

# Agenda

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## Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: **Thursday 10 December 2015**

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Time: **5.00 pm**

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Place: **St Aldate's Room, Town Hall**

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For any further information please contact:

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As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record the meeting please let the Contact Officer know how you wish to do this before the start of the meeting.

# Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

## Membership

<b>Chair</b>	Councillor Linda Smith
	Councillor Gill Sanders
	Councillor Sam Hollick
	Councillor Elizabeth Wade
	Councillor Elise Benjamin
	Councillor David Henwood
	Geno Humphrey

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# AGENDA

Pages

## 1 APOLOGIES

Substitutes are not allowed.

## 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

## 3 HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2015/16 QUARTER 2

7 - 10

Background Information
This report contains outcomes at the end of September 2015 (2015/16 quarter 2) for a set of housing performance indicators previously selected by the Panel.
Why is it on the agenda?
The Housing Panel has a role in monitoring Council performance against housing targets. The Panel may wish to ask questions or request additional information.
Who has been invited to comment?
Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing and Property, has been invited to answer the Panel's questions.

11 - 26

## 4 RENTS PERFORMANCE

Background information
The Panel has agreed to monitor the Council's rents performance and requested a report to update members on current and former tenant arrears.
Why is it on the agenda?
For the Panel to monitor and scrutinise rents performance.
Who has been invited to comment?
The following people have been invited to present the report and answer the Panel's questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Councillor Susan Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services;</li><li>- Tanya Bandekar, Revenue and Benefits Service Manager;</li><li>- Damon Venning, Rents Team Manager.</li></ul>

**5 CHOICE BASED LETTINGS UPDATE**

27 - 44

Background information
<p>The Housing Panel requested a report on Choice Based Lettings when agreeing its work programme for 2015/16. The Chair visited the Allocations Team in October and agreed that the scope of the report would cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Proposed changes to the CBL scheme</li><li>- Data on bidding activity,</li><li>- Data on non-bidders,</li><li>- Information on refusal reasons.</li></ul>
Why is it on the agenda?
<p>For the Panel to receive an update on Choice Based Lettings and consider proposed changes to the scheme.</p>
Who has been invited to comment?
<p>Councillor Rowley, Board Member for Housing, and Tom Porter, Allocations Manager, have been invited to present the report and answer the Panel's questions.</p>

**6 HOUSING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

45 - 46

For the Panel to note and agree its work programme.

**7 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

47 - 50

For the Panel to note the record of its meeting on 8 October 2015.

**8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Housing Panel members have been invited to the Budget Review meeting on 7 January to scrutinise the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and other budget proposals related to housing.

The next Housing Panel meeting is provisionally scheduled for 11 January at 5pm.

## **DECLARING INTERESTS**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your\* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licences for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". What this means is that the matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

\*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those of the member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

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# Agenda Item 3

## Performance Summary Housing Panel

Trends compare relative performance with

Prd: previous month

Prev Year End: previous March

Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Green = target met  
Amber = within tolerance  
Red = outside tolerance

Sep-2015

Measure		Owner	Result 2014/15	Latest Data		Year End Target 2015/16	RAG	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result			Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
<b>Estates Regeneration</b>											
LP013	LP013: Increase satisfaction with parks	Caroline Chanides	84.0%	84.9%	84.0%	90.0%	A				Oxford Residents Survey 2014/15
<b>Housing Supply</b>											
HC016	HC016: Number of affordable homes for rent delivered	Stephen Clarke	13 Number	67 Number	109 Number	67 Number	G				20 units at Minchery Farm were completed in September
CA001	CA001: Delivering a programme of new homes at Barton	Jane Winfield	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	G				On site with main infrastructure .First phase housebuilder finalising planning application . Phase 2 land sale on the market
BV064	BV064: Empty homes returned to use	Stephen Clarke	15 Homes	7 Homes	12 Homes	14 Homes	G				
NI154	NI154: Net additional homes provided	Michael Crofton -Briggs	253 Number	102 Number	169 Number	200 Number	G				
<b>Welfare Reform and Housing Crisis</b>											
HP003	HP003: The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	0 Number	0 Number	45 Number	G				An annual estimate of rough sleepers is done in November, and will be reported for that month.
HP004	HP004: The number of successful interventions with rough sleepers	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	125 Number	209 Number	250 Number	G				

**Performance Summary  
Housing Panel**

Trends compare relative performance with

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Prd: previous month

Prev Year End: previous March

Sep-2015

Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Measure		Owner	Result 2014/15	Latest Data		Year End Target 2015/16	RAG	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result			Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
NI156	NI 156: The number of households in Oxford in temporary accommodation	Stephen Clarke	107 Number	120 Number	128 Number	120 Number	A				<p>The service saw an unexpectedly high number of homeless families in September that required placements into temporary accommodation. A significant number had lost their private rented accommodation through no fault of their own, and many had not had previous contact with the service. A significant number were also previous Home Choice cases where the landlords are seeking higher market rates for the property, and where we have been unable to source access to alternative local private rented accommodation that would meet the households needs.</p> <p>At the end of September also, we are having to report to the DCLG that we have breached the 6 week rule in one case – accommodating a homeless family (or pregnant woman) in non self-contained B&amp;B accommodation for over six weeks. Other than one household in 2008/09 who was accommodated under a court order pending a court hearing, this is the first time since this regulation was introduced in 2004 that we have had to report this situation at the end of a quarter.</p> <p>A number of homeless households are presently under offer to council and housing association property, including a percentage to the new units just completed by the Council, so it is hoped that this number will fall back to around target next month. Additional temporary accommodation provision is also being made from council properties where tenancies have ended, to try and ensure that we have adequate accommodation provision without the need for such high levels of B&amp;B use.</p>



**Performance Summary  
Housing Panel**

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Amber = within tolerance  
Red = outside tolerance

Trends compare relative performance with  
Prd: previous month  
Prev Year End: previous March  
Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Sep-2015

Measure Ref	Description	Owner	Result 2014/15	Latest Data		Year End Target 2015/16	RAG	Trends			Comments
				Target	Result			Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
BV066a	BV066a: Percentage of rent collected	Helen Bishop	97.79%	95.50%	95.30%	98.00%	A				
CS002	CS002: Time to process changes in circumstances	Helen Bishop	10 Days	10 Days	8 Days	9 Days	G				Results for this indicator remain good - the 4,384 changes processed in Sept taking an average of 8.7 working days. The year to date result is now 7.91 days, comfortably within the 10 working days target.
CS005	CS005: Time to process new benefits claims	Helen Bishop	12.66 days	14.00 days	17.48 days	13.00 days	R				The result for Sept was disappointing - the 337 new applications processed taking an average of 24.6 working days. The target is to process these within 14 working days. As a result the year to date cumulative result becomes 17.5 days.
CS010	CS010: Total current tenant arrears	Helen Bishop	£1,042,353.00	£1,070,000.00	£1,119,140.00	£900,000.00	A				
CS011	CS011: Total former tenant arrears	Helen Bishop	£342,358.00	£400,000.00	£373,659.00	£350,000.00	G				
CS013	CS013: Total arrears of tenants owing more than 7 weeks rent	Helen Bishop	£437,539.00	£375,000.00	£508,635.00	£370,000.00	R				
CS014	CS014: Number of NSPs served on tenants in arrears YTD	Helen Bishop	917 NSPs	300 NSPs	241 NSPs	600 NSPs	G				
HC003	HC003: Homeless Acceptances	Stephen Clarke	114 Number	72 Number	51 Number	144 Number	G				
HC004	HC004: Homelessness cases prevented	Stephen Clarke	1,147 Number	450 Number	565 Number	900 Number	G				

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**To: Housing Panel**

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

**Report of: Head of Financial Services**

**Title of Report: Rents Performance**

## **Summary**

**Purpose of report:** To provide an update on rents arrears as requested by the Panel

**Key decision** *No*

**Executive lead member: Councillor Susan Brown**

**Report author: Damon Venning**

**Policy Framework:**

## **Appendix 1: Case Studies**

### **Background**

1. Following the Housing Scrutiny Panel's meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014 this report provides an update on current and former tenant arrears as at the end of October 2015. In particular:
  - The profile of debt by age and value
  - The number of tenants in arrears who are affected by any of the benefit changes and/or direct payment rollout.

### **Overall Rent Collection Performance**

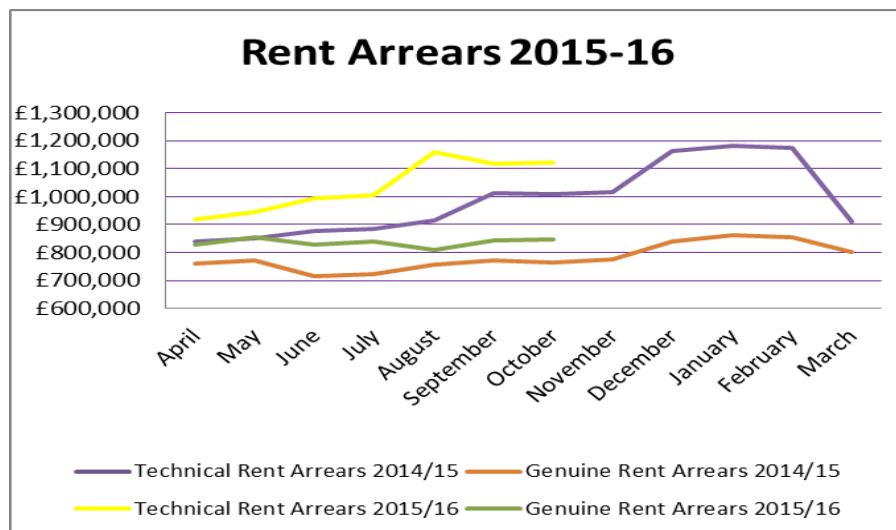
2. As at 31<sup>st</sup> October the collection rate was 95.93% against a target of 94.75%. This is up on the October 2014 position (95.47%). The target collection rate at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 is 98.00%. The target collection rate at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 was 97.5%.

### **Technical arrears versus genuine arrears**

3. As the rent debit is raised weekly, the arrears figures are skewed by the following variables:

- Direct Debit payment dates of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and end of month
  - The timing of monthly instalments. Most tenants paying their rent by Direct Debit will pay for their annual rent in 12 equal monthly instalments.
  - In 2015/16 there are 52 weekly rent debits, which equates to 4.34 weeks rent being paid each month, therefore at certain points in the year the monthly debit is not cleared by the monthly payment. However, the instalment plan will ensure that each rent account will be cleared by the end of the financial year.
  - Direct payments of Housing Benefit are paid 4 weekly in arrears
4. This report adjusts the technical arrears figures to provide a 'genuine arrears' figure on a monthly basis. ('genuine arrears' take into account the timing issues related to direct debits and direct payments of housing benefit).
5. Table 1 below shows technical and genuine arrears from the end of March 2015 to the end of October 2015, compared to the 2014 figures. Technical arrears were £911,717 (2.12% of rent roll) at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. They had risen to £1,121,890 (2.44% of the rent roll, an increase of £210,173) at the end of October 2015. Genuine arrears were £803,690 at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 and had risen to £847,174 at the end of October 2015, an increase of £43,484. The trend levels in changes to arrears patterns are similar to corresponding years, which will lead to reducing levels at end of year.

**Table 1: Rent arrears comparison between 2014 and 2015 to the end of October 2015**



6. Table 2 below shows the profile of debt by the number of weeks in arrears. It shows there is a decrease of 295 arrears cases since March 2015 predominantly in the 0-13 week bracket (305). However, the number of arrears cases between 13 and 52+ weeks has increased both in value (£13,644) and volume (10). There are 15 cases older than 26 weeks that:
- Have been to Court for possession but an arrangement made

- Are continually monitored by the Income Management Team so that any failure to keep to the arrangement is actioned immediately.

**Table 2: Aged Debt Analysis for Rent**

Range	Genuine Arrears March 2015	Genuine Arrears Cases	Genuine Arrears October 2015	Genuine Arrears Cases
0 to 4 weeks	227,401	1732	229,883	1405
4 to 13 weeks	349,679	462	377,036	484
13 to 26 weeks	176,528	89	193,097	100
26 to 39 weeks	44,824	15	39,394	13
39 to 52 weeks	5,258	1	7,763	2
52 Weeks +			0	0
	<b>803,690</b>	<b>2299</b>	<b>847,174</b>	<b>2004</b>

### High Level Arrears (13-52+ weeks)

7. All cases over 13 weeks in rent arrears have either been taken or are in the process of going to court to seek a legal agreement to pay the rent arrears. The Rents Team are members of the court user group and judges have requested that we work with tenants early in the arrears process so any orders or judgements made are realistic for the tenant to adhere to payments.

### Arrears Engagement Activity

8. Table 3 below shows the last three years of agreement and court activity highlighting a decrease in legal activity in the last two years. This outlines the team's endeavours to contact tenants early in the arrears process and resolve debt problems before they escalate. It also shows that tenants are adhering to long term agreements or payment plans.

**Table 3: Arrears Actions for all Tenants**

Arrangement Type	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	October 2015
Agreements	859	996	734	456
Court Orders	68	125	114	42
Court Restorations	32	87	46	28

9. Tenants in arrears are contacted by the Rents Team in the first instance to make an agreement. If this agreement is not adhered to, or we are unable to make contact with the customer, then the case is escalated to a court hearing. At the court hearing the judge will make a determination based on the individual case presented, and will either grant possession, or suspend possession based on an agreement being maintained via a court order, or adjourn the case subject to a payment arrangement being agreed and maintained. The team has evicted 5 tenants in the current year; this is significantly lower than organisations in our benchmarking group where the average is approximately 20 per year.

### Engagement with tenants

In June 2015 the team achieved full compliance for the Customer Service Excellence assessment, as well as achieving three compliance pluses for;

- Developing customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences.
- Empowering and encouraging all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer-focused culture of the organisation.
- Demonstrating how customer-facing staffs' insight and experience is incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.

### Former Tenant Arrears

10. Since April 2015 we have increased our focus on collection of Former Tenant Arrears to ensure we are collecting these debts alongside current tenant arrears. Our collection performance in the current year is 12% compared to an industry benchmark of 10%. This is shown in monetary terms below:

Starting Balance April 2015	£427,051
Balance at October 2015	£373,098
Collected	£53,953
Collection Rate	12.64%

11. The Council are currently procuring a new Enforcement Agency and Debt Collection Agency contract for the collection of all debts which will come into force in January 2016. The Debt Collection Agency will be engaged to collect income where efforts by the team have been unsuccessful. It is intended to select two agencies that will provide competition and we can measure performance against each. We are currently working with a company called Akinika who are collecting 3.24% of our outstanding debt before we write off any remaining.

### 12. Case Studies

- Attached at Appendix 1 are some case studies which show customers with varying levels of debt. This shows how arrears can accumulate and what actions the team takes to recover debts.

### Debt Analysis by Value

13. Table 4 below shows the profile of debt by value. Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 the number of arrears cases has decreased by 295, however, the arrears have increased (£43,484).

**Table 4: Rent Debt Analysis by Value of Debt**

Range	Genuine Arrears March 2015	Genuine Arrears Cases	Genuine Arrears October 2015	Genuine Arrears Cases
£0 to £100	30,560	876	23,533	559
£100 to £250	84,071	532	79,925	481
£250 to £500	144,546	394	154,884	430
£500 to £750	124,304	204	121,228	200
£750 to £1000	87,812	101	95,540	111
£1000 +	332,398	192	372,064	223
	<b>803,690</b>	<b>2299</b>	<b>847,174</b>	<b>2004</b>

## Welfare Reform

### Universal Credit

14. Out of a total of 7,645 tenants, there are 31 tenants who are now in receipt of Universal Credit (UC). 23 of these cases have had an arrears increase of an average of £573.
15. We have applied for a total of 10 Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA), where the housing element of Universal Credit is paid directly to the Council.
16. There have been several issues in dealing with the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) to ensure tenants receive timely assessments and communicate the information required. To assist in enhancing our communication with the DWP we will be applying to become a "Trusted Partner" that will allow us to undertake APA reviews on behalf of the DWP that will assist our tenants to avoid falling into arrears due to delays in payment of their Universal Credit.

17. Of the 31 tenants that have received UC payments three were part of the direct payment demonstration pilot (DPDP). None of these tenants are in rent arrears and are keeping to agreed payment plans.

### Direct Payments

18. We currently have 915 tenants that are receiving direct housing payments. Table 5 below outlines that there are 182 tenants on direct payments in rent arrears at the end of October 2015. Some of these tenants were in arrears prior to being moved onto direct payments. 131 of those tenants have rent arrears of less than £200.

19. Table 5 below shows the level of arrears at the end of March 2015 and the end of October 2015 for tenants affected by Welfare Reform with Direct payments broken down into each phase

**Table 5: Arrears Breakdown**

		Genuine Arrears March 2015	Genuine Arrears August 2015	Genuine Arrears September 2015	Genuine Arrears October 2015
<b>No Housing Benefit</b>	Sum	£360,652	£336,122	£340,315	£338,422
	Tenant in Arrears	994	807	792	796
	Average	£363	£417	£430	£425
<b>Direct Payments</b>	Sum	£19,442	£60,538	£65,131	£66,418
	Tenants in Arrears	96	164	166	182
	Average	£203	£369	£392	£365
<b>Housing Benefit (Partial and Full)</b>	Sum	£423,596	£412,800	£436,720	£442,334
	Tenants in Arrears	1209	966	1019	1026
	Average	£350	£427	£429	£431
<b>OCC Tenants</b>	Sum	£803,690	£809,460	£842,166	£847,174
	Tenants in Arrears	2299	1937	1977	2004
	Average	£350	£418	£426	£423

### Bedroom Tax

20. There are currently 407 tenants currently affected by the bedroom tax, this is a reduction from 660 tenants with bedroom tax deductions when the policy was introduced in April 2013.

21. Out of these tenants there are 21 that are being supported by Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). There are a further 6 tenants in receipt of DHP affected by the Benefit Cap which was introduced in April 2013.



22. Current data suggests that a further 109 City Council tenants may be affected by the proposed reduction in the benefit cap in 2016. The Welfare Reform Team is currently contacting these tenants to inform them of the likely impact and invite them to engage with the Team in order to help prepare for the changes.

**Benchmarking data:**

23. Benchmarking data provided by HouseMark for the 12 months to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 compares data for the City Council with similar Local authorities that have retained their Housing stock.

Rent Arrears & Collection Summary							
KPI	SampleSize	Upper	Median	Lower	Oxford City Council (2014/2015)		
					Result	Rank	Quartile
<a href="#">Percentage of rent collected (excluding current arrears brought forward)</a>	35	99.84	99.54	99.35	100.11	2	Upper Quartile
Current tenant rent arrears as % of rent due (excluding voids)	36	1.29	1.68	2.3	2.14	25	Middle Lower
Former tenant rent arrears as % of rent due (excluding voids)	36	0.63	1.23	1.79	0.86	13	Middle Upper
Percentage of rent debit not collected due to rent arrears	33	0.17	0.48	0.67	-0.11	2	Upper Quartile

24. The chart below shows Oxford City Council as 25<sup>th</sup> out of 36 Local authorities for current tenant rent arrears as a % of rent due (excluding voids). We are arranging offsite visits to investigate and take the learning from those delivering best practice.



## Service Improvement

### 25. Actions completed from the last report

- Promoting Direct Debit as our preferred payment method- we now offer this as the preferred payment option and current take up is almost 40% of total tenants (which includes those on full Housing Benefit)
- Improved processes and procedures- as part of the restructure and the tenant consultation process we have revised letters and correspondence, improved efficiency and communication through tenant and staff consultation, and improved technology. The Council has purchased the RentSense software from Mobyssoft which will provide improved management and reporting of arrears.
- Arrears prevention at sign up of tenancy- we have had a dedicated officer who has built on and improved the process, and this will be incorporated into the new Housing structure as this moves forward this year
- Former Tenant Arrears collection- we have placed greater emphasis and management on these arrears this year and monitor collection more closely. We have started to measure collection and are collecting this debt at around 2% higher than our peers.
- Process review- from cradle to grave- we are working with a number of other teams in Housing, Welfare Reform, Customer Services to journey map the processes we have with tenants from the initial contact with us to the end of a tenancy. We have developed an action plan and will be reviewing this in January 2016 once a number of new processes have been embedded through the Housing Team restructure
- Universal Credit implementation- we have 31 tenants on Universal Credit and continue to work with Job Centre Plus and the Welfare Reform and Benefits Team to ensure a smooth transition

#### **Name and contact details of author:-**

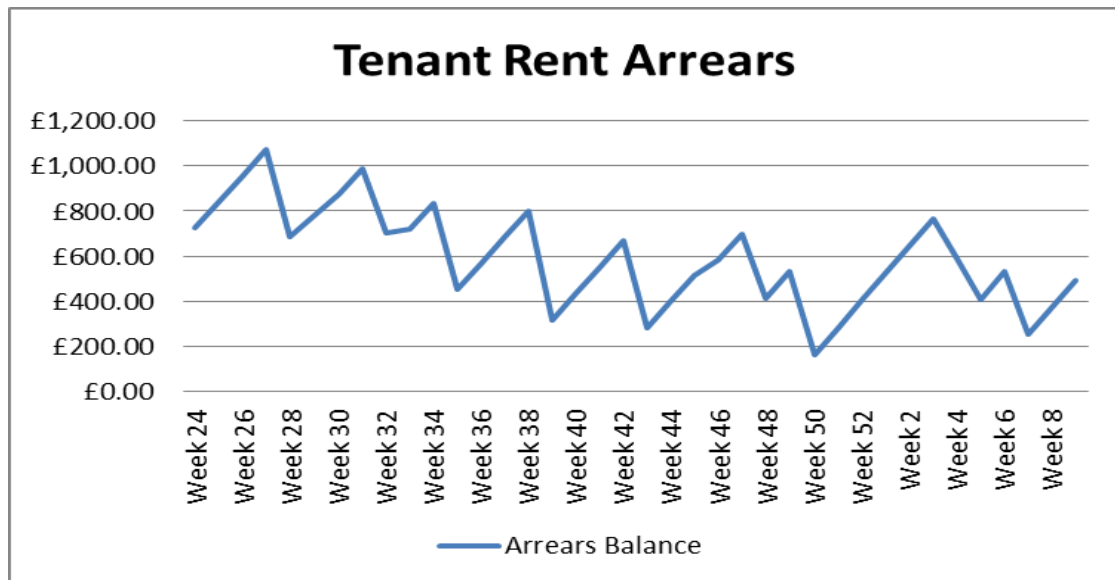
Name Damon Venning  
Job title: Rents Team Manager  
Service Area / Department Financial Services  
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**Version number: v4**

## Appendix 1: Case Studies

### Case Study 1

<b>Your Organisation</b>	Oxford City Council	<b>Your Name</b>	
<b>Your Position</b>	Rent Officer	<b>Contact details</b>	



Vital information about the tenant and household i.e. Mental/physical impairments, Literate etc.	Tenant is living with partner; he has previously had a heart attack and double hernia.
Any known Support e.g. Social worker	Only partner
Date Social Services were e-mailed if children in household	N/A

#### Brief Summary of Account

Tenant is a 56 year old male living with partner in a three bedroom house. There are no known dependents and the tenant is not in receipt of any benefits.

Rent arrears started in September 2013 when the direct debit that was set up to pay the monthly rent was rejected two months in a row. This coincided when the main tenant had long term health problems that resulted in leaving employment. The tenants are always in constant contact to pay their rent but in that period were living off a reduced income that was causing financial difficulties.

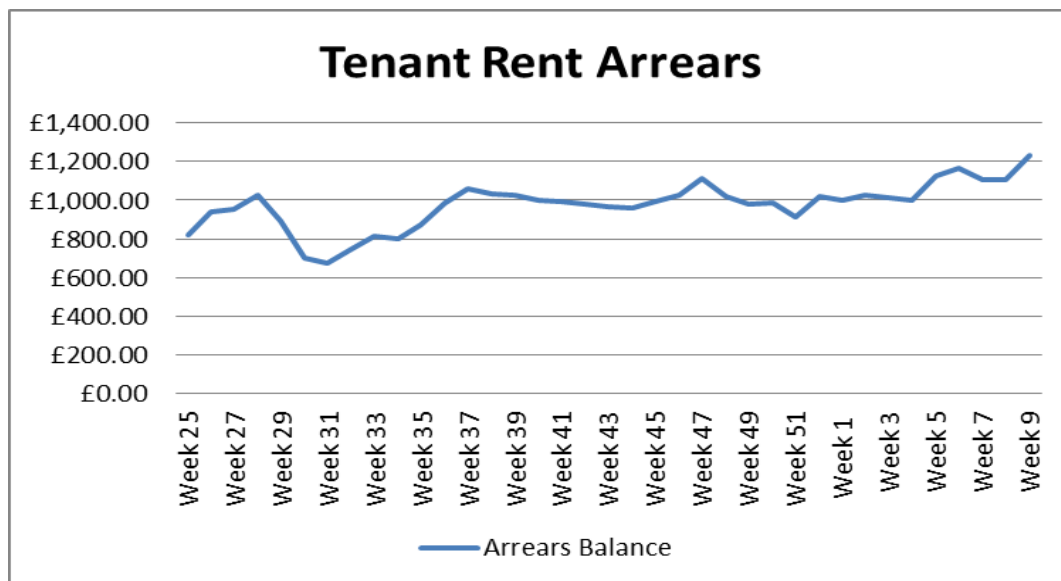
The tenants did not apply or receive benefits during this period despite being advised to apply. In the past year the Rents Team has been in contact with tenant and partner at least twice a month due to the way they pay their rent.

The tenant is able to work however is on reduced hours and contracting so income is sporadic. This causes rent payments to fluctuate with the amount of work the tenant does. The team set arrangements to pay the arrears with the tenant that have to be adjusted for each change in circumstances.

The current arrangement is to pay the rent plus £25.00 per week to reduce the arrears. If the arrangement is adhered to the arrears will be paid off in five months' time. The tenant has been served a Notice of Seeking Possession (NSP) in line with procedures and if arrangements are not adhered to or contact with tenant ceases then the next course of action would be a court application.

## Case Study 2

<b>Your Organisation</b>	<b>Oxford City Council</b>	<b>Your Name</b>	
<b>Your Position</b>	<b>Rent Officer</b>	<b>Contact details</b>	



Vital information about the tenant and household i.e. Mental/physical impairments, Literate etc.	The tenant is a female in receipt of housing payments of £2.08 per week. There are four dependents and four non-dependents declared in the property although there has been confirmation of twelve family members residing in the property.
Any known Support e.g. Social worker	Unknown
Date Social Services were e-mailed if children in	Social Services are involved with this family.

**Brief Summary of Rent Account**

Social Services have confirmed there are 12 people living in this five bedroom property as there are further non-dependents that have not been declared to housing benefit.

The rent account has been in rent arrears since December 2010 and has slightly been increasing due to non-dependent charges and variances in income that effect housing benefit claims. In November 2013 the tenant was taken to court where a possession order was granted as the tenant was not engaging with our services.

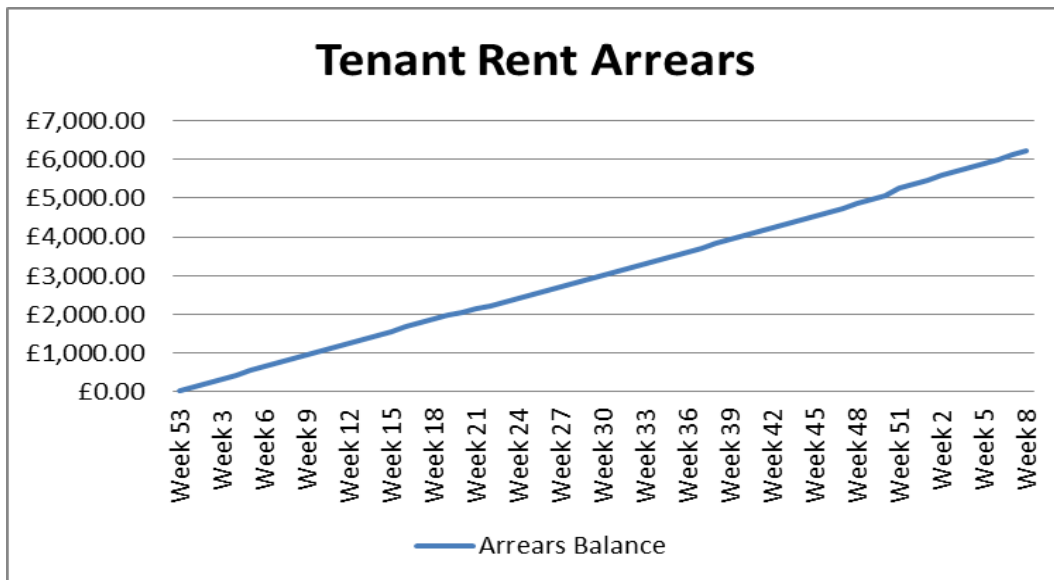
The tenant has recently been engaging with our services as well as the support services offered by the Council. It appears that there is a continuing battle with the tenant to pay the amount due after housing payments have been taken into account. The tenant is ineligible for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) due to earned income and we are constantly engaging with the tenant to pay rent owed.

In conjunction with the Tenancy Sustainment Team we have had numerous meetings with the tenant to avoid eviction as the cost to the Council to re-house this family would far outweigh the current rent arrears. After several meetings and conference calls between various sections Social Services have agreed to pay £500 of the rent arrears which is a good sign however it still leaves the tenant in default of approximately £500.

It is positive that the tenant is now frequently engaging although it is resource intensive to work with the tenant and ensure payments are maintained. In the last six weeks the Rent Officer for this tenant has estimated that he has spent ten hours of work on this tenant alone.

## Case Study 3

<b>Your Organisation</b>	<b>Oxford City Council</b>	<b>Your Name</b>	
<b>Your Position</b>	<b>Rent Officer</b>	<b>Contact details</b>	



Vital information about the tenant and household i.e. Mental/physical impairments, Literate etc.	The tenant remained in the property after the death of parent and was not granted succession of the property. The account was deemed a Use and Occupation account whilst review conducted.
Any known Support e.g. Social worker	Unknown
Date Social Services were e-mailed if children in household	

### Brief Summary of Rent Account

The tenant remained in the property following the death of parent in August 2010 whilst a review into succession was carried out. The rent element was being paid in that period by housing benefit until it ceased in August 2014. The situation was investigated with Rent Officers and Tenancy Management Officers as the rent arrears increased at the end of 2014 whilst it was agreed the tenant would not succeed the property and it was sent to Legal Services in January 2015 to recover the property.

Throughout this period no payments were made to the account whilst we waited for

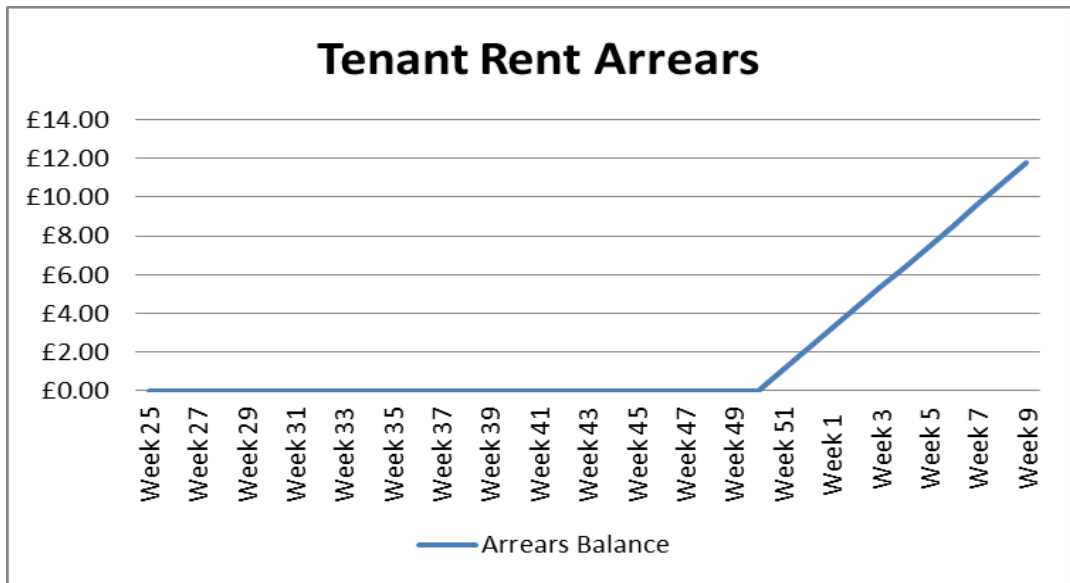
the legal process to begin. An application was submitted to the court in first week of March 2015 and we received confirmation from the court on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 that a hearing would be set for 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

At the hearing the Council was granted possession of the property after 14 days and an application for a warrant was made in the first week of June 2015. The Council has now had confirmation that and an eviction date has been set for 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015 that will ensure the property has been recovered.

It is suspected that the tenant has been sub-letting the property in the last three years and was claiming housing benefit for that period until it ceased in 2014. The case was referred to Fraud and an investigation involving service areas of tenancy management, rents and fraud led to the legal recovery of the property.

## Case Study 4

<b>Your Organisation</b>	Oxford City Council	<b>Your Name</b>	
<b>Your Position</b>	Rent Officer	<b>Contact details</b>	



<b>Vital information about the tenant and household i.e. Mental/physical impairments, Literate etc.</b>	The tenant is 93 years old and has had a tenancy since January 1986.
<b>Any known Support e.g. Social worker</b>	Unknown
<b>Date Social Services were e-mailed if children in household</b>	

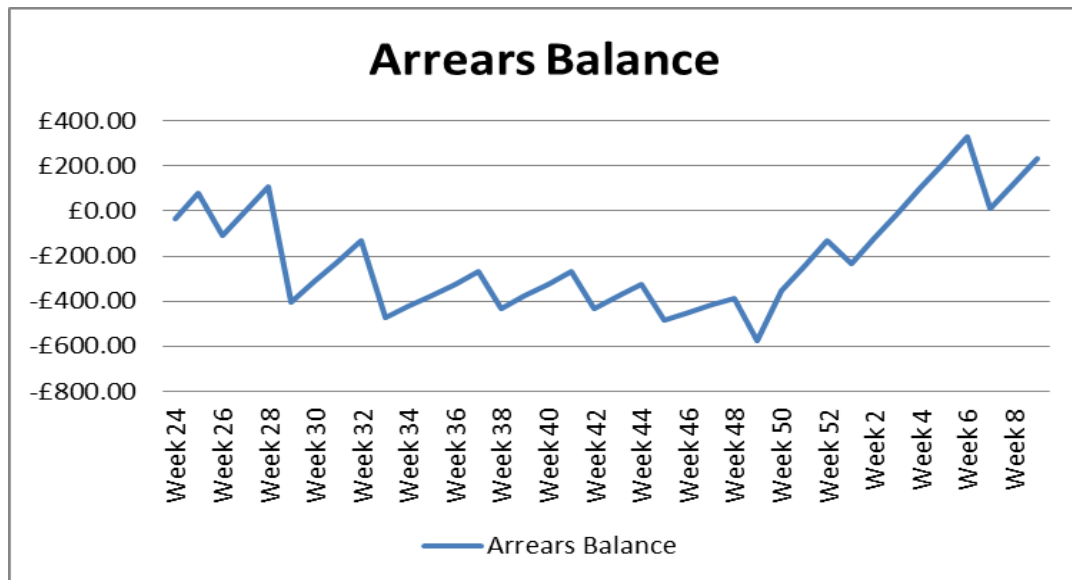
### Brief Summary of Rent Account

The tenant was on full housing benefit payment until 6<sup>th</sup> April 2015 when the rent was increased and housing benefit was re-assessed. It has been awarded with a £1.07 per week deduction due to excess income due to excess capital exceeding £16,000.

The arrears have been increasing at this rate since the start of the financial year and the team have visited the property and were unable to initiate a payment plan due to non-access of the property. The team will continue to pursue personal contact rather than by letter to arrange payment if initial assessment of housing payments continue.

## Case Study 5

<b>Your Organisation</b>	<b>Oxford City Council</b>	<b>Your Name</b>	
<b>Your Position</b>	<b>Rent Officer</b>	<b>Contact details</b>	



Vital information about the tenant and household i.e. Mental/physical impairments, Literate etc.	The tenant is a 48 year old female living in a two bedroom house with no known dependents.
Any known Support e.g. Social worker	Unknown
Date Social Services were e-mailed if children in household	

### Brief Summary of Rent Account

The tenant has been in work throughout her tenancy however was on full housing



benefit for a period in 2014 when her account was £500.00 in credit. The housing benefit was reduced in August 2014 due to earned income and this saw a reduction in the credit on her account then in March 2015 the housing benefit ceased and responsibility for payment of full rent began.

The tenant was contacted by the Rents Team in April 2015 (Week 4) where a payment plan was agreed for payments over the internet as direct debit was refused due to funds in bank account. In June 2015 it was agreed to set up a direct debit for future payments as tenant was confident payments would be sustained at the agreed level. The payment plan was agreed that the arrears will be reduced to £0.00 by the end of this current financial year.

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**To: The Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 10/12/15**

**Report of: Allocations Manager**

**Title of the Report: Choice-Based Lettings Update**

## Summary and Recommendations

<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To provide an update on Choice-Based Lettings and future changes being considered
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Meeting Housing Needs
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	Note the changes being considered to Choice-Based Lettings cycles

## Appendices

*Appendix I: A summary of Housing Need Priority Bands*

*Appendix II: Lettings & Nominations 1/4/15 to 31/10/15*

*Appendix III: A breakdown of the number of bids received during each Choice-Based Lettings cycle for the last 3 months*

*Appendix IV: Oxford Register for Affordable Housing lettings targets*

1.	<p>The Council's Allocations Scheme sets out the policy used to prioritise those in housing need on the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing (ORAH) for offers of housing. The current scheme was approved by the Council and came into effect on 12/12/13. The Allocations Scheme seeks to balance local needs and aspirations with current legislation, guidance and best practice as well as local housing conditions. The Allocations Scheme and a shorter summary are both available on the Council's website.</p>
2.	<p>The Allocations Scheme uses Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) to advertise the limited amount of properties becoming available each year in Oxford. For those who are eligible and qualify for inclusion on the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing (ORAH) CBL increases the choice available to most housing applicants (with some restrictions such as those on the Homeless List living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council) but it cannot increase the number of properties becoming available each year.</p>
3.	<p>When new properties are built or existing properties become available to re-let they are advertised in a lettings cycle (currently every fortnight). Housing applicants included on the housing register can then bid on up to 3 suitable properties during each letting lettings cycle and they are placed on a shortlist for the property. After the lettings cycle closes a final shortlist is created listing all the housing applicants who have bid (applied) for the property by priority order taking into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Need Priority Band (a summary of the Housing Need Priority Bands is shown in <b>Appendix I</b>)</li> <li>• Housing Need Priority Band Start Date</li> <li>• Any other preferences on the advert – for example, preference to the General Register List, Transfer List or Homeless List if the property has been advertised with priority to applicant's to one of these lists. Or if a property is on the ground floor and/or has adaptations suitable for a person with a disability priority will be given to those assessed as requiring this type of accommodation</li> </ul>
4.	<p>Where a housing applicant bids for a property and shortlists for a potential offer of housing, checks are made by the Allocations Team to determine whether the applicant should be considered for an offer of housing or not.</p> <p>These checks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility for housing</li> <li>• Housing Need Priority Band/Reason</li> <li>• Household details</li> <li>• Registration Date/Priority Band Start Date</li> <li>• The size of property they are eligible for</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenancy issues and whether they are suitable for an offer or can only be considered for certain properties or whether they need support and if so whether it is place</li> <li>• The property is considered suitable for their housing requirements or could be adapted if required</li> </ul> <p>If the housing applicant's details are correct and they are considered suitable for an offer and the property is considered suitable for their housing requirements they will only then be made an offer. Before this is done they will be contacted where possible to discuss the property details and location to double check they are definitely interested in the property to avoid wasting time if they state they are no longer interested in the property.</p> <p>Customers who confirm they are interested in a property are sent a written offer and are then contacted to arrange a viewing once the property is ready so that they can make a final decision about whether they wish to accept or refuse the offer.</p>
5.	<p><b>Offers &amp; Refusals</b></p> <p>The Allocations Team made 428 offers of housing from 1/4 to 31/10/15, 364 offers were accepted and 64 were refused. The Allocations Team seeks to minimise the number of refused offers balanced with ensuring those in housing need are given the opportunity to view properties and move to more suitable accommodation where possible. Where a housing applicant is made an offer and refuses with good reason – for example if after viewing the property it is found not to be suitable for their housing requirements because of their health needs they are not penalised and can continue to bid for future properties. Furthermore, Council Tenants seeking to downsize are encouraged to bid and are not penalised if after they view a property they decided to refuse an offer, in order to maximise the number of family properties becoming available to re-let to larger families in housing need.</p> <p>If a housing applicant is offered a property and refuses without good reason a penalty may be applied. Unreasonable refusals delay other applicants in housing need moving into a property, cost the Council and other landlords in lost staff time and can result in the landlord losing rental income from having longer void periods. If a housing applicant's reason for refusing is considered reasonable by the Allocations Team they will be able to continue to bid.</p> <p>If a homeless applicant refuses a suitable offer without good reason the Council will no longer have a duty to accommodate them and ask them to leave their temporary accommodation and to resolve their housing situation themselves. If the applicant does not move out the Council will take action to take possession of the property.</p>

Applicants on the General Register or Transfer Lists who are considered to have unreasonably refused two suitable offers of accommodation within the last 12 months will be suspended from bidding for 12 months. With the exception of tenants on the Transfer List occupying a property suitable for a family and seeking to downsize to a smaller property. Other exceptions may also be made on a case by case basis by the Allocations Manager.

**Appendix II** shows a breakdown of family and non-family properties let from 1/4 to 31/10/15.

**6. Choice-Based Lettings Cycles.**

CBL lettings cycles currently start fortnightly and last for 13 days. They start on a Tuesday and end 13 days later on a Monday. The last 3 months of lettings cycles are show below.

<b>Start of Lettings Cycle</b>	<b>End of Lettings Cycle</b>
12/8	24/8/15
26/8	7/9/15
9/9	21/9/15
23/9	5/10/15
7/10	19/10/15
21/10	2/11/15
4/11	16/11/15

7.

**Bidding**

A housing applicant can bid for up to 3 properties during a lettings cycle. An applicant can only bid for properties they are eligible to apply for. If an applicant is not eligible for a property they will not be able to bid for it.

**Appendix III** shows a breakdown of the bids received during each lettings cycle for the last 3 months. The information from **Appendix III** has been summarised in the table below. This shows that on average 79% of the bids made are completed within the first 7 days of the lettings cycle and only 21% of bids are made in the last 6 days.

Lettings Cycle	Total Bids During the first 7 days	Total Bids during the Last 6 days
<b>12/8 to 24/8/15</b>	79%	21%
<b>26/8 to 7/9/15</b>	77%	23%
<b>9/9 to 21/9/15</b>	80%	20%
<b>23/9 to 5/10/15</b>	77%	23%
<b>7/10 to 19/10/15</b>	80%	20%
<b>21/10 to 2/11/15</b>	78%	22%
<b>4/11 to 16/11/15</b>	81%	19%
<b>Average Percentage of Bids</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>21%</b>

8.

**The Housing Register**

There are currently over 3000 households on the Housing Register. The table below shows a breakdown of the housing register by Housing Need Band and List.

Housing Need Priority Band	Housing List			Total
	Transfer	General Register	Homeless	
<b>Band 1</b>	45	1		<b>46</b>
<b>Band 2</b>	184	54		<b>238</b>
<b>Band 3</b>	289	343	89	<b>721</b>
<b>Band 4</b>	42	91		<b>133</b>
<b>Band 5</b>	384	1609		<b>1993</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>2098</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>3131</b>

The vast majority of housing applicants are in Housing Need Priority Band 5 and are considered to be in low or no housing need so their chances of

	<p>successfully bidding for a property are extremely low (with the exception of some older applicants applying for low demand sheltered accommodation). Housing applicants in Band 5 are advised when they register they have little chance of receiving an offer of housing and should consider other housing options too.</p>
9.	<p><b>Methods of Bidding</b></p> <p>All housing applicants are sent a “User guide to bidding” when they are included on the Housing Register. The guide provides information about how CBL works and advice on how to apply for properties. The guide is also available from Council Offices and on the Council website <a href="http://www.oxford.gov.uk">www.oxford.gov.uk</a>.</p> <p>Housing applicants can bid by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CBL website; <a href="http://www.oxfordcitycbl.org.uk">www.oxfordcitycbl.org.uk</a></li> <li>• Phone</li> </ul> <p>The vast majority of housing applicants bid using the website and only a very small number bid by phone (and it is likely this method will no longer be used in the future). Customers in housing need without access to the internet and unable to come into local offices can be assisted with bidding to help them avoid missing out. For example, customers who are older or with a disability can receive assistance from the Housing Needs Team, their Tenancy Management Officer, Accommodation &amp; Sustainment Officer, Support Worker or staff in St Aldate’s or Templar’s Square Offices with bidding. A CBL newsletter called “Direction Home” listing all of the properties becoming available is also circulated to Local Offices during each CBL cycle. Currently, around 50 newsletters are posted during each lettings cycle to those identified as vulnerable and who are unable to come into a local office.</p>
10.	<p><b>Non-Bidders</b></p> <p>Housing applicants in high housing need (Bands 1 or 2), older applicants and those identified as having a disability are helped where possible by the Allocations Team with bidding when suitable properties become available. The team also contact those in lower bands (Bands 3 or 4) if suitable properties become available and it appears likely that if a bid is placed they may shortlist for an offer.</p>



11. The table below lists the number of housing applicants in Bands 1 to 4 on the housing register who have never bid for a property.

Housing Need Priority Band	Housing List		
	General Register	Transfer	Total
<b>Band 1</b>		27	<b>27</b>
<b>Band 2</b>	3	55	<b>58</b>
<b>Band 3</b>	27	33	<b>65</b>
<b>Band 4</b>	16		<b>21</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>171</b>

The Housing Applicants in Band 1 & 2 on the Transfer List are under-occupying tenants who have stated that they may wish to move in the future but are not ready to move at this time or are waiting for a property to become available in a very specific location. A member of the Allocations Team has a specialist role in contacting such applicants and helping them to bid. From 1/4/15 to date 30 tenants have been helped to move to smaller more suitable properties and their former homes have been re-let to larger families in housing need.

The 3 housing applicants in Band 2 on the General Register either require very large properties that become available extremely rarely or will only consider moving to very specific areas where properties become available extremely rarely.

The Allocations Team will continue to monitor the non-bidders and contact those who are not bidding if and when potentially suitable properties become available.

12. **The Oxford Register for Affordable Housing (ORAH) Partnership**

The Oxford Register for Affordable Housing (ORAH) is a partnership between the Council and most Registered Providers of social housing with properties in Oxford. The ORAH partnership agreement includes lettings targets that the Allocations Team work to. These targets are now out of date and along with the proposed changes to the CBL cycles they are currently being reviewed with our partners. The current targets are listed in Appendix IV. Performance against these targets is reported to the ORAH partnership board bi-annually. The Allocations Team seeks to balance making offers within target against aiming to only allocate properties to housing applicants where they are suitable for an offer and the property is suitable for their housing requirements. Where an offer is made outside of the lettings target it is normally because further information or checks are required to ensure the housing applicant is suitable for an offer. The majority of offers have no impact on void re-let times and it is

	rare for a delay in an offer have a significant impact on re-let times.
13.	<p><b>Proposed Change to CBL Cycles</b></p> <p>The Council is under increasing pressure to minimise the loss of any rental income to the Housing Revenue Account when properties become vacant. The Registered Providers within the ORAH partnership also seek to minimise the loss of rental income. One of the recommendations of a review of the voids process undertaken by the staff involved was that consideration should be given to reducing the length of lettings cycle. The ORAH partners also support this approach.</p> <p>Analysis of bidding activity shows that almost 80% of applicants bid during the first week of the lettings cycle and only around 20% bid during the last week. So it is proposed that lettings cycles are changed in the future so that properties are only advertised for 7 days (instead of 13 days as currently). As part of this process all housing applicants will be written to notifying them of the change and the 20% who tend to bid later in the lettings cycle will need to bid during the first week. Please note many Local Authorities already use weekly lettings cycles including our former Sub-Regional Partners in Oxfordshire: Vale of the White Horse, South Oxfordshire District Council &amp; Cherwell District Council.</p> <p>Following the proposed change housing applicants bidding activity will continue to be monitored and assistance will be provided with bidding to those in housing need unable to bid for properties themselves. The Allocations Team will continue to send “Direction Home” newsletters to vulnerable customers.</p> <p>The ORAH partner Registered Providers will be requested to pay a charge for advertising properties in the future to cover the additional cost of printing and issuing newsletters more frequently.</p> <p>The Allocations Team will be able to focus more on assisting non-bidders because they will have a more balanced workload with offers spread over 52 lettings cycles instead of 26 lettings cycles as currently.</p>
14.	<p>Implementation of the Proposed Changes to CBL lettings cycles</p> <p>It is proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Head of Housing authorises a change to weekly CBL lettings in early 2016</li> <li>• All housing applicants and support providers are written to notifying them of the change before it takes place</li> <li>• Housing applicants in housing need continue to receive assistance with bidding</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regular monitoring takes place to ensure housing applicants in housing need, particularly the elderly or vulnerable are bidding for suitable properties advertised as becoming available</li></ul>
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**Name & contact details of author:**

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Allocations Manager

Community Housing and Community Development

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## Appendix I: A summary of Housing Need Priority Bands

<b>Band 1</b>	<b>Exceptional Housing Need</b>
1.1	Applicants assessed as having Exceptional circumstances, where there is an immediate risk to health and safety, complex needs, "place of safety" cases or other emergency needs
1.2	Council or other ORAH partner tenants under-occupying their home by two or more bedrooms seeking to downsize to a smaller property or move to a sheltered scheme
1.3	Council or other ORAH partner tenants requiring a Decant and other housing management moves
1.4	Successor tenants who need to move to a more suitable property
1.5	Housing applicants where a Prohibition/demolition notice has been issued by the Environmental Health department
1.6	Households where the level of overcrowding exceeds the statutory limit
<b>Band 2</b>	<b>Urgent Housing Need</b>
2.1	Housing applicants assessed as having "urgent social or welfare needs"
2.2	Housing applicants assessed as having "urgent health or disability needs"
2.3	Council or ORAH tenants under-occupying their home by one bedroom seeking to downsize to a smaller property or move to a sheltered scheme
2.4	Applicants who have been assessed as ready to move on from supported accommodation (quota arrangements are in place due to the lack of properties)
2.5	Overcrowded families assessed as being 2 or more bedrooms short of their housing needs
2.6	Any applicant with two or more compoundable categories in Band 3
<b>Band 3</b>	<b>Significant Housing Need</b>
3.1	Applicants found to be homeless, in a priority need group and a duty to offer housing has been accepted (not compoundable) and may be offered private rented accommodation by the Housing Options Team instead of social housing
3.2	Housing Applicants assessed as having "significant social or welfare needs"
3.3	Housing applicants assessed as having "significant health or disability needs"
3.4	Applicants assessed as living in sub-standard unsatisfactory housing: Category Level 1 Health Hazard (normally confirmed by Environmental Development)
3.5	Overcrowded families or households assessed as being one bedroom short of their housing needs
3.6	Insecure tied accommodation where the loss of the accommodation is through no fault of the housing applicant
3.7	Insecure private rented accommodation where the loss of the accommodation is through no fault of the housing applicant
3.8	Any applicant who qualifies for at least two compoundable categories in Band 4
<b>Band 4</b>	<b>Moderate Housing Need</b>
4.1	Housing applicants assessed as having "moderate social or welfare needs"
4.2	Housing applicants assessed as having "moderate health or disability needs"
4.3	Housing applicants who are homeless and not in a priority group, sofa surfers, no fixed abode or in supported "move on" accommodation (not compoundable)
4.4	Applicants assessed as living in sub-standard unsatisfactory housing: Category Level 2 Health Hazard (normally confirmed by Environmental Development)
<b>Band 5</b>	<b>No or Low Housing Need</b>
5.1	Applicants who are adequately housed or no immediate need for housing

(For full details see the Allocations Scheme available on the Council website: [www.oxford.gov.uk](http://www.oxford.gov.uk)).

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## Appendix II: Lettings & Nominations 1/4/15 to 31/10/15

The tables below show the number of family and non-family properties let from 1/4/15 to 31/10/15.

### Family Properties

<b>2 Bed</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>3 Bed</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>4 Bed</b>	<b>15</b>

### Non-Family Properties

<b>1 Bedroom Properties</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>1 or 2 Bedroom Sheltered Properties</b>	<b>42</b>

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**Appendix III: A breakdown of the number of bids received during each Choice-Based Lettings cycle for the last 3 months**

<b>Lettings Cycle</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 1</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 2</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 3</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 4</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 5</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 6</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 7</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 8</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 9</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 10</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 11</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 12</b>	<b>Number of Bids on Day 13</b>	<b>Total Bids During Lettings Cycle</b>
<b>12/8 to 24/8/15</b>	967	281	149	101	120	138	88	152	69	62	45	53	111	2336
<b>26/8 to 7/9/15</b>	1060	267	165	103	92	84	144	140	124	77	56	59	110	2481
<b>9/9 to 21/9/15</b>	843	239	180	76	74	116	98	116	51	74	24	60	71	2022
<b>23/9 to 5/10/15</b>	779	257	147	80	121	106	92	125	78	89	37	48	97	2056
<b>7/10 to 19/10/15</b>	890	304	184	94	144	145	88	139	73	52	60	33	95	2301
<b>21/10 to 2/11/15</b>	743	209	140	64	86	99	80	92	72	52	53	37	85	1812
<b>4/11 to 16/11/15</b>	826	249	151	109	108	112	106	124	89	63	29	39	56	2061
<b>Total Number of Bids</b>	6108	1806	1116	627	745	800	696	888	556	469	304	329	625	15069

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## **Appendix IV: Oxford Register for Affordable Housing lettings targets**

The Council will aim to provide a nomination within the following target timescales to minimise the impact of the allocations process on void turnaround times.

For the purpose of this monitoring, Non-Family Accommodation is taken to be all one bed accommodation; all disabled adapted or supported accommodation; all sheltered accommodation; and all property designed for a specific age group.

### **Property that is either ready to let, or with an anticipated ready date in the week following the bid cycle ending**

- Family Accommodation – within 2 working days of the bid cycle closing (i.e. by the end of the Wednesday)
- Non Family Accommodation – within 3 working days of the bid cycle closing (i.e. by the end of the Thursday)

### **Property with an anticipated ready date beyond the week after the bid cycle ending**

- Family Accommodation – within 4 working days of the bid cycle closing (i.e. by the end of the Friday)
- Non Family Accommodation – within 5 working days of the bid cycle closing (i.e. by the end of the following Monday)

### **Re-offers of property that is either ready to let, or with an anticipated ready date within a week**

- Family Accommodation – within 1 working day (24 hours) of the notification of the refusal by the Association
- Non Family Accommodation – within 2 working days (48 hours) of the notification of the refusal by the Association

### **New Build schemes with more than 10 units of accommodation advertised in one bid cycle** (Agreement on managing adverts for such schemes is expected to be reached in advance by the Council and the Association)

- within 5 working days of the bid cycle closing (i.e. by the end of the following Monday)

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## Housing Panel work programme 2015-16

### Items for Housing Panel meetings

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Approach</b>
Tenant Involvement	Review group or one-off panel to look at how tenants are involved in decisions that affect them.
Performance monitoring	Regular monitoring of housing performance measures.
STAR survey results	Annual monitoring of results of the tenant survey.
Rent arrears	Monitoring of performance measures; update report.
De-designation of 40+ accommodation	Final annual report on the latest phase of the de-designation of 40+ accommodations.
Homelessness	Mid-point review of homelessness action plan 2013-18.
Supporting people	Verbal updates on the joint commissioning of housing support services.
Choice Based Lettings	To consider proposed changes to the CBL scheme plus data on bidding activity, demographic data on non-bidders, and information on refusal reasons.
Security in communal areas	Request report on security issues in tower blocks and different approaches being taken to address ASB and other issues. Canvas views of block representatives.
Great estates programme	Request report to update members on capital investments to improve housing estates including Blackbird Leys and Barton.
Asset Management Strategy	Pre-scrutinise asset management strategy for Council's housing stock.
Sustainability of the Council's housing stock & HRA plan	Report to CEB expected in 2016. Also a focus of the budget review.
Homelessness Property Investment	Pre-scrutinise decision to approve investment in a property investment fund to help secure access to local, suitable and affordable private rented accommodation.
Housing Energy Strategy	Pre-scrutinise report to CEB on energy efficiency and fuel poverty in the Council's domestic housing stock. Consider environmental sustainability of the Council's housing stock
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Scheme	Pre-scrutinise report to CEB setting out the results of the statutory consultation and the proposed future of the licensing scheme. Consider research trends of private sector housing costs
Sheltered Housing Review	Pre-scrutinise decision to approve outcomes of review, including future of some of the stock. Consider progress against previous Housing panel recommendations.
Private Sector Housing Policy	Pre-scrutinise report to CEB setting out the future priorities and areas of intervention in the private rented and owner-occupied residential sectors in Oxford. Consider licensing for private sector landlords & research trends of private sector housing costs.

Housing Development delivery models	Pre-scrutinise report to Council setting out possible housing development models and to seeking project approval for the delivery of the Council's 2015-18 affordable housing programme. Consider alternative delivery models including; community land trusts, self-build, more housing on the waterways, high-density housing.
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### **Draft Housing Panel Agenda Schedules**

<b>Date and room (all 5pm start)</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>
11 January, Plowman Room	1. A Housing Company for Oxford (pre-decision)	Alan Wylde
9 March, Plowman Room	1. Performance Monitoring – quarter 3	N/A
	2. Update on the Great Estates programme	Martin Shaw & Jack Bradley
	3. Security in communal areas of tower blocks	Daryl Edmunds
	4. STAR survey results	Bill Graves
	5. Review of Older Persons Accommodation / Review of Sheltered Housing (pre-decision)	Frances Evans

### **Informal meetings closed to the public**

<b>Date and room</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>
7 January, Plowman Room (5.30pm)	1. Budget Review 2016/17 – Regeneration & Housing (joint session with Finance Panel)	Stephen Clarke & Nigel Kennedy

## NOTES OF THE HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

www.oxford.gov.uk



**Thursday 8 October 2015**

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Sanders, Hollick, Wade, Smith (Chair), Benjamin and Henwood.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer), Adrian Chowns (Team Leader HMO Enforcement Team), Martin Shaw and Ian Wright (Environmental Development)

### **10. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Geno Humphrey, Councillor Rowley, Councillor Price and Stephen Clarke (Martin Shaw stood in for Stephen Clarke).

### **11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **12. HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) LICENSING**

The HMO Enforcement Team Leader introduced the report and summarised the findings of the consultation. He advised that the proposed changes to the additional licensing scheme for HMOs included the introduction of 5 year licenses for accredited landlords, and changes in fees that would reduce costs for compliant landlords and increase costs for non-compliant landlords. The scheme had been making a difference to the standards of HMOs in the city but there was more to do to improve conditions in this sector.

The Panel asked a number of other questions, including about; the impacts and fairness of the scheme on families that wanted to take in more than two lodgers and on weekday lodgers who worked in the city, the problem of bidding was created by agents, whether longer licenses could lead to a drop in standards, what happens if landlords breach their license, whether the finances of the scheme were sustainable, whether there was a public register of HMOs, the validity of various points raised by the Residential Landlords Association, and the types of landlords operating in the city.

The Panel questioned whether there was an opportunity to build additional security for tenants into the scheme, such as longer tenures and rent level

guarantees. The Panel suggested that longer tenancies could encourage tenants to take more care of HMO properties and could help to address other issues often associated with HMOs, such as unkempt gardens. The Panel heard that it was unlikely that these controls could be built into the licensing scheme for legal reasons. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity to influence the market by including these as discretionary criteria within the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

The Panel noted that each household was entitled to two free bulky waste collections per year but that many tenants of HMOs were unable to access these because the free collections were used by landlords, and were often required to pay for bulky waste collections. The Panel suggested that the City Council looks at ways of addressing this issue, possibly through changing waste collection policy in relation to HMOs or by encouraging landlords to pay for tenants' bulky waste collections.

The Panel also AGREED that the following comments should be referred to the City Executive Board on 15 October:

1. That the Housing Panel restated its support for the additional licensing scheme for HMOs;
2. That the Housing Panel welcomed the success of the consultation and that officers should be commended for the high level and quality of engagement achieved.

The Panel AGREED that the following recommendations should be made to the City Executive Board on 15 October 2015:

1. That the City Council should encourage landlords and agents offer longer term tenancies and rent level guarantees, and explore the option of including these as discretionary criteria within the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
2. That the City Council should consider whether there is anything that can be done to address the inequity whereby many tenants living in HMOs are unable to access free bulky waste collections.

### **13. ARRANGEMENTS TO FACILITATE THE FITTING OF SOLAR PANELS**

The Property Services Manager introduced the report which requests project approval to fit solar panels on some of the Council's housing stock. The Panel heard that feed in tariffs would reduce dramatically in the New Year but that the Low Carbon Hub was exploring ideas to make the best of the situation and find a viable model for proceeding with this scheme. The arrangements would need to be clear that any risk would be borne by the Hub. The Panel heard that the proposals would not benefit the Council directly but would assist some Council tenants through reduced fuel bills and would contribute to the wider low carbon agenda.

The Panel noted regret that a previous scheme had been cancelled several years ago and that the current report set out a better approach to the fitting of solar panels on Council-owned housing stock. The Panel asked questions about



timescales, tenants' consent, the financial model of the Hub and the Council's own financial investments in solar panels.

In response to a question, the Panel heard that some properties had been lined up and could potentially be fitted before the level of the feed in tariff was reduced.

The Panel AGREED that the following recommendation should be made to the City Executive Board on 15 October 2015:

1. That the City Council should make every effort to enter into a viable agreement with the Low Carbon Hub as soon as possible in order to maximise the available benefits of fitting solar panels on Council-owned housing stock.

#### **14. HOUSING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel noted that some decisions that were due to be taken by the City Executive Board in November had slipped and AGREED to cancel the additional meeting that had been scheduled for 5 November 2015.

#### **15. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Panel approved the notes of the meeting held on 3 September 2015.

#### **16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Panel noted that as the 5 November meeting had been cancelled, the next meeting would be held on 10 December 2015.

**The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.25 pm**

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