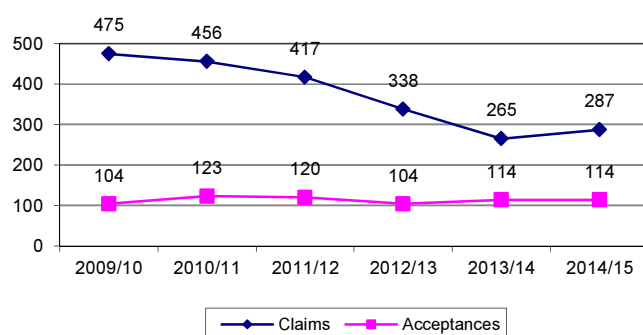


Appendix 3: Housing Needs Performance - How did we do in 2014/15?

Homeless Claims and Acceptances

We saw over 2,000 people at the Housing Options Duty service in the last year, visited around 50 people and assisted 105 households to access private rented accommodation by helping with a deposit. Through continued homelessness prevention work, the council has kept the number of people becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness low. In 2014/15 we accepted 114 households as statutory homeless. This was the same number as in 2013/14. In 2015/16, we aim to keep that number as low as possible by helping more people to stay in their existing homes or by assisting them in other ways to secure accommodation.

Homelessness claims and acceptances



As there is limited social housing becoming available for offers we are now discharging our homelessness duty by offering suitable accommodation in the private sector (using new powers in the Localism Act). In some instances we offer accommodation outside the city because of the high cost of private rented housing in Oxford. The median average rent for a 2-bed property is £995 per month, but the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is only £834. For a 3-bed the median rent is £1,250, but the LHA is only £988. In 2014/15, we discharged duty to 41 households accepted as statutory homeless by making an offer of accommodation in the private sector. 12 households accepted the private sector offer and 29 households refused. However, 8 households won their review on suitability.

In 2014/15, the council and its partners prevented 1,147 households from becoming homeless. This included negotiations with landlords or other assistance to help people remain in their private rented property, assisting people finding private rented housing with the help of a deposit or bond, homeless prevention fund payments, helping to resolve housing benefits and rent arrears problems, providing a sanctuary scheme and reconciliation with family when they threaten to exclude family members.

To help our customers keep their accommodation and prevent their homelessness, the Council now try to look more holistically at all of our customers needs. We have developed excellent arrangements with the Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to help customers manage their debts. This service is available for Housing Needs, Rents and Welfare Reform teams to refer customers at risk of homelessness to independent money advice, where help with managing debts would help customers to sustain their housing and avoid homelessness.

Teams in Housing Needs also work in partnership with the Council's Welfare Reform Team to help find solutions for customers affected by the bedroom tax and the benefit cap. The team provides financial support to help tenants pay their rent while they find their own way of coping with the effects of welfare reform. For those affected by the bedroom tax, solutions include help to move to a smaller home, applying for bedroom tax exemptions, getting help with debts or increasing their income through work or more hours at work. Families affected by the benefit cap are helped to apply for benefits exempting them from the cap, or are given support to find enough paid work to claim Working Tax Credit and exempt them from the benefit cap.

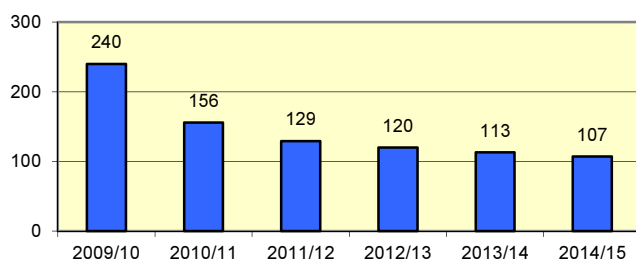
Shelter continue to provide an independent housing advice service at Templars Square on a Tuesday, and at St Aldates Chambers on a Thursday (drop-in sessions in the mornings), both of which continue to be well attended.

Temporary Accommodation

We have worked hard to reduce the number of households staying in temporary accommodation (mostly households which have been found to be homeless by the council and to whom we have a statutory duty to house) by arranging alternative suitable accommodation, where possible.

At the end of March 2015, the number of households in temporary accommodation was down to 107, a reduction of 6% from March 2014 (113). In England as a whole the number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 11% during the same time period. We aim to keep the number of households in temporary accommodation at 120 or less during 2015/16.

Number of households in temporary accommodation

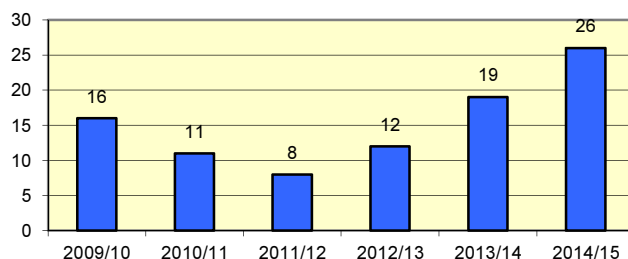


The Accommodation and Sustainment Team work to assist and empower clients to develop independent living skills, so those clients can positively move on from temporary accommodation. The Sustainment team specifically work with existing Council tenants to help them sustain their tenancy. Our performance in relation to these activities has been very good, with many positive outcomes for clients. 2014/15 saw the tenancy sustainment team managing 111 cases. Many of the cases were referred to the team because households who had fallen in to rent arrears were experiencing difficulties maintaining their tenancy or their home. The team were successful in sustaining tenancies with 94% of cases closed during this period having a positive outcome.

Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness

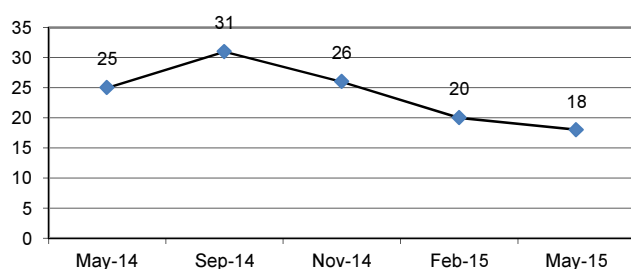
The number of people recorded as sleeping rough in the city remains an on-going issue and we continue to work in close partnership with agencies in order to address this. At the official count in November 2014, 26 people were counted sleeping rough.

Number of people sleeping rough



In addition to the Official Street Count that all Local Authorities are required to carry out between October and November every year, Oxford City Council and partners also conduct counts following the same strict government guidelines every three months.

Street counts 2014/15



No Second Night Out is a national initiative promoted by government, and has been rolled out across England over the past three years. In July 2012, No Second Night Out was launched in Oxford. The NSNO team works in close partnership with Oxford City Outreach to provide a rapid response to new and returning rough sleepers. The aim is that no one new to the streets of Oxford will spend a second night out on the streets. When a person has been verified as sleeping rough, a thorough assessment will be carried out and individuals will be offered a place in the NSNO assessment hub where they will be assessed and offered suitable accommodation and support (a Single Service Offer). This could include an individual being offered a place in one of the homeless hostels in the city, if the person has a local connection to Oxfordshire, or an offer to return to an area where the person does have a local connection.

We commission a highly assertive outreach team that work closely with enforcement agencies and we have set up a hotline for people to report if they are rough sleeping. The public can also use this hotline (01865 304611 or outreach.oxford@mungosbroadway.org.uk) to report someone sleeping rough, in order to ensure that everyone sleeping rough in the city receive the help and support they need to access accommodation and support.

In 2014/15:

- 269 people were verified as rough sleeping in Oxford city for the first time
- 146 rough sleepers accessed a No Second Night Out bed (some people may have accessed one more than once)

- the average waiting time to access a No Second Night Out bed for someone new to the streets was 6.8 days
- 85 people without a connection to Oxfordshire were reconnected to their local area

Oxford City Council fund a range of different services in order to tackle rough sleeping in the city such as Oxford City Outreach, O'Hanlon House, Elmore Community Services, Aspire Oxfordshire and others. More information about what we and partner agencies are doing to tackle rough sleeping in Oxford can be found on our [Street Homelessness and Rough Sleeping page](#).

Housing Register

The number of applicants applying to be included on the Housing Register is high, with many more people applying to us for housing each year than we can possibly help.

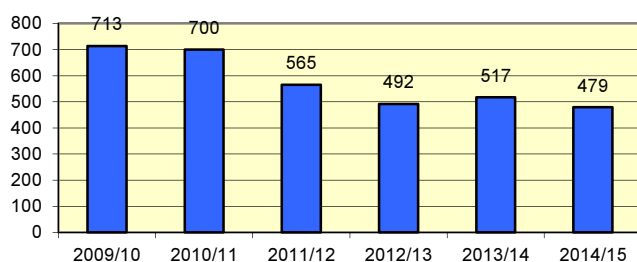
In December 2013, following extensive consultation, a new Allocations Scheme was introduced. Amongst many changes, most applicants are now required to have a local connection to Oxford in order to be on the housing register. In March 2015, there were 3,339 households on our housing register – 2,343 on the general register and 996 on the transfer register.

We received over 1,500 housing applications in 2014/15. We keep the housing register up to date by sending out re-registration letters to all applicants on the register once a year, and cancelling applications where we don't receive a response.

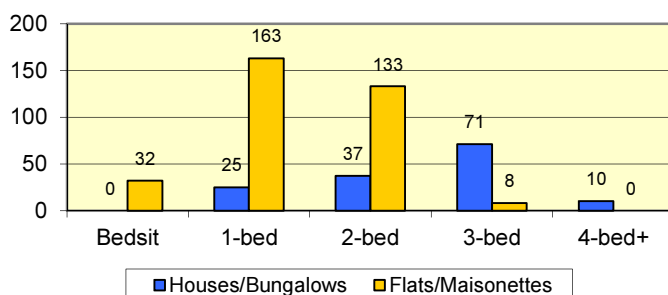
Allocations

Over the last year, 479 households were housed through the Choice-Based Lettings scheme and allocated new tenancies in Oxford by the Council and our partner Housing Associations. We allocated 346 council homes and 133 housing association homes. 70% of the households were allocated flats or maisonettes and 30% were allocated houses. Just over half of the households housed were families; 164 were allocated two-bedroom properties, 79 three-bedroom properties, 7 four-bedroom properties and 3 were allocated five-bedroom properties.

Number of properties allocated



Properties allocated in 2014/15: Breakdown Houses - Flats



Over the past year, we assisted 158 new Council tenants by furnishing their new homes to help them settle in. The cost of this service is recovered through additional rental charges for the following five years on those properties furnished.

The Council helped to make 57 more properties available to let to families in need, by assisting existing “under-occupying” tenants in two, three and four-bedroom properties to move and downsize to smaller more suitable properties through the Removal Incentive Scheme. The empty properties were then allocated to families in housing need.

Each year, the Council agrees lettings targets to help prioritise accommodation across the different housing lists. For example, we now aim to allocate 50% of all two bed property to the General Housing register, with the remaining property allocations split between the homeless and transfer lists.

New Affordable Homes

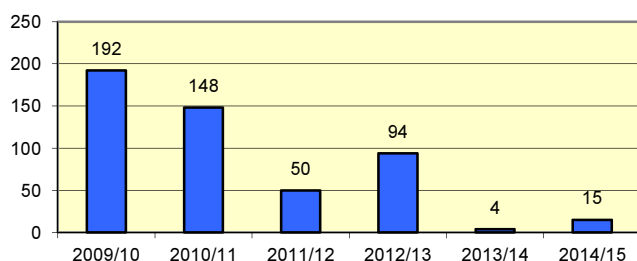
The delivery of affordable housing remains at low levels but the volume of the programme is being built up in line with Corporate housing targets. Completions in 2014/15 were 15 units, including the first units of the Council’s current building programme which will provide a total of 113 units for rent by the end of August 2015. Housing Association developments are expected to add another 50 rented units by the end of the year.

The development programme over the next three years will be shaped by the new Housing Strategy which has objectives to increase the supply of new affordable housing; improve access to housing that is already available; and to support the growth of a balanced housing market which underpins the plans for economic growth in the City.

Infrastructure work has started on the Barton Park scheme and residential construction will begin in Autumn 2016. Further opportunities to develop on Council owned land will be investigated and through working with housing associations and other partners, the aim is to deliver between 300-400 new dwellings by 2018.

Supporting the way the overall housing market operates will be through a combination of measures to get more effective delivery, to improve private rented sector provision where growth has been most marked and by bringing forward strategic sites such as Northern Gateway and Oxpens and major regeneration schemes such as the Blackbird Leys central area project.

New affordable homes



Empty Properties

Since April 2014, empty dwellings now fall under 5 categories, for Council Tax purposes: Short term empty (under 6 months), Long term empty (over 6 months), Long term empty premium (over 2 years), homes that are owned by a deceased person and Second Homes. The category, 'Long term empty premium' are now charged an additional 50% Council Tax.

The Council has a target of bringing 14 or more such properties back into use. We seek to achieve this by encouraging owners to act, and we have consistently exceeded the target. There are usually a complex range of reasons for a dwelling to be unoccupied. On occasions the Council takes formal action to ensure a property is brought back into use, and this may be initially by getting owners to improve the appearance or to secure a property. In 2014/15, the Council has served 7 formal notices on owners of empty properties. In October 2013, the Council agreed to move to compulsorily purchase a long term empty dwelling. In support of this and other possible compulsory purchases a budget of £750,000 has been set aside.

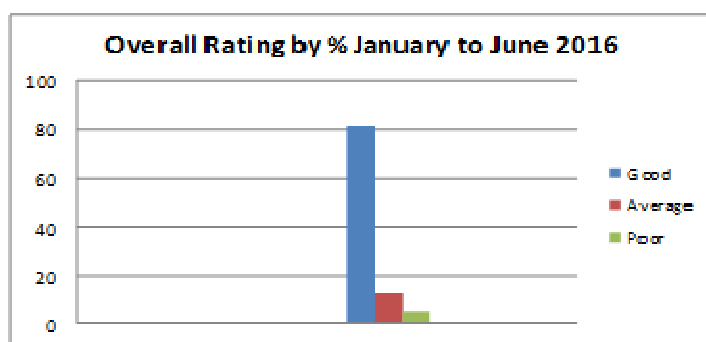
In partnership with Council Tax, unoccupied properties are identified and written to by means of a mailshot twice a year. Information received as a result of the mailshot is used to update records. The direct effect of the mailshot is the ability to have correct data on properties held by Council Tax, a truer picture of how many empty homes we have, and regular income as a result of the New Homes Bonus. In 2014/15, 93 properties have been occupied following this initiative.

Number of empty dwellings and second Homes in May 2015

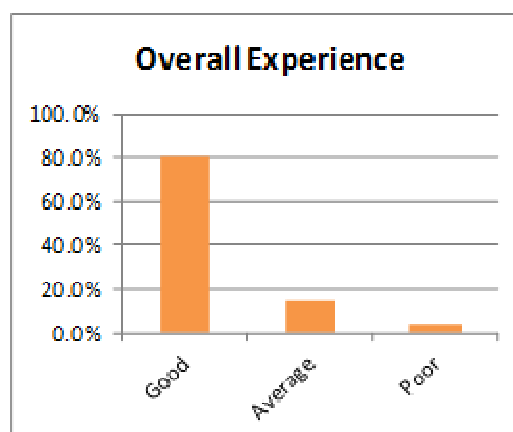
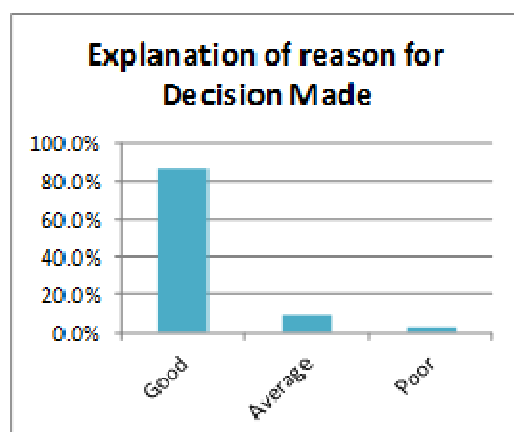
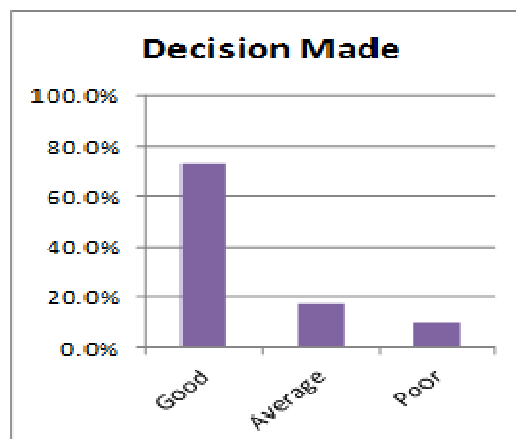
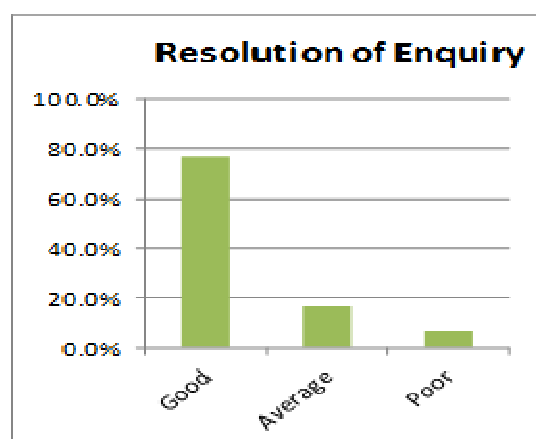
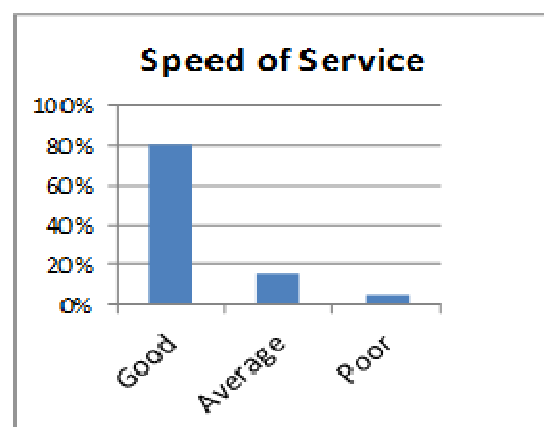
Category	Number
Long Term Empty Premium	72
Long Term Empty	164
Short Term Empty	485
Properties empty following death	204
Second Homes	762

Customer Feedback

Since January 2015, customers using the Housing Needs service have been asked to complete a short customer satisfaction survey. Since the survey was introduced over 200 people have completed the cards with 82% of these seeing an officer in St Aldate's Chambers and the rest during home visits. The results have been good, with many customers also taking the opportunity of personally complimenting the officer that dealt with them. All aspects of the service were rated as 'Good' over 80% of the time during the period January to June. The best rating was for Helpfulness of Staff which has been rated as 'Good' 91.9% of the time and is reflected in the additional comments received each month.



Ratings by Criteria:



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