Consultation draft
North Somerset Housing Strategy
2016-21
Contents

Foreword (by Executive Member, to be written)

Executive Summary (to be included later)

1. Introduction

2. National and Sub-Regional Context

3. North Somerset – The Local Context

4. Outcome – Quality of Place

5. Outcome – Health and Wellbeing

6. Outcome – Prosperity and Opportunity,

Appendices (to be included later)

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Appendix 2 – Key Achievements and Outputs

Appendix 3 – Consultation

Appendix 4 – Delivery Plans and Glossary

Appendix 5 – Contacts List

Every effort has been made to avoid the use of jargon. However where this has not been possible, explanations of specialist terms will be included in a glossary as an appendix to the final strategy.
1. Introduction

Time for a new housing strategy?

This draft new housing strategy for 2016-21 sets out our vision to help meet housing needs in North Somerset. The following chapters outline the context in which we are working, the priorities we will focus on and supporting actions. Priority areas were identified through consultation and research. We will develop a detailed action plan (please note appendices and detailed action plan not included at this stage) to show how we intend to achieve our strategic actions and measure success in delivering the final strategy.

The diagram below shows areas that impact on housing and which in turn housing affects. This illustrates why ‘getting housing right’ has such an impact on other aspects of life.

To deliver the strategy we will continue to work with a range of organisations in all sectors. We will continue to forge strong relationships with existing and new partners such as investors, employers, private and social landlords¹ and innovative agencies that can add to our district’s housing offer.

¹ housing associations
The content of this draft strategy is informed by evidence and consultation. It is a strategy which will give our partners certainty over our direction of travel and makes it clear what our priorities are; whilst at the same time it has enough flexibility to re-align our actions if necessary as economic, political and social circumstances change. A number of more specialist delivery plans will sit underneath the final strategy and will be listed in an appendix in the final version.

Reductions in public spending are continuing as part of central government’s plan to reduce the national deficit. All public bodies need to think about how services are provided and funded. Underpinning all the priorities and related actions we have identified in this strategy is the need to maximise our resources, to achieve more with less and still meet housing needs. For housing, as with other council services this includes transforming the way we deliver services, e.g. reducing the cost of ‘back office’ functions to free up resources for ‘front line’ service delivery, mobile working and more customer self-service options. We await clarification of the government’s housing and budget objectives in a proposed Housing Bill, due autumn 2015 and in the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement.

Links to other plans

The housing strategy does not stand alone. It links to a number of other plans within the district:

We have aligned the housing strategy with the council’s Corporate Plan. A number of delivery plans support the strategy and set our more detailed and specialist actions, these will be included in an appendix.

---

2 Hereafter referred to as government
The housing strategy sits alongside North Somerset Council (NSC)’s Local Development Framework (LDF), which includes the Core Strategy. The West of England Joint Spatial Plan (being developed from 2015) will identify the overall quantum of new development for the sub-region and broad strategic locations which will then be implemented through the roll forward of existing local plans within each unitary authority.

What we are setting out to achieve?

The Council has a clear vision for North Somerset:

“A great place to live where people, businesses and communities flourish. Modern, efficient services and a strong voice for North Somerset”

Our housing vision to complement this is:

“Delivering good housing services that meet the needs of our communities”

To achieve this vision we have developed priority areas for the housing strategy under the three corporate outcomes of:

- Quality of Place
- Health and Wellbeing
- Prosperity and Opportunity

Consultation

Understanding the needs and priorities of our residents, partners and stakeholders was important in the development of the draft strategy. Consultation was carried out at various stages in its development, by:

- Online consultation via the council’s e-Consult pages
- A housing strategy event with a wide range of stakeholders
- Specific housing surveys

Consultation responses were used to establish our priorities for this draft strategy so that it better meets the needs and concerns of our residents and reflects the aims of our partners/stakeholders. This draft strategy is another opportunity for partners and stakeholders to comment.

Equality and diversity

To make sure our services reflect the needs of the community we carry out a programme of equality impact assessments on all strategies, policies, plans and services to identify their potential impact on our residents and staff. The equality impact assessment for the final strategy will be available as a separate document.
2. National and Sub-Regional Context

This chapter identifies the national and sub-regional drivers for our draft strategy. It is common for national policy direction to change during the life of a strategy, so we will ensure that we keep our final housing strategy up-to-date by carrying out annual reviews.

National context

The national policy drivers for housing from the current government include:
- the Budget July 2015 and continued welfare reform

Housing has been high on the political agenda for some time. The new government chose its first budget to convey its priorities for housing and further welfare reform. Some key headlines include:

- extend Right to Buy to housing associations
- reduce social housing rents by 1% a year, for four years from 2016
- ‘Pay to Stay’, high income tenants in council or former council housing to be charged a market or near market rent
- review the use of lifetime tenancies in social housing to make best use of the stock
- limit backdating of Housing Benefit (HB); restrict entitlement for young people
- remove automatic entitlement to housing support for new claims in Universal Credit from 18-21 year olds who are out of work
- lower the household benefit cap to £20,000 outside Greater London
- set the level of Discretionary Housing Payment funding to councils, funding to protect the most vulnerable to adjust to welfare reforms
- freeze working-age benefits, including tax credits and the Local Housing Allowance for four years from 2016-17
- increase the Rent-a-Room relief from £4,250 to £7,500 a year for those who rent a room in their main residence
- Inheritance tax, the value of property that can be left to dependents has increased and will rise to £1m for a couple by 2020

More details will follow in a Housing Bill in the autumn of 2015 and the final strategy will be amended to reflect this.

The supply of housing is subject to national debate with 243,000 new homes per year calculated as being needed to meet the national shortage. There have been recent national planning reforms aimed at simplifying the planning process and boosting supply. The key policy guide is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which signalled:

3 With exemptions e.g. for vulnerable young people
4 From 2016
5 Source to be referenced
• a shift in emphasis towards a presumption in favour of sustainable development
• councils to identify the full, objectively assessed need for market and affordable homes in their area
• councils to respond positively to wider opportunities for growth
• there should be a significant boost in the supply of housing

The NPPF also sets a definition of affordable housing for planning purposes. North Somerset Council (NSC)’s Core Strategy sets the local context for the delivery of housing objectives and has shaped our own planning policies for the delivery of high quality, well-designed homes.

**Funding for Affordable Housing**

At the same time as build costs are increasing the availability of government grant for affordable housing has reduced significantly since our last housing strategy. The new model for funding is explained on page 17. With the announcement in the July budget of a reduction in social housing rents by 1% from 2016 for four years, housing association partners have concerns they will not be able to develop as many affordable homes as they had planned. Many providers are currently reviewing their business plans and associated development programmes.

**Transformation of health and social care reform**

The provision and commissioning of health and social care nationally is undergoing fundamental transformation. Housing can have a significant impact on health and well-being. The Care Act 2014 which recognises the role of housing in the provision of care, overhauls the social care system in England and integrates housing into the assessment and meeting of care needs. There are lots of examples of joint working around health and housing within this draft strategy.

**Sub-Regional Context**

**West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**

Working together, business and councils (Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council) are supporting economic growth and attracting new jobs and investment to the sub region. Councils have a duty of co-operation to find solutions for issues that cross council boundaries. Part of the LEP is the **West of England (WoE) Planning, Housing & Communities Board**, which has Executive Members with responsibility for planning and housing from each council working together to:

• oversee sub-regional planning and development
• deliver levels of growth proposed by Local Plans
• support the delivery of housing and employment land allocations
• work to achieve balanced housing markets
• invest in public and private housing to address existing and future need

**Joint working with other local authorities**

We have also been working closely with South Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset and Bristol on a number of housing and planning initiatives and projects. Most recently on the West of England Strategic Housing Market Assessment, June 2015 (link to page on WoE LEP website) and the establishment of the **HomesWest Partnership (HWP)**.

The HWP was established in 2015 to deliver new affordable housing (AH) across the WoE in 2015-2018 and beyond. The HWP partners\(^6\) will work with each council to help meet their local AH priorities. The partnership has a series of delivery standards to ensure excellence in the delivery of new homes, allocations and ongoing housing management and partners have agreed to:

- Increase the supply of good quality, sustainable, AH in the WoE
- Explore new and innovative routes to the delivery of AH
- Target the use of funding to meet priority housing needs

We continue to work with Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and West Somerset councils on the housing impact and appropriate mitigation measures for the proposed development of a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point in West Somerset.

\(^6\) To be listed in an appendix
3. North Somerset – The Local Context

North Somerset key facts

- The district covers 145 square miles and comprises coastal and urban areas, market towns and rural villages
- In 2001 North Somerset had a population of 189,000, at 2014 it was 208,154, and is expected to rise to 234,000 by 2026
- There are an estimated 92,000 households in the district
- The average household size is gradually getting smaller
- The district is home to an above average proportion of older residents, with the 65-84 age group estimated to increase by 41% by 2031 to 55,000 residents and the 85+ group to double to 14,000 in the same period
- In 2011 the district’s Black and minority ethnic population was 2.7%, up from 1.4% in 2001
- **Land Constraints** - the Green Belt covers 40% of our area, the AONB covers 10% and the functional floodplain covers 12%
- Lower quartile house prices are 7.68 times greater than lower quartile earnings, compared to an average of 6.48 in England
- 79.5% of the working age population is economically active. This is slightly lower than in the South West of England (80.2%) and higher than the Great Britain average (77.3%)
- 5.0% of the district’s working age population is unemployed, the same as the overall South West percentage and lower than the Great Britain average of 6.2%
- 60.7% of those in employment work full-time and 39.3% work part-time
- The health and life expectancy of people in North Somerset is generally better than the England average. However there are large inequalities in health, see life expectancy under deprivation section below

There is a high level of out-commuting from the district, with 35% of the working population travelling to jobs outside of the district. So employment growth must be considered alongside housing growth, to reduce the district’s dependence on employment elsewhere and reduce traffic congestion.

Deprivation

The district has the seventh largest inequalities gap - the gap between our wealthiest and poorest communities - in the country. One stark example of this is life expectancy, which is nine years lower for men and six and a half years lower for women in the most deprived areas compared to the least

---

7 Both figures from Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2014 mid-year estimates
8 Three bullets above from ONS 2013
9 Note - some overlap between these 3 categories, AONB = area of outstanding natural beauty
10 2013 CLG Table 576: ‘Ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile earnings by district’
11 All three bullets above from the NOMIS website
12 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2012
13 2011 Census
deprived in the district. This inequalities gap presents us with one of our greatest challenges and we must work hard to narrow it by ensuring all our communities share in prosperity and employment growth. Many housing interventions will contribute to narrowing this gap.

**Housing Profile of North Somerset**

**Tenure mix**

In common with the rest of the country the percentage of owner occupiers has fallen as the private rented sector (PRS) has grown. In North Somerset the growth in the PRS has been from 7,958 homes in 2001 to 14,270 in 2011 (a 79% increase). The table below shows the housing tenure mix in the district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>North Somerset</th>
<th>England &amp; Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing association housing</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rented</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing association housing</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rented</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2001 and 2011, excludes living rent free so does not add to 100%; owner-occupied includes shared ownership

**Housing costs and affordability**

The South West region has third highest house prices after London & the South East, the WoE area has the third highest house prices in the South West after Dorset & Gloucestershire. Households on low to middle incomes are finding it harder to afford owner occupation. The cost of housing inevitably affects the affordability of an area. In North Somerset the mean average house price in 2013 was £220,919 and the mean average earnings were £27,269. This means the income required for an 80% mortgage is £50,496.

Lower quartile house prices in the district are 7.68 times greater than lower quartile incomes, making affordability a real issue. Although not hugely higher than ten years ago (6.62), the deposit required by lenders to access a mortgage is now much higher than it was then. Another way to look at this is that since 1969 the average house price in the South West is 43 times higher, but average incomes are 27 times higher.

Households unable to access home ownership may remain living at home or live in the PRS, the so called ‘generation rent’. High demand has resulted in PRS rents rising and the previous coalition government concerned about a rising Housing Benefit bill, introduced the Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

---

14 DCLG English Indices of Deprivation 2010 - March 2011
15 Assumption of rent free dwellings at the same rate as 2011 to make this figure comparable
16 National Housing federation (NHF) Home Truths
17 This is the latest figure available
18 All figures here from NHF’s Home Truths 2014/15 via Land Registry or ONS
19 Both lower quartile house prices to lower quartile income figures from DCLG Table 276
20 Shelter - housing affordability for first time buyers March 2015
This restricts rents for those who receive LHA to a level within the bottom 25% of the rental market. Research into the PRS in 2015 revealed that the LHA is not keeping pace with PRS rents. We are now finding it increasingly challenging to persuade private landlords to let to those who need support to maintain their housing. The WoE area has had the highest PRS rent increases after London\textsuperscript{21}. During May 2015 we looked at HomeTrack data for lower quartile rents (the bottom 25%) in the PRS for 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom properties in both Portishead and Weston and compared them with the respective Broad Market Rental Area (BMRA)\textsuperscript{22} figures (the bottom 30%). With the exception of ‘one beds’ in Weston all average rents were higher than the BMRA. This highlights that the PRS is becoming unaffordable for those on HB unless they use other income to ‘top up’ their rent.

**Housing conditions**

The 2012 Private Sector Housing Condition Survey highlighted that significant improvement has been made in the condition of private housing since the last survey in 2005:

- the percentage of non-decent homes has gone down from 37.7% to 29.5%
- the number of vulnerable households living in decent homes has gone up from 58.3% to 68.6%

Despite this welcome improvement, there are still areas of concern, particularly, the number of older owner occupiers, relatively high levels of fuel poverty and the poor condition of the private rented sector, especially in Weston Super Mare (hereafter Weston). Five wards in the district have levels of non-decency of 32% or above. Three are in Weston and these wards also have the highest concentration of fuel poverty.

**Housing need and demand**

We have a responsibility to assess local housing needs and to develop partnerships and strategies to meet those needs. The main evidence bases we use are a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), our HomeChoice register, specific surveys, e.g. rural housing, and information from partner agencies. The June 2015 SHMA for the wider Bristol Housing Market Area (i.e. the NSC, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire areas) identified that there was a need for 84,364 dwellings 2016-36. This figure will be tested through the Joint Spatial Plan. The total affordable housing need is 29,054 dwellings.

The HomeChoice register records the number of eligible people wanting affordable housing. In the last 12 months\textsuperscript{23} the number of new applicant households with at least one priority housing need\textsuperscript{24} was 928 which compares

\textsuperscript{21} NHF Home Truths

\textsuperscript{22} The BRMA is the limit for the amount Local Housing Allowance/Housing Benefit will pay; it is higher for the Bristol area (includes Portishead) than the Weston area

\textsuperscript{23} Sept 2014 to Sept 2015

\textsuperscript{24} Under section 167(2) of the housing act 1996
to an average 444 lettings per year\textsuperscript{25} which went to people not already in affordable housing. The research in the PRS summarised on page 13 (below) shows an increased number of people competing in this sector. Finally we know access to the owner occupied sector is getting harder to access as illustrated on page 12. See Chapter 4 below on how lack of supply leads to more demand.

\textsuperscript{25} Average for the three years 2012/13 to 2014/15, in the same period an average 246 lettings per year were transfers of existing affordable housing tenants
4. QUALITY OF PLACE

Under this outcome we will focus on the following priorities:

- Increasing housing affordability and supply including improving the residential offer in our town centres
- Making the best use of existing stock
- Ensuring quality design and standards

We want to build and sustain great places to live, that are safe, accessible and flourishing, ensuring housing growth protects out natural heritage and the special character of our towns and villages.

Increasing housing affordability and supply

Housing Growth and Supply

An increase in the delivery of housing needs to be carefully managed through planning policy and strategy. Growth should be used to balance housing and employment markets, and stimulate regeneration ensuring new development complements existing communities. To reduce the impact of housing growth on the environment we will continue to work with partners to maximise the use of previously developed, brownfield land. For example, 91% and 81% of all homes built in 2014/15 and 2013/14 respectively were on brownfield sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing completions in North Somerset since the last housing strategy</th>
<th>All completions</th>
<th>Of which affordable housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>567&lt;sup&gt;26&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The West of England Joint Spatial Plan will identify the strategic vision and objectives, district growth targets for housing and employment and key infrastructure requirements such as transport required 2016-36. This plan will be adopted in 2018. The unitary authorities will be updating their detailed local plans in parallel with the emerging sub-regional plan to demonstrate how growth will be delivered sustainably. As this plan develops it will link to updated versions of this housing strategy.

Weston Villages

Weston Villages is a major ongoing strategic development area within the district as set out in the Core Strategy. It comprises two new communities located to the east of Weston. Together they will form sustainable communities comprising around 6,200 dwellings which will be provided in step

<sup>26</sup> Compares to the 20 year average from 1994/95 to 2013/14 of 902 completions per year
with supporting facilities, services and infrastructure and where sufficient employment and affordable housing will be provided. There are also targets for 33% of the workforce to live locally\(^27\) and (over 15 years) creating 1,000 apprenticeships.

**Improving the residential offer in our town centres**

We want all our town centres to be places with an excellent range of homes which support and crucially in turn are supported by employment, retail, education, digital, transport and leisure offers. Our initial emphasis is on Weston town centre and our ambitions are captured in a housing led regeneration project called ‘Prospectus for Change’. It has a number of elements, but the housing headlines are significant growth and investment (2-3,000 new homes in and around the town centre plus new student accommodation) and investment in diversifying the currently limited types of housing on offer in the town centre. Part of Weston has been given ‘housing zone’ status by the HCA – (a ‘housing zone’ is an area of land where the government can potentially provide funds to unlock development). Specific planning guidance will be produced specifically for the town centre regeneration project.

**Private Rented Sector (PRS)**

The PRS in the NSC area grew by 79% (from 7,948 to 14,270 homes) compared to 75% growth nationally in the years between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. The sector was 16.8% of all North Somerset’s housing stock in 2011 and is anticipated to grow to 22% by 2025. The PRS provides homes for a variety of people at different stages in their housing careers, including aspiring first time buyers, people who enjoy the flexibility of short tenancies, those who cannot access housing association housing and those who we have helped into the sector so as to prevent them from becoming homeless. The growth in the PRS presents a number of challenges relating to housing quality, management and the unsecure nature of tenancies. See Chapter 5 for how we work to improve standards in the PRS. A proposed new nuclear power station **Hinkley Point C** in neighbouring West Somerset would attract workers to our area and create employment opportunities in our district. This may add to demand for housing especially in the PRS. To help mitigate this the council has negotiated funding to be spent on initiatives to ensure those already disadvantaged in the PRS are not further affected and to look at ways to increase private rented supply.

**Affordable housing**

We work in partnership with housing associations\(^28\) and private developers to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing (AH). AH as defined by the NPPF is housing for residents who cannot afford to rent or buy a home in the private

\(^{27}\) Within North Somerset or a 20 mile radius of the site  
\(^{28}\) Their legal name is registered housing providers
market. It includes social rented housing, Affordable Rent housing as well as intermediate housing solutions such as shared ownership products. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) have announced a new AH Programme 2015-18, which has now been extended to 2020 and we await the type of housing the HCA will expect, but we anticipate it will be more intermediate types of housing favouring those on higher than very lowest incomes.

In addition to HCA funded AH, NSC also negotiates a minimum of 30% affordable housing, without the need for public subsidy on all eligible housing sites of over five units. A supplementary planning document (SPD) covering development contributions was re-written in 2015 to make these costs very clear for potential developers. There is also funding ring fenced for AH housing from the NSC Capital Programme and Developer contributions to provide support to housing associations to fund AH which meet local priorities. NSC has a target to deliver a minimum of 150 affordable homes per year.

Since the last housing strategy government funding for AH has considerably changed and been replaced with a revenue model, based on rents, private finance and borrowing. This revised model makes income stream critical and welfare reform has made workless tenants more high risk in this respect. Housing associations have highlighted concerns over the proposed extension of ‘Right to Buy’ and social rent reductions which they feel will undermine their ability to supply more affordable housing.

NSC’s Affordable Housing Delivery Plan (link to plan) demonstrates our commitment to growth and opportunity for local people in the delivery of AH and details our overall approach. The current AHDP will be updated once the new Housing Strategy 2016-21 is adopted.

**Access to owner occupation for first time buyers**

As this draft strategy is prepared details are starting to emerge of the government’s Starter Homes Initiative for brownfield sites and rural exception sites. Starter homes would offer a 20% reduction in market value and be aimed at young (under 40) first time buyers. On such schemes the starter homes would be instead of any pre-existing types of affordable housing including shared ownership. The government hopes this scheme will bring new sites forward rather than being applied to existing sites. At the same time NSC is looking at whether there are viable opportunities to develop its own scheme to help first time buyers in the district.

---

29 Rents set at 80% of the open market rent in an area including any service charge
30 A government agency for delivering housing and regeneration
31 Funds as part of the 2006 Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of NSC’s housing stock to what is now Alliance Homes and additional funds received through developer contributions (s106 agreements) for the provision of AH inc. off-site contributions made where on-site AH provision would not work
Making the best use of existing stock

With this demand across tenures we will continue to make use of existing stock to increase the supply of homes. Standards and improvements to existing homes will be covered in the Health and Wellbeing section of this draft strategy.

Empty Homes

At September 2015 there were 401 properties that had been empty for six months or more in North Somerset, this include properties subject to major alterations/repairs or in probate. We prioritise the top ten empty properties in the district for action, by the length of time a property has remained empty, its condition, its social impact on the neighbourhood, the number of complaints received and any action we may have taken against the owner previously. Our aim is to see properties lived in again. We promote a successful private leasing scheme in partnership with a housing association provider who will find tenants, guarantee rent and then manage the property on behalf of the owner.

Under-occupation

Reducing under-occupation of housing association housing helps to reduce the level of need for new housing (as larger properties become available) and eases rises in rents as a result of welfare reform (the spare room subsidy reductions). We work with housing providers to assist them in reducing under-occupation, many have incentives for tenants to move to smaller homes. We will also look at ways that we can help overcome the barriers that older and disabled occupiers face in moving to smaller, more accessible homes. Affordable housing applicants on the HomeChoice register who are under occupying by two or more bedrooms are awarded Band A. Applicants who are under occupying by one bedroom are awarded Band B. If rent arrears are solely linked to the Housing Benefit under occupancy charge then the applicant is not excluded from the register and can still apply to move.

Remodelling existing buildings

The proposed regeneration of Weston town centre (page 16) includes looking at alternative uses for currently underused space e.g. redevelopment of redundant and under-utilised buildings including those that are not currently used for housing use and unused flats over shops.

Ensuring Quality Design and Standards

Through the Housing Standards Review, the government aimed to simplify development regulations and standards into one key set, driven by Building Regulations. The Code for Sustainable Homes can no longer be required as a planning condition for new approvals, but an updated space standards

32 Applicant on the register are allocated to one of four bands with Band A the highest
document was released by NSC in March 2015 to ensure high quality development in North Somerset.

**Summary of Strategic Actions**

- Promote low cost home ownership products and options to access this tenure
- Continue to work with our housing association partners to supply good quality affordable housing and maximise HCA and other investment
- Prioritise our empty homes work and promote the use of private sector leasing schemes to bring them back into use
- Take an active role in ensuring quality housing is a major part of the town centre regeneration programme
- Continue to work with private landlords and review our current offer of support and incentives to house those on a low income and increase supply
5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Under this outcome we will focus on the following priorities:

- Improving house conditions within the private sector
- Providing support to help maintain independent living
- Promoting energy efficient and safe homes

**Improving house conditions in the private sector**

The private sector accounts for the majority of residential accommodation in North Somerset. The Private Sector House Condition Survey (HSC) which was undertaken in 2012. It showed:

- five wards in the district where 32% and above of the housing stock was non-decent
- 25,000 homes in the district that do not meet the decent home standard (DHS)
- a high number of older owner occupiers, a proportion of whom have difficulty maintaining their properties
- relatively high level of fuel poverty especially in three wards in Weston

A major issue is to ensure quality and safety within this sector. We also need to ensure any investment in this sector contributes to the provision of affordable and sustainable housing, the prevention of homelessness and especially the duty to promote health and wellbeing. To achieve this we work with a range of partners including private landlords, West of England (WoE) Care & Repair, housing associations, the voluntary sector and individual homeowners.

**Improving health outcomes through housing interventions**

Housing partners work closely with colleagues in public health and other health services to contribute to reducing levels of health inequality in the district and the services outlined in this chapter are a major contribution to that aim. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (link to JSNA webpages) sets out a joint vision for health and wellbeing by health and local authority partners.

**Helping homeowners to improve their homes**

Property repairs are the responsibility of the homeowner with our role being to offer appropriate assistance and advice to those unable to access funds who are vulnerable. The main service to homeowners is to offer low cost loans through our partner Wessex Reinvestment Trust, for essential property repair and improvement. For smaller works a referral to WoE Care & Repair may be appropriate.
Improving PRS standards

The housing service plays a fundamental role in regulating the quality of the PRS. Our approach is to empower landlords to ‘help themselves’ with encouragement to: e.g. join a professional landlord association, seek accreditation (sign up to the new WoE Rental Standard) or be part of our own Private Sector Housing Forum. The aim is to support good landlords and encourage professionalism in the sector thus allowing us to focus limited resources on those landlords who provide poor quality, unsafe housing which can be detrimental to tenants’ health. We use enforcement powers to ensure these substandard homes comply with statutory requirements.

We fulfil our statutory duty for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) through licensing and multi-agency work to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime arising from multi-occupied properties. Our in-house survey has indicated 49% of those living in HMOs have concerns over drug or alcohol abuse by other residents. We currently have a discretionary HMO licensing area (DLA) in a part of Weston which had the most complaints and poorer housing conditions in the PRS, along with higher densities due to sub division of an aging housing stock. The DLA came into force in 2014 and lasts for five years, its success and need will be reviewed after 18 months.

Providing support to help maintain independent living

The HCS also highlighted that across North Somerset 31.4% of vulnerable households live in non-decent homes. See also the ‘Improving housing options for vulnerable households and people with support needs’ section of the next Prosperity and chapter for more on this. This situation has improved since an earlier HSC, but still represents 17,400 owner occupied properties and 7,160 in the PRS. We aim to assist older, disabled and otherwise vulnerable homeowners to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible. To achieve this we must ensure that their homes are decent, safe and warm. If housing does not meet those criteria the health related risks are numerous e.g. falls, trips, hypothermia, respiratory, carbon monoxide poisoning etc. We also work with and support WoE Care & Repair and partners such as local hospitals to facilitate the safe discharge of patients from hospital.

A statutory duty which presents a major challenge is the increasing demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) at a time when resources are constrained and the older population is growing. DFGs are grants for adaptations, which must be approved for eligible applicants. Demand is predicted to increase significantly in coming years. We are improving the efficiency of the process to be cost effective through contracting and expansion of in-house agency. We are also exploring opportunities to reduce the burden on NSC’s limited resources around improving health and housing through increased external funding.
Promoting energy efficient and safe homes

Fuel poverty is defined as “a household living on a lower income in a home which cannot be kept warm at reasonable cost” Our stock condition survey revealed 14% of NSC’s households in fuel poverty (previous definition), but even taking account of fuel supply reductions and a new definition the number is still around 10%. Fuel poverty can have a detrimental effect on a person’s health and wellbeing.

To reduce fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency we work in partnership with agencies across health, environment and community safety. We maximise external income from utility companies and from government schemes, although the recent DECC announcement to end the Green Deal has triggered a fundamental review of home energy efficiency. We will continue to target those in greatest need and those homes with the poorest energy efficiency ratings. In response to public health guidance issued by National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) on tackling cold homes we are preparing a new strategy focusing on health outcomes.

Everything in this chapter will be covered by and expanded on in a new Private Sector Housing Strategy, which will be produced after this housing strategy is finalised and will link to it.

Summary of Strategic Actions

Pursue the actions which maximise health and wellbeing outcomes including:
- Work with landlords, home owners, partners and other agencies to ensure information on advice and loans for improvement are widely available
- Continue to work in partnership with WoE Care & Repair to target vulnerable households in need of assistance with repairs or adaptations
- Investigate options for further discretionary licensing schemes
- Target home improvement and energy efficiency assistance to areas where it will bring most benefit

A detailed action plan will be included as an appendix.

33 Dept. for Energy and Climate Change
6. PROSPERITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Under this outcome we will focus on the following priorities:

- Improving housing options for vulnerable households and people with support needs
- Preventing and tackling homelessness
- Improving training and employment opportunities linked to the development of housing

**Improving housing options for vulnerable households and people with support needs**

Vulnerability takes different forms, for example, people seeking to maintain independence, but who need support or people who are socially excluded. We have identified empowering and addressing the housing needs of older people, care leavers, those with learning disabilities and those with enduring mental health needs as priorities for major planned work. But these are not the only groups in housing need and all types of households in need of housing assistance or advice will be offered it.\(^3\)

Empowering vulnerable people to live independently in their own homes is a central feature in government policies relating to housing, health and social care and this is reflected in our priorities. The housing service has a valuable contribution to make through the provision of new housing appropriate to the needs of vulnerable people, an effective advice service and housing related support. A recent in-house survey of private tenants showed the council is the most popular first port of call for housing advice, the second is the Citizens Advice Bureau.

To do this, we work closely with North Somerset’s Supporting People team and colleagues in adult and children’s social care teams (link to Supporting People Programme\(^35\)).

**Supported Housing**

There is a predicted increase in the number of people with a learning disability (LD) in the district so there has been comprehensive planning for housing need between the Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities (CTPLD) and housing teams to bring about a range of independent living solutions. Work has indicated that people want to live in their own local communities and that housing suitable for people with LD should be spread throughout the district. So successful has this approach been that NSC is now extending this proactive approach to housing for people with enduring mental health needs. In 2008, there were 22 people with LD living in independent housing, by 2015 this had risen to 198, including social rented and PRS housing and living with a supporting family.

---

\(^3\) From our housing advice team

\(^35\) Link to web pages
We also have a particular responsibility for ensuring care leavers and young people have suitable housing. Recognising this wider duty, our housing advice service has specialist officers to work with 16/17 year olds and care leavers, posts either fully or jointly funded with other directorates.

The district is home to an above average proportion of older residents, with the 65-84 age group estimated to increase by 41% by 2031 to 55,000 residents and the 85+ group to double to 14,000\(^{36}\). This growing older population presents significant challenges in terms of ensuring access to housing choice. We recognise that the vast majority of older people wish to live as independently as possible in homes of their own. Whilst for some this will mean a move to more specialist accommodation in later life – for example sheltered or extra care housing – most will wish to remain in the house\(^{37}\) that has been their home for years. We need to identify and deliver a better range of alternative accommodation and support models to improve the housing options available to our older residents.

We continue to work with specialist housing providers to deliver additional extra care housing in the district so this can be another option. 64 flats on site at September 2015. We recognise, however, that meeting the housing needs of older people cannot happen only through new buildings. There is also the issue of rethinking the use of traditional sheltered accommodation which many older people have rejected as suitable for their needs (page 18).

Homeless people and ‘Home from Hospital’ – see ‘Preventing and Tackling Homelessness’ below.

Gypsy and Traveller communities may be excluded from services. Management and standards in existing council owned Gypsy and Traveller sites have been assessed and improved. Elim Housing Association now manage our sites along with their own new 24 pitch site in Weston. A new assessment of the housing needs of these communities (called a GTAA) has been commissioned and will be reporting in the autumn of 2015. This will inform the relevant delivery plans. A wider strategic group (including education, health etc.) for Gypsies and Travellers that includes multi-agency representation has been led by the Head of Strategic Housing.

Preventing and tackling homelessness

North Somerset has a strong record in tackling and preventing homelessness and where possible enabling people to remain in their existing homes using a variety of methods including negotiation with private landlords, housing benefit colleagues, mortgage lenders or families. Homelessness prevention is defined as ‘activities that enable a household to remain in their current home where appropriate, or that provide options to enable a planned and timely move to help sustain independent living’. The council’s housing advice service is constantly striving for improvement and is working to achieve the

\(^{36}\) ONS 2013
\(^{37}\) Or flat, or bungalow etc.
government’s ‘Standard’ for homelessness prevention and housing advice. As part of this process the service has recently taken part in a peer review and scored 77% which was the highest in the sub-region.

The table below details the number of households assisted by the service over the past five years. The numbers prevented from homelessness and those where a full homelessness duty has been accepted (figures in brackets) has steadily increased. Housing advice continues to be a priority to enable clients to resolve their own housing issues at an early stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Prevention cases</th>
<th>Homeless applications</th>
<th>Housing advice</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>187 (79)</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>2,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>268 (82)</td>
<td>1,507</td>
<td>2,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>219 (99)</td>
<td>2,477</td>
<td>3,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>264 (83)</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>3,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>268 (104)</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>2,515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding solutions

Increasingly people who present as homeless have other contributing issues, for example addiction and/or anti-social behaviour problems. Our housing advice service works closely with other agencies such as mental health services, advocacy services and supported housing providers\(^{38}\) to make sure these households get the support they need to make their housing ‘work for them’. The service also has a dedicated floating support officer who can help a person remain in their own home but can also help with resettlement if they have no choice but to move.

An example of this work is to ensure people being discharged from hospital do not end up with nowhere to stay or in poor quality homes which may exacerbate their problems. The Supporting People funded ‘Home from Hospital’ service and training for health practitioners within Weston Hospital have recently been promoted and strengthened, following a Health Watch report\(^{39}\) into this area. A Community Outreach Practitioner has also been employed who works closely with the hospital discharge team and other homelessness services in the district to ensure all homeless clients have access to appropriate healthcare.

The housing advice service also has a range of jointly funded specialist officers to work with groups such as 16/17 year olds, care leavers and people with LD. A housing benefit officer is embedded with the service to take on complex enquiries involving Housing Benefit issues and to act as an incentive to new landlords who may wish to work with the service in providing accommodation. This also give faster access to Discretionary Housing Payments\(^{40}\) for those households where this will bridge the gap in their

\(^{38}\) Many funded by our Supporting People programme (page 23)

\(^{39}\) Report in 2014

\(^{40}\) An interim fund established by government to help some households affected by welfare reform
housing costs. The service’s officers frequently liaise with other professionals such as social workers, support workers and housing providers in order to ensure the most suitable solutions to complex cases.

The way housing advice services are accessed has been transformed since the last housing strategy with first contact through the customer service gateway which is run in partnership with the council’s service delivery partners Liberata and Agilisys. Customers are assisted with basic housing advice enquiries, but can be referred on to the housing advice service if the query is more complex or if a homelessness application is necessary.

Our Homelessness Strategy will be updated in 2016 and will review the range of services and interventions we use and set out priorities for the future.

Private Rented Options

A major prevention option is to work closely with and incentivise private landlords and letting agents to secure accommodation for those threatened with homelessness. A dedicated officer works with both landlords and tenants to find suitable accommodation at an affordable rent, opening up more options for people on lower incomes. At the same time the ending of assured short-hold PRS tenancies is major reason for households needing help, so the service tries to negotiate longer term tenancies for our clients, but we are finding it harder to access the PRS at rents clients can afford.

Our service also helps homeless people to access a deposit or rent in advance, but there is often a shortfall between the amount PRS landlords charge and the level of Housing Benefit (HB) available for the size of property for which a tenant can claim. Those dependent on HB includes working households on low incomes as well as non-working households. We are currently reviewing our incentives to see what else we can do to persuade more PRS landlords to work with us. Failure to access the PRS can have a knock-on effect by increasing the number of households having to be placed in temporary accommodation.

Preventing Rough Sleeping

To ensure rough sleeping in the district stays at a low level North Somerset is an active partner in the Avon & Somerset Rough Sleeper Steering Group which is a collaboration of seven local authorities. The Group was awarded approximately £450,000 as part of the government’s ‘No Second Night Out’ Initiative to try and improve services available to rough sleepers. North Somerset, Bristol and B&NES also successfully bid for £240,000 to provide further assistance to single homeless clients and now provides intensive outreach services across the region to complement the work already carried out by our local outreach worker.
HomeChoice Register

As a housing option the HomeChoice register enables people seeking housing association housing to bid for properties of their choosing and for which they are eligible. This system is transparent and allows tenants and potential tenants to make decisions over the locations and properties they would like to live in. We regularly review HomeChoice to ensure it is effective in providing choice and meeting local need and that it is easily accessible to those that need it.

In January 2010 there were 6,180 households on HomeChoice, in September 2015 there were 3,436 a reduction of 44%. This was mainly as a result of changes to the district’s rehousing policy in October 2013 which allows only applicants with a local connection to join the HomeChoice register. It was decided that due to the high demand for housing in North Somerset restrictions were needed to ensure applicants with a local connection in high housing need got priority. Households eligible and non-eligible for HomeChoice are given a clear picture of their housing options and choices by our housing advisers.

Types of households on register

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of head of household</th>
<th>Number on the HomeChoice</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-59</td>
<td>2,282</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and over</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,436</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the strengthening of the local connection eligibility, other significant changes include:

- exclusions from joining HomeChoice for owner occupiers, applicants with sufficient financial resources, applicants guilty of serious anti-social behaviour, perpetrators of hate crime or domestic abuse and applicants owing money to a housing association.

Introduction of banding:
- for existing social housing tenant applicants who are under occupied and need to downsize if affected by the housing benefit under occupancy charge.
- to reflect the introduction of allocations through HomeChoice for Gypsy and Traveller pitches.
- for applicants who are in employment and also for armed forces members.
- to reflect the Right to Move

---

41 All figures in this section at 7/09/15
42 Using powers from the Localism Act 2011
Improving training and employment opportunities

The housing on offer in a community can contribute to the economic success of that community. Achieving the right housing, including affordable housing, is vital in attracting and retaining a skills base that will encourage inward investment. Research reveals the long-term health problems and low educational attainment that are associated with poor quality housing increase the likelihood of a person being unemployed or working in a low-paid job.\textsuperscript{43} If we can create employment opportunities alongside new or refurbished housing we create a ‘win, win’ situation which may break the potential vicious circle of ‘no job, no home’.

Through partnerships such as Team North Somerset\textsuperscript{44}, major employers and especially housing associations are helping vulnerable people (especially young people) into employment/apprenticeships/training. We want to see employment and housing developed at the same time to make communities more sustainable. There is a lack of work experience and training opportunities within the district for those without qualifications and there is a particular problem of youth unemployment. NSC already offers an award winning and nationally recognized apprenticeship scheme in partnership with Weston College and Agilisys\textsuperscript{45}. It is now looking at establishing a Public Services Academy. The aim is to increase the number and diversity of apprenticeship opportunities in North Somerset by public services (and potentially private sector) employers working together on a joint apprenticeship scheme. We will look at the potential to improve opportunities for employment and training in affordable housing developments. With Weston College the council is currently developing a ‘Train and Build’ scheme for ex-servicemen where they will build their own homes, learning construction and related skills as part of the process. On completion of this project we will evaluate it to see if the model can be used for other groups including young people.

Summary of Strategic Actions

- Continue to provide a comprehensive housing advice service which seeks to prevent households becoming homeless with relevant interventions
- Work with colleagues in adults, children’s, mental health and health services to develop appropriate housing options for vulnerable people; includes looking at new models of housing for older people e.g. extra care
- Work with Team North Somerset, housing associations, Weston College and other partners to maximise EET\textsuperscript{46} opportunities including within affordable housing developments
- Develop further digital opportunities to enable self-service for those seeking housing.

\textsuperscript{43} Shelter (2006) Chance of a lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children’s lives
\textsuperscript{44} A partnership of 11 public, private and voluntary/community organisations
\textsuperscript{45} The agent for NSC’s admin and entry level functions
\textsuperscript{46} EET = education, employment and training
There is a pro forma for feedback attached to this DRAFT strategy at Appendix A for you to complete and email back to kevin.mulvenna@n-somerset.gov.uk, if you will like a hard copy of this paper and the feedback questionnaire please contact Kevin Mulvenna on 01934 427487