

Agenda



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Date: 19 November 2019
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A meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

will be held on Thursday 28 November 2019 at 7.00 pm

Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB

Members of the Committee:

Councillors:

Nathan Boyd (Chairman)
Jerry Avery
Ron Batstone

Samantha Bowring
Cheryl Briggs
Andy Foulsham

Robert Maddison
Mike Pighills
Max Thompson

Substitutes Councillors

Paul Barrow
Eric Batts
Hayleigh Gascoigne

Alison Jenner
Diana Lugova
Sarah Medley

Patrick O'Leary
Janet Shelley
Elaine Ware

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Reed', written in a cursive style.

Margaret Reed
Head of Legal and Democratic

Agenda

Open to the Public including the Press

1. Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence and the attendance of substitute members.

2. Minutes

(Pages 3 - 7)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Scrutiny Committee minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2019.

3. Declarations of interest

To receive any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Urgent business and chairman's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chairman determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chairman.

5. Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

REPORTS AND ISSUES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6. Planning enforcement annual review 2018/19

(Pages 8 - 15)

To consider the head of planning's report.

7. Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy

(Pages 16 - 62)

To consider the head of housing and environment's report.

8. Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

(Pages 63 - 66)

To review the attached scrutiny work schedule. Please note, although the dates are confirmed, the items under consideration are subject to being withdrawn, added to or rearranged without further notice.

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday 19 September 2019 at 6.30 pm

in Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Foulsham, Robert Maddison, Mike Pighills and Max Thompson

Officers: Steve Culliford, Nadeem Din, Adrian Duffield, Dylan Evans, Simon Hewings, Holly Jones, Suzanne Malcolm, Melanie Smans, Richard Spraggett and Mark Stone

Also present: Councillors Andrew Crawford, Helen Pighills, Bethia Thomas and Catherine Webber

Number of members of the public: 5

Sc.1 Apologies for absence

Councillor Samantha Bowring had sent her apologies for absence.

Sc.2 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the committee meeting held on 28 March 2019 and agree that the chairman signs them as such.

Sc.3 Declarations of interest

Councillor Mike Pighills declared a personal interest in the performance report for The Beacon, Wantage as his partner was the Cabinet member for leisure.

Sc.4 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman made two announcements:

1. advising all present of the emergency evacuation arrangements; and
2. requesting that all future committee meetings commence at 7pm.

Sc.5 Public participation

Two members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting as follows:

1. Mr Michael Tyce spoke on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England about the Local Plan Part 2, which he believed was unsound. The housing numbers in the plan were too high and based on the outdated housing needs assessment from 2014. The plan also included an allocation of Oxford's unmet housing need, figures which had not yet been tested at the Oxford Local Plan examination hearing. With increased housing density in the plan, this would provide sufficient housing numbers. He urged the committee to recommend that the plan's adoption was deferred until Oxford's unmet housing need figures had been tested.
2. Honorary Alderman and former district councillor Joyce Hutchinson had registered to speak about The Beacon's performance report but was not present at the meeting.

Sc.6 Local Plan 2031 Part 2 - options for adoption

The committee considered the head of planning's report on the council's options on Local Plan Part 2. The report was presented by Councillor Catherine Webber, the Cabinet member for planning, together with planning officers. The report set out the background to the local plan's development to date, together with three options open to the council at this stage:

1. To withdraw Local Plan Part 2
2. To not adopt Local Plan Part 2
3. To adopt Local Plan Part 2

The Cabinet member for Planning recommended option 3, to adopt Local Plan Part 2, as the plan had been found to be sound by the independent planning inspector. Work could then commence on a new local plan.

The committee was being consulted on the options before Cabinet on 4 October made its recommendations to full Council on 9 October.

The committee raised several questions regarding the options, including whether the council had a fourth option to defer adoption of the plan, pending the outcome of the examination of Oxford City's Local Plan and its unmet housing need allocated to the Vale. Officers advised that the outcome of that examination could be some time away, in which time the Vale could be exposed to the threat of speculative housing development if it lost its five-year housing land supply.

The committee noted that the local plan preparation process was set out in detailed regulations. The analysis of the options and the risks attributed to each were based on officers' experience of this and other councils. The committee expressed concern that the process to form and describe the options, and the analysis of those options, provided insufficient detail to allow councillors to make an informed choice. In particular, councillors believed that the report had not sufficiently analysed the risks of each option, for example, was the council at risk of judicial review if it adopted the plan (option 3)?

It was moved by the chairman that the committee supports the recommendations as set out in the report, namely to note the inspector's conclusions, to note the options, and to recommend Cabinet to accept the inspector's report and recommendation and adopt Local Plan Part 2. However, this motion did not receive the support of a seconder and therefore was withdrawn.

It was then moved by Councillor Mike Pighills and seconded by Councillor Rob Maddison that the committee:

- notes the conclusions of the independent inspector, appointed to examine Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the head of planning's report to Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2019;
- notes the options in relation to Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the report;
- requests that the confidential legal advice around the Local Plan, which the council has received, be released to all councillors; and
- requests officers to amend the report (i) to include the process for developing the options and (ii) to rate the risks relating to each option.

The committee supported the motion and hoped that the information would help Cabinet members and later all members of the Council to make a balanced decision.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the conclusions of the independent inspector, appointed to examine Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the head of planning's report to Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2019;
- (b) note the options in relation to Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the report;
- (c) request that the confidential legal advice around the Local Plan, which the council has received, be released to all councillors; and
- (d) request officers to amend the report (i) to include the process for developing the options and (ii) to rate the risks relating to each option.

Sc.7 Financial outturn 2018/19

The committee considered the head of finance's report on the financial outturn from 2018/19. This showed that the council had a revenue and capital underspend at the year end.

The Cabinet member for finance welcomed the committee's comments on the report. He accepted that the council needed to be more focussed on better budgeting in future but recognised that it was difficult to set a budget and keep to it as some events were outside of the council's control.

The committee noted that the revenue underspend of £2.2 million was largely due to the revenue underspend carry forwards from the previous year. Capital expenditure on several projects was paused during the year due to uncertainty over future government funding, resulting in a capital underspend also.

The accountant present at the meeting answered councillors' questions on budget preparation, in-year monitoring, and budget variances. The committee challenged the effectiveness of the budget setting process. Notwithstanding the difficulties with setting reliable budgets, the committee considered that there must be lessons that could be applied and that the Cabinet member for finance and officers should look to improve the budget setting process. It was suggested that the committee reformed its budget task group to help improve the budget setting process. The Cabinet member for finance welcomed this.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the overall financial outturn position for 2018/19, as well as the outturn of individual service areas; and
- (b) reform the committee's budget task group to support the Cabinet member for finance to form the budget process.

Sc.8 Continuation of meeting

RESOLVED: to continue the meeting for an additional thirty minutes, in accordance with the committee's procedure rule 35.

Sc.9 Business and Innovation Strategy Action Plan update

The committee considered the head of development and regeneration's report, which updated on progress against the business and innovation strategy's action plan 2017 to 2020. The report showed progress up to 31 March 2019.

The Cabinet member for development and regeneration reported that the strategy had been developed to gain a better understanding of the needs of the Vale's business community, in particular the needs of small and medium sized enterprises. Most actions were either completed or on track for completion. The key successes were outlined in the report, as were the key initiatives for 2019/20.

The committee welcomed the report and congratulated officers on the work carried out to-date. Councillors also asked officers to feedback on customer satisfaction in the next monitoring report.

It was noted that the next iteration of the strategy would look at how the council could help businesses become greener and more sustainable. It was suggested that the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee could be asked for suggestions on this. The Cabinet member for development and regeneration agreed to pursue this.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) welcome the progress made against the business and innovation strategy's action plan 2017 to 2020, as set out in the head of development and regeneration's report;
- (b) advise the Cabinet member for development and regeneration that the committee supports the key initiatives for 2019/20 set out in the report; and
- (c) ask the Cabinet member for development and regeneration to seek ideas from the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee on how the council could help businesses become greener and more sustainable.

Sc.10 2018/19 Performance report for The Beacon, Wantage

Councillor Mike Pighills declared a personal interest in the performance report for The Beacon, Wantage as his spouse was the current Cabinet member for leisure, and therefore he left the meeting during consideration of this item.

Vale of White Horse District Council – Scrutiny Committee minutes

The committee considered the head of community services' report on the 2018/19 performance of The Beacon at Wantage. The Cabinet member for community services reported that The Beacon had achieved four per cent revenue growth during 2018/19 but accepted that transformation was a long-term project and that there was more work to be done.

The committee welcomed the report and congratulated staff on achieving four per cent revenue growth.

RESOLVED: to note The Beacon's performance in 2018/19.

Sc.11 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee reviewed its work programme. The chair asked members to contact him with any suggestions for future agenda items.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Scrutiny Report



Report of Head of Planning

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Wards affected: All

Cabinet member responsible: Cllr. Catherine Webber

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To: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 28 November 2019

Review of planning enforcement performance 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2019

Recommendation

That Councillors consider the content of the report and feedback any comments to the Cabinet Member for Planning.

Purpose of Report

1. To inform councillors of the current workload of the planning enforcement and compliance service and the legislative structure it works within.
2. To review the performance of the planning enforcement service over the last 18 months; 1 April 2018–30 September 2019.

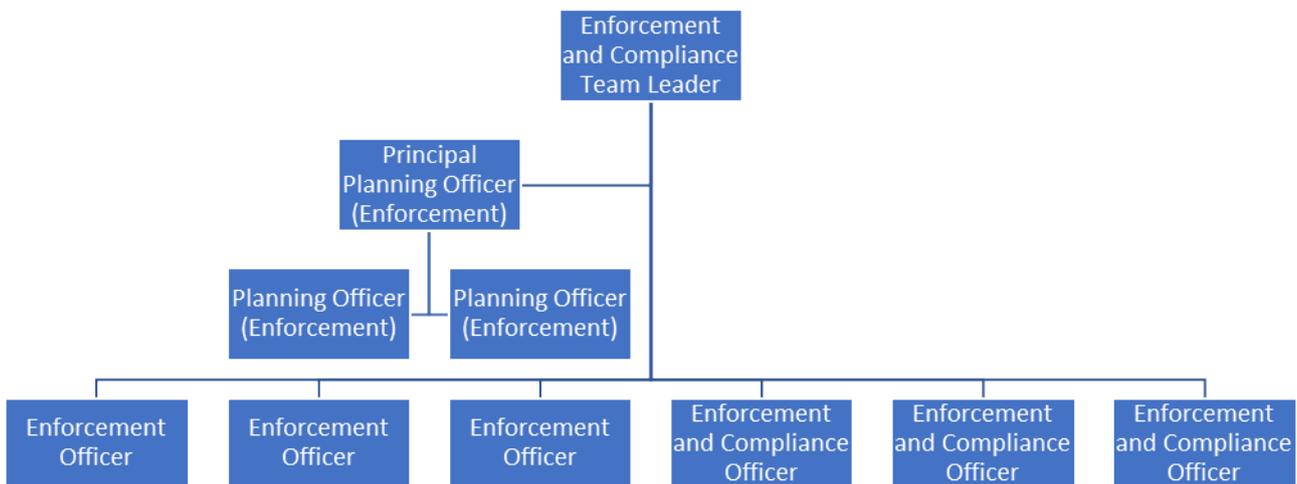
Corporate Objective

3. The Corporate Plan 2016-2020 has a Strategic Objective on; Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing where we will continue to improve our environment.
4. With regard to planning, to meet this objective we will:

- Work positively with developers and applicants through the planning process to minimise breaches of planning control that could otherwise lead to enforcement action.

Background

5. The enforcement team, within Development Management comprises ten posts that provide a service for both South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse District Councils. See structure below.



6. The principal role of the team is to investigate breaches of planning control and remedy, if considered expedient, any harm identified. The team is not responsible for controlling or managing all activity taking place on land.
7. The main functions of the service are to;
 - Ensure that unauthorised development is brought within the planning regulations or its impact is reduced, or, if it is totally unacceptable, make sure it is removed or stopped.
 - Make sure that conditions and limitations attached to planning permissions are met or if appropriate, any changes are managed in accordance with the planning regulations.
8. The service is limited in law to managing development under the terms set out in the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the Planning & Compensation Act 1991, the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Localism Act 2011.
9. Decisions in relation to planning enforcement are made taking into account the policy set out in paragraph 58 of the National Planning Policy Framework,

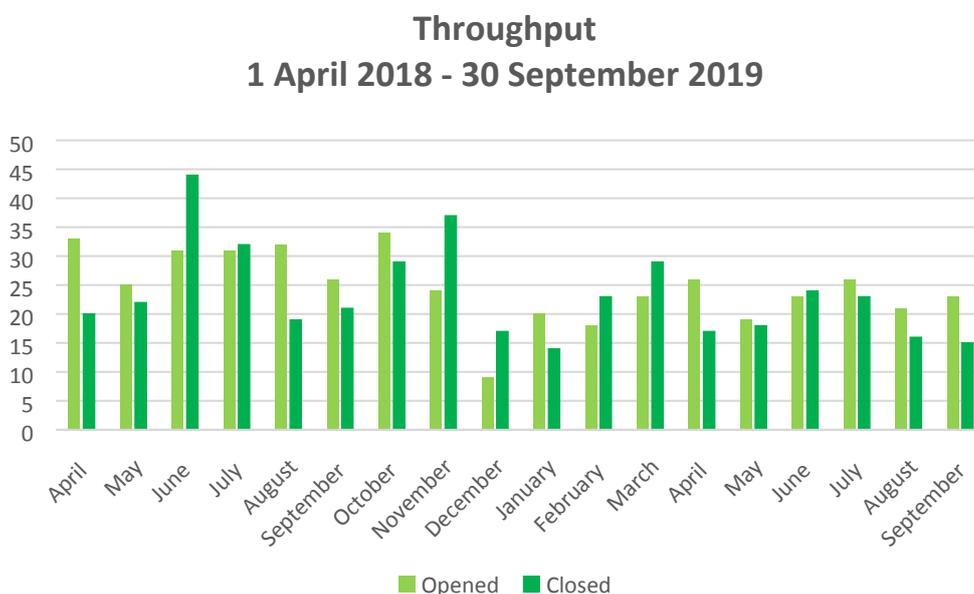
'58. Effective enforcement is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system. Enforcement action is discretionary, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control. They should consider publishing a local enforcement plan to manage enforcement proactively, in a way that is appropriate to their area. This should set out how they will monitor the implementation of planning permissions, investigate alleged cases of unauthorised development and take action where appropriate.'

In addition, we must consider Government guidance (PPG), the policies of the adopted Local Plan, including made neighbourhood plans, supplementary planning documents and where appropriate the Human Rights Act 1998.

10. Other than unauthorised works to listed buildings, protected trees and the unauthorised display of adverts, breaches of planning control are not criminal acts.
11. Officers do not 'police' the district. The focus of the service is to remedy planning harm and not to punish those that may not have obeyed the rules. Just because something is a breach of planning control is not in itself a reason to take formal action.
12. All investigations are carried out in the wider public interest. Officers do not carry out investigations on behalf of individuals, groups or organisations.
13. The team does not ordinarily investigate anonymous complaints, unless they relate to matters with the potential for immediate or irreversible public planning harm, e.g. alleged works to a listed building.
14. The planning enforcement service is set out in the Planning Enforcement Statement which is published on the council's website. This statement explains how we monitor the implementation of planning permissions and how we investigate alleged unauthorised development. It was last updated in 2016. Legislation and guidance have evolved, and the team are in the process of reviewing and updating this document, which is expected to be completed and considered by Cabinet before March 2020. If councillors have any comments on this statement, then please ensure the Cabinet Member for Planning is made aware, so they can be considered as part of the review.

Workload

15. The workload of the team is customer driven and each allegation undergoes a desktop triage assessment to ensure it is a planning matter.

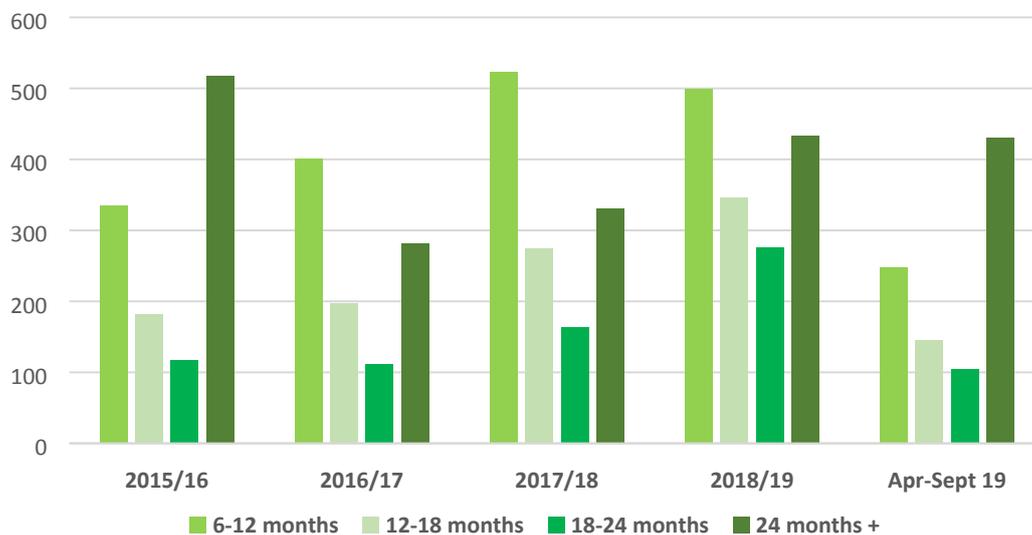


16. In the period April 2018 to September 2019 we had 568 enforcement cases under investigation, of which 240 are in Vale of the White Horse district.
17. The table below shows that up until April 2019 there has been a year on year increase in the number of enquiries received by the team. This is an average of 24 new cases per month but in the last full year the average was 26 cases. The last 6 months has seen a drop in the numbers received, this reflects the slowdown that the Planning Service has experienced in development across both districts.

Year ending	Cases received	Cases completed	Cases open
2019/20 (6 months)	138	141	240
2018/19	306	307	215
2017/18	295	248	217
2016/17	278	258	173
2015/16	266	281	154

18. The following table sets out the number of unresolved investigations that are still open and are over 6 months old. Generally, there is an increase in unresolved cases, which reflects the increase in new cases. All cases remain open until the matter is fully resolved including if necessary full compliance with any notices served.

Cases unresolved over 6 months Old



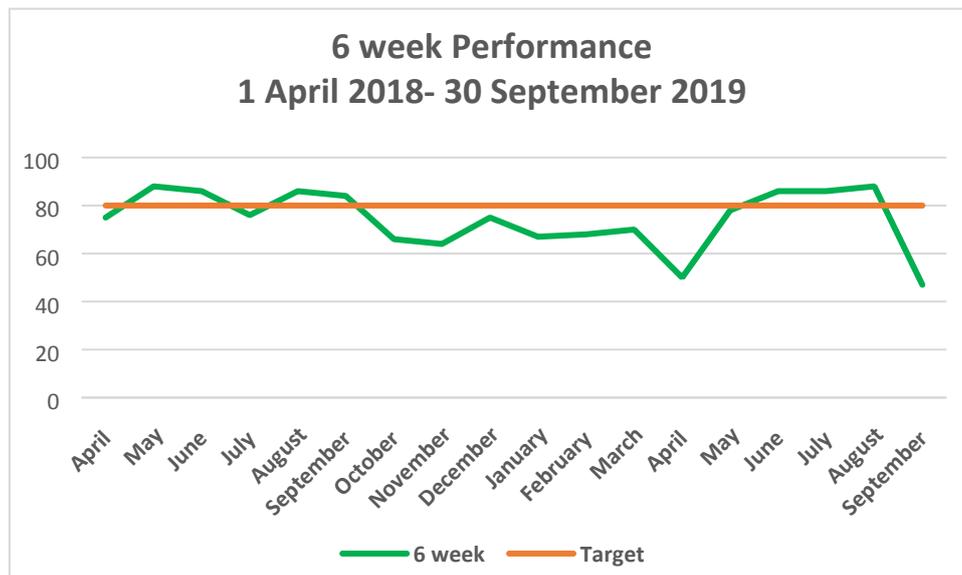
Formal action and appeals

19. Since April 2018 we have served 24 enforcement notices, two breach of condition notices and secured, at very short notice, a High Court Injunction to stop unauthorised residential use of land at Goosey.
20. We currently have three enforcement appeals pending and are pursuing three prosecutions for non-compliance with enforcement notices served. We have won the

two appeals that have been determined in this period and are waiting for the final compliance with one outstanding issue at Cross Trees Farm.

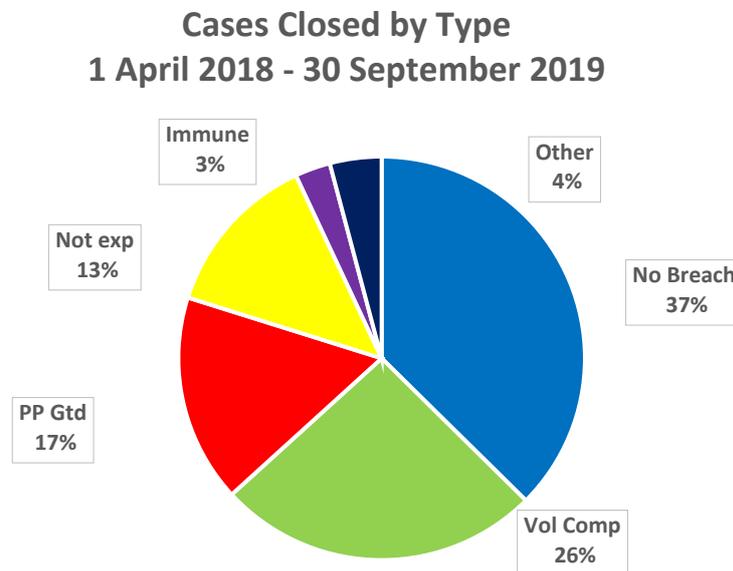
Performance

21. Planning enforcement targets are set locally. Unlike planning applications, the council is permitted to set targets that reflect the level of service it wants to deliver to communities, subject to the resources made available.
22. The enforcement service performance is measured against efficiency and effectiveness targets. The council's Corporate Plan sets the key objective and the Planning Enforcement Statement sets out how work is prioritised and investigated.
23. Performance is currently reported in the Board Report and in a monthly Portfolio report submitted to the Cabinet Member for planning.
24. The team's current targets that reflect the Corporate Objective are;
 - To investigate and determine a course of action for 80% of cases within 6 weeks from allocating the enquiry.
 - To increase the number of voluntary compliance cases by 3% using 2016/17 data as a base line

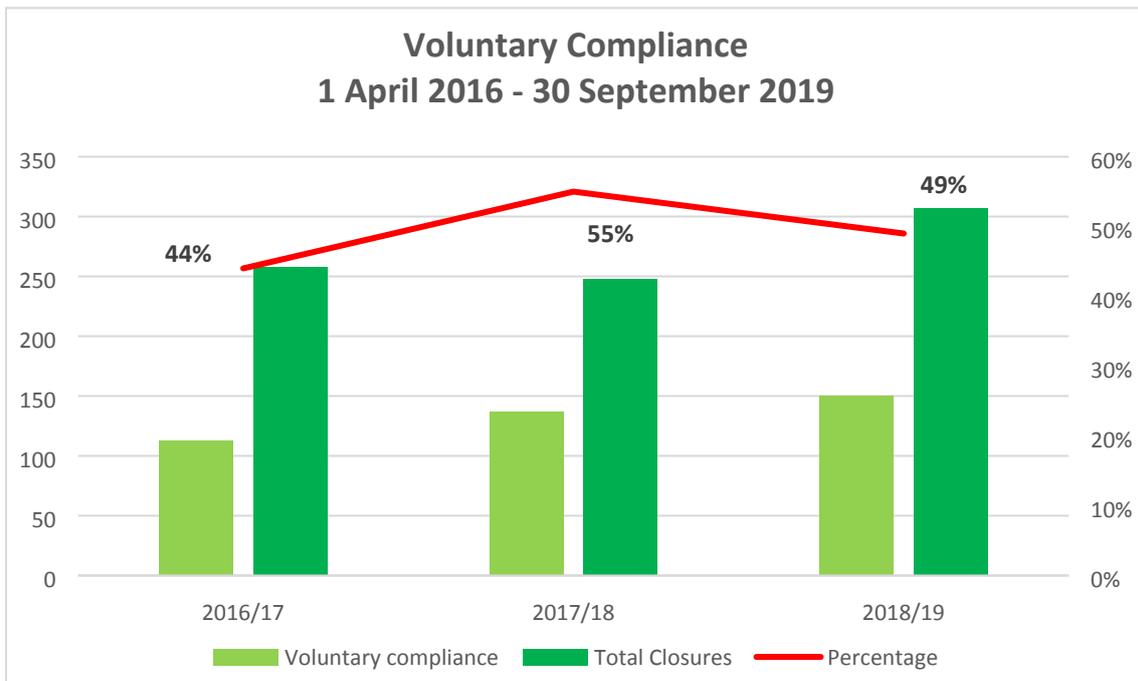


25. As can be seen in the graph above between April 2018 to September 2019 we have not consistently hit our efficiency target of deciding a course of action in 80% of cases within 6 weeks of being allocated. The drop in performance between October 2018 and May 2019 is consistent with the team being down to 50% capacity. The dip in performance in September 2019 relates to a number of the team taking annual leave in August.

26. Although the team undertake regular reviews to improve efficiency in working and seek to increase productivity, the efficiency target missed over this period is about team capacity.



27. The pie chart above shows that between April 2018 and September 2019, 196 cases (43%) were resolved either by the developer voluntarily complying with the planning legislation or by a grant of planning permission through a retrospective planning application. Also 61 cases (13%) were closed as not expedient because the technical breach identified was not considered harmful in planning terms.
28. 173 cases (37%) investigated were found not to be breaches of planning control. The majority of these were small scale householder issues such as fences, sheds and extensions. The more complex cases are usually the ones that result in formal action being taken. For example the unauthorised material change of use of The Hatchett pub at Childrey to a private residence and the unauthorised material change of use of agricultural land at Foxcombe Hill Farm to a mixed use of agriculture and residential use.
29. Where a breach is identified, in line with national policy, guidance and the development plan, we encourage developers to engage with the planning system and rectify the issues without the need to for the Council to take formal action.
30. The current corporate target requires the team to increase the amount of voluntary compliance by 3% per annum taking 2016/2017 data as the baseline.
31. The chart below shows that we have succeeded in increasing compliance by 7.5%. This equates to 113 cases in 2016/17, 137 cases in 2017/18 and 150 cases in 2019/20. Although the percentage figure over the overall number of cases closed has dipped slightly in 2018/19, there has been a year on year increase in case numbers resolved through voluntary compliance.



- 32. The work of the enforcement team is predominately reactive. Officers receive and process enquiries from residents, councillors, parish councils and other bodies. We process retrospective planning applications arising from our investigations, applications for certificates of lawfulness and all enforcement appeals including hearings and public inquiries. We also write and serve our own notices, act as witnesses at prosecutions and conduct interviews under caution when necessary.
- 33. Although we aim to be proactive in our work it has been limited over the last 18 months due to capacity. However, we have been successful in securing High Court injunctions at short notice when required. Currently our proactive monitoring of major development is limited.

Work Programme

- 34. Work is on-going to forge better links with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) highways department. OCC oversee highways works associated with large scale development and we are working together to become more efficient at managing the implementation of major sites which can cause widespread upset and disruption to communities if they are not closely monitored. They have in recent years been the subject of many complaints.
- 35. Currently the team are reviewing the Planning Enforcement Statement and aim to have a revised draft early in the new year for Cabinet to consider.
- 36. The team are also working on improving our standard planning conditions, which will include some training for colleagues. This is to ensure conditions imposed can meet the legislative tests including the enforceability of the condition.

Financial Implications

- 37. The planning enforcement service is provided and funded from within the existing Development Management budget

38. It is important to recognise the resources required and the timescales involved in dealing with planning enforcement matters. Typically, the more complex the case the longer it will take to resolve. For example, we have served an enforcement notice at the The Hatchett Inn, Childrey against the unauthorised material change of use of a public house into a single dwelling. The matter is currently at appeal. If we win the appeal, then we will need to monitor the compliance of the notice and if it is not complied with then consider prosecution proceedings and also if necessary High Court proceedings. This will involve a project team of enforcement officers, solicitors, a barrister and a process server.

Legal Implications

39. There are no legal implications generated by this performance report.

Conclusion

40. Overall, over the last 18 months, although the performance in determining a course of action within six weeks is 75% and thus below the target of 80%, this reflects the capacity of the team.
41. The increase in voluntary compliance is over twice the target meaning that more people are engaging with the planning system. In addition, the team have taken formal action where deemed necessary and have successfully defended our decisions at appeal.
42. Completion of the work programme and increased proactive working is a focus, it is however subject to capacity, including the level of skills.
43. Any comments are welcomed for the Cabinet Member for planning to consider.

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Housing and Environment

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To: Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 28 November 2019

Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025.

Purpose of Report

1. To brief scrutiny on the content of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
2. To invite scrutiny to provide any comments on the draft strategy.

Background

3. The 2002 Homelessness Act requires local housing authorities to publish a homelessness strategy at least every five years.
4. Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils have a joint homelessness strategy that expires in September 2020.
5. In August 2018 the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy aims to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and to “end it for good” by 2027.
6. The strategy requires all local housing authorities to update their current homelessness strategy and to rebadge it as a “Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy”.
7. The strategy must be submitted to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and published online. The local housing authority are required to report progress in delivering the strategy and to produce an annual action plan.

8. Between 2010 and 2018 the number of households in temporary accommodation in England rose by 65 per cent. Over the same period, the number of rough sleepers increased by 165 per cent.
9. These trends are not reflected in the Vale of White Horse. In 2018/19 the council assisted 420 households at risk of homelessness. Despite the increasing demand on the council's homelessness service, the number of households in temporary accommodation fell by 56 percent over the last five years to only eight households. The number of rough sleepers recorded at the official count in November 2018 was only nine persons.
10. The councils' have a proactive approach to tackling homelessness, with a strong focus upon prevention, early intervention and increasing access to sustainable accommodation. These actions have helped maintain low levels of homelessness and rough sleeping in the district.

Development of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

11. The draft strategy has been developed following a review of homelessness services that included stakeholder engagement exercises with councillors, service users and partner organisations.
12. The review considered the council's achievements during the lifetime of the previous strategy; the demands on the homelessness service; and the ability to meet these demands in the future. The review findings informed the aims and objectives of the new strategy.
13. The draft strategy was subject to a public consultation for a six-week period from 14 October 2019.

The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

14. The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 retains a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness; or if prevention is not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
15. The strategy has three aims:
 - to prevent homelessness whenever possible
 - to end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
 - to end the need for rough sleeping
16. In order to achieve these aims the strategy has five objectives:
 1. To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness.
 2. To minimise the use of temporary accommodation.
 3. To further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

4. To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers.
 5. To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households who are either at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.
17. The strategy is supported by a detailed action plan designed to achieve the aims and objectives.
 18. The success of the strategy will be measured against Key Performance Indicators and targets will be set annually.
 19. The strategy will be reviewed annually, and the findings published on the councils' websites.

Financial Implications

20. There are no financial implications associated with producing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Legal Implications

21. The council has a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to publish a Homelessness Strategy every five years.

Risks

22. The council would be in breach of its statutory duty if it does not publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy every five years.

Other Implications

23. None

Conclusion

24. The Vale of White Horse District Council has a strong track record in the prevention and reduction of homelessness.
25. The draft homelessness and rough sleeping strategy is designed to build upon this success by continuing to drive down homelessness and rough sleeping in the district.
26. The draft strategy and a consultation report will be submitted to Vale cabinet for approval on 31 January 2020 and will include consideration of comments received from South and Vale Scrutiny Committees.
27. Subject to cabinet approval, and the strategy not being called-in, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be published on 10 February 2020.

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Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

[Publication Date]

FOREWORD

“Homelessness has a shattering effect on the lives of individuals and families. It could happen to any one of us: through illness, loss of employment, the breakdown of a relationship, through no fault of our own. The councils have a duty to do all they can to help people who find themselves homeless or at risk of it and this homelessness strategy is a vital part of that plan”.

Councillor David Rouane
Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment
South Oxfordshire District Council

“Prevention is better than cure when it comes to homelessness. The homelessness strategy focusses on helping people avoid the devastation of losing their home but also puts in place support services if they do”.

Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment
Vale of White Horse District Council

“South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are achieving a high prevention and relief success rate when compared to the national average which is pleasing to see”.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Directorate
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a legal requirement for Local Housing Authorities to publish a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy every five years that sets out the scale and cause of the problem and how to prevent and tackle it.

Since 2010 homelessness and rough sleeping has risen significantly in England. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have not witnessed a similar rise, despite the increasing demands placed upon the homelessness service.

The councils have a proactive approach to tackling homelessness, with a strong focus upon prevention, early intervention and increasing access to sustainable accommodation. These actions have helped maintain low levels of homelessness and rough sleeping in the districts.

The joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 retains a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness; or if prevention is not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

The new strategy increases the support and accommodation available for homeless households and rough sleepers in the districts.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed new duties upon local housing authorities to prevent homelessness; to intervene early and to increase support for homeless households.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse adopted this approach during the lifetime of the previous strategy. The new strategy refines and builds upon these principles.

The strategy has been developed following a review of services that included a series of stakeholder engagement exercises with councillors; the public; service users and partner organisations.

The review considered the councils' achievements during the lifetime of the previous strategy; the current demands on the homelessness service, and the ability to meet these demands in the future. The review findings informed the aims and objectives of the new strategy.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, supported by a detailed action plan, has three aims:

- to prevent homelessness whenever possible
- to end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- to end the need for rough sleeping



Five strategic objectives have been identified to support the achievement of the aims:

1. To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness.
2. To minimise the use of temporary accommodation.
3. To further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
4. To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers.
5. To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

The success of the strategy will be measured against Key Performance Indicators and targets will be set annually.

The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and the findings published on the councils' websites.

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Homelessness Review

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2. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness has a highly detrimental effect upon individuals, families and communities. It causes disruption and distress in the short-term and, if not quickly resolved, has a negative impact on the wellbeing and life opportunities of homeless households.

The common perception of homelessness tends to be persons living on the street. Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, however it is a much broader issue affecting many thousands of households across the country.

Homeless households may be accommodated in emergency shelters, refuges, hostels and in temporary accommodation provided by the local authority.

In November 2018, the homelessness charity Shelter estimated that there are at least 320,000 people recorded as homeless in Britain. These figures however do not include the larger number of households referred to as the “hidden homeless”. These households may be living with friends and not have a bedroom, known as “sofa-surfing”, or they may be living in statutory overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing.

The most common reason for homelessness in England is family or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate. The second most prevalent reason is the termination of a private rented tenancy¹.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 sets out how South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils will tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the next five years.

The strategy has been developed following a review of homelessness services that included a series of stakeholder engagement exercises.

The strategy will be published and progress reviewed annually.

¹ Ministry of Housing, Community and Housing; Statutory Homelessness, October to December (Q4) 2018:England.



3. THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT 2017

The Homeless Reduction Act was implemented on 3 April 2018. The act places new duties on local housing authorities to intervene early to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness² for all eligible applicants, not just applicants that have a priority need.³

The Homelessness Reduction Act does not replace previous legislation, it introduces additional duties on local housing authorities and public bodies.

The aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act are to improve the quality of housing advice; to refocus local housing authorities on prevention work; to increase support for single people and to strengthen links between public bodies in order to prevent homelessness.

The main duties introduced by the Act can be summarised as follows:

- The extension of the period someone is threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.
- A duty on local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for all eligible households regardless of priority need.
- A duty on local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible households regardless of priority need for 56 days.
- A duty on local housing authorities to carry out a holistic assessment of an applicant's housing needs and to produce a Personalised Housing Plan for each applicant.
- A duty on named public services to notify the local housing authority of potentially homeless households.

The 1996 Housing Act (Part VII) establishes what duties may be owed by the local housing authority to provide temporary accommodation. The type of duty owed is dependent upon whether the applicant is eligible for assistance; whether they are homeless; if they are in priority need and if they are intentionally homeless.

² Appendix 2: Definitions of key terms Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

³The main priority need categories are: households with dependent children; pregnancy; persons aged 16 or 17; care leavers aged 18 to 20; and households who are vulnerable as a result of old age, physical disability, mental health problems, fleeing domestic abuse or time spent in care, prison or the armed forces. The priority need categories are defined by the 1996 Housing Act (Part VII and the Homelessness Act 2002).



HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

4. THE REVIEW PROCESS

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is informed by a detailed review of homelessness services in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

The review considers:

- councils' achievements during the lifetime of the previous strategy
- actions outstanding from the previous strategy
- demand on homelessness services
- councils' current provision of homelessness services
- unmet demand for council homelessness services
- future challenges facing the councils' homelessness service.

The review included engagement exercises with key stakeholders:

Stakeholder workshop event	Date(s) held
Housing needs team	18 March 2019 21 March 2019
Internal and external partners ⁴	18 June 2019 21 June 2019
South Oxfordshire councillors	25 June 2019
Vale of White Horse councillors	26 June 2019

Telephone interviews were conducted with eight households in temporary accommodation to receive feedback from services users.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE PREVIOUS STRATEGY

The key achievement of the previous strategy was to help reduce homelessness. This was during a period when nationally homelessness and rough sleeping increased significantly.

The introduction of new services and work processes focussed around the prevention of homelessness were central to achieving this result.

⁴ Appendix 1: Partner organisations attending stakeholder workshops



The main service improvements introduced during the lifetime of the previous strategy can be summarised as follows:

- Enhanced Housing Options (EHO)

EHO is a web-based self-help tool that allows households to answer a series of questions and receive a personalised housing plan. The plan provides tailored advice and information to help the household either maintain their current accommodation or secure alternative accommodation. In the last two years 4234 EHO assessments have been completed in South and Vale.

An important feature of EHO assessments are that if the applicant indicates they are at risk of homelessness, they will be contacted by a Housing Needs Officer to be offered help with their housing situation.

Enhanced Housing Options has increased the capacity of Housing Needs Officers to focus resources upon the more complex and vulnerable homelessness cases.

- Front-to-end customer service

A new model of working has been introduced to streamline and accelerate housing advice and assistance. The traditional service delivery method of a customer contacting a housing assistant, being referred to a Housing Needs Officer and then potentially a homelessness officer, was replaced by a direct line to a Housing Needs Officer who becomes the caseworker for that person.

- Adult Homeless Pathway

In 2017/18 South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils entered into a funding agreement with Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to support the Adult Homeless Pathway. The pathway provides over 200 supported beds for homeless households.

- Outreach support for rough sleepers.

In 2017 the councils entered into a joint contract with Connection Support to provide an outreach service for rough sleepers. The service offers rough sleepers intensive and holistic support focussed on securing sustainable accommodation.



- Housing First Project

South Oxfordshire District Council are working in partnership with SOHA and Aspire Oxfordshire to provide support and accommodation for rough sleepers. The Housing First Project will accommodate six former rough sleepers in sustainable long-term housing.

- Oxfordshire Trailblazers

In 2016 the Government funded a network of homelessness prevention trailblazers. South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse were part of a successful bid led by Oxford City Council. The Oxfordshire Trailblazer brings together key partners to prevent homelessness. The trailblazer has three workstreams: targeted upstream prevention, resilience services and a Homeless Champions Network.

Funding for the project ends in 2019, however South and Vale are keen to explore options with trailblazer partners to ensure a legacy for the project.

- Goldrose Supported Accommodation Project

From September 2018 the councils entered into an agreement with Mind Oxfordshire to provide support for eight households with mental health issues. The accommodation is provided by Advance Housing.

- The Gold Standard

The National Practitioner Support Service⁵ issued the Gold Standard challenge to local housing authorities in England. The Gold Standard is ten service standard challenges for housing advice services. In April 2018 South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse became the first councils with a shared housing service to achieve the silver level award.

- Partnership working with advice agencies

The council has established rapid referral protocols with debt advice agencies to help customers quickly access specialist benefits and debt advice.

- The Duty to Refer

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse worked in partnership with public bodies across Oxfordshire to successfully introduce a new web-based referral system.

⁵ The National Practitioner Support Service supports local authorities and their partners to deliver early intervention and prevention-focussed housing option services



6. THE STRENGTHS OF THE COUNCILS' HOMELESSNESS SERVICE

- Dedicated Officers who offer a high-quality service to partner agencies and customers.
- Effective partnership working with Registered Providers, statutory agencies, advice agencies and volunteer groups.
- A practical, problem solving approach to tackling homelessness
- Protocols with partner agencies to provide timely support to homeless households
- White Horse Lettings⁶ provides an excellent service to both private landlords and prospective tenants.
- An innovative approach to providing sustainable accommodation for homeless households and rough sleepers.
- Effective participation in county-wide partnerships including the Adult Homeless Pathway and Housing Support Advisory Group.

The feedback received from service users on the overall housing needs service

“Very good, lovely, very impressed. Kept me updated”.

“Handled my case very well, placed me in temporary accommodation after initial meeting, made a successful bid shortly afterwards”

“absolutely fine, very informative”

“Happy with how quickly I was offered accommodation after a house fire”

“Very well handled, felt looked after, felt there was someone on my team, would say 95 per cent positive”

“Handled my case well”

“Dealt with extremely well, good communication”

“Can't fault initial advice from caseworker. Set up plan straightaway”

⁶ White Horse Lettings is the councils' in-house social lettings agency



7. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The review identified six areas for further development.

- Closer county-wide partnership working.

Build upon the strong relationships with county-wide partners to develop a strategic county-wide approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping that will deliver a more consistent service and to share best practice across Oxfordshire.

- Build upon the strong existing relationships with Registered Providers and private landlords to further increase access to sustainable accommodation.

- Review the provision of temporary accommodation

Vale of White Horse District Council owns 19 units of temporary accommodation. The council owns three houses in Abingdon and two hostels in Wantage and Faringdon. The hostels have shared bathroom facilities, South Oxfordshire District Council do not own any temporary accommodation.

- Increase support and accommodation for rough sleepers

Connection Support provide a high-quality outreach service in South and Vale, however the councils should consider increasing the support available to rough sleepers.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) in Oxfordshire provides emergency accommodation to rough sleepers in extreme weather conditions. The councils should investigate providing access to a winter shelter throughout the winter months.

- Better consultation with service users

Seek to develop a customer feedback framework to promote continuous service improvement

- Raise awareness of the homelessness service

Aim to promote the quality of its homelessness services in the media and provide a practical guide to councillors on rough sleeping.



8. FUTURE CHALLENGES

The review identified a number of challenges facing the homelessness service. The main challenges identified can be summarised as follows:

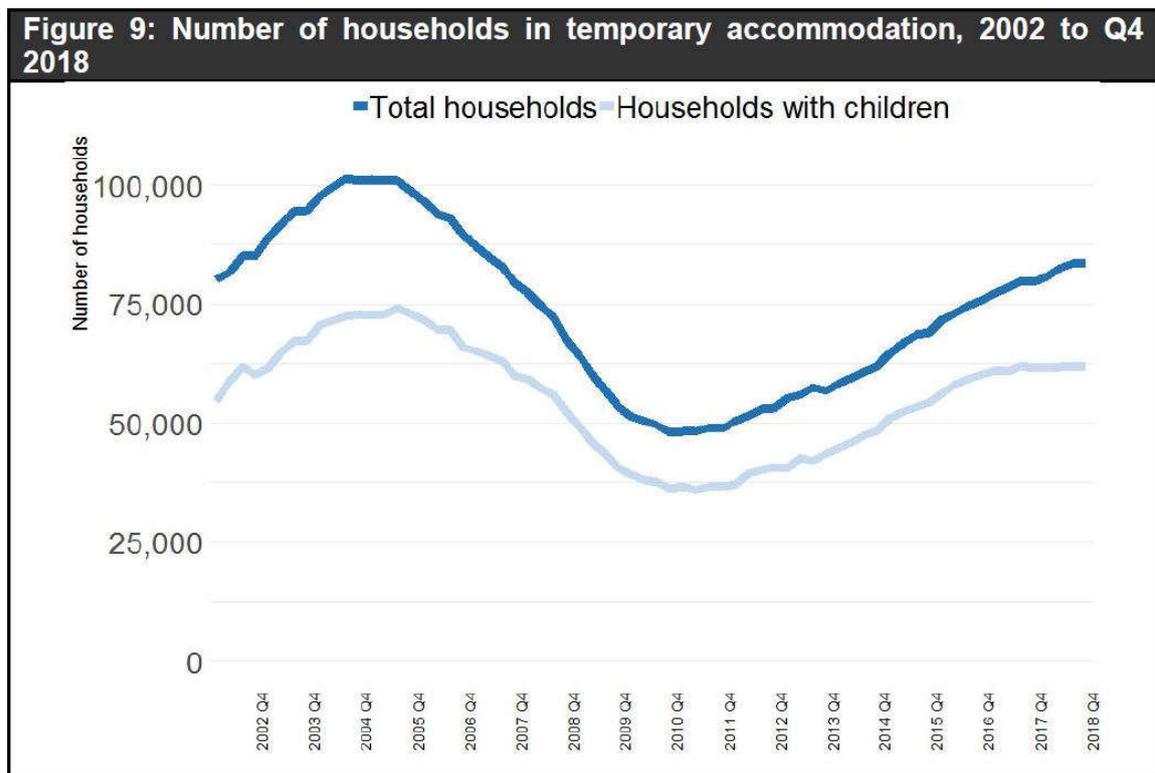
- The increasing demand upon the homelessness service to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- The greater complexity and increased vulnerability of homeless cases.
- The increased administrative burden of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- The increasing demand for affordable rented housing.
- The rising cost of home ownership and open market renting.
- The impact of welfare reform, particularly the four-year freeze on local housing allowance.
- The continuing roll-out of Universal Credit.
- The rise in household debt and rent arrears.
- The reduction in county-wide funding for housing related services.
- The withdrawal of private landlords from the housing benefit market as a result of the divergence between market rents and local housing allowance.
- The affordability of “affordable rent” tenancies for the lowest income households.



HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

9. HOMELESSNESS – THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Since 2010 the number of households in temporary accommodation has risen significantly in England. By 31 December 2018, the number of statutory homeless households in temporary accommodation had increased by **63 per cent** from 50,400 to 83,700.

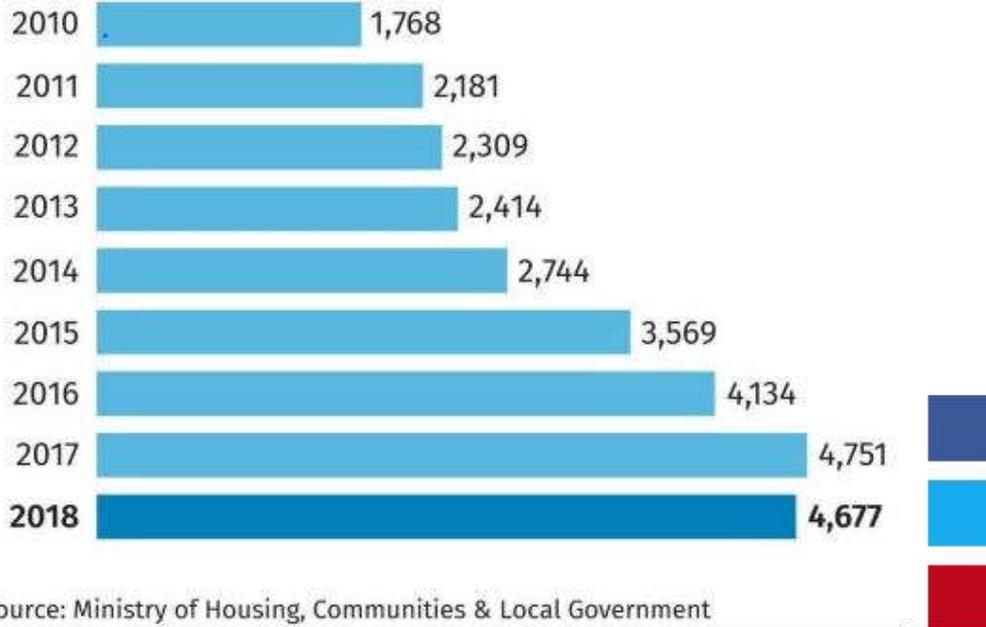


Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government



The number of rough sleepers in England since 2010 has increased by **165 per cent**.

People sleeping rough in England



The rise in homelessness and rough sleeping nationally has not been reflected in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, despite the increasing demand on the homelessness service.

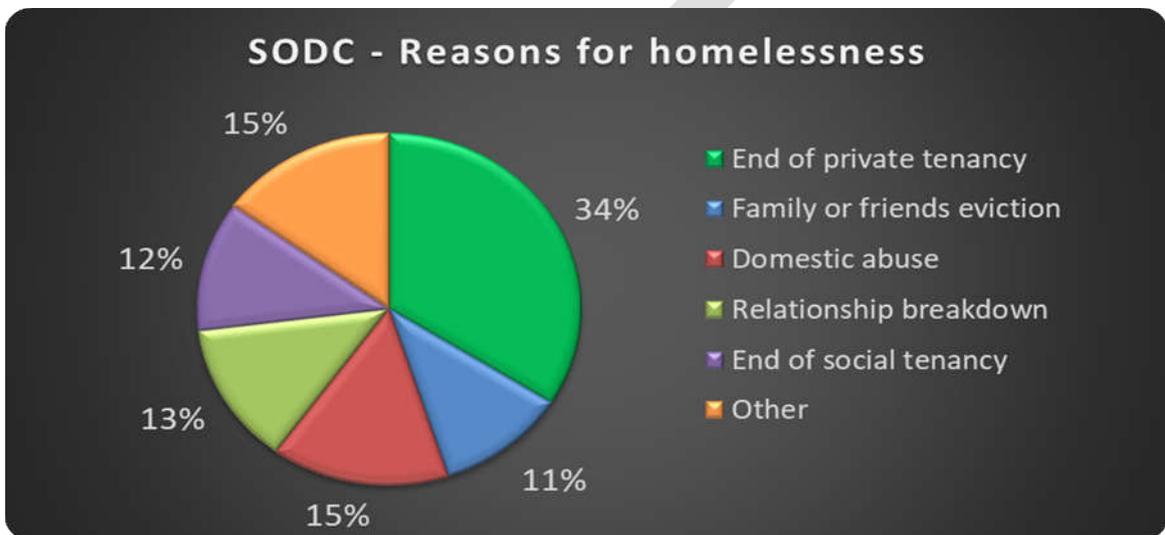


Homelessness in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse

10. REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

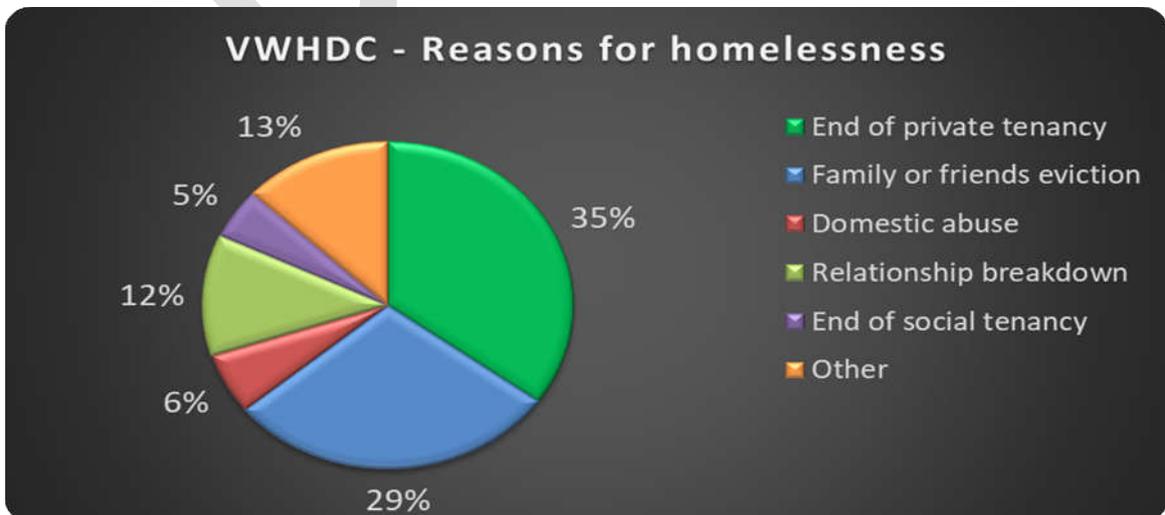
The main reasons for being at risk of homelessness in South Oxfordshire between April and December 2018 was the loss of private rented accommodation, followed by domestic abuse and relationship breakdowns.

The loss of private rented accommodation is an increasing cause of homelessness. Private landlords can secure significantly higher market rents in comparison with Local Housing Allowance.



April to December 2018

The loss of private rented accommodation is also the main cause of homelessness in the Vale of White Horse, followed by family or friend evictions and relationship breakdowns.



April to December 2018



11. HOUSEHOLDS WITH SPECIFIC HOUSING NEEDS

Households experiencing domestic abuse

Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services (ODAS) offers emotional and practical support to victims suffering or fleeing domestic abuse. Support can include: phone support, face to face meetings in a safe environment, safety planning, access to a confidential refuge where women (with or without children) can stay temporarily in order to escape an abusive relationship.

The councils provide a Sanctuary Scheme to allow persons experiencing domestic abuse to remain safely in their home with enhanced security measures.

The councils have a specialist Housing Needs Officer who leads on domestic abuse issues. The role includes attending Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency tasking meetings with partner agencies.

The council also refers persons experiencing domestic abuse to Independent Domestic Violence Advisors for specialist support.

Households with persons who have mental health needs

Research by the homelessness charity Homeless Link reports that 86 per cent of homeless persons suffer from mental health issues. 44 per cent have a formal diagnosis of a mental health condition.

In South Oxfordshire, between April and December 2019, a total of 42 households at risk of homelessness had mental health issues. In the Vale of White Horse 37 households at risk of homelessness had mental health issues. This equates to 47 percent of households in South Oxfordshire and 40 per cent of households in the Vale of White Horse.

The Oxfordshire Mental Health Pathway provides supported accommodation for persons with high mental health support needs.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse recognises that persons at risk of homelessness with low to medium mental health issues may not be eligible for supported housing.

In September 2018 the councils entered into an agreement with Mind Oxfordshire to provide support for eight households with mental health issues in accommodation provided by Advance Housing.



Households Leaving the Armed Forces

The councils have developed strong links with the Armed Forces in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

A specialist Housing Needs Officer attends events and forums held by the Armed Forces to promote the housing assistance available from the councils. The councils work closely with SSAFA, the armed forces charity, to offer housing advice and support to members of the armed forces community. This proactive approach reduces the number of persons leaving the armed forces who become at risk of homelessness.

In 2018/19 South Oxfordshire were approached by six households leaving armed forces accommodation at risk of becoming homeless. All six households avoided becoming homeless, and secured alternative accommodation with the assistance of the housing needs team

The Vale of White Horse were approached by twelve households leaving armed forces accommodation at risk of becoming homeless. The housing needs team helped secure alternative accommodation for ten of the households and one household left the area.

Households with persons who have substance misuse issues

The number of homeless households with substance misuse issues is significantly higher than in the general population. Research by Homeless Link reports 41 per cent of homeless households have drug issues and 27% have issues with alcohol.

In South Oxfordshire, between April and December 2018, a total of 16 households at risk of homelessness had substance misuse issues. The same number of households at risk of homelessness and suffering mental health issues approached the Vale of White Horse. This equates to 18 per cent of households in South Oxfordshire and 17 per cent of households in the Vale of White Horse.

There is local support available for persons experiencing substance misuse. Turning Point is a social enterprise that supports persons with drug and alcohol issues. It has a support hub based in Didcot and offers weekly drop-in sessions in Abingdon and Henley.



Young Persons in housing need

Oxfordshire County Council has a statutory duty to provide support and accommodation for looked after children⁷ in Oxfordshire.

The Young People's Supported Housing Pathway provides supported housing for 16 to 24-year olds. It is delivered by Oxfordshire County Council in partnership with the five district councils. The pathway provides accommodation for vulnerable young people, including those owed a statutory duty by the County Council. There are currently 227 units of accommodation in Oxfordshire, including 11 units in South Oxfordshire and 21 units in the Vale of White Horse.

The councils refer vulnerable young persons into the Young Persons Pathway

Oxfordshire County Council recently produced a Housing and Homelessness Strategy for Vulnerable Young People and Families in Oxfordshire. The strategy has three broad aims; to provide the right buildings for young people, to provide appropriate support services and to offer clear housing pathways.

The YMCA Henley also provides 31 units of supported accommodation for young people aged 16-25 with a local connection to Henley or the surrounding area.

In South Oxfordshire, between April and December 2019, a total of 44 young persons at risk of homelessness approached the council for housing assistance. The number approaching the Vale of White Horse for assistance was 40.

12. DEMAND FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

A key indicator of demand on the council's homelessness service is the number of successful homelessness prevention cases.

The Homelessness Reduction Act changed the definitions of homelessness prevention and relief and introduced new reporting standards. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of recorded successful prevention cases from April 2018 onwards.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have a proactive, early intervention approach to prevent homelessness. The new reporting standards do not include upstream prevention work undertaken before the statutory 56-day period. The new standards also

⁷ A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. Looked after children are also referred to as children in care.

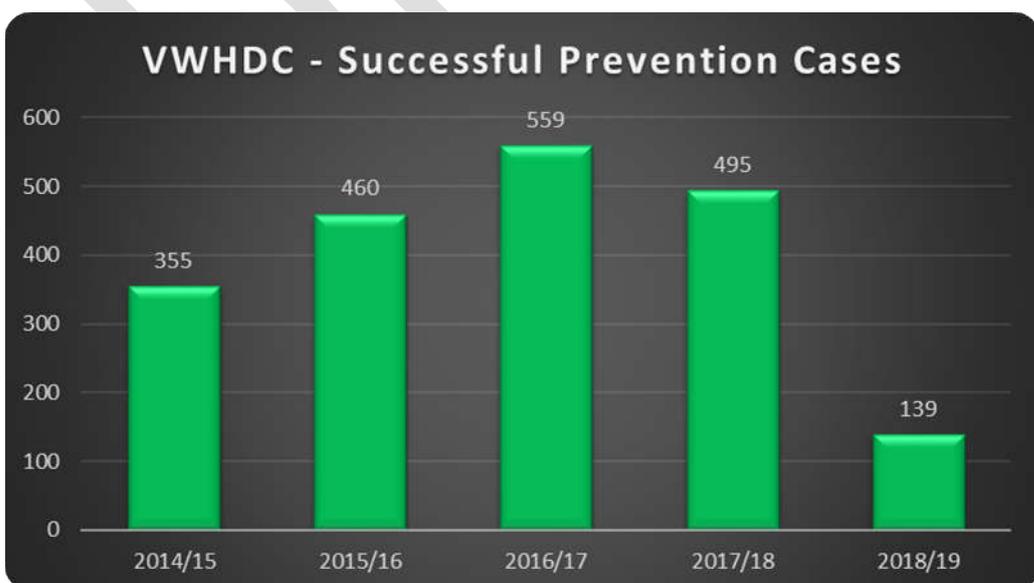
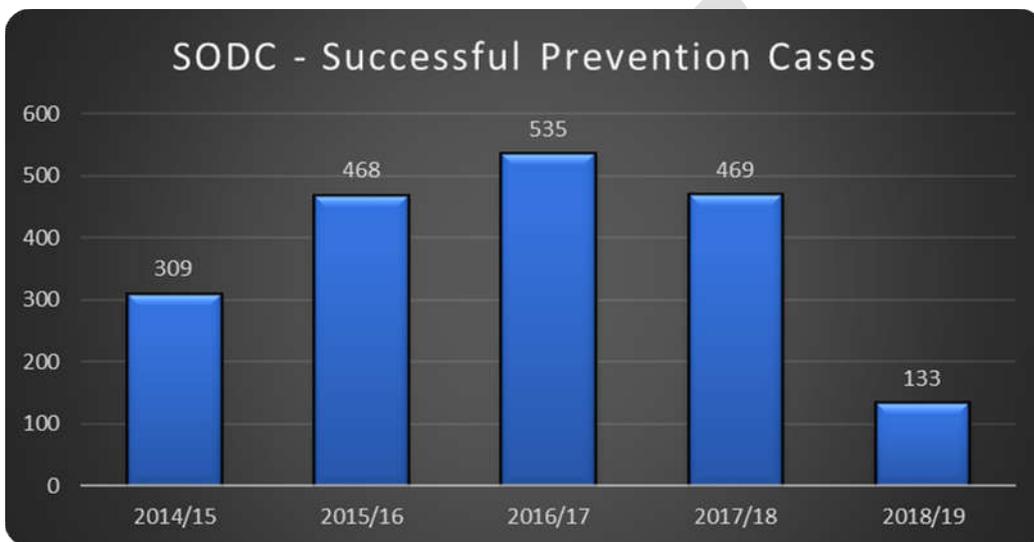


redefine certain cases previously recorded as successful prevention as successful relief cases.

A consistent indicator of demand between 2017/18 and 2018/19 are the number of Enhanced Housing Options assessments completed

Households at risk of homelessness complete an on-line Enhanced Housing Options assessment. The assessment helps inform the Personalised Housing Plan completed with the caseworker.

The number of EHOs completed increased from 882 in 2017/18 to 915 in 2018/19 which equates to an increase of 4 per cent.



The Local Government Association has highlighted the additional casework generated by the Homelessness Reduction Act:



“There have been significant new burdens associated with the Act’s implementation. Local Housing Authorities have seen increasing footfall, and an increased administrative burden associated with each case”⁸.

This quotation reflects the experience of South and Vale Housing Needs Offices.

13. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

Despite rising demand, South and Vale continue to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness. The number of cases where the councils have failed to prevent or relieve homelessness has fallen significantly.

The Homelessness Reduction Act requires local housing authorities to focus upon preventing or relieving homelessness. The authority cannot make a main homeless decision until they have been unable to prevent homelessness or relieve homelessness within 56 days.

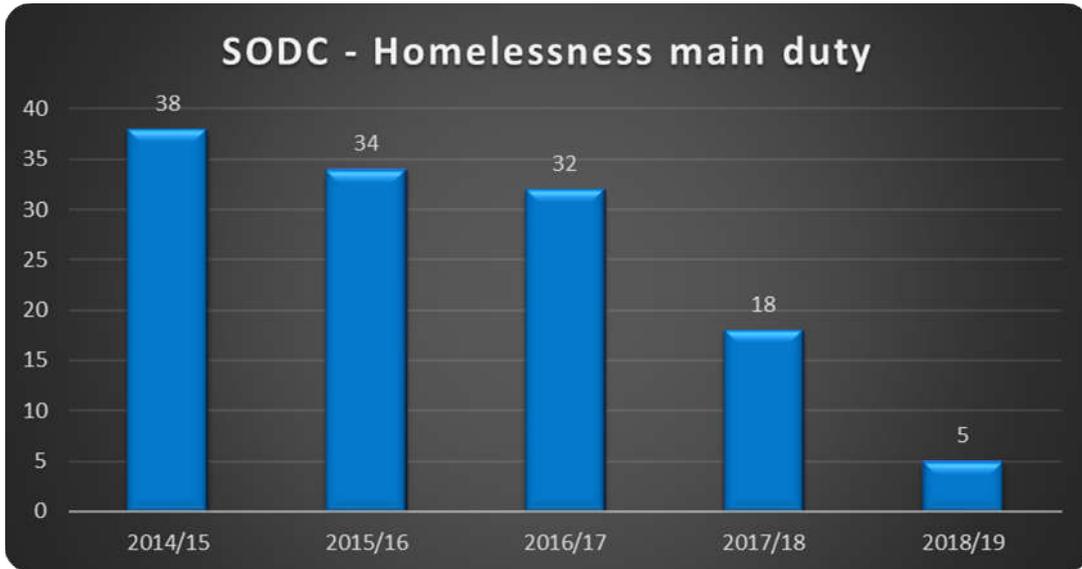
The main duty decision determines if the applicant is owed the main housing duty. The decision assesses whether the applicant is homeless, if they are in priority need and whether they are intentionally homeless.

An applicant who is homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless is owed the main housing duty. The council will have an ongoing duty to provide temporary accommodation until they secure suitable alternative accommodation.

The councils are focused upon preventing or relieving homelessness in agreement with the household before making a main duty homelessness decision that may affect them adversely.

⁸ Local Government Association: Homelessness Reduction Act: one year on. Submission to Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee 5 April 2019





South Oxfordshire completed 16 homelessness assessments during 2018/19. The table below shows the types of decision.

Decision type	Number of decisions
Main duty	5
Not homeless	3
Not priority need	5
Intentionally homeless	3



Vale of White Horse completed 26 homelessness assessments during 2018/19.



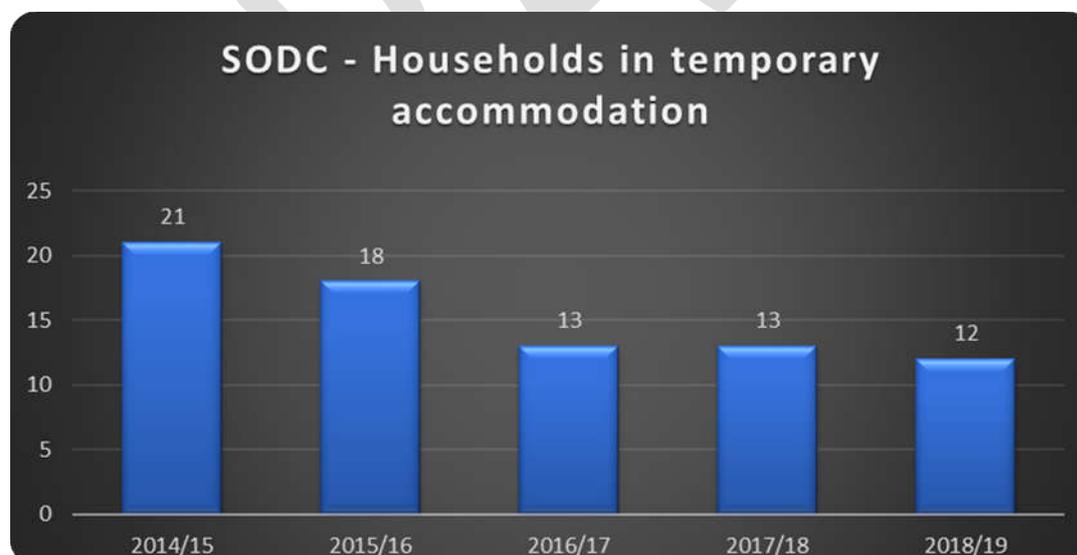
The table below shows the types of decision.

Decision type	Number of decisions
Main duty	12
Not homeless	1
Not priority need	5
Intentionally homeless ⁹	8

South and Vale continue to work with intentionally homeless households to secure a housing solution and are exploring options with Oxfordshire County Council to improve housing outcomes for intentionally homeless families.

The success of the councils in preventing or relieving homelessness is further evidenced by the decreasing number of households in temporary accommodation.

The provision of temporary accommodation is often disruptive to homeless households, who do not normally have a choice over the type or location of the accommodation. It may limit their access to support networks and affect work and school arrangements. The councils' approach is to secure suitable alternative accommodation in agreement with the applicant if it is not possible to prevent homelessness.

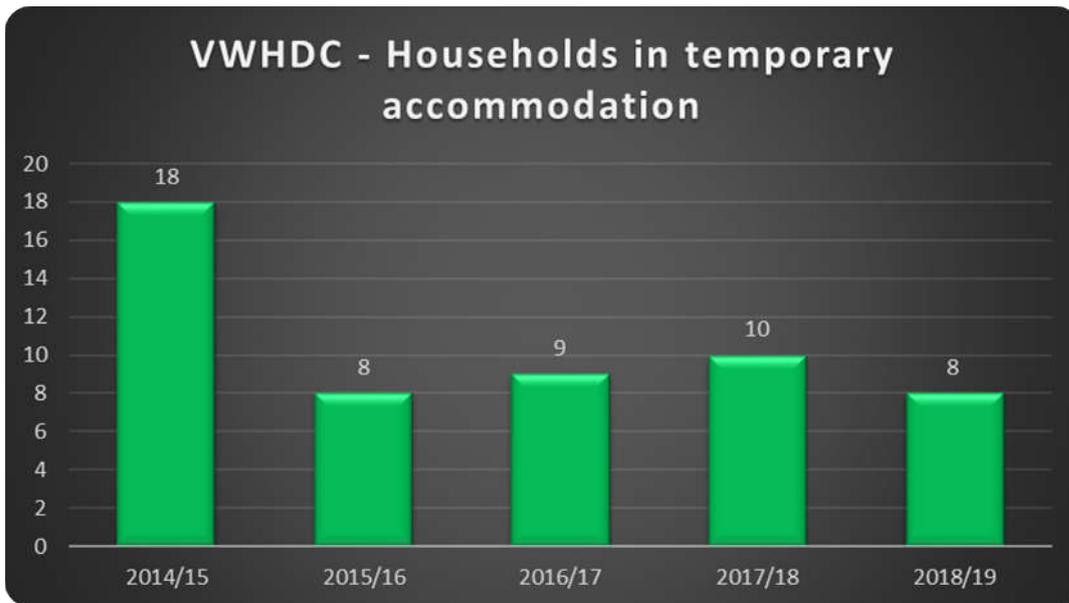


Number of households in TA as of 31 March

The number of households in temporary accommodation in South Oxfordshire fell by **43** per cent in the last five years.

⁹ Applicants are considered intentionally homeless if they have lost their previous accommodation as a result of a deliberate act or omission on their part and the accommodation would have been available and reasonable to continue to occupy.



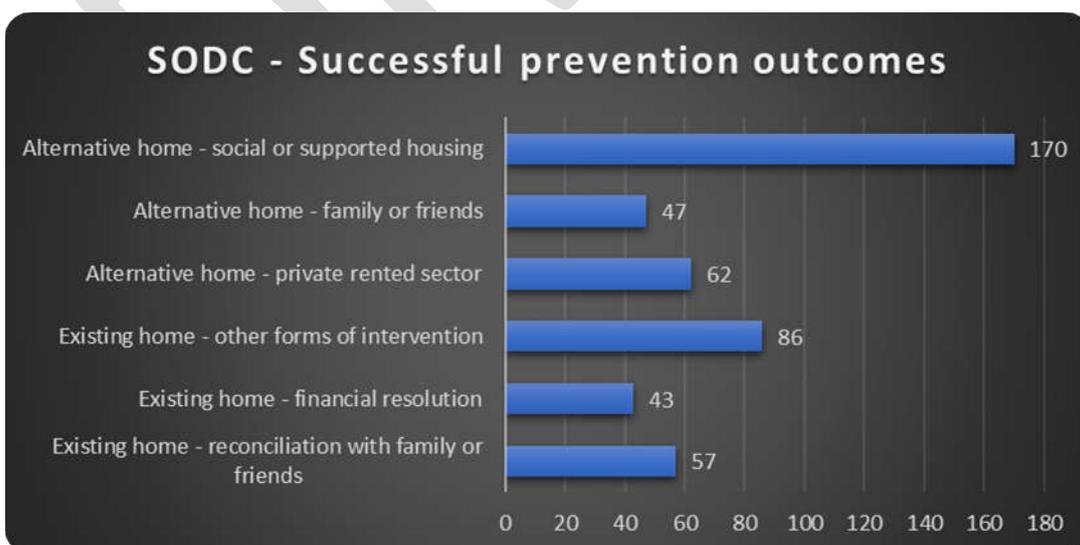


Number of households in TA as of 31 March

The number of households in temporary accommodation in Vale of White Horse fell by **56** per cent in the last five years.

The councils can prevent or relieve homeless by either enabling the household to remain at home or by securing suitable alternative accommodation.

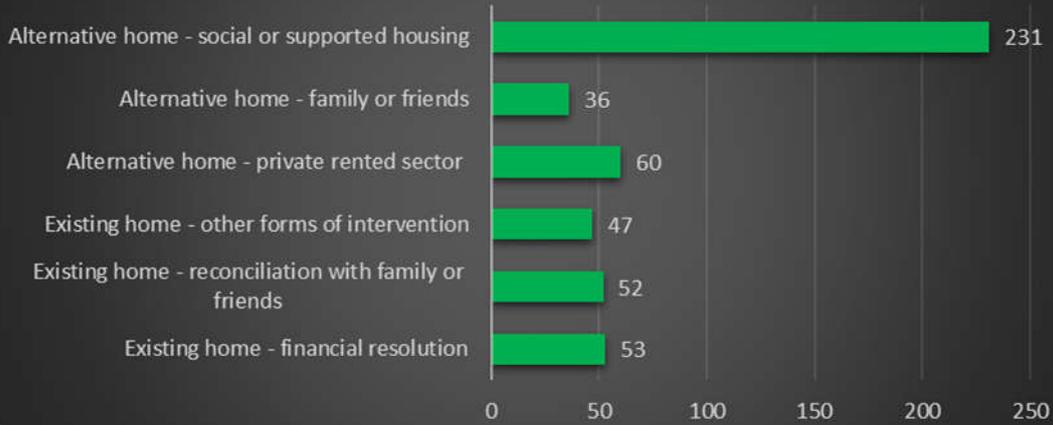
In 2017/18 the three main outcomes for households at risk of homelessness in South and Vale was to securing social housing, to be able to remain at home, or securing accommodation in the private rented sector.



2017/18



VWHDC - Successful prevention outcomes

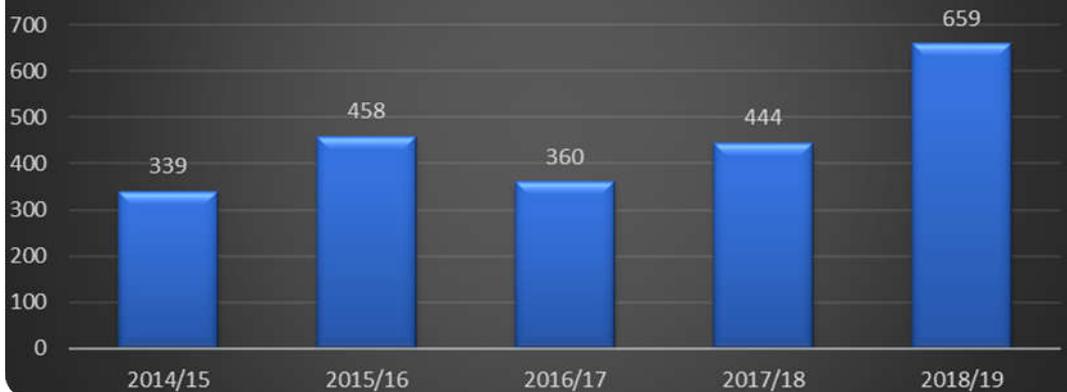


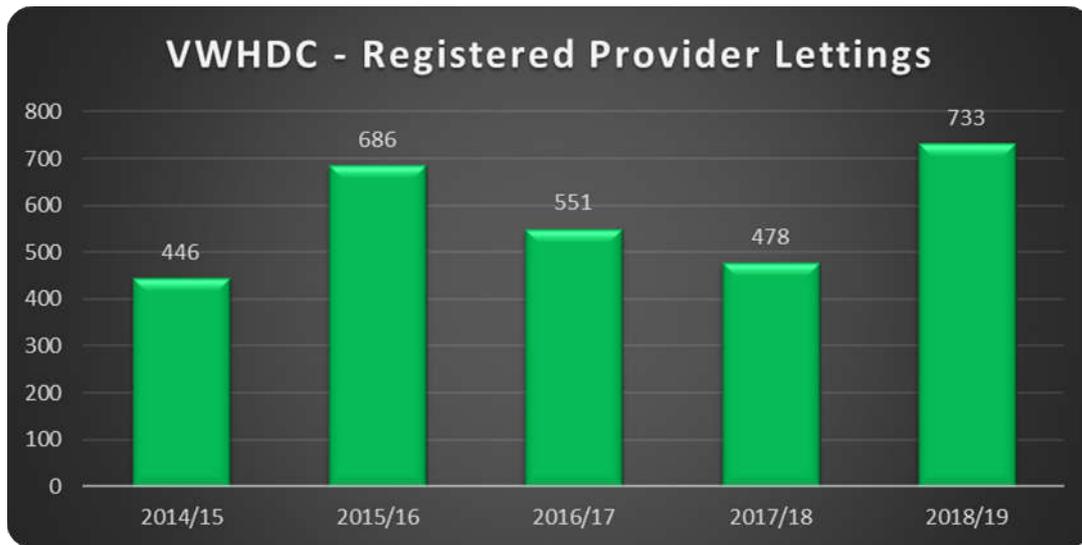
2017/18

Lettings by Registered Providers

The supply of social or supported housing lettings is a key tool for preventing or relieving homelessness. The number of lettings by Registered Providers has increased significantly over the last five years.

SODC - Registered Provider Lettings





Private Lettings

The councils both maintain a housing register for applicants to apply for social housing. Eligible applicants are placed in one of four priority bands¹⁰ and bid for Registered Provider properties advertised on the Choice Based Lettings website.

As of 31 March 2019, there were 859 applicants in housing need on South Oxfordshire's housing register and 725 applicants in housing need on the Vale of White Horse's housing register.

The length of time an applicant may wait to make a successful bid varies widely depending upon their priority banding and the areas in which they are bidding.

It is however often the case that households at risk of homelessness may have insufficient priority or waiting time to make a successful bid through Choice Based Lettings.

It is therefore essential the councils can secure affordable tenancies in the private rented sector.

White Horse Lettings is the councils in-house social letting agency. It works closely with private landlords to secure affordable tenancies for households at risk of homelessness. White Horse Lettings offers a range of free services to landlords including tenancy support, a rent deposit scheme and rent-in-advance loans to tenants.

¹⁰ Band 1: Exceptional Need; Band 2: Urgent Need; Band 3: Significant Need; Band 4: Adequately housed



Over the last three years White Horse Lettings has secured 112 new tenancies in South Oxfordshire and 115 tenancies in the Vale of White Horse.

In 2018/19 White Horse Lettings worked with 15 new landlords in South Oxfordshire and 30 new landlords in the Vale of White Horse.

Remaining at home

To enable households at risk of homelessness to remain safely at home often requires the skilled intervention of Housing Needs Officers.

It may be necessary to mediate and negotiate with friends or family to allow the household to remain at the property.

The household may need legal or financial advice to help them remain in the property. The councils have a rapid referral protocol with Citizens Advice and a strong relationship with independent advice agencies.

Rough sleeping in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse

A key aim of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is to end the need for rough sleeping in the districts.

The Government's definition of rough sleeping is as follows:

- People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments)
- People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes").

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.

14. REASONS FOR ROUGH SLEEPING

Connection Support provide an outreach service for rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. Connection Support provides a weekly report to the councils on rough sleeping in the districts.



Many of the rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse have chaotic lifestyles. In most cases the complex nature of rough sleeping is further complicated by substance misuse or mental health issues. There are also incidents where rough sleepers are not willing to engage with services or have been excluded from hostel accommodation.

The outreach service is focussed upon supporting rough sleepers into secure, sustainable accommodation. This may include suitable accommodation with family or friends, private rented accommodation or access into the Adult Homeless Pathway.

15. LEVELS OF ROUGH SLEEPING

In 2018/19 Connection Support received 61 referrals for rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and 47 referrals for the Vale of White Horse.

The tables below illustrate the gender and age of rough sleepers referred to the council's outreach service in 2018/19.

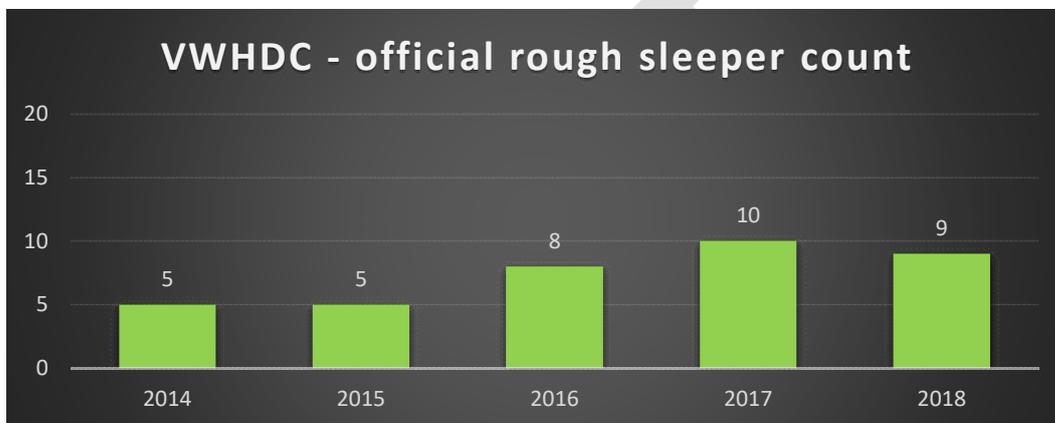
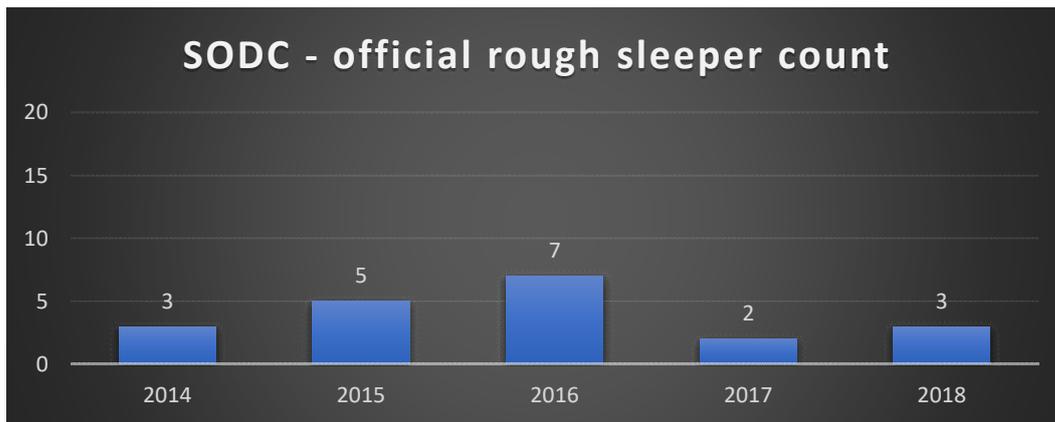
Gender:	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Number SODC:	38	9	14	61
Number VOWH:	30	8	9	47

Age:	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	Unknown	Total
Number SODC:	10	8	11	5	2	1	24	61
Number VOWH:	7	7	5	6	3	1	18	47

Connection Support have reported increasing demand for their services over the last three years.

The official annual rough sleeper count, undertaken by all local housing authorities, shows a low level of rough sleeping in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. These figures reflect the success of the councils, in partnership with Connection Support, in resolving incidents of rough sleeping.





The outreach service started in the Vale of White Horse District in 2017. The outreach service provides a more accurate, intelligence-led estimate of rough sleeping in the districts. The number of rough sleepers recorded in the Vale of White Horse at the end of June 2019 was six persons.

Persons of no fixed abode

There are single homeless households who are not rough sleeping but have no permanent address. These households are described as having no fixed abode and are sometimes referred to as “sofa surfers”.

This “hidden homeless” is far more prevalent than rough sleeping but it is difficult to measure due to its hidden nature.

As of 30 June 2019, there were 46 persons on South Oxfordshire District Council’s housing register and 64 on the Vale of White Horse District Council’s housing register who were either of no fixed abode or lacking a bedroom. This figure however only reflects households who have applied to the housing registers.



16. SUPPORT FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS

The councils continue to increase support and accommodation for rough sleepers.

The councils financially support the Adult Homeless Pathway in Oxfordshire. The funding provides twelve high support hostel beds in Oxford and thirteen supported flats in Abingdon. The Pathway provides short to medium-term accommodation for rough sleepers and supports them into sustainable long-term accommodation.

In September 2018 the councils entered into an agreement with Mind Oxfordshire to support eight households with mental health issues in accommodation provided by Advance Housing.

South Oxfordshire District Council, working in partnership with SOHA and Aspire Oxfordshire, have launched a Housing First Project. The project provides six units of accommodation with intensive support for former rough sleepers. The project will offer long term accommodation in a supportive and sustainable environment. Vale of White Horse District Council are exploring options with Registered Providers to develop a Housing First project.

The increasing support and accommodation available to rough sleepers supports the strategy's aim to end the need for rough sleeping in South and Vale.

17. STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This strategy, supported by a detailed action plan, has three central aims:

- to prevent homelessness whenever possible
- to end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- to end the need for rough sleeping

Following stakeholder engagement exercises and a review of homelessness, five key objectives have been identified to achieve the strategic aims:

Objective 1: To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness.

- Further develop county-wide partnership working to improve the delivery of homelessness services.



- Improve partnership working with key agencies to prevent homelessness.
- Improve engagement with councillors.
- Develop a communications strategy.

Objective 2: To minimise the use of temporary accommodation.

- Prevent the need for households to access temporary accommodation.
- Assist households to move quickly into suitable and sustainable accommodation.
- Review the provision of council-owned temporary accommodation.

Objective 3: To further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

- Further improve the quality of housing advice offered to customers.
- Improve performance monitoring and service development.
- Create a customer feedback framework to promote continuous service improvement.

Objective 4: To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers.

- Improve access to emergency accommodation for rough sleepers.
- Improve the support available for rough sleepers.
- Better data collection to tackle rough sleeping.

Objective 5: To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

- Improve the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable persons.
- Encourage private landlords to let their properties to households at risk of homelessness.
- Bring empty properties back into use for households at risk of homelessness.



Measurable Outcomes

The success of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be measured against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- The number of main duty homelessness decisions.
- the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation
- the length of stay for homeless households in emergency temporary accommodation.
- The number of rough sleepers.

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South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

18. Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

ACTION PLAN



1. Improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness

Objective	Key Actions	Timescales	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Further develop county-wide partnership working to improve the delivery of homelessness services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop with county-wide partners proposals to improve the delivery of homelessness services in Oxfordshire. The proposals will consider the potential benefits of county-wide partnership working, including pooled budgets and co-commissioning. 	Year 1	Office time	HNM*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, recruit to the position of an Oxfordshire Homelessness Co-Ordinator to help develop proposals on county-wide working 	Years 1 - 2	FHSG**	HNM & HATL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To work in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire district councils to improve housing services for vulnerable young people through co-commissioning of services and the development of the Young Persons Housing Strategy. 	Years 1 - 5	Officer time FHSG	HATL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to commission and deliver the Adult Homeless Pathway in 2020/21 and 2021/22. 	Years 1-2	FHSG	HNM & HATL



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To work with partners from “Oxfordshire Homeless Prevention Trailblazer” to maintain and develop links with probation services, hospitals and Oxfordshire County Council children’s services to prevent homelessness through early intervention. Work with Oxfordshire County Council to develop better housing outcomes for families found to be intentionally homeless. 	Years 1-5	Officer time	HNM & HATLs
		Year 1	Officer time	HNM
Improved partnership working with key agencies to prevent homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with supported housing providers to increase move-on options for their residents to help them move into sustainable, independent accommodation. Host an annual Registered Provider Forum with a focus upon support for tenants at risk of homelessness. Develop a protocol with the Police, Community Safety and housing providers to ensure a co-ordinated response for victims of modern slavery. Host an annual Homelessness Forum for partner agencies. Work with the Police to develop a rough sleeper housing protocol. Participate in the development of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy and assist in securing accommodation for victims of domestic abuse. 	Years 1 – 5	Officer time	HNM & HATLs
		Years 1 -- 5	Officer time	LTL
		Year 2	Officer time	HATL
		Years 2 – 5	Officer time	HNM
		Year 1	Officer time	HNM & HATL
		Years 1-2	Officer time	HATL



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build upon our links with the Armed Forces by attending local events and forums and providing specialist housing advice from a designated Officer. • Host an annual Private Landlord's Forum to promote White Horse Lettings. 	Years 1-5	Officer time	HNO
		Years 1-5	Officer time	HATL
Improved engagement with councillors Page 54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance for councillors on reporting and supporting rough sleepers. • Publish an annual review of the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. 	Year 1	Officer time	HATL
		Years 1-5 Ongoing	Officer time	HNM
Development of a communications strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the awareness of our homelessness service with partners, support agencies, service users and the public by developing a communications strategy. • Promote the success of the housing needs service through traditional and social media. 	Years 1-5	Officer time	HNM
		Years 1-5	Officer time	HNM



2. Minimise the use of temporary accommodation

Objective	Key Actions	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Prevent the need for households to access temporary accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness in the first instance, including the early identification of at-risk households with specific housing requirements. e.g. large families or households with disabled persons. 	Years 1 – 5	Officer time	HATLs, LTL & HNOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise the opportunities through White Horse Lettings for households at risk of homelessness to secure alternative accommodation. 	Years 1 – 5 Ongoing	Officer time	HATLs & HNOs
Assist households to move quickly into suitable and sustainable accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively work with households in temporary accommodation to identify and secure suitable alternative accommodation. 	Years 1 - 5	Officer time	HNOs, WHL & LTL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and update temporary accommodation procedures with a focus upon the early relief of homelessness. 	Years 1 – 5	Officer time	LTL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce an exit plan for all households entering temporary accommodation and monitor on a weekly basis. 	Years 1 - 5	Officer time	HATLs & LTL



Review the provision of council-owned temporary accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake an options appraisal for the future provision of council-owned temporary accommodation, including the needs of disabled households. 	Years 2 3	Officer time	HNM and property team
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review joint protocol arrangements with Registered Providers. 	Year 1	Officer time	LTL

3. Further develop our homelessness service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity

Objective	Key Actions	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Further improve the quality of housing advice offered to customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Homelessness Reduction Act procedures to ensure they are structured around securing practical housing solutions as well as compliance with the legislation. 	Year 1	Officer time	HATLs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop individual training programmes for Housing Needs Officers. 	Year 1	Officer time	HATLs
Improve performance monitoring and service development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the development of the housing needs dashboard that provides weekly and monthly key performance data. 	Year 1	Officer time	HNM



Create a customer feedback framework to promote continuous service improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and promote a questionnaire to capture customer feedback. 	Years 2-5	Officer time	HNM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure service improvement actions are taken in response to customer feedback. 	Years 2-5	Officer time	HNM & HNOs

4. Improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers

Objective	Timescale	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Improve access to emergency accommodation for rough sleepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish access to a winter shelter for rough sleepers. 	Year 1	Officer time FHSG	HATL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit to a winter shelter co-ordinator role that will help rough sleepers accessing the shelter to secure alternative accommodation. 	Year 1	Officer time FHSG	HATL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate options for providing a local winter shelter. 	Year 1	Officer time FHSG	HATL
Improve the support available for rough sleepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a dedicated, specialist Housing Needs Officer to casework rough sleepers. 	Year 1	Existing resources	HNO



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit to a floating support role to support vulnerable households at high risk of homelessness. Organise bi-annual operational meetings for rough sleeping support services and accommodation providers. Review the outreach service provision for rough sleepers. 	Year 1	Officer time FHSG	HATL
		Year 2	Officer time	HATLs
		Year 2	Officer time	HNM
Better data collection to tackle rough sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the Government statistical returns on homelessness (HCLIC) to analyse the support needs of rough sleepers. 	Year 2	Officer time	HNM & HATL

5. Improve access to sustainable accommodation for households at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

Objective	Key Actions	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Improve the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the evaluation of Housing First in partnership with SOHA and Aspire Oxfordshire. 	Year 1	FHSG	HNM & HATL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the option to develop Housing First projects with other Registered Providers. 	Year 2	FHSG	HATL
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review our current provision of supported accommodation for persons with mental health issue. 	Year 1	FHSG	HATL



Encourage private landlords to let their properties to households at risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the incentives offered to private landlords to let properties through White Horse Lettings. Promote White Horse Lettings services at the private landlord's forum. 	Year 2	Officer time	WHL
<p>Page 59</p> Bring empty properties back into use for households at risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a private sector housing database of medium to long term empty properties. Develop a package of incentives for owners that includes both White Horse Lettings incentives and private sector team incentives. Implement a programme for contacting empty property owners. 	Year 1	Officer time	PSH
		Year 1	Officer time	PSH
		Years 1 - 2	Officer time	PSH
Develop a marketing strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the Communications teams to develop a marketing strategy for White Horse Lettings. 	Year 1	Officer time	WHL

* Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. This is a Government grant that is ring-fenced for the purposes of preventing or relieving homelessness.

** HNM Housing Needs Manager LTL Lettings Team Leader WHL White Horse Lettings
 HATL Housing Advice Team Leader HNO Housing Needs Officer PSH Private Sector Housing



20. APPENDICIES

Appendix 1: Partner organisations attending stakeholder workshops

Appendix 2: Definition of key terms: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

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Appendix 1: Partner organisations attending stakeholder workshops

A2 Dominion
Abingdon Foyer
Catalyst Housing
Community Safety team
Connection Support
Department of Works and Pensions Oxfordshire
Housing lettings team
Mind Housing
Oxford City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Oxfordshire NHS Foundation Trust
Private Sector Housing team
SOHA
SSAFA Oxfordshire
Silva Homes
Turning Point
Wantage and Grove Foodbank
Wantage Independent Advice Centre
YMCA Henley



Appendix 2: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: definition of terms

Households who are statutorily homeless are owed legal duties that fall into three main categories:

- **Prevention duties** include any activities aimed at preventing a household threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This would involve activities to enable an applicant to remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. The duty lasts for 56 days but may be extended if the local authority is continuing with efforts to prevent homelessness.
- **Relief duties** are owed to households that are already homeless and require help to secure settled accommodation. The duty lasts 56 days and can only be extended by a local authority if the households would not be owed the main homelessness duty.
- **Main homelessness duty** describes the duty a local authority has towards an applicant who is unintentionally homeless, eligible for assistance and has priority need. This definition has not been changed by the 2017 HRA. However, these households are now only owed a main duty if their homelessness has not been successfully prevented or relieved.



Scrutiny work programme

19 November 2019



MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Scrutiny Committee 28 Nov 2019	Planning enforcement	To review performance in 2018/19	Councillor Catherine Webber	Emma Turner emma.turner@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 28 Nov 2019	Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy	To comment on the draft strategy	Councillor Jenny Hannaby	Phil Ealey phil.ealey@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee January 2020	Oxfordshire Growth Board governance	To consider governance arrangements	Councillor Judy Roberts	Andrew Down andrew.down@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee January 2020	Didcot Garden Town	To consider governance arrangements, funding allocations and priorities	Councillor Judy Roberts	Marybeth Harasz marybeth.harasz@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee January 2020	Fees and charges 2020/21	To consider proposals	Councillor Andrew Crawford	Simon Hewings simon.hewings@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 23 Jan 2020	Council tax reduction scheme	To consider proposed changes for 2020/21	Councillor Andrew Crawford	Paul Howden paul.howden@southandvale.gov.uk

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Agenda Item 8

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Scrutiny Committee 23 Jan 2020	Planning monitoring report 2018/19	To review the annual report	Councillor Catherine Webber	Ben Duffy ben.duffy@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 23 Jan 2020	Planning appeals 2018/19	To consider the annual report	Councillor Catherine Webber	Tracy Smith tracy.smith@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2020	Budget 2020/21	To consider the final budget proposals	Councillor Andrew Crawford	Simon Hewings simon.hewings@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2020	Community infrastructure levy spending strategy	To consider the strategy	Councillor Bethia Thomas	Jayne Bolton jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 3 Mar 2020	Draft corporate plan 2020-2024 and delivery framework	To comment on the draft corporate plan and delivery framework	Councillor Debby Hallett	Ben Coleman ben.coleman@southandvale.gov.uk Michelle Wells, michelle.wells@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 26 Mar 2020	Delivery of affordable housing	To receive a progress report	Councillor Bethia Thomas	Jayne Bolton jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
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Items for future meetings (dates to be determined)				
Joint Scrutiny Committee June 2020	Oxfordshire Plan 2050	To respond to the consultation draft plan	Councillor Catherine Webber	Adrian Duffield adrian.duffield@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	Civil parking enforcement		Councillor Jenny Hannaby	John Backley john.backley@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	Homes in multiple occupation	Implementation of legislation	Councillor Jenny Hannaby	Phil Ealey phil.ealey@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	Unlawful encampments		Councillor Jenny Hannaby	Liz Hayden liz.hayden@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	Inter-authority agreement		Councillor Debby Hallett	Adrianna Partridge adrianna.partridge@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	Regular budget monitoring		Councillor Andrew Crawford	Simon Hewings simon.hewings@southandvale.gov.uk

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	Strategic property review		Councillor Bethia Thomas	Suzanne Malcolm suzanne.malcolm@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date	The Charter, Abingdon		Councillor Bethia Thomas	Suzanne Malcolm suzanne.malcolm@southandvale.gov.uk