

Draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Oxford 2023 to 2028

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Foreword

When we started developing a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy for the city and engaging the public on priorities last year, we started by stating the problem as we saw it – that Oxford is facing a housing and homelessness crisis.

The evidence for this is clear - the city's housing is some of the most unaffordable in the country when compared to local incomes – both to rent and to buy. Rough sleeping levels increased over the last decade and have remained stubbornly high. Our statutory homelessness services are under strain, due to many of the city's residents seeking help when faced with high rents. The city's housing stock requires investment to meet the challenges of a net zero carbon future. More decent, affordable homes are needed, but land is scarce. These are all considerable problems, but problems that the Council is determined to tackle.

Unfortunately, since starting out on developing our new strategy the housing challenges facing the city have only grown – from the cost of living crisis that is seeing rising bills for all, to our desire to provide sanctuary to people fleeing war zones and hardship in other parts of the world, and public services across the board under strain while trying to recover from the pandemic. All of these developments further contribute to the challenges of affordability in the city and the insufficient supply of homes in the city to those who need them.

The challenges the city faces in terms of housing and homelessness can at times seem overwhelming, but the Council is determined to tackle them and make a difference on the issues of unaffordability, insufficient supply, and the need for improved housing conditions to improve the homes and lives of the city's residents.

This strategy, developed by the Council in partnership with key stakeholders, sets out how the Council and its partners will do this. I believe the ambition contained in this document lays out a plan that will make progress against these key challenges in the years ahead, and highlights the steps we will take to meet the priorities we are committed to deliver on. The 5 year period of this strategy will see the Council making unprecedented investment in recent decades towards developing new social housing, investment into our tenants homes, and rollout innovative and sector leading approaches to homelessness and rough sleeping, to name just a few of its commitments.

I look forward to working with the Oxford community and our partners and stakeholders, to deliver our commitments outlined in this strategy.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing

Introduction – about this strategy

The effects of homelessness and the impact of not having a good quality home where you feel safe have devastating effects on people and families. This strategy – Oxford's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, sets the direction and priorities - between now and 2028 - for how we, together with partners, are going to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Oxford. It sets out the steps that we will take to meet our vision:

'By 2028, addressing Oxford's need for more affordable housing, improving the standard of housing in the city while lowering its carbon impact, with services and partnerships that are focussed on preventing people losing their homes, rapidly rehouse those who become homeless, and ending the need to sleep rough.'

This strategy has been in development since early 2021, with the creation of a Homelessness Review for the city and wider strategy evidence base. The review and evidence base pulls together the key information we needed to know in order to develop the ideas and direction of travel to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Oxford – it underpins and informs this strategy.

The review and evidence base includes information about the levels of homelessness in the city, who is affected by homelessness and the reasons they are made homeless. It includes detailed information about what we as a Council and other organisations do to prevent homelessness. It also incorporates data and information about wider housing issues, such as the Council's role as a social landlord, what is happening in the private rented sector, the plans to build more affordable homes, and the need to tackle the role housing has in carbon emissions. Together, it forms a unified and clear picture of the current state of housing and homelessness in the city, as well as our challenges and opportunities, and informs the priorities for the Council for the next 5 years.

During summer 2021, we consulted on the review and evidence base, as well as a draft vision and emerging priorities for the new strategy. We wanted to make sure that the public, partners and stakeholders could have a say early on in the strategy development process, let us know if we had included all the relevant information we needed to look at, and if we had drawn the right conclusions and developed the right priorities. The consultation feedback largely endorsed our work, which gave us the green light to draft this strategy, taking all the consultation feedback on-board.

The housing and homelessness crisis in Oxford is not a situation that has developed recently. It has long been one of the most prominent issues for this city. Since the implementation of the last Housing and Homelessness Strategy in 2018, we have come a long way in meeting our strategic housing and homelessness goals.

We have increased affordable housing available to those in housing need, invested in the homes we own, successfully implemented new homelessness legislation, increased the number of people we are assisting to prevent becoming homeless, and we responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by changing the way people could access our services by moving Council services into our local communities.

Despite the successes and the progress we have made over the last few years, there is still more work to do. To make a significant difference for residents of the city we face big challenges to deliver what we need to do under this strategy.

- The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are still being felt by many in our community, and public services are still adjusting to post pandemic demand.
- Financial pressure on people in Oxford due to the cost of living crisis that has gripped the country in the aftermath of the pandemic, is likely to lead to more households becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Recent national predictions are that homelessness is going to increase and cause further pressure on local authorities.
- The Council is under significant financial pressure and will need to make tough choices over the coming years. The Council has seen a large reduction in incoming funds after a decade of austerity measures, and the Council's ability to generate income to fund services has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis.
- High inflation impacts the services we provide, including rising costs of building material and labour for our new housing developments.
- We still need to deliver more affordable homes in the city to meet housing need, and while there are plans in place to do so, supply needs to go further so that it will make a real impact on affordability in the city.
- Rents in the private rented sector remain too expensive and are continuing to rise.
- The expectations from Council tenants are rising, and we need to continue to improve our services.
- Climate change, and the impact of this that puts every region of the earth at risk, has led to us declaring a climate emergency in Oxford and setting an aim of Oxford city being net zero by 2040. Domestic buildings in Oxford are one of the main contributors to carbon emissions that causes climate change. We need to make progress now to meet net zero carbon ambitions for domestic buildings in the city in order to help prevent the stark effects of climate change locally and globally – such as wildfire, flooding and droughts – from getting much worse.
- The city welcomes a high number of individuals and families fleeing war and violence to resettle in Oxford through various resettlement schemes, including the most recent 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme. We will continue this work and will work to find long-term, sustainable housing solutions for them.

The challenges we face are significant. Our commitments and plans under this strategy are therefore ambitious.

The wider picture in Oxford is crucial, as the ambition to address the housing and homelessness issues, is impossible to meet, without the Council's wider work and overall ambition. Oxford's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sits alongside, and is aligned with, a number of other key Council strategies. In particular, this strategy speaks to the Council Strategy 2020-24. The Council Strategy sets out the overall vision for the Council – Building a world-class city for everyone – and the 4 key priorities that will get us there:

- Enable an inclusive economy
- Deliver more affordable housing
- Support thriving communities
- Pursue a zero carbon Oxford

The Council vision and priorities is the driving force of all our work.



Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

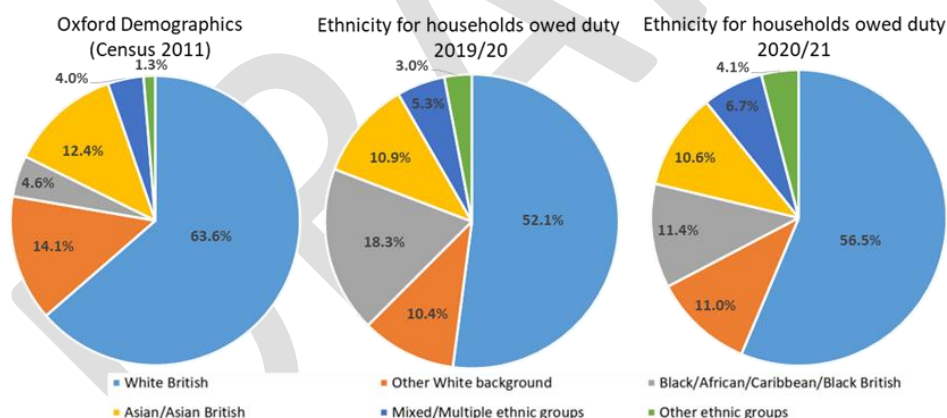
We know that homelessness affects people and communities differently in the city, and we know that certain groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness and poor housing conditions.

A key focus of all the Council's work - as outlined in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy - is to ensure that the Council's services, investments and policy-making are designed to address the city's social and economic inequalities.

Oxford's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy embraces and incorporates this focus throughout, and informs our plans under every priority. We will make sure that our services are accessible, that our policies and practises do not discriminate, not directly and not indirectly, that we understand the needs of our customers and communities, and that we can react to changing trends.

This is how we are going to deliver these commitments:

- Work to deliver the Council's housing related commitments set out in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, including:
 - Ensuring that we understand and respond to issues that disproportionately affect specific groups in our community and that may lead to homelessness. For example, the Black community has been overrepresented in homelessness cases for many years compared to the overall share of the population in Oxford. We will seek to understand the reasons behind this better, and engage with service users in order to improve our services to combat this trend.



- work with communities to address any issues that disproportionately affects specific groups in order to better prevent homelessness;
- review and improve how we engage with our tenants and leaseholders and ensure that inclusion is at the heart of this;
- use our programme of capital investment to set an example of high standards and inclusive design and planning for social housing.
- Improve our data collection so that we can better understand the impact of homelessness on people with certain characteristics, such as the LGBTQIA+ community; and use this data to inform service development.
- Continue to consider the needs of the travelling community, and seek to work in partnership with our neighbouring authorities to commission a new study of need for the period up to 2040.

- Routinely report and use data to understand shifts in the profiles of people that we support in relation to homelessness, such as a recent decrease in the proportion of women presenting, in order to make sure that any changes is not due to inaccessibility.
- Conduct comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments in line with best practice for key policies and working practises, such as the Tenancy Strategy and the Allocation Policy, to ensure that there is truly fair access to our services for those with protected characteristics
- Ensure information and communication is accessible, through using a range of mediums and accessible language.
- Provide training for all of our staff to ensure they are all skilled and confident in delivering services and work with HR partners to have a workforce that as a whole reflects Oxford's diverse population.

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Improving our services

As a Council, we know that we need to change the way we communicate and work with our customers, as well as change and adapt the way our customers can communicate and get in touch with us. This came to the forefront during the pandemic, when our offices closed and we moved to digital and phone contact with our customers.

Our housing services historically have been too reliant on customers seeing us face-to-face and that documentation and information is provided in hard-copy, either by posting this to us or handing it in to one of our offices. Providing more facilities and opportunities for our customers to provide information and an ability to access our services online, to have digital 'help-yourself' facilities, and moving to IT solutions where our officers can do more 'on the go', will make our services both more customer friendly, by fitting around people's lives, and more efficient.

Our need to improve our IT systems and expand our digital offer to include more ways for the community to access our services and communicate with us, are key considerations for our commitments under this strategy and includes:

- Complete a rollout of our new IT system that will enable new innovative approaches to the delivery of services for tenants, including greater ability for our tenants to access self-service options online.
- Achieve greater efficiency in how we deliver services by moving to provide more services and assistance 24hours on-line and via self-serve options, including submitting applications to join the general housing register and provide supporting information.
- Deliver improved communications and engagement activities to our tenants using digital means.
- Develop facilities that allows us to get customer feedback digitally as soon as customers have received a service, so that we can use this to get feedback and makes changes in real time.
- While embracing new technologies, reaffirm our commitment to continue to offer a face-to-face service for tenants, and people facing homelessness, who need it.

Housing-led solutions to homelessness

The number of individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness in Oxford has been too high for too long. We are therefore adapting and changing the approach we take to resolving homelessness, by implementing a housing-led approach to the services we deliver.

A housing-led approach means that homelessness is resolved by offering people their own, secure home as quickly as possible. A housing-led approach is key to successful homelessness prevention as support and advice is provided so that people can stay in, and maintain, their own home for the long term.

The fundamental aspects of a housing-led approach have informed key strands of this strategy and cuts across our priorities and include:

- Rapid re-housing of homeless households. If households become homeless and need to access temporary accommodation, we will aim for their stay in such accommodation to be as short as possible. We will work with households to find and move to a permanent home as quickly as possible – they will be rapidly re-housed.
- Whenever possible, we will make sure that households that are in need of any extra support receive this, either through our own services, or by working with other organisations to put a good support package in place. This will ensure that homelessness can be prevented in the future.
- Provide more Housing First style accommodation. We are moving away from using congregate style accommodation for those experiencing rough sleeping. Congregate style accommodation can often be detrimental, lead to abandonment of accommodation and thus repeat homelessness. Instead, evidence has shown that we are more likely to help break the cycle of homelessness by providing a permanent home for those with the most complex needs with the necessary support in place but without conditions of previous engagement with services, abstaining from substances, or good tenancy history for example.
- Increase the number of 1-bedroom properties available for private and social rent in the city. We are seeking to increase the provision of 1-bedroom housing units across the city, both by building our own and working with partners to build more. This will enable more single persons and couples that are homeless, to move into their own home that they can afford.

Effectively implementing and delivering this housing-led approach is key to Oxford seeing a reduction in homelessness across the board in the longer term.

Our priorities and actions

This strategy sets out 5 priority areas that will drive and focus the Council's work to realise our vision for housing, homelessness and rough sleeping.

These priorities come from carefully reviewing all of the information and learning gained from the review and evidence base, together with the strategic direction and aims of the council set out in the Corporate Strategy. They are focussed on meeting the key challenges we identified, such as the acute affordability issues in the Oxford housing market, the need to tackle the carbon emissions from housing, and the need to go further to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping. Under each priority, we have clear commitments, also informed by evidence and feedback from the consultation process during summer 2021 and discussions with key partners.

We cannot deliver this work alone, we will work closely with the community and partner organisations to ensure that our commitments are delivered.

Our 5 priorities are:

- **Providing more, affordable homes**
 - Why? There are not enough affordable homes in the city and this means that people pay a large proportion of their income towards housing costs, putting financial pressure on families which may cause homelessness.
- **Great homes for all**
 - Why? Everyone should have a safe and good quality home, whether living in social or private rented housing.
- **Housing for a net zero carbon future**
 - Why? Domestic buildings are one of the largest contributor to carbon emissions in Oxford, and therefore one of the main contributors to climate change. We need to reduce these emission now to be able to reach the aim of Oxford city being net zero carbon by 2040
- **Preventing homelessness and adopting a rapid rehousing approach**
 - Why? No one should lose the place they call home – it is traumatising and impacts wider life chances. If this does happen, people need to be assisted to find a new home as quickly as possible
- **Ending rough sleeping**
 - Why? No one should need to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford

This strategy will be accompanied by a detailed action plan that will set out how we deliver our commitments over the life of the strategy. The action plan will be updated regularly so that it stays relevant to the ever changing context we are operating within.

Priority 1 - Providing more, affordable homes

By the end of this strategy period, we are seeking to:

- Significantly increase the number of affordable homes delivered in the city. Building, enabling and supporting the development of enough homes in the city and surrounding districts to meet the overall housing need in Oxford, including the development of the right mix of property sizes and tenure types.
- Deliver the biggest council house building programme in Oxford since the 1970s, building more than 1,650 genuinely affordable, high quality and energy efficient new council homes through the Council's housing company, OX Place, and with the Council, over the next ten years.
- Let the majority of the Council's new affordable homes at a social rent level, approximately 40% of the market rent.
- Work closely with housing associations to ensure Oxford is seen as a good place to build homes, and use planning policy and influence to ensure greatest housing needs as met (e.g. by delivery of affordable social rent).
- Work with our housing association partners to collectively deliver a forecast of over 1,600 affordable homes in the city over the next four years.
- Ensure a range of tenure models are developed for affordable homes, such as shared ownership, to meet the needs of those struggling to afford private rents in Oxford.
- Continue to work with our neighbouring authorities to progress housing developments across the county that help meet housing need in Oxfordshire and create strong communities with good local amenities and sustainable transport links into the city, delivering over 15,000 homes, 7,000 as affordable tenures by 2031
- Support an increase in the supply of homes through new and innovative approaches, such as Community Housing, and by bringing empty homes back into use.
- Continue to take steps to meet the unmet need of people who require more specialist forms of accommodation, such as people with complex needs, in line with Local Plan policies.
- Develop an approach that will support the Council to utilise the land it owns for housing development, and encourage strategic partners in the city to do likewise.

How the Council and partners are going to do this

Deliver new council homes

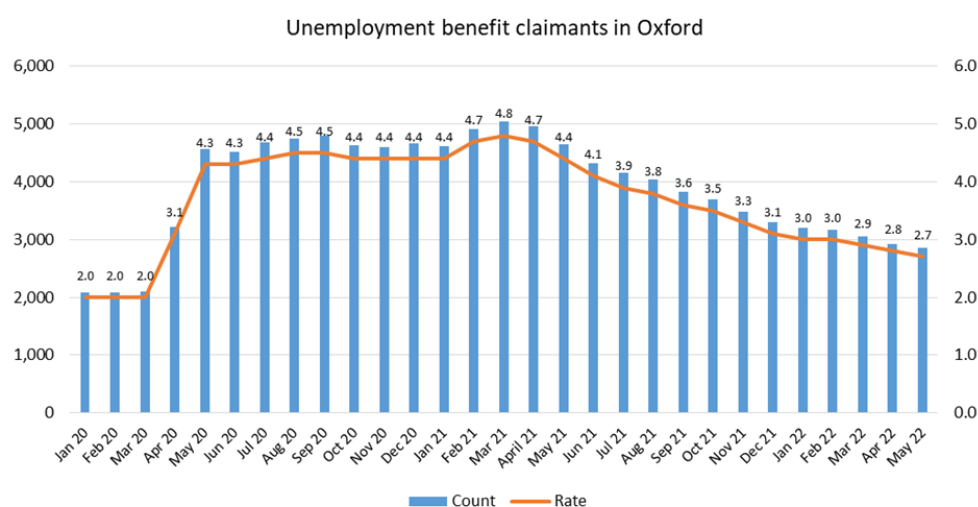
- Accelerate our housebuilding programme through the council owned housing company, OX Place, to deliver new affordable homes, including new council housing charged at a social rent level, and shared ownership.
- Build spacious new homes that exceed the 'Nationally Described Space Standards'
- Ensure significant investment from the Council's Housing Revenues Account goes into the development of new affordable homes, with a commitment to make an estimated investment of £370 million over the next 4 years.
- Continue to explore viable options to develop small plots of council owned land including garage sites, for affordable housing, and explore opportunities for community-led housing.
- Continue to use Right to Buy receipts to purchase homes that can be let as part of our Council stock at a social rent

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take available steps to secure and deploy public investment where this is available to make further affordable housing development viable in Oxford and Oxfordshire, including Homes England funding and wider infrastructure funds.
Increase the rate of affordable housing development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through a combination of the Council's ability to deliver new homes and by working with housing association partners, increase the pace of delivery of social housing in the city. Offer support and partnership to developers, social landlords and community led-housing groups to encourage a faster rate of delivery of new homes. Support and encourage the use of factory-built housing and modular construction. Work to ensure new homes delivered meet housing need: a good supply of one bedroom affordable homes to support our ambition to tackle single homelessness; increase in the number of units available for Housing First; larger homes to meet acute need to house large families; sufficient housing that is disability adapted, such as for wheelchair users. Review the OX Place and Council model of delivering new homes to ensure that structures and approaches best meet corporate priorities, that there's effective clienting of OX Place by the Council, and that opportunities for future growth are maximised.
Provide homes for those struggling in the Oxford housing market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver an ambitious shared ownership development programme. Engage with the delivery of First Homes in Oxford, working with partners across the County to apply the policy to maximise potential to ensure this new type of home meets local need, and limit the impact of this national policy on the viability and deliverability of schemes in Oxford. Review and implement a new Tenancy Strategy to recognise the new tenure types the council is developing, and to ensure households in different income groups can access different housing models. Continue our work to bring empty homes back into occupancy, ensuring that the number of empty properties in Oxford reduce. Purchase properties using funds from retained receipts from Right to Buy sales and borrowing in the Housing Revenue Account and let these properties to people on the General Housing Register
Work better with our housing delivery partners and neighbouring Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on our strategic relationships with Registered Providers (housing associations), to support and encourage more investment into developing new affordable housing in Oxford Work with neighbouring councils to support the delivery of a number of developments in Oxfordshire that will help meet housing need for the whole County, and make effective agreements with the District Councils so that Oxford residents in need of affordable housing can access homes across Oxfordshire. Support and identify opportunities for community-led housing developments, including opportunities within our small sites policy. Work with our partner Catalyst Housing to deliver the regeneration scheme in Blackbird Leys. Explore options with our Housing Association partners to develop small adjoining sites.

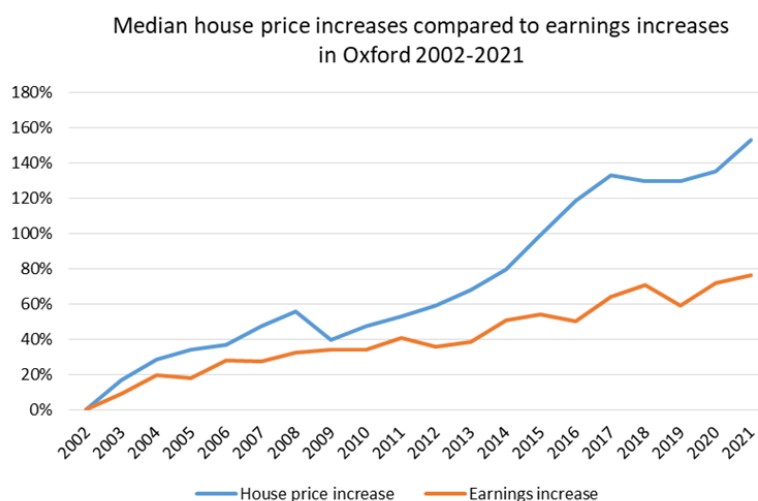
- Continue to monitor the property market post-pandemic, pursuing opportunities that may arise from changing city centre demand that could support delivery of housing, adjusting council policy as required.

Why we need more affordable housing

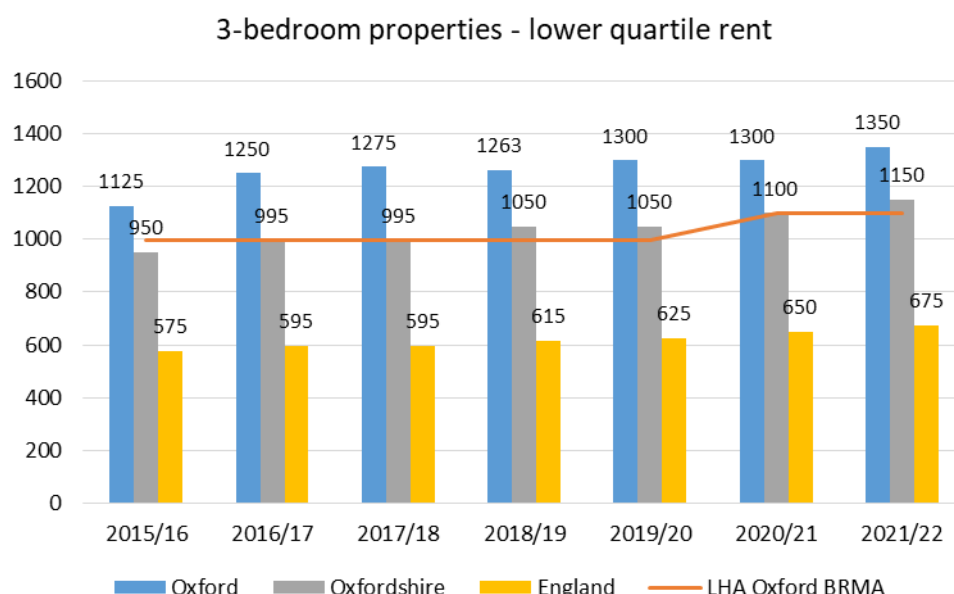
Oxford is densely populated, surrounded by green belt and rural countryside. Land for new development of housing is significantly constrained. Oxford has a strong economy, with more jobs than people of working age. Unemployment increased through the pandemic, but has now returned to near pre-pandemic levels.



A strong economy with many opportunities attract people to come to Oxford. This is positive, but puts significant pressure on the housing market. The latest Census shows that the population grew 6.7% between 2011 and 2021. Oxford has become one of the least affordable places to live in the UK as house prices have increased much more than earnings for a number of years. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2021 the median house price in Oxford was 12.32 times the median gross earnings in the city, compared to a national average of 8.96 times the median earnings.



Renting a home in the private rented sector is also expensive. Homes at the lower price end of the market are especially expensive in Oxford compared to England as a whole. This means that people on low incomes cannot afford to rent even the cheapest homes in the city. With high and increasing rents in this sector, a large proportion of people's income go towards housing costs.

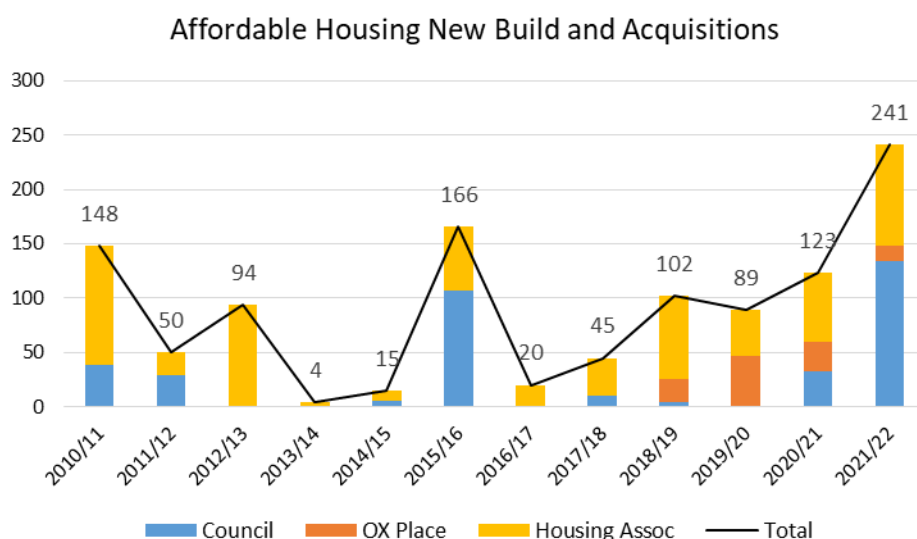


The private rented sector has grown in Oxford over the last 20 years, and compared to the England average, a significantly higher proportion of homes are let through private landlords. The 2011 Census shows that 28% of households in Oxford rent their home in the private rented sector, compared to 17% in the rest of England.

Despite Oxford's economic success, Oxford is a city with inequalities and poverty. Whilst most neighbourhoods in the city are in the 'least deprived' half of the Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings, a large number of areas are in the most deprived 30% in the country. The high costs of housing is a contributing factor, and after housing costs, 1 in 4 children live below the poverty line in Oxford. The Covid-19 pandemic, followed by the cost of living crisis, has further exposed the extent of inequalities in Oxford, with those already experiencing inequality being impacted disproportionately.

#Oxford Needs Homes

It is estimated that 678 affordable homes needs to be delivered every year in Oxford if all households who are not able to meet their housing needs in the housing market were to be allocated a home they can afford. However, in the last decade, much less affordable housing has been delivered than there is need for. And there is now an acute need for affordable housing in the city.



Over the last few years, we have made good progress to address the crisis. Between April 2018 and until end of March 2022, over 555 affordable homes have been delivered in Oxford. The Oxfordshire Growth Board, a joint committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire together with key strategic partners, have helped secure over £500 million of investment in housing and infrastructure across the county. The Council owned company OX Place has started housing developments on 10 sites across the city, as well as enabled partners to deliver social housing at Barton Park. We have also worked with our neighbouring Districts to develop agreements on how they can help meet Oxford's unmet housing needs, including agreeing nominations agreements for social housing in the Districts for households who are on the City Council's register.

How to deliver the homes we need

Our new strategy will see us step up our activity in the next 5 years, building on the major progress of recent years, to deliver the biggest increase in social housing since the 1970s. We need to work with partners to significantly increase the number of affordable homes delivered in the city, alongside significant delivery of new council homes through the Council's wholly owned housing company OX Place. There needs to be development of enough homes, both in the city and in the surrounding areas to meet the overall housing needs in Oxford, including different property sizes and different tenures types.

OX Place, will build over 2,200 new homes in the city over the next ten years. These homes will be of high quality, they will be energy efficient and the majority of these homes will be let to residents of Oxford at a genuinely affordable rent.

But we are not the only organisation that provides affordable housing in the city. Housing Associations play a key role too. We will work closely with them to help them develop more homes in Oxford and the neighbouring areas, for example working with Catalyst Housing to deliver the regeneration scheme in Blackbird Leys. Oxfordshire as a whole have a shortage of affordable homes, and we will continue to work with our neighbouring local authorities to create strong communities with good local amenities and sustainable transport links. The aim to meet housing

need for Oxfordshire by 2031 will see over 7,000 affordable homes built in neighbouring council areas that Oxford residents will be able to move into

We will work to ensure that the homes built in the city will be determined by what is needed, both in terms of size and tenure. Demand for affordable 1 bedroom properties has increased over the last few years and our development plans seeks to address this. As a Council, we are now for the first time managing shared-ownership properties, and this is something we will continue to develop as we recognise that this helps many households buy a stake in a home, that they would otherwise not be able to afford.

Making the best use of the residential properties that exist in Oxford is also important in order to increase the provision of much needed housing in the city. The number of domestic buildings in Oxford that are empty for long periods of time has unfortunately increased over the last few years, despite our efforts to tackle this trend. Over the last few years, we have worked with owners of empty homes to bring them back into use, and we will continue to do so. We will do this by working with owners, and if necessary, we will use enforcement powers to do so. We are looking to increase the use of formal action to bring empty homes back into use, including, where appropriate, the implementation of Empty Dwelling Management Orders, both where this is being made with the support of property owners and where owners are not engaging or willing to take part in the process.

There has been an increase in the number of short term lets in Oxford over the last few years. Properties rented out as short term lets, results in fewer properties being available for longer-term lets for households in housing need in Oxford. As a Council, we have limited power to tackle this trend. There is no requirement for short term lets to be licenced, or for landlords to notify the council when a property has been converted into a short term let. The change to short term let may require planning permission, however, this has to be determined on a case by case basis and we have taken successful planning enforcement action where the use of a house has changed into holiday accommodation without such permission. Since 2018, we have repeatedly called for the government to introduce effective regulation on short term lets and we will continue to do so.

We will work to enable supply from different sources, including supporting groups and organisations that want to develop community-led housing, as well as continuing our work to bring empty homes back into use, all which contributes to more people finding a home that they can afford to live in.

Priority 2 - Great homes for all

By the end of this strategy period, we are seeking to:

- Work to drive up standards in Oxford's private rented housing sector, through use of our regulatory powers and the operation of citywide property licensing, covering the whole private rented sector.
- Influence central government policy on short term lets, making the case for local government to gain new powers to regulate the market to prevent the displacement of local residents.
- Improve the quality of council homes and the surrounding neighbourhoods through increased levels of investment into homes, communal areas and estates, ensuring high standards of compliance, good maintenance, higher levels of energy efficiency, and guided by tenant voices and views.
- Transform the services we deliver to our tenants, to improve tenant satisfaction about their homes, their neighbourhood and the services we deliver to them.
- Continue to develop a new, integrated and locality-based way of working to deliver services to our communities, where Council teams work better together across departments to assist our tenants when they are in need.
- Establish a great tenant repairs service, that is based on the principles of:
 - Repair at the customers convenience, giving tenants choice and flexibility on repair appointments;
 - First time fix, fixing repairs in one visit whenever possible;
 - Staying fixed, quality repairs that keep the problem solved.
- Deliver an improved approach to tenant engagement and involvement, with clear strategies and adequate resourcing to make sure that we have systems in place to receive feedback on the services we provide and the condition of tenants' accommodation, and that we can use such feedback effectively to develop and improve our services as well as make decisions as a landlord.
- Deliver our Thriving Communities Strategy, which will take a wider holistic look to ensure homes are part of a wider thriving community, and work closely with our communities as part of our healthy place shaping agenda, and building on the Barton Healthy New Town approach.
- Continue to effectively manage the Council's Housing Revenue Account, ensuring overall spending priorities are delivered, and that we deliver the investment programme in areas such as affordable housing development, decarbonisation, and investment in our stock.
- Become fully compliant with the Government's Social Housing White Paper, meeting the new customer regulatory standards, the tougher decent homes standard, and being fully compliant with building safety changes, with tenants able to judge and benchmark our performance through new national landlord tenant satisfaction measure.

How the Council and partners are going to do this

Improve the quality of accommodation in the private rented sector

- Deliver the citywide selective licencing scheme and continue to deliver the citywide additional Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing scheme to help ensure that accommodation in the private rented sector is of good quality and to maintain and improve compliance in HMOs in the city.
- Through property licensing, work proactively to increase the percentage of privately rented homes that do not contain serious

	<p>home hazards through increased number of property visits and increase the number of HMOs that are compliant with the HMO licensing scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to lobby central government to introduce controls around the short let market in the city to prevent the loss of residential units to this sector
Deliver increased investment into our council homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest a committed £51m into our council homes in line with our asset management strategy, to ensure homes are fully compliant and of good quality, taking into account all priorities, including energy efficiency, decarbonisation, decency and safety • Begin to deliver targeted investment programmes by 2025 including: replacing doors and windows; re-roofing; structural repairs; improving lifts and door-phone entry systems; cyclical repairs and decoration; kitchens & bathrooms, improvements to internal communal areas. • Develop a programme of rolling annual stock condition surveys, which will see all our domestic buildings having condition surveys every 5 years, in order to keep information about our properties accurate and up to date. • Use stock condition surveys to ensure a consistent and updated asset management strategy is in place, which will include and provide a coordinated work plan for maintenance, investment, regeneration and carbon reduction works.
Provide quality, timely and responsive services to council tenants, with high levels of tenant satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a comprehensive transformation programme of our Landlord Services leading to improved services for our tenants, and which is informed by, the results and response to the latest tenant survey, the recommendations of an external review of our Landlord Services, the review of tenant engagement and tenant involvement by the Scrutiny Committee, and ensuring our services are compliant with the Social Housing White Paper, including changes to building safety regulations and changes to decent homes standards • Deliver a new, integrated and locality-based way of working to deliver services to our communities. This approach brings together different council functions and local networks to deliver enhanced and joined up services in the community, with better customer journeys and outcomes, embedding learning as obtained from the Covid-19 response. • Work collaboratively with Oxford Direct Services to ensure that repairs services delivered for our tenants are excellent and informed by the guiding principles of making repairs at the customer's convenience, make the fix first time whenever possible, and having it stayed fixed. • Use a combination of annual tenant surveys and transactional surveys to gain an accurate and clear picture of tenant satisfaction with the repairs process, which is then able to respond to feedback and to drive service development and improvement. • Complete the rollout of the new housing IT system that will enable new innovative approaches to how we deliver services for and communicate with tenants, including greater ability for our tenants to self-serve online.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support tenants impacted by antisocial behaviour, engaging tenants on these services and their priorities, and responding to their feedback on developing any improvements.
Improve tenant engagement and tenant involvement to enhance accountability and put tenants' views at the heart of decision making and service development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish refreshed aims and purpose for our tenant engagement and involvement activities, aligned with the priorities tenants have expressed through feedback, following best practice in our approach and ensuring that such activities are resourced effectively so that we meet the Charter for Social Housing Residents. • Ensure that our tenant services are resourced sufficiently to comply with the Social Housing White Paper, such as our complaints and tenant engagement functions. • Ensure there is sufficient capacity with the organisation to carry out responsive engagement activities where we can gain insight and quickly react to and learn from events, including in relation to areas such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Building Safety ○ Fire safety ○ Carbon reduction programme ○ Digital channel shift ○ Council spending • Establish a scrutiny function that allows tenants to better hold the Council and Oxford Direct Services to account and to influence outcomes • Take steps to ensure we meet our statutory obligations to release our results against the new national tenant consumer standards as set out in the Social Housing White Paper, and where possible, seek to do so ahead of time, so that tenants can judge our performance, and once all social landlords are in compliance can benchmark us as a landlord. • Take further steps to better understand our tenants, including better capture and analysis of data so that we can ensure that services are delivered well to all. • Ensure that tenants and leaseholders involved in engagement and involvement activity including the tenant ambassadors, reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of Council tenants • Use resident feedback to review and improve future specifications for new homes.

The need for a good home

Everyone deserves to live in a good quality, secure and safe home, whether they rent their accommodation from a private or social landlord. Housing conditions have a great impact on people's physical and mental health. Living in poor housing, homes that are damp and cold, in an insecure tenancy, in time-limited or non-permanent tenancy, or living in overcrowded conditions, can all cause significant stress and have a negative impact on both physical and mental health, as well as education and work. Housing conditions therefore, have great effects on ultimate life chances. The introduction of the Decent Homes Standards for social housing in the early 2000s, has improved conditions for many. However, there is still a long way to go in addressing issues of poor quality homes across all sectors, as well as insecurity of tenures, and affordability so that these issues will not impact people and our communities negatively.

Addressing serious housing safety issues can be a cost effective way to reduce some of the financial burdens on our health and social care services and provides early support for anyone who is vulnerable due to their health, wellbeing or personal circumstances. In Oxford, Oxford City's Home Improvement Agency (HIA) offers grants and support to vulnerable people who live in homes that are in poor condition or who need adaptations to properties that are unsuitable for their needs. They aim to prevent situations from worsening and result in homelessness, as well as enabling residents to work towards independence in all its forms.

In addition to improving the actual homes of people, we can also introduce other, preventative measures linked to the place someone lives that will help reduce the inequalities in our city, help people increase their general prospects, wellbeing and life chances. Through the Thriving Communities Strategy that is being developed at the same time as this strategy, the Council has a strong focus on this work through encouraging well-designed neighbourhoods and parks where healthy lifestyles are the norm, developing skills, ensuring growth in the city is inclusive, strengthening communities and improving access to leisure, sports and the arts. We have already introduced measures and activities which have had great success over the last few years.

Through our Youth Ambition Programme we have made more activities available for young people, including youth clubs, holiday schemes and multi-sports sessions. Such activities play an important role in reducing adverse childhood experiences, which can lead to a range of negative outcomes in later life, such as homelessness. Young people with lived experience of homelessness reported they had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences, compared to just over 1 in 10 in the wider population. We have also offered free access to our leisure centres for people experiencing rough sleeping.

Challenges in the Private Rented Sector

According to the 2011 Census, the number of households in Oxford that rent their accommodation in the private rented sector is very large - 28% - compared to the average of 17% across England as a whole. Renting in the private sector is expensive, and unfortunately, there is also evidence that the housing conditions in parts of this sector can too often be poor. A review carried by METASTREET on behalf of the Council in 2020, estimated that over 6,000 homes contained a serious home hazard, with the most common hazards relating to fire safety and excess cold. We know that the quality of housing can greatly affect people's physical and mental health, and we are therefore committed to working with private landlords to improve conditions.

We have operated an 'additional licensing scheme' in Oxford for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) since 2011. The scheme was brought in to address problems associated with poor management of HMOs. The scheme has been very successful in bringing up standards and protecting tenants.

Building on the past success of measures to improve the private sector, the Council made a successful bid to the government for a citywide selective licensing scheme that will be applicable for all properties rented out in the private sector. The scheme offers a massive opportunity to improve the sector, ensuring landlords are fit and proper and that properties meet a minimum standard and are safe places to live. It is estimated that over 12,000 homes in the city will require a selective licence.

Oxford is currently the only local authority in the UK to operate a property licensing across the whole of the private rented sector.

The Council as a landlord

According to the 2011 Census, 21% of all households in Oxford lived in social rented housing. The City Council is the largest social landlord in the city, with around 7,800 homes that we own and let to those in housing need. The vast majority of Council properties are charged at a social rent level, which are typically around 40% of market rents charged for similar properties. We manage all aspects of these properties, including the allocation process, arranging lettings agreements, providing assistance and support to our residents, repairing and maintaining the properties and their surroundings.

As a landlord, we have a great responsibility to ensure that our properties are of good quality, that our tenant's homes receive the maintenance and repairs that are needed, and that neighbourhoods are well maintained and safe. Over the last few years, we have delivered all the schemes that were identified under the Great Estates programme, which means that there have been improvements to neighbourhoods and the way our residents use them. We have also completed the refurbishment of the tower blocks owned by the council, and delivered considerable investment into council homes in general.



Our strategy lays out our ambition to transform the homes and services we offer tenants over the next few years. It commits us to continued investment into the homes we own, communal areas and estates to ensure high standards of compliance, good levels of maintenance and better energy efficiency.

One of the main priorities going forward will be to develop a programme of transformation for our landlord services that will see significant change in how we deliver our services, making them more responsive, accessible and joined up across different council teams. This is in response to feedback we have received from tenants, and the changes to legislation we are governed by.

A major aspect of how we need to change has been informed by how the pandemic challenged us to rethink how we deliver our services in our neighbourhoods. In response to the pandemic, the Council delivered more services in the communities – a locality-based model - through the lockdowns. This offered an improved way of delivering services closer to our communities that we want to continue in the future through the integration of services that will focus on strengthening connections between existing teams in the Council, local communities, residents and partner organisations.

We also want to modernise and use new technologies in the way services are delivered. This will include giving our tenants greater ability to self-service through the internet, more information at

the 'touch of a button', and the use of new technologies to make us more efficient and effective in how we maintain our housing stock.

Change doesn't just apply to the Council's core landlord services. Many of the repairs and maintenance services for our homes are carried out by the Council owned company Oxford Direct Services (ODS) and we will work closely with them to deliver a significant transformation in tenant repairs services, increasing convenience and satisfaction.

We welcome the increase in government regulation into the social housing sector, and through this strategy, we will deliver the required changes for our tenants. One of the biggest changes is the introduction of the Social Housing White Paper that will strengthen the tenant voice to influence decisions about their homes and neighbourhoods and increases consumer standards. The Building Safety Act brings about increased regulation for building safety, including a requirement for there to be an Accountable Person who is legally responsible for assessing and managing fire and structural risks for high risk buildings, along with other measures.

We will also take major steps to empower our tenants through enhanced engagement and involvement work, with a clear approach and increased resourcing. This will enable routine feedback on our services and investment, as well as the condition of accommodation. We will use this feedback to help develop and improve the services we offer, as well as inform the decisions we make as a landlord. We carried out a tenant survey in 2021 that helped inform this direction, and we are committed to continue to collect this form of feedback through regular tenant and transactional surveys.

Priority 3 - Housing for a net zero carbon future

By the end of this strategy period, we are seeking to:

- Deliver commitments set out in the Council's Net Zero Carbon Action Plan to realise a significant reduction in carbon emissions from residential buildings in the City.
- Ensure all new homes are built to high standards, using sustainable contractors, including accessible design and high levels of energy efficiency consistent with Oxford's journey towards net zero by 2040.
- Build more than 2,000 new homes across Oxfordshire over the next 10 years through the Council's housing company OX Place, consistent with Oxford's net zero target date of 2040
- Improve the energy efficiency of Council owned domestic buildings through a significant investment programme
- Bring improvements to energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector in Oxford

How the Council and partners are going to do this

Improve standards for new developments of council housing in the city

- Build homes to standards compatible with achieving net zero by 2040 to ensure that further work in the future is not needed to improve the energy efficiency of homes
- New build delivered by OX Place to have at least 40% less carbon emissions than 2021 Building Regulation standards.
- Deliver new homes using a sustainable development framework for the delivery of off-site homes to meet a minimum standard of 40% carbon reduction from 2021 Building Regulations. Where site feasibility allows, the framework also allows access to the following further standard:
 - Passivhaus equivalent standard
- Development sites such as Mill Lane, Marston, Collins Street and Princess Street to be built targeting carbon reduction of 70% or more on the 2013 Building Regulations requirement.
- Work towards our aspirational target that all homes built through OX Place are electric only and heated through low carbon means such as heat pumps. If grid decarbonisation continues as planned, this would make these homes zero carbon by 2035.
- Build as far as possible using a 'fabric-first' approach, and where not already in situ, enabling on-site renewable energy to be easily retrofitted at a later date.
- Tackling the performance gap and potential heat pump/technology performance issues by using innovative energy quality assurance service
- Continuing to learn as we go – engaging with our Off-site Manufacture (OSM) Framework partners, industry and consultants; consider how we can learn from our customers' experience

Invest to decarbonise our council owned housing stock

- As part of our asset management strategy, informed by stock conditions surveys, and coordinated as part of planned maintenance and improvement work to our existing council homes, we will invest to improve energy efficiency, with a target average 95% or more of our council homes to have an EPC rating of C or above by 2030.
- Work with tenants to agree and implement the programme of energy efficiency measures that will see tenants' energy usage reduce,

	<p>including seeking a reduction to the number of tenants refusing energy efficiency improvements in Council owned properties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to bid for central government funding to fund our work to increase energy efficiency for our housing stock
<p>Work with other landlords, such as Registered Providers and Private Rented Sector landlords to increase energy efficiency, both in existing buildings and new developments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New build delivered in the city to have at least 40% less carbon emissions than 2021 Building Regulation standards. • Work and engage with landlords of residential properties to increase efficiency standards for their properties towards B rating, by 2030, and conduct enforcement action if necessary • Bring improvements to energy efficiency to the private rented sector, through lobbying the government to raise energy efficiency standards, our property licensing schemes, and to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) • Continue to assist home owners and private landlords to access funding for energy efficiency and decarbonisation through various means including the Home Improvement Agency. • Work with the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership to trial innovative approaches to different retrofit approaches, scale delivery, and share best practise

Climate Emergency

Climate change is arguable the most significant threat to humankind at this time. Caused by the build-up of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere, released by burning fuels that we use daily to heat our homes, travel and transport goods, climate change is caused by human influence, harming the planet and putting billions of people at risk. In January 2019, Oxford City Council declared a climate emergency in Oxford and agreed to set up a Citizens' Assembly to consider new carbon targets and additional measures to reduce emissions, and thus do what we can to slow climate change. In response to the clear message coming from the Assembly, we, as a Council, have taken on a leading role in reducing emission and increasing biodiversity in the city.

In February 2021, we held a Zero Carbon Oxford Summit, attended by leaders from all major institutions in Oxford to map the city's journey towards net zero. Those attending the summit signed a Charter, setting the ambition to help Oxford as a city become net zero by 2040. The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership was established at the summit, and this partnership has since established and a new science-based roadmap and action plan outlining how the city, can reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040.

Homes and carbon emissions

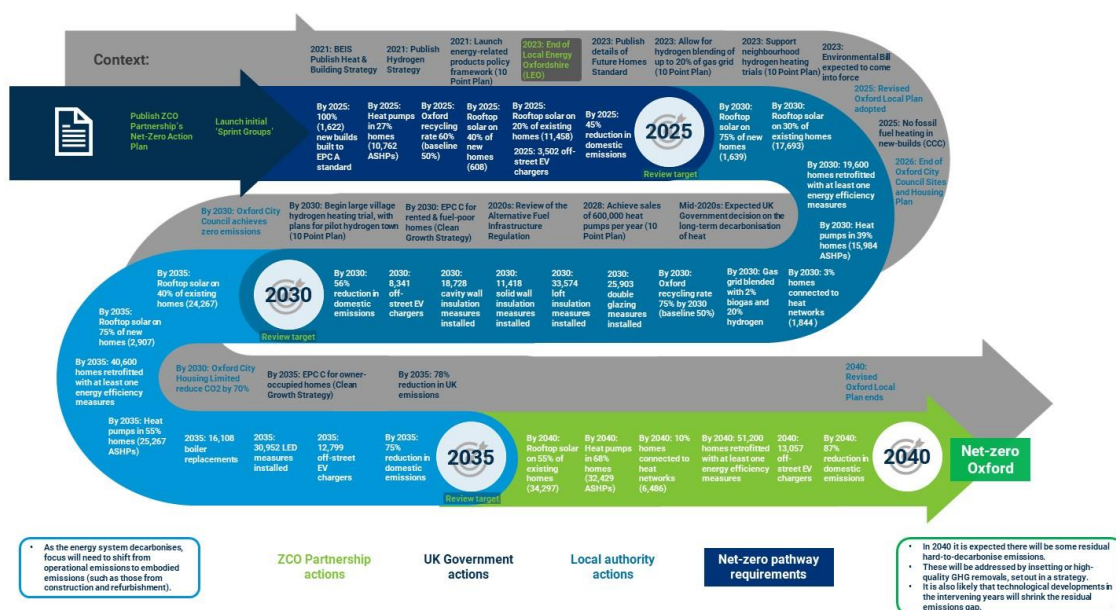
The roadmap divides the city's emissions into five sectors that have the most significant impact on the climate - one of these being emissions from domestic buildings. 25% of emissions in Oxford come from residential buildings and the Zero Carbon Oxford Road map sets out that if Oxford city is to reach net zero by 2040, domestic emissions must be reduced by 87%.

2018 Baseline emissions in Oxford by sector (excluding land use). Source: ZCOP Roadmap



Improving residential housing is therefore crucial in order for the city to see a net zero carbon future, and detailed actions are set out in the roadmap and action plan. It includes raising the standards to ensure new built homes are significantly more energy efficient, and that the energy efficiency standards for existing homes are improved across all tenures.

ZCOP Domestic Sector Net-Zero Roadmap



Reducing emissions

As the strategic housing authority, the City's biggest landlord, and owning a housing development company, we, as a Council, have a key role to play here. The Council's housing company OX

Place has committed to deliver a significant number of new homes over the years to come, and built to high energy efficiency standards which means these new homes will have significantly lower carbon emissions. This includes all homes meeting 40% carbon reduction from 2021 building regulation standards, alongside delivering ambitious pioneering sites and schemes with even higher standards. We have an aspiration that all new homes build through OX Place will use electric only and heated through low carbon means. The technology advances quickly in this area and we will continue to learn 'as we go', adapt and learn from our industry partners.

Significant investment is needed into the homes we own and rent out in order for these to be more energy efficient and reduce carbon emissions. We are developing an investment and delivery programme, in line with our overall maintenance plans for our domestic buildings, to retrofit and introduce energy efficiency measures. We will also bid for any further central government funding to support this work.

Improving the energy efficiency standards of our homes will not only help move the City towards net zero. It will also bring benefits to our tenants, as energy usage will reduce as a result of these measures being introduced. With the current cost of living crisis, where cost of fuel is seeing one of the major price increases, this will help overall household finances. Working with our tenants to agree and implement the programme of improvements and energy efficiency measures to their homes, will be a key feature of our plans.

Our desire to improve energy efficiency standards for our homes is ambitious, and it is important that we make good progress on this to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. However, the work that needs to be carried out to meet the commitments outlined in this strategy requires significant levels of investment. The Council operates in an increasingly challenging financial position, impacting all providers of social housing, and at the same time as we need to invest in our housing stock overall. We are therefore faced with difficult budget choices, and will have to prioritise our investment. Therefore Central Government will have to step up and support providers of social housing with the necessary funding for us to meet our carbon reduction targets.

Many of the homes in the private rented sector, as well as homes owned, also need work to improve energy efficiency if the city is to be net zero by 2040. Introducing such measures can be expensive, and we will therefore actively help landlords and home owners to access funding that can help pay for these, as well as continue to call for more powers from central government to support our work in raising standards in the private sector.

The HIA can also provide help to people who are elderly, vulnerable or have long-term illnesses and are finding it hard to heat and insulate their homes, as well as providing funding for owner occupiers to help pay for free boiler servicing, the replacement of boilers and repairing heating systems for owner occupiers. Funding is available to older, disabled and vulnerable residents from all tenures from the agency for energy efficiency advice and free measures such as insulation, draught proofing, radiator panels, and letterbox/keyhole covers. This helps improve energy efficiency standards for existing homes in the city across all tenures.

Planning proposals for new homes in the city, including our own, will need to demonstrate compliance with planning policies, including those of the Local Plan. The policies of the Local Plan require high environmental standards, including in relation to carbon efficiency.

A key aspect of seeing a reduction in emissions from residential homes in the city is the work we are doing with the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership to trial and test new and innovative retrofit approaches, so that we can share best practise and use methods that work.

Priority 4 - Preventing homelessness and adopting a rapid rehousing response

By the end of this strategy period, we are seeking to:

- Put the prevention of homelessness at the heart of council services and the wider network of partners the Council works with. Working better with partner organisations, such as the County Council, Health and Probation, to improve customer journeys and share information and data, in order to prevent people losing their homes.
- Reduce the number of households being evicted from the Private Rented Sector, by introducing an enhanced offer of support to private tenants to help them stay in their homes. Working better with private landlords to help support households to stay in their tenancies, and make it easier for people in need of housing to find a home in the private sector.
- Go beyond our statutory obligations and do more, at an earlier stage, to prevent homelessness and help households stay in their homes.
- Deliver more responsive and dynamic services, able to react quickly to changes in patterns of homelessness, where customers can quickly access quality advice and support through a variety of channels when needed, and uses timely, accurate data to respond to developing trends in real-time and effectively target interventions.
- Develop a rapid rehousing approach across our services, which means that where homelessness cannot be prevented, we rehouse households quickly into an appropriate and secure home, with support as required.
- Significantly reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation, as well as reducing the average length of time someone has to live in temporary accommodation. Ensure the temporary accommodation we provide is always safe and of a high standard, and that we provide support to assist families and singles to move onto a permanent home quickly.
- Ensure those in greatest need can get access to social housing, through a simplified and equitable allocations system, increasing access to social housing for households who are homeless or in temporary accommodation.

How the Council and partners are going to do this

Transform council services to better prevent and relieve homelessness

- Deliver a new, integrated and locality-based way of working to deliver services to our communities, including a focus on prevention of homelessness, where Council teams work together across departments.
- Complete the transformation of our Housing Needs team (covering homelessness services and the housing register), moving it to a new model better able to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing, and able to react to new challenges such as the cost of living crisis.
- Create a new homelessness prevention team, with dedicated staff holistically supporting and coordinating support across the private and social sectors to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.
- Ensure a continuous culture of change and service improvement is embedded into Housing Needs, supported through regular evidence based reviews.
- Embed a Corporate approach to the prevention of homelessness in Oxford City Council, so every staff member at the council understands their role to support people to stay in their home, including incorporating homeless prevention work into key strategies such as the Thriving Community Strategy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Council's online homelessness advice services so more people can access quality, tailored advice when they need it. Link this advice to more intensive support delivered by staff and partners when required. • Improve online self-service for the housing register. • Make better use of the council data to inform the prevention and relief of homelessness, and seek to utilize the council's data together with other statutory body's data to allow targeted homelessness prevention.
Focus on tackling homelessness from the Private Rented Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish for the first time a new dedicated provision to tackle early upstream homelessness prevention in the private rented sector, as part for the new homelessness prevention team, that will be focused on working with private tenants and landlords, providing mediation when needed, and working closely in partnership with statutory and support services. • Create a new approach to coordinating homelessness prevention work within the Council and beyond, seeking to establish One Gateway into all council provided preventative homelessness support, so that customers and support agencies find it easier to navigate council services and to prevent silo working within the council. • Complete a review of the Council's current schemes that support homeless people to access private rented sector housing through deposits and rent guarantees. We will develop and implement changes to ensure our Private Rented Sector schemes remain effective in the context of rising rents and a frozen local housing allowance; and create a bespoke service for single adults to help them move in to the private rented sector. • Continue to call for government to implement its election pledge to abolish section 21, and if implemented during the strategy's implementation period, ensure the Council supports public awareness of the new rules and tenants' rights.
Work in partnership to prevent homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress further joint work with health, in order to help prevent delayed discharge and establish better joint working with specialist provision such mental health, drugs and alcohol services, enabling better housing outcomes for those with health conditions, and to move to these services functioning as 'one system', with shared accountability, management of risk and decision making. • Work with the Oxfordshire Homelessness MDT and the Lived Experience Advisory Forum to ensure that services are accessible, empowering and trauma-informed, increasing engagement and access to mainstream services and reducing health, housing and care inequalities for people with multiple and complex needs. • Improve the Council's joint working arrangements with prisons and probation services, so that people leaving prison receive early housing support to help move them back into the community, to avoid homelessness and help combat reoffending. • Promote better joint working between City Council housing services with the County Council, enabling more cross function working and sharing of data and information to deliver better outcomes. • Work to improve our support of the survivors of domestic abuse and deliver good housing outcomes, by fully conforming to the

	<p>requirements of the new Domestic Abuse Act, and seeking to gain Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation through a programme of service development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work closely with the County Council and providers to help those leaving the Young Persons Supported Accommodation Service into good appropriate accommodation, and work in partnership to make any necessary changes to policy and process to support care leavers. • Build on the joint work already done with our partners who deliver great work in the city such as the Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance, Crisis Skylight and Advice Centres, creating better customer journeys between council services and other organisations supporting people experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness, while promoting a more strategic and coordinated approach across the sector to combat homelessness. • Continue to support and deliver refugee resettlement schemes, rehousing refugees in Oxford ensuring the city is welcoming and a safe place to make a home, reviewing the current schemes function, and being ready to engage with any future government schemes. • Reduce evictions from supported housing and Housing Association accommodation by working in partnership with neighbouring councils and providers on pre-eviction protocols, ensuring customers have access to preventative support and that statutory services are involved earlier to help sustain tenancies.
Adopt a rapid rehousing response to homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a unified and coordinated approach to rehousing homeless households within the council, by bringing together social and private rented housing placements together with move on from temporary and supported accommodation, ensuring one view of the path from homelessness to successful rehousing that we can tailor to a households needs. • Rollout a new approach to support planning and move on in our temporary accommodation, ensuring every client has a move on plan linked to support to help them move into suitable permanent home as fast as possible. • Make changes to current policy and process to support more rapid move on from temporary and supported accommodation, and provide move on support in the new permanent accommodation when possible. • Review our use of temporary accommodation stock, seeking to improve quality, seeking to reduce the amount of temporary accommodation needed, and ensure that accommodation is best matched to needs. • Agree a new temporary accommodation standard that commits us to providing accommodation of a certain quality, in particular for children, and to keep stays as short as possible. • Complete a review of our allocations scheme and update our allocations policy, designed to make it easier for customers to join and use, is simplified and less bureaucratic, and uses more opportunity to prevent homelessness and move people on from temporary and supported accommodation, with particular attention to ensure certain groups of people such as care leavers, former

	<p>rough sleepers and those leaving the mental health supported accommodation, are supported to access permanent housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in partnership with other commissioning bodies and Registered Providers to ensure there is sufficient suitable accommodation options available to meet the need for people moving on from supported accommodation in the city.
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New challenges – Cost of living crisis

This strategy's evidence base was put together at a time when the country and the city was meeting the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This presented some difficulties in trying to analyse and predict how the landscape would change following the pandemic and the end of government support to local authorities and individuals, as well as ending of measures such as a ban on evictions. As we emerge from the pandemic however, the country has moved straight into a cost of living crisis, driven by high levels of inflation, increasing living costs and in particular a spike in the cost of fuel. Households are already feeling the strain, and with the colder winter months ahead, household finance will be severely impacted.

We are concerned and predict that immediate and longer term effects of the cost of living crisis will result in increased pressure on Council services and an increase in levels of homelessness in the city. Our approach in this strategy is therefore one that allows for continued transformation of our services that will allow us to be flexible and responsive to changes in demand, whilst providing excellent services with successful outcomes.

The Council is under significant financial pressure, and whilst demand for our services are likely to increase, there is no further funds available to increase our resources. This makes the transformation outlined in this strategy even more important as we will only meet these significant challenges through prevention, working in partnership and moving those who are homelessness quickly into new housing.

Homelessness in Oxford

Homelessness levels have been high in Oxford for many years, intrinsically linked to structural factors such as high housing costs, significant unaffordability, high levels of deprivation and changes to the welfare system, which all are major contributors to homelessness in Oxford. Other factors, linked to the individual circumstances of persons, such as personal crisis, mental health, or physical health come together to make some households more likely to be affected by homelessness.

In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was introduced. This legislation brought about the biggest changes to homelessness legislation for over 40 years. It imposed new duties on local authorities and refocuses statutory homelessness services on prevention of homelessness, with a more person centred and collaborative approach.

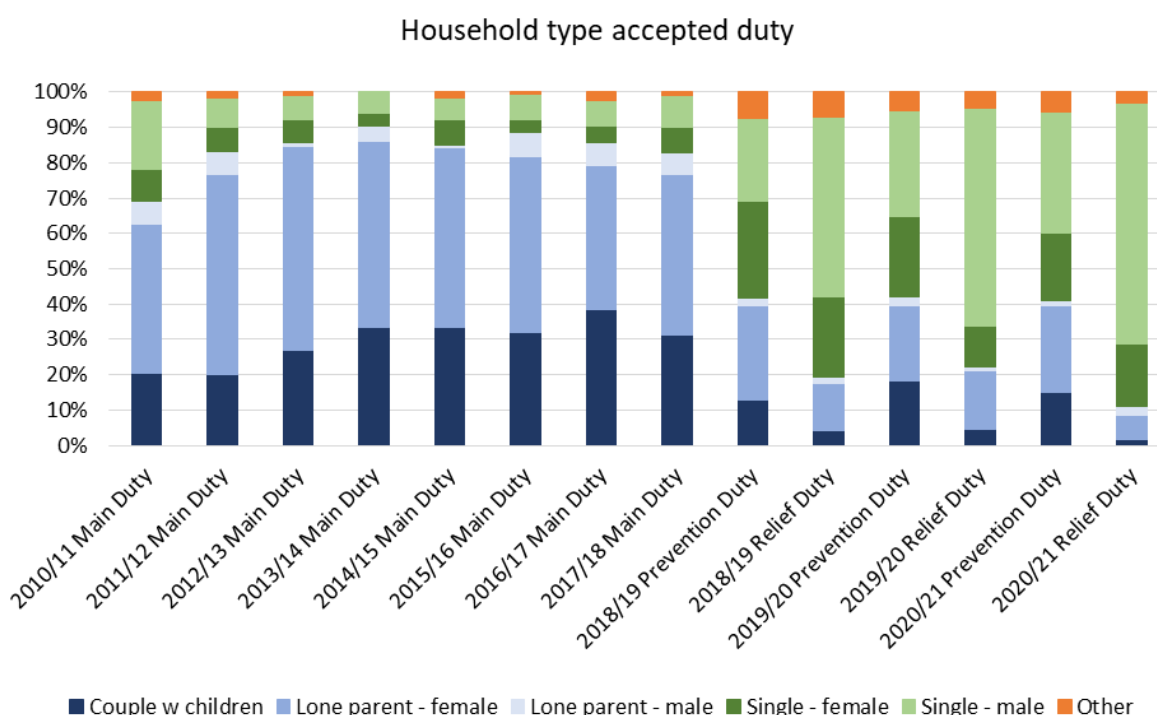
We have successfully implemented the new requirements of the act, and have worked hard to prevent homelessness. Since its introduction, we are now working with more households than ever before to prevent and relieve homelessness, with good outcomes.

This enhanced approach, together with significant investment from central government and the Council into homelessness prevention services and services for those experiencing rough

sleeping, means that the overall picture of homelessness has generally improved since the last strategy in 2018. However, homelessness levels in the city remain stubbornly high. Therefore, a key focus of this strategy will be to go further to tackle homelessness. There will be more focus on preventative services that kick in earlier, are more “upstream”, to help people stay in their homes wherever possible. We will also target our services better on the main causes of homelessness in the city. These changes will require continued progress with the significant transformation of the Council’s homelessness services.

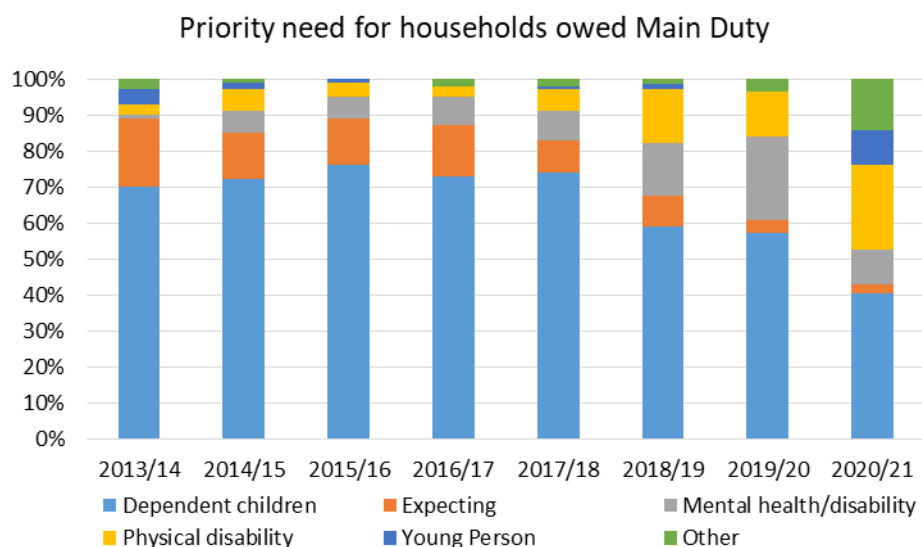
The ending of a tenancy in the private rented sector is the main reason why people are homeless or threatened with homelessness in Oxford. Yet, our services have historically been less focused on the private sector, and there is insufficient support offered to private tenants when they first run into difficulty, with statutory support kicking in too close to an eviction when it is often too late to save a tenancy. Therefore, this strategy commits the Council, through our services and partnerships, to have an increased focus on homelessness prevention in the private rented sector, and to transform its services to increase support for private tenants, with support services to both help people move within the sector to avoid homelessness, and to stay in their home where possible.

One of the biggest changes we have seen since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act is that we are now assisting more single people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This was one of the intentions with the new legislation. We will therefore work with partners to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to homeless prevention for single people seeking to keep people in their homes or suitable supported accommodation, and to ensure there is a range of accommodation options that single people can move to if homelessness cannot be prevented.



A significant proportion of those we owe a statutory duty towards have support needs. For those household who are in priority need and where we owe a main homelessness duty, there has been a marked increase in people who have a physical or mental health disability in the last few years.

We are committed to working with partner agencies to find the right support for households so that their support needs do not contribute to homelessness.



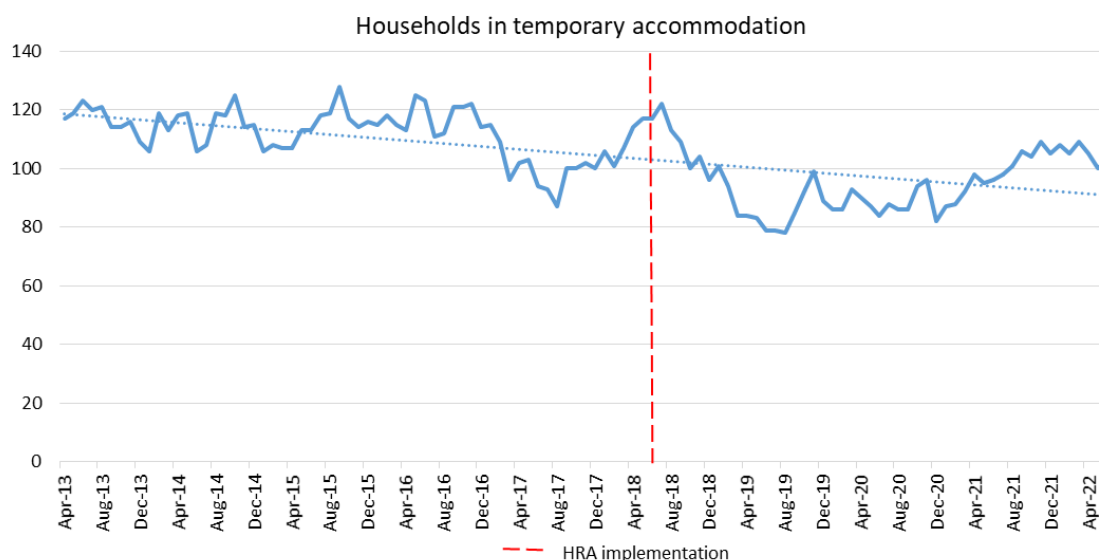
As homelessness is caused by so many different factors, and because people are affected by homelessness in so many different ways, our future services will take a holistic view on prevention, including working with partner agencies such as health, probation and social care to ensure those with support needs can get relevant assistance.

Financial difficulties, including debt, often driven by high housing costs, are already one of the main issues faced by households we work with. A high level of households we owe a duty towards are in full-time or part-time work. This changed during the pandemic as a direct effect of a sharp increase in unemployment, but we are now starting to see more people in work seeking help again. This is yet another sign of housing unaffordability in Oxford, as people in work are struggling to afford their rent. The cost of living crisis is likely to make the financial situation of many households worse, and we will therefore incorporate support for this in our holistic view on homeless prevention and when working with households to relieve homelessness and when finding alternative homes.

We will improve our services for those who have experienced domestic abuse, through gaining accreditation with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, and we will continue to support and deliver refugee resettlement schemes. This is to make sure that each individual gets the help and assistance that will be effective for them.

Helping people to get a home quickly

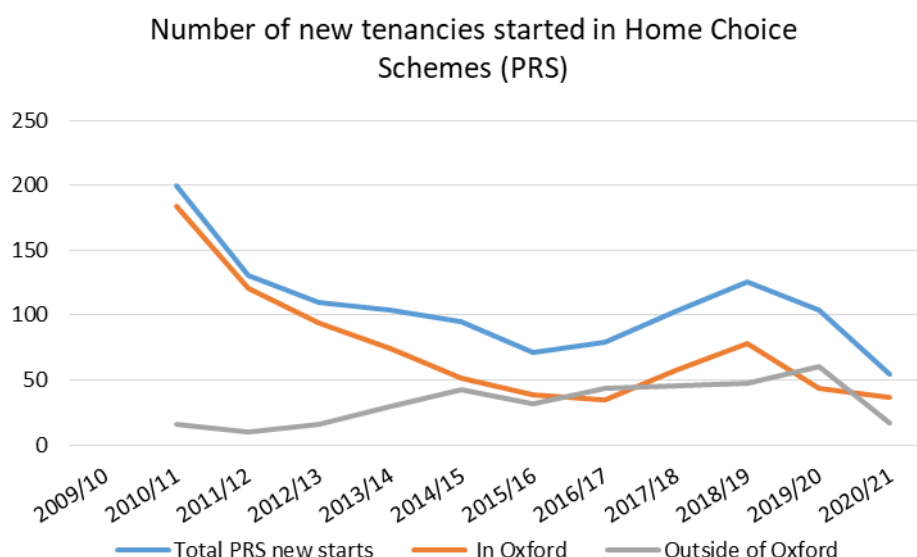
We have seen a gradual reduction in the number of households we accommodate in temporary accommodation over the last few years, which is partially due to the focus we have had on homeless prevention. As we continue to develop and enhance our work on prevention, this will in turn mean less demand on our statutory services such as temporary accommodation.



Although we want to try to prevent people from becoming homeless and having to stay in temporary accommodation wherever possible, this is not always avoidable. Whilst we have seen the number of households in temporary accommodation reduce, people stay in temporary much longer than they and we want them to. This is linked to the challenges in finding affordable homes to help people move to.

Therefore, a key objective under this strategy is to develop and implement a rapid rehousing model for the council's homelessness services. This will aim to keep temporary accommodation stays as short as possible, reducing the impact of homelessness on people and families. New emphasis within our temporary accommodation will be put on how we prepare and work with tenants to become ready to move into permanent housing and make it a success. This will see us putting less emphasis on people being considered "ready" for a tenancy, and more focus on what support would a household needs to make a future tenancy a success.

To enable this rapid rehousing approach we will renew our approach to access to the Private Rented Sector for homeless households. We already rely heavily on this sector when assisting those we owe a duty towards to find alternative accommodation to move to. We have developed different schemes over the years to be able to help people find accommodation in the private rented sector. Our offer includes financing rent in advance and deposits by providing interest free loans, or paying rent directly to the landlord. Over the last 10 years, it has been getting more difficult for us to assist people into the private rented sector as rents are increasing rapidly.



Taking this into account, we recognise that we need to do even more, and develop better prevention tools for those in the sector, as well as to work with landlords in the city to reinvigorate schemes that will be more competitive and continue to allow people to access affordable private rented sector accommodation in the city.

Alongside better access for homeless households into the private sector, we also need to support good access into social housing. We will seek to update our social housing allocations policy and lettings targets, learning from best practice in other authorities, to make it an easier and simplified process to join the housing register, supports people moving on from interim accommodation, and helps the most vulnerable in our society to access accommodation.

Priority 5 - Ending rough sleeping

By the end of this strategy period, we are seeking to:

- Have ended the need for anyone to sleep rough in Oxford
- Ensure that where rough sleeping cannot be prevented, it is brief, rare and non-recurring
- Establish and embed a new countywide approach to preventing and relieving rough sleeping, with new jointly commissioned arrangements across local government, voluntary sector partners and health and social care in Oxfordshire
- Work with partners to deliver the right range of preventative services so that the vast majority of people who are facing the need to rough sleep can access support prior to being made homeless.
- Enable a housing-led approach to rough sleeping, rapidly moving people off the street and into a settled home, with more use of flexible support and less use of interim, supported accommodation.
- Improve access to social housing for single households experiencing or at risk of homelessness by changing our approach to how we allocate social housing and by working with housing associations to provide more accommodation.
- Improve access to private rented housing for single adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Make less use of large, supported, congregate/hostel style and shared accommodation.

How the Council and partners are going to do this

Implement the County Wide strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with all partners across Oxfordshire to deliver the Oxfordshire Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy • Enhance partnership working across all service areas both at strategic and operational level, including with commissioning partners, statutory services and the voluntary sector • Work with and support the Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance of organisations commissioned to deliver services for single homeless people and those experiencing rough sleeping to ensure that service provision and access to accommodation is transformed in line with the County wide strategy commitments, including moving to a housing-led and more person centred approach. • Work closely with our partner commissioning bodies and Alliance providers to make sure partnership work underpins service delivery and that there is good accountability and performance. • Work with our District Council colleagues and Registered Providers to ensure that commitments to the provision of 1 bed-room accommodation is met across the County.
Maximise funding resourcing and profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work closely with DLUHC to access funding from future Rough Sleeping Initiative funding rounds, and apply for other funding made available, both capital and revenue, in order to support investment into services for rough sleepers, including accommodation. • Lobby the government to continue to providing funding to local authorities and to review policies to ensure they are responsive to change.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with commissioners of supported accommodation operating in the city to ensure that as much as possible is provided through registered providers, who are subject to more regulation and impose less costs on the Council through reduced housing benefit subsidy.
Provide the right service at the right time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that statutory and non-statutory services in Oxford develop a joint approach to support those experiencing rough sleeping, so people get access to statutory homelessness assistance, Care Act assessments and mental health support. • Make sure that people do not have to sleep rough before they can be offered the assistance they need • Implement and embed an 'Alliance of services' approach to the delivery of support services for persons at risk of or experiencing rough sleeping • Implement the principles of Somewhere Safe to Stay in the City to ensure people who find themselves sleeping rough will have an immediate option of moving off the streets while more permanent accommodation options are sourced. • Invest in a psychologically informed assessment hub in Oxford City to make sure that those at risk of or experiencing rough sleeping can get a psychologically informed assessment of their specific needs as soon as possible. • Facilitate access to appropriate health and care services for those who are in need.
Improve access to social housing and range of accommodation options available to single people and couples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly monitor the number of single homeless people offered social housing as well as monitor the cases of single persons who have been excluded from the housing register. This will include monitoring the instances of nominations that all social landlords have refused in order to maximise learning and develop new solutions and inform revisions of allocations policies where necessary. • Carry out a full review of the Council's Allocations Policy, including the exclusion criteria based on learnings from case reviews and data in order to ensure that single homeless people are not being discriminated against by being excluded from social housing. • Work with our District Council partners and Registered Providers to pursue options and solutions for 'hard to let' properties across the County with the view to increasing available stock for single people. • Work with Registered Providers to ensure there is sufficient suitable and affordable accommodation options to meet the need for singles and couples and for those moving on from supported accommodation in the city. • Enhance our offer for single adults with no or low support needs who are rough sleeping or living in supported accommodation, to move into accommodation in the private rented sector, through renewed and new access schemes.
Ensure there is sufficient provision of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Together with our County and District partners and working towards the goals of the County wide strategy, commission a range of flexible accommodation for singles and couples.

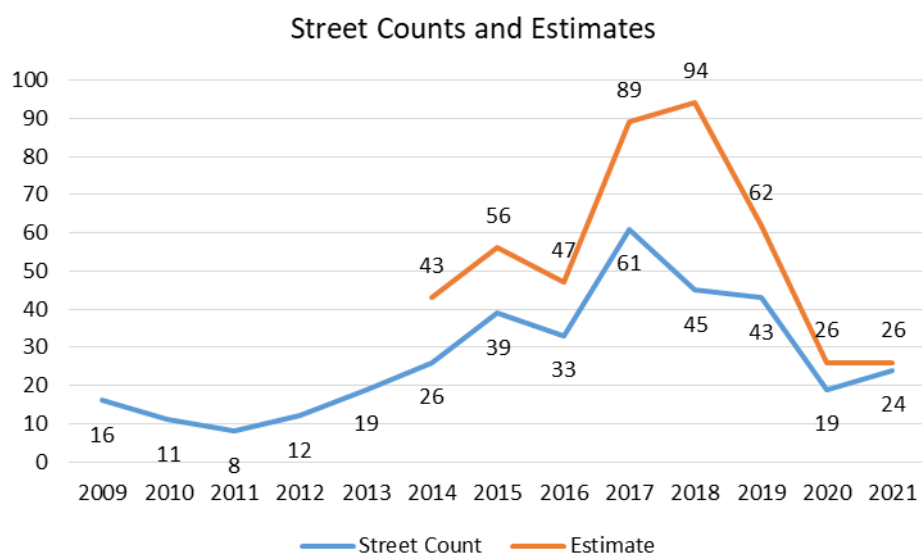
suitable supported accommodation to meet a range of needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with others, such as the Buckingham, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System, to enable the commissioning of specialist supported accommodation, ensuring good support models are in place. • Together with partners and under the County wide strategy, review commissioning and contract management of supported services ensuring choice and variety is maximised, both in terms of accommodation and support provision. • Offer every individual who requires support a clear assessment and arrange delivery of relevant support in a flexible way, minimising the need for individual to move to other accommodation. • Work with services we commission to move to a strength-based approach to delivery of housing support services where a person's individual needs are at the centre of the service provision. • Support people experiencing rough sleeping in Oxford who do not have recourse to public funds to find appropriate solutions
Introduce a housing-led approach to offer of accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through Housing First, we will, where appropriate, move people into their own accommodation as soon as possible and provide the support individuals may need in order to sustain the accommodation. Housing First will in particular answer housing need for longer term rough sleepers experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness. • Implement and monitor the commissioning and contract management arrangements of the provision of support, ensuring choice and variety is maximised, including support not linked to a housing offer; undertake clear assessment with every individual who requires support and arrange delivery in a flexible way minimising the need for people to move to other accommodation • Work with the Alliance to continue to transform our approach to the provision of accommodation to single homeless persons, including reviewing our current accommodation offers as we move to a housing-led model and helping facilitate changes agreed as part of this review.

Rough Sleeping in Oxford

Oxford City Council and our partners have been working to tackle high rough sleeping street counts and support people off the street into a suitable accommodation. In 2018, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (now Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) published a Rough Sleeping Strategy and delivery plan, which set out plans to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. This followed a period of almost 10 years, when rough sleeping numbers across the country increased sharply. The government launched a new Rough Sleeping Strategy in early September 2022 – Ending Rough Sleeping For Good. The new strategy builds on the achievements under the previous one and is backed by further funding and investment for the next three years. The strategy recognises that rough sleeping is a complex issue, and driven by many different factors, and the approach that has been developed under the new strategy is therefore a whole system approach.

The level of rough sleeping in Oxford increased from 8 in 2011 to 63 in 2017 and was a result of a range of austerity measures put in place by government that affected local authorities from 2010

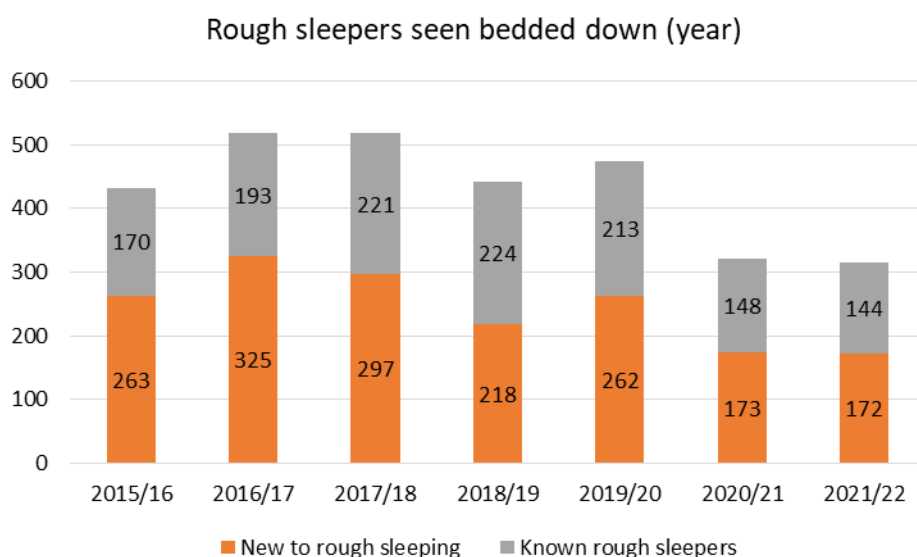
onwards. In Oxford and Oxfordshire, this meant funding cuts for non-statutory service historically funded by the County Council, such as supported accommodation for rough sleepers and single homeless persons.



Along with the national rough sleeping strategy in 2018, the government also started a large funding programme which marked a change and new opportunity to bring people off the street. Since 2018, we as a Council have successfully bid for over £5m in grant funding for services, which has funded additional service for single persons and those who are rough sleeping. As a result, we have seen the number of rough sleepers reduce. At the start of the pandemic, the government launched the ‘Everyone In’ mandate, where all local authorities were asked to provide accommodation for all rough sleepers and those accommodated in communal areas to allow people to live in self-contained accommodation during the pandemic. Funding was provided to local authorities. Since the end of the ‘Everyone In’ mandate, rough sleeping numbers have started to increase again across the Country, including in Oxford.

The majority of those rough sleeping in Oxford are male. Around 33% are in the age group 35-44. A large proportion of rough sleepers have support needs, often multiple support needs, which makes them more vulnerable and this can create barriers to securing accommodation that is suitable, both in terms of the accommodation itself, and also the kind and level of support people may need. As a result of this, we see people who continuously fall out of, or leave the accommodation they have been assisted to move to and instead return to the street. We are also continuing to see people ending up on the street for the very first time, with about half of those seen rough sleeping every year, being new rough sleepers.

There are regularly people experiencing rough sleeping in Oxford, who do not have recourse to public funds. This means that due to their immigration status, they cannot receive benefits as Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, and in most cases they cannot access social housing or supported accommodation. This means that the options for moving off the streets and into accommodation are very limited. However, our commissioned services work with specialist immigration support agencies to support people to regularise their immigration status, in order for them to be able to access public funds. Support is also available to return to a home country if individuals wish to do so. At present, there are also 15 units of accommodation, funded by the Oxfordshire Homeless Movement, that people who are rough sleeping and have no recourse to public funds can access.



Preventing rough sleeping

To end the need for people to sleep rough in Oxford, we need to prevent people from ending up on the street in the first place, we need to have enough accommodation available to assist people off the streets, it needs to be the right accommodation, and there needs to be services in place to help people stay in their accommodation. Developing a range of different provision, is a central focus going forward, and a central theme of the Oxfordshire's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy that was implemented in 2021. This strategy will drive and inform much of the City Council's work.

The Countywide strategy is the result of the County, City and Districts Councils, as well as health partners, working together to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. It focusses on collaboration and working across geographical and professional borders to end rough sleeping in the County and to target resources collectively to meet the needs and aspirations of people affected by homelessness and rough sleeping. The strategy will underpin a transformation in the way housing, social care and health services work together and with people in need of housing and support.

New commissioning and new services

One of the biggest shifts in service provision for rough sleepers and single homeless people brought about by the countywide strategy, is the commissioning of a group of different organisations that have come together to form the Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance. The Alliance of organisations are operating as one service that has shared responsibility. This will include an assessment and triage centre in the city that will function as a multi-disciplinary hub and 'Somewhere Safe to Stay' provision.

The Alliance will implement a significant transformation of services during the life of this strategy, with more personalised services linked to what individuals need in order to move from the street, and adopting a model that supports greater amounts of Housing First accommodation, a model where people move to a permanent home but with the right flexible support to make it a success.

Whilst a large proportion of accommodation and other services for single homeless people and rough sleepers are commissioned together with partners, we also have a large commissioning

programme that funds additional services that are needed in Oxford to meet the needs in the city. The City has a large commissioning programme for such services and funds for this have increased over the last three years, largely due to successfully securing funds from government schemes. Continuous funding from the government and other sources is key for us to be able to continue to deliver and develop the range of services that are needed to end rough sleeping in the city.

In addition to working with others to commission and develop more supported accommodation options, we also need to work together to ensure that single persons can move into private rented or social rented accommodation. The Crisis commissioned housing-led feasibility study for Oxfordshire considered the allocations schemes in place for Districts and the City council. One example the report references, is the number of allocations that are made to those who are either currently rough sleeping or leaving supported accommodation (such as hostel accommodation). Only 4.5% of allocations go to this group in Oxford, while other local authorities that promote access for this group achieve much higher numbers, such as Hull who allocates 21.4%, or Coventry at 18.3%. We have carefully considered these findings which will inform our future approach to allocations for social housing under this strategy.

Governance and delivery of the strategy

Our strategy covers a period of 5 years. It is hard to predict what is going to happen in this time, and undoubtedly, there will be changes to legislation, regulation and wider societal and economic shifts that will impact on our communities and what we can and need to do as a Council.

What we do not anticipate will change are the priorities we have set out in this strategy to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis and to realise our vision. However, to make sure that we can deliver our priorities, the action plan that will be developed to accompany this strategy, and which will be published alongside the finalised strategy, will be reviewed regularly. We will use key data and other information to tell us what is happening, and review and update our actions accordingly, so the strategy is able to adapt and change to the circumstances the city finds itself in, and we are able to continue to progress our priorities.

This update will go to the Cabinet of Oxford City Council annually to update on progress and make revisions to the strategy and action plan as necessary.

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