



Somerset
Council



Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Consultation

July 2024



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Section 1

Overview of Homelessness in Somerset



Overview of Homelessness in Somerset

Introduction

As a new unitary authority formed in April 2023, one of Somerset Council's first actions has been to review homelessness. Our housing system is under strain as increasing numbers of people face unmet housing need. The shortage of suitable, affordable housing is one of the many causes of homelessness and rough sleeping. There is a growing imbalance between supply and demand.

The main drivers, needs, and challenges include:

- Accessibility and equalities.
- Affordable housing supply and demand.
- Diversity and suitability.
- Low wages and high costs economy.
- Increasing mental health or substance needs.
- Lived experience.
- Partnership working.
- Rural Somerset.
- Sharing learning resource and expertise.
- Training and awareness.

Homelessness is complex and can happen to anyone who finds themselves in a combination of challenging circumstances. Multiple disadvantages can lead to a greater vulnerability to homelessness, compounding existing needs and trauma. This can make it harder to access and sustain suitable accommodation. Access to health, social care, and other support services is also a critical factor in overcoming this barrier.



Population of Somerset

In 2021 the population of Somerset was 571,600, an increase of around 41,600 people since 2011, making it the second largest unitary authority in England. This is a rise of 7.8%, slightly faster than that for England and Wales (6.3%). Demographic trends indicate an increasingly older population with health needs and mobility impairment.

In Somerset it is estimated that by 2036 just over a third of the population will be 65 or over. The population is expected to grow to 599,330 by 2029, with almost all of the growth coming from those of retirement age. Internal migration from within Britain is the primary factor in Somerset's increasing population, especially from some neighbouring districts, the South East, and London.

However, there is a consistent net flow of 16-24 year-olds out of Somerset. This has implications for the future economic development of the county as there is a dwindling resource of young people to generate income.

Tenure of Households in Somerset

40.3%

owns outright

28.1%

owns with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership

13.7%

social rented

17.8%

private rented

Tenure of Households in England and Wales

32.8%

owns outright

29.7%

owns with a mortgage, loan or shared ownership

17.1%

social rented

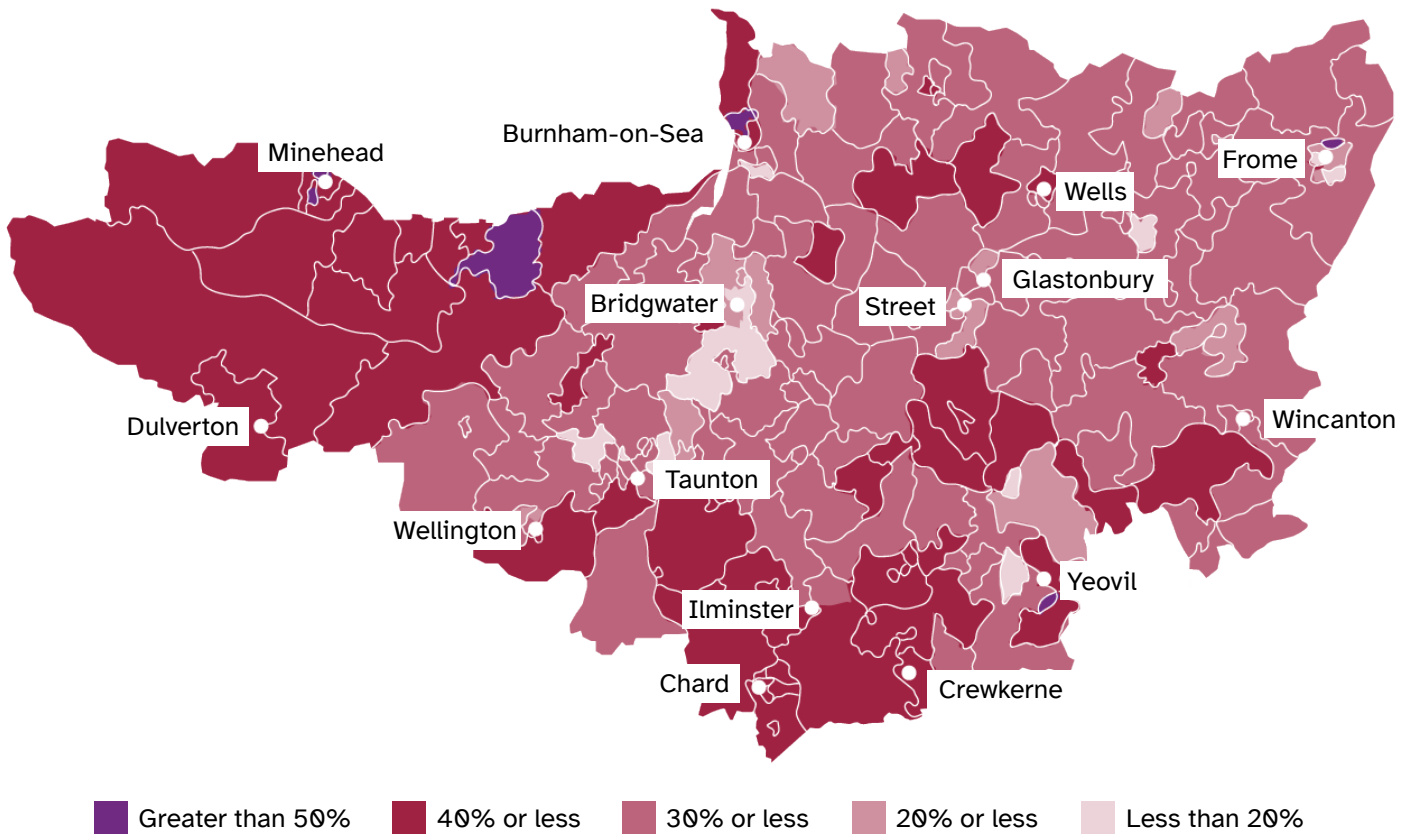
20.4%

private rented

Source: [Somerset Intelligence](#)



Projected proportion of LSOA that will be aged 65 or over in 2043

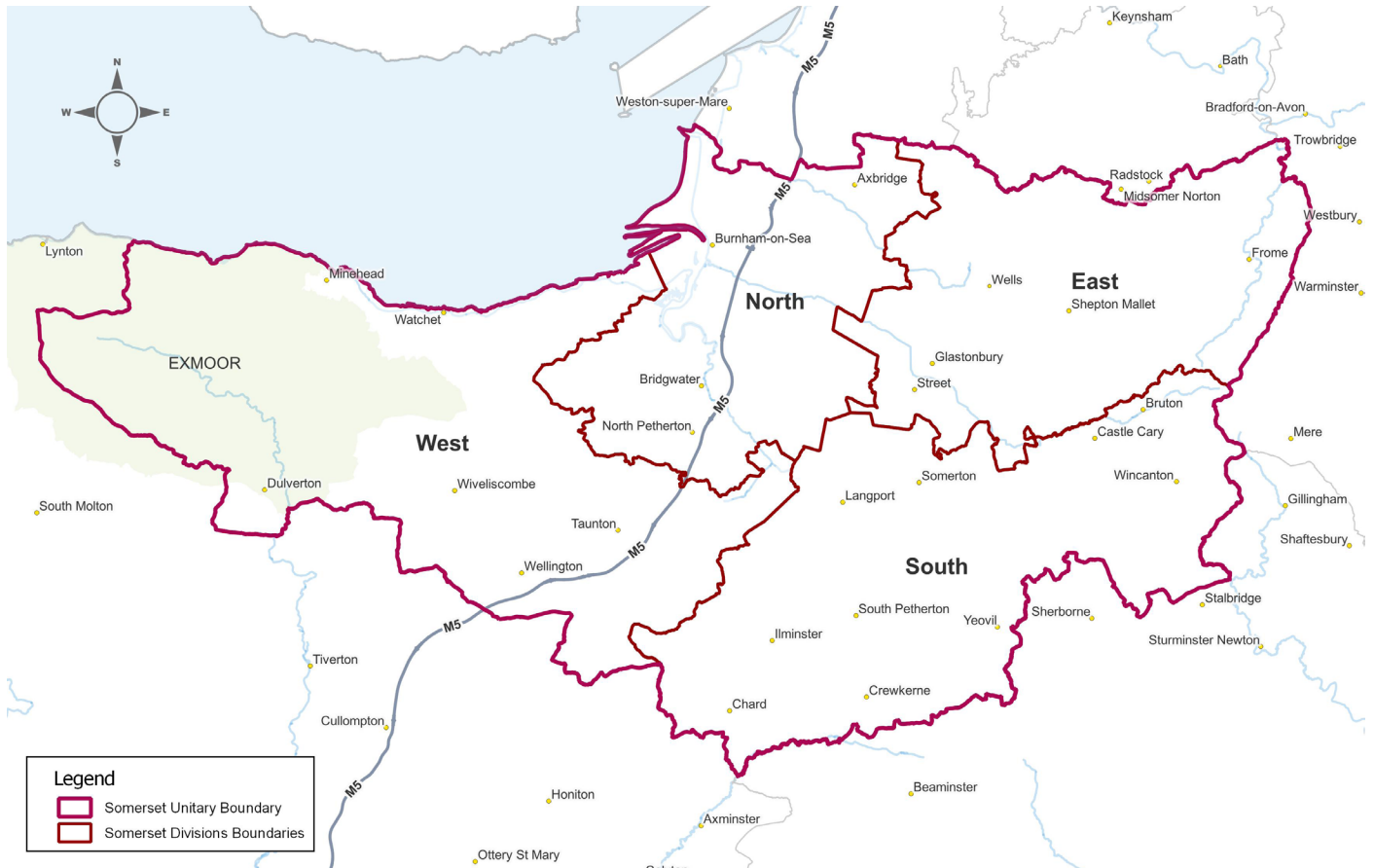


LSOAs are small geographic areas produced by the ONS to enable reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales. There are 32,844 LSOAs in England, each having a population of approximately 1,500. (Source: www.gov.uk)



Geography

Map of Somerset Divided by Unitary Boundaries



Scale at A4: 1:400 500

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This map illustrates Somerset Council's unitary boundaries referred to throughout this document. They are structured to ensure effective management and representation across the diverse geographical and demographic landscape of the county. The divisions are based on the administrative areas previously served by the four district councils—Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, and Somerset West and Taunton—as well as the Somerset County Council.

The division into North, South, East, and West aligns with the need to provide tailored services and support to the varied communities within Somerset, from rural market towns to larger urban centers. Each division has its own unique set of challenges and priorities.

Somerset is **48% rural** and is also the second largest unitary authority in England.

Somerset faces challenges such as:

- High concentrations of holiday homes reducing the number of viable homes for local residents.
- High house prices especially in rural locations such as Exmoor.
- High rates of fuel poverty in rural locations exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

These rural housing issues are further intensified by the disparity in services such as:

- Travel time to GP averaging 10 miles in areas such as Winsford.
- Almost 2,000 rural students relying on a full County Ticket to reach college by bus.
- Older women in rural locations being particularly affected by a lack of transport, due to the lack of car ownership.
- Areas without sufficient broadband access creating further barriers, particularly for the disabled, such as Old Cleeve.
- West Somerset being the worst performing area for social mobility in the whole of England.
- Limited public transport for people to access services, especially in the evenings and weekends.

Rural homelessness is growing; in March 2024, 25.3% of rough sleeping was rural, with 41% in the East of Somerset where 50% of people sleeping rough were at rural locations.

The former district council area of West Somerset, which is both rural and coastal, was identified as having the poorest social mobility in the country. Somerset generally has poor educational attainment compared to the majority of England.

For urban areas, the West has the highest flow of people sleeping rough. This is partly due to the lack of off-the-street accommodation in the West. For the North and South, the rough sleeping numbers also cluster around its urban areas.

Other issues in urban areas are:

- Bridgwater area has the highest number of shared accommodation listings on Right Move per month, but the highest mean rental price (per calendar month) for shared accommodation.
- Areas of deprivation such as Roman Road (Taunton) experience high rates of fuel poverty.
- There are limited locations offering faith and cultural support for young people and communities with different cultural and religious beliefs.
- Glastonbury is now a hot spot for van dwellers and rough sleepers, rising from 45 in 2018 to 300 in 2024.

Around a third of people leave custody without housing, and yet we know that safe and stable accommodation is a critical foundation to sustainable resettlement.

Where housing has not been found prior to release there is the task, particularly in the North and South, for the local housing authority to engage with Probation Services in offering support to ensure that people are not released from prison 'direct to the street'.

The rural nature of Somerset makes access to transport, employment, and housing problematic. This is made worse with increasing levels of need and complexity, especially for those sleeping rough. Rural locations also affect those that care for others or need to travel.



Individuals with multiple disadvantages are particularly at risk of homelessness in rural areas. Rural poverty exacerbated by high housing costs are fundamental drivers of rural homelessness, with rural areas also receiving 65% less funding per capita for homeless prevention. In the past year, there has been a **24% increase in rural rough sleeping nationally**.

Almost half the population of Somerset live in rural areas (48.5%), placing Somerset in the top 10 nationally for this indicator. Rural areas have a more elderly age profile.

Accessibility and Equalities

People with protected characteristics are overrepresented by homeless households and those at risk of homelessness as well as those seeking social housing.

This includes those who are women, young, elderly, disabled, LGBTQ+, have experienced gender reassignment, pregnant, ethnic minorities, and armed forces veterans. **Our homeless data tells us that the following people are most at risk of homelessness:**



- Leaving prison or youth detention accommodation.
- Regular armed forces veterans.
- Victims of domestic abuse.
- Leaving hospital.
- Experiencing mental illness.

Others include young adults, those with physical or learning disabilities or who are neurodivergent, victims of violence or sexual abuse, victims of harassment, having a drug or alcohol addiction, being a victim of trafficking, people facing significant multiple disadvantage, or possessing any of the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010.

In a rough sleeper snapshot at the end of March 2024, 68% of people experiencing homelessness in Somerset were known to have multiple needs. On the date the snapshot was taken, 76.6% of rough sleepers were aged between 25 and 54, 4% were under 25, 10.6% were between 55 and 65, 5.3% were over 65, and 2.6% were of unknown age.

63%

were known to have mental health needs

48%

were known to have physical health needs

12%

presented as neurodivergent

39%

had drug and alcohol issues

35%

had experienced domestic abuse

45%

had experience of the criminal justice system

Better Futures analysis also showed that mental health was the most identified support need in the homeless population.

The Better Futures Programme is a collaboration between statutory agencies and the voluntary and housing sectors to develop and support better systems, meeting the needs of those facing significant multiple disadvantage. This typically includes those in supported housing and those sleeping rough.

Shortage of appropriate accommodation options impacts on a wide range of vulnerable groups, which includes older people and those with disabilities. Just under 2% (approximately 200) of households registered on Homefinder Somerset have been assessed as needing a wheelchair accessible home or home with adapted bathroom. Homefinder is Somerset's choice based lettings system for Social and Affordable Housing

There is a mismatch between the vulnerable groups that need accessible, affordable, and specialist accommodation, and the accommodation available. People living in supported accommodation have limited move-on options to help support independence and long wait times. Only 0.8% of homes advertised on Homefinder have such adaptations.

The rural nature and geographic extent of Somerset makes delivery of essential services more difficult, especially given the needs of the growing elderly population. Many rural areas do not receive good broadband or mobile connectivity. Many elderly people are not digitally connected, often relying on other forms of communication.

Older people may also require access to assistive technology to support continued independence. We will also need to provide more specialist and adapted housing. Nationally, 1 in 5 children live in overcrowded, unaffordable, or unsuitable homes. Two thirds of these have a need for social housing. The picture for Somerset is similar.

Within Somerset, the figure for households with children who are 'owed a main homeless duty' is higher than comparison authorities.

There are approximately 600 people across the county in supported housing accommodation or sleeping rough. These individuals often have a range of disadvantages, including serious health conditions. There is also a growing need to provide appropriate accommodation and support solutions for victims of domestic abuse.

The rise in international migration will place more demands on services. Much is being done to accommodate and support displaced people, but can we be doing more? Do our services support race equity? The same is true for gypsies and travellers and other protected characteristics, such as for LGBTQ+.

Diversity and Suitability

Improving diversity, equality, and inclusion is important to achieving our ambition of improving services and goes to the heart of what we stand for as a local authority. Housing people from different groups, ethnicity, faiths, or others who may be vulnerable and experience disproportionate disadvantage will be a key element of our homelessness strategy.

Voices of Individuals with Lived Experience

We are asking groups of people with lived experience of homelessness for their views and what would help to prevent or resolve homelessness.

'It's good to have a roof over my head and to be and feel safe'

Things that Help

'Upskilling and training'

'Help with getting work; I need to keep busy'

'Being given a proper chance to make a fresh start, with everything from a deposit, rent in advance, furniture and white goods, support and guidance on how to manage a flat and how to budget'

'Living in a community'

'People around me who understand what it's like to be homeless and support after I get somewhere to live'



Experiences and Perceptions

'I feel like I'm on trial having to prove myself and not really cared about'

'A bereavement led to me becoming homeless after 18 years as I wasn't on the tenancy - no one seemed to care enough and here I am now'

'Being given an empty shell with no carpets or anything is like being told I can have a job, but it's in Australia and I have to walk to work'

Please also watch the videos made by people with lived experience: you can hear more from [John](#), [Philip](#), and [Tyreece](#).

We conducted an appreciative enquiry with the public. The feedback from these open interviews echoes feedback from people with lived experience and services, **with some key messages being:**

- The need for better sharing of information and collaborative working between services.
- Personal interactions are important.
- Difficulty accessing transport means providing accessible local services matters.
- There is not enough affordable housing.
- Meaningful activities are important to health and wellbeing for example: social networks, green spaces, fun activities.

Displaced Persons

Every year, millions of people around the world are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, violence, human rights violations, persecution, disasters, and the impact of climate change. Somerset Council has been working alongside partners since 2015 to resettle people impacted by conflict and displacement.

Great work has been achieved so far, with Welcome Hubs set up to support Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, helping them find accommodation in Somerset. More can be done, and this strategy will aim to build on this work to ensure that safe, secure and affordable housing is available to everyone, regardless of their background.



Affordable Housing Supply and Demand

One of our aims is to ensure that the right number and quality of homes are being built for those who need them. The planning system exists to enable housing needs to be met. New housing should also meet the housing needs of different cohorts, and vulnerable groups within the community.

Growth in **single-person households** has had a significant influence on the housing market.

The demand for 1-bed homes is the highest in both general housing and for those who need supported or 'move-on' accommodation. Affected groups include singles, young people, couples, older adults, the elderly and vulnerable, and those with a range of health conditions, both mental and physical.

Somerset Council will develop a Somerset Local Plan with the aim to produce a new single Local Development Scheme for Somerset. This will exist alongside the Local Plan for Exmoor which is part of the National Parks Planning Authority. Work has begun to investigate the content and timescales for the new Local Plan. The adopted Local Plans of the former districts gives some measure of housing demand in the immediate future.

Area	Projected Housing Requirement
North (Sedgemoor)	13,530 (644 per annum) by 2032
South (South Somerset)	16,950 by 2028
East (Mendip)	9,635 (420 per annum) by 2029
West	
Taunton Deane	17,000 by 2028
West Somerset	2,900, by 2032
Total Somerset average housing requirement per annum	12,015 per annum

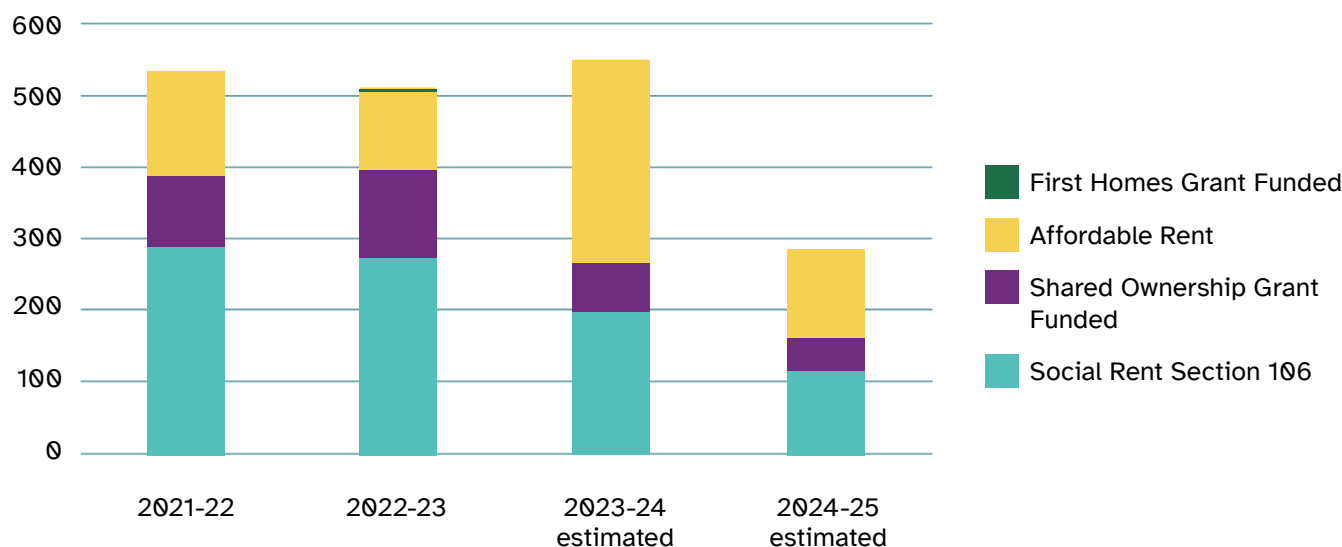
Housing supply varies from year to year, and trends by tenure can present a complex picture, but the following detail provides an overview of affordable housing delivered in Somerset in the last 3 years.

Type of accommodation	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (estimated)	2024-25 (estimated)
Social Rent S106*	291	281	200	118
Social Rent grant-funded	46	89	220	42
Shared Ownership S106	186	151	153	64
Shared Ownership grant-funded	99	119	68	47
First Homes S106	0	-	6	12
First Homes grant funded	0	4	-	-
Discounted Open Market S106	28	3	12	-
Affordable Rent	142	106	282	122
Total	792	753	941	405

*Section 106



Somerset's Affordable Housing Delivery Figures 2021 to 2024



Housing Affordability

Somerset has a low wage economy overall compared with regional and national figures. It has a shortage of suitable and affordable housing, with an imbalance between supply and demand. The cost of private homes means that home ownership is out of the reach of many, particularly younger people with few accessing the housing they need, leading to some being stuck in unsuitable accommodation or in need of greater support.

Being unable to afford repairs and maintenance to properties, or afford energy retrofit upgrades, could affect both physical and mental health.

People on low incomes or in supported housing have been disproportionately affected by the cost-of-living crisis, increasing rents and associated service charges, due to providers and landlord charges increasing significantly.

With rising interest rates and property purchases becoming more difficult to achieve, there is an increase in demand for private rental properties. Private renting was once the 'relief valve' for pressures elsewhere in the housing system, but renters are paying more and around a third more of their income is going on rent (31%) compared to people in social housing (average 27%) or with a mortgage (average 18%). The availability of private rented homes in some parts of Somerset has decreased.

ONS statistics for Somerset show housing affordability between 2021-2022 has deteriorated and earnings have not kept pace with the pace of house price growth. Typical house prices in 2022 were nearly 9 times the annual wage in Somerset, the least affordable in the East area (Mendip), where median prices are 9.33 times the annual wage.

Partnership Working

Effective partnership working is crucial to ensuring people receive the right accommodation and the right housing support to meet their diverse needs. There is considerable interdependence between housing, health and social care (alongside other services) in promoting wellbeing, joint planning, funding, commissioning and provision of services.

Many partnerships already exist between housing, health and social care and other public and voluntary sectors with each committed to ending homelessness. [See the “Achievements” chapter to learn more.](#)

Sharing Resources

The importance of working collaboratively can have wide-reaching benefits, such as helping to build the capacity of front-line staff, and improving everyone’s understanding of homelessness and associated issues. **A shared approach could support the following:**



- Information sharing.
- Upskilling and empowering staff.
- Access to skills and expertise.
- Training.
- Connecting different areas of communities.
- Cost-sharing or access to finance.
- Increased strategic impact.

Underlying Challenges

The housing sector is experiencing substantial financial pressures. Debt levels are rising at the same time as increased cost of living pressures in a weakening housing market. Sharing resources will be key to managing these risks and requires a strategy that supports a wide range of accommodation for a diverse community.



Households at Risk of Homelessness, and Our Duty to Support

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was one of the biggest changes to the rights of homeless people in England for 15 years. It effectively strengthened homeless prevention and **added 2 new duties to the original statutory rehousing duty:**

- Duty to prevent homelessness
- Duty to relieve homelessness

The Prevention Duty applies to all eligible applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

The number of households owed a prevention or relief duty in 2022-23, per 1,000 population, was lower in Somerset than all comparator areas, except Wiltshire.

Despite this, the challenges as outlined above have led some people to lose their home. The end of an assured shorthold private tenancy was the most common reason, the Somerset average over the 5 years was higher than other comparator areas. One particular issue in Somerset is lack of private rented sector properties affordable to the low-wage worker. The private rented sector market in rural Somerset is weak, relying on the larger market towns (Bridgwater, Yeovil and Taunton), where impacts on demand for housing such as the Hinkley C power station construction are concentrated.

Rough Sleeping in Somerset

Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness.

Traumatic, damaging, dangerous & isolating.

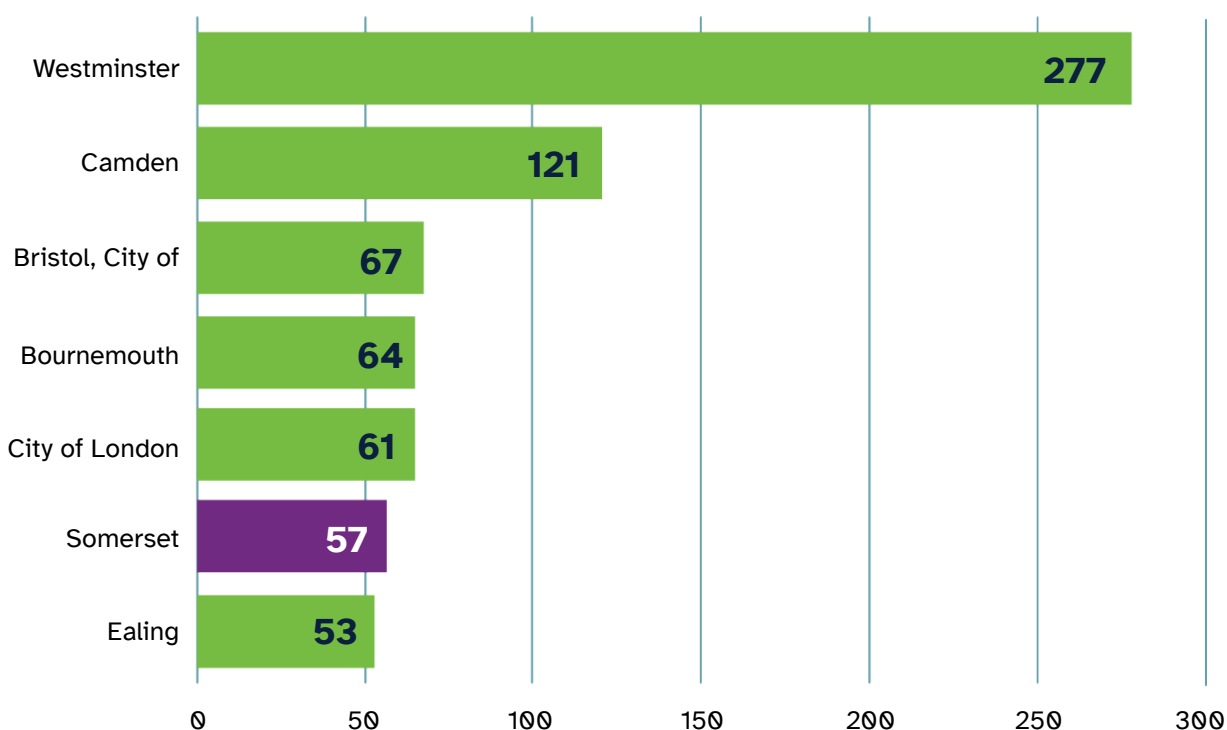
An individual who spends just 3 nights on the streets is 15 times more likely to experience mental health issues. In Somerset over half of rough sleepers have mental health needs.

People who sleep rough regularly over a long period of time are more likely to die young than the general population - the average age of death is 45 for men and 43 for women.

Risk to health, wellbeing, safety and life even greater in severe weather.

Our rough sleeping numbers are high. Somerset experienced a **19% increase** in rough sleeping in its annual street count in November 2023, with 57 individuals found sleeping rough. This was the fifth highest number in the UK.

Local authorities with highest estimated number of people sleeping rough



The number of individuals sleeping rough has already increased since the annual count. In May 2024 128 individuals slept rough throughout the month, of which 43 were long term rough sleepers. 46 people were found sleeping rough on a single night. Including those in off-the-street accommodation were 169 rough sleepers in the course of April.

Opportunities

- Local knowledge helps find hidden rough sleeping locations, particularly the rural ones.
- Local community-based groups and services help to prevent homelessness and the escalation of disadvantages.
- Bridgwater and surrounding rural areas currently benefit from well-connected transport links.
- Outreach services and drops-ins in a number of critical services take the service to where the people are.

Section 2

Achievements



Achievements

Between 1 January and 16 March 2024, 101 of the 515 homes that have been advertised on Homefinder Somerset included a **preference label for households with an assessed homeless duty**. This makes it easier to move people on from temporary accommodation.

Our Strategic Approach to Homelessness

- **Homeless Reduction Board (HRB)** a partnership overseeing homelessness strategy, service effectiveness and direction.
- Systems and service collaboration to tackle multiple disadvantages through the HRB's **Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM)** and **Better Futures** programme.
- **Voluntary and Community Sector collaboration** (Connect Somerset, Open Mental Health, emerging Local Community Networks, Citizens Advice, Second Step, YMCA, Connect Community Church, Somerset Community Council, Credit Unions and accommodation providers).
- **Working towards the integration of health, social care and housing** underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding supported by the Integrated Care Board and Somerset Board.

Thriving Partnerships

- **Homeless Reduction Board and Operations Group** (representing Somerset providers) helping us create and deliver our strategic vision, highlighting and addressing relevant emerging issues and trends.
- **Registered provider partners** helping us to meet local accommodation needs.
- **Creative Solutions Panels** uniting our partnership approach to solutions for individuals facing significant multiple disadvantage and gateway agreement to social housing.
- **Multi agency and provider meetings** helping provide the best solutions and support for rough sleepers, as well as making best use of accommodation options. This includes move on from temporary accommodation (TA), minimising time in TA, and cost.



Homeless Health Nursing Team

A Parliamentary Award-winning Homeless Health Nursing Team and Inclusion GPs providing outreach health interventions to rough sleepers, and 'non-bricks-and-mortar' communities wherever they may be. As of June 2023, since its establishment in March 2021, the team have seen:

871

individual
clients

4,469

appointments
completed

296%

increase in referrals to
the team from 2021-22

The Homeless Health Nursing team provide:

- Basic health checks.
- Wound care.
- Blood tests, including hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV, and syphilis testing.
- Help with medical appointments.
- Advice and support with medication concerns.
- Sexual health promotion, including contraception advice and STI checks.
- Dental health promotion.
- Swabs, removal of stitches or staples.
- Confidential advice and advocacy.



Whole Systems Approach



Somerset Independence Plus

Somerset Independence Plus

supporting vulnerable people to remain independent in their own homes.

Displaced People Service supporting Ukrainian, Syrian, Afghan and other refugees and asylum seekers, including:

- Over 300 asylum seekers
- Over 1,900 refugees

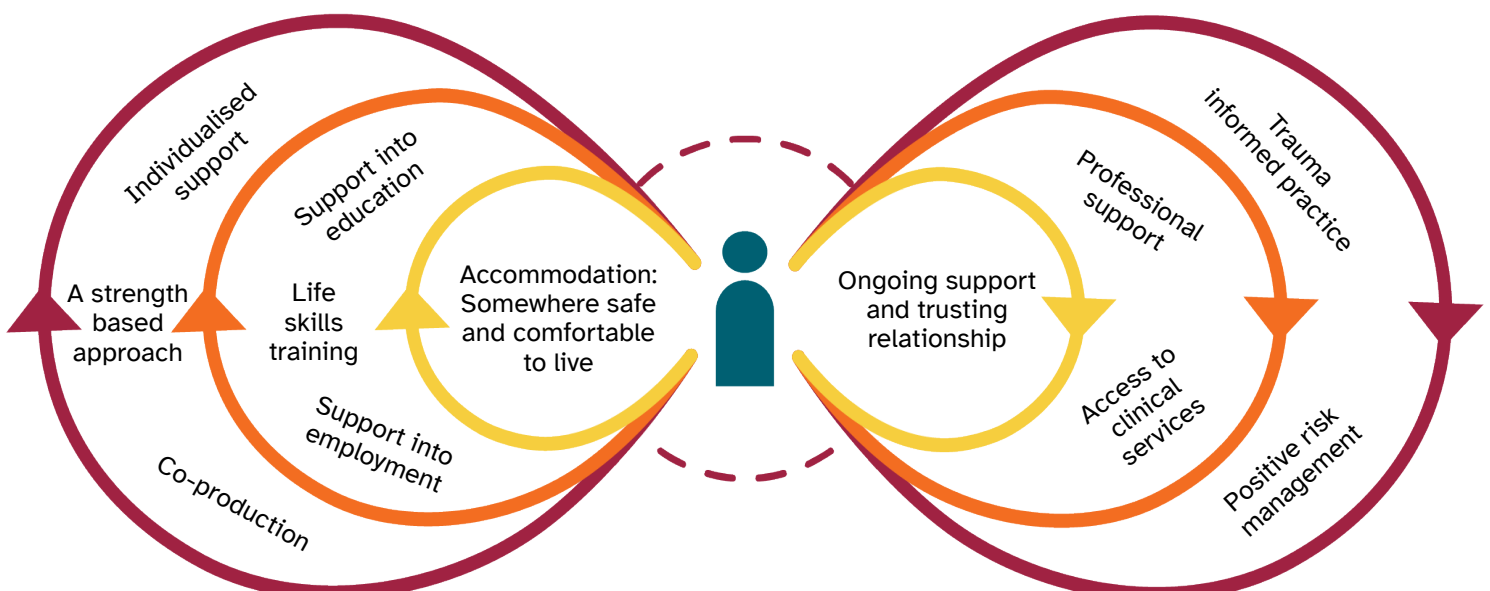
Providing wrap-around support, through accommodation, health, education, and community cohesion.

Thrive 16+ is a newly commissioned pathway to independence offering housing related support and accommodation for children in care, care leavers and 18-25 year olds in priority need in Somerset. The service provides a range of options to meet different needs, which often change. **This includes:**

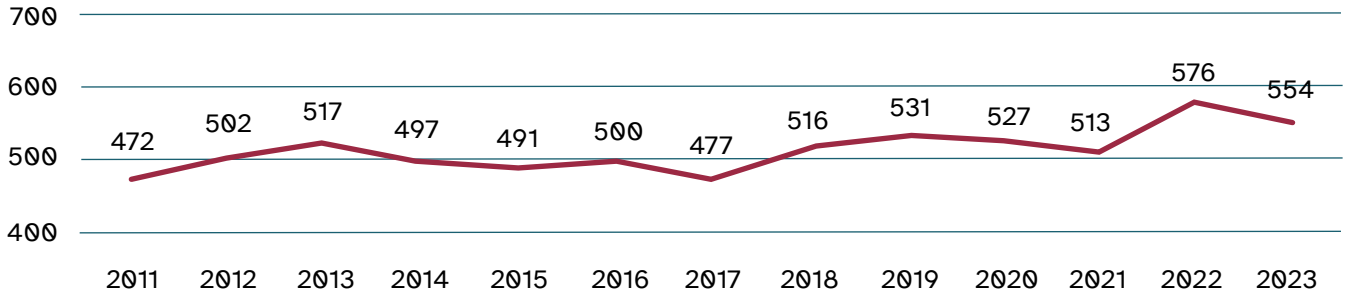
- Wrap around support with the Staying Close pilot.
- Somerset Drug and Alcohol Service link workers.
- Tenancy Accreditation scheme.
- Floating support and Housing Options support.
- Rent guarantor scheme.
- Dedicated Housing Options Officer.
- 190 Children’s Social Care and Housing beds.
- Support to engage in training, education, and employment.

Success in semi-independent living

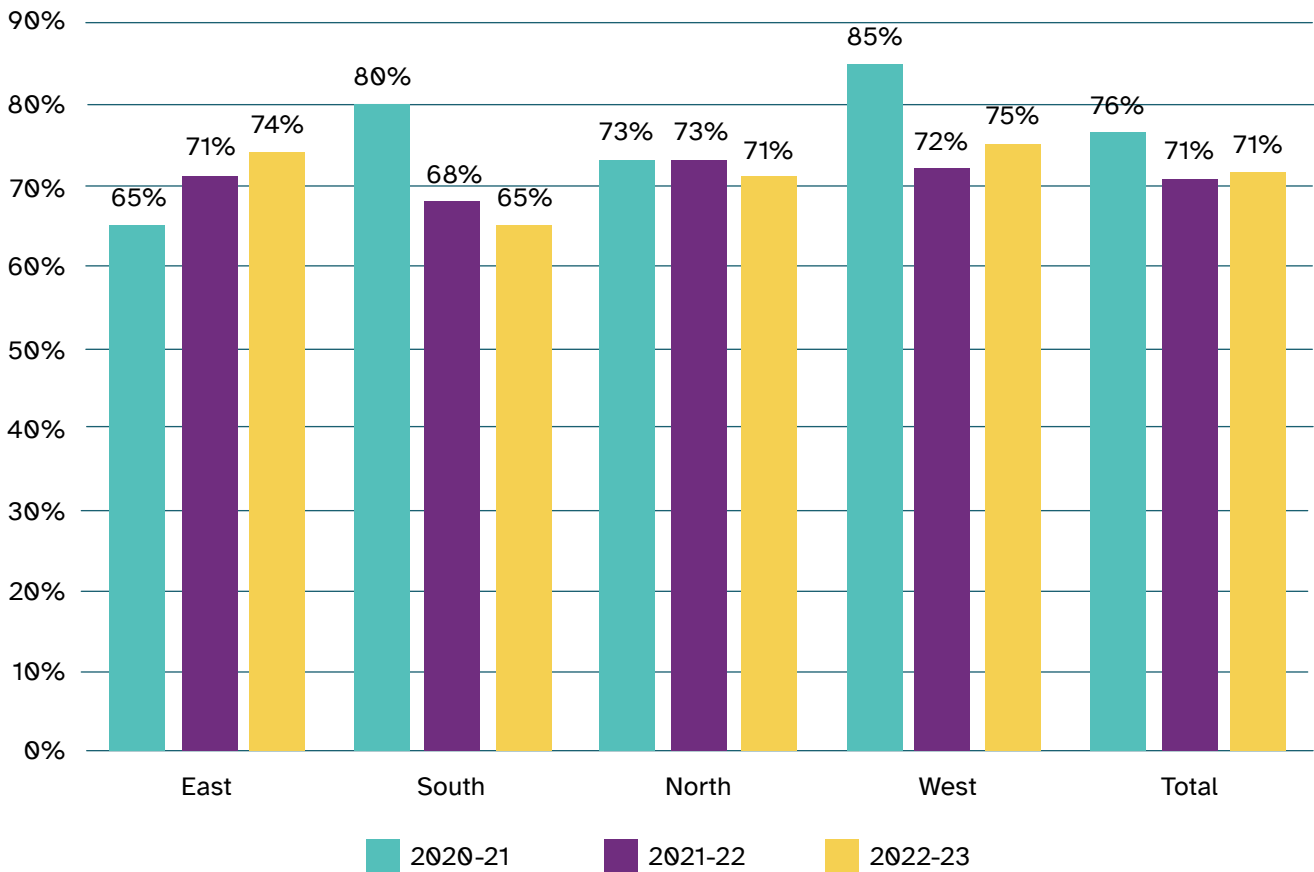
Young person’s wellbeing



Young People Looked After Between 2011 and 2023



Successful Move-On from Service



Pathways

- **Gypsy Liaison Officer and Roadside Housing Advisor** supporting Gypsies and Travellers.
- **Off the Street and second stage accommodation** for rough sleepers, our first step away from homelessness, helping to rebuild lives and reduce rough sleeping. Where we don't have this offer, rough sleeping numbers are more than double.
- A growing provision of **Housing First** accommodation for rough sleepers with complex needs. Housing First is currently helping individuals aged 21 and over with multiple disadvantage.
- **Tenancy sustainment and services supporting access to accommodation**, such as:
 - Housing Options teams.
 - Roadside Housing Adviser, supporting non-bricks-and-mortar communities in Glastonbury.
 - Successful funding awards and homeless prevention service delivery.
 - 5 tenancy sustainment workers.
 - 3 complex needs housing options officers.
 - 2 prison release workers in the North and South areas.
 - 1 hospital discharge worker.
 - 4 targeted support workers.
 - Work rent assistance scheme.
 - 'Help to Rent' and private sector access schemes.
 - Step Together complex needs support service.
- **Everyone-in and SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)**, our responses to emergency situations, successfully engaging the majority of rough sleepers to come in for their own safety during lockdown and severe weather.

We can learn from our successes



Section 3

Prevention and Support

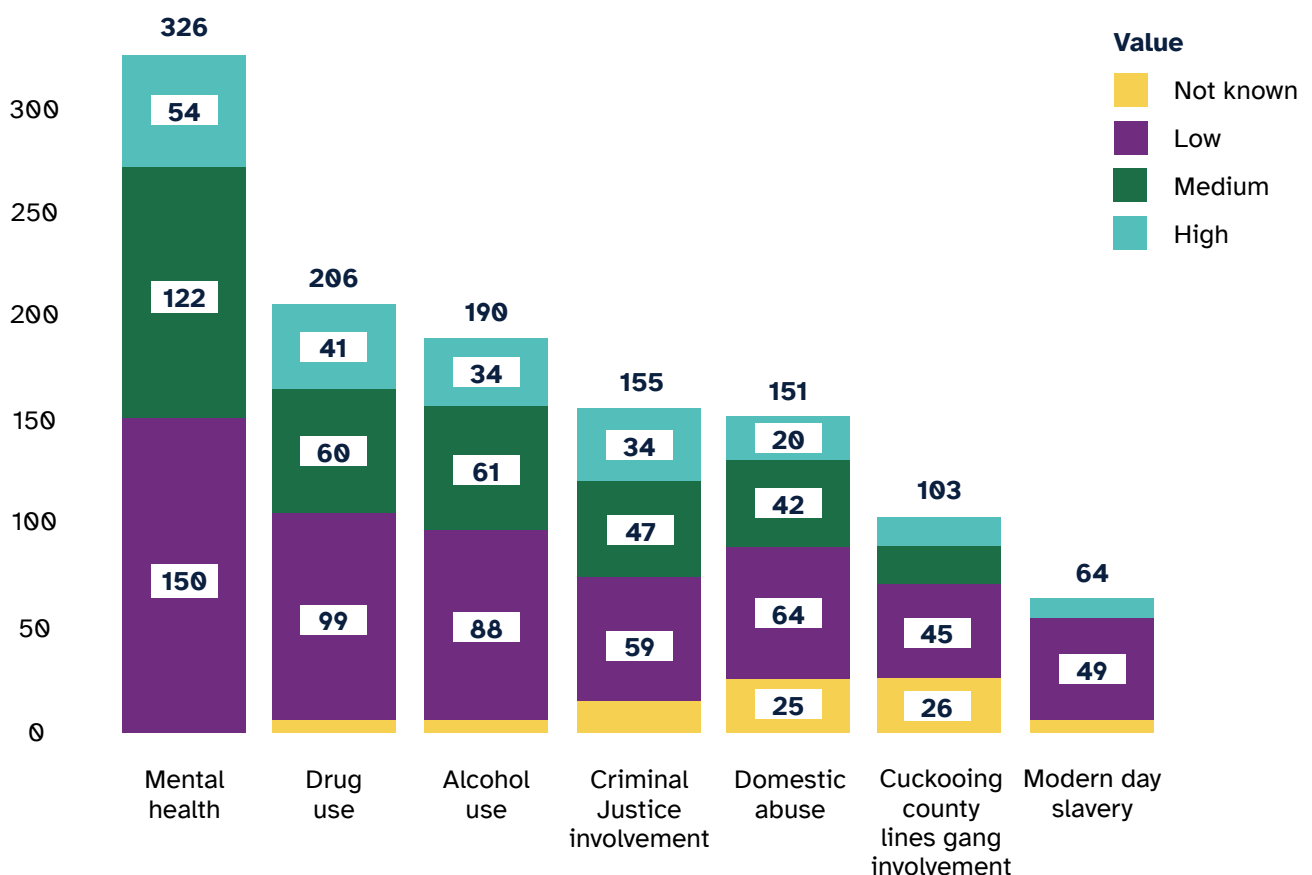


Prevention and Support

Key themes include increasing complexity, increasing level of need, and gaps in provision.

There are worrying trends around those suffering multiple disadvantage and homelessness in Somerset, with the severity of conditions such as poor mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence. There are increasing gaps in service provision, with many individuals unable to access or receive the support they require.

The graph below shows **assessed care and support needs for those within supported housing or people sleeping rough (December 2022)**. Many individuals have co-morbidities such as a combination of mental health needs, drug use, alcohol use, and others.



In May 2024, **128 individuals slept rough** throughout the month, of which 43 were long term rough sleepers. 46 people were found sleeping rough on a single night.

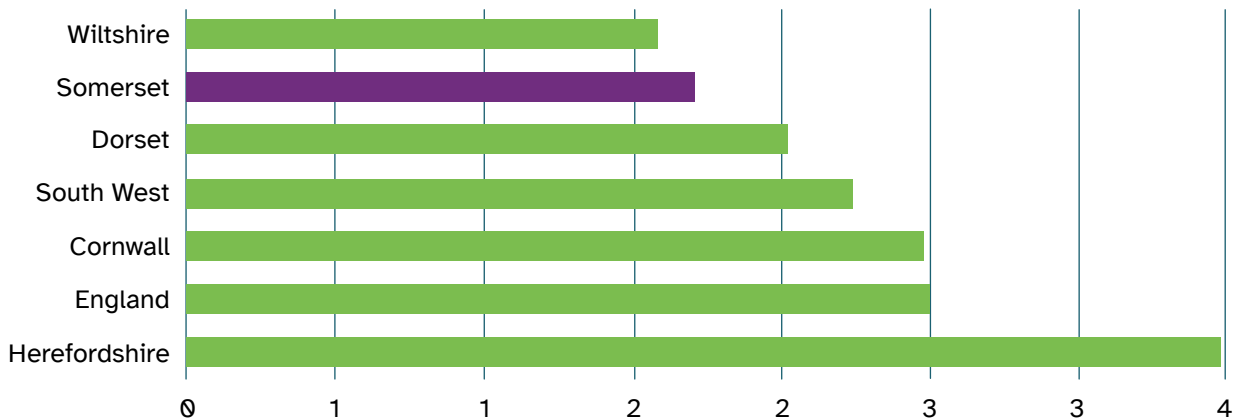
Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention are crucial to ensure that potential or actual problems are resolved quickly, and do not escalate. The local authority has ‘prevention duties’ for anyone threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The proportion of people owed a prevention duty has been steadily falling across Somerset:

56.6% in 2018 to 2019 **to 42.8%** in 2022 to 2023

The opportunity to undertake prevention work is missed if households are only being assessed at the point where they are already homeless.

Number of households owed a prevention duty in 2022-23, per 1,000 population



Various groups of vulnerable people need to be a focus for prevention activity. One group is children and young people. Currently in Somerset as of early 2024:

Children in care settings	568
Care leavers	377
Young people working with Adult Social Care to prepare them for adulthood	148
Proportion of homelessness cases that are people aged 16-25	23%

The Thrive 16+ service offers housing related support and accommodation to protect this vulnerable group. There are currently 100 beds for children in care and care leavers, and 90 beds for young people who have no care experience but are deemed in priority need. There are additional options to increase beds to cater for emergencies and increased demand.

However, more needs to be done to increase prevention activity for children and young people, as well for other groups.

Specialist Intervention and Support

Access to specialist support in a quick and timely manner is essential to ensure that issues and disadvantages are managed, and so enable people to maintain stable living. For example, the award winning Homeless Health Nursing Team and Inclusion GPs provide vital health interventions to rough sleepers, and non-bricks-and-mortar communities, wherever they are located. The Displaced People Service provides support and homes for refugees and asylum seekers from Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Partnership Working and Collaboration

Collaboration across services and systems is essential to delivering effective prevention and support.



Challenges

Rising service demand (including the number of people sleeping rough) and increasing complexity in relation to health conditions, addictions, and other disadvantages. There are gaps in provision for both accommodation and support.

Public sector financial emergency impacting Somerset Council, public sector partners, and provider resources.

Lack of resources, both human and financial, to provide the range of necessary support services. This includes housing related support (such as tenancy sustainment and transitional support) as well as specialist support such as mental health, and domestic violence support.

Delivering and maintaining effective partnership relations to support those with multiple disadvantage.

Embedding a trauma-informed and asset-based approach to supporting clients.

Rising numbers of people with protected characteristics that require support: young people with mental health conditions, elderly with care needs, families, victims of domestic violence, displaced persons.

Links to employment; lack of business engagement, and lack of financial support for those who are working whilst residing within supported accommodation.

The impact of changes to Government policy. A recent example is the changes to the prison early release scheme and time in Probation supervision, which results in difficulties in providing timely prevention, support and accommodation.

Opportunities

Design services through the voice and engagement of lived experience.

Realise the potential of the HRB to raise the profile of the work to support homelessness and rough sleeping, and to drive integrated commissioning across services and systems. This includes the need to influence the Somerset Integrated Care System and the active pursuit of the [MEAM](#) and Better Futures programme.

Realise the potential of Council assets, including workforce, property and technology. To rethink the way that we deploy the workforce, with more outreach, more interdisciplinary activity, and more generalists to provide ongoing support.

Work with Registered Housing Providers to improve the sharing of data, information, and learning, to develop innovative products.

Work with employers to explore the potential of the Homelessness Covenant.

Forge closer ties with local businesses to explore access to training and apprenticeships, to secure local business support for the work of the HRB.

Deliver more cross-sector training and support relating to prevention, early help, and trauma-informed approaches. Work towards a trauma-informed Somerset. Ensure that children and young people are a focus for prevention-related activity.

Support the work around Transform, to help develop an innovative data-sharing platform that will assist our approaches to prevention and early help.

Develop [Connect Somerset](#) and build on community assets and strengthen links with the voluntary sector, to support prevention activity and early help. To work with the [Open Mental Health](#) alliance to help facilitate quick and timely support for a range of mental health conditions.

Section 4

Accommodation



Accommodation

Challenges and Gaps

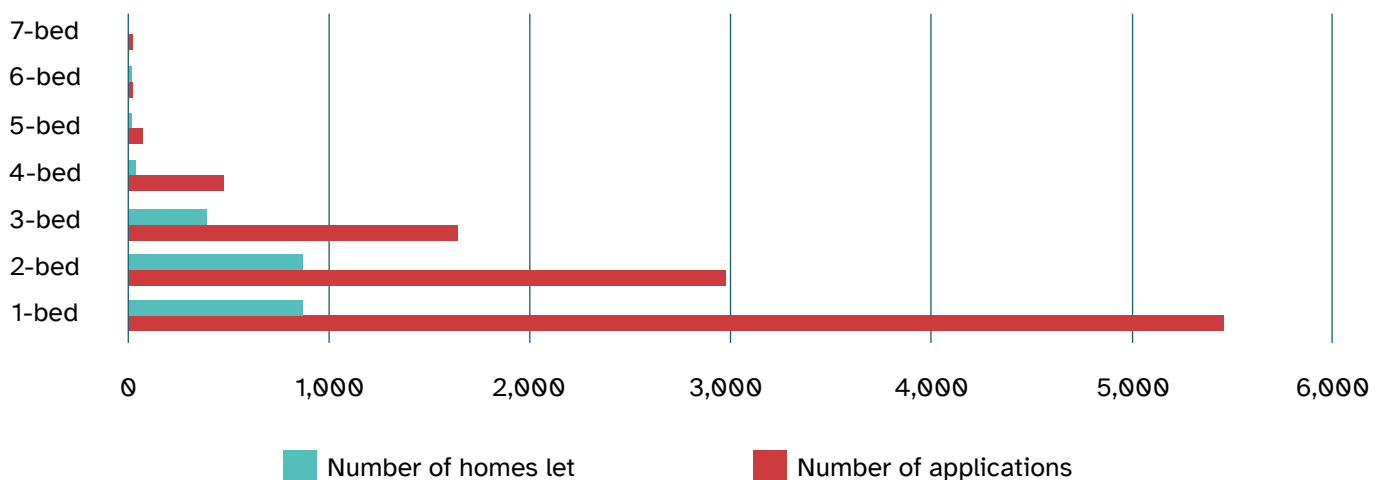
There is currently high demand for limited affordable accommodation supply:

- Not enough 1-bed homes: 55% of Homefinder Somerset applicants are for a 1-bed need.
- Temporary accommodation (TA) shortfall and increasing Bed and Breakfast costs. In 2023-24, the average length of stay in TA was:

126	nights for all households	131	nights for singles and couples with no children	172	nights for larger families
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- Supported accommodation wait is at an average of 6 to 12 months for move-on accommodation, once a resident is ready.
- 109 bids on average for each home advertised on Homefinder Somerset.
- Waiting lists for all supported and Housing First accommodation.
- Significant under-supply of Gypsy and Traveller and non-bricks-and-mortar provision, with only 20 local authority Gypsy and Traveller pitches. There are 80 unauthorised encampment locations across Somerset, with the highest density in Glastonbury area, at an estimated 300 vehicle-dwellers living roadside and unauthorised.

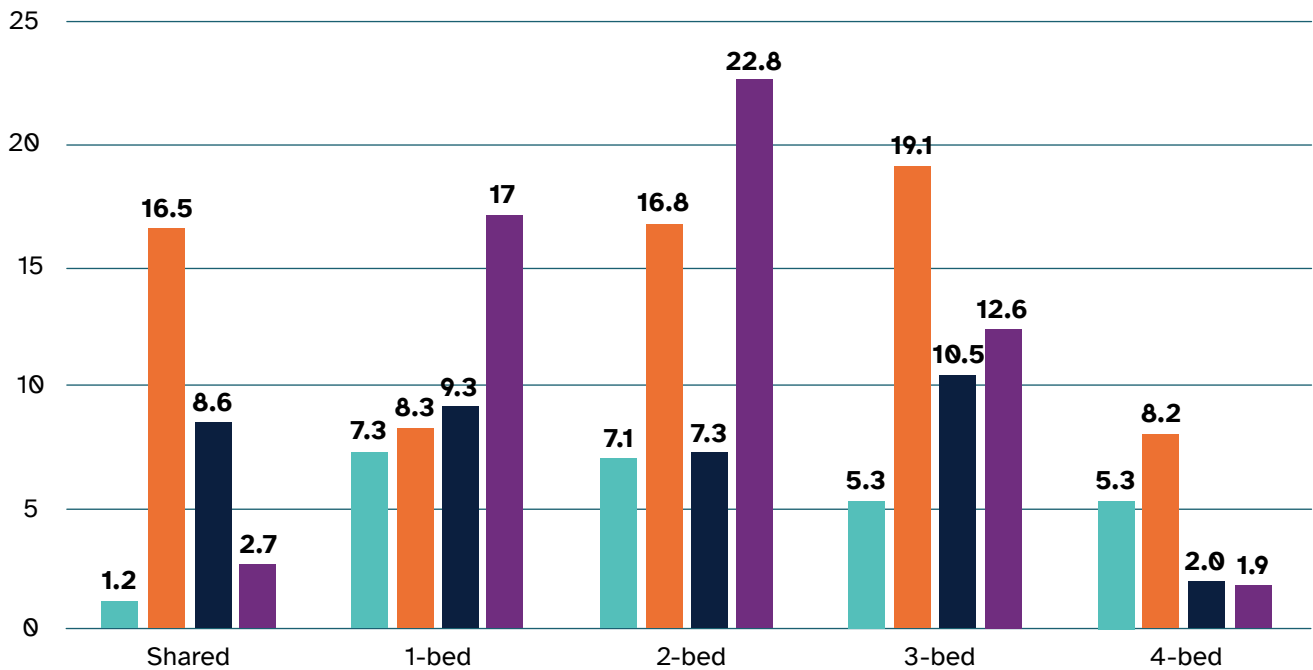
Homefinder Somerset Demand for Social Housing Versus Supply, April 2022 to March 2023



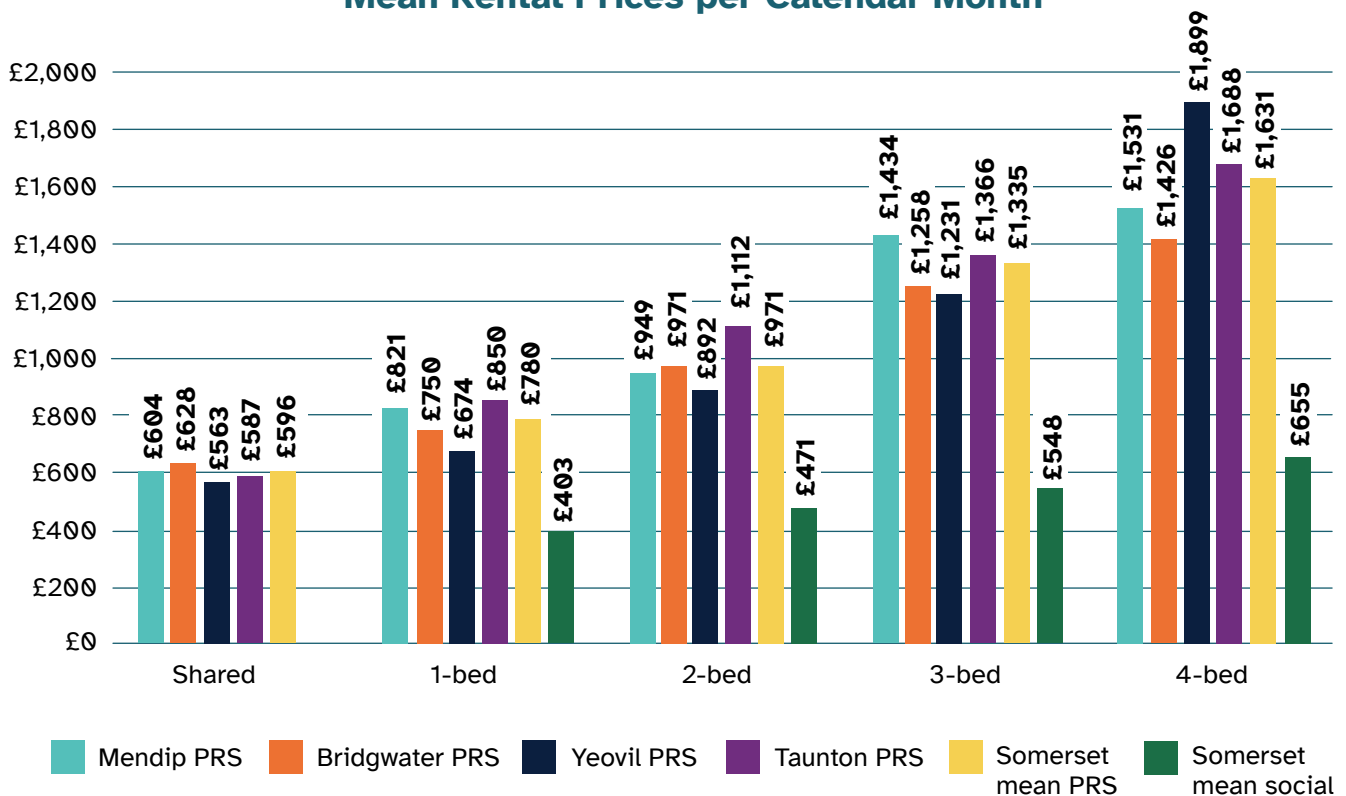
There is limited access to the Private Rented Sector (PRS) with unaffordable rents, local housing allowance shortfall, a significant non-home based workforce, and Airbnb adding pressure. There is a market in which landlords can pick and choose, and demand outstrips the supply of housing.

There are over 11,000 Hinkley Point C (HPC) workers on site, with an anticipated peak of 12,040, over 8,000 of which will be non-home based and seeking accommodation in the area. A further 4,000 workers are estimated for Gravity and 2,500 keyworkers from NHS and Social Care will be seeking accommodation over the next two years.

Mean Number of Private Rental Sector (PRS) Listings per Week



Mean Rental Prices per Calendar Month



Other challenges in providing accommodation to those facing homelessness include:

- Short term funding regimes don't give accommodation providers long term sustainability.
- Patients who are medically fit for discharge from hospital, but without suitable move-on accommodation, may lead to longer hospital stay and put additional pressures on available bed space.
- Increasing development delays, costs and challenges, such as phosphate mitigation, Biodiversity Net Gain, and planning policy.
- Quality of older housing stock limits flexibility to meet need.
- Closure of 24 units of accommodation for people on probation and earlier sentence release increasing the demand for accommodation.

Specific accommodation gaps include:

- Low range of 1-bed properties to meet different needs.
- Not enough social housing.
- Few larger adapted or adaptable family properties.
- Limited accommodation for people on probation.
- Limited drug and alcohol treatment accommodation.
- Limited intense-support complex needs accommodation.
- Few 4+ bed properties.
- Limited off the street accommodation county-wide.
- Higher need for Housing First county-wide.
- Limited step down from hospital accommodation.
- Limited higher support mental health supported accommodation.
- Limited sufficient temporary accommodation.
- Limited flexible end-to-end floating support for a range of needs to enable access to accommodation and tenancy sustainment.

To meet the identified gaps, we need to develop more accommodation that is...

Accessible

Adaptable

Flexible

Affordable

Supported

Specialist

Opportunities

To explore together with partners:

- **Partnerships with Registered Providers** can help us in the delivery of more affordable homes, supported housing, and Gypsy and Traveller pitches through Homes England's affordable housing capital programme.
- **Smaller specialist Registered Providers** committed to delivering rough sleeper accommodation and specialist supported housing in partnership can help us meet need.
- **Influencing partners to incorporate more flexible homes**, supported accommodation, affordable housing, and social housing where feasible in larger scale developments.
- **Use modern methods of construction** to deliver more modular build small homes, quicker, easier, compact.
- **Later living homes** - there is a lot more choice for older people.
- **Make better use of existing stock** through physical improvements and flexibility, such as by incentivising downsizing, multi-generational tenancies, bringing empty homes back into use, and building on trials in suitable sheltered housing schemes to include younger disabled people with support needs.
- **Somerset Council's asset disposals programme** may present opportunities for developing accommodation in partnership with Registered Providers and developers.
- **Extra Care Housing recommissioning** could create more flexible provision to meet a greater range of need.
- **The opportunity to influence the developing new Somerset Local Plan** to ensure robust planning development policy that embraces affordable homes, such as bricks-and-mortar and Gypsy and Traveller, and coordination with planning to enable effective scheme design and better meet housing need.
- Continue what works and adopt the principles more widely.



Section 5

Resources



Resources

Tackling homelessness needs a systems-based approach which requires the buy-in of key partners such as Registered Providers (RPs) and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

Ways you can help us as Registered Providers are:

- Dedicated staff to work on Development Programmes for schemes for the vulnerable.
- Help us to strengthen the communications between Somerset Council and RPs.
- Incorporate the Prevention & Reduction of Homelessness in your strategies.
- Adopt **Homes For Cathy Initiative**: simple commitments for housing providers to sign up to support homeless prevention.

Internally, we will seek to capitalise on the opportunities by:

- Linking in with Partner Agencies to meet local needs.
- Increasing joint training opportunities.
- Focusing on harm reduction, safer living, and recovery.
- Promoting a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach in all homeless prevention and support and accommodation services.
- Making use of funding such as the Homes England Affordable Homes Programme.
- Listening to the voice of people with lived experience to inform services and drive change.
- Engaging with Rural Housing Enablers.
- Championing homelessness as a priority in safeguarding adults, health social care housing and the voluntary sectors so that it becomes embedded in what we do across the whole system.

In these exceptionally challenging times, we can:

- Explore the potential for greater service integration between health, housing, and social care.
- Explore and access the potential of the Integrated Care System to deliver shared resources through integrated commissioning arrangements.
- Exploit external funding and working with partner agencies to effectively develop support services and access to the private rented sector.
- Collaborate with partner agencies in both local communities and strategically to develop effective sustainable prevention, support and accommodation services to meet local needs. Continue to work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Homes England, as well as key local partners.