

To: Cabinet
Date: 9 July 2025
Report of: Director of Housing
Title of Report: Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide an update on the progress made in Year 2 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and to seek approval for the implementation of the Year 3 action plan
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Good, affordable homes
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2028

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Note the progress made in Year 2 to implement the Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan and the emerging risks and challenges for delivery over next year and beyond; Approve the adoption of the new Strategy Action Plan for Year 3 (25-26); and Delegate authority to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to update the Action Plan when required.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Year 2 Action Plan 2024-25
Appendix 2	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Year 3 Action Plan 2025-26
Appendix 3	Risk Register
Appendix 4	Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Introduction and background

1. Following implementation of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28, considerable progress has been made towards actions within the Year 2 (24/25) action plan. Despite this progress, the Council faces significant and emerging challenges impacting the delivery of the Strategy, stemming from the local housing market, national policy and other sources, and therefore we have revised the action plan for Year 3 (25/26) to ensure it continues to drive forward progress to meet the objectives as outlined in the Strategy while addressing new risks and developments. The year 2 action plan and progress rating can be found in Appendix 1.
2. As part of the agreed governance of the Strategy, an annual report is provided to Cabinet and this report sets out progress made against the year 2 action plan for the five priority areas and seeks approval to implement the new year 3 action plan which is set out in Appendix 2. The overarching risks are detailed in the Risk Register in Appendix 3 and this report also sets out key governance, financial, environmental and equalities considerations.

Progress on the 5 Strategy priorities

Priority 1 – Providing more affordable homes

3. The affordable housing supply programme is currently on course to delivery 1,512 homes over the next four years, this is slightly below the ambitious four-year delivery target of 1,600 however it will exceed its target for social rented units, with 1,008 units projected to be delivered, against a target of 850. In 24/25, 109 affordable homes were handed over – 86 social rent, 2 affordable rent and 21 shared-ownership properties.
4. Agreements have been signed previously with three District Councils on the allocation of Social Housing for Oxford's unmet need. One remaining agreement with Cherwell District Council is pending sign off and officers are working on progressing this. These Councils have agreed to allocate several thousand affordable homes over the coming years to help meet Oxford's housing need.
5. These "unmet need" agreements are starting to deliver units for the people of Oxford. In 24/25 over 140 lets were made through the Vale of White Horse housing register for applicants that had an Oxford City connection or dual connection, including at least 75 cases where Oxford City Council had an active homelessness duty, where households are at immediate risk of becoming homeless or were already homeless in Temporary Accommodation (TA), securing them affordable housing close to the city.
6. There has been further progress on the Council's property acquisition programmes. In 24/25, utilising grant funding through Social Housing Accommodation Programme (SHAP) and Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF), the Council purchased 7 new council homes for Housing First and 10 homes to accommodate homeless households and resettled refugee families. We have also utilised Retained Right To Buy Receipts (RTRBR) to purchase 12 additional homes which will now be available at social rent to households on the housing register, which means 29 units were delivered through acquisition programmes overall.
7. The supply team have been proactively engaging with landlords; this has resulted in several development opportunities being brought forward this year and Officers have reviewed feasibility on a number of small sites across the city to try and increase housing supply.
8. In 24/25 there have been well publicised issues with Thames Water and the possible objection by the Environment Agency to future housing developments in Oxford due to improvements requires at the Oxford Sewage Treatment Works. Joint work between Oxford City Council, Thames Water and the Environment Agency has led to a new sewage

infrastructure deal whereby the Environment Agency is satisfied for Thames Water to introduce an interim scheme in 2027 to provide improved wastewater capacity, ahead of a full upgrade in 2031, enabling continued housing supply in the Oxford area from the end of 2027.

Priority 2 – Great homes for all

9. The Council continues to work to ensure the Council's housing stock and our services to tenants are fully compliant with the regulatory regime introduced as part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and new consumer standards. Work is on-going to drive service improvement across Council services for tenants, with transformation underway in our landlord services and property teams, to ensure compliance over a number of areas.
10. Significant work has been undertaken on the Housing Revenue Account assets, with a new Asset Management Strategy and 5-year capital investment programmes agreed at Cabinet in December 2024, with continuation of rolling stock surveys to monitor property stock condition to ensure homes meet or are brought up to decent homes standards.
11. Work is on-going to reset our approach to resident involvement, ensuring an empowered tenant voice that shapes and influences our services. An initial roadshow in February 2025 reached 400 residents with significant work in train for the coming year.
12. Work to ensure private rented properties are compliant with property licencing schemes continues, with enforcement of both HMO and selective licensing schemes now aligned and additional staffing in place to proactively inspect properties. Through the licensing team, in total 17,195 properties are now covered by our property licensing schemes (when including individual flats under block licenses) including selective and HMO Licensing and the regulatory team continue with landlord engagement through landlord forums.

Priority 3 – Housing for a net zero housing future

13. OX Place continues to work on exceeding current building regulations and continues to use energy quality assurance on all schemes in contract and explore how to increase environmental standards.
14. Our Asset Management Strategy now informs our planned maintenance programme, which includes delivery of elements of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C and above. As detailed within the environmental section further down in this paper, the Council has clear aims to ensure Oxford meets its commitment to become a net zero city, however future delivery timelines and programmes will need to be balanced against funding parameters.
15. We continue to invest in energy efficiency and measures to decarbonise our council homes with surveys and designs to be rolled out across the remaining sub-EPC C properties in preparation for delivery in 2026 onwards.
16. The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) 2 ended on 31 March 2025 with over £250k awarded in grants to make homes more energy efficient. Oxford City Council has joined a consortium with Oxfordshire County Council which has been awarded £3.75 million for 3 years under the Warm Homes: Local Grant. The award announcement was made in March 2025. The scheme will start in April 2025. Active promotion of Warm Homes: Local Grant will begin once the County have confirmed delivery partner and communication and engagement plan for the scheme, and this is likely to be in summer 2025.

Priority 4 – Preventing Homelessness and creating a rapid rehousing response

17. Homelessness has increased in Oxford in recent years, in line with the national trends, driven by cost-of-living pressures, rising interest rates and strong rental inflation. Despite growing demand, the service has continued to transform, enabling a more effective

response. Homeless prevention services have been expanded, with a majority of homelessness cases in Oxford in 24/25 picked up at the prevention stage, and 63% of cases ending in a positive outcome preventing homelessness through either tenancy sustainment or rehousing.

18. The Council has also continued to transform its approach to rehousing homeless households and in its provision of temporary accommodation (TA). A renewed approach to private rented sector lets, and a reviewed social housing letting approach, led to increased TA move on, with 139 homeless households being housed into the private rented sector in 24/25. Temporary accommodation supply has been boosted in response to rising hotel and B&B use, with approximately 200 new TA units set to be delivered over the next 18 months. This includes over 30 private leased units, the leasing of units from housing associations, new partnerships with local charities who provide accommodation, and changing use of lower demand housing stock the council owns.
19. We continue to focus on providing a better digital offer to customers, building on the introduction of the online general housing register form this year. Over the next 12 months, we will look to develop our online offer to include transfer applications, and eventually Personal Housing Plans when meeting the Council's homelessness duties. We are seeking to procure a new housing needs ICT system and currently assessing bids, the aim of this procurement is to support further transformation of services.
20. Following the conclusion of an internal review of the Councils social housing allocations policy, the Council intends to consult on changes to inform a new policy, helping to meet the challenges the Council currently faces.
21. The Refugee and Resettlement Team continues to lead the response to growing refugee and asylum demand work within the City. The team led on securing the Council of Sanctuary Award which is a council-wide initiative and approval of the Council of Sanctuary Framework 2025-2028 and action plan. The team has successfully delivered the corporate resettlement commitment of 8 families a year.
22. The Council has secured another year's funding for its successful Out of Hospital programme, via the Better Care Fund, funding Step Down beds and other interventions to avoid people becoming homeless leaving hospital and other health facilities.
23. There is work on-going across Oxfordshire to create a new forum of registered providers, the aim of the group will be to enable regular conversations between housing associations and councils to discuss issues that are important to residents including housing management, repairs, allocations and homeless prevention, alongside affordable supply.

Priority 5 – Ending Rough Sleeping

24. The Council has made good progress in its efforts to end rough sleeping in 2024/25. The Council and its partners continue to invest in and transform services to move people off the street. This has resulted in a decline in the street count this year with data records showing a high of 90 individuals rough sleeping in August 2024, which had dropped to 35 by March 2025, this reduction is within a period where the country and many of our comparator authorities have recorded increases.
25. A review of key work areas within the commissioned Homelessness Alliance took place during summer 2024, which has led to the development of a transformation plan for the Alliance which is now being implemented. This comprehensive plan sets out the steps to change the Alliance's services and bring them into line with our strategic priorities, this includes greater specialisation of supported accommodation, the creation of a Housing-Led offer, expansion of Somewhere Safe to Stay services, and improvements in prevention and outreach services.
26. The Countywide Homelessness partnership has been making good progress. Two Housing Summits were held at the end of 2024 to bring together all key parts of the public

sector and registered providers to look at the homelessness and supply challenges Oxfordshire faces. This has helped inform an updated Countywide action plan, which includes work on joint commissioning, improving joint working across homelessness and Adult social care teams, and other key work.

27. Good progress has been made against our commitment to provide Housing First accommodation. Through a combination of acquisitions and the releasing of existing units from Council and A2 Dominion stock, we have secured 17 lettings this year giving a total of 47 units. By the end of March 2026, we expect to have 58 people in accommodation

Year 2 Strategy Action Plan

28. As outlined above, we have made good progress against our Year 2 action plan, but significant challenges remain. Within the Year 2 Strategy action plan document attached within Appendix 1, Officers have provided a narrative description of progress against each action with a rag rating to show progress.
29. The majority of actions are either on track or have minor delays as a significant number of work streams have been developed, implemented or in progress, to meet the various actions as set out within the Strategy.
30. Whilst there has been good progress against individual actions there are several over-arching risk themes that have emerged. These are highlighted below, alongside how Officers propose to mitigate these risks.

Emerging Risks and Challenges

31. A number of significant risks and challenges have emerged in the housing and homelessness area over the past year to 18 months and these are captured within the Risk Register in Appendix 3.
32. Due to the evolving context and challenges the strategy needs to be updated and flexible to meet changing demand, otherwise it risks becoming outdated and this is the first over-arching risk captured in the risk register. We plan to mitigate this risk through a flexible approach, adapting the action plan annually, with the ability to make changes more frequently if necessary. The Year 3 action plan is detailed within Appendix 2 and seeks to respond to the changing demands and pressures placed on the Council.
33. The second over-arching risk relates to the regulatory landscape and the compliance requirements of the Social Housing (Regulations) Act 2023 provisions and all consumer standards, which ensure the Council complies with the requirements from the Regulator of Social Housing. Officers are mitigating this risk with work underway across the authority to ensure compliance with the standards, learning from the other Councils who have gone through an inspection. This includes our work on tenant involvement, which is now moving at pace, with the new governance structures mapped out in the delivery phase and the Asset Management Strategy and 5-year capital investment programmes agreed at Cabinet in December 2024.
34. Oxford City Council continues to see high and rising homelessness in the city, and a high temporary accommodation (TA) placement rate, in line with national trends, which is the third over-arching risk captured within the risk register. Cabinet have supported a number of mitigations in order to increase the supply of TA, create a new TA procurement process, increase private and social housing move on options and increase homelessness prevention activities. Despite this the Council has limited ability to change the overall rate of homelessness in the city, which is principally driven by the wider economy, rental prices and government policy, and the Council will continue to be exposed to high levels of demand and rising TA use for the foreseeable future and need to continue to respond at pace.

35. The government has consulted on significant changes to local government funding for homelessness services (Homelessness Prevention Grant). If implemented these will result in large funding reductions for Oxford and other authorities in the South East of England that experience high rates of homelessness. This is due to moving the main measure of demand from homelessness duties to local benefit claim rates. This, if it goes ahead, could result in service reductions or a greater burden on the core Council finance. This is the fourth key risk captured within the risk register. Officers are engaging central government on the effect of these significant changes and seeking to raise awareness to influence governmental policy.
36. The transformation of our approach to rough sleeping is facing a critical 12 months ahead and is the fifth over-arching risk. We have agreed a new budget and transformation plan for the Homelessness Alliance for 25/26 to mitigate this risk, which will see fundamental changes to their accommodation and support offer. However, transformation covering six organisations, in a period of high demand, and stretched budgets bring considerable challenges. The governments short-term funding arrangements also pose a risk and Officers continue to engage with government to advocate for a long-term funding settlement to tackle homelessness.
37. Local government re-organisation is the sixth over-arching risk captured within the risk assessment. This could have a significant effect on the Council's or any successor Council's statutory remit as it could merge with other District or County Local Authorities and the boundaries are re-drawn, as well as causing significant upheaval. It will also influence agreements such as the Countywide Strategy (which expires in 2026) captured in paragraph 25 above. At present proposals for Local Government Re-organisation in Oxfordshire are being drawn up and will be submitted to central government by November 2025. Officers are in regular contact with government, who have indicated that the earliest date for reorganisation for councils in Oxfordshire will be in 2028 and therefore at present Officers are monitoring this risk but do not believe it will have an immediate impact on the aims and delivery of the Strategy in Year 3 (2025/26)
38. The Council has committed to a number of development programmes to increase the supply of housing including in partnership with OX Place. To be able to achieve the Council's stated aim, there is a requirement to ensure the right level of resourcing and expertise are in place, which will need to be reviewed and actioned as pipeline schemes go through the development process, this forms the seventh key risk. Failure to do so may lead to slippage or delays in schemes being completed. To mitigate this risk, we now have an agreed programme risk register covering a series of mitigations set out in it. These risks sit at Corporate; Service; Programme; and Scheme level, with the internal officer Delivery Review Group (Housing) meeting overseeing it.
39. The HRA's 40-year Business Plan was presented to cabinet in December 2024 and approved. The Council has adopted the plan which details expected incomes, expenditure on housing management, housing repairs and capital maintenance over the next 40 financial years. It also models approved proposals for additional council house building and acquisitions. The plan shows that the Council is able to fund planned expenditure over the medium term as set out in the 2025/26 Budget and medium term financial plan proposals. The Business Plan confirms the reasonably good health of the HRA over the next 40 years, however previous rent caps, high inflation and interest rates have put pressure on the HRA, whilst at the same time increasing demands on delivery. There are a number of options that have been adopted within the plan to improve the financial position and will act as mitigations against this financial risk which forms the eighth over-arching risk detailed within the risk assessment.

Year 3 Strategy Action Plan

40. To respond in overarching risks as well as progress against the year 2 action plan, a new year 3 action plan has been developed, updating the current action plan after consideration of progress and to ensure the strategies, actions and priorities are adapted to the emerging challenges. The new action plan for year 3 can be found in Appendix 2.
41. We have worked closely with colleagues across the Council, Oxford Direct Services and OX Place as well as key external partners to develop this action plan and have ensured that our actions are aligned with other Council strategies, business plans and work priorities. The Action plan contains 5 year objectives, alongside year 3 actions, to ensure gradual progress towards our stated goals within the Strategy.
42. The Action Plan will be reviewed regularly to monitor and report on our progress against our commitments in the Strategy. To ensure it can respond quickly to emerging priorities and risks, we have requested approval to revise the plan throughout the year as required in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

Strategy governance

43. The Strategy document outlines the governance arrangements that will be put in place to ensure progress against the Strategy, outline accountability to those who need to deliver actions, and to support and inform the annual updating of the action plan over the duration of the Strategy.
44. Routine monitoring of the Strategy is done internally, with identified Officer Groups responsible for the delivery of the Strategy. As large parts of the Strategy sit across other departments and teams in the Council, regular review meetings are held with relevant colleagues across the organisation to ensure the Strategy is joined up.
45. Progress against actions will be updated on a quarterly basis, with regular updates made to the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and the Communities, and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).
46. A full review of the Action Plan and progress is completed on an annual basis and the recommendations for revisions to the action plan are presented annually to Cabinet for approval.

Next Steps

47. Subject to approval by Cabinet, the year 3 Action Plan 25-26 will be implemented in July 2025. Work on the monitoring framework for the action plan will begin immediately, with the governance and reporting structure resuming.

Environmental Implications

48. There are considerable environmental implications resulting from the actions contained within the Strategy. The majority of actions contained within the Strategy will either benefit or have no impact on the environment. This is because measures include considerable investment in energy efficiency improvements in our Council housing stock, higher standards for new builds being developed through our investment, and work in the Private Rented Sector to bring up standards.
49. Any development brings benefits and costs to the environment and is noted that there are risks associated with the costs to delivery on the Council's net zero ambition. Overall, the Council is clear in its Council Strategy that the delivery of more affordable housing is a priority to meet housing need, and therefore by developing to higher environment and energy efficiency standards this Strategy is helping to lower environmental implications of future development.
50. As significant schemes, projects and funding roll out in coming years that have significant impacts on the environment, those that have to go to Cabinet to be approved will have individual environment impact assessments in line with the Council's Constitution. The proposal complies with the City Council's policies and commitments

relating to carbon and the environment and brings us closer to our commitment to becoming a zero carbon council by 2030 and a zero carbon Oxford City by 2040.

Financial implications

51. Throughout its development, the new Strategy is informed by the current financial context the Council finds itself in. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been considered when developing the Strategy. The current economic climate including increased regulatory costs will have major financial impacts on the Council's finances, and this will also have an impact on the levels of funding that the Council will be able to allocate to deliver actions under the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
52. Particularly, the significant increase in homelessness presentations over the last year to 18 months which has caused a sharp increase in demand for temporary accommodation, leading to the frequent use of expensive nightly charge accommodation and increased regulatory regime and compliance requirements. This will continue to be a significant financial risk to the Council over the coming years. Preventing and tackling all forms of homelessness is a priority for the Council and despite the financial pressures, we have been able to increase spending on homelessness over the last few years. This is due to our success in obtaining external grant funding.
53. The delivery of the Strategy over the coming years is contained within the Medium-Term Financial Plan, of which a net budget of £7.180 million has been allocated for Housing Services within the general fund is detailed below:

2025/26 Approved MTFP Budget:

	Latest Approved Budget
Strategy & Service Development	£520,132
Garages (Landlord Services)	£91,143
Homelessness Prevention	£598,330
Rapid Re-Housing	£4,208,712
Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness	£1,594,685
Other homelessness costs	£167,735
	£7,180,737

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is intended to record expenditure and income on running a council's own housing stock and closely related services or facilities, which are provided primarily for the benefit of the council's own tenants. A breakdown for 25/26 is found below:

<u>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</u>	<u>Approved Budget</u>
Dwelling Rent	(£56,887,000)
Service Charges	(£3,066,000)
Garage Income	(£288,000)
Miscellaneous Income	(£1,006,000)
Net Income	<u>(£61,247,000)</u>
Management & Services (Stock Related)	£15,524,000
Other Revenue Spend (Stock Related)	£990,000
Misc Expenditure (Not Stock Related)	£834,000

Bad Debt Provision	£994,000
Responsive & Cyclical Repairs	£18,211,000
Interest Paid	£15,290,000
Depreciation	£12,040,000
Total Expenditure	£63,884,000
Net Operating Expenditure/(Income)	£2,637,000

54. The Council, and other Local Authorities, have relied heavily on funding from central government for any increased spending on homelessness, in particular in relation to preventing and tackling single person homelessness and rough sleeping, over the last few years. These funding pots have been short-term, which presents us and service providers with challenges as we cannot plan and commit funding to long term solutions. We currently have confirmed grant funding only up to March 2026. Following the government's spending review publication in June 2025 we hope to be informed of a multi-year grant settlement that will allow longer term planning, which will help facilitate further transformation.

55. As outlined in the Council zero carbon strategies, we have a clear commitment to improve energy efficiency standards for our homes which are 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. This is at the same time as we need to invest in our housing stock overall. Significant central government funding will be required in this area to fulfil ambitions.

Legal issues

56. We are required by law to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in place. This must be based on a review of all forms of homelessness in the local area and this Strategy should be refreshed at least every 5 years. The current Strategy came into place in April 2023. There is no such legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy, however, it is seen as best practice. Due to the link between the supply of housing and levels of homelessness, the Strategies are interlinked and cannot be easily separated. We have therefore brought these interdependent strands together to create one cohesive Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Level of risk

57. Individual risks and rag rating against progress are captured within the year 2 action plan and progress description.

58. Over-arching risks are summarised within this report and captured in the risk assessment which is attached as Appendix 3. Please note this risk assessment is for the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Strategy itself includes many projects which will each have their own individual risk assessments.

Equalities impact

59. An equality impact assessment was completed as part of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, and this has been reviewed for this cabinet paper and can be found in Appendix 4.

60. A number of actions in the year 2 action plan were set in relation to improving the delivery of the Strategy and in relation to individuals or groups with a protected

characteristic and in relation to delivering actions related to equalities, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

61. Positive progress has been made including a project to analyse the characteristics of households approaching the Council as homeless, OCC tenants and General Housing Register applicants. Officers have developed comprehensive data sets and plan to use this data to inform service planning and targeted initiatives in 2025/26 alongside related service delivery and existing projects.
62. Building on the progress in 24/25, the Year 3 action plan has set a number of actions related to EDI to ensure we give due regard to negative impacts on equalities and seek actions to mitigate any such impact.

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Background Papers:	
1	<u>Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28</u>
2	<u>Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 Year 2 Action Plan</u>