

Oxford City Council – Tenancy Policy

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1. Introduction

Oxford City Council (“the Council”) is a social housing landlord and the Tenancy Policy sets out how it will operate and deliver the requirements of the Council’s overarching Tenancy Strategy (which sets expectations for all registered providers) including how we let homes, the types of tenancies we offer, and how we help tenants to maintain their homes successfully.

The Council manages around 8,100 homes with other registered providers in Oxford managing around a further 4,100 homes. The Council works with registered provider partners via the Oxford Register of Affordable Housing (ORAH) Partnership Agreement to increase the supply of social housing in Oxford. Around 90% of available homes from partner landlords are allocated to households on the Council’s Housing Register.

The Tenancy Policy puts into action the priorities outlined in the Social Housing (Regulations) Act and Consumer Standards introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing (including the Tenancy Standard) as well as the Council’s strategy objectives to provide *good affordable homes* and *thriving communities*.

This document updates and replaces Oxford City Council’s Tenancy Policy 2018-23 and has been informed by key Council housing policies including the Tenancy Strategy, Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, Housing Allocations Scheme, Oxford City Council Strategy 2024-2028 and is also complimented by and supports a range of Council policies including the Council’s Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

The policy should be read alongside your Tenancy Agreement (which sets out your legal rights and responsibilities)

If you require any further information, please contact your allocated Housing Officer or the Housing Services Team who will be happy to assist you.

2. Allocations and Lettings

All available council homes are allocated in accordance with the Council’s Allocations Scheme, which sets out who qualifies for housing, how priority is assessed, and how homes are offered.

The Council works closely with the Oxford Register of Affordable Housing (ORAH) partners to maximise access to social housing. The Council is committed to making best use of its stock while meeting urgent housing need, supporting the prevention of homelessness and meeting our aim to create *great homes for all* in line with the Council’s Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028.

Most properties are advertised through the Council’s Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) system, where applicants can bid for the homes, they are eligible for. The Allocations Scheme also allows for direct offers in certain circumstances, such as when a person is at risk of serious harm, or where there are urgent health or safeguarding needs.

Some groups are not required to have a local connection to Oxford in order to be accepted onto the affordable housing register. This includes people fleeing domestic abuse, care leavers under 25, and members or former members of the armed forces.

The allocation scheme also provides additional support to applicants with complex housing needs or who are moving on from supported housing. For full details including exact local connection criteria, residents can refer to the Allocations Scheme available on the Council's website.

The Council is committed to ensuring fair and inclusive access to its allocations of housing. We recognise that tenants and applicants may face different barriers based on protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. We aim to promote inclusive practices that are sensitive to individual and diverse needs.

3. Types of Tenancy

The Council supports the use of Introductory and Secure Lifetime tenancies ("Secure Tenancy") as the default tenure types. These provide long-term stability and support the Council's ambition to reduce housing insecurity and promote inclusivity.

The Council uses a 12-month Introductory Tenancy for new Council tenants as a trial period, which automatically converts to a Secure Tenancy if the tenant complies with the terms of the agreement.

Introductory Tenancies

When you become a tenant with the Council you will be given an introductory tenancy if:

- you have never rented a home from us before
- you have only rented from a private landlord
- you have had a period away from being a tenant of a council or a housing association

This will normally last for a year. You will usually be given a secure lifetime tenancy at the end of the year as long as you have not broken your introductory tenancy agreement.

With an introductory tenancy some of your rights are limited:

- you cannot apply to buy your home
- you cannot exchange homes with another tenant
- you cannot sub-let your home
- the Council can bring your tenancy to an end more easily

With Introductory Tenancies, they allow new tenants to demonstrate they can successfully manage their tenancy obligations and there is an expectation that

tenants will receive adequate support to conduct their tenancy successfully. This is reviewed at regular intervals and will consider how the tenancy has conducted your tenancy and managed your property. Extensions to the introductory period may be made in line with legal provisions. If in the circumstance tenancy action is to be taken, clear information and communication will be given.

Secure Tenancies

Most tenants who have had their tenancy for at least one year will have a secure tenancy. With a secure tenancy you have more rights:

- you can stay in your home for as long as you want provided you do not breach the tenancy agreement
- you cannot be made to leave your home except by a court order
- when you die, your tenancy can normally be taken over by a spouse or partner, or another family member who has been living in the property with you before your death (depending on the date your tenancy started and how long your family member has lived in the property). Further details can be found in the succession section further down this document.
- you can buy your home under the Right to Buy legislation if you meet the relevant criteria (with certain exceptions for specialist housing)

The Council may use other tenancy types in specific circumstances, including:

- Non-secure tenancies for temporary accommodation;
- Licence agreements for supported housing or emergency placements;
- Demoted tenancies following court action related to anti-social behaviour or other related tenancy breaches.

Fixed Term Tenancies

The Council supports the use of secure tenancies and does not generally support the use of Fixed-Term Tenancies (FTTs). In line with the Council's Tenancy Strategy FTTs will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and only after review and approval by the Director of Housing Services. FTTs will normally be for a minimum of 5 years and only less in exceptional circumstances. Occasions where FTTs may be used, including FTTs under 5 years, include when:

- The Council is prohibited from issuing a longer tenancy due to grant funding restrictions on the property
- The property can only be let on a short-term basis and would otherwise be left vacant due to a planned re-development in the future or other reasons.

Full details on the Council's procedure on FTTs is available on the website including:

- *The circumstances in which the Council may or may not grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term, in the same property or in a different property, and the detail of the process on how FTTs are reviewed*
- *How a tenant or prospective tenant may appeal against a decision on a review of a fixed term tenancy*
- *The Councils approach on taking into account the needs of those households who are vulnerable by reason of age, disability or illness, and households with children, including through the provision of tenancies which provide a reasonable degree of stability.*
- *Advice and assistance available for tenants on finding alternative accommodation in the event there is a decision not to grant another tenancy.*
- *The policy on granting discretionary succession rights, taking account of the needs of vulnerable household members.*

If you have questions about your tenancy, please contact your Housing Officer or the Housing Services team for advice.

4. Rent and Affordability

Oxford is one of the most expensive places to live in the UK, and we know that rent affordability is a major concern for tenants. The Council is committed to making our homes genuinely affordable for people on low and modest incomes.

Oxford City Council homes preferred level is set at Social Rent levels for general needs housing, which are lower than market rents. If the Council is required to offer an Affordable Rent (for example, due to external funding conditions or viability for new build properties) the Council will ensure that the rent does not exceed the Local Housing Allowance for Oxford. Other rental types such as Council managed temporary accommodation rents are set based on other regulations. The Council reviews rent levels to help make sure housing costs are fair and manageable for our tenants.

5. Tenancy Management

The Council aims to provide proactive, preventative and compassionate tenancy management service with a focus on supporting vulnerable tenants with diverse needs.

Tenants can expect timely responses to queries, requests for tenancy changes, and support to resolve disputes or difficulties.

The Council also undertakes regular tenancy audits to identify and address issues such as:

- Tenancy fraud;
- Overcrowding or under occupation;
- Anti-social behaviour;

- Support needs or safeguarding concerns.

The Council understands that Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) has a profound effect on tenants and the Council's anti-social behaviour policy has five key principles:

- Principle One: No one should have to suffer from ASB.
- Principle Two: Reports of ASB will be treated seriously and dealt with professionally.
- Principle Three: ASB will be addressed firmly, fairly and proportionately.
- Principle Four: We will work with partners in order to deliver an effective ASB service for our communities.
- Principle Five: We will deliver high quality customer service.

The Council will work collaboratively with tenants, the Police, and other statutory and voluntary services to tackle anti-social behaviour. Please contact the Anti-Social Behaviour team if you want to make any reports or find out more regarding how the council is tackling anti-social behaviour.

6. Preventing Eviction and Tenancy Sustainment

We want every Oxford City Council tenant to succeed in their home. If you're struggling to manage your tenancy or falling behind with rent, we will work with you to offer early help and support.

Advice and signposting is provided on the Council's website for support with benefits, income maximisation and finding work alongside links to health and social care provision.

For tenants who require more support, our Tenancy Sustainment Team is here to help Council tenants who are finding it difficult to manage their tenancy. We offer advice on managing money, claiming benefits, and getting support from specialist services. We also work closely with the Council's homelessness prevention teams and partner organisations through the pre-eviction protocol to prevent evictions where possible.

We aim to resolve issues as early as possible and will always treat you fairly, respectfully, and without judgment. Eviction is always a last resort and will only be considered where all other support options have been exhausted and in line with legal procedures.

The Council also works with a number of advice centres in the City to ensure tenants can access impartial advice, with more information on our website - [Oxford City Council Homepage – Oxford City Council](#)

7. Tenancy succession, assignment, exchange and transfer

Assignment, Succession and Exchange can only take place under the limited circumstances permitted by the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) and (in the case of Mutual Exchange) with the Council's written permission which we can only withhold in certain specified circumstances.

- Assignment - a tenant passes on the tenancy to an eligible person before they die.
- Succession - when a tenant dies their tenancy can be passed to an eligible person.
- Mutual exchange - when tenants swap the tenancies of their homes.

Assignment

If you are a secure tenant you have the right to assign your tenancy to another person in the following circumstances, in all cases a deed of assignment is required;

- You may exchange your property with another secure or assured tenant. You must obtain our written permission before the exchange takes place.
- You can assign your tenancy to someone who would be eligible to succeed to your tenancy on your death. You can only do this if there have been no other successions to this tenancy.

Succession

The Localism Act 2011 changed the law relating to succession rules. That part of the Act came into law in April 2012 and it enabled landlords to set out the changes in their Tenancy Agreements. The first update to the Oxford City Council Tenancy Agreements after that date was on 15th September 2014

If you became a tenant before 15th September 2014 and providing there has been no previous succession, when you die your tenancy will pass to your husband, wife or civil partner if they are living with you at the time of your death. If you do not have a husband, wife or civil partner when you die, your tenancy can pass on to another member of your family who has been living with you for at least 12 months before your death. Family members include your partner, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece but does not include foster children.

If you became a tenant after 15th September 2014, your tenancy can only pass to your husband, wife, civil partner, or a person who lives with you as if they were a husband, wife or civil partner if they were living with you at your home at the time of your death.

That person must occupy the property as their only or principal home at the time of the tenant's death.

If you have a joint tenancy and one of you dies, the tenancy will pass to the other joint tenant and this will count as a statutory succession.

If your tenancy passed to you when the previous tenant died, no one else has the right to succeed or take over your tenancy.

In some special circumstances the Council may grant a surviving member of the household a new tenancy under the terms of our allocations policy.

That person must be;

- Living in the property as their only or principal home when the person dies,
- The tenant's wife or husband or civil partner, or
- The tenant's partner who has lived with the tenant for at least 12 months immediately before the tenant died, or
- A member of the tenant's close family who has lived with the tenant for 12 months immediately before the tenant died.

If the property does not match the housing needs of the person granted a new tenancy, we have a right to move them to another property. For example, the home may be too large or have special adaptations.

If someone living in the property does not qualify to succeed to a tenancy, a referral will be made to the Council's Housing Needs team to offer support to find appropriate housing in line with the Council's homelessness duties.

Mutual Exchange

The Council supports secure tenants who wish to swap homes with another council or housing association tenant. This process, known as a mutual exchange, can help tenants move to different areas, find more suitable accommodation, or be closer to family, work, or support networks.

Oxford City Council tenants can find a swap through a variety of methods including national platforms such as HomeSwapper. The Council and most registered social landlords operating in Oxfordshire have joined HomeSwapper. This is a national scheme for exchanges between tenants across the country. This service is free to Oxford City Council tenants and also tenants of housing associations that have joined the scheme

Tenants considering a swap must have a secure tenancy and no serious breaches of their tenancy agreement. Exchanges are subject to approval and must meet legal and policy criteria.

We cannot refuse permission to exchange unless there is a good reason including if you have broken the terms of your tenancy agreement, further information can be found in your tenancy agreement including conditions you must meet.

Transfer

You may apply to move to another property suitable to your needs owned by the Council or another social landlord by application to the Housing Transfer Register.

Change of tenant by Court Order

A court can make an order for the transfer of a tenancy in special circumstances. We recommend that you seek independent legal advice in the event of a relationship breakdown or other tenancy dispute.

If you have questions about your tenancy, please contact your housing officer or the Housing Services team for advice.

8. Decant

When homes must be vacated for redevelopment, regeneration, or major repairs the Council aims to ensure that tenants are consulted, supported, and kept informed. The Council offers priority to move via the Council's Allocation Scheme.

Tenants affected by a decant will be offered suitable alternative accommodation, assistance with removal and resettlement, and, wherever possible, the opportunity to return. Security of tenure will be preserved throughout by offering the same or similar tenancy terms (this could include an offer of an Assured Tenancy with a registered provider).

Emergency decants relating to disrepair, for example due to fire or structural issues or damp and mould in accordance with Awaabs Law and the Council's Damp and Mould policy, requiring an urgent move may be arranged outside of the Allocations Scheme by the Council via a management move in line with statutory requirements.

9. Ending your tenancy

If you want to end your tenancy, you must write to give us notice. You must do this at least four weeks before you want to leave your property. This four weeks' notice must start on a Monday and end on a Sunday or as prescribed in your tenancy agreement.

Only a named tenant can end the tenancy but if you are joint tenants, either of you can end the tenancy on behalf of both tenants. This will end the tenancy and if the other joint tenant(s) wants to stay we will decide whether to offer the remaining person a tenancy of the property. Please note the Council will still hold the departing tenant individually responsible for any arrears of rent and recharges created up to the date the notice ends.

We may allow you to hand back the property before the end of the notice period and not charge you the rent for the remaining period. The property must be completely clear of any belongings and furnishings, including the garden and external buildings and no persons must remain in the property.

In accordance with the Council's allocation scheme, when one party within a joint tenancy gives notice, a new sole tenancy may be granted to the other party at the discretion of the Council. Please note the circumstances below where this will be considered as stated within the Council's allocation scheme:

Joint To Sole and Sole to Joint Tenancies

Joint to Sole On receipt of written notice (normally 4 weeks' notice) that one party wishes to end the tenancy, a new sole tenancy for the same property may be granted at the discretion of the Tenancy Management Manager. This will only be considered where the property remains suitable to the needs of the tenant.

Sole to Joint On written notice by the sole tenant, a new, joint, tenancy for the same property may be granted at the discretion of the Tenancy Management Manager. This will only be considered where the property remains suitable to the needs of the tenants and there has been no previous succession to the tenancy. We strongly

advise that any person considering giving notice should contact their Housing Officer in the first instance or seek independent legal advice.

10. Domestic Abuse and Safe Tenure

The Council recognises domestic abuse as a serious safeguarding and housing issue and is committed to providing a safe, supportive and survivor-led response.

The Council's approach is guided by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Secure Tenancies (Victims of Domestic Abuse) Act 2018, and the principles of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) which the Council is a member of. This commitment is set out in full in the Council's Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users.

The Council adopts a survivor-led approach. This means that tenants who disclose domestic abuse are listened to, believed, and supported to make informed choices about their housing and safety. The Council aims to provide a consistent, trauma-informed service that enables survivors and their children to feel safe and supported whether they remain in their current home or need to move.

Where a move is necessary, the Council guarantees that survivors who held a lifetime tenancy will be offered a new secure tenancy in line with legislative entitlements, so that they do not lose housing security because of abuse. The Council will also support applicants fleeing domestic abuse to access appropriate accommodation under its allocations and homelessness duties.

The Council consults with partners when safety planning and participates in the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference), MATAC (Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination) and Drive Programme processes, as well as local and regional Domestic Abuse forums.

Council housing staff and designated officers receive training to help them recognise the signs of domestic abuse, respond sensitively to disclosures, and take appropriate action. This may include making safeguarding referrals or connecting tenants with specialist domestic abuse services.

The Council is also developing a network of Domestic Abuse Champions and maintains specialist leads to support a consistent, survivor-led approach across its housing services

The Council also acknowledges that survivors may be from any background and may face additional barriers to accessing help. The Council is committed to ensuring an inclusive response to all groups, including those who have a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2021.

All disclosures of domestic abuse are treated as confidential in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy, unless there is a legal duty to share information to prevent harm or protect children or vulnerable adults or elsewhere required by law.

Tenants experiencing domestic abuse can contact their Housing Officer via the Council's Customer Service team or call the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse

Service (ODAS) via 0800 111 2222 (10am - 7pm, Monday to Friday) for immediate help and housing support or the National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 200 0247 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

11. Downsizing and Transfer Support

The Council supports tenants who wish to move to a more suitable home - whether they are under-occupying, overcrowded, experiencing health or personal difficulties, or affected by changes to their circumstances.

If you're living in a home that no longer meets your needs, you can apply for a transfer through the Council's Allocations Scheme. Transfer applications are assessed in the same way as new applications and prioritised based on your level of housing need, using the Council's banding system.

Tenants may be eligible for a transfer in a range of situations, including:

- Requiring fewer or more bedrooms;
- Needing to move due to medical or care needs;
- Being at risk of domestic abuse or serious anti-social behaviour;
- Needing to move because of redevelopment or major works to their current home.

To make best use of available homes, the Council also operates a dedicated incentive scheme for tenants who are under-occupying and want to downsize to smaller accommodation. The scheme offers:

- A financial payment based on the number of bedrooms released;
- Practical support with removals, resettlement, and applying for suitable properties.

This helps reduce housing costs for tenants while making larger family homes available to others in need.

You can find full details of the scheme, including eligibility and how to apply, on the Council's website.

If you're considering a transfer or downsizing, our housing officers are here to provide advice, discuss your options, and guide you through every stage of the move. This work reflects Oxford City Council's wider commitment to making best use of its housing stock and supporting tenants to live in homes that are right for them.

12. Resident Involvement

The Council is committed to ensuring that tenants have meaningful opportunities to influence the services that affect their homes, neighbourhoods, and communities. This commitment is underpinned by the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, which sets out clear expectations for how

social landlords must engage with residents. These national standards apply to all social landlords, setting out clear expectations for how residents must be treated, involved, and supported.

The Resident Involvement Strategy 2025-28 will set out how we will meet the requirements of the Consumer Standards and ensure residents have a strong voice in shaping housing services.

The strategy recognises the changing landscape and need for stepping up efforts to improve resident engagement ensuring that residents voice forms part of service delivery and that meaningful engagement platforms and support are in place. This approach will enable residents to have better opportunities to influence, help shape and scrutinise the quality and delivery of services they receive.

If you would like to find our further information about resident involvement or participate in influencing Council policies, please contact the Resident Involvement team.

13. Monitoring and Review

The Council will monitor delivery of the Tenancy Strategy to ensure it delivers the objectives and outcomes for local residents.

Formal monitoring will be conducted through a yearly report to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and then shared for consideration and input from the Council's scrutiny committee and relevant tenant and leaseholder board.

Alongside formal monitoring, the Council will keep the contents under review and will update with any minor changes to take account of:

- Updates to the Council's relevant housing policies and strategies
- Legislations or regulations to which it must follow
- Good practice developments

The Council will hold regular partnership meetings with registered providers and relevant agencies within the City to prioritise the objectives within the policy, including ORAH partnership meetings regarding lettings and nominations, new housing supply and housing management within neighbourhoods.

Glossary of Terms

Introductory Tenancy

A 12-month probationary tenancy given to new tenants. It can become a secure tenancy if no serious breaches occur.

Secure Tenancy

A lifetime tenancy that offers long-term housing security and more legal rights.

Mutual Exchange

A home swap between two social housing tenants, with permission from both landlords.

Succession

When a tenancy is passed on to a family member or partner after the tenant dies.

Demoted Tenancy

A one-year tenancy with fewer rights, used when a tenant has seriously breached their agreement (e.g. due to anti-social behaviour).

Social Rent

A rent level set by government guidelines, generally much lower than private rents.

Affordable Rent

A rent level that is higher than social rent, the council advocates if it is used, this must be below local market rents and capped at Local Housing Allowance levels.

Decant

When tenants are temporarily or permanently moved to another home due to major works, redevelopment or other reasons.

Pre-Eviction Protocol

A local agreement on how to support tenants and prevent evictions through early help and partnership working.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

Tenant Satisfaction Measures are collected by social landlords and are intended to be a tool to allow tenants to scrutinise their landlord's performance and give insights to landlords on where they might look to improve their services

Succession

When a tenancy is passed on to a family member or partner after the tenant dies.

Registered providers of social housing

Organisations that have been officially recognised by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to provide social housing in England.

Anti-social Behaviour

Behaviour by a person which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as the person

Reference List

Legislation and Guidance Referenced in the Strategy

Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023: [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023](#)

Localism Act 2011: [Localism Act 2011](#)

Consumer Standards 2024: [Annex 3: Consumer standards 1 April 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

Equality Act 2010: [Equality Act 2010](#)

Domestic Abuse Act: [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance: [DAHA - Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance](#)

National Planning Policy Framework: [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

Oxford City Council Strategies and Policies Referenced

Oxford City Council Strategy: [Introduction - Our Strategy | Our Strategy 2024-28 | Oxford City Council](#)

Housing, Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy: [Introduction | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 to 2028 | Oxford City Council](#)

Allocations Scheme: [Housing Register Allocations Scheme - summary version | Oxford City Council](#)

Choice-Based Lettings: [Choice Based Lettings | Oxford City Council](#)

Domestic Abuse: [Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users | Oxford City Council](#)

ASB Policy: [Download the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure | Oxford City Council](#)

Oxford City Council Tenancy: [Your tenancy agreement | Oxford City Council](#)

Incentive Scheme for tenants: [Incentive scheme for council tenants to move into a smaller home | Oxford City Council](#)

Resident Involvement Team: [About Resident Involvement | Oxford City Council](#)

Tenant Satisfaction Measures: [Tenant Satisfaction Measures - April 2024 to March 2025 | Our performance as a landlord | Oxford City Council](#)

Mutual Exchange information: [Exchange your council home | Oxford City Council](#)