

TOO MANY COOKS

A solution to expensive and fragmented housing services

In a 21st-century wealthy democracy, **housing** is a fundamental expectation, alongside clean water and food. For EYV members living and working in a national park, obtaining housing away from the parental home involves negotiation with most or all of the authorities listed below.

Depending on whether they seek affordable rented or self-build housing, they will have to find the time, money, persistence and courage, during working hours, to approach:

- The local council
- Up to 5 housing associations
- Somerset Homefinder or Devon Homechoice

And will then have to find help to complete forms, time to travel, gather evidence, and collect and deliver documents.

Self-builders will probably have to deal with:

- Planners
- Water companies
- Electricity companies
- Parish council
- Highways
- Ecology group(s) re protected species surveys
- Development Control Group
- Neighbours and landowners (where there is a local tie)
- Multiple sources of loans and grants
- Mortgage companies who will refuse them
- Architect for drawings and plans
- Land Registry

The above entails several meetings, numerous emails and phone calls, and multiple documents and references delivered and collected, with additional and unexpected costs.

Recently, EYV supported a disabled member to find rented accommodation that met her particular needs. She succeeded. But only after 119 emails, the involvement of 7 professional advisers, obtaining 3 professional references and 12 other document exchanges.

EYV members and their charity are probably wasting their own and everyone's time struggling and juggling so many different demands. Housing needs to be a one-stop-shop, one overriding, well-staffed and resourced department of the new Somerset Council.

How might it be funded? It's claimed that centralising will save money, and the savings are already promised for 'communities,' so there lies a fund that could be used. This is likely to be seen as a popular move for the new council in its first year.

The opportunity is there for this new department, with all partners, to design a simple system that is both centralised and more localised by using its central powers to coordinate all aspects of housing. Members of the relevant Local Community Networks and parish councils could confirm the local connection and need.

'Need' must consider *the future need* for family growth and work needs.

The new 'Somerset Housing' could also campaign with other counties for larger houses and gardens in rural areas to account for modern life's demands. It is a folly to build smaller, meaner homes when people, and the equipment they need, are both increasing. Land-wise, we are encouraged to grow some of our own food and help our children play outdoors.

The current system is fragmented - expensive, ineffective and unwieldy to the point of actively discriminating against all but the brightest and most persistent young people. Our next paper will ask how we ensure equal access for less able young people. In light of our duty to house people, it is inefficient to put such a huge administrative burden onto applicants. Instead, we need to simplify, de-clutter and create a one-stop-shop arrangement that enables our young adults to find the homes they need. Prioritising young people in this way carries out the intentions of Equalities legislation, as it addresses the needs of a group that is seriously missing out.

Our small national park has the oldest population demographic in England. There are not enough children to ensure a future for our schools. A school-free national park loses teachers, vets, doctors, dentists, and solicitors and cannot attract new and larger businesses. Recruitment and retention are already serious problems.

Who will provide essential services in shops, care, building, and deliveries, including Royal Mail?

The park is on the cusp of becoming a geriatric desert, over-weighted with second and holiday homes. It already has an unnatural, unbalanced population. Now, the opportunity is there to plan for a transformative service to be proud of and demonstrate a way forward that might suit the rest of the country.