

Name of Committee

6 October 2026

Temporary Accommodation Policies

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr G Taylor, Housing & Homelessness

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

S Crowe - Executive Director, Housing, Prevention and Communities

Report author and job title:

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Housing Solutions Service is responsible for securing, allocating and managing accommodation for households undergoing assessment under the homelessness provisions contained within Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. Households owed an accommodation duty may be placed in a range of temporary accommodation options, including Bed and Breakfast accommodation, Dorset Council-owned hostel provision, or accommodation secured through private sector leasing arrangements.
- 1.2 The South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) audit recommended that the Council undertake a comprehensive review of its Temporary Accommodation policies to ensure they reflect current legislation, statutory guidance and good practice. This included the development and revision of policies relating to the sourcing of accommodation, the management of void properties and the allocation and letting of temporary accommodation.
- 1.3 In response to these recommendations, the Council has developed a suite of policies that together provide a clear framework for the sourcing, allocation,

and management of temporary accommodation. Collectively, these policies will help ensure that accommodation secured by the Council is safe, compliant and suitable, while maintaining a flexible portfolio capable of meeting the diverse needs of households experiencing homelessness. The policies also promote transparency by clearly setting out the principles and criteria used when matching and allocating accommodation.

- 1.4 Without an agreed policy framework, the Council would be exposed to an increased risk of inconsistent decision-making, legal challenge and reputational damage. The adoption of these policies will strengthen the Council's ability to fulfil its statutory duties under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended, while safeguarding the rights, welfare and wellbeing of households accommodated through the homelessness service.
- 1.5 The Housing Service is now an integral part of the Housing, Communities and Prevention Directorate and this will provide emerging opportunities to embed closer working relationships with our Communities, Commissioning and Health partners. Alongside strengthening the council's ability to fulfil its statutory duties the new policies will support our aims in terms of prevention and communities supporting us to respond to specific needs of our homeless residents experiencing multiple disadvantage, reduce reliance on less suitable forms of accommodation and strengthen coordination with our Housing Homelessness Service and Assets and Property.
- 1.6 These policies will give our homeless residents absolute clarity around the service they can expect to receive from the council, and transparency around our decision making processes, at a time when they are at their most vulnerable.
- 1.7 The Sourcing Policy, in particular, supports the Council Plan target to achieve the desired balanced position of a smaller but sustainable temporary accommodation stock over the next 5 years. The policy suite as a whole, supports the wider plan to reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation by 30%.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the following policies for implementation by the Housing Solutions Service:
 - 1) Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation Policy
 - 2) Void Policy (management of unoccupied properties that are not generating income)
 - 3) Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 To support officers in meeting the needs of applicants who are homeless by providing appropriate and safe accommodation that represents value for

money, facilitates suitable placements in line with statutory requirements, and ensures accommodation charges remain affordable.

4. The report

- 4.1 The Council has statutory responsibilities under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, to prevent and relieve homelessness and, where required, secure accommodation for eligible households. Whilst Dorset Council has achieved positive outcomes in preventing homelessness, there remains an ongoing need to provide temporary accommodation for households owed a specific duty such as the S188 interim duty or S193, the Main Housing duty.
- 4.2 The pressures on the need for temporary accommodation have risen over the last year with the three most common causes of homelessness being the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST), exclusion from accommodation by family or friends, and domestic abuse. The profile of homelessness in Dorset broadly reflects the national picture; however, there are some notable differences including an increase in domestic abuse approaches of 22%, compared with the national average 17%.
- 4.3 Dorset also records a greater proportion of households becoming homeless following departure from an institution, including hospitals and offender accommodation, at 9.9% compared with 6.7% nationally. In addition, the proportion of households whose cause of homelessness is recorded as 'Other Reason' is more than double the national figure, at 14% compared with 6.9%.
- 4.4 These higher proportions are likely to contribute to increased demand for temporary accommodation and may indicate a need for a broader range of prevention and support interventions to address the underlying causes of homelessness within Dorset.
- 4.5 Council-owned temporary accommodation forms part of the Council's wider operational property portfolio and requires ongoing collaboration between Housing Services and Assets & Property to ensure effective asset management, maintenance, statutory compliance and the provision of safe, suitable and available accommodation for residents.
- 4.6 Any accommodation secured for homeless households must be considered suitable, regardless of whether it is provided on an interim basis or as a means of discharging a homelessness duty through a permanent offer of accommodation. Chapter 17 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance sets out the factors that must be taken into account when assessing suitability. Suitability extends beyond the physical condition and standard of the property and must also consider the specific needs, circumstances, and vulnerabilities of the individual household.

- 4.7 The Council recognises that Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation should only be used as a last resort for households accommodated under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996. However, there will be occasions when immediate accommodation is required, and no suitable alternative is available. Legislation prohibits households with dependent children from remaining in B&B accommodation for more than six weeks, and 16 and 17-year-olds must never be placed in B&B accommodation. In addition, B&B accommodation is not regarded as suitable for care leavers.
- 4.8 These policies will assist the Council in meeting the requirements set by the Secretary of State to ensure that any Bed and Breakfast accommodation used is of an appropriate standard. Compliance will be achieved through regular inspections, ongoing monitoring, and quality assurance arrangements with accommodation providers.
- 4.9 To support Dorset Council's commitment to minimising the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, it is essential that vacant units within the temporary accommodation portfolio are returned to use as quickly as possible. This includes ensuring that all necessary repairs, maintenance works, and statutory compliance requirements, such as the completion of gas safety inspections and certification, are undertaken within the shortest practicable timescales through effective working arrangements between Housing Services and Assets & Property. These vacant properties are referred to as 'voids'.
- 4.10 The efficient management and processing of void properties maximise the availability of temporary accommodation and helps reduce reliance on more costly forms of emergency accommodation, such as Bed and Breakfast establishments. This contributes to better outcomes for homeless households and supports the effective use of Council resources. Successful delivery of the policies will require ongoing collaboration between Housing Services and Assets & Property to coordinate repairs, maintenance, compliance activities and property turnover arrangements
- 4.11 Both the Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation Policy and the Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy will influence decisions regarding the location of accommodation. Dorset Council's preference is to secure accommodation within the Dorset Council area wherever possible. However, where this is not achievable, the search area may be extended beyond the Council's boundaries. When making placement decisions, the Council will seek to minimise disruption and ensure that households can maintain existing employment, education, family connections, healthcare arrangements, and established support networks wherever reasonably practicable.

- 4.12 Affordability is a key element of accommodation suitability. The Council is required to consider whether an applicant can meet the housing costs associated with a placement without being deprived of basic necessities, including food, clothing, heating, transport, and any other essential expenses relevant to their circumstances.

5. **Alternative options considered**

- 5.1 The recommended option is the formal adoption and implementation of all four policies. The only alternative would be for officers to continue operating without an approved policy framework. While officers already work broadly in accordance with the principles contained within these policies and could continue to deliver some of the associated benefits, the absence of formally adopted policies exposes the Council to unnecessary risk. Their adoption will enhance transparency, promote consistent and evidence-based decision-making, and reduce the potential for legal challenge.

6. **Legal considerations**

- 6.1 The adoption of a Placement Policy is not a statutory requirement. However, in *Nzolameso v Westminster City Council* [2015], the Supreme Court recommended that local authorities maintain an up-to-date, publicly available policy setting out how temporary accommodation is procured and allocated. Such a policy can assist in explaining the factors considered when making placement decisions for individual households.

Implementing an Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy will support a transparent, consistent and accountable approach to meeting the household needs in respect of temporary accommodation. Without a formal policy, the Council may face challenges regarding the allocation of accommodation and the decision-making process, potentially leading to complaints, adverse publicity, reputational damage, and the use of resource-intensive review and appeal procedures.

Where concerns cannot be resolved through internal processes, complaints may be escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, which could result in findings against the Council and recommendations for compensation. In addition, a decision not to adopt the Policy may increase the risk of legal challenge, including by way of Judicial Review.

Implementing a Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation Policy and Void Policy will only strengthen the Council's position by ensuring that safe and compliant accommodation which is charged at an affordable rate is available or becomes available in a timely manner.

If these policies are adopted, it is essential that they are applied consistently and in accordance with their provisions. Failure to follow policy could expose

the Council to the same risks of complaint, challenge and legal action as having no policy in place.

7. Financial implications

7.1

Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation Policy

- An increase in the provision of suitable long term accommodation will reduce the reliance on making placements into expensive B&B nightly rate accommodation.

Voids Policy

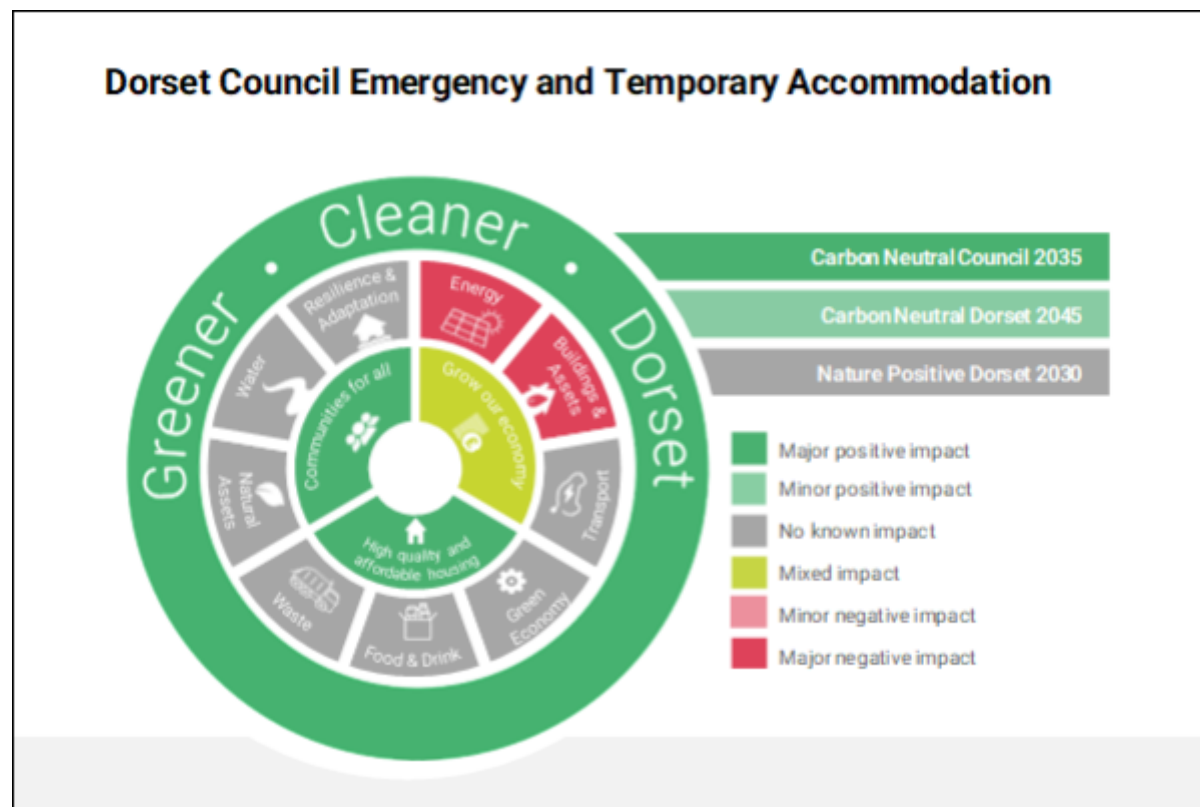
- Minimising turnaround times when a property becomes vacant, by achieving key performance indicators, should enable a reduction in income loss and reduce expenditure incurred, such as Council Tax and utilities. Achievement of these targets will require continued support from Assets & Property in delivering repairs, maintenance works, statutory compliance activities and safety inspections to return properties to occupation as quickly as possible

Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

- No discernible financial implications arise from this policy.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1



Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	major negative impact
Buildings & Assets	major negative impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	major negative impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	major negative impact
Resilience and Adaptation	major negative impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	neutral
High-quality and affordable housing	strongly supports it
Communities for all	strongly supports it

Recommendations	
Energy	

Ensure all electrical equipment is the most energy efficient	The duty place on the Housing department is to secure accommodation, it is not to provide any of the appliances within. However some properties may be acquired with kitchen 'white appliances' already integrated. Our primary concern is in relation to the safety of the installation and not as to its efficiency. Where a property this is the responsibility of the owner and not Dorset Council. Conversations can and will take place however should equipment need to be replaced as to efficiency ratings.
Maximise energy efficiency of the building fabric (e.g. Loft & wall insulation, triple glazing)	Dorset Council will aim to onboard the most energy efficient properties where possible. Owners of properties within the existing portfolio will be advised as to any current schemes available as well as signposting to services such as Healthy Homes Dorset.
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The proposed Void Policy, Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy, and Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation Policy are expected to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of households accessing temporary accommodation. Collectively, these policies support the Council's statutory duties while promoting accommodation that is safe, suitable, affordable, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of residents experiencing homelessness.

The Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation Policy will help ensure that accommodation procured by the Council meets appropriate quality and safety standards. Access to accommodation that is safe, well maintained, and free from significant hazards contributes directly to both physical and mental wellbeing. By undertaking regular inspections and quality assurance checks, the Council will seek to ensure that residents are accommodated in environments that support their health, dignity, and personal wellbeing during what is often a period of significant uncertainty and stress. This is supported through the Council's property management arrangements, with Assets & Property providing repairs, maintenance and compliance services to Council-owned temporary accommodation

The Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy recognises the importance of maintaining access to established support networks and essential services. Wherever reasonably practicable, placements will seek to minimise disruption to employment, education, healthcare provision, childcare arrangements, family relationships, and community connections. This approach supports residents' emotional wellbeing and reduces the potential negative impacts associated with displacement from familiar surroundings. Careful consideration of household circumstances and vulnerabilities when determining suitability also helps to ensure that accommodation placements support individual health and welfare needs.

The Void Policy will contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes by reducing the length of time that temporary accommodation units remain unavailable for occupation. Efficient management of voids will increase the supply of suitable accommodation and support the Council's objective of reducing reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This is particularly important for families with children and vulnerable households, for whom prolonged stays in emergency accommodation can negatively affect health, wellbeing, educational attainment, and social outcomes. Faster turnaround of vacant properties will assist households in accessing more suitable accommodation at the earliest opportunity.

Overall, the three policies are designed to work together to improve the quality, affordability, availability, and suitability of temporary accommodation.

Whilst some households may still need to be accommodated outside their preferred area due to limited housing supply, the policies provide a framework that seeks to minimise adverse impacts and promote positive health and wellbeing outcomes for residents experiencing homelessness. The proposals are therefore considered to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing and support Dorset Council's commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable residents.

10. Other implications

10.1 None.

11. Risk implications

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: **(Medium)**: Without approved and consistent policies, there is a risk of inconsistent decision-making, challenges to placements, ineffective use of temporary accommodation, financial inefficiencies, and difficulties demonstrating compliance with statutory homelessness duties.

Residual Risk: **(Low)**: The implementation of clear policies will provide a consistent framework for sourcing, managing, allocating and charging for temporary accommodation, reducing the likelihood of inconsistent practice and supporting compliance with legislative requirements. Some residual risk remains due to ongoing pressures on temporary accommodation demand, availability of suitable accommodation, and changes in legislation or case law.

12. Equalities

12.1 The EQIAs are contained within the appendices. These have been submitted and are currently awaiting sign off.

13. Appendices

Appendix 1:

SWAP Audit Report – Temporary Accommodation

Appendix 2:

SWAP Audit Report Findings & Action Plan – Temporary Accommodation

Appendix 3:

Policy for the Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation

Appendix 4:

Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

Appendix 5:

Voids Policy Housing Management – May 2026

Appendix 6:

EQIA Policy for the Sourcing of Temporary Accommodation

Appendix 7:
EQIA Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy
Appendix 8:
EQIA Voids Policy Housing Management May

14. Background papers

14.1 None.

15. Report sign-off

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)