitable' within the current analysis.

e) Mixing units of accommodation

It is considered that the following accommodation types could be mixed within the same building

- Short term-assessment accommodation
- Emergency assessment accommodation
- Supported short/medium-term accommodation for medium/high risk customers
- Could also include Trainer flats, but these could also benefit from being dispersed

The above could be in one place and closely linked with support provision/hub arrangements. This would aid with specialist assessment and access to those services that are most needed by this client group.

f) Accommodation that needs to remain separated

The following need separate accommodation solutions and cannot be mixed with others

- MAPPA
- Under 25s – currently provided by the P2I service
- Dry house / Abstinence
- Women Only

Some women will actively benefit from female only accommodation options. At present we have none, other than the refuge for victims of domestic abuse. This matter needs active consideration to assess the level of need (including catering for the needs of pregnancy and children). As a broad estimate – of the 50 beds at Canonsgrove we have had between 5 and 10 women resident at any one time

g) Units of accommodation that need to be decommissioned

The following existing units are unsuitable and need to be decommissioned

- Arc crash pads
- B&B – to be minimised*
- MAPPA – i.e. current provision which is 'out of area'
- Temporary Accommodation units (Wheatley Crescent/Sneddon Grove)
- Homes in Multiple Occupation i.e. Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI)/No First Night Out (NFNO)

There will always be a place for some minimal use of B&B accommodation. For example

- to help stop silting (see section k) below)
- for some 'low needs' move on use until something becomes available
- for on the night and out of hours referrals

h) Location

Convenient access to services is a fundamental consideration. Accordingly, provision will need to be met primarily in Taunton and its environs, with some also being met at Minehead and Wellington.

For any new provision, impact on adjoining neighbours / communities will be an important consideration.

i) Standard of Accommodation

Canonsgrove is a temporary facility at Trull on the south-west fringe of Taunton. It has capacity for approx. 60 individuals designated as complex homeless/rough sleepers. It was provided in response to 'Everyone In'. The Canonsgrove project reflects much of what is now regarded as best practice for hostel accommodation. There are a number of factors that have made it a success:

- Partnership working – all main services working collaboratively
- Self-contained units (and the ability for segregation in the presence of covid)
- On-site provision of housing management and support services (e.g. mental health, drugs and alcohol)
- Surrounding green space providing opportunities for relaxation, recreation and sport
- Communal areas within the building
- Engaging activity
- A sense of community

Many of these features are replicated at other provision. For example, Arc have recently opened an on-site GP surgery at their Lindley House facility.

However, there are issues. It can be difficult to segregate the most challenging individuals from those who are less complex and require less intensive support. This can have the effect of holding back progress for some individuals. This raises questions over the size of the facility and the ability to segregate the different levels of need and complexity. These are problems that have challenged housing services for many years.

Hostels are the most common homeless accommodation projects in the country and will continue to have a role locally. However, the recent Covid situation has emphasised that we (providers and support services) need to enhance the quality of the offer. We have undertaken best practice research on Homeless Hostels. This research is invaluable. A useful summary of recent research in this area was provided by Homeless Link in their report 'The Futures Hostel (2018).

Summary from Homeless Link "The Futures Hostel" (2018)

- Hostels account for 90% of all homeless accommodation projects
- Most provide medium level support.

- Key metrics are successful move on; unplanned moves, plus other measures (Outcome Star); employment & training participation rates etc
- They are important to help develop skills, abilities, resources and personal development for independence

Providers and commissioners should aim for:

- *Supportive staff with positive, engaging culture who can build trust. Interventions to be personalised and responsive to individual needs, goals, and aspirations.*
- *Strong partnership working with agencies (housing, addiction services, mental health services, financial support, physical health, training etc). The more integrated these services are, the better.*
- *Accepting dogs (otherwise this becomes a barrier for some homeless)*
- *Good range of engaging activities for the tenants*
- *Support for tenants to engage with mental health support, including emotional support, counselling and advisory.*
- *Floating Support to follow tenants during and after Move-On is key. This needs to be part of local housing pathway*
- *Some flexibility around rules and regulations. Alternatives considered and residents involved in developing (e.g. communal space for visitors)*
- *Good quality and range of food offered*
- *A lack of affordable housing is the main issue and needs to be addressed.*
- *Hostels should see their role as time limited, and should focus on supporting people to move towards independence*
- *Consider the benefits of Trauma-informed care and Psychologically Informed Environment*

*Homeless Link are the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England

These aims are recommended for all future hostel provision across SWT.

It is worth noting that MHCLG, in an advisory capacity, recommend the provision of self-contained accommodation. This is something that we support, as we have seen the benefits of such provision at Canonsgrove and elsewhere. However, whilst we will adopt this as an aim, we are also mindful of the need to adopt a pragmatic approach. There is a place for HMOs. Also, we can be constrained by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA - for PRS options) and the provision of the shared room rate.

There is also a need to deliver accessible units of accommodation. Our analysis shows that we have a need for 8 units of accessible accommodation across the spectrum of single homeless accommodation. Financial assistance is available to help with the delivery of accessible accommodation (see Finances below).

A further factor to consider is climate change and the provision of homes that provide thermal comfort. Any properties that are purchased by SWT will be compliant with legislation as it affects local authority land holdings. All partners

will be encouraged to adopt 'best practice in the private rented sector' and achieve an EPC rating C by 2030.

The above aspirations are consistent with the *Better Futures Programme*. This will ensure that our future homeless provision complies with what is seen as best practice. We will require reporting and monitoring that evidences the outcomes and successes described. See item b) above.

- j) Replacing Canonsgrove and anticipating future demand – accommodation options

At any one time there can be up to 50 residents at Canonsgrove. Of this, approximately 30 can be regarded as having medium or high needs. Approximately 20 have low needs and should ideally be in other accommodation options including move-on, if there was capacity in the system.

The Canonsgrove facility will be stood down during the early part of 2023. This gives us 18 months to find alternative capacity. We are working closely with a range of partners to manage this situation.

All future provision (to meet overall demand i.e. demand over and above that within Canonsgrove) will seek to provide accommodation according to the level of client need (low, medium or high). It will be for the 'assessment and referral panel' (see *item c* above) to assess which clients are suitable for which accommodation.

Our current thinking / progress can be summarised in the tables below

(note: we are in confidential discussion with a range of providers regarding accommodation options – these are referred to Accommodation A, B, C etc)

Table 3: Low Needs Clients – Accommodation Profile		
Accommodation	No of Units	Comments
SWT TA	12	Shift to low over time
NFNO	5	Low needs (prevention)
Satellite – various (Arc)	66	Shift to all low
Veterans House (Arc)	5	(Flexible: others are medium)
Accommodation A	4	Lease to be negotiated
Lindley House	16	To be agreed
Accommodation B	10	To be agreed
Over-supply	(4)	Can reduce TA if required
Total	114	

Table 4: Medium Needs Clients – Accommodation Profile		
Accommodation	No of Units	Comments
Gascony (YMCA)	18	Minehead
Prospect House (YMCA)	10	Minehead

Lindley House (Arc)	24	To be flexible – longer term, some low
Veterans House (Arc)	3	(Flexible – others are low)
Accommodation C	4	(Offered 2-11 self-contained – to be negotiated)
Accommodation D	0	MHCLG bid for 15 failed
Unresolved gap	9	To resolve
Total	68	

Table 5: High Needs Clients – Accommodation Profile		
Accommodation	No of Units	Comments
Accommodation E	10	Will need SWT revenue funding plus strong HRB commissioned services
RSI Houses	8	Can be scaled to zero
Accommodation F	8	Accommodation to be sourced. To be agreed.
Accommodation G	5	Provider to be commissioned. Can be scaled to zero.
Unresolved gap	7	To resolve
Total	38	

The above separation of clients with different levels of need is easier to support from a housing management perspective. The disadvantage is the difficulty of delivering support services to dispersed facilities. This will need careful consideration. Dispersed facilities in proximity may be a solution.

We expect the best practice aims (item (i) above) to be adhered to, and this will be established within commissioning / contractual arrangements.

It would be sensible to 'stress test' the assumptions on future demand (e.g. +/-15% so that we have a broader range of numbers), however the accommodation would need to be flexible enough to be able to step up or down to accommodate these numbers.

Similarly, we need to do further work to ensure that we are creating the right geographical mix. We also need to be clear about which units need to meet accessibility standards.

Housing First – Pilot. 'Housing First' is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services as needed. The fundamental ethos of Housing First asserts that housing is not contingent upon readiness, or on 'compliance' (for instance,

sobriety). Rather, it is a rights-based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing, and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery. We see the potential for a pilot project. This option will only cater for a small number of people – possibly four to six in the first instance, as we would wish to test the application of the model before making any further commitments. Housing First is subject to wider pilot work within the *Better Futures* Programme and progress will be monitored by the HRB.

Ultimately, SWT want to eradicate / minimise B&B costs, which will release revenue funding to support high needs provision and fund floating support (refer to item (l) below).

A further solution is still required for overnight / very short-term assessment. Inevitably, this will include low, medium and high needs clients. This could be B&B, however some more intense support accommodation will be required.

The model needs to be flexible enough to transition to lower needs over time. For example, 31 clients with high needs (currently) should be able to shift to say 15 in 2-3 years. Similarly, Lindley House needs to be configured so that one third could be shifted from medium to low needs as support proves successful

Once the provision of accommodation is agreed, work will be required by all parties to steadily shift existing use to meet the future accommodation profiles (tables 3, 4 and 5 above). This will require significant move on, albeit this must be a client focussed decision for each case.

k) Move on

Lack of affordable single rented accommodation is a national problem and a key issue to resolve in this accommodation strategy. Simply put, without an adequate supply of suitable and affordable accommodation for single people, both supported housing accommodation and the council's temporary accommodation becomes silted up. Our analysis suggests up to 28 bedspaces in the system are currently being used by customers able to sustain a tenancy in the social or private rented sectors with minimal or no support. The problem is exacerbated by average local rents that exceed local housing allowance (LHA). Accommodation for single households is circa 50% of registered Homefinder demand.

Homeless Link have published a report "Moving on from homelessness – how services support people to move on" which found that nationally 30% of people ready to move on are unable due to lack of supply. Lack of move-on accommodation was our main issue from the rough sleeping workshops held in Summer 2020.

Different housing providers and services refer to move on in a number of ways however for our purpose we mean a home to move into from supported housing, be that a room in a HMO or self-contained accommodation. An important element of move on is the ability of individuals to sustain accommodation and to ensure they are supported appropriately to avoid repeat homelessness.

Our strategy to increase move on includes the following:

- Increasing the capacity and focus in our homeless team to work with the private rented sector to increase supply for our client group
- Explore the case for a council owned Housing Company to procure units of single accommodation available for our client group
- Provision of floating support to increase supply from landlords (who would otherwise be reluctant from a risk perspective), and to improve sustainability of tenancy across all tenures.
- Encourage social landlords using schemes such as tenancy accreditation to take a greater proportion of homeless directly from supported accommodation
- Utilise shared HMOs with lower support e.g. Arc satellite accommodation
- Engage with supported housing, registered provider and other partners to increase supply locally through lease arrangements

l) Floating Support

Floating Support is key to improving the sustainability of a tenancy once homeless clients have moved on from supported accommodation. P2I in Somerset has adopted this approach and evidenced success. It was also raised as important by the supported housing providers at the rough sleeper workshops during Summer 2020. It is also a fundamental component of the *Better Futures* programme.

The St Mungo's research paper 'Home for Good: The role of floating support in ending rough sleeping (December 2018)' describes floating support (or tenancy sustainment) as helping people, who might otherwise struggle to cope, to live independently in their own home. It helps prevent vulnerable people from losing their home and can prevent a return to the street, for those who were rough sleepers. Support is delivered by skilled case workers who visit people in their homes or meet them somewhere close by. Services can also be delivered digitally.

Benefits include improved outcomes for their customer group, increased independence and more homes available for vulnerable people to rent, by providing more reassurance for landlords. The St Mungo's report also highlights that funding cuts to 'Supporting People' has led to a reduction in this support across the country.

SWT regards floating support as an essential component of this single homeless accommodation strategy. It is as important as any other element and without it the strategy will fail. Ideally floating support should be provided in collaboration with partners, as all elements of the housing, health and care sectors have a vested interest in keeping clients secure and stable. The resourcing and commissioning of floating support will require cross sector conversations within the auspices of the Homeless Reduction Board. However, this may take a couple of years to develop. Before then SWT will invest in the provision of floating support

Finance model

The delivery of the strategy will require a significant financial investment, utilising external grants, SWT funding, partner funding and a review of current commissioning arrangements for support services. A mix of capital and revenue funding is required. Capital is required to secure additional supply, while revenue is critical for the maintenance and development of support services along with customer security and safety. Capital is much easier to secure as it is usually a one-off payment, and can sometimes bring a return on investment, Revenue funding is much harder to secure being a commitment to year-on-year financial investment. A strategic review of commissioning arrangements for support services (health, care and housing) should identify opportunities to develop holistic system-wide prevention-based services, with coordinated funding arrangements. This will be driven by the *Better Futures Programme* within the remit of the Homelessness Reduction Board.

An important component of the financial support to the strategy, and beyond the control of SWT and local partners, is the current housing benefit (HB) regime, including Local Housing Allowance (LHA). There is pressure on HB spend (particularly enhanced HB that is used to support tenants with complex issues), with MHCLG encouraging councils and their partners to deliver targeted and financially sustainable models of support. A complicating factor is that local rents exceed LHA rates, which presents an additional challenge when seeking to place / support customers within the private rented sector. Often, we require Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to bridge the gap. DHP is a finite resource, with budgets reducing.

The delivery plan for the strategy sets out the capital and revenue requirement by scheme. The preferred investment route of the service is through partners. Direct delivery by the council will only be used where it is economically advantageous or where partners are unable to support. The total capital investment for 54 new bedspaces is estimated to be just under £5m with an anticipated Council contribution of up to £1.55m.

It is predicted that most of the additional revenue costs will be met after 2024/2025 through reduced bed and breakfast costs. At that point, it is envisaged that additional revenue costs for accommodating more single homeless responsibility will reduce to £0 being covered through existing budgets. However, the service needs to go through change to ensure customers are supported in the correct location and can progress towards sustainable tenancies. The following additional revenue forecasts is required in addition to the 2022/2022 base budget:

- 2021/2022 = £0
- 2022/2023 = £113,000
- 2023/2024 = £255,000
- 2024/2025 = £73,000
- 2025 onwards = £0

Existing voluntary sector partners and potential new partners have investment models which use their own borrowing strength to purchase accommodation. Each partner has its own business model. Sometime the voluntary sector would welcome capital grants to support their investment, however revenue costs tend to be a greater consideration. Existing partners are also being asked to consider their current provision to better achieve outcomes and in some cases this will divert capital investment away from new supply.

SWT's Housing Revenue Account and SWT Corporate Company will explore how they could invest to create more one bed opportunities to help meet the significant demand in the district

Timescales and Delivery Plan

The Council has created a detailed single homeless accommodation delivery plan to support the ambitions of this strategy. The delivery plan outlines how the remaining 54 units of accommodation will be achieved by 2027 and clarify the existing and new partners who will be engaged in delivery. The delivery plan seeks the early delivery of a significant proportion of the units given the need to decant Canonsgrove by March 2023. The delivery plan will be used by a panel of officers reporting to the Director of Housing and Communities and to the Portfolio Holder for Housing. The panel will prioritise and promote the most beneficial purchases and leases and will help to ensure new supply fits the needs of the customers. The panel will also allow the council to align grant opportunities through MHCLG and Homes England with new supply opportunities. The delivery plan will be supported by a live database of accommodation opportunities which has been set up. Revenue needs have also been addressed by scheme and need group.

Summary

In summary there are several key elements to this strategy. We shall work with our partners to meet the demand for single homeless accommodation and to end rough sleeping by 2027. We shall do this in accordance with the *Better Futures programme* and by delivering the following:

- A more effective regime of early help and prevention
- To deliver effective local commissioning within an appropriate monitoring framework
- The successful establishment of a Homeless Reduction Board, working with partners to undertake a fundamental review of strategic commissioning arrangements
- A new assessment and referral panel and procedures
- Flexibility of provision within our accommodation choices
- Very high standards of accommodation
- The decommissioning of Canonsgrove and replacement with suitable alternatives

- The stabilisation of residents through working collaboratively with support services
- The provision of additional move-on accommodation through the activity of a SWT housing company. We shall also look to other providers to help with the provision of move-on accommodation
- The provision of enhanced levels of floating support
- The delivery of specialist accommodation
 - MAPPA
 - Trainer Flats
 - NFNO
 - Women only
 - Accessible units
 - Housing First – pilot
- A finance model that exploits all available resources, including that of SWT, the willingness and capital expenditure of our provider partners, grant opportunities made available from MHCLG, and the integration of budgets to deliver more effective support services.

Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

The [EIA guidance notes](#) will help you complete this assessment.

If you need help or advice please contact Paul Harding. P.harding@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Organisation prepared for	Somerset West and Taunton Council		
Version	1	Date Completed	29th June 2021
Description of what proposed change or policy is being impact assessed			
SWT Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy (2021 – 2027) and Delivery Plan			
Evidence			
What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the Office of National Statistics , Somerset Intelligence Partnership , Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) , Staff and/ or area profiles ,, should be detailed here			
<p>Report to SWT Executive – Options Appraisal for Canonsgrove (March 2021) Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan 2019 to 2023 Somerset Housing Strategy 2019 – 2023 Improving Health and Care Through the Home in Somerset – A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (2020) Homelessness Act 2002 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Crisis report “It’s no life at all” 2016 Crisis report “homelessness kills” 2012 NHS Rough Sleepers Report 2019: https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/10/rough-sleepers-in-homeless-hotspots-to-benefit-from-nhsmental-health-outreach/ https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-homelessness Public Health England – Health Matters 2020 https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2019/feb/13/making-homelessness-services-more-trans-inclusive</p>			

<https://www.bigissue.com/latest/black-people-are-more-than-three-times-as-likely-to-experience-homelessness>

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

Comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA) were recently completed to inform the development of the Somerset Housing Strategy (2019) and Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019). Both documents were subject to consultation, seeking the input of those who provide services (accommodation and support) to vulnerable customer groups. These EIA illustrate that it is the vulnerable who are often disadvantaged in relation to housing conditions and housing circumstances. For example (the following list is not exhaustive):

- Age: For the young – increasing incidence of homeless, care leavers and access to supported accommodation and move-on accommodation, overcrowding, rising incidence of case complexity, 'sofa surfing', reluctance to use/lack of awareness of Homefinder; for the elderly - trips and falls, dementia, cold homes, lack of accessible/adapted properties, rising incidence of homelessness.
- Armed Forces Veterans: case complexity, need for support services, access to Homefinder;
- Race and Ethnicity: language barriers, exploitation, overcrowding, hate crimes, failure to meet the housing and health needs of the gypsy and traveller community;
- Disability: increasing complexity of mental health problems for rough sleepers/complex homeless, lack of accessible/adapted properties for physical and mental disabilities;
- Rurality: social isolation, distance from services, distance from gas network (contributing to fuel poverty), lack of transport options.

At a more operational level, we have undertaken detailed needs assessments with everyone accommodated at Canonsgrove. We have also undertaken several case studies which have supported much of the national evidence that exists around statistics on rough sleepers. For example: -

- Average life expectancy of a male rough sleeper is 44 and female rough sleeper 42 (compared to 80 for men and 84 for women in Taunton) (source: Public Health England – Health Matters and Somerset Intelligence website)

- 90% of rough sleeper deaths are male and 10% female (compared to 48% and 52% nationally) (Source Crisis: homelessness kills).
- Suicide accounts for 13% of deaths (source Public Health England)
- Nationally, 84% of rough sleepers are male and 16% female. 6% were aged 25 or younger (and 94% over 25) - Nationally, 64% are UK nationals; 22% EU nationals and 3% non-EU nationals (Public Health England: Health Matters)
- 77% of people sleeping rough experience violence or anti-social behaviour against them (Source: Crisis: It's no life at all)
- 45% had been intimidated or threatened (Source: Crisis It's no life at all)
- 80% of rough sleepers experienced childhood trauma (Source: NHS rough sleepers report)
- 46% had physical health needs. One third nationally are not registered with a GP and homeless people access to A&E services are 8x higher than the average person. (Source: Public Health England)
- 80% of homeless people have reported poor mental health and 45% have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. (Source: Mental Health org.uk)
- Addiction is a big issue. 42% had alcohol misuse needs and 41% had drug misuse needs (Source: Public Health England)
- Nationally, 10.7% of people applying for help with homelessness were black (but only 3% of population) (Big Issue 2020)

It is worth noting that the work over the past year through providing a 'hub' model of support (Canonsgrove) that brings together practitioners on mental health, addiction services, physical health, social care and other support has made a positive difference on many of the above inequalities locally. For example, 9% of deaths nationally are related to liver related disease (Source: Public Health England) and we have brought in Hepatitis screening and treatment. We have also registered everyone with a GP and many of the risk factors associated with rough sleeping above are removed simply through accommodating rough sleepers. The success of collaborative working across health, care and housing can be evidenced at Canonsgrove, which is a rough sleeper hostel that was established under the Government's (Covid) 'Everyone In' initiative. After 12 months of operating, two thirds of the 'highly complex' people at Canonsgrove have either been moved on to settled accommodation or their needs have reduced. This is far better than was achieved previously at other settings. This is an affirmation of the strong partnership working and impact it can have when we all work 'shoulder to shoulder' to address health (and other equalities related) vulnerabilities.

The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy (SHRSAS) seeks a solution to provide appropriate support and accommodate to complex homeless/rough sleepers into the longer term and therefore will positively affect all the issues outlined above once delivered. Consultation in relation to the SHRSAS has been primarily held with providers of homeless accommodation to consider alternative models of delivering accommodation to this customer group. The consideration of support services is an active ongoing dialogue at the Homelessness Reduction Board, involving representation from all interested support services and provider representation.

In addition, there is ongoing evidence gathering – Public Health are coordinating research into Vulnerability Pathways and Health Needs Assessment. Both will provide a rich source of equalities relevant data to inform the development of specific proposals/future commissioning arrangements. These will be considered by the Homelessness Reduction Board in relation to the recommissioning of support services. The HRB is also seeking to ensure that the ‘customer voice’ is present and able to influence decision making.

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age needs to be defined differently for complex homeless / rough sleepers. With rough sleepers, the average life expectancy is 44 (men) and 42 (women). The SHRSAS proposes a way forward to provide accommodation and support to this customer group which will inevitably lead to people’s life expectancy increasing. The provision of more supported accommodation, together with additional move-on facilities, will actively help both young and elderly. As will enhanced support services including importantly) tenancy support. Outside the remit of the SHAS, other work such as the regulating HMOs and improvements to Homefinder (digital access) will also help. 	☐	☐	☒
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence above shows that complex homeless and rough sleepers are disproportionately affected by poor physical and mental health. The SHRSAS allows resources to be focused on the client group. The strategy will enable us to better match accommodation and individual needs including access and 	☐	☐	☒

	<p>mobility requirements. We recognise that there is a need for 8 units of accessible units of accommodation. The SHRSAS will seek to deliver these. Working with the Homelessness Reduction Board, we shall improve the provision of support services to help tackle poor mental health, and drug and alcohol addictions.</p>			
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence suggests that homeless amongst trans people is disproportionately high, although we have not encountered this locally. Provision of more accommodation (including self-contained) will provide greater capacity to provide safe shelter for single homeless customers including those going through gender reassignment. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific additional outcomes identified. However the recommended option provides SWT with the accommodation capacity to provide safe shelter for single homeless customers status. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific additional outcomes identified as a statutory consideration applies for women who approach the Council and are homeless and are pregnant. We work closely with the Life Project, who have accommodation to support vulnerable women who are pregnant and / or have small children. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race and ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is national evidence to suggest that BAME communities are more likely to suffer from homelessness and rough sleeping. However, we are not seeing this locally. No specific additional outcomes identified. However, the SHRSAS will provide SWT with the accommodation capacity to provide safe shelter for single homeless customers regardless of their race and ethnicity. Similarly, the introduction of a multi-agency 'assessment and referral panel' will enable us to consider individual clients and any issues they may be encountering because of their race/ethnicity. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<p>The panel will also perform the same function in relation to the other protected characteristics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of accommodation matters for the gypsy and traveller community is to be addressed within the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment that is due for completion later in 2021. The districts and the county council currently fund Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers (GLO) that are available for advice and assistance. 			
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific additional outcomes identified. However, the SHRSAS will provide SWT with the accommodation capacity to provide safe shelter for single homeless customers regardless of their religion and beliefs. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness and rough sleeping disproportionately affects men. However, for women, the impact can often be worse, as they may become extremely vulnerable and subject to the worst excesses of exploitation. Life expectancy for female rough sleepers is less than that for men (although it is chronically poor for both). The strategy has identified a lack of single homeless accommodation exclusively for women. We shall work with partners to enable safe female only provision. The strategy will provide accommodation capacity to provide safe shelter for single homeless customers regardless of sex. • The council and its partners are currently considering the implications of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Act widens and clarifies the definition of domestic abuse, seeks to establish multiagency partnership boards (within the remit of the upper tier authority) and places specific housing requirements on the local housing authority e.g. use of B&B not acceptable for victims of domestic Abuse. The implications of the Act are currently subject to active consideration between all key partners. It will be for the Homelessness Reduction Board working alongside the 'Domestic Abuse Board' to advise the level of need (with the 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<p>upper tier authority being responsible for the commissioning of support services) and the housing solutions that need to be established. This work is subject to ongoing dialogue.</p>			
<p>Sexual orientation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific additional outcomes identified. However, the strategy provides SWT with the accommodation capacity to provide safe shelter for single homeless customers regardless of their sexual orientation. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Other, e.g. carers, veterans, homeless, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SHRSAS builds on the ambitions and contribution to equality made in the Somerset Housing Strategy and the Somerset Homeless and Rough Sleeper strategy and action plan. This report reflects the sentiments of these strategies. The SHRSAS provides a framework to better match the diverse range of needs which single homeless customers have ranging from access to accommodation that matches their ability to live independently, to accommodation which provides a higher level of support which will increase their opportunity to develop skills and habits which over time will help them sustain independent accommodation. The SHRSAS includes consideration of provision for veterans to ensure these are catered for. The accommodation requirements for armed service veterans are currently met at Victory House, East Reach (10 bed spaces). We consider that, at present, there is no need to increase this provision The SHRSAS seeks to provide accommodation options in Minehead, so that provision is provided to serve rural western sector of the district The SHRSAS will retain and focus SWT resources on the provision of accommodation and support for single homeless and not dilute energy and financial resources in accommodation which the market is able to provide. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Negative outcomes action plan

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
N/A	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

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Completed by:

Mark Leeman

Date

30th June 2021

Signed off by:

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Date	
Equality Lead/Manager sign off date:	
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	
Review date:	

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 10

Document is Restricted

Full Council Meeting – 27 July 2021

Report of Councillor Fran Smith - Housing

Director of Housing and Communities Introduction

As can be seen from the contents of this report, the service has a huge amount of work to deliver in the current year to achieve the outcomes we expect for tenants and to get the service to where we want it to be. Our operating environment is certainly fast paced and constantly changing, which creates additional challenges. The volume of case work from customers is at a very high level, much of which is complex. I constantly review resource capacity with the senior team and we have recently taken steps to agree additional posts to help with key pressures and projects. However, we are also finding recruitment difficult in some areas for example, filling some of our tradesperson roles at the current time.

We are also looking to address the quality of what we do, as we are still experiencing a high number of complaints. We are supporting the team with training and process reviews to constantly try to improve our decision making and to actively try to learn from when we don't get things right - and when we do! As we continue to work mostly in a remote way, staying connected as a team and remaining co-ordinated as a service is something we have to work hard at, so I am pleased we are now able to take some small steps back to more face-to-face working practices, which I am sure will help us in many ways.

Lastly, I am massively proud of the team for the hard work that they continue to undertake and how they continue to strive to deliver the best service they can for tenants.

Housing Development and Regeneration Team

The team continues to deliver new affordable homes directly by the Council or through partnerships. The team through its direct delivery, enabling and strategic work have been identifying and progressing opportunities to support the most vulnerable in the district, in relation to their housing and support needs.

Housing Strategy

Somerset Homeless Reduction Board (HRB)

- A successful first meeting of this County wide strategic partnership was held in April, with a subsequent meeting in June. This partnership will meet regularly to

identify how best to bring about better futures for some of the County's most vulnerable customers. This will include opportunities to introduce new commissioning arrangements for support services.

- The HRB has agreed to deliver a pilot project looking at improving support services for the residents of Canonsgrove (and other rough sleeper settings within the County). The results of this work will then be used to inform a work programme that seeks to deliver integrated commissioning between health, care and housing services.

Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy

- The Executive supported a draft strategy in March, and a final version for approval will be going through Scrutiny (July), Executive (August) and Full Council (Sept).
- The strategy included the following vision: *'Rough sleeping in Somerset West and Taunton will end by 2027. An active programme of Early Help and prevention will be established to proactively reduce the chance of homelessness and escalating need. For those requiring support, all single homeless people shall have access to a client centred service that will provide excellent coordinated support within a range of appropriate self-contained accommodation options that can flex according to changing demand'*.
- The Strategy is accompanied by a detailed delivery plan. The Housing Regeneration and Development function and the Housing Options service are working closely with partners to deliver the accommodation to support the strategy and delivery plan.

Hinkley Point C

- We are currently working with the Development and Place Directorate to assess the impact of the workforce uplift on the local housing market. Peak construction workforce is expected to increase from 5,600 (previous assumption) to 8,500 (expected during 2022/23). Negotiations continue with EDF and Sedgemoor District Council concerning the nature of the impact, the geographical communities that will be impacted, and possible mitigation measures.

Housing Demand Study

- The Housing Strategy team will shortly conclude its study on housing demand across SWT, including general need, specialist need and homelessness. This will be shared for discussion and it will then inform a supply / delivery strategy.

HRA New Homes

- The contract for NTWP phase A has been signed and Engie will start on site in August after completing their site set up. The build period will be two years with some homes being ready to let within 12 months. The phase will see 47 new low carbon homes and a community facility built. The Service are progressing the

details of the contract for the next phases which it is hoped will start April 2022. Work with the planning authority continues for Phases B and C.

- Community Working Groups continue to meet and the community were recently involved in a project with Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme aimed at encouraging engagement with our natural heritage. The project led to the decoration of some of the hoardings protecting sites and was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- The Council's development of 54 zero carbon homes at Seaward Way Minehead, was recently approved by planning committee and contractors Classic Builders have been appointed. Classic Builders were the contractors who build eight council homes at Laxton Road which were completed in January. They also build the award winning zero carbon passivhaus apartments on Seaton seafront. Following a refinement of low carbon works the development is due to start on site this year.
- The zero carbon affordable housing schemes to be built on various sites in Taunton are being prepared for planning approval. The service has been working on a phosphate solution, which if approved by Natural England will support the planning applications. The service is also using the knowledge gained in designing and developing low carbon new homes to work with colleagues across the directorate on developing the Council homes retrofit strategy and delivering some early schemes.

Housing Enabling

- As part of the National Rural Housing Week, the Enabling team have promoted the importance of affordable housing in helping rural communities remain vibrant and sustainable. Examples included a tour of the new affordable housing in Stoke St Gregory and promotion of the significant progress being made by the Rural Housing Enabler to facilitate affordable housing on Exmoor. There are a broad range of schemes under discussion with the Enabling team, ranging from tentative enquiries, to enquiries following physical completions. It is anticipated that circa 300 affordable homes are due to complete during 2021/22.
- The phosphates issue continues to delay schemes achieving planning permission in parts of the Council area and with ongoing viability challenges this will impact the affordable housing delivery long term forecast.
- The Annual SWT Affordable Housing Partnership Survey was issued to our ten affordable housing delivery partners as part of the team's 360 feedback and to identify opportunities to improve the current partnership. Initial responses received to date have been very positive with the majority ranking as extremely satisfied with the partnership and the Enabling service provided.

Housing Property Team

A summary of all areas of activity being undertaken within the Housing Property team is provided below, but it should be noted that we are generally still in the process of bringing back services to pre-COVID lockdown period levels. That said, a

positive direction of travel is being maintained. Specific updates on each of these work areas are as follows:

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Both emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs continue to be undertaken, although the hold placed on non-emergency internal responsive repairs during the lockdown period continues to lead to a backlog of these works. All emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging), and the ongoing non-emergency backlog is being resolved by recruitment of additional resources for the in-house trade team. We are also using an external contractor (MD Group). We are continuing to carefully monitor and manage progress in this area and keep residents informed in relation to their repair requests.
- Void repairs are also being undertaken, but the high level of properties being received in poor condition (leading to 'major' void repair works being required), is causing difficulty as is the recruitment of skilled tradespersons. Delays in licensed asbestos removals (due to specialist contractors furloughing their staff) is also presenting a challenge in returning the properties back to our Lettings team promptly. We are, however, continuing to take appropriate management action on these issues and seek to continue the positive overall trend in performance.

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken, including gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works & fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works. Positive progress is being made to all areas, and they are being carefully monitored with weekly review meetings in place.

Capital Programmes

- All capital programme works previously placed on hold during the Covid lockdown periods are now being planned for delivery.
- Many of the capital works programmes planned to be undertaken during 2020/21 were not completed. The capital programmes to be delivered in 2021/22 will now seek to incorporate these, although it should be noted that delivering this volume of works will be very challenging. As an indication of this challenge, the 2021/22 capital programme, combined with slippage from the 2020/21 programme, will total over £14m. We are recruiting additional capital programme staff resource to assist with delivery of these programmes. Capital work programmes currently being mobilised include:
 - ASHP's
 - Heating improvements
 - External doors
 - Fascias and soffits
 - Windows

- Fire safety works
- Insulation
- A substantial procurement exercise is in progress for a range of new capital contracts, and an additional Interim Procurement Case Manager has been recruited specifically to assist in delivery of this work for the Housing Capital Programme.

Asset Management

- Stock Condition Surveys and Energy Assessments are being undertaken, including use of additional external resources to accelerate these programmes to improve data in these areas. Capital work programme planning (for both this financial year and forward plans) is being undertaken, together with development of our energy efficiency / affordable warmth programmes of work.
- The implementation of the Open Assets module of our Capita software system project is continuing. We are currently reviewing the configuration of the underlying tables, undertaking 'gap analysis' and populating new validated data, ongoing data cleansing, and undertaking User Acceptance Testing (UAT) to both the system functionality and reporting suite. We anticipate this module going live by August 2021.

Housing and Communities Team

Rough Sleeper Delivery Plan

- The MHCLG have confirmed that we are able to continue to deliver all existing rough sleeper initiatives. In addition, they have agreed to fund a floating support service to support people to move into independent accommodation who are currently living at Lindley House and Canonsgrove.
- We have 8 rough sleepers across the district, one in Minehead and seven in Taunton. The team are engaged with all these individuals and working towards securing appropriate accommodation.
- Gascony House in Minehead welcomed its first tenants in May. Gascony House offers 18 units of supported self-contained and cluster units. This was secured using Next Steps funding from the MHCLG. We were able to move across clients previously placed at The Beach Hotel, allowing The Beach to return to commercial use.
- The MHCLG are due to visit mid-July to observe the work of the outreach teams and to visit Gascony House, Canonsgrove and Lindley House.

Housing Options

- Housing Options has 358 live homeless applications currently with full time Officers carrying an average of 30 cases each.

- We have experienced an increased number of 'duty to refer' cases from other statutory services, in particular hospital discharges and prison releases. We have seen an average of 15 a month, all of which are single applicants.

Recruitment

- We have filled the following vacancies in our Rough Sleeper Team, meaning this team is now fully staffed:
 - 2 x Inreach/Outreach Officers (fixed term until 30/03/22).
 - 2x Rough Sleeper Tenancy Sustainment Officers (fixed term until 30/03/22).
 - 1x NFNO/RSI House Officer (fixed term until 30/03/22).
- We have also recruited the following positions in Housing Options:
 - 1 x G Grade Senior Case Manager (currently covered through agency).
 - 1 x F Grade Case Manager (Private Rented sector).
 - 1 x F Grade Case Manager (Tenancy Sustainment).
 - 1 x H Grade Case Management Lead (currently covered by agency allowing us to permanently recruit).
 - 3 x F Case Manager Housing Options (currently temporary staff whilst we go to permanent recruitment).
 - 1 x D Grade Homefinder Officer (temporary cover for 3 months).
 - 1 x D Grade Finance Officer (temporary position whilst we go to permanent recruitment).

Training Delivery Programme

- We have commissioned some lone worker training so that we can start carrying out home visits. These are vital to allow us opportunities to prevent homelessness by being able to negotiate with families or landlords, but also to allow us to understand a customer's situation better and to complete a more accurate assessment.
- We have also commissioned training from Relate. This will be delivered over two days and will cover negotiation and mediation as well as professional boundaries and self-care for staff.

Private Rented Sector

- We continue to roll out our new incentives package to targeted letting agents, however this is a very challenging market currently and competition for properties is high. That said, we have been able to secure properties for six of our customers.
- In conjunction with the sustainment team, we are pro-actively engaging with letting agents and landlords so that we are put in touch with any tenants who are struggling in their tenancies or who have been served notice. This will enable us to look to engage support and preventative interventions that mean we can

sustain these tenancies and also build trust and confidence in our service with letting agents and landlords.

- We are engaging with landlords of HMO's to encourage them to come to us with any vacancies they may have.
- We are reviewing our incentives scheme and building on this with a view to promote this at a landlords' forum.

B&B Overview

- We currently have 29 single placements and 3 families in B&B accommodation.
- We have seen an increase in the presentation of families and expect this to rise with the phased changes in evictions.
- We have seen an increase in presentations from those fleeing domestic abuse.
- The cost and availability of B&B provision has increased due to people holidaying at home.

Homefinder

- Homefinder has reduced its backlog to around four weeks which is what we set as our initial target. This has been extremely challenging as we have experienced a high volume of documents for processing and calls into the service.
- We have taken on another temporary member of staff who has been focused on the pieces of work required to be completed before the data is migrated to the new system. We also have another temporary member of staff joining the team in mid July, who will be helping to reduce the backlog as well as providing extra capacity in the team to allow for testing and training of the new system.
- The new system (Locata) is set to "go live" with the new look Homefinder Somerset on 2 August. This is a challenging date as we are still testing and refining some elements of this, but the Partnership is working hard to meet this date for the first properties to be advertised.

Extra Care Housing

- Way Ahead Care (commissioned by Somerset County Council) staff and all SWT staff continue to work in COVID-safe ways, to minimise risks.
- All visitors are asked to follow government guidance and use PPE, as appropriate.
- The Outreach Clinic run by District Nursing has continued to run, which allows vulnerable patients access to health care support, without the need to enter the hospital.
- Way Ahead Care are running the 'assisted dining' for tenants, Mon – Fri (tenants are helped to the communal lounge for a meal they purchase). PPE is used and tenants sit on separate tables, to minimise risks.
- Monthly referrals meetings and lettings are still being undertaken, with Adult Social Care and other housing association partners.
- SWT staff continue to complete the weekly on-site Health and Safety checks.
- Gardening and maintenance work has continued to take place.

- SWT staff continue to meet tenants within the communal areas, or visit them in their home where essential, using PPE.

Sheltered Housing

- The Sheltered Housing team continue to make welfare calls to tenants, updating the annual reviews.
- Staff have been undertaking home visits where necessary; for example, for tenants who have partial hearing, learning disabilities or where using the telephone presents an additional challenge.
- Aids and adaptations assessments, tenancy sign ups, installation of lifelines, manage tenancies ending and responding to neighbour disputes is all taking place, to maintain business as usual.
- Staff continue to complete regular estates checks, involving tenants and local Councillors.
- Many sheltered tenants have had their vaccinations. The changing date for the relaxation of Government COVID rules and the newer strains of the virus are concerning for some tenants, leaving them feeling anxious about getting back out and about. Staff are supporting tenants to have phased returns to build their confidence, involving family and friends for support.
- During all visits, staff wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and are required to follow the relevant risk assessment guidance, which has been regularly updated and reviewed.
- The Sheltered Housing team continue to run the Deane Helpline rota, to follow up on concerns arising from calls made to sheltered tenants by the helpline.
- Gardening works have been able to continue to take place and emergency repairs have also been completed.
- Plans for the meeting halls to begin to re-open in mid-June have been moved to September 2021, following recent changes in COVID transmissions and guidance. However, staff are continuing to prepare for the re-openings, including planning re-decoration of some venues and purchasing new furniture, where needed. Small groups of tenants are supporting this process and the decision making.
- A group of tenants at Taunfield Close are working with staff to create a planting area within the scheme, for growing some fruit and veg.
- Staff are attending a variety of Housing Qualities Network training, to develop their skills and knowledge regarding matters such as tenancy management, ASB, hoarding etc.
- Staff are meeting with EROSH to begin establishing plans to develop an accredited service and standard within our sheltered and extra care housing.

Lettings

- The Home Move Plus project continues to develop well, with plenty of referrals for Housing Officers.
- Paul Hadley the Homeless Plus Officer is still on course to reach his target of 100 bedspaces by the project end date of May 2022.

- The recent housing newsletter article produced positive responses. An article in the next housing newsletter will focus on our more mature service users (the 60+ age group) to consider contacting the Homeless Plus officer.
- Work continues on “Open Housing” to replace the software system Academy. This and the new Home finder Somerset software “Locata” will impact the Lettings team in the transition to these new databases.
- The Lettings team are looking to work in a more normal pre-COVID way, taking a more non-pandemic approach to work. We have reinstated the weekly voids meetings where we work closely with the Voids team to plan works and reduce turnaround times. These are much more fruitful discussions resulting in better outcomes for all.
- Pre-void inspections have been reinstated, which in turn will help in the marketing and advertising of SWT properties on the Homefinder Somerset website.
- Since the last report in May, we have relet 83 properties in a six-week period. Of those tenants that have responded we are averaging a year-to-date average of 97.5% satisfaction rate of the standard of the property let to them.

Income

- The Rent Recovery Team now have a new target for 21/22, this year’s target is £461k, the arrears on 16/06/21 are £565,7270.87 with 1501 tenants in arrears. The team will continue to work in accordance with the “Lean Process” to reduce the arrears whilst continuing to support our tenants.
- We have recruited an agency member of staff who started in June, to cover a maternity leave position.
- The Open Housing Project has had an impact on the capacity of the team and will continue to do so. Therefore, it has been agreed that we can increase our team capacity with an agency member of staff for 6 months. This will relieve the pressure on the current members of staff that are involved with the project.
- We developed a backlog of garage lets during COVID and the lockdowns. We are now working through these to clear the backlog and let the vacant garages.
- The Debt and Benefit Officers continue to support all our tenants to maximize their income. They are currently exploring ways to help our new tenants, right at the start of the tenancy to stop them falling into arrears and falling behind on other bills such as Council Tax.

Tenancy/Estates and ASB Teams

- The team have gone through significant pressure over the last two months with sickness and other absences. This has created real pressures for the team.
- As a department generally we are experiencing high demands for service from our customers. This is not unusual in the sector, as most housing providers have recently experienced similar high demands.
- It is pleasing that the team are now back to working at full strength; and are working hard to catch up on the backlog of work.
- We have successfully recruited some additional staff to help us through this period and to support the team during the Open Housing Project. The posts are as follows:

- 1 x Senior Housing Case Manager – to help support both teams.
 - 1 x ASB Officer – for a four month period
 - 1 x Estates/Tenancy Case Managers – for a 4/6 months
 - 1 x Estates/Tenancy Case Manager – 12 months to support the team during Open Housing Project
- Once these staff are up and running we are hopeful that the team will get back up to speed and we can again focus on their process workflows in preparation for Open Housing. We are looking to ensure that for each task that we have that there is a workflow which will include guidance notes and processes, along with standardised letters. This will ensure that all our customers receive the same high standard of service across the whole area.
 - We are also looking to roll out Service Standards for both teams and hope this will be able to deliver by late Summer, which we hope will help to reduce the number of complaints that are currently coming into the service.

ASB Team

- We have currently just over 80 active open cases; with a small proportion of these being high level ASB. The team are currently preparing witness statements and are having ongoing discussions with our legal team.
- The temp ASB Officer has a Police background and will be supporting the team in getting these witness statements completed.
- The team are also recognising that several of the ASB Cases involve repeat offenders and we will be looking to take swift action to try to get these perpetrators to amend their behaviour. Working closely with them in the past as not had the outcome we would have wanted, so we will possibly be looking to serve them with a Notice of Seeking Possession as a deterrent for any future bad behaviour. A Notice of Seeking Possession is the first step towards taking legal action against a perpetrator; this notice is valid for 12 months; and at any point during this 12-month period SW&T could decide to take Court action if their behaviour continues to cause nuisance and annoyance to the community.
- The outcome we want is to not evict but is to ensure that we get a long-term change in their behaviour. However, if we must evict then we will take that position.
- The team have also now served their first Community Protection Warning (CPW) as we have delegated powers to do so. This notice has been served on a person living in one of our properties but is not the tenant. We are now closely monitoring whether this has been successful. We will be able to provide further feedback moving forward. If the CPW is breached then we will be serving a Community Protection Notice (CPN).

Estates/Tenancy Team

- The team have now held six skip events across the borough which have been successful and well used. We are planning to hold a further event in the Halcon area as two of the largest skips were completely filled. We have included a couple of photographs of our successful skip days at the bottom of this section.

- We have also worked closely with Link Power (Volunteer group) and they have worked extremely hard and supported us in these events.
- As these events have been successful, we will be planning more.
- Block and estate inspections are also continuing and staff are stating that blocks are now looking good and most continuing to remain clear. We are now working closely with our Compliance team as legislation is now allowing for internal balconies to be checked to ensure that they are not cluttered and to not present as a fire hazard. Again, we will be able to report on this further as and when we establish a process for moving this forward.





Our very successful skip days

Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)

- As the Country continues to ease out of lockdown, Somerset Independence Plus (SIP) is witnessing a steep rise in referrals from Occupational Therapists as they work towards clearing their backlog of assessments due to not being able to make face to face contact with clients. Somerset County Council staff are finding clients with increased mobility issues and poor health due to isolation, lack of exercise and social contact. In the last two months, SIP received 90 referrals in the Sedgemoor and Somerset West and Taunton area. We are currently assessing our staff resources and prioritising cases. There is also an emphasis on managing the backlog as quickly as possible as the NHS, County Council and SIP prepare for the demand brought on by tackling the surge in cases for people needing operations which is a Government priority. The Hospital Resettlement post is working hard to prevent bed blocking, with a current caseload of 62 cases. Embedded in Musgrove Hospital, the post has been extremely busy in finding housing solutions for patients so they can go back to a safe home. There will be some relief for the post as there is currently an advert out for a second post.
- Besides the immediate situation with ambulant and no ambulant care, the service is also being inundated with referrals from health professionals such as mental health and social workers, as well Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue and Community Village Agents, Health Connectors and GP's for clients who have reached crises point with hoarding and houses in a poor state of repair. There are two Independent Living Officers and they have received over 200 referrals in the last year up 25% on the previous year. In the last two months, 40

referrals of which it is a 50/50 split between Sedgemoor and Somerset West and Taunton. Many are presenting themselves due to a year in isolation due to lockdown.

- There is a great deal of prevention work taking place, working with the Social Housing Providers to improve the DDA compliancy of the stock as part of their refurbishment programmes. SIP has also designed off the shelf plans for developers to use as part of designing in facilities and easy access for households with disabilities in affordable housing. SIP has been working with Homes in Sedgemoor to redesign and configure a number of sheltered units investing heavily in assistive technology, a spin off from SIP's involvement with the County Council in the assistive technology pilot. SIP is working with contractors to ease the pressures of material shortages and price increases due to unprecedented demand.
- Finally, SIP has been delivering on the retrofit programme for energy measures in social housing, owner occupied and privately rented properties. Having been successful with bids for LADS 1A and 1B (£518k plus £809k respectively), Warm Homes Fund £1.3 million and now working with West Of England Combined Authority and the SW Energy Hub to deliver £200 million, to install energy measures. This ranges from air source heat pumps through to AWI insulation and external wall insulation. To date SIP working with SW&T Social Housing officers, SHAL, Homes in Sedgemoor and the CSE have surveyed all 75 properties in the LADS 1A and now surveying for LADS 1B. The works have tight turnarounds in terms of deadlines from award of the bid to completion with the job not made easy by subsequent lockdowns preventing surveys. LADS 1A has to be completed by the end of August and LADS 1B by the end of September. The surveyed work is now progressing to installations. The Warm Homes Fund has seen significant assistance in energy advice with over 3,000 people given free energy advice in the last year with in excess of £665,319 in benefits delivered to households such as fuel bill savings, take up in benefits etc. Of the 3,000 households, 2,634 were in fuel poverty. Over a quarter of the people assisted were in the Somerset West and Taunton area. Besides advice the Warm Homes Fund will also assist with 175 air source heat pump and first time gas installations (the latter being a very small percentage and applied in properties where there is no other solution) to Somerset West and Taunton managed Council stock.

Housing Performance Team

Since our last report we have been progressing the following key pieces of work:

- We have started work on the STAR action plan, addressing the “communication” theme e.g. sourcing customer service refresher training and designing the mystery shopper programme for volunteers.
- Producing an annual report to tenants to be published over the summer.
- Working to implement the new housing software (Open Housing). This continues with many groups set up to implement the various modules.
- Held the first Tenants' Strategic Group meeting (virtually) with the newly appointed group.
- Produced a training plan for the Tenants' Strategic Group including access to TPAS training (TPAS are a tenant engagement organisation).

- Supported our managers to consult our Tenants' Strategic Group on policy documents.
- Held our Tenants' Action Group meeting to consider sub-groups and forward business.
- Supported the responses to complaints within the 10-working day deadline.
- Started to review how we can improve our complaints process. There is a corporate review being undertaken in the next few weeks.
- Continued our development of website forms and pages, which we will report upon during this meeting.
- Continue work on our in-depth assessment against the consumer standards part of the white paper.
- Produced summer newsletter content to tenants and leaseholders.
- Continued to publish a two weekly newsletter to staff to share information across the service.
- Internally we continue to ensure that regular governance meetings are held to oversee and manage the activities of the housing directorate e.g., programme management, finance, performance and risk meetings.