

To: Cabinet

Date: 15th April 2026

Report of: Director of Housing

Title of Report: Housing Service – end of year annual report 2025/26

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To note the progress made by Housing Services during 25-26, and note the key challenges going forward to 26-27
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Good affordable homes
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the end of year report which highlights service improvements and services delivered by the Housing Service over the past 12 months (2025/26) 2. Note the challenges facing the Housing Service going forward and the priorities that it is seeking to deliver over the next 12 months (2026/27) 3. Delegate authority to the Director of Housing in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing and Communities to make any adjustments to service priorities and delivery

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	EQIA	No
Appendix 2	Risk Register	No

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Oxford City Council is a Local Housing Authority with responsibility of providing support and housing to those most in need. At the same time, the Council is a social landlord with responsibility for the **management and maintenance of approximately 8000 council homes** – providing a home for approximately 20,000 tenants and their families and approximately 720 leaseholders. This report seeks to provide an annual update on the performance and achievements that have been delivered and challenges faced by the Housing Service through its transformation journey over the past twelve months.
- 1.2 Service improvement over the past year has been founded on two critical elements: improving our asset knowledge through a programme of stock condition surveys (83% completion as at end of February 2026) and knowing our tenants better through a programme of tenant profile audits (71% completion as at end of February 2026). This information is enabling the service to better understand tenants needs and in turn tailor services that better support their needs including to those with disabilities or language needs.
- 1.3 At the same time, the service has also been grappling with increasing homelessness and demand for housing. The service has accepted over **1,500 legal duties to relieve or prevent households' homelessness** over the year, has placed over **500 households into temporary accommodation**, and has **over 3,900 households currently waiting for social housing**.
- 1.4 The service has remained focused on realising its **vision for housing "Great Homes for All"** and this has guided the housing transformation journey. This vision has also not only just been a slogan; it is reflected through the Corporate Plan priorities for housing and driven by values of accountability, inclusivity, and efficiency. Within this context, it should also be recognised that the Housing Service is operating within a challenging and unpredictable housing environment to raise service standards and provide excellent housing services for residents and those most in need. Despite these pressures **the Council has maintained a rigorous focus on operational excellence**. This can be evidenced with the dual commitment of continuing to deliver new, high-quality social homes and delivering on a robust capital investment programme to modernise the council's existing housing stock.
- 1.5 A critical driver of this year's progress has been the **proactive alignment of housing's management with the Social Housing Regulator's evolving requirements and related Consumer Standards**. By integrating these requirements into the housing core governance operating framework, the housing service is transitioning towards a more transparent and accountable service model. This includes a fundamental reset of resident engagement and the implementation of enhanced safety measures that is enabling the service to meet its statutory obligations relating to safety and quality including Awaab's Law. These improvements are ensuring that the Housing Service not only meets its legal duties but that it is a service fit for purpose going forward and that it delivers proactive and responsive housing services that better meet residents needs and ensures their safety.
- 1.6 Improvements are being made in the handling of complaints, repairs, in the management of the housing register and in our tenancy management service following a significant restructure to deliver a more proactive and preventative focussed service to residents. By prioritising early intervention and prevention and investing in our properties, we are delivering tangible benefits for residents while safeguarding the Council's long-term assets. **Our work to date, reaffirms that, despite external economic and legislative challenges, the housing service remains focused and**

committed to a path of continuous improvement, ensuring that Oxford's residents receive the high-quality services and secure homes they deserve.

2. The Year at a Glance (2025/26)

2.1 The past twelve months (2025/26) has been a year of **tangible delivery** and national recognition for Oxford City Council's Housing Service. Some of the key highlights and milestones are summarised as follows;

- The Housing Service was recognised as one of the UK's best for its efforts to prevent **homelessness and rough sleeping – with the Housing Needs Team winning the Local Government Chronicle Housing Team of the year.**
- The completion of circa 151 **new dwellings**, including **45 high-quality affordable homes** through OX Place.
- Housing **323 households** into social housing from the housing register, including **132 homeless households** and **100 transfers** within the council or registered provider housing stock.
- The service kept a strong focus on the prevention of homelessness, with **59% of homelessness prevention duty cases ending in a successful outcome** (as at February 2026)
- Responded to growing temporary accommodation demand, by expanding the Council temporary stock to **224 units**, up from 169 a year before and on track to deliver 300 units by the end of 2026; helping us end the use of B&B for families with children for more than 6 weeks.
- This year's annual street count found 32 individuals bedded down in one night, down from 44 last year. This demonstrates Oxford is bucking the national trend of rising rough sleeping rate, but there are still too many people sleeping rough in the city, and work continues to reduce rough sleeping.
- Strong overall Tenant Satisfaction **rating of 77% in 2024/25**, placing the housing service in the top quartile of local authorities nationwide.
- Despite the continuous changes in safety legislation and a challenging financial climate, a strong performance across all "Big 6" safety measures and invested **£21m into energy efficiency and estate improvements**, ensuring council homes remained safe, warm, and fit for the future.
- The Housing Service has now reset how it engages with tenants and this is now embedding as a cornerstone and part of day-to-day service improvement practice. The service launched its reset in July 2024, culminating in a co-designed, new **Resident Involvement and Engagement Strategy** which was approved by Full Council in January 2026 which focuses on co-design providing tenants with greater opportunities to hold the council to account and established genuine platforms to influence and shape the delivery of the services they receive through the new Tenant and Leaseholder Board.
- The service remains focused on improving **the handling and responsiveness of complaints** and has recognised that historic complaint performance needed improvement with ongoing improvements being made to processes.
- The service remains committed to improving its knowledge and the performance of its council housing stock. **A stock condition survey programme** is currently assessing every single council home.
- Repairs are the "shop front" of the Housing Service. Whilst satisfaction rate with repairs carried out in the last 12 months is high at **83.6%**, it is also recognised that further improvements and efficiencies are required and in response, the service has conducted an in-depth review of the repairs journey which has now resulted in a new programme.

- The Housing Service continues to work jointly with residents, its key stakeholders and across services to ensure communal areas and estates are maintained and managed well. Our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) focus had led to the effective handling of ASB cases in partnership with the police, using a "*support first, enforce second*" model.

3. Self-Assessment, Accountability and Risk management

3.1 Self-assessment - this year has also been driven by the pursuit of not only meeting legislative and regulatory standards but a proactive approach to renewing how we engage and involve our residents in service delivery. Whilst there have been a series of achievements and in line with Regulator expectations, we also carried out a self-assessment to ensure full alignment with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards. The internal self-assessment evaluated the housing service performance against the Consumer Standards, including governance and accountability arrangements. The assessment confirmed that while substantial measures were in place, the service needed to strengthen compliance and has developed a housing improvement plan to support this.

3.2 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) - we are also learning from the annual TSM results with 77% of tenants saying they are satisfied with the overall service in 2024/25. Whilst this is strong compared to other local authorities, the data has highlighted areas for further improvement and we are integrating this feedback into our improvement plan so that residents are able to see that we are actively learning from what they tell us, that they feel respected and encouraged to continue to work with us in improving service delivery. This data, alongside our tenant data has been incorporated into our service planning.

3.3 Oxford Direct Services (ODS) and contractor accountability – our contractor and client management responsibilities play an important part of how we deliver services to our residents. ODS is the council's wholly -house company commissioned annually for the maintenance and upkeep of the council's housing stock. Throughout this year, the Housing Service has been working jointly with ODS to strengthen client monitoring arrangements ensuring greater transparency and accountability for the works and services that they deliver on behalf of the council. This has meant that we are applying and agreeing better performance measures, so we are able to better track quality of services delivered, targets and expenditure to ensure that we also maximise a return to the HRA and our tenants.

3.4 Risk Management and mitigation - the Housing Service has established and continues to strengthen its risk management practice, ensuring this is fully aligned with the Regulator of Social Housing's expectations and embedded within the Council's corporate risk framework. The service has strengthened the identification and oversight of key housing related risks—such as landlord compliance, tenant safety, financial resilience, data quality, and service delivery performance—by ensuring they are clearly articulated, regularly reviewed, and accurately scored within the Council's risk register, providing assurance and compliance with consumer standards, safeguarding tenants, and maintaining organisational resilience in a challenging operating environment.

4. Looking ahead into 2026/27

4.1 As the Housing Service prepares for the year ahead, it faces a rapidly evolving landscape shaped by significant organisational change, regulatory developments, and growing financial pressures. The next 12 months will bring a series of strategic challenges and risks for the Council that demand continued adaptability and resilience. Careful management and forward planning will be key to

avoid disruption in service delivery and ensuring that the service can uphold its commitments to residents, maintain compliance, and respond effectively to the growing complex needs of residents. A summary of the challenges facing the housing service are as follows:

- **Impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR):** The Council is currently navigating a statutory transition period following the submission of a Three-Unitary Proposal to Government. This undoubtedly will create significant administrative, financial and workforce uncertainty.
- **Workforce capacity and recruitment:** Housing management and workforce capacity is already under extreme pressure due to the dual burden of maintaining service delivery whilst at the same time also needing to design/integrate within a new unitary authority. Recruiting technical housing staff remains a critical risk, as the high cost of living in Oxford continues to drive high vacancy rates in essential areas like compliance and surveying. Changes to Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard around competency and conduct will drive many improvements but also carries some risks around recruitment and retention.
- **Regulatory Inspection:** The Housing Service is still due its inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing. Within this, the Regulator continues to enhance its rigorous inspection regime.
- **The updated Decent Homes Standard and extended Awaab's Law:** Compliance with the government's updated Decent Homes Standard is a significant unfunded mandate. New requirements for faster hazard resolution under Awaab's Law and enhanced window safety features necessitate a reallocation of capital that that will need considerable review.
- **Evolving Tenants' needs and digital inclusion:** As Oxford's tenant profile becomes more diverse, there is a growing demand for complex support services. The Council must invest in digital-first communication channels while simultaneously supporting an aging population with increasing accessibility needs in the existing stock.
- **Escalating Homelessness demand:** This remains the most significant financial threat to the housing General Fund budget. Demand for temporary accommodation (TA) is forecast to continue to grow in the years ahead, meaning the Council will need to continue to expand its TA stock to avoid rapidly growing spend on B&B and hotels. The Council has plans to deliver another 260 units in addition to existing plans, by investing £32m, bringing down ongoing cost.
- **Decarbonisation and Stock Sustainability:** The commitment to achieving an **EPC C rating** for all 8,000 homes by 2030 is under pressure from rising material costs and a real-terms reduction in government grant funding. This is likely to create a funding gap where energy efficiency improvements may need to be balanced against HRA new build commitments or other investment priorities.

5 Our housing priorities for 2026/27

5.1 The Housing Service priorities for the coming year are focused on delivering safe, high-quality, and genuinely affordable homes while navigating a rapidly evolving and challenging housing landscape. To meet these challenges, the Housing Service will continue its transformation and improvement journey, ensuring we have the resources, professional skills, and robust culture required to deliver a modern, resilient service. We are deeply committed to driving continuous service enhancements and fostering a culture of transparency that puts resident voices at the heart of our decision-making. By focusing on these core strengths, we remain dedicated to achieving significantly better outcomes for our tenants and ensuring our service is fit for the future. The following ten priorities represent the housing roadmap for the year ahead:

1. **Prevent Homelessness and expand Temporary Accommodation supply**

Expand the temporary accommodation stock by 260 units, including up to 150 acquisitions, alongside leasing and conversions. This is a critical fiscal priority intended to reduce reliance on

expensive hotels and B&Bs and relief pressures on the General Fund, forecast to deliver £5.2m in savings and cost avoidance. Alongside enhancing our homelessness prevention offer, through establishing a new face to face centre, procuring IT upgrades for homelessness teams, investing in a new move on service and delivering against the Renters Rights Act.

2. Tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness

Continue to tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness, taking the opportunity of a three-year homelessness grant settlement to implement a transformational approach to what we commission, across the Homelessness Alliance, and other prevention, accommodation and support services we commission. Working closely with the broader public sector to align services for people and renewing the countywide rough sleeping strategy.

3. Strengthen Regulatory compliance and inspection readiness

Ensure the Council meets the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards: Safety and Quality; Transparency, Influence and Accountability; Neighbourhood and Community; and Tenancy via the improvement plan.

4. Invest in and upgrade existing council homes to meet current and future Decent Homes Standards

Complete the stock condition survey programme and deliver on 2026/27 investment programme as well as implement priority actions within repairs and voids improvement programme, whilst accelerating the retrofit programme to meet the 95% EPC C rating target for all 8,000 council homes by 2030. Start preparing for the emerging Decent Homes Standards and new Minimum Energy Standards.

5. Improve collaboration with Registered Provider partners

Lead and strengthen co-operation and collaboration with Register Provider partners across the City; providing strategic leadership and support whilst also collectively driving up standards on our estates and across shared spaces, to provide better services for all tenants.

6. Deliver the Resident Involvement and Engagement Action Plan

Deliver the new Resident Involvement and Engagement Strategy and action plan to strengthen resident's engagement and ensure their voice becomes embedded in service delivery. Engage and empower tenants through by providing accessible services, clear communication and enable participation in decision-making.

7. Improve complaints handling and respond to tenants' complex needs

Improving our complaints handling process and complete the getting to know tenants better programme, using data profile across services to ensure that service delivery is inclusive and all tenants and that they are provided with equal opportunities to have their say.

8. Complete the digital transformation of Housing Services

Complete the procurement exercise to secure the long-term solutions partner for housing and housing asset management, including mobile working that improve asset and tenant data. The goal is to enable better investment planning for council HRA assets and continue to provide digital self-service options and mobile working solutions to improve efficiency and demand management.

9. Ensure HRA financial stability and effective rent setting

Implement the 4.8% social rent increase (CPI + 1%) to generate the revenue necessary to

improve the affordability of the HRA. A minimum reserve of £4m is maintained to manage ongoing financial risk

10. Manage LGR transition and maintain service continuity

Manage the Housing Service within the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) framework as the Council prepares for the 2028 unitary transition when this comes into practice.

6 Delivering on our priorities

- 6.1 Our achievements to date, are evidence of how much we can achieve by working better together across services and with our key stakeholders. We remain committed to continuing to work in this joined up way as it delivers the best results for residents. The priorities that we have set out to deliver will ensure that each team within the Housing Service can identify how collectively we will deliver services to tenants and how we will support the delivery of corporate priorities.
- 6.2 The delivery of our priorities will be supported by an existing Housing Service Performance Reporting Framework which has been designed to ensure that it captures wider directorate and corporate priorities which are translated into performance measures and are appropriately monitored.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The proposals within this report are intended to be cost neutral and can be delivered using existing approved budgets across housing. Any additional financial implications arising from the need to further implement new initiatives, programmes or projects – these will be marshalled through the financial governance processes and approvals in conjunction with finance colleagues.

8. Legal issues

- 8.1 The proposals within this report will go towards contributing and supporting the council complying with its legal obligations as the local housing authority in providing housing support to those in need and in its role as landlord to tenants – ensuring it complies with related legislation such as the Homelessness Reduction Act as well as compliance with the Social Housing Act 2023 and the Regulator for Social Housing associated Consumer Standards.

9. Level of risk

- 9.1 The risks of not complying with related housing legislation including requirements of the Social Housing Regulator have been incorporated and listed within the corporate risk register with mitigating actions that are regularly updated and monitored as highlighted in section 3.4 of this report.

10. Equalities impact

- 10.1 The **Equalities Impact Assessment** for the 2026/27 housing priorities confirms a proactive commitment to narrowing inequality gaps across the city. The getting to know tenants better programme that is currently in place will support older residents, those with disabilities, and ethnic minority households who maybe be inadvertently and disproportionately affected for example by fuel poverty and housing instability. While the 4.8% rent increase and digital

transformation pose potential risks to low-income and digitally excluded tenants, these are mitigated through support and sign-posting to advice agencies. The increase in resident involvement and engagement and new performance reporting framework will ensure that the housing improvement journey remains transparent and that the benefits of safer, more sustainable homes are equitably distributed across all sections of the community.

11. **Carbon and Environmental Considerations**

11.1 The implementation of the housing priorities will go towards helping reduce carbon emissions by ensuring housing services are more accessible and through local areas. The inclusion of digital engagement channels will also help reduce the carbon footprint.

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