

# Agenda

## Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Thursday 6 March 2025**

Time: **6.00 pm**

Place: **Zoom - Remote meeting**

**For further information** please contact:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor,

☎ 07485 309899

✉ DemocraticServices@oxford.gov.uk

**Members of the public can attend to observe this meeting and.**

- may register in advance to speak to the committee in accordance with the [committee's rules](#)
- may record all or part of the meeting in accordance with the Council's [protocol](#)

Information about speaking and recording is set out in the agenda and on the [website](#)

Please contact the Committee Services Officer to register to speak; to discuss recording the meeting; or with any other queries.

*View or subscribe to updates for agendas, reports and minutes at  
[mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk](http://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk).*

*All public papers are available from the calendar link to this meeting once published*

**Committee Membership**

Councillors: Membership 6: Quorum 3: substitutes are permitted.

|                                  |                            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Councillor Lizzy Diggins (Chair) |                            |
| Councillor Theodore Jupp         |                            |
| Councillor Edward Mundy          |                            |
| Councillor Asima Qayyum          |                            |
| Councillor Rosie Rawle           |                            |
| Councillor Anne Stares           |                            |
| Councillor Linda Smith           | Cabinet Member for Housing |

Apologies and notification of substitutes received before the publication are shown under *Apologies for absence* in the agenda. Those sent after publication will be reported at the meeting. Substitutes for the Chair and Vice-chair do not take on these roles.

# Agenda

|  | <b>Pages</b> |
|--|--------------|
| <b>1 Apologies</b>   |              |
| <b>2 Declarations of Interest</b>  |              |
| <b>3 Chair's Announcements</b>   |              |
| <b>4 Notes of the previous meeting</b>   | 9 - 16       |
| <p>The Panel is asked to <b>agree</b> the notes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 and the extraordinary meeting on 27 November as a true and accurate record.</p>   |              |
| <b>5 Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan</b>  | 17 - 18      |
| <p>The Panel is asked to consider the Work Plan and agree any amendments.</p>  |              |
| <b>6 Report back on recommendations</b>  | 19 - 32      |
| <p>At its meetings on 13 November 2024 and 11 December 2024, Cabinet considered the following reports from the Housing and Homelessness Panel and made responses to the recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Furnished Tenancy Scheme</li><li>• HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5 Year Investment Programme</li><li>• Tenancy Engagement and Management</li></ul> <p>Cabinet's responses to recommendations were presented to the Scrutiny Committee at its meetings on 2 December 2024 and 14 January 2025 for noting.</p> <p>The Panel is asked to <b>note</b> Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.</p> |              |
| <b>7 Selective Licensing Implementation Update - Year 2</b>  | 33 - 38      |
| <p>The Director of Planning and Regulatory Services has submitted a report updating the report for the Selective Licensing Implementation for year 2.</p> <p>Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities,</p>   |              |

|           |   |          |
|-----------|---|----------|
|           | David Butler, Director of Planning and Regulatory Services and Courtney Bennett, Regulatory Services Manager will present the report and ask any questions.<br>The Panel is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.   |          |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment</b><br><br>The Director of Housing has submitted a report detailing the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment.<br>Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager and Kat Mayes Customer Care & Complaints Manager will present the report and ask any questions.<br>The Panel is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations. | 39 - 80  |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Building Safety and Compliance</b><br><br>The Director of Housing has submitted a report detailing the Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update.<br>Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager, and Aidan Heed, Senior Surveyor (Interim) HRA, will present the report and ask any questions.<br>The Panel is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.                                      | 81 - 94  |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update</b><br><br>The Director of Housing has submitted a report detailing the Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update.<br>Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager and James Pickering, Homelessness Prevention Manager, will present the report and ask any questions.<br>The Panel is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.      | 95 - 100 |
| <b>11</b> | <b>Housing complaint case to Ombudsman</b>  | 101 -    |

The Director of Housing has submitted a report a finding from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager and James Pickering, Homelessness Prevention Manager, will present the report and ask any questions.

The Panel is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.

## **12 Dates of future meetings**

The Panel is asked to note the dates and times of future meetings of the Housing and Homelessness Panel:

*Next meetings are scheduled for after the Scrutiny Committee in June 2025.*

*Meetings will take place remotely via Zoom.*

## **Information for those attending**

### **Recording and reporting on meetings held in public**

Members of public and press can record, or report in other ways, the parts of the meeting open to the public. You are not required to indicate in advance but it helps if you notify the Committee Services Officer prior to the meeting so that they can inform the Chair and direct you to the best place to record.

The Council asks those recording the meeting:

- To follow the protocol which can be found on the Council's [website](#)
- Not to disturb or disrupt the meeting
- Not to edit the recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes not editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those being recorded.
- To avoid recording members of the public present, even inadvertently, unless they are addressing the meeting.

Please be aware that you may be recorded during your speech and any follow-up. If you are attending please be aware that recording may take place and that you may be inadvertently included in these.

The Chair of the meeting has absolute discretion to suspend or terminate any activities that in his or her opinion are disruptive.

### **Councillors 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; licenses 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". 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 member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Thursday 7 November 2024**

www.oxford.gov.uk



### **Committee members present:**

Councillor Diggins (Chair)

Councillor Mundy

Councillor Qayyum

Councillor Rawle

Councillor Stares

### **Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

Kieran Edmunds, Rapid Rehousing Manager

Carolyn Devenney, Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer

Alan Chandler, Senior Refugee and Migrant Officer

Tom Porter, Senior Strategy and Service Development Officer

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Katherine Mayes, Customer Care and Complaints Manager

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

### **Also present:**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Cabinet Member for Housing

### **Apologies:**

Councillor(s) Jupp sent apologies.

Substitutes are shown above.

No apologies were received

## **18. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Theo Jupp.

## **19. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Asima Quayyum declared she lived in a Council property ; it was not a pecuniary interest but made the declaration for reasons of transparency.

Councillor Edward Mundy declared he lived in a Council property; it was not a pecuniary interest but made the declaration for reasons of transparency.

## **20. Chair's Announcements**

None.

## **21. Notes of the previous meeting**

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 10 October 2024 as a true and accurate record.

## **22. Furnished Tenancy Scheme**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, introduced the report, highlighting the number of tenants using the scheme and that it was cost neutral to the Council.

Kieran Edmunds, Rapid Rehousing Manager, Carolyn Devenney, Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer, and Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager were also in attendance to answer questions.

Councillor Rawle noted that a very small percentage of social homes are furnished on average in Oxford, compared to a much high percentage in the private rented sector. The Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer responded that they couldn't comment on the private sector, however stated that there had been more demand for the scheme and how the Council was promoting the scheme to residents.

Councillor Mundy asked if the scheme was offering good value for money for residents. The Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer responded that residents could have different options for the length of their tenancies and the Council had many residents over the 5 years.

Councillor Diggins inquired whether residents can use the same furniture if they swap tenancies and if this applies only at the beginning of their tenancy. The Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer clarified that residents can take the furniture to their new property only if they are moving into another OCC property. Carpets and curtains will remain in situ.

If residents move outside of Oxford or to another Housing Association, the items will be returned and recycled within the Scheme. However, for items that cannot be reused, such as mattresses, these will be gifted to tenants moving to a non-OCC property.

Councillor Mundy asked about the impact this scheme had on the Housing Revenue Account. The Landlord Services Manager noted the pressures on the HRA budget, however it is currently a cost neutral scheme, but it is kept under review.

The Panel agreed to make the following recommendation:

- 1. That the Council establishes relationships with local organisation, including charities, to enhance the reuse and recycling of used furniture under the Furnished Tenancy Scheme, with an aim to reduce wastage by extending life of furniture that may still hold value for temporary housing or community projects.***



### **23. Implementation of Refugee Resettlement in Oxford**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, and Alan Chandler, Senior Refugee Migrant Officer introduced the report.

Councillor Rawle queried how refugees had access to the scheme and the communication is given to those leaving the scheme. The Senior Refugee Migrant Officer responded that the families are offered up to two years of support which is provided by our partner Asylum Welcome to enable the families to become independent, after which, the Council offers a 'light touch service' signposting those seeking advice, enabling their independence from the resettlement programme.

Councillor Diggins asked about how the scheme operated, to which the Senior Refugee Migrant Officer commented that the Council secure predominantly private rented properties, although the Council has successfully secured additional Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) to procure 4 properties for the council's housing stock, to be used to house Afghan families until they no longer need those homes. The recent acquisitions would be retained for the council's future use. To secure private rented accommodation the council pays a holding fee, 2 months' rent in advance and helps with furnishing. From when families arrive, they will be supported to apply for universal credit, offered access to therapeutic counselling, education, training, and employment to give them the best possible chance to become independent and to sustain their tenancies. Many families will remain in the same property that they were initially offered after completing the programme.

Councillor Diggins asked if there was a maximum of families the Council could support. The Senior Refugee Migrant Officer responded that there was no maximum for how many properties the Council could secure for the scheme.

*Cllr Stares left the meeting.*

*The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.*

### **24. Housing Performance Monitoring (2024/25 mid-year)**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, and Tom Porter, Senior Strategy and Service Development Officer briefly introduced the report.

Councillor Diggins asked why the void relet performance seemed to be decreasing as per the report. The Landlord Services Manager responded that progress had been made but expected a reset by the beginning of the new financial year.

Councillor Diggins responded that that there seemed to be improvement. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager responded that homelessness continued to be a challenge but with a higher prevention targets were a positive step and improving the mediation service specialising between landlords and dealing with disputes.

Councillor Diggins also asked about the breakdown of Council's prevention duty outcomes. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager stated that this data was known which would be shared with the Panel outside of the meeting.

*Councillor Qayyum left the meeting.*

*The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.*

## 25. Housing Complaint Handling Performance (Q1 & Q2 2024/25)

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager noted there was a backlog that was expected to be completed before the end of the year and that complaints had doubled compared to last year.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities commented on transparency and the work of the team in resolving the complaints.

Councillor Mundy asked about the complaints going to the Housing Ombudsman and any correlation with national trends on tenant satisfaction. The Landlord Services Manager responded that the last few years saw the Council improve its overall tenant satisfaction rating when compared to the national average.

Councillor Diggins asked if complaints were being upheld and if there was an expected impact with more damp and mould complaints being received. The Landlord Services Manager expected these complaints to increase over the next few quarters but noted better communications with tenants and Oxford Direct Services.

*The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.*

## 26. Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan

The Panel noted the Committee's current work plan.

## 27. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates of future meetings.

**The meeting started at Time Not Specified and ended at Time Not Specified**

**Chair .....**  
**November 2024**

**Date: Wednesday 27**

*When decisions take effect:*

*Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired*

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued*

*All other committees: immediately.*

*Details are in the Council's Constitution.*

# **Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Wednesday 27 November 2024**

www.oxford.gov.uk



## **Committee members present:**

Councillor Diggins (Chair)

Councillor Mundy

Councillor Qayyum

Councillor Rawle

## **Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Peter Matthew, Executive Director of People and Communities

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services

Lourdes Debarry, Housing Consultant

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

## **Also present:**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

## **Apologies:**

No apologies were received

## **28. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Asima Qayyum declared she lived in a Council property; it was not a pecuniary interest but made the declaration for reasons of transparency.

## **29. Chair's Announcements**

None.

## **30. HRA 40-Year Business Plan**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Peter Matthew, Executive Director (Communities and People), Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services and Lourdes DeBarry, Housing and Tenancy Consultant were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, noted that the reports presented to the Panel at this meeting reflected significant changes to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Executive Director (Communities and People) highlighted the series of workstream undertaken over the past year to thoroughly

review the HRA functions comprehensively. These efforts were driven by key challenges in Oxford: the increasing homelessness in the city and issues with temporary accommodation faced by the council; a new, tougher regulatory regime for the HRA partly influenced by post-Grenfell reforms; and ongoing challenges related to tenant engagement with the council.

*Cllr Diggins joined the meeting.*

The Executive Director (Communities and People) stated that the business plan was a requirement for all Housing Authorities, and modelled against the expenditure set out on the Council's budget, due at Cabinet in December 2024.

Councillor Diggins raised a question about the balance between investments on the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFS) and longer-term investments, asking whether any consideration had been given to regulatory changes that might necessitate further work. The Executive Director (Communities) responded that while 'what-if' scenarios could not be modelled into the plan, the HRA is required to review its Business Plan annually. Councillor Qayyum then asked if the Panel would have the opportunity to review the Business Plan each year. It was explained that unless there were substantial changes to the HRA, the Panel would not be asked to review the document.

Councillor Diggins followed up with a question about risks of slippage in the programme. The Executive Director (Communities and People) clarified that slippages would not impact the Business Plan itself, but a significant delay could reduce the number of houses coming onstream. This would require a remodel and potential Cabinet approval, particularly if additional funding was needed.

Councillor Diggins queried if there was a threshold that would trigger a formal review of the Business Plan, to which the Executive Director (Communities and People) said that there would not be specific scenario but emphasised that any review would be aligned with the Council's budget setting process.

Councillor Diggins also noted the assumptions relating to rent increases and building costs, asking how the figures were confirmed. It was explained that the rental figure was based on Government policy while building costs were determined by current inflation rates.

Councillor Mundy queried the financial repercussions if the rental inflations exceeded 1%. The Executive Director (Communities People) replied that the figures were based on Government policy projections for the next five years.

The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.

## **31. HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5-Year Investment Programmes**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Peter Matthew, Executive Director (Communities and People), Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services and Lourdes DeBarry, Housing and Tenancy Consultant were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

The Housing and Tenant Consultant introduced the report, explaining its connection to the HRA Business Plan and how it supports governance and forward planning. It was noted that the 3-year Asset Management Strategy set the foundation for Council's long-term

approach to replenishing the housing supply. The 5-year Investment Programme was based on resident surveys and data on the Council's current housing stock, with Governance arrangements ensuring value for money and improved client management.

Councillor Diggins queried the percentage of residents satisfied with their landlord services. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that 71% of residents were satisfied, exceeding the target of 70%, to which Councillor Diggins asked if the Council could aim higher. The Housing and Tenant Consultant acknowledged that while the Council could be more ambitious, Oxford already has a very high satisfaction rating from its tenants.

Councillor Diggins asked about the demand led programmes. It was explained that demand could not be predicted but noted that the budget included provisions to increase funding if there was an unexpected surge in housing repair requests.

Councillor Diggins also asked about the management of the transition period. The Housing and Tenant Consultant referred to the five-year investment plan, which would ensure the programme was properly resourced and support the Council's tenants to ensure necessary work was completed.

Councillor Mundy raised a question about the satisfaction targets mentioned in the report. The Head of Housing Services clarified that the survey aligns with the definitions in the Tenant Satisfaction Measure. The Executive Director (Communities and People) added that there was a standard approach to conducting tenancy surveys in accordance with regulations.

The Panel agreed to make the following recommendation:

1. That Cabinet sets more ambitious targets for tenant satisfaction, aiming to exceed the current benchmark of 70%, but aligning with best practices from top-performing authorities and exploring opportunities for enhanced engagement with tenants.

## **32. Tenancy Engagement and Management**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Peter Matthew, Executive Director (Communities and People) and Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report, emphasising its focus on the Council's tenants. She said that this marked a reset in the Council's approach on tenant engagement and reorganisation of its Landlord Services to ensure compliance with the Housing Act. The new approach aims to improve tenant engagement, establish clearer governance structures, communicate the Council's performance data to tenants, and develop a strategy for ongoing improvement.

Councillor Rawle welcomed the report but questioned why the Young People Forum was separate from the other forums. The Head of Housing Services explained that the number of tenants aged 16-25 was relatively low compared to other demographics, but the Council recognises the need to engage with younger residents and understand their level of interest in working with the Council.

Councillor Diggins further queried about the Young People Forum, particularly the demographic anticipated to attend these meetings. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, clarified that the forum was aimed to young people living in Council homes, providing an opportunity for the Council to hear directly from young

residents about how to improve their estates. The Executive Director (Communities) added that the Council effectively engaged specific groups within its housing stock and separated different governance levels to tailor its approach. Engaging with young tenants, in particular, would allow the Council to improve overall engagement. It was noted that launching this new initiative would take time, but it was expected to begin in the new year.

Councillor Diggins raised a question on how the new approach differed from the current process. The Head of Housing Services responded that the current approach was reactive, whereas the new strategy will be preventative, allowing the Council to identify and address issues earlier. The Executive Director (Communities and People) added that the new plan would help the Council better understand its tenants and their needs.

The Panel agreed to make the following recommendation:

- 1. That Cabinet reconsiders its approach of Young People within the tenant engagement structure to ensure their representation is given greater prominence, by elevating their role within the governance structure, providing a direct pathway for their contributions to the Tenant Representative Forum and creating a bespoke mechanism for their input to be highlighted at the top level; and that innovative and youth-focused methods of engagements are continually explored to ensure their voices are actively included in strategic decision-making.

**33. Dates of future meetings**

The Panel noted the dates of future meetings, and the next meeting on 6 March 2025.

**The meeting started at 6:10 pm and ended at 7:46 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: 6 March 2025**

*When decisions take effect:  
Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired  
Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued  
All other committees: immediately.  
Details are in the Council’s Constitution.*

## [Provisional] Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan

NB This work plan is provisional and is subject to change. Changes made outside meetings are agreed between the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor and the Chair.

Cabinet items beyond two months in advance are not included on the work plan owing to the greater potential they will move or alternative items of higher priority arise in the meantime.

### 06 March 2025 – confirmed reports

| Agenda item   | Cabinet item | Description   | Cabinet portfolio                          | Lead officer                                      |
|---|--------------|---|--|---|
| Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment | No           | To consider the report and agree any recommendations. | Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities | Nerys Parry, Director of Housing                  |
| Building Safety and Compliance                            | No           | To consider the report and agree any recommendations. | Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities | Nerys Parry, Director of Housing                  |
| Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update           | No           | To consider the report and agree any recommendations. | Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities | Nerys Parry, Director of Housing                  |
| Housing complaint case to Ombudsman                       | No           | To consider the report and agree any recommendations. | Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities | Nerys Parry, Director of Housing                  |
| Selective Licensing Implementation Update - Year 2        | No           | To consider the report and agree any recommendations  | Cabinet Member for Planning                | David Butler, Director of Planning and Regulation |

This page is intentionally left blank



**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13 November 2024  
**Report of:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Title of Report:** Furnished Tenancy Scheme

| <b>Summary and recommendations</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Purpose of report:</b>  | To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision |
| <b>Key decision:</b>   | No   |
| <b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>   | Councillor Lizzy Diggins, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel                            |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>   | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities                               |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | Good, Affordable Homes, Thriving Communities   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>   | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028                                      |
| <b>Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report</b> |  |

| <b>Appendices</b> |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Appendix A</b> | Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations |

## Introduction and overview

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 7 November 2024 to consider a report on Furnished Tenancy Scheme. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 13 November 2024, recommends that Cabinet approve the procurement of a contract at a value of £4,300,000 over a 5-year period for a supplier or suppliers to provide household furniture, white goods, and carpets as part of a Furnished Tenancy Scheme; and to delegate to the Interim Executive Director for Communities and People in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, authority to award a Furnished Tenancy Scheme contract to a supplier or suppliers, selected by an evaluation panel, following a fully compliant procurement process.
2. The Committee is grateful to Cllr Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities), Kieran Edmunds (Rapid Rehousing Manager), Carolyn Devenney (Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer) and Richard Wood (Housing Strategy and

Needs Manager) for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

### Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities introduced the report. The report sought authority to procure and delegation to award a contract to deliver the Council’s Furnished Tenancy Scheme.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the scheme’s uptake within Oxford compared to national averages, the flexibility of the contract in accommodating growing demand, and how well it meets the needs of local tenants. Questions also focused on the extent to which the Council could support tenants without placing undue financial pressure on them, particularly given rising costs of living and inflationary pressures on service charges.
5. The Committee sought clarity on items like carpets, which are unique to Oxford’s scheme, and on the process for repairs, replacements, and storage of furnished items across tenancies.
6. In discussion, the Committee noted the benefits for tenants and the Council, including the scheme’s flexibility to allow tenants to choose from various furnishings, thus promoting a sense of ownership and belonging. Financial advantages for tenants were also noted, particularly that the scheme’s service charges are covered by housing benefits, effectively eliminating out-of-pocket expenses for eligible tenants. This set up was noted as being mutually beneficial, given that the scheme operated on a cost-neutral basis funded by the HRA, avoiding additional pressure on the Council’s resources. The Committee also noted the economic challenges, which has emphasised the scheme’s role in preventing tenants from resorting to high-interest credit sources to furnish their homes.
7. The Committee discussed the disposal and potential wastage of furniture under the scheme, noting that whilst some furniture are recycled or stored for future use such as emergency housing, there are opportunities for local organisations to repurpose those furniture. The Committee emphasised the value of collaborating with external organisations such as charities to minimise waste through creative reuse and recycling channels.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council further explores opportunities to establish more formalised relationships with local charities and organisations to enhance the reuse and recycling of used furniture under the Furnished Tenancy Scheme, with the goal of reducing waste by extending life of furniture items that may still hold value for temporary housing or community projects.***

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Report author</b>       | Celeste Reyeslao   |
| Job title                  | Scrutiny and Governance Officer                                      |
| Service area or department | Law and Governance   |
| Telephone                  | 01865 252946   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk">creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

**Appendix A**  
**Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of**  
**the Housing and Homelessness Panel of the Scrutiny Committee**

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Housing and Homelessness Panel on 7 November 2024 concerning the Furnished Tenancy Scheme. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

| <b><i>Recommendation</i></b>  | <b><i>Agree?</i></b> | <b><i>Comment</i></b>  |
|---|----------------------|--|
| 1) That the Council further explores opportunities to establish more formalised relationships with local charities and organisations to enhance the reuse and recycling of used furniture under the Furnished Tenancy Scheme, with the goal of reducing waste by extending life of furniture items that may still hold value for temporary housing or community projects. | Agree                | The team already makes every effort to reuse and recycle furniture, but we agree formalised and better established relationships with local charities and organisations in the City could further increase this. The team will take this forward in the coming weeks and seek to have these enhanced relationships in place for when the new FT contract comes into place. |

This page is intentionally left blank

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 11 December 2024  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5-Year Investment Programmes

| <b>Summary and recommendations</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Purpose of report:</b>  | To present the Scrutiny recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision |
| <b>Key decision:</b>   | No   |
| <b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>   | Councillor Lizzie Diggins, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel         |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>   | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities             |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | All  |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>   | Corporate Strategy 2024-28   |
| <b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b> |  |

| <b>Appendices</b> |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Appendix 1        | Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee |

### **Introduction and overview**

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 27 November 2024 to review a Cabinet report on HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5-Year Investment Programmes. The report, which is due for consideration on 11 December 2024, recommends that Cabinet adopt the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Strategy plan for 2025-28; approve the HRA Investment Programmes of up to £250m over the next 5 years; approve the commissioning of the sub programmes to Oxford Direct Services Ltd (ODS) through current HRA direct award arrangements; approve the commissioning, clienting and financial management arrangements for effectively implementing the recommendations and enable the development of annual Delivery Plan by ODS for 2025/26; and delegate authority

to the Executive Director for Communities and People, in consultation with the lead member for housing.

2. The Committee was grateful to Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) for attending to present the report as well as to Peter Matthew (Executive Director – Communities and People), Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services) and Lourdes DeBarry (Housing and Tenant Consultant) for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Committee.

**Summary and recommendations**

3. Lourdes DeBarry, Housing and Tenant Consultant introduced the report, highlighting its connection to the HRA 40-Year Business Plan. The strategy included a three-year asset management plan, which establishes the foundation for the Council’s long-term approach to planning, investing, and improving its housing stock, alongside a five-year investment programme outlining the planned delivery of works. Both were informed by tenant surveys and existing asset data.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including those about the setting of tenant satisfaction targets, and how demand-led aspects of the programme would be managed given the unpredictability of future needs. Questions were also raised in regard to the management of the transitional period for implementing the investment programme, and whether mechanisms would be in place to address urgent issues that fall outside expected lifecycles.

The Panel discussed measures considered to manage the unpredictability of demand-led aspects of the programme, noting the importance of data trends and joint working to predict and address future needs, particularly for issues like repairs and adaptations. A proactive approach to managing demands was underscored, and the Panel was reassured that current delegation arrangements allow for flexibility in budget allocations, enabling resources to be effectively redirected to priority areas in response to under or overspending.

5. Another key focus of discussion was the importance of ensuring that tenant satisfaction targets were ambitious enough to drive continuous improvement, particularly in areas such as repairs and placemaking. Acknowledging the necessity to benchmark against national standards for comparability, the Panel was of the view that there are other opportunities to enhance satisfaction levels through increased face-to-face engagement, aligning with the Council’s commitment to delivering better outcomes for its tenants.

***Recommendation 1: That Cabinet sets more ambitious targets for tenant satisfaction, aiming to exceed the current benchmark of 70%, by aligning with best practices from top-performing authorities and exploring opportunities for enhanced engagement with tenants.***

|                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Report author              | Celeste Reyeslao                |
| Job title                  | Scrutiny and Governance Advisor |
| Service area or department | Law and Governance              |

Telephone

01865 252946

e-mail

[creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank



**Appendix A**  
**Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of**  
**the Housing and Homelessness Panel of the Scrutiny Committee**

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Housing and Homelessness Panel on 27 November 2024 concerning the HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5-Year Investment Programme. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

25

| <b>Recommendation</b>   | <b>Agree?</b> | <b>Comment</b>  |
|---|---------------|---|
| 1) That Cabinet sets more ambitious targets for tenant satisfaction, aiming to exceed the current benchmark of 70%, by aligning with best practices from top-performing authorities and exploring opportunities for enhanced engagement with tenants. | Yes           | We will assess the efficacy of our tenant satisfaction target further as we review our tenant engagement arrangements, our plans for reviewing the delivery of our landlord services; and the expected improvements in the delivery of repairs services as a result of our new commissioning and clienting arrangements with ODS and we will align to the corporately agreed KPIs on tenant satisfaction as follows:<br>23-24 - 78%<br>24-25 - 79%<br>25-26 - 80%<br>26-27-81%<br>27-28 - 82% |

This page is intentionally left blank

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 11 December 2024  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Tenancy Engagement and Management

| <b>Summary and recommendations</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Purpose of report:</b>  | To present the Scrutiny recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision |
| <b>Key decision:</b>   | No   |
| <b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>   | Councillor Lizzie Diggins, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel         |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>   | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities             |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | All  |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>   | Corporate Strategy 2024-28   |
| <b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b> |  |

| <b>Appendices</b> |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Appendix 1        | Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee |

### **Introduction and overview**

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 27 November 2024 to review a Cabinet report on Tenancy Engagement and Management. The report, which is due for consideration on 11 December 2024, recommends that Cabinet approve the adoption and implementation of the new approach to Tenant Engagement; and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Communities and People (Interim) to make any further changes necessary, in line with service development and new legislation.
2. The Committee was grateful to Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) for attending to present the report as well as to Peter Matthew (Executive Director – Communities and People) and Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services) for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Committee.

## Summary and recommendations

3. Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services introduced the report, highlighting its focus on resetting the Council's approach to tenant engagement and landlord. The report alludes to key outputs from the Grenfell report which informed a new approach, including improved tenant engagement, clearer governance structures, enhanced communication of performance data to tenants, and the development of a comprehensive strategy. In addition, the reorganisation of the landlord services, planned for the next calendar year, aims to better respond to tenant needs and deliver a more cohesive and effective service.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including why the Young People's Forum was proposed as a separate group within the tenant engagement structure, given concerns about their underrepresentation and distinct needs as a demographic. Questions were also raised seeking clarity on how the Young People's Forum would integrate with other engagement mechanisms, and how these structures would address the unique challenges faced by younger tenants (such as mobility and differing engagement styles).
5. The Panel also queried how the new approach to tenant engagement would differ from the current model. The Panel was particularly interested in understanding how the new model would allow for earlier identification of issues and vulnerabilities within the tenant community. It was noted that the new structure aims to shift from reactive work to more responsive approaches, focused on meaningful contact with tenants to address concerns before they escalate into more significant problems.
6. The Panel refocused its discussion on the engagement of younger tenants, noting that though they represent a smaller proportion of the Council's tenant population, their unique needs and perspectives are crucial to consider. The Panel highlighted the value of bespoke initiatives, such as interest-based activities and youth-focused programmes, to foster greater participation and engagement among this demographic. Recognising that traditional forms of engagement may not resonate with younger tenants, the Panel suggested reconsidering the approach to ensure their voices are effectively represented within the tenant engagement structure.

***Recommendation 1: That Cabinet reconsiders its approach of Young People within the tenant engagement structure to ensure their representation is given greater prominence, by elevating their role within the governance structure, providing a direct pathway for their contributions to the Tenant Representative Forum and creating a bespoke mechanism for their input to be highlighted at the top level; and that innovative and youth-focused methods of engagements are continually explored to ensure their voices are actively included in strategic decision-making.***

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Report author              | Celeste Reyeslao   |
| Job title                  | Scrutiny and Governance Advisor                                      |
| Service area or department | Law and Governance   |
| Telephone                  | 01865 252946   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk">creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

**Appendix A**  
**Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of**  
**the Housing and Homelessness Panel of the Scrutiny Committee**

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Housing and Homelessness Panel on 27 November 2024 concerning the Tenancy Engagement and Management. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

29

| <b><i>Recommendation</i></b>   | <b><i>Agree?</i></b> | <b><i>Comment</i></b>   |
|--|----------------------|---|
| 1) That Cabinet reconsiders its approach of Young People within the tenant engagement structure to ensure their representation is given greater prominence, by elevating their role within the governance structure, providing a direct pathway for their contributions to the Tenant Representative Forum and creating a bespoke mechanism for their input to be highlighted at the top level; and that innovative and youth-focused methods of engagements are continually explored to ensure their voices are actively included in strategic decision-making. | Yes                  | We will consider how best to secure the involvement and representation of young people as we develop our tenant engagement and governance arrangements. |

This page is intentionally left blank

**To:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 06 March 2024  
**Report of:** Director of Planning and Regulation  
**Title of Report:** Selective Licensing Year 2 Update

| Summary and recommendations  |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Decision being taken:</b> | To provide a brief update on the year 2 actions of the Selective Licensing scheme |
| <b>Key decision:</b>         | No  |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>       | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing                                |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | Deliver More Affordable Housing   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>     | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028                       |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Recommendation(s):</b> That Panel resolves to:                                  |
| 1. <b>Note and comment</b> on the report and <b>agree</b> any recommendations here |

## Introduction

1. This report provides a brief overview of the key actions taken, challenges faced, and progress made during Year 2 (1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024) of the Selective Licensing Scheme. It also includes an update on the implementation of the recommendation made by the Panel in March 2024: "That the Council rolls out a Selective Licensing scheme communications campaign aimed at tenants to raise awareness of the scheme and tenants' rights; and actively engages with tenants' unions as part of the campaign." The report concludes with Year 3 priorities to support continued improvements.

## Year 2 Progress Summary

2. **Enhanced Application Processing Efficiency:** Significant improvements were made in processing licence applications. The average processing time reduced from 376 days in Year 1 to 201 days in Year 2, following operational changes such as caseload delegation and streamlined training. In Year 2, the scheme received 1,041 applications, bringing the total number of applications since its inception to 11,940. The Council issued 7,492 final licences in Year 2, bringing the total to 9,631

(80%) of all applications receiving a final licence. Additionally, 10,541 (88%) of applications have been issued a draft licence.

3. **Formation of the Residential Regulation Team:** To improve efficiency and customer service in the private rented sector, the Residential Regulation Team was created by merging the HMO Enforcement Team and the Private Sector Safety Team. Recruitment for new posts within this team has progressed, although several vacancies remain.
4. **Proactive Inspection Expansion:** Efforts to identify unlicensed properties continued, with 83 cases investigated in Year 2 for failing to hold a selective licence. For the first time, proactive inspections were introduced, accounting for 239 out of 335 total inspections completed in Year 2. In contrast, Year 1 relied solely on reactive inspections, with 143 conducted. Since the scheme's start, a total of 478 inspections have been carried out, significantly increasing enforcement capacity. Notably, 70% of inspected properties were found to have Category One or Category Two hazards, reinforcing the urgent need for intervention to improve housing conditions.
5. **Increased Enforcement Actions:** The council escalated its enforcement efforts in Year 2, taking 62 formal enforcement actions—a 100% increase from Year 1. This included 26 Hazard Awareness Notices, 16 Improvement Notices, 15 Prohibition Orders, and 5 Emergency Remedial Actions, all targeting non-compliant landlords and improving housing conditions for vulnerable tenants. The council expects to continue this trend in Year 3.
6. **Audit Results:** An independent audit was conducted in Year 2 and presented to the Scrutiny Committee. While the findings confirmed that the scheme was well-managed, medium risks were identified, particularly regarding inspection progress and training of the Residential Regulation Team. These challenges were expected given the difficulties encountered in staffing and resources.

### **Challenges and Lesson Learn**

7. **Staffing and Recruitment:** During Year 2, significant staffing challenges emerged, particularly within the Residential Regulation Team, where a national shortage of skilled officers made it difficult to fill vacancies. The Applications Team also suffered from high staff turnover. In response, targeted recruitment efforts in spring 2024—including the appointment of an HR Recruitment Specialist who leveraged LinkedIn-based strategies—stabilised staffing levels. Additionally, the introduction of a Caseload Management System, ensuring each application was handled by a single officer from submission through to licence issuance, significantly reduced errors and processing delays, ultimately enhancing customer service.
8. **Procurement Processes:** The procurement of the large-scale inspection contract encountered difficulties. An initial attempt in summer/autumn 2023 resulted in a single bid that exceeded the budget, causing delays. A revised process in summer 2024 attracted more competitive bids and highlighted the need to include delegated powers in the designation report from the outset, preventing future administrative delays.
9. **Payment and Operational Processing:** The application system, originally designed to accept only credit card payments, faced issues as many managing agents requested BACS. Without integrated payment reconciliation, manual processing was required, slowing the workflow. Resource constraints also delayed



improvements such as landlord guidance materials and website enhancements, while supplier delays in upgrading the data connection system hindered timely report generation. These issues underscore the need for system enhancements and better resource planning.

- 10. Training and Workflow Efficiency:** Efforts to improve training and streamline workflows yielded significant benefits during Year 2. The training period for new officers was successfully reduced from 16 weeks to 12 weeks through the implementation of streamlined processes and clear flowcharts for application handling. This reduction not only expedited the onboarding process but also contributed to overall operational improvements by minimising training bottlenecks.

### **Update on 2024 Panel Recommendation**

- 11. Panel Recommendation:** “The Council rolls out a Selective Licensing scheme communications campaign aimed at tenants to raise awareness of the scheme and tenants’ rights; and actively engages with tenants’ unions as part of the campaign.”
- 12. Tenant Awareness Challenges:** In Year 2, engagement was limited by staffing constraints, particularly within the Residential Regulation Team, which faced recruitment and retention challenges. These delays affected direct tenant engagement and proactive communication of their rights under the scheme. Nevertheless, tenant awareness improved, as shown by an increase in rent repayment order inquiries from 7 in Year 1 to 23 in Year 2. The Council also continued working with Justice for Tenants, a not-for-profit organisation that helps tenants reclaim rent from landlords operating unlicensed properties and supported general awareness through social media and news reports.
- 13. Tenant Engagement Communication Campaign:** To strengthen tenant engagement, the Council is prioritising a targeted communications campaign to inform tenants about their rights, rental standards, and how to check if a property is licensed. This campaign will provide clear guidance on reporting substandard conditions and ensure tenants understand their options.
- 14. Strengthening Partnerships and Tenant Support:** Alongside this, the Council is expanding collaboration with tenant support organisations, advice centres, and tenants’ unions to ensure tenants have access to the resources they need. By strengthening these partnerships and incorporating tenant input into housing improvements across the private rented sector, the Council aims to empower tenants, improve housing conditions, and establish standardised procedures for addressing rental issues.

### **Year 3 Priorities**

- 15. Clear Backlog and Improve Processing:** The Council will prioritise clearing the remaining backlog of applications while continuing to improve processing efficiency. A 16-week processing target will be introduced for all applications received from September 2024 onward, ensuring a more structured and timely approach to licensing.
- 16. Proactive Inspection Programme:** A large-scale inspection programme will be fully launched in April 2025, enabling a more comprehensive assessment of housing conditions and strengthening enforcement measures. In parallel, the Council will expand efforts to identify and address unlicensed properties, ensuring compliance across the private rented sector.

**17. Strengthening Engagement with Tenants and Landlords:** The Council will enhance tenant awareness and landlord guidance by expanding its communications campaign, providing clearer resources on property standards, compliance requirements, and tenant rights. Efforts will focus on direct tenant engagement, including multilingual materials and partnerships with grassroots organisations to reach diverse communities. Additionally, landlord engagement will be improved through better compliance support, promoting best practices and ensuring greater accountability across the private rented sector

### **Financial Implications**

18. The scheme operates on a self-funding model, with income received from licensing fees used to fund the operational and enforcement aspects of the scheme.

### **Legal Issues**

19. The scheme required Government confirmation before implementation, and all legal aspects had been thoroughly addressed in previous Cabinet reports from March 2021 and September 2020. The Law and Governance team continues to provide ongoing legal support and guidance in addressing issues that arise.

### **Level of Risk**

20. The original Risk Register for the scheme identified several key risks. These included the possibility of judicial review, concerns over whether the submission for the scheme would be accepted, and challenges in recruiting officers with the necessary qualifications and experience to conduct inspections and enforcement activities. To mitigate these risks, the Selective Licensing Board continues to collaborate with the People Team to strengthen recruitment efforts and ensure that the scheme operates effectively.

### **Equalities Impact**

21. The introduction of Selective Licensing was designed to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector. The scheme benefits tenants and residents across the city by ensuring safer and better-maintained rental properties. This report does not raise any additional equalities issues beyond those previously assessed during the initial planning and implementation phases.

### **Conclusion**

22. Year 2 of the Selective Licensing Scheme demonstrated significant progress in processing efficiency, enforcement activities, and tenant engagement. Looking ahead, Year 3 will focus on expanding proactive enforcement, deepening tenant engagement, and enhancing operational efficiency to ensure the continued success of the scheme.

23. As the scheme progresses, further review reports will be produced to outline the outcomes and developments of the initiative. These reports will be made publicly available on the Council's website to ensure transparency and accountability in the scheme's ongoing operation.

|                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Report author</b>       | Courtney Bennett            |
| Job title                  | Regulatory Services Manager |
| Service area or department | Planning and Regulation     |

Telephone

01865 252474

e-mail

[cbennett@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:cbennett@oxford.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:** None

This page is intentionally left blank

**To:** Housing & Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025  
**Report of:** Director of Housing  
**Title of Report:** Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment 2025

| <b>Summary and recommendations</b> |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Decision being taken:</b>       | For members to note and comment on the outcome of the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. |
| <b>Key decision:</b>               | No  |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>             | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing  |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>         | Supporting thriving communities   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>           | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028   |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Recommendation(s):</b> That Cabinet resolves to: |
| 1. Note and comment on the-assessment               |

| <b>Appendix No.</b> | <b>Appendix Title</b>   | <b>Exempt from Publication</b> |
|---------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>Appendix 1</b>   | Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment 2025 Feb 25 | No                             |

## Introduction and background

1. The Housing Ombudsman Service was introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and from April 2013 it took over responsibility for all new complaints about social housing. This includes complaints about the Council’s relationship as a landlord to our tenants and leaseholders. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman cover complaints that do not relate to the landlord function.
2. The Housing Ombudsman launched its Complaint Handling Code in July 202 and updated and strengthened the Code in April 2022. This introduced the requirement

for landlords to complete a self-assessment against their compliance with the Code's requirements. These requirements (and therefore the self-assessment) have increased significantly since the Code was first launched.

3. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman updated the Code, and it became a statutory requirement. The self-assessment requirements were updated accordingly.
4. The last self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code was presented to the Housing and Homelessness Panel in March 2024.
5. The self-assessment must be reviewed at least annually, submitted to the Housing Ombudsman, and published on our website.
6. This report introduces the 2025 self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
7. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman also have an aligned Code of Complaint Handling, however compliance with it is currently voluntary, although recommended. It is expected to become mandatory in 2026/27.

### **The Self-Assessment**

8. The updated self-assessment is grouped in nine themes. All elements are mandatory requirements. The nine themes are:
  - Definition of a complaint
  - Exclusions
  - Accessibility and awareness
  - Complaint handling staff
  - Complaint handling principles
  - Complaint handling process
  - Complaints stages
  - Putting things right
  - Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement
9. There have been changes in our handling of complaints since the last self-assessment, and these are reflected in the 2025 version.

### **Commentary Against the Code**

10. The commentary on the self-assessment sets out the views relating to the landlord function only. The landlord function broadly meets the requirements of the Code, although there are areas where we are looking to improve, notably 9.3, 9.6 and 9.7.
11. Improvements made since the last self-assessment, include:
  - Updating the procedure published on our website to better reflect the requirements of the Code.
  - Introducing a process for rejecting complaints when necessary.
  - Ensuring customers being surveyed for their opinions are advised on how they can complain.
  - Carrying out training with various teams within the Council on recognising complaints and our procedures.
  - We have amended our letter templates to ensure the required information is included.

12. Further work planned for the coming year to improve complaint handling against the Code includes:
13. Developing a survey for residents to complete following a complaint to gain a better understanding of their experience and needs in relation to our complaints handling.
14. Exploring how we can introduce more transparency and share our insights and service improvements more frequently, in addition to the steps detailed below. We are currently involved in a knowledge-sharing group made up of complaints managers from other registered providers and are looking at whether we can implement any elements of their approaches to address this.
- Setting up a group of tenants and leaseholders to examine our procedures, trends and learning from complaints.
  - Publishing complaints data and service improvements (You said, we did) on our website and in our tenant publications on a more regular basis.
  - Producing more regular updates, for example quarterly for the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC') and Cabinet
15. Providing the MRC and Cabinet with information on Housing Ombudsman determinations as they are received.
16. Given the significant increase in the volume of complaints received, an additional officer is being recruited to cover this and provide capacity to focus on these improvements.

### Next Steps

17. The self-assessment will be published on the Council's website and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman.
18. The self-assessment will also be included in the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report that will be reported to Cabinet later in the year. This will include a full overview of our complaints for 2024/25, as well as the details of Housing Ombudsman determinations, an analysis of trends, and service improvements that have been identified.
19. The self-assessment will be reviewed in early 2026, unless an earlier review is requested by the Housing Ombudsman.

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Report author</b>       | Kat Mayes  |
| Job title                  | Customer Care & Complaints Manager                             |
| Service area or department | Housing Services   |
| Telephone                  | 07302 002020   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:kmayes@oxford.gov.uk">kmayes@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

This page is intentionally left blank



## Appendix 1: Self-assessment form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.

Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.

We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

## Section 1: Definition of a complaint

| Code provision | Code requirement  | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence  | Commentary / explanation   |
|----------------|---|------------------|---|--|
| 1.2            | <p>A complaint must be defined as:</p> <p><i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’</i></p>  | Yes              | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p> | <p>This is defined within our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure. The section titled <i>‘What is a complaint?’</i> specifies:</p> <p><i>‘A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council, its staff, or those acting on behalf of the Council, affecting an individual citizen or group of citizens.’</i></p> |
| 1.3            | <p>A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord’s complaints policy.</p> | Yes              | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p> | <p>Our residents do not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. This is defined within our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure.</p> <p>The section titled <i>‘Who can make a complaint’</i> specifies:</p> <p><i>‘The Council will accept complaints from anyone who</i></p>   |

|     |  |     |  |  |
|-----|--|-----|--|--|
|     |  |     |  | <i>has used or been affected by a service provided by or on behalf of the Council. The Council will also accept complaints from anyone who is acting on behalf of a service user with their knowledge and consent.'</i>  |
| 1.4 | Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>This is defined within our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure. In section titled '<i>What is a service request?</i>' it states:</p> <p><i>'Complaints and service requests can be closely related. A service request is a request for a service made for the first time, where it couldn't be reasonably expected that this should already have been actioned.</i></p> <p><i>When assessing whether to treat a contact as a complaint or a service request each case will be considered on its individual merits, and consideration may be given to the following factors. This list is not exhaustive:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Whether the customer</i></li> </ul> |

|     |   |     |   |  |
|-----|---|-----|---|--|
|     |   |     |   | <p><i>has been made aware of the complaints procedure and has identified their contact as being a complaint</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What the expression of dissatisfaction is about</i></li> <li>• <i>The tone of the correspondence</i></li> <li>• <i>What the customer would like to happen next</i></li> <li>• <i>Whether the matter has already been treated as a service request'</i></li> </ul> <p>As a landlord we recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. We follow the Housing Ombudsman definition on this matter.</p> |
| 1.5 | A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains. | Yes | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p> | <p>As per our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, we will consider 'Whether the matter has already been treated as a service request'.</p> <p>Front line staff are trained to recognise expressions of dissatisfaction as potential</p>  |

|     |  |     |  |   |
|-----|--|-----|--|---|
|     |  |     |  | complaints, empowered to offer to log them as such, and staff are aware that a complaint being logged should not prevent any immediate actions being taken or delay anything already in progress.   |
| 1.6 | An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain. | Yes |  | <p>Residents completing surveys through our website are provided with the link to the part of our website with details on how to make a complaint.</p> <p>Staff carrying out consultations and events with residents are aware of how to recognise complaints and encouraged to advise residents of how they can make a complaint or take the details and pass them to the Customer Care &amp; Complaints team.</p> <p>We also gather real-time transactional satisfaction performance on completion of repairs &amp; gas servicing, with direct interventions by team leaders/planners where satisfaction is less than required.</p> |

|  |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
|  |  |  |  | Residents completing our STAR survey were provided with the details on how they can make a complaint if they wish to do so. |
|--|--|--|--|---|

## Section 2: Exclusions

47

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation   |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|--|
| 2.1            | Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits  | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>Our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure details what we may not accept as a complaint and provides alternative avenues for these issues where possible.</p> <p>When a complaint is not accepted, the resident is formally advised of this in writing, with the reason(s) why, and provided with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.</p> |
| 2.2            | <p>A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve</li> </ul> | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>This is set out in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure in the section titled '<i>What will not be treated as a complaint under this procedure</i>'.</p>  |

|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     | <p>months ago.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.</li> <li>• Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.</li> </ul>                     |     |  |  |
| 2.3 | <p>Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.</p> | Yes | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p>  | <p>This is detailed in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure.</p> <p>The decision to decline to investigate a complaint is made by the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager and is only done on the grounds of time limits when the length of time that has passed means we would be unlikely to be able to obtain the evidence to conduct a fair and thorough investigation.</p> |
| 2.4 | <p>If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to</p>  | Yes | <p><a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing/annual-housing-complaint-performance-service-improvement-report">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing/annual-housing-complaint-performance-service-improvement-report</a></p> | <p>When a complaint is not accepted, the resident is formally advised of this in writing, with the reason(s) why, and provided with the</p>  |



|     |  |     |  |  |
|-----|--|-----|--|--|
|     | the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint. |     |  | <p>contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.</p> <p>The number of complaints rejected and the reasons for this are recorded, monitored and reported on in our Annual Complaint Handling &amp; Service Improvement report.</p> |
| 2.5 | Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.                   | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | This is set out in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure in the section titled ' <i>What will not be treated as a complaint under this procedure</i> '.   |

### Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

50

| Code provision | Code requirement  | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation  |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|---|
| 3.1            | Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process. | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>This is set out in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, in the section <i>'Reasonable Adjustments'</i>:</p> <p><i>'Anyone is welcome to make a comment, compliment or complaint and the Council is committed to treating everyone fairly. If a complainant requires any particular assistance they are advised to let the Council know and state what assistance is required. This may include, for example, the provision of information in alternative formats (e.g. large print), the use of a language service, or communication through a representative.'</i></p> |
| 3.2            | Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to  | Yes              |  | Our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure provides contact details for residents to raise complaints   |

|     |  |     |  |   |
|-----|--|-----|--|---|
|     | pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.   |     |  | <p>via the internet, by telephone, or in writing. It also advises they can make them directly to the relevant service.</p> <p>We accept complaints made to any member of staff. Training is regularly carried out to make staff aware of the complaints process, and everyone has the option to log the complaint themselves or pass the information on to the Customer Care &amp; Complaints team.</p> |
| 3.3 | High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain. | Yes | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints – Oxford City Council</a></p> <p><a href="#">Complaints against us as a landlord   Oxford City Council</a></p> | <p>Staff are encouraged to recognise potential complaints and offer to log them as such.</p> <p>The complaints pages, both general and housing-specific ones, can easily be found on our website by entering 'complaints' into the search bar.</p> <p>The complaints service and how to make a complaint is regularly featured in our Tenants In Touch magazine sent quarterly to residents.</p>        |
| 3.4 | Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This  | Yes | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p>  | <p>This is published on our website.</p>  |

|     |  |     |  |   |
|-----|--|-----|--|---|
|     | will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.                       |     |  | Residents are also made aware of timescales and what happens at the stage they are at in complaint acknowledgement and outcome letters.   |
| 3.5 | The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.                                       | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a><br><br><a href="#">Complaints about council housing – Oxford City Council</a> | <p>Our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure has a section titled '<i>Ombudsman</i>'.</p> <p>We also have a page on our website that includes our self-assessment and annual report.</p> <p>Contact details for the Ombudsman (including a website address) is included with all formal complaint letters.</p> |
| 3.6 | Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a>   | This is detailed in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, in the section titled ' <i>Who can make a complaint?</i> '  |
| 3.7 | Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.             | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a>   | <p>Our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure has a section titled '<i>Ombudsman</i>'.</p> <p>Contact details for the</p>   |

|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  | Ombudsman (including a website address) is included with all formal complaint letters. |
|--|--|--|--|--|

## Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

54

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation   |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|--|
| 4.1            | Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties. | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>Within Landlord Services there is a complaints 'hub' made up of the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager, and Customer Care &amp; Complaints Officers. The hub takes responsibility for the investigating, resolving and responding to complaints, and monitoring actions and service improvement.</p> <p>Along with the Ombudsman Link Officer, the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager liaises with the Ombudsman.</p> <p>The Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager is responsible along with senior management within Landlord Services for reporting to the governing body.</p> |
| 4.2            | The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and  | Yes              |  | Those within the complaints hub are empowered to approach all necessary staff to   |

|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     | autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.  |     |  | gather evidence and progress actions. Decisions on whether a complaint is upheld or not, remedies, and compensation are made by those in the hub.  |
| 4.3 | Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively | Yes |  | <p>Staff within the complaints hub undergo regular training via the Housing Ombudsman website and other providers.</p> <p>We provide guidance and training to staff within other teams around complaints.</p> <p>As of January 2025, we are recruiting an additional Customer Care &amp; Complaints Officer.</p> |

### Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation  |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|---|
| 5.1            | Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain. | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>We have a single complaints procedure that is compliant with the Code.</p> <p>Those within the complaints hub ensure that customers are not treated differently by others if they complain, and there is a</p> |

|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     |   |     |  | process in place to ensure fair investigation should someone wish to complain about their treatment by someone handling their complaint.   |
| 5.2 | The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | <p>We make every effort to ensure actions are completed prior to the complaint outcome letter being sent, and monitor outstanding actions when this is not possible.</p> <p>When a complaint is made via our Contact Centre, the officers have been trained to make any necessary arrangements for repairs etc prior to the investigation beginning.</p> <p>We have two complaint stages and treat anything that meets the definition of a complaint as such, providing the resident agrees to this.</p> |
| 5.3 | A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.  | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | Our procedure has only 2 stages.   |
| 5.4 | Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a   | Yes |  | ODS (Oxford Direct Services) is a wholly owned company of  |



|     |  |     |  |   |
|-----|--|-----|--|---|
|     | contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.  |     |  | Oxford City Council. They follow our two stage process.   |
| 5.5 | Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.   | Yes |  | <p>ODS (Oxford Direct Services) is a wholly-owned company of Oxford City Council. They follow our two stage process.</p> <p>They share reports with us, seek advice, and we work collaboratively to ensure we are consistent and compliant.</p>   |
| 5.6 | When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as “the complaint definition”. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification. | Yes |  | We seek clarification where necessary, and all complaints include the complaint definition in the acknowledgement letter with a prompt for the customer to let us know if anything is incorrect or missing. When the customer has further comments that alter the definition, we issue an amended acknowledgement letter. |
| 5.7 | When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear  | Yes |  | The acknowledgement letter  |

|     |   |     |  |   |
|-----|---|-----|--|---|
|     | which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.  |     |  | contains this as part of the complaint definition. Any issues that cannot be considered within the complaint are identified as such.  |
| 5.8 | <p>At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;</li> <li>b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;</li> <li>c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and</li> <li>d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.</li> </ul> | Yes |  | <p>Those working within the complaint hub are empowered to act independently, seek to fully understand the resident's situation and the impact on them, and carries out a thorough investigation, taking expert advice from colleagues where necessary, resulting in an evidence-based conclusion. If staff have previously been involved, the case handler will request an additional and/or more senior review of the situation.</p> <p>Staff handling complaints are able to challenge colleagues and contractors if they feel it is necessary and can escalate concerns to their manager.</p> <p>Letters written by the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Officers are reviewed by the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager.</p> |
| 5.9 | Where a response to a complaint will fall   | Yes |  |   |

|      |  |     |  |  |
|------|--|-----|--|--|
|      | outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.   |     |  | Any extensions to timescales are confirmed in writing and a new target date given. Complainants are provided with the direct contact details of the person handling their complaint.   |
| 5.10 | Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | This is covered by the 'Reasonable Adjustments' section of our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure.   |
| 5.11 | Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.   | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | Our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure sets out the reasons we may not accept a complaint. Any refusal to escalate would be confirmed in writing with the reasons given.<br><br>Our complaint outcome letters all provide information on how to escalate to the next stage of the process. |
| 5.12 | A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each  | Yes |  | Complaints are recorded on our CRM system, and all   |

|      |   |     |   |   |
|------|---|-----|---|---|
|      | stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.   |     |   | outgoing letters are saved to this. Other documents are saved centrally to a folder accessible by the complaints hubs.  |
| 5.13 | Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.                 | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a>  | This is detailed in our ' <i>How will complaints be dealt with?</i> ' section of our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure.  |
| 5.14 | Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a><br><a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/comments-compliments-complaints/procedure-managing-vexatious-customers">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/comments-compliments-complaints/procedure-managing-vexatious-customers</a> | This is included in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, in the sections titled ' <i>Reasonable and Unreasonable Behaviour</i> ' and ' <i>Managing unreasonable behaviour and vexatious complaints</i> '.<br><br>It is also covered by our Procedure for Managing Vexatious Customers. |
| 5.15 | Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard   | Yes | <a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/comments-compliments-complaints/procedure-">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/comments-compliments-complaints/procedure-</a>   | See point 4.2 of our Procedure for Managing Vexatious   |

|  |  |  |  |            |
|--|--|--|--|------------|
|  | for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. |  | <a href="#">managing-vexatious-customers</a> | Customers. |
|--|--|--|--|------------|

## Section 6: Complaints Stages

### Stage 1

| Code provision | Code requirement  | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation  |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|---|
| 6.1            | Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident. | Yes              |  | Every effort is made to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, having due regard to the complexity of the case, and any urgent issues are dealt with in a timely manner before the complaint response is sent out. |
| 6.2            | Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <b><u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u></b>  | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | As per our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, stage 1 complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days of the complaint being received.   |
| 6.3            | Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <b><u>within 10 working days</u></b> of the complaint being acknowledged.  | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | As per our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, stage 1 complaints are responded to in full within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged,  |

|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     |   |     |  | excluding where an extension is required.  |
| 6.4 | Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | Any extensions to timescales are confirmed in writing and a new target date given. The reason for the extension is explained in the letter.  |
| 6.5 | When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.  | Yes |  | We provide the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman in our extension letters, as well as in all other formal correspondence relating to a complaint.  |
| 6.6 | A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.                                 | Yes |  | Outstanding actions are detailed in our complaint outcome letters, alongside timescales for completion when appropriate.<br><br>These actions are monitored by the complaint handler, and the case is kept open on our CRM system in a 'monitoring' state until it has been confirmed that all agreed actions have been completed. |

|     |   |     |  |   |
|-----|---|-----|--|---|
|     |   |     |  |   |
| 6.7 | Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.   | Yes |  | <p>Our letters address all points raised, provide reasons for decisions, and reference policy, law, the Ombudsman Code, etc, when relevant.</p> <p>Letters from the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Officers are checked by the Manager to ensure this.</p>  |
| 6.8 | Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint. | Yes |  | <p>Prior to the acknowledgement letter being sent, we will add any additional issues raised to the complaint. After that point, we will include any related issues that are raised and will apply an extension if necessary to address these.</p> <p>Any non-related issues that are raised after the acknowledgement letter has been sent will be considered and if they meet the criteria of a complaint, a new stage 1 will be logged to address them.</p> |
| 6.9 | Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the complaint stage;</li> </ul>  | Yes |  | Our complaint outcome letters are modelled on the Ombudsman's template, and   |



|  |   |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. the complaint definition;</li> <li>c. the decision on the complaint;</li> <li>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</li> <li>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</li> <li>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</li> <li>g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.</li> </ul> |  |  | include all of the required information. |
|--|---|--|--|--|

Stage 2

65

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation   |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|--|
| 6.10           | If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response. | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | The right to escalate to stage 2 as the final stage is detailed in our Comment, Compliments and Complaints procedure, as well as in the stage 1 outcome letters. |
| 6.11           | Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.                            | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | As per our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, stage 2 complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days of the escalation being requested.          |
| 6.12           | Residents must not be required to  | Yes              | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and</a>  |  |

|      |   |     |  |   |
|------|---|-----|--|---|
|      | explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response. |     | <a href="#">complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a>                           | Whilst we may ask for guidance from the complainant regarding what they consider to be outstanding and what outcome they are seeking, if this is not forthcoming we will proceed with the Stage 2 investigation and review the complaint in its entirety.   |
| 6.13 | The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.   | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | The Customer Care & Complaints Officer will handle a complaint at stage 1 and will investigate with colleagues from other teams.<br><br>At stage 2, the Customer Care & Complaints Manager will consider the complaint, and wherever possible look to review evidence with more senior colleagues than those involved at stage 1. |
| 6.14 | Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <b><u>within 20 working days</u></b> of the complaint being acknowledged.  | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | As per our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, stage 2 complaints are responded to in full within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, excluding where an extension is required.  |

|      |   |     |  |  |
|------|---|-----|--|--|
| 6.15 | Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident. | Yes | <a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a> | Any extensions to timescales are confirmed in writing and a new target date given. The reason for the extension is explained in the letter.  |
| 6.16 | When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.  | Yes |  | We provide the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman in our extension letters, as well as in all other formal correspondence relating to a complaint.  |
| 6.17 | A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.                                 | Yes |  | Outstanding actions are detailed in our complaint outcome letters, alongside timescales for completion when appropriate.<br><br>These actions are monitored by the complaint handler, and the case is kept open on our CRM system in a 'monitoring' state until it has been confirmed that all agreed actions have been completed. |
| 6.18 | Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide  | Yes |  | Our letters address all points   |

|      |   |     |  |  |
|------|---|-----|--|--|
|      | clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.  |     |  | raised, provide reasons for decisions, and reference policy, law, the Ombudsman Code, etc, when relevant.  |
| 6.19 | Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the complaint stage;</li> <li>b. the complaint definition;</li> <li>c. the decision on the complaint;</li> <li>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</li> <li>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</li> <li>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</li> <li>g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.</li> </ul> | Yes |  | Our complaint outcome letters are modelled on the Ombudsman's template and include all of the required information.  |
| 6.20 | Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.   | Yes |  | Staff investigating complaints are empowered to approach all staff members necessary to gather evidence and gain an understanding in order to provide a thorough response. |

## Section 7: Putting things right

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence  | Commentary / explanation  |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|---|
| 7.1            | <p>Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apologising;</li> <li>• Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;</li> <li>• Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;</li> <li>• Taking action if there has been delay;</li> <li>• Reconsidering or changing a decision;</li> <li>• Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;</li> <li>• Providing a financial remedy;</li> <li>• Changing policies, procedures or practices.</li> </ul> | Yes              | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p> | <p>This is detailed in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure, in the section '<i>How will complaints be dealt with?</i>'.</p> <p>Actions taken are detailed in the outcome letter, along with Next Steps for anything outstanding, and service improvements already identified at that stage. These are monitored within the complaint hub until completion.</p> |
| 7.2            | Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.  | Yes              |   | We seek to gain an understanding of the impact of any service failure and consider this when offering remedies.   |
| 7.3            | The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in   | Yes              |   | Actions taken are detailed in   |

|     |  |     |  |  |
|-----|--|-----|--|--|
|     | agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion. |     |  | the outcome letter, along with Next Steps for anything outstanding, and service improvements already identified at that stage. These are monitored within the complaint hub until completion. Cases with outstanding actions remain open on our CRM system for monitoring. |
| 7.4 | Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. | Yes |  | We agree on remedies in consultation with the Ombudsman's published advice on remedies and compensation.   |

## Section 8: Putting things right

71

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence   | Commentary / explanation  |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|---|
| 8.1            | <p>Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.</li> <li>b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept;</li> <li>c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;</li> <li>d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;</li> <li>e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and</li> <li>f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.</li> </ul> | Yes              | <p><a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing</a></p> | <p>Our Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement report contains this information.</p> <p>The 2024 Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement report was presented to the Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and Cabinet (Governing body) on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024. It was not possible to collate the end of year data and produce the report and present it to cabinet sooner due to the scheduling of their meetings. The report and governing body response have now been published.</p> <p>We intend to have the 2025 Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement report published by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025.</p> |

|     |   |     |   |   |
|-----|---|-----|---|---|
| 8.2 | The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this. | Yes | <a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing</a> | <p>The 2024 Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement report was presented to the Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and Cabinet (Governing body) on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024. It was not possible to collate the end of year data and produce the report and present it to cabinet sooner due to the scheduling of their meetings. The report and governing body response have been published.</p> <p>We intend to take the 2025 report to Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025, and have their response ready to be published by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025.</p> |
| 8.3 | Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.  | Yes |   | We carry out the self-assessment annually and are committed to additional reviews should there be a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.  |
| 8.4 | Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment   | Yes |   | We comply with all requests from the Ombudsman.   |



|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     | following an Ombudsman investigation.   |     |  |  |
| 8.5 | If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code. | Yes |  | If this situation did occur and we were unable to comply with the Code, then we would be committed to inform the Ombudsman and the affected complainants and publish this on our website with the appropriate timescales for the reconvening of the service. |

## Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

| Code provision | Code requirement   | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence  | Commentary / explanation  |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|---|
| 9.1            | Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.   | Yes              | <a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing/annual-housing-complaint-performance-service-improvement-report#section6">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing/annual-housing-complaint-performance-service-improvement-report#section6</a> | <p>We publish details of service improvements as part of our annual complaint performance and service improvement report.</p> <p>Identifying service improvements is considered an important part of a complaint investigation.</p> <p>The complaints hub liaises with the relevant department when trends are identified to examine possible improvements.</p> |
| 9.2            | A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery. | Yes              |   | <p>Complaints are regularly discussed in meetings and training sessions, including the benefits to the organisation of the information and opportunities they provide.</p> <p>The complaints hub encourages a positive</p>  |

|     |   |     |  |   |
|-----|---|-----|--|---|
|     |   |     |  | <p>approach to complaints within the organisation and build productive relationships with other teams in order to have open, well-informed discussions on resolutions and learning. We believe complaint investigations, resolution, and service improvements are best achieved through positive collaboration and clear ownership of issues.</p>   |
| 9.3 | <p>Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.</p> | Yes | <p><a href="https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing/annual-housing-complaint-performance-service-improvement-report#section6">https://www.oxford.gov.uk/complaints-council-housing/annual-housing-complaint-performance-service-improvement-report#section6</a></p> | <p>Learning and improvement from complaints is reported as part of the Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement report. This is available on our website. This report is presented to the governing body annually.</p> <p>Information regarding complaints is regularly featured in our tenant newsletter.</p> <p>Complaints performance and learning is reported to the Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel (of the Scrutiny Committee). Minutes and</p> |

|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     |   |     |  | <p>reports from these meetings are published on our website.</p> <p>We are currently exploring the best format for involving residents more with complaints and service improvements, with a view to forming a panel to discuss our approach, improvements, and trends.</p>  |
| 9.4 | <p>Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.</p> | Yes |  | <p>The Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager assesses themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision. This is done in collaboration with the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Officers, the complaints hubs handling non-housing related complaints, and management from other teams.</p> <p>The Landlord Services Manager has accountability for complaints handling.</p> |
| 9.5 | <p>In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support</p>   | Yes |  | <p>The Leader of Oxford City Council is responsible for complaints in their Cabinet portfolio.</p>   |

|     |   |     |  |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|--|
|     | a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').   |     |  |  |
| 9.6 | The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.  | Yes |  | <p>Complaints performance and learning is reported to the Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel (of the Scrutiny Committee). The MRC has access to this information and can approach staff at any point for further information.</p> <p>We will look to implement quarterly reporting to the MRC to ensure we are more proactively sharing information.</p>             |
| 9.7 | <p>As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;</li> <li>b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;</li> <li>c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in</li> </ul> | Yes |  | <p>Complaints performance and learning is reported to the Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel (of the Scrutiny Committee).</p> <p>The 2024 Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement report was presented to the Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and Cabinet (Governing body) on</p> |

|     |   |     |   |  |
|-----|---|-----|---|--|
|     | <p>complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and</p> <p>d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.</p>  |     |   | <p>16<sup>th</sup> October 2024. We intend to take the 2025 report to Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025.</p>  |
| 9.8 | <p>Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:</p> <p>a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;</p> <p>b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and</p> <p>c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.</p> | Yes | <p><a href="#">Comments, compliments and complaints procedure   Oxford City Council</a></p> | <p>This is all reflected in our Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure.</p> <p>This approach is also regularly reinforced internally through training and communication, overseen by the Customer Care &amp; Complaints Manager.</p> |

**To:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025  
**Report of:** Director of Housing  
**Title of Report:** Q3 Building Compliance Report for OCC HRA Stock  
 September - December 2024

| Introduction                 |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Decision being taken:</b> | To note the content of this report.                          |
| <b>Key decision:</b>         | No   |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>       | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing           |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | Thriving Communities   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>     | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028. |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Recommendation(s):</b> That Cabinet resolves to: |
| 1. Note the content of this report.                 |

| Information Exempt From Publication |
|-------------------------------------|
| None                                |

| Appendix No. | Appendix Title  | Exempt from Publication |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Appendix 1   | Q3 Summary Data |                         |

## 1. Introduction and background

1.1. This report outlines the building compliance status for OCC’s HRA stock, covering statutory requirements, reports on compliance, adherence to decency standards as well as the Regulator for Social Housing’s requirements.

- 1.2. The Building Compliance Team within Property Services reports monthly on performance relating to compliance and allows operational and strategic direction to achieve and improve delivery where identified.
- 1.3. A quarterly compliance report (this report) is then produced for the Quarterly Compliance Board currently chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive for Place before a review by CLT, and circulation to relevant members.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. Attached in Appendix 1 is the quarterly summary compliance dashboard.
- 2.2. Overall performance for Q3 has been positive, with fourteen of the twenty-one indicators at 100%, three within the KPI threshold, and one (installation of Smartlink monitors) not having a KPI but reported for information only. The body of the report below covers all indicators which are not at 100% irrespective of the KPI parameters.
- 2.3. There remains a challenge with getting data returns in a timely manner, largely due to the manual nature of the processes involved. This is particularly relevant to external contractors who have no access to our systems to update jobs or works.
- 2.4. To resolve this, work continues to develop the contractor portal access to QL which will allow real-time monitoring and improve our ability to manage and report on contractor performance. It is anticipated that contractor testing will be undertaken within the next quarter with the portal going live in April 2025. In the interim, colleagues are actively working with contractors to ensure timely data receipt.
- 2.5. There is a need for continued auditing of asset data via various works streams such as the rolling stock condition survey and insurance building surveys which have identified omissions in the asset lists e.g. including three passenger lifts, which have now been included in the planned maintenance programmes.



- 2.6. A review of stairlift data identified one hundred and seventy-seven stairlifts that are on the servicing contract but not being certificated under the LOLER regulations. With a more robust approach being introduced to building compliance these have now been added to the LOLER test and certification programme. Other compliance areas are being audited to ensure data accuracy.
- 2.7. Identified issues are currently being resolved, significantly reducing risk to the Council, providing greater confidence in our knowledge base of the assets for which the Council is responsible and providing assurance going forwards that servicing and certification will cover all OCC's responsibilities.
- 2.8. A schedule of auditing is currently being developed to support each delivery workstream and service area. An audit programme will be rolled out with the first audit scheduled to commence in March 2025.
- 2.9. By way of a trial in this area, we have undertaken a compliance audit on properties used by the Housing Needs Team and are working with them to deliver corrective actions.
- 2.10. Training remains a key focus for Property Services, and the Compliance Team is contributing to the development of training, and the identification of what training is needed by which personnel. The team has recently written two eLearning modules, Legionella and Asbestos Awareness to be rolled out to all site-based staff.

### 3. Exception Report on Compliance Performance

#### 3.1 Domestic Electrical Safety

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| % of domestic sites with a compliant status (ie satisfactory EICR, 5-year EIC) | <b>94.60%</b> |
|--|---------------|

- 3.1.1. The effects of the change of testing frequency from 10-years, through 7-years, to 5-years, has largely been addressed. Non-compliant properties include:
- 3.1.2. 218 properties with overdue tests resulting from no access. ODS are currently working with Housing Management to gain access to these properties.

3.1.3. 172 properties with unsatisfactory certificates which require major remedial works, mainly rewires. ODS are again working with Housing Management to arrange access to these properties or resolve hoarding/overcrowding issues.

3.1.4. In both instances the combined efforts are getting positive results which will reflect in improved performance over Q4.

### **3.2 Communal Electrical Safety**

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| % of communal sites with a compliant status (ie satisfactory EICR, 5-year EIC) (including, satellite offices & boiler houses) | <b>99.34%</b> |
|---|---------------|

4. There are three properties with overdue tests. Pound House, due for completion in January, Tompson Terrace which will become void in January thereby allowing access to the electric cupboard, and Blackbird Leys Road which is awaiting quote approval.

3.2.1. It is projected that 100% Compliance will be achieved during Q4.

### **3.3 Emergency Lighting**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| % of emergency lighting sites with a compliant status (ie passed certificate for 3hr annual drain down test) | <b>99.81%</b> |
|--|---------------|

3.3.1. Compliance with statutory testing regimes has very significantly improved across the quarter (Q1 - 49.5%; Q3 - 99.71%) with the majority of identified issues being resolved. One site is outstanding due to access issues. This test is booked for January on completion of which we will be reporting 100% compliance.

### **3.4 Fire doors**

3.4.1. A fire door and hatch inspection programme has been commissioned through ODS, which commenced on 20th January and is scheduled to be completed before the end of March. Every asset will be tagged and information, including photographs and every individual report, will be uploaded to QL. This data will be used to inform future fire-door maintenance and replacement programs.

### **3.5 FRA Inspection Actions - Blocks Overdue**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| % of actions which are overdue, having gone past the FRA suggested timeframe for completion. | <b>50.71%</b> |
|--|---------------|

3.5.1. Quarterly compliance has fallen significantly. Most FRA assessments were undertaken in June/July which means a number of medium risk actions become overdue in December, greatly impacting on compliance performance.

3.5.2. The Fire Safety team has continued to work through these and has prioritised the high-risk actions first. Of the 3,450 HRA actions, 980 were completed by December. It is projected that another tranche of over 100 actions will be completed in January with a minimum of 500 further completions during Q4.

3.5.3. These actions include a large number of individual items, such as doors, which fall into overarching programmes which have been developed for ODS to deliver within the next twelve to eighteen months.

3.5.4. A Corporate Fire Safety manager has been recruited, and we are currently preparing recruitment for Fire Risk Assessors to oversee the process and deliver FRAs internally to ensure a consistent approach.

**3.6 Fire Alarms and equipment test & inspection**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| % of HRA fire alarms sites (communal, domestic, satellite offices, hostel, TA, sheltered) with compliant 3 monthly periodic inspection | <b>93.34%</b> |
|--|---------------|

3.6.1. Our Fire Alarm inspection compliance has been below target over the quarter and was significantly down in December resulting from staff sickness within the contractor workforce. At a meeting with the contractor, OCC received assurance that changes have been made to ensure business continuity going forward and that resources have been allocated to swiftly address the backlog.

3.6.2. The current Sureserve contracted inspection cycle for fire alarms is 3 monthly. The Code of Practice as detailed in BS5839-1 states that these inspections need to be undertaken by a trained and competent person every six months, supported by weekly tests and monthly visual inspection undertaken by client employees in line with current practice. We are currently in discussion with ODS

to ensure all such inspections are undertaken and recorded – ODS are currently developing their tablets to allow live-time reporting and analysis.

### 3.7 Asbestos Management

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| % of HRA communal areas with a compliant communal inspection report inc. communication centers, satellite offices and boiler houses. | <b>99.78%</b> |
|--|---------------|

5. Quarterly performance was impacted by poor compliance in October. The November and December Asbestos inspections ran at 100%, leaving the quarterly performance Amber. It is anticipated that 100% compliance will be achieved in Q4.

### 3.8 Lift Safety

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| % of stairlifts with 6 monthly service and maintenance visits undertaken. [NOTE - Servicing Performance Indicator] (Council stock) | <b>94.50%</b> |
|--|---------------|

3.8.1. In December a Compliance Team audit of certification against servicing records identified 177 domestic stairlifts on the service contract that were not on the LOLER certification programme. These have been added to the contract as of 23/01/25 and inspections will commence in February. This will impinge on compliance performance until this backlog has been addressed, although we propose adding assets after the test to ensure that the data on the servicing contract is correct.

3.8.2. Audit also identified three passenger lifts not on the test and inspection programme for LOLER compliance. These have now been added to contract, and all will be tested and certificated during January 2025.

### 3.9 Lightning Protection

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| % of lightning protection systems (general needs and sheltered sites tested with 11 months) | <b>66.67%</b> |
|---|---------------|

The three non-compliant systems are at:

- 3.9.1. Plowman Tower. Remedial works are scheduled for January.

3.9.2. 37-59 Pennywell Drive. Major works are required which will necessitate road closures. Works are scheduled for completion in April.

3.9.3. 9-16 Snow House. Major works are required, but start is delayed awaiting confirmation of responsibility.

### **3.10 Bollard & Gates**

3.10.1. To date no installations requiring statutory inspection have been identified as HRA assets, although the Compliance Team are undertaking an asset review to confirm.

### **3.11 Damp and Mould**

3.11.1. We have installed 37 Smartlink systems, each equipped with multiple damp monitors that collect data on the home environment of our tenants. This allows us to proactively address issues related to damp and mould.

3.11.2. Eleven tenants have downloaded the app and are using the tool to help prevent damp and mould in their home.

3.11.3. Training of staff from the Damp and Mould team to monitor and manage the data will be commencing shortly.

### **3.12 Decency Standards**

3.12.1. Stock condition surveys continue to progress. Results to date are being used to inform the five-year capital investment programme to improve decency across the portfolio which is currently standing at 96.7% based on latest data from the stock condition surveys (74.4% of stock inspected).

3.12.2. The stock condition survey will be undertaken annually to ensure continued monitoring of stock decency.

## **4. Conclusion**

4.1. Historically OCC's recording of certification, maintenance programmes and asset listings has been largely done manually and therefore not in a system

driven manner, risking poor or missing data and poor performance on testing regimes. Much of this can be attributed to the changeover of systems around 2018/19 and introduction of QL. However, QL has developed considerably, enabling uploading and management of assets in a better and more reliable way. Areas of the QL modules continue to improve the way OCC operates in these areas (such as the contractor portal).

- 4.2. This report demonstrates the improvements and measures being taken by the delivery and compliance teams in Property Services, to identify areas of omission and concern and implement effective corrective actions to maintain and improve OCC's high standard of compliance in its social housing stock within continued development.

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Report author</b>       | Aidan Heed   |
| Job title                  | Senior Surveyor (Interim) HRA                                |
| Service area or department | Property Services  |
| Telephone                  | 07483 010896   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:ahead@oxford.gov.uk">ahead@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Background Papers:</b> |  |
| 1                         | Appendix 1 – Summary of Quarterly Compliance Dashboard |
| 2                         |  |
| 3                         |  |
| 4                         |  |

This page is intentionally left blank



**Appendix 1 – Q3 Summary Data**

| Workstream<br>(TSM measure)                      | Performance indicator  | Target            | Target              | 2024/25<br>Q1 – average compliance | 2024/25<br>Q2 – average compliance | 2024/25<br>Q3 – average compliance |
|--|--|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Area of compliance                               | Description  | Compliance target | Total Annual Amount | Ave. across April, May, June       | Ave. across July, Aug, Sept        | Ave. across Oct, Nov, Dec          |
| <b>Gas safety - Social Housing Stock</b>         | % domestic properties (with gas appliances with a valid LGSR)  | 100%              | 7015                | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
|  | % gas carcasses (with no gas appliances) with a valid LGSR)  | 100%              | 19                  | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
|  | <b>Gas safety (Private Sector Leased)</b><br>% domestic properties (with gas appliances) with a valid LGSR                                     | 100%              | 4                   | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
| <b>Gas Safety social housing (boiler houses)</b> | % HRA communal boiler sites (i.e district and communal heating systems with a valid CP15)  | 100%              | 27                  | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
| <b>Electrical compliance</b>                     | % of domestic sites with a compliant status (ie satisfactory EICR, 5 year EIC)   | 100%              | 7924                | 91.66%                             | 93.25%                             | 94.60%                             |
|  | % of communal sites with a compliant status (ie satisfactory EICR, 5 year EIC) (including Satellite offices & boiler houses)                   | 100%              | 404                 | 98.50%                             | 98.70%                             | 99.34%                             |
|  | <b>Electrical compliance (Private Sector Leased)</b><br>% of domestic sites with a compliant status (ie satisfactory EICR, 5 year EIC, In-date | 100%              | 8                   | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
| <b>Smoke Alarms</b>                              | Properties with working of Smoke Alarms, from EICR, LGSR or void   | 100%              | Variable            | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
| <b>Carbon Alarms</b>                             | Properties with confirmed working of Carbon Monoxide alarms.   | 100%              | Variable            | 100%                               | 100%                               | 100%                               |
| <b>Fire Safety (TSM BS02)</b>                    | % of emergency lighting sites with a compliant status (ie passed certificate for 3hr annual drain down test)                                   | 100%              | 335                 | 49.50%                             | 62.33%                             | 99.81%                             |
|  | % of sites (High-Med-Low rise, sheltered, storage, hostels, boiler houses) with a valid fire risk assessment                                   | 100%              | 498 (HRA FRA's)     | 99.00%                             | 98.50%                             | 100.00%                            |

|   |  |      |                    |        |        |         |
|---|--|------|--------------------|--------|--------|---------|
| <b>Fire Alarms</b>  | % of actions which are not overdue past FRA recommended timeframe  | 100% | 498<br>(HRA FRA's) | 79.51% | 72.75% | 50.71%  |
|   | % of HRA fire alarms sites (communal, domestic, satellite offices, hostel, TA, sheltered) with compliant 3 monthly periodic inspection           | 100% | 65                 | 85.67% | 79.59% | 93.34%  |
| <b>Dry risers</b>   | % of dry risers (general needs + sheltered buildings) with a certificate of conformity and received twice yearly compliance visits               | 100% | 26                 | 94.00% | 100%   | 100.00% |
| <b>Lightning Protection Systems</b>                             | % of lighting protection systems (general needs and sheltered sites tested with 11 months)   | 100% | 13                 | 100%   | 100%   | 66.67   |
| <b>Asbestos (TSM BS03)</b>                                      | % of HRA communal areas with a compliant communal inspection report including satellite offices & boiler houses                                  | 100% | 615                | 100%   | 100%   | 99.78%  |
| <b>Legionella risk assessments and water quality (TSM BS04)</b> | % of sites (HRA Housing communal cold-water tanks, Sheltered, HPU's, Boosted-water sites) with a valid risk assessment                           | 100% | 510                | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
|   | % of actions completed within RA recommended timeframes. [NOTE - Actions Performance Indicator]  | 100% | Variable           | 99.00% | 100%   | 100%    |
| <b>Lifts (TSM BS05)</b>   | % of site with passenger lifts (General Needs, Sheltered, Operational Sites, HPU) with insurance inspection compliancy. (Temporary accomodation) | 100% | 28                 | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
|   | % of sites with monthly service and maintenance visits undertaken. [NOTE - Servicing Performance Indicator] (Council stock)                      | 100% | 31                 | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
| <b>Stair lifts + other equipment [Adaptations]</b>              | % of stair lifts with 6 monthly service and maintenance visits undertaken. [NOTE - Servicing Performance Indicator] (Council stock)              | 100% | 194                | 100%   | 100%   | 94.50%  |
|   | % of stairlifts with thorough inspection compliancy (Council stock, insurance) annually.   | 100% | 6                  | 50.00% | 50.00% | 100%    |

|                                     |   |      |                |        |        |         |
|-------------------------------------|---|------|----------------|--------|--------|---------|
| <b>Barriers, gates and bollards</b> | % of other equipment (i.e. runways(25), Anchor Point (5) hoist(1), bath lifts(0) and slings (0)) with LOLER inspection compliancy                             | 100% | 31             | 91.14% | 58.33% | 100.00% |
|                                     | % of other equipment with 6 monthly or annual service and maintenance visits undertaken. [NOTE - Servicing Performance Indicator]                             | 100% | 28             | 87.54% | 73.55% | 100%    |
|                                     | % HRA automated barriers and gates (across general needs, sheltered, operational sites) with a RA & planned preventative maintenance carried out bi-annually. | 100% | 0              | N/A    | N/A    | N/A     |
| <b>Play sites</b>                   | % of HRA play sites with an independent annual inspection report.   | 100% | 13             | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
|                                     | % of HRA play sites with an bi-monthly operational inspection report.   | 100% | 13             | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
| <b>Damp and Mould</b>               | Number of urgent actions outstanding. [NOTE - Actions Performance Indicator]  | 100% | Responsive KPI | 100%   | 95.24% |         |
|                                     | Responding effectively to reports of damp and mould   | 100% | Responsive KPI | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
|                                     | (% of enquiries resolved in a year) – incl. council TA  | 100% | Responsive KPI | 100%   | 100%   | 100%    |
|                                     | Investing in our stock to prevent damp and mould by installing Smart Link monitors, when identified (number of properties improved in a year)                 |      |                |        |        |         |

This page is intentionally left blank

**To:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 6 March 2025  
**Report of:** Director of Housing  
**Title of Report:** Update on Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Pressures (April to December 2024)

| Summary and recommendations  |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Decision being taken:</b> | N/A  |
| <b>Key decision:</b>         | No   |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>       | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | Good, affordable homes.  |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>     | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy                  |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Recommendation(s):</b> That Panel resolves to:        |
| 1. For Housing and Homelessness Panel to note the report |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Report author</b>       | Richard Wood   |
| Job title                  | Housing Strategy and Needs Manager                           |
| Service area or department | Housing Services   |
| Telephone                  | 01865 252002   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:rwood@oxford.gov.uk">rwood@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

**Key Temporary Accommodation (TA) Demand Indicators**

| Description   | Result at EOY 23/24 (March) | Result December 2024        | Comments  | RAG rating |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|------------|
| 1.1 Number of households in temporary accommodation (all types)                       | 246                         | 237                         | <p>The number of households in TA in Oxford has seen a small decline since March 24. Good progress made between May and Dec with number slowly coming down due to mitigations taken by the Council. However, with homelessness rates and new TA placements still high, significant risk of further increases, keeping the rating at amber. This modest decrease has been made possible by the Council's ongoing investment in homelessness prevention and the expansion of move-on accommodation.</p> <p>Outside of the reporting period, a very challenging January saw a further 63 households placed into TA, so we expect ongoing pressure.</p>   | Amber      |
| 1.2 Number of households in hotel accommodation                                       | 123                         | 107                         | <p>With the overall decrease in TA numbers, the number of households in hotels and BnB accommodation has also declined. In addition to the previously mentioned factors, this reduction has been further supported by the introduction of new PSL TA accommodation (see mitigation below for details). However, with 107 households still in hotels, the rating remains amber.</p>  | Amber      |
| 1.3 Number of households with children in hotels over 6 weeks                         | 14                          | 8                           | <p>The Council has a responsibility to avoid hotel placements for 6 weeks and over for households with children. We had 14 families in hotel accommodation in March 24 over 6 weeks, whilst trying to source accommodation for those families. Since March a huge effort has led to this number coming down significantly to 3 in September 2024. However, we have since seen an increase and this number has now gone to 8, despite the measures put in place. This is due to an increased presentation rate of families. Mitigations includes more PSL leasing, continued focus on sourcing move on accommodation in social and private sectors, and increased staffing to assist with homelessness decisions and caseworking. RAG rating changed to red due to increase.</p> | Red        |
| 1.4 Current weekly placement rate into temporary accommodation (number of households) | 10.18 (Oct 23 to Mar 24)    | 8.97 (April to Dec average) | <p>Despite a slight decrease since March, the number of households being placed in TA remains exceptionally high. On average, 8-9 households enter TA each week, a significant increase from the previous norm of 3-4. While efforts are being made to reduce this through investment in prevention services, broader factors such as housing market conditions and</p>   | Red        |

|  |                |                     |   |  |
|--|----------------|---------------------|---|--|
|  |                |                     | economic conditions continue to play a major role. In particular, rising rental costs leading to PRS evictions and discharges from a Home Office Asylum hotel are key contributors to homelessness in the city.   |  |
| 1.5 Number of accepted homelessness relief cases per quarter (most recent published quarter) | 103 (Q4 23/24) | 121 (Q3 Oct-Dec 24) | The number of accepted homelessness relief cases remains at historic highs in Oxford, and risen further, linked to factors explained in the previous comment. Two years ago, we typically accepted 30-40 relief cases a quarter, we accepted 121 last quarter, which demonstrates the high levels of homelessness in the city. It's putting considerable strain on the Housing Needs Team to be able to support the increased number of households approaching us, but staffing has been increased. |  |

| Temporary Accommodation Demand Mitigations |  |                  |   |            |
|--|--|------------------|---|------------|
| Area                                       | Description  | Progress statues | Comments  | RAG rating |
| 2.0 Prevention                             | 2.1 Delivery of Homelessness Prevention "Invest to Save" to increase teams capacity to focus on prevention | Completed        | A fixed term investment has been made into the Councils Housing Options and Early Intervention teams from a central government grant, with 4 new officers recruited, and is supporting a large increase in number of households being supported and an increase in successful outcomes achieved (see points below). Due to the success we have extended the resource for at least another year via grant funds.   |            |
|  | 2.2 Homelessness Prevention 50% or more of all duties taken  | Ongoing          | A good indicator of health in statutory homelessness services is the balance between how much activity a Council does at the prevention stage v. how much it does in relief (once someone is already homeless). Therefore we target 50% or more of our duties to be Prevention Duties. During the first three quarters of the year we have achieved 53.7% prevention, but the recent months have seen more relief taken due to increased homelessness presentations, we continue to monitor and will take action if required. |            |
|  | 2.3 Percentage of homelessness prevention outcomes being   | Ongoing          | We have also seen an increase in the number of prevention cases we close with a successful outcome. In 23/24 we achieved 52.5% having a successful outcome (with the rest either homeless or lost contact). So far in 24/25 we are achieving 62.8%, an  |            |

|  |  |            |   |  |
|--|--|------------|---|--|
|  | positive   |            | increase in positive cases, breaking down to 40 households sustained in current accommodation, and 63 households supported to move to alternative accommodation before becoming homeless. This is a considerable achievement in the current difficult housing market conditions.  |  |
| 3.0<br>Expand<br>TA stock<br>to lower<br>hotel use | 3.1 Develop and expand a private sector leasing (PSL) scheme   | Delivering | We have successfully established a PSL scheme targeting an initial 30 units to be used as TA, including three HMOs. We have now achieved this target, with ODS undertaking works in our HMO units ensuring all meet the same standards as the council owned stock, all units should be in use by April.   |  |
|  | 3.2 Use more Council stock for the purpose of TA, to prevent households having long stays in hotels.       | Delivering | We continue to gradually move more housing stock into TA use, whilst seeking to avoid a significant impact on overall supply, in particular to ensure families are not spending long periods in hotel rooms.  |  |
|  | 3.3 Launch a new Temporary Accommodation Procurement Framework, to drive up standards and drive down cost. | Delivering | Cabinet approved the creation of the framework in May. Work is underway with providers joining the framework, and finalisation is imminent, ready for the first rooms to be purchased from the framework before April.  |  |
|  | 3.4 Continue to develop and seek approval for other schemes to expand the Council's TA stock               | Ongoing    | Working with Housing Associations and the Council stock to repurpose stock for TA use ahead of redevelopment. Currently Richard Grey Court is being decanted by GreenSq and will be used for TA for a few years ahead of redevelopment. We are also consulting with tenants in Windale House and Northbrook House about redevelopment, with a recommendation to Cabinet on how to proceed in due course. If we proceed with the decant, we will use the blocks as TA between the decant and the demolition. |  |
| 4 Increase the move on of homeless                 | 4.1 Maximize PRS move on   | Ongoing    | Service development and investment in our PRS Procurement Team continues to deliver in a very challenging market, with them securing 109 new lets to homeless households from April to December.  |  |



|                      |                                       |         |   |  |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---|--|
| households out of TA | 4.2 Maximize access to social housing | Ongoing | In order to meet our statutory obligations, we target 40% of all lets to homeless households. Between April and December 35.56% of new lets went to homeless households in TA, up from 24.82% for the same period last year. We are currently not on target for 40%, so the team are focusing on this for Q4. |  |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---|--|

This page is intentionally left blank

**To:** Housing and Homeless Panel  
**Date:** 6 March 2025  
**Report of:** Nerys Parry, Director of Housing  
**Title of Report:** Briefing report on a finding from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

| <b>Summary and recommendations</b> |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Decision being taken:</b>       | N/A.   |
| <b>Key decision:</b>               | No   |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>             | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>         | Good, affordable homes   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>           | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy                  |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Recommendation(s):</b> That Housing and Homelessness Panel resolves to:   |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>For Housing and Homelessness Panel to note the report;</b></li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol> |

1. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman wrote to the Council in December 2024, informing us of their findings that the Council made a number of faults in the service we provided to a household who became homeless in 2023, and presented to our homelessness services, giving us a number of actions to rectify the situation for the client, but also ensure learning and changes in services.

2. One action was to provide this report to the relevant scrutiny committee of the Council.
3. The failings involve several aspects of the service we offered the client and are detailed in the table below. The Housing Needs Team have now made a number of changes to our service offer to ensure the mistakes are not repeated.
4. It is important to explain the wider context at the time of these faults. Housing Services were experiencing an unprecedented rise in demand for our services, and the operational team was struggling to deal with the number of clients presenting as homeless. This also coincided with a challenging period of staffing as we struggled to recruit and retain experienced Housing Options Officers as LAs across the Country expanded their Housing Teams in the face of growing demand.
5. We have since invested heavily in additional staff and training which has resulted in improved staffing levels and retention, with significant improvements to quality and quantity of work. This action was acknowledged and welcomed by the Ombudsman in their report.
6. The table below contains a brief overview of the Ombudsman findings in the case as well as the service improvements we have implemented in response to the Ombudsman decision, as well as changes made in our ongoing efforts to improve and develop our services.

| <b>Ombudsman Finding</b>   | <b>OCC response and actions to ensure compliance</b>   |
|--|--|
| <p>The customer approached the Council as homeless. The customer was issued with a homeless application as was the procedure at the time, to complete at home.</p> <p>The Ombudsman found that we had not fulfilled our statutory duty by issuing a homeless application for the customer to complete and should have accepted the application without needing the form completed.</p>   | <p>A new procedure is now in place where homelessness applications are completed by a Housing Officer during a pre-arranged meeting with the customer, in line with good practice.</p> <p>This joint meeting includes the initiation of any further investigations that need to take place to determine if a housing duty is owed.</p>   |
| <p>The customer submitted the homeless application form in August 2023 following receipt of a court issued possession order. The customer states that we lost this form, and the Ombudsman agreed, and in September 2023 the customer moved into an unsecured tenancy. The customer could not afford the rent and borrowed money from friends to pay it. In October 2023, the customer approached the Council again and was advised that she needed to complete another homeless application form.</p> | <p>Housing Officers have been reminded that waiting for a court issued possession order is not required for the Council to decide on whether a housing duty is owed.</p> <p>The homelessness application form is now an online product completed with an officer, which is stored within our secure housing database. Applications are completed by a Housing Officer online with the customer, meaning they cannot be lost.</p> |
| <p>The homeless application was submitted with the support of a local charity in October 2023. The Housing Options</p>   | <p>The Officer in charge of the case who lost the original homeless application form and failed to accept a housing duty</p>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Officer who was dealing with the case failed to take the case forward correctly and did not accept a housing duty.</p>   | <p>has had their performance addressed in line with the Council's performance management policy, and no performance issues with the officer have been identified since its completion.</p>  |
| <p>In January 2024, the customer could no longer afford the rent and was placed into a B&amp;B by the charity supporting her over the weekend. On the following Monday, the Council placed the customer into another B&amp;B. A homelessness duty was still not accepted.</p> <p>In February 2024, following representation from a local solicitor's firm, a homelessness relief duty was accepted, and a personalised housing plan was sent to the customer.</p> | <p>Fortnightly case supervision by Housing Options Team Leaders has been improved for all housing officers, overseeing what officers are doing with each case, allowing us to spot errors in staff work.</p> <p>Reporting improvements allow managers to more easily spot service failure and ensure they are corrected.</p> <p>Clearer expectations of the service required for each case has been provided to the housing officers with clear deadlines for completion.</p> |
| <p>The client complained about the service provided. The Council responded to the complaint in a timely manner apologising for its errors but failed to offer a right of reply or escalation.</p> <p>The complaint was escalated to stage 2 by the charity supporting the customer and a response was sent apologising for the errors made along with an offer of</p>   | <p>A new corporate complaints hub has now been implemented which has overarching responsibility for ensuring complaints are dealt with in line with the Ombudsman best practice guidance, including always informing the complainant of escalation routes.</p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>compensation for £400.</p> <p>The customer was unhappy with our response and escalated the complaint to the Ombudsman in April 2024.</p>   |  |
| <p>After 10 weeks in a B&amp;B, the customer moved to a property in the private rented sector. This breached the governments statutory target for families living in B&amp;Bs of 6 weeks.</p> | <p>As Housing Panel is aware, the Council has been impacted by an unprecedented increase in homelessness demand in recent years. This includes our placement rate into temporary accommodation rising from 3-4 a week 2 years ago, to 8-10 now. The Council has insufficient temporary accommodation stock to cope with these levels of demand and has had to use hotels and B&amp;B to continue to provide accommodation.</p> <p>While we regret anybody having to stay for prolonged periods in hotels and B&amp;B, we must use what accommodation is available to us while we expand our TA stock, which once delivered will mean we have less use of hotels and B&amp;B in the future. The Ombudsman in their response did acknowledge this pressure, and our work to bring down hotel use in their decision letter.</p> <p>In 2024 we implemented a families in</p> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>B&amp;B reduction plan in partnership with MHCLG. This plan involved significant investment in additional staffing to both support prevention and increase the speed of move on from TA, the procurement of additional properties in the private rented sector and changes to annual lettings plan to increase move on to social housing. This approach has drastically reduced the numbers exceeding 6 weeks and has been cited by MHCLG as best practice as part of their wider work with local housing authorities.</p> |
| <p><b>Ombudsman recommendations</b></p>  |   |
| <p>Apologise to Ms X for the fault identified in this case. This apology should be in accordance with the Ombudsman’s new guidance Making an effective apology.</p>  | <p>A letter was sent to the customer by the Head of Housing Services on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2025.</p>   |
| <p>Pay Ms X £200 as an acknowledgement of the time and trouble she has spent pursuing this complaint.</p> <p>Pay Ms X £500 to recognise her distress and uncertainty.</p> <p>Pay Ms X £600 for the impact of being placed in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for four weeks more than the six allowed. This figure is based on £150 per week.</p> | <p>A payment of £3650 was made to the customer in December 2024</p>   |



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Pay Ms X £2,350 in recognition of her avoidable financial loss.</p>  |  |
| <p>Remind relevant staff of the importance of effective complaint handling, including offering escalation.</p> <p>Share a copy of this decision with staff in the relevant departments to consider the lessons that can be learned from this case and remind staff of the Council's duties.</p> | <p>The Homelessness Prevention Manager held sessions with the Housing Teams to highlight the importance of identifying complaints and explaining the role of the new OCC complaints hub, alongside reflecting on the wider learning from the case. A copy of the Ombudsman's findings was shared with Housing managers and staff involved in the case.</p> |
| <p>Refer this decision and the lessons learned outcomes to the Cabinet Member for Housing and the scrutiny committee.</p>   | <p>Cabinet portfolio holder briefing held in January 2025</p> <p>Ombudsman's findings added to the housing scrutiny panel agenda for March 2025 (this report).</p>   |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Report author</b>       | James Pickering  |
| Job title                  | Homelessness Prevention Manager  |
| Service area or department | Housing Services   |
| Telephone                  | 01865 252831   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:jpickering@oxford.gov.uk">jpickering@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

This page is intentionally left blank