Oxford City Council

Regional Homelessness Champions 2008

Housing Strategy 2008 to 2011

"More Housing for Oxford, Better Housing for All."

Executive Summary

There is an ongoing housing crisis in Oxford. This was true when our last housing strategy was produced in 2005 and the problems of supply and affordability that are familiar to us in Oxford have been exacerbated and are now common across the country and have been recognised in national housing policy.

This strategy shows how we plan to make the most of the opportunities in Oxford for the next three years. In the longer term, we want to be more ambitious in closing the gap between housing need and supply and will use this plan period to work out how we can do this.

Very high demand for housing from a growing population and increasing numbers of households combined with a severely restricted bank of land to develop housing on has led to acute problems of affordability in all tenures, a homelessness crisis and unprecedented demand for affordable rented housing.

The City is a densely packed urban space covering 46 sq km (29 sq miles) with very high levels of housing density. There are severe pressures on housing stock, with large concentrations of homes in multiple occupation and significant numbers of homeless and other vulnerable groups. Some areas of the City suffer multiple levels of deprivation; low skills, low incomes, and high levels of crime.

The strategy takes a broad view of the full range of housing issues in Oxford, including homelessness and the Council's own housing stock. More detailed descriptions and plans for these aspects are set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2011, the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, and, the Private Sector; BME and Older Persons Housing strategies.

In Chapters 1 and 2 we look at how a range of local, regional and national housing policies and strategies inform this Strategy and explain how it has been developed.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 we explain the three central themes to this strategy:

➢ Meeting housing need in Oxford;
➢ Helping vulnerable people, and;
➢ Improving the housing stock and services and supporting communities.

In Chapters 6 and 7 we describe how plans will be laid for the future development of housing services in Oxford, outline the financial situation and explain how this strategy will be implemented and monitored.

In Chapter 8 we set out the Strategic Housing Action Plan which maps out the main elements of work to meet the proposed aims and objectives of this strategy.

The Council's priorities for the City are:

- Reduce inequality through social inclusion
- Provide more housing for Oxford, better housing for all
- Improve Oxford's environment, economy and quality of life
- Reduce and prevent crime and anti-social behaviour
- Tackle climate change and promote environmental resource management
- Ensure more efficient and improved services
- Be an open, intelligent and responsive organisation.

Aims

The Housing Strategy 2008 to 2011 aims to ensure housing:

- Meets needs and offers choice;
- Is affordable;
- Is high quality;
- Reflects the City's diversity;
- Is delivered in partnership, and;
- Is managed efficiently.

Objectives

The objectives of this Housing Strategy are to continue to:

Meet Housing Need in Oxford:

1. Provide more affordable housing to meet current and future needs in and around the City.
2. Prevent and reduce homelessness.

Help Vulnerable People:

3. Address the housing needs of vulnerable people and tackle social exclusion.

Improve the housing stock and services and support communities:

4. Improve the quality of the existing housing stock across the City;
5. Improve housing services, choice and quality of life on estates;

Plan for the future:

6. Improve our understanding of housing needs to develop and implement housing strategy, and;
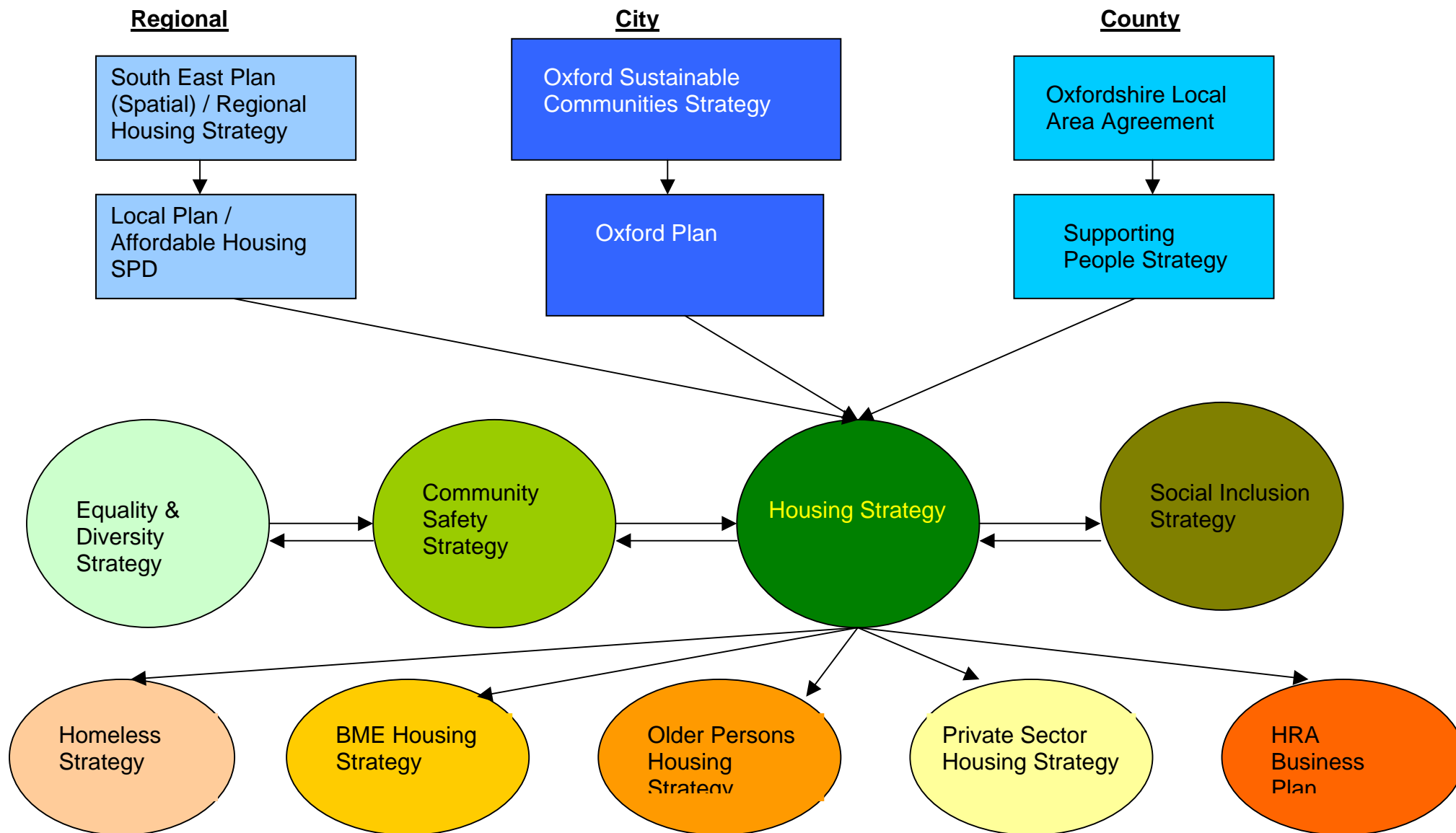7. Ensure housing services offer value for money.

1 CHAPTER 1: Strategic Overview

1.1 This strategy sits within a framework of policy across the City, the county, the South East region and national housing priorities. It is within this framework that activities for delivering housing and other service priorities are shaped.

1.2 Many of the challenges that face Oxford cannot be solved by the City Council alone. Therefore it works with many organisations to deliver and enable services for the people of Oxford. The Council believes that working with partner agencies is essential to ensure the delivery of the best services possible to meet the needs of local communities in the most cost effective way. In particular we recognise the huge contribution that voluntary and community groups make in Oxford.

1.3 Housing has been identified as a key priority area for the Council, the City, the County and region as a whole. The need for additional affordable housing is stated as a priority in the Local Area Agreement, the Oxford Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council's own Corporate Plan.

1.4 An overview of these strategic partnerships in relation to housing services in the City is given in figure 1 below. This shows how the Council is working collectively to deliver improved housing services and meet housing needs. These strategic links are explained in more detail in Appendix 2.

1.5 Meeting National Housing Priorities

1.6 The Council is working to ensure that local and sub-regional priorities are aligned with national housing policy priorities to make the most effective use of local and national resources. This housing strategy strongly reflects the key national housing policy priorities of providing additional affordable housing to meet local need and to deliver on growth points; tackling affordability and improving access to housing; preventing homelessness; improving housing conditions; meeting the needs of vulnerable people and making efficient use of existing housing resources.

1.7 In October 2006 the Government named Oxford as one of 29 towns and cities confirmed as New Growth Points, with the potential to deliver up to 100,000 extra new homes over the next ten years. It is proposed that and additional 5,692 new homes will be built in Oxford.

1.8 Certain national policy priorities are not relevant directly to Oxford and these include housing market renewal in areas where there is low demand and the provision of housing in rural areas as there is not any significant rural settlement within the City's boundaries.

Figure 1: Strategic Housing Framework (Summary Diagram)

Regional

South East Plan (Spatial) / Regional Housing Strategy

Local Plan / Affordable Housing SPD

City

Oxford Sustainable Communities Strategy

Oxford Plan

County

Oxfordshire Local Area Agreement

Supporting People Strategy

Equality & Diversity Strategy

Community Safety Strategy

Housing Strategy

Social Inclusion Strategy

Homeless Strategy

BME Housing Strategy

Older Persons Housing Strategy

Private Sector Housing Strategy

HRA Business Plan

2   CHAPTER 2: Strategy Development

2.1   In developing this strategy we have taken into account the evolving national policy framework for housing, progress against the previous Strategic Housing Action Plan (SHAP 2005-08) and the views of partners and stakeholders to produce a set of relevant and realistic objectives.

2.2   Information on current and planned activity within the Council was gathered and linked with new information from the Census updates, survey data, government guidance and recent service reviews. These were considered in the context of the Council's financial position to establish local priorities.

2.3   The Housing Strategy 2005-2008 was reviewed on a regular basis by the Strategic Housing in Oxfordshire Partnership (SHOP). The last review was in Autumn 2007 and details of progress and achievements are summarised below and are shown in more detail in appendix 5.

2.4   Review of the 2005-08 Housing Strategy.

2.5   The headline successes of the nine objectives of the preceding housing strategy are listed here with further detail in Appendix 5.

2.5.1   <u>Increase the supply of housing for people in need</u>

➢ 551 (net) new affordable homes have been provided in the City (2004/05 to 2006/07).
➢ 100% of new homes built on brown field land 2006/07.
➢ Affordable housing planning target enacted.

2.5.2   <u>Improve the affordability of housing in Oxford</u>

➢ Detailed Housing Market Assessment undertaken.

2.5.3   <u>Increase opportunities for choice and mobility within the housing stock</u>

➢ Oxford Register of Affordable Housing (ORAH) established 2006.
➢ Choice Based Lettings (CBL) launched 2008.
➢ Success of Homechoice scheme with over 600 households assisted.

2.5.4   <u>Improve the condition of Housing in Oxford</u>

➢ HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) licensing introduced
➢ On track to meet HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act) targets by 2010
➢ On target to meet decent homes standard (at 84% for 2007/08)

2.5.5   Reduce homelessness in Oxford

➤ Households living in temporary accommodation reduced by 45%.
➤ Number of homelessness acceptances reduced by 47%
➤ Reduction in level of rough sleeping

2.5.6   Improve housing and support services for all those who need to use them.

➤ Physical improvements to temporary accommodation
➤ Improved tenant satisfaction
➤ Support services provided and funding reviewed.

2.5.7   Improve the environment on estates and in areas of decline

➤ Street warden service extended.
➤ CANAcT (Crime and Nuisance action team) reducing anti-social behaviour and preventing homelessness
➤ Redevelopment of Rose Hill underway.

2.5.8   Develop housing strategy and policy to support service improvement

➤ Clear affordable housing focus in community and corporate strategies.
➤ Suite of housing strategies for BME (black and minority ethnic), Older Persons and Private Sector.
➤ Development of core strategic housing service function.

2.5.9   Address the financial pressures on the Council for housing related services.

➤ Review of HRA (Housing Revenue Account) following stock options appraisal.
➤ Ongoing and additional Government grant funding for homelessness services.
➤ Reduction in cost of homelessness services.

2.6   Research

2.7   The Council is using existing information better and has invested in research where we did not have enough evidence of local needs and conditions (for example the Housing Market Assessment and Balance of Dwellings Study). All statistics quoted in this strategy are from public sources or locally commissioned research, principally the 2006 Census updates, the Council's returns to Communities and Local Government (CLG), including the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendices and quarterly homelessness returns, stock condition data, housing needs surveys and housing market assessments.

2.8   We are using this improved knowledge to set out our priorities in this new housing strategy, consulting widely to ensure it reflects the right

issues and priorities and building partnerships to help deliver the strategy.

2.9 Consultation

2.10 In preparing this strategy we worked with tenants, residents, partner organisations, Councillors and Council officers.

2.11 Wide-ranging consultation has been undertaken to get the views of as many people and organisations as possible to inform the development of this strategy (and the accompanying homelessness strategy), with a particular emphasis on service users and partners.   The main consultation activities carried out were:

- Resident questionnaire via the City Council's Talkback Panel.
- Service user questionnaires for people in temporary accommodation, users of homelessness and housing options services and Council and RSL (Registered Social Landlord) tenants including those on the waiting list.
- Questionnaires to partner organisations (RSLs, voluntary sector, etc).
- Focus groups (service users, Community Housing staff and managers and partner organisations).
- Meetings with members.
- Partners / Stakeholder conference (13th February 2008).

2.12 The results of the main consultation activities are summarised in Appendix 1. Key points to note which have informed this strategy are:

2.12.1 The main areas of concern for housing in Oxford were:
- o High house prices and rents
- o Lack of affordable rented housing for families and singles & couples.
- o Long waiting lists for affordable rented homes.
- o Street homelessness or rough sleeping.

2.12.2 Peoples priorities for addressing these problems were:
- o Build more family sized (3+ bedrooms) and smaller (1 or 2 bedrooms) homes to meet demand.
- o Build new homes in or immediately around the City, and;
- o Build more homes away from the City in surrounding towns.
- o The responses for the latter two options varied between respondent type with the Talkback Panel opting, by a very slight margin only (1%), in favour of 'away from the City', and service users opting by a large margin for 'in or near the City'.

2.12.3 Specific issues raised by respondents included:
- o More and better housing services for young people.
- o Affordability of private rented housing for those in work.
- o Ensure there are good links between housing and support for vulnerable people.
- o The condition of housing (public or private sector).

2.13 The strategy will also be subject to consultation as a draft including approval by Council, Housing Scrutiny Committee and wider consultation with a range of Council and partner, community groups and organisations prior to final publication. (*This is to be updated after it has all been completed*).

2.14 Working with partners

2.15 By working with partners we contribute to and develop sub-regional priorities with the main aim of developing quicker, more efficient ways of delivering affordable, decent housing and other housing services.

2.16 We understand that people do not restrict their housing choices to administrative areas and that, acting alone, we can only make a limited contribution to improving the supply, condition and quality of housing. It is therefore vital that the Council explores opportunities inside and outside the City to develop relevant partnerships that can achieve this. The Council has built up partnerships within Oxford and across the county and region.

2.17 Locally

2.18 The Council develops and maintains partnerships and builds up expertise that enables us to influence regional and national policy for the benefit of Oxford and to meet government objectives. Central to this are the Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP), and the Strategic Housing in Oxford Partnership (SHOP). The OSP (a Local Strategic Partnership) was established in February 2003 and published its first Community Strategy in June 2004. A new Sustainable Community Strategy is being published in 2008 to follow on from the first plan.

2.19 The new Sustainable Community Strategy has identified affordable housing as a key flagship issue. An early part of the OSP's work to meet the challenge of this priority area has been to establish an Affordable Housing Select Committee which will report on its findings on how best to support and enable additional affordable housing provision in the City during 2008. This work will directly support the LAA1 (Local Area Agreement) core target of delivering additional affordable housing to meet needs.

2.20 Regionally

2.21 We work closely with neighbouring district Councils and Oxfordshire County Council although there are inevitably tensions due to urban / rural and political differences.

2.22 Joint working takes place at all levels: strategic and operational housing liaison, homelessness strategy development and training, joint commissioning of services for private sector renewal and housing

advice. For example, 'Beacon Council' status was achieved by all the Oxfordshire Councils for their joint work on Supporting People.

2.23 These links were strengthened when Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Members Group (OMAHG) was established in 2003, now the Oxfordshire Housing Partnership (OHP). Senior Councillors from each district and the County Council meet regularly to tackle housing issues more effectively by working together.

2.24 The OHP commissioned a sub-regional housing market area assessment which will be published in 2008 and has influenced the development of this strategy. We see this as a basis for collaboration on meeting housing need, developing affordable housing, developing a sub-regional strategy and an opportunity to meet CLG requirements to assess the needs of gypsies and travellers countywide.

2.25 The Council also plays an active part in Oxfordshire Partnership (OP, the county-wide Local Strategic Partnership) in implementing and developing the LAA, which has identified affordable housing as a high priority, stimulated debate and raised awareness of issues, particularly in relation to homelessness. The structure of the City and countywide partnerships is shown at Appendices 2 & 4 .

2.26 Summary of Positive Outcomes From Partnership Working.

Activity / Issue	Partnership	Outcome
Joint work between Councils and RSLs in Oxford on strategic housing issues	Strategic Housing in Oxford Partnership (SHOP)	Single Homeless and Family Homeless sub-groups meet quarterly to review and drive implementation of joint services for these client groups.
Joint work between the City Council, County Council and Youth Offending on young persons homelessness.	Joint Housing Team	Improved targeting of shared resources on addressing high levels of homelessness among young people (under 25s)
Increasing land supply for affordable housing	Oxford Strategic Partnership	Housing objectives included in Community Strategy and Affordable Housing select Committee
Joint housing register.	ORAH	More efficient letting of affordable housing in the City.
Housing market assessment	Joint commissioning with all local Councils (OHP)	Comprehensive housing market assessment of Oxfordshire housing sub-market to inform housing and planning matters.
Choice Based Lettings	CBL Partnership / ORAH	Choice based lettings launched in City and being developed for sub-region.
Develop good practice; make a common case for urban housing issues in	Cities In the South East Housing Group (CISE)	CISE formally recognised as a consultee on the Regional Housing Strategy; making case

the region		for funding from Regional Housing Board.
Recommissioning housing related support services.	Supporting People	Range of housing related support services in the City and county recommissioned. Including Domestic Violence refuges, hostel accommodation, move-on accommodation and floating support.

2.27 Our improved knowledge and understanding and feedback from residents and partners tell us that the eight main housing objectives for Oxford are to:

1. Provide more affordable housing to meet current and future needs in and around the City.
2. Prevent and reduce homelessness.
3. Address the housing needs of vulnerable people and tackle social exclusion.
4. Improve the quality of the existing housing stock across the City;
5. Improve housing services, choice and quality of life on estates;
6. Improve our understanding of housing needs to develop and implement housing strategy, and;
7. Ensure housing services offer value for money.

2.28 The housing priorities are described in more detail in the coming chapters and the actions that will be taken to deliver them are identified in the Action Plan (Chapter 8).

3 CHAPTER 3: Meeting Housing Need in Oxford

3.1 Very high demand for housing from a growing population and increasing numbers of households combined with a severely restricted bank of land to develop housing on has led to acute problems of affordability in all tenures, a homelessness crisis and unprecedented demand for affordable rented housing.

3.2 The City is a densely packed urban space covering 46 sq km (29 sq miles) with very high levels of housing density. There are severe pressures on housing stock, with large concentrations of homes in multiple occupation and significant numbers of homeless and other vulnerable groups. Some areas of the City suffer multiple levels of deprivation; low skills, low incomes, and high levels of crime.

3.3 Population and Housing in Oxford

3.4 Population

3.4.1 The City's population is growing. The 2001 census recorded the City's population at 135,500[1] but the 2006 estimate stated the population had increased to 149,100[2]. Oxford has a young population with two thirds of the population aged under 40 and just 15% aged over 60[3]. See Table 1 for further detail.

Table 1: Oxford's Population 2006.

Age range	Population (1000's)	% of Population
0 – 19 years	39.2	22.1%
20 to 29 years	43	28.8%
30 to 39 years	21.7	14.6%
40 to 59 years	29.8	20%
60 to 74 years	12.8	8.6%
75 years +	8.9	6%

3.4.2 The City has a very ethnically diverse population. In the 2001 Census, Oxford was estimated to have a black and ethnic minority (BME) population of 12.9% compared with 8.7% in England and Wales. The ethnic diversity among young people is especially high, at 19.8% of under-16s (in 2001). The impacts of this aspect of the City's population are discussed in detail in the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy 2006/07.

3.4.3 Oxford has a large population of students. Over 25,000 attend Oxford and Oxford Brookes Universities each year. This places pressure on housing supply in the City, particularly the private rented sector with many of the students living out of university provided accommodation

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[1] 2001 Census. Office of National Statistics (ONS).

[2] 2006 Population Estimates, ONS.

[3] 2006 Population Estimates, ONS

for part of their study period. It is estimated that up to 10,000 students at any one time occupy 3,000 of the properties in the City. Balancing the demands placed on housing by students and the needs of permanent residents (many of whom are former students or work for the universities) is a challenge for the City.

3.4.4 Oxford is an affluent City but one that contains pockets of severe deprivation. The City ranks 155th (out of 354 local authority areas in England) in terms of overall deprivation (the City's ranking in 2004 was 144th). Notable among the calculations for this, is Oxford's rank of 129th in terms of income deprivation, which highlights extreme income variations in the City.[4]

3.5 Households

3.5.1 The number of households in the City is increasing rapidly. In 1991 there were 45,000 households that had increased to 55,854 by 2006. The number of households in the City is projected to continue to increase to 74,500 by 2026 placing huge pressure on housing.[5] Projected population growth does not match the growth in household formation as a result of trends for more single person households, which is a consequence of more younger people, more very elderly people and higher rates of divorce.

3.5.2 It is projected that the proportion of single person households in the South East region will increase by 21% between 2006 and 2021[6]. This is the largest regional growth in the country. If this is replicated or exceeded in Oxford then pressure of housing will continue to be a serious issue. Smaller and single person households do not necessarily want or demand smaller homes and this is particular challenge when planning for future growth.

3.6 Tenure and Dwellings

3.6.1 Housing provision in Oxford is very diverse by tenure (see Table 2). Oxford has a very large private rented sector (22%), it retains a sizable social rented sector (22%) and the level of owner occupation is among the lowest in the country (56%), which is very low for the South East of England region.[7]

Table 2: Tenure Split in Oxford and Comparisons

	Oxford	**South East**	**England**
Owner Occupation	56.1%	76%	69%
Social rented	21.8%	13.5%	18.4%
Private rented	22.1%	10.5%	12.6%

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[4] CLG Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007. Ranking – 1 being the most deprived, 354 the least.
[5] Oxfordshire Housing Market Assessment 2007
[6] Joseph Rowntree Foundation. "Single Person Households and Social Policy" (2006)
[7] Oxford Private Sector Housing Stock Condition survey 2004.

3.6.2 There are 54,546 dwellings in the City with approximately 70% being houses (see Table 3), although many of these are used as HMOs.[8]

Table 3: Dwelling Types in Oxford

Detached	9.8%
Semi-detached	31.6%
Terraced	30.2%
Flats	26.7%
Other	1.8%

3.6.3 There is a large provision of social rented sheltered housing for older people in the City with over 1000 homes in 48 schemes provided by the City Council and housing associations.[9]

3.7 Affordability

3.8 Average house prices in Oxford have increased dramatically in recent years (see Table 4) In 2000 the average house price was £155,346 and this increased by 90% to the year 2006 when the average price was £295,406. [10] Rapid house price inflation continues in the City and prices increased by an additional 13% in 2007. This saw average prices break the £300,000 barrier in the City, rising to £339,404[11]. Overall, Oxford has been identified as the 10th least affordable area to live in the South East region.[12]

Table 4: Average house prices in Oxford

1997	2000	2003	2006	2007
£98,576	£155,346	£247,840	£295,406	£339,404

3.9 There are wide variations in average prices for different types of property (see Table 5) and this has significant effects on the affordability of housing for different groups of people. The situation is particularly acute for people who would be first time buyers; that is singles, couples and families in the age group 20-39.

Table 5: Average house price by property size and type, 2007

1 bed flat	2 bed flat	2 bed house	3 bed flat	3 bed house	4 bed
£174,723	£210,271	£242,109	£343,242	£271,176	£390,753

(Home track, May 2007)

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[8] Private Sector Housing Strategy 2007
[9] Older Persons Housing Strategy 2007
[10] Land Registry 2006.
[11] Nationwide House Price Index 2007.
[12] Oxfordshire HMA 2007

3.10 Average household incomes for first time buyer households are below the county, regional and national averages (see Table 6) despite average first time buyer homes being the most expensive in the county. An analysis of house prices in the Oxfordshire Housing Market Assessment (HMA) 2007 has shown that the average 'entry level' house prices (lowest quartile averages for all properties and just terraces) in the City are in excess of £200,000 (see Table 7).

Table 6: Average First Time Buyer Household Income.

Locality	Average Income per Year
Oxford	£37,626
Oxfordshire Average	£42,620
South East Average	£41,342
England Average	£38,996

Table 7: Lowest Quartile House Prices 2007.

	Lowest quartile - all properties	Lowest quartile - terraces only
Oxford	£216,700	£220,700
Oxfordshire	£194,900	£218,968

3.11 Owner occupied housing is increasingly out of the reach of people on lower incomes in the City. The ratio between the lowest quartile house price and lowest quartile annual income was 10.86 in 2006, having doubled since 1997 when it was 5.41[13]. Affordability is also a major issue for single income households (typical first time buyer households are joint income). Average household incomes for single income households are around £25,000 in the City and in order to purchase a 2 bed flat that household would have to pay 50% of its income in mortgage costs. The ratio is 60% for a 2-bed house. Both ratios are well above standard affordability ratios of 33% of income[14].
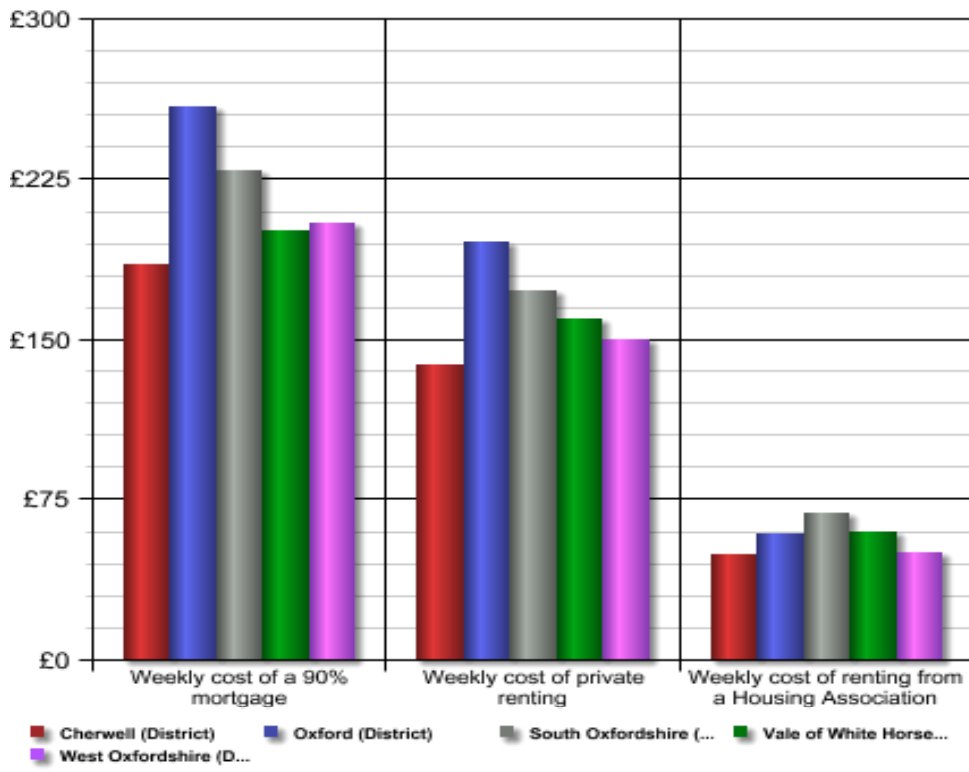
3.12 The HMA 2007 has projected that house prices in Oxford will have to fall by at least 15% before affordability returns for the average household. Even under current uncertain national housing market conditions this level of decline remains unlikely given the robust nature of the City's housing market (Oxford was declared the 3rd most 'bomb-proof' housing market in the country in the Sunday Times (2008)).

3.13 Private renting in Oxford is popular but relatively expensive. Indeed, it can be more expensive to rent a property from the private sector in Oxford than it would be to purchase a property in another part of the county. However, rental costs do tend to be lower than equivalent mortgage costs in the City hence the popularity of the tenure. Renting from a housing association is considerably cheaper than either option in the City. See figure 2.

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[13] Oxfordshire HMA 2007
[14] Oxfordshire HMA 2007

Figure 2: Comparative costs of renting & buying a two-bed property May 2007

3.14

Figure legend:
- Cherwell (District)
- Oxford (District)
- South Oxfordshire (...
- Vale of White Horse...
- West Oxfordshire (D...

© Hometrack

3.15 Delivery of Additional Affordable Housing

3.16 The widening gap between housing costs, particularly for owner occupation, and household incomes has resulted in fewer households being able to afford housing in Oxford. In general, this means that a wide range of households need special help to live in a home that meets their needs.

3.17 The groups particularly affected are households in housing need because of their personal circumstances. These can include families increasing in size who need to transfer to a larger property or households that wish to downsize; those who are at risk of offending; those who need to move because of racial harassment or domestic violence; and people with special housing needs because of their health or personal circumstances.

3.18 Oxford's Housing Requirements Study (2004) identified a need for between 1,700 and 1,800 additional affordable dwellings per year (after social housing relets). The City Council's strategic target for all dwelling completions (affordable and market) is 433 dwellings per year which, considering that typically, less than half of these will be affordable is well below the identified affordable housing need per year.

3.19 The Oxfordshire HMA 2007 has reinforced the level of affordable housing need identified for the City. Indeed, the HMA has identified a substantial increase in need for affordable housing taking into account levels of overcrowding in the City. The 2001 census identified 6,100 households living in overcrowded conditions in the City. The HMA has adjusted this figure to take account of the fact that many overcrowded households do not wish to move but even with a 50% deduction for this there exists in the City an additional population of 3050 households in need of better and affordable housing (people don't move when they want to because they cannot afford to do so).

3.20 The HMA has also projected demand for affordable housing forward to 2026 and has identified that countywide the current shortfall is currently around 2,200 homes per year, and that this will rise to 7,500 pa by 2026. Oxford City accounts for 83% to 89% of this need.

3.21 <u>Planning Context</u>

3.21.1 The Oxford Local Plan was adopted in 2005. This set a strategic target for Oxford of 6,500 dwellings over the Plan period which equates to an annual average of 433 dwellings (market and affordable rented combined). This total annual figure has been exceeded (see Table 9) for six of the last seven years and over 50% of the Local Plan target has already been achieved.

3.21.2 The Local Plan requires a minimum of 50% of dwellings to be affordable on residential sites with ten or more dwellings, or on a residential site of a quarter of a hectare. The proportion of the total amount of affordable housing obtained through the planning system in this manner has been between 40% and 50% over the last four years (see Table 8). The overall proportion of affordable housing built is less than 50% as much new housing is built on sites below the planning threshold (see Table 9).

Table 8: Proportion of affordable housing from S106 agreements

2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
43.35%	44.6%	49.2%	40.4%

(OCC Planning Policy Annual Monitoring Report 2006)

Table 9: Net Total and Affordable Housing Completions

Year	Net total dwelling completions	Net affordable dwelling completions	Proportion of total dwellings that are affordable
2001/02	439	71	16.2%
2002/03	267	46	17.2%
2003/04	578	141	25.7%
2004/05	673	186	27.6%
2005/06	943	167	17.7%
2006/07	821	267	32.5%
TOTAL	**3721**	**878**	**23.6%**

(OCC Planning Policy Annual Monitoring Report 2007)

3.21.3 The net increase in affordable housing in the City over the period 2004/05 to 2006/07 was 551 (see Table 10) which while welcome does not meet current and predicted future demand. In 2006/07 255 net affordable homes were delivered is still considerably short of the demand outlined in the Housing Requirements Study 2004 of an additional 1700 affordable dwellings per year, let alone that predicted in the HMA 2007.

Table 10: Affordable housing completions compared with Right to Buy sales 2003/04 to 2006/07

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	Total
New RSL rented dwellings	138	113	164	415
New RSL shared ownership dwellings	48	54	103	205
Total new RSL dwellings	186	167	267	620
Right to Buy sales	45	12	12	69
Net increase of affordable housing	141	155	255	551

3.22 <u>Balance of Dwellings</u>

3.22.1 Of the 3,278 dwellings completed in the first 7 years of the Local Plan period over 80% were 1 and 2 bed dwellings[15] (see Table 11). This reflects the number of smaller City centre flat developments and the trend for conversion of larger dwellings to flats. To address this issue and to support Local Plan policy on the balance of dwellings, the Council commenced the production of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in September 2006 with the aim of increasing the proportion of larger homes provided. This will be adopted in 2008.

Table 11: Proportion of dwellings completed that were 1 and 2 beds.

	2005/06	2006/07
Market	93.5%	83.5%
Affordable	89.2%	74.9%
TOTAL	92.7%	80.8%

(OCC Planning Policy Annual Monitoring Report 2006)

3.23 <u>Land Supply</u>

3.23.1 Many areas of Oxford are unsuitable for building due to the risk of flooding and the need to protect and enhance the natural and historic environments, limiting the scope to provide more housing. Planning policies are designed to get maximum benefit from this limited supply of land.

3.23.2 The Council has a target of ensuring at least 95% of all new homes are built on 'brown field' (previously developed) land. This target has been met and for the last three years the proportion has been in excess of 99%. See Table 12.

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[15] Oxford City Council Annual Monitoring Report, Planning 2006/07

Table 12: Proportion of Dwellings Built on Brown Field Land.

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
99.85%	99.43%	100%

3.23.3 The Council is working with partners to ensure that the maximum amount of land is made available for affordable housing, including sources that may not previously have been considered. The only opportunity to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing within the City on brownfield land, in the foreseeable future is the development of the West End area where up to 700 homes are planned.

3.23.4 Small sites exist within Oxford that could potentially be used for housing but are dependent on significant investment in infrastructure. The infrastructure does exist outside the southern boundary of the City to support the construction 4,000 homes. This is on green belt land of low agricultural value and is the most realistic means of meeting the City's housing need in the medium to long term. The Council is working to ensure that the needs of people in desperate housing need are met through the utilisation of this land.

3.23.5 The Council is pursuing options in the Core Strategy to develop housing on 'Reserve Land' sites in the City as another strategy to meet the very high level of need that has been clearly identified.

3.23.6 The Council is supporting a bid to develop one of the new proposed Eco-Towns to the north of the City. This will help deliver more housing for people in need and contribute to the Council's priority of tackling climate change.
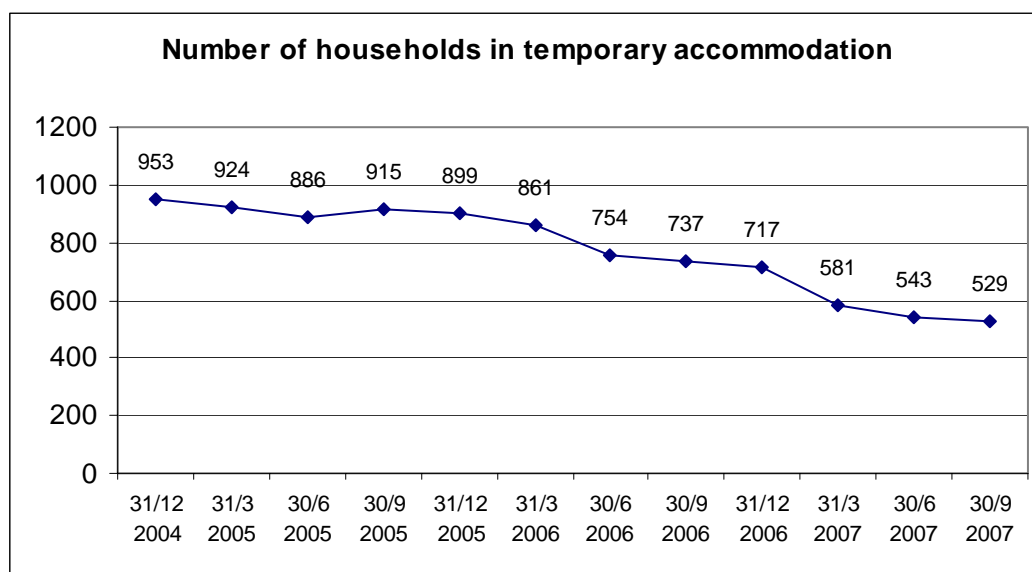
3.24 Homelessness

3.25 The main consequence of the affordability and supply crisis for housing in Oxford is homelessness. The Council has been working very hard with its partners to prevent and reduce impact of homelessness. This work has been delivered via the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2003 to 2008.

3.26 The level of homelessness in the City has been reduced in certain key areas. The number of homelessness acceptances by the Council has almost halved over the period of the Homelessness Strategy (see Table 13) as has the number of households living in temporary accommodation (see figure 3).

Table 13: Homelessness Acceptances by Oxford City Council.

2002/03	438
2003/04	382
2004/05	376
2005/06	370
2006/07	233

Figure 3: Number of Households in Temporary Accommodation.

3.27 These successes have been achieved by a rigorous application of the homelessness prevention agenda which includes making better use of the City's private rented housing stock (over 620 households at risk of homelessness were helped by the Council to secure private rented accommodation over 2005/06 and 2006/07), family mediation, use of discretionary housing benefit payments, the provision of additional affordable housing and more efficient use of existing affordable rented housing in the City (e.g. City Council void property relet times have been reduced from over 100 days to less than 33. (See Table 14).

Table 14: Average re-let times – Oxford City Council properties

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
102 days	48.74 days	32.65 days

3.28 Prevention work has led to reductions in the length of time homelessness people wait for permanent housing. The average time spent waiting for permanent accommodation for households who have been accepted as homeless has reduced from two years and nine months in 2002/03 to two years three months in 2006/07. The Council remains concerned that over 40% of homelessness households wait more than two years for permanent housing and is committed to continuing to reduce this wait.

3.29 None the less, the level of homelessness in the City remains high in spite of the achievements of the Homelessness Strategy. Areas of particular concern include:

➢ Relatively high levels of rough sleeping the City. This has reduced considerably since 1998 when there were 52 rough sleepers, to an average of 8 to 11 in 2006/07 (using the same counting methodology) however this remains an ongoing area of concern as levels of single homelessness remain high.
➢ High levels of recorded homelessness among households from BME communities (23% of homelessness acceptances and 31% of residents in temporary accommodation).[16]
➢ The impact of homelessness on young people (over 60% of homelessness acceptances are for people under 25[17]) and people leaving different institutions (e.g. hospitals and prisons).

3.30 Demand for Affordable Rented Housing

3.31 Demand for affordable rented housing in the City is high. As at 1 April 2007 there were 5046 households on the housing register yet for the preceding year there were just 704 lettings made (see Table 15). The situation for family sized accommodation is especially acute as there were only 151 lettings to properties with 3 or more bedrooms and nearly half of all lettings were for one-bedroom homes.

3.32 Table 15: Lettings in 2006/07

Housing Associations	246
Oxford City Council	458
TOTAL	**704**

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[16] BME Housing Strategy 2007
[17] CLG P1E quarterly returns 2007/08

3.33 The Council works closely with housing associations in the City to ensure that all affordable rented homes are let quickly and that people are offered choice where possible. In 2006 the Council established the Oxford Register of Affordable Housing (ORAH) with the main housing associations to ensure that people in housing need are offered homes through one centralised system. In 2008 the Council launched Choice Based Lettings (CBL) to increase choice for people waiting for homes.

3.34 Summary of Main Action Points To Meet Housing Need:

Strategic Objective 1: Provide more affordable housing to meet current and future needs in and around the City.

➢ Deliver an average of 150 affordable new homes each year ensuring that at least 30% are for families (3 bedroom or larger).
➢ Obtain the maximum possible number of affordable homes through the planning system.
➢ Continue to lobby for and progress proposals to provide housing on development land around the City.
➢ Achieve local growth targets set in the local and structure plans and regional housing strategy, meeting LAA targets.
➢ Monitor housing affordability using local housing market indicators.
➢ Exploit all opportunities to provide social and other low cost housing in areas of traditional BME settlement. Ensure that social housing mix reflects the needs of the communities seeking to live in the area.
➢ Remodel Council owned temporary accommodation to permanent homes.
➢ Increase availability of affordable supported accommodation for single homeless people.

Strategic Objective 2: Prevent and reduce homelessness;

➢ Increase the range of housing options and services available to prevent homelessness.
➢ Reduce the numbers of homeless people against key targets.
➢ Support families in housing need to prevent homelessness.
➢ Support rough sleepers into settled accommodation and develop clear pathways into permanent homes, training and employment.
➢ Support vulnerable young people in housing need to prevent homelessness.
➢ Improve housing options services.
➢ Identify and address the specific housing needs of different groups in the community who are at risk of homelessness.
➢ Ensure housing options services offer value for money.

4 CHAPTER 4: Help Vulnerable People

4.1 People become vulnerable and require the assistance of others for a range of reasons. The Council aims to support vulnerable people through working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies. This chapter describes how we will work to improve housing based support to vulnerable people and also provide broader support to sustain and develop communities.

4.2 Vulnerable People

4.3 Homeless People

4.3.1 The Council's plans for helping homeless people are covered in detail by our Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 13. Below are listed the main ways the Council and its partners help homeless people. The Council's priority for homelessness is prevention as this is better for the families and individuals concerned and makes better use of the Council's resources. The Council has been recognised for the work it is doing to prevent and reduce homelessness with the award of 'Regional Homelessness Champions' status for the South East in 2007.

4.3.2 Families

4.3.2.1 The Council works hard to ensure that families at risk of homelessness are prevented from becoming so. A multi-agency team Families at Risk of Homelessness (FAROH) reviews the situation of families at risk of losing their homes and provides targeted support based on need. This work is ongoing and subject to review and development.

4.3.2.2 One of the biggest issues for family homelessness is the lack of family sized affordable rented homes and consequent long waits for larger housing and overcrowding. In 2006/07 only 15 four bedroom homes became available to let from the Council or the housing associations in the City. The Council operates an incentive scheme designed to encourage people who now under-occupy larger homes to move to a smaller home enabling an over-crowded family to move. This scheme will be continued and developed. When planning the development of new affordable housing the Council will take into account the balance of dwellings in a locality and seek to ensure that appropriate numbers of larger family homes are provided.

4.3.3 Single Homeless People / Rough Sleepers

4.3.3.1 Significant improvements have been made to services provided for single homeless people and rough sleepers in Oxford over the last five years. This includes reductions in the level of rough sleeping with the introduction of the Reconnection Policy, the redevelopment of two of the City's hostels and the development of move-on services for

single people (the City participated in a national Homelessness Link 'Move On Plans Pilot Scheme' (MOPSS) in 2006/07).

4.3.3.2 However, the problem of single homelessness and rough sleeping remains serious with two of the most pressing problems being the lack of available move-on accommodation for single people which blocks beds in the hostels and the lack of suitable services across the county outside of the City which places pressure on City services.

4.3.4 Generally

4.3.4.1 The Council's Homechoice scheme has been a great success in helping prevent homelessness in the City. This scheme makes use of the large private rented sector in the City to enable people (families and singles) at risk of homelessness to access good quality accommodation that meets their needs. More than 500 households at risk of homelessness have been helped by this scheme over the last two years. The Council will continue to develop Homechoice to work more effectively and efficiently so as to help more people in need.

4.4 Young People

4.4.1 The majority of people accepted as homeless by the Council are aged under 25 (64% In 2006/07 and 67% for the first quarter of 2007/08) so young people are a priority group for preventing homelessness.

4.4.2 An innovative partnership between the City, the County Council and the Youth Offending Service has led to the introduction of the 'Joint Housing Team' which works specifically on preventing homelessness among young people, particularly those leaving care or excluded from, or unable to live in, the family home. The team includes staff with expertise in social work, housing and youth work, and is able to offer some housing and support services direct to vulnerable people, or give advice about other provision in the County.   The JHT is now working on a three-year plan to address the particular issues of youth homelessness and this is incorporated in the action plan for the Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013.

4.4.3 There are specific services in the City for young homeless people (which include a day centre and a hostel) but these struggle to cope with demand. These services are being reviewed and will be re-commissioned in 2008. The Council would like to see a residential supported accommodation scheme (often referred to as a foyer) developed in the City to provide additional support for homeless young people. This will be actively pursued as part of the Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013.

4.5 Older People

4.5.1 The Council's sheltered housing accommodation in the City has been reviewed for future sustainability and three sites have been identified as in need of redevelopment. Future redevelopment plans include provision of extra care housing for elderly people which is important as the 'very elderly' proportion of the population (those aged 75+) is increasing.

4.5.2 The Council provides a mobile warden service for Council sheltered housing and an emergency call out service for elderly (and disabled) people living in the wider community. The contact centre used for these core services also offers similar contact services for a range of other organisations to assist vulnerable people (such as Telecare for the County Council) and out of hours contact for other Council services. The Council will continue to deliver these services (according to contract) and seek to develop and expand this function.

4.5.3 The Council is participating in a countywide review of elderly services through the Supporting People Partnership. This review is looking at how Supporting People funded services for elderly people will be delivered in the future through a more efficient targeting of resources at needs.

4.6 People with disabilities (physical and mental health)

4.6.1 The Council works with partners to ensure that the housing needs of people with disabilities are addressed. Working with Supporting People a new floating support service for people with mental health problems is being introduced in the City in 2008. This will help people live independently and maintain their tenancies reducing the risk of them coming to harm or becoming homeless.

4.6.2 Emergency call out support is provided by the Council for people with disabilities who wish to use the service (as described under Older People above). The Council ensures that adapted affordable rented homes that become available for letting are prioritised for people with disabilities appropriate to the adaptations or design. Through the new Choice Based Lettings scheme such properties are clearly identified to prospective tenants. When new homes are developed the Council aims to ensure that where appropriate these meet 'Lifetime Homes' standards, which reduces the need for people who have, or develop, disabilities to move out or have adaptations works.

4.6.3 The Council also provides an adaptations service for people with disabilities. This assistance is provided by the Disabled Facilities Grant scheme operated by the Council for people in private sector accommodation or a HRA funded scheme for people in Council homes.

4.7　Victims of Domestic Violence

4.7.1　The City Council provides accommodation for refuges for women fleeing domestic violence and works in partnership across the county to ensure that there is adequate provision of refuges and other support to aid women at risk of domestic violence from all sections of the community.　The Council is also working to develop sanctuary schemes, which help women remain safely in their home while protecting them from their abuser.　When appropriately used, sanctuary schemes help prevent homelessness for women and their children and reduce the pressure on refuges.

4.8　Minority Communities

4.8.1　The Council has developed a BME Housing Strategy 2006/07 and this is being implemented.　Key points form this include developing a better understanding of the housing needs of different communities, reviewing why high numbers of people from BME communities are becoming homeless and working to provide accommodation suitable to local needs (including larger and culturally appropriate homes).

4.9　People with Substance Misuse Problems

4.9.1　Services for people with substance misuse problems are not provided directly by the Council, but via partners working across the City and county.　The Council supports some of this work via its homelessness grants programme as it sees this as a key part of the homelessness prevention agenda.　The Council is also working with the Supporting People partnership to develop housing related drug recovery services in the county.

4.10　Ex-offenders

4.10.1　Being released from prison without a home to go to is a common cause of homelessness and this is a significant problem in the City.　The location of a prison near the City and the high concentration of single homelessness support services in the City combine to emphasise this particular issue.　The Council is working with its partners in the City, including the prison and probation services, to address this problem. The Council's reconnection policy for single homeless people sleeping rough is central as this assists people released from prison make connections back to their original location which can help them resettle.

4.11 Summary of Main Action Points To Help Vulnerable People:

Strategic Action 3: Address the housing needs of vulnerable people

➢ Implement new housing support services for older people following the Supporting People review.
➢ Implement new floating support service for people with mental health problems in the City
➢ Undertake feasibility study for learning and support based accommodation scheme for homeless young people (Foyer)
➢ Improve domestic violence services in the City to reduce harm and risk to women and prevent homelessness.
➢ Extend the range of provision for elderly persons housing and support including Telecare and Extra Care.
➢ Develop clearer understanding of the needs of minority groups (BME, gypsies and travelers, gay and lesbian) and develop appropriate services
➢ Develop and improve support offered to residents in temporary accommodation including support beyond 1st stage.
➢ Review joint working and partnerships for all vulnerable client groups to improve referral routes and services.

5   **CHAPTER 5: Improve the housing stock & services and support communities:**

5.1   The condition of a home has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the people that live in it. By improving the condition and quality of homes in the public and private sector the Council is helping prevent people's lives being blighted by ill-health and reduce the risk of future homelessness as a result. The Council is also committed to helping people live in energy efficient homes which will reduce their fuel bills, helping alleviate poverty, and lowering the individual and collective impact of home energy use on the climate.

5.2   **Housing Conditions**

5.3   City Council Homes

5.3.1   The City Council has been working on bringing its own housing stock up to the decent homes standard. In 2003 only 49% of the Council's homes were found to be decent and all the stock was expected to fail the standard by 2010 if no remedial action was taken. At the same time it was found that the average energy efficiency rating for Council homes was above average, with an energy efficiency (SAP) rating of 60.[18]

5.3.2   The Council has to ensure that all of its homes meet the decency standard by 2010. In order to decide how to finance and achieve this key target the Council undertook a stock options appraisal, which was completed in 2005/06. The outcome of this was a decision for the Council to retain ownership of its housing stock and to continue to directly manage it. As a result the Council has to directly fund all decent homes works through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Please refer to Appendix 7 and the HRA Business Plan for further detail on this.

5.3.3   Considerable progress has been made towards improving decency and the intervening 2006/07 target of 77% of Council homes achieving the Decent Homes Standard has been met. The target for 2007/08 is 84%. As part of the improvement works to homes led by the decency standard the average energy efficiency rating of the City Council's homes has increased from a SAP rating of 60 in 2003 to 70 in 2006/07.[19]

5.3.4   Meeting the 2010 target of 100% will be very challenging because of the financial pressures on the HRA. The Council is committed to achieving the target and significant improvement in the HRA financial position has been achieved over the last three years. The funding gap is now reduced to circa £6.5 million to achieve the decency deadline of

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[18] HRA Business Plan 2006/07
[19] HRA Business Plan 2006/07

2010/11. The Council's main financial challenge during the next four years is to make decisions and find funding for re-modeling of sheltered blocks, together with making decent and undertaking other essential works to both tower blocks and other non-traditional dwellings. These could potentially add a further £18 million to the funding gap. Proposals are being prepared to find a way of carrying out the necessary works by disposing of the least number of assets.

5.4   Decent Homes – Housing Associations

5.4.1   Standards are high in the housing association sector as much of their stock is relatively new. Only 2.2% of housing association stock in the City fails the decent homes standard (2006/07) and the average SAP rating for their dwellings is 71, which is equivalent to that of City Council homes.[20]

5.5   Decent Homes – Private sector

5.5.1   The Council has been working hard to help people who live in private homes (either as owner occupiers or as private renting tenants) to live in better conditions. The Council adopted a Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS) in 2007 and this provides substantial detail on activities and plans in this area. Some of the key facts about the private sector identified in the PSHS are detailed below. For further detailed information please refer to the PSHS 2007.

- 78% of housing in Oxford is privately owned (56% is owner occupied and 22% is privately rented).

- 5069 (over 9%) of houses are in multiple occupation; that is shared by people who are not related. Of these over 6% are unfit and 70% do not have adequate fire escape provision. Many of these houses are in East Oxford.

- 3285 dwellings are thought to be below standard (having a category one hazard under the new health and safety rating) mostly due to excessive cold.

- There are approximately 140 homes that have been vacant more than six months. This is lower than the national average but still an important factor given the current housing crisis in the City.

- Many of the most vulnerable people living in poor housing conditions are older people.

5.5.2   The Council has implemented the mandatory HMO licensing scheme to ensure the safety of tenants of these premises and is preparing an additional scheme to cover a wider range of HMO's. To date the

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[20] Housing Corporation 2006/07

Council has licensed 345 HMO's out of approximately 800 covered by the mandatory scheme. It is anticipated that a further 1500 HMO's will be covered by the additional scheme once operational.

5.5.3 The Council is committed to helping people improve the quality of their homes but resources are limited and available grants are targeted at vulnerable people on low incomes. The Council provides advice and information services for all residents on improving their homes.

5.5.4 In 2004 it was found that 30.7% of private sector homes were non-decent but that only 30% of vulnerable households lived in non-decent homes, which meant the Council was meeting the national 2010 target in this respect.[21] Nonetheless the Council has continued to work to improve housing conditions for the vulnerable and in 2006/07 grants were provided to 178 households.

5.6 <u>Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty:</u>

5.6.1 Energy efficiency in private sector dwellings is a concern in the City. The average SAP rating for private sector dwellings was 53 in 2004 (compared to 60 in Council homes that year) and 12% of all such dwellings have SAP rating of below 35 which is very poor. [21]

5.6.2 As well as providing an advice service on energy efficiency, maintaining up to date information and advice and responding to public enquiries, the Council participates in a range of schemes and initiatives to make continued progress towards the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) target. Over the period 1995 - 2006, the Council reported an improvement in home energy efficiency of 25.2%. This puts the Council well on track to meet the HECA target of 30% by 2010. [21]

5.6.3 Fuel poverty is a significant problem in Oxford. If the City is in line with South East statistics, then it is estimated that there are 2500 households in fuel poverty and, there are 2771 private sector dwellings in the City requiring mandatory action under the HHSRS[22] hazard 'excessive cold'. To tackle this, the Council signposts people on benefit to the national grant scheme 'Warmfront' and has attracted £134,000 for energy efficiency works in 242 Oxford households in 2006/07. [21]

5.6.4 In 2006/07 the Council attracted £248,000 of external funds from GOSE for insulation in homes of the over 60s (680 Oxford households benefited), and had a fuel poverty budget of £50,000 for basic insulation measures in housing in areas of Oxford with most need). In both these cases, partnerships with British Gas saw them match our funding to enable twice as many households to benefit. [21]

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[21] Private Sector Housing Strategy 2007
[22] Housing Health and Safety Rating System

5.7 Empty Homes

5.7.1 There are very few long-term empty homes in Oxford (138 were identified in the 2004 private sector housing survey) but the Council is working to ensure that these properties are returned to use as homes where possible. An Empty Homes Officer was appointed in 2006 as a part of the work identified under the Housing Strategy 2005 to 2008 and 10 empty homes have been returned to use since April 2006.

5.8 Regeneration

5.8.1 The Council is working to improve the quality of homes beyond the decent homes standard. In several cases this involves the whole scale redevelopments of places or types of dwelling.

5.8.2 Work has commenced on the redevelopment of the Orlit (pre-cast reinforced concrete) homes at Rose Hill following planning approval for the provision of 237 new homes (50% of which will be affordable). The Council has worked closely with the community of Rose Hill and Oxford Citizens Housing Association (who are managing the physical redevelopment works) to bring this project to fruition.

5.8.3 The Council has completed an options appraisal of its sheltered housing schemes to decide which remain suitable for future needs and to raise standards. Three sites have been identified for redevelopment, as the schemes there no longer meet modern standards. The land will be used to provide a mix of additional housing to meet current and projected need. Particularly for vulnerable people with Extra Care housing, homes for people with learning or physical disabilities and provision for homeless young people.

5.8.4 The Council is keen to review other less popular elements of its housing stock, in particular tower blocks. The Council will be undertaking a wholesale review of its tower blocks with a view to determining options for their future use and potential re-development.

5.9 Improve services, choice and quality of life.

5.10 Resident Involvement, consultation and satisfaction

5.10.1 The Council is committed to ongoing and meaningful consultation with the residents of the City. The Council launched its new Tenant's Compact in 2007 which has led to more tenants being involved in managing their homes in a range of different ways.

5.10.2 We want to ensure that people who are placed in temporary accommodation are included in consultation and involvement activities which enable them to participate in decisions affecting their temporary homes and their future permanent homes. This is one of our key service improvement priorities.

5.11 Customer Satisfaction and Service Improvement

5.11.1 We currently undertake a wide range of customer and service user satisfaction monitoring which helps us improve and develop our housing services. This activity includes satisfaction surveys for Council tenants and people living in temporary accommodation. We want to increase the level of satisfaction monitoring to include people who approach the Council for housing advice and whom we help in preventing becoming homeless.

5.11.2 We have a range of customer service standards in place for housing services. These describe what levels of service customers can expect to receive when using housing services provided by the Council. We want to review these with our customers to ensure they remain relevant and up to date and explore how best we can report our performance in meeting these, particularly in homelessness prevention.

5.11.3 The Council is continuously seeking to improve and develop its services and we will be working to deliver improvements that are clearly recognised by customers. Our aim is to deliver services that are excellent, as defined by the Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry[23], and acknowledged as such by our customers. This includes ensuring that services are tailored to reflect the diverse needs of people in the City and offer value for money.

5.12 Efficient use of Stock.

5.12.1 In order to help meet the high demand for housing that has been identified in the City it is vital that the most efficient use is made of existing affordable housing stock. This includes ensuring that vacated homes are relet to tenants as quickly as possible. The City Council has significantly reduced the time it takes to relet its homes and has a target now to ensure that the time taken to relet is no more than four weeks.

5.12.2 We work with the main housing associations in the City in a partnership called ORAH (Oxford Register of Affordable Housing) to ensure that lettings are efficient and fair. In 2008 a new way of letting affordable homes in the City was launched called Choice Based Lettings (CBL). CBL allows people waiting for Council or housing association homes to exercise choice over which homes they apply to rent and has ended to

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[23] Audit Commission www.audit-commission.gov.uk

practice of the Council allocating homes to applicants against their personal preferences. The Council is working with other districts to provide a 'sub-regional' choice based lettings system across most of the county by 2010.

5.12.3 The Council operates a scheme to encourage tenants who are under-occupying their home (for instance following changes in family circumstances) to move to a more suitable sized home, releasing the larger home for a family in housing need. Under this scheme the Council offers such tenants financial incentives to make this voluntary move. 114 tenants have taken advantage of this scheme four years with 32 during 2007.08. However this have been mostly for people moving out of two-bedroom homes. We aim to review this scheme alongside housing associations to ensure that more under-occupied homes become available to people in housing need.

5.12.4 The Council is piloting a scheme which will see properties that have been designated for letting only to people above a certain age reviewed to help younger people in housing need access affordable rented accommodation. This need is particularly acute for single homeless people who require 'move-on' accommodation to free up hostel and supported accommodation they are occupying. The results of this pilot will be reviewed with a view to further rolling out the re-designation scheme where appropriate.

5.13 Supporting Communities

5.14 Community Safety

5.14.1 The Oxford Community Safety Strategy 2005 to 2008 (developed by the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership) has been instrumental in ensuring housing related community safety issues have been addressed and this work is continuing.

5.14.2 The City Council runs two key initiatives aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. The Crime and Nuisance Action Team (CANAcT) is the dedicated anti-social behaviour team. This team deal a wide range of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and works in direct partnership with Oxford City Homes to tackle problems on estates. Recent work has focused on prevention activities and in particular ways of preventing families losing their homes through the behaviour of one or some of their members. See Table 17 for a summary of CANAcT activity.

5.14.3 CANAcT now use a family support worker whose role is to provide support to families where ASB is a problem to prevent escalation to possible eviction proceedings. So far in 2006/07 69 families have been supported in this way and the level of notices (NOSPs) served on tenants for ASB has reduced significantly. This links in directly to the Council's homelessness prevention agenda.

Table 17: CANAcT Casework

5.15 CANAcT performance	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08*
Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (full)	10	13	9*
Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (interim)	7	2	6*
Acceptable Behaviour Contracts	76	75	48*
Notices served	23	15	10*
Evictions	6	8	5*
Family Support given	#	#	69*

* Ongoing statistics (Apr to Dec'07)

5.15.1 The Street Wardens service has been successfully expanded to cover the Barton and Wood Farm estates and funding for this service has now been mainstreamed into the General Fund securing the future of this valuable service.

5.16 Community Development

5.16.1 The Council has long had a strong community development role with services being provided through a variety of departments and partnerships. This will be reviewed and strengthened as the community safety and community development functions of the Neighbourhood Renewal department are merged with Community Housing in a new cross cutting department during 2008. This will bring together specific work on crime and safety and equalities. Working together as one unit, all these functions will be better placed to provide a more efficient and needs targeted service. This is a key area of development for the Council for the immediate future and is central to developing stronger and more sustainable communities.

5.17 Summary of Main Action Points To Improve the Housing Stock and Services and Support Communities:

Strategic Objective 4: Improve the quality of the existing housing stock across the City;

➢ Meet the decent homes target for Council owned homes.
➢ Improve energy efficiency in the private sector
➢ Deliver demonstrable improvements to the private rented sector through use of mandatory and additional HMO licensing
➢ Develop the landlord's forum and the landlords accreditation scheme (pilot)
➢ Monitor and improve the quality of temporary accommodation and Homechoice properties
➢ Progress renewal and redevelopment work following sheltered housing appraisals.
➢ Complete redevelopment of Rose Hill.
➢ Undertake options appraisal for City Council tower blocks.

Strategic Objective 5: Improve housing services, choice and quality of life on estates.

➢ Involve service users more in shaping the services that they use and that affect their lives.
➢ Improve the overall standard of all housing services in a way recognised by service users
➢ Make maximum efficient use of existing affordable rented housing stock (minimise relet times and encourage take up of under-occupations incentive schemes)
➢ Ensure CBL is not having any adverse impact on vulnerable groups in obtaining affordable housing
➢ Develop CBL to cover sub-region (County).
➢ Undertake equality impact assessments for all housing services.
➢ Develop proposals for enhanced Housing Options Service and multi-agency service hub as part of office redevelopment plans
➢ Complete integration and review of Community Housing and Community Safety / Development functions.