



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Preventing Homelessness Strategy



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Foreword

Becoming homeless, or fearing that this could potentially occur, can have a major impact on the lives of individuals: their health, well-being, employment opportunities, education, and training may all be affected if suitable, long term accommodation options are not made available to them.



Homelessness is an issue which is high on the national agenda. The 'Everyone In' response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown what can be achieved in addressing rough sleeping. Locally this helped people in transformative ways which has continued beyond the pandemic. The countrywide joined-up response gained national praise and attention. We need to continue to build on this progress and the commitments of this strategy reflect this.

Homelessness isn't just a term used for those that we see visibly rough sleeping but can happen to anyone at any time. Most people who approach our council for advice on their housing situation are not sleeping rough but are instead at various stages of being threatened with homelessness.

There are many reasons why someone may be threatened with homelessness with many people living in precarious or unsuitable homes. This could include people who are; private renting, but their tenancy is about to end; living with family or a partner but relationships are breaking down; are sofa surfing; or have suffered an income shock and are no longer able to afford their mortgage or rent.

As part of developing the strategy and setting out our Priorities we have reflected on a wide evidence base including reviewing data regarding our local housing market, our population demographics as well as assessing homelessness trends specific to our area.

In drawing up the strategy, we have consulted with both the public, our stakeholders, and partners.

It is intended that this strategy be a live document with a regularly updated Action Plan and annual reviews to ensure this continues to reflect our shared aims and evolving priorities.

We cannot deliver the priorities and actions set out in the strategy alone, and therefore the continued collaboration and support of our partners is key to its success. A multi-agency approach and working alongside community partners is the only way that this can happen effectively.

Councillor Geoff Saul



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Introduction

Working with our residents and partners to prevent and resolve homelessness and the threat of homelessness is at the very heart of this strategy.

The most obvious form of homelessness, those sleeping rough on the streets, is not common in the West Oxfordshire district, thanks to our strong partnership approach to 'No Second Night Out' to ending rough sleeping and subsequent initiatives introduced during the pandemic. However, the wider problems experienced by those who need to leave their homes due to notices from private landlords, abuse or violence, living in unsafe or insecure accommodation or whose home is not suitable to meet their specific housing needs are key issues for this strategy to address.

Preventing homelessness before it occurs is the main ethos of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017. However, West Oxfordshire District Council has taken this even further by investing in a strong approach to engaging with residents at the very earliest stage, to prevent homelessness before official duties are triggered under HRA 2017.

The Council has also supported a strong 'No Second Night Out' approach to ensuring that anyone who does find themselves rough sleeping is offered an accommodation option as soon as possible.

Since 2020 however and despite the many proactive and progressive initiatives introduced as the result of the pandemic, homelessness within the district has increased by around 50% as the impacts of the Cost-of-Living Crisis continue to be felt by residents.

In developing this strategy, West Oxfordshire District Council has consulted with stakeholders, residents, and services users alike to help us agree four objectives which are set out below:

Priority 1 Preventing Homelessness

Priority 2 Establishing effective partnerships and working arrangements.

Priority 3 Supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs.

Priority 4 Increasing Accommodation Options

These priorities are intended to be high level and therefore the strategy will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate and respond to changes in the external environment during its lifetime.

Detailed action plans will be developed in collaboration with our partners to support and deliver the strategic objectives. We recognise that during the three-year life span of this Strategy we will need to prioritise and even change direction with certain objectives and actions.

This document will provide a basis for the direction of travel and will guide us in our current and future activities.



West Oxfordshire District Council Overview



114,200
Population



22% of the local population are pension age, which is **6%** above the national average



£400,000
Average House Price



11.4x
Average House Price vs. Average Earnings for a single person



Tenure Split
Owner Occupied **62%**
Private Rent **17%**
Social Housing **19%**



495
Households offered Affordable or Social rents in 2023/24



2,150
Applicants registered for Housing (November 2024)



District
West Oxfordshire District Council

Location
One of five districts in Oxfordshire County, England.

Area
715 km²

Character
Predominantly rural, with large market towns and smaller rural settlements.



Total number of housing advice and homelessness enquiries:

Pre Covid:
around **450** approaches annually

During and post Covid:
2021/22: 630 approaches
2022/23: 980 approaches

2023/24: 1,020 approaches



1,262
Number of households seeking 1 bed accommodation



1,262
Number of Households in emergency accommodation (November 2024)

Housing In West Oxfordshire District Council

General



15,950

New Homes required
2011 - 2031



8.9%

households in the
district considered to
be in fuel poverty



274

New Affordable homes
required annually for the
period 2014-2031



**Averages Private
Sector Rents:**

1 bed	£882
2 beds	£1,113
3 Beds	£1,377

Homelessness

Top three Main Reasons for Homelessness

30%

Family or Friends
no longer willing to
accommodate

25%

Required to leave
Home Office
Accommodation

18%

Domestic
Abuse



1

Rough Sleeper identified
as rough sleeping in as at
30th November 2024



Number of households seeking accommodation by bedroom need

1 bed	1,207
2 bed	542
3 bed	236

Successes



Maintained a low to zero number of Rough Sleepers – recording between **0-2** at official monthly and annual counts



Worked with our partners at Cottsway and Aspire to provide a Housing First option for the most complex of our residents



Worked with our partners at Cottsway and Aspire on the Our House Project to provide an innovative housing solution for young people facing homelessness



Prevented over **250** households from becoming homeless in 2023/24



Increased our permanent resources by **2 FTE** in January 2025



Provided emergency accommodation for **140** households whose homelessness couldn't be prevented in 2023/24



Worked with our county partners, our housing provider partners and Domestic Abuse support agencies to provide places of safety in the district for those feeling violence



238 Affordable homes delivered in 2023/24

Challenges for West Oxfordshire DC in Preventing Homelessness

- Affordability and access to the private rented sector
- High demand for affordable housing
- High support needs compared to locally available services.
- Lack of supported accommodation within the district
- Lack of available short term temporary accommodation
- Lack of available emergency accommodation for people with disabilities
- Ensuring sufficient, suitable emergency and move on accommodation is available for survivors of domestic abuse;
- Meeting the housing needs of young people, especially care leavers and those from rural areas;
- Lack of One bed general need accommodation
- Low number of HMO's to meet the needs of under 35's

Wider challenges within the West Oxfordshire that contribute increasing homelessness

- Low wages compared to housing costs
- High numbers of Air B&B / Second Homes/ Holiday Lets/ Empty Homes
- Tackling disrepair and poor standards of accommodation in the private sector
- Achieving high environmental and quality standards in both new and existing homes

Strategic Aims and Priorities

Priority 1 Preventing Homelessness

Given the challenges we face around increasing homelessness it is crucial that we continue to put homeless prevention at the heart of everything we do. This principle will form the basis of how we respond to the economic hardships faced by our residents impacted by the continuing cost of living crisis.

Being flexible, agile and adapting to local challenges will be key in meeting future issues that may lead to homelessness if not tackled.

We will find innovative and proactive ways of both understanding and addressing the factors that can lead to homelessness - such as the impact of the Renters Rights Bill on private sector tenancies and landlords, family/relationship breakdown and discharge from institutions.

We will also develop a greater understanding of the impact of wider social issues such as poverty and disadvantage, unemployment, poor health and wellbeing and lack of access to affordable, decent homes.

We believe this will greatly increase the chances of positive outcomes for people at risk of becoming homeless.

Key Objectives

- Monitor and act on the impact of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act within the council's Housing Team and wider housing services.
- Develop further preventative actions based on the evidence of what has previously been successful in preventing homelessness
- Understanding and tackling the economic impacts of the cost-of-living crisis that may otherwise lead to homelessness.
- Develop greater understanding of the 'triggers' that are driving homelessness presentations
- Identify and respond to the housing needs of vulnerable groups.
- Review how customers contact us and interact with our service.
- Promote the HomeseekerPlus housing application process and provide support for people to use it
- Continue to effectively communicate with people about how to avoid the risk of homelessness, ensuring that advice and appropriate support is readily available.

Priority 2: Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support to those who are threatened with homelessness, to improve their resilience and reduce the risk homelessness occurring.

The previous Preventing Homelessness strategy emphasised partnership working to co-ordinate activity and focus combined energies on preventing homelessness and improving services for homeless people.

With this new strategy we will develop this approach further. Over the life of this strategy, we will build stronger relationships with our partners and ensure that our collective efforts to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping are effectively aligned.

Key Objectives

- Continue to establish appropriate pathways for customers between agencies which reinforce the early identification of factors that may be likely to lead to a risk of homelessness.
- Build on and improve existing processes to ensure an effective 'duty to refer' from all relevant public sector bodies as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Ensure that the council's workforce have the appropriate skills to assist all client groups
- Challenge and resolve barriers to effective service delivery as part of business as usual.

Priority 3: Supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs.

Although the intelligence-based estimates show low to zero numbers of rough sleepers in the district, our priority remains to prevent all forms of rough sleeping when it does occur.

We recognise many more people are living in insecure accommodation such as having to 'sofa surf' or rely on the good will of friends or relatives and are therefore at risk of rough sleeping.

Key Objectives

- Align efforts and resources with partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Work with our countywide partners to support and evaluate the current Outreach service, to better understand the causes of local rough sleeping as well as the pattern and locations of rough sleepers.
- Work with the community and local businesses act as 'eyes and ears' to ensure that no rough sleeper goes without support
- Support rough sleepers who are ready for independent living to move into longer-term accommodation and to sustain their tenancy.
- Evaluate and adapt housing pathways, and develop new ones where they do not exist, to ensure they meet the needs of those living with complex needs as well as new/emergent client groups.
- Build on existing work with partner organisations to develop appropriate supported housing solutions, such as the 'Housing First' model, for homeless people with the highest level of need.

Priority 4: Increasing Accommodation Options

The use of impractical and expensive B&B placements for people experiencing homelessness has long been viewed as unsuitable for anything more than to address an urgent need for safe accommodation.

Therefore, developing new temporary accommodation solutions to meet local needs is a more sustainable way is a key priority for the council.

Key Objectives

- Ensure that council priorities are aligned by linking this strategy with the targets included in the Local Plan to increase affordable housing supply.
- Ensure that our countywide priorities are aligned by working with our county partners to develop an increase in the supply of move on accommodation for all supported housing pathways.
- Maintain efficient and appropriate use of all council owned temporary accommodation, ensure that all residents are provided with high level support to enable them to move on into long term accommodation.
- Expand the range of temporary accommodation available to our customers, including investigating all options to purchase or lease buildings and working with the private sector
- Develop a greater understanding of what may encourage private landlords to increase the supply of affordable rented accommodation and how we may assist with making this a realistic housing solution.
- Work with Registered Providers to develop schemes that increase accommodation options.





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