



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 15 JULY 2026
Subject	OUR HOUSE FUNDING EXTENSION 2026-2030
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety. Email: geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Claire Locke - Executive Director Email: Claire.Locke@publicagroup.uk
Report Author	Caroline Clissold – Head of Housing Solutions. Email: Caroline.Clissold@publicagroup.uk
Purpose	To update members on the 'Our House' project with a recommendation that funding be extended from 1st November 2026 to 31st March 2030.
Annexes	Annex A – Our House Q4 Update Annex B – Equalities Impact Assessment Annex C – Climate Impact Assessment Outcome
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: 1. Approve a 4-year funding extension for the Our House project from 1 November 2026 to 31 March 2030; 2. Agree to continue with the current Support Provider via waiver; 3. Delegate authority to the Head of Housing Solutions, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, to approve any minor amendments to this funding extension; 4. Agree to utilise Housing Projects Reserves as set out in the Proposal in section 4 of the report.
Corporate Priorities	• Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	Yes
Exempt	NO

Consultees/ Consultation	Executive Members with Responsibility for Housing Director of Governance and Regulatory Services Chief Executive Director of Finance Head of Finance Head of Legal Services Cottsway Housing Association
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Our House Project was initially launched by West Oxfordshire District Council in 2014 in partnership with Cottsway Housing Association to address a rising concern with homelessness in young people.
- 1.2** Early learning identified that the best approach for the residents was to separate the support element from tenancy management to maximise their readiness for moving on into independent accommodation. The project was relaunched in 2021 to include the provision of the support element by Aspire Oxfordshire.
- 1.3** The aim of the project remains to provide young people with accommodation and support them with healthy lifestyles, employment, education, training and moving into their own independent accommodation.
- 1.4** Funding to extend the project until March 2030 is available from Housing reserve funds.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** West Oxfordshire District Council has worked with our countywide partners for many years to provide a collaborative approach to ending homelessness and rough sleeping in the County.
- 2.2** As a result of this collaboration, Oxfordshire has both an established Young Peoples Supported Accommodation Pathway (YPSA) which is for care leavers, and a general needs Adult Homelessness Pathway and has achieved much success in reducing the numbers of those that are sleeping out.
- 2.3** The traditional supported accommodation approach, often located out of the district, does not work for all with many preferring the 'own front door' or to live in smaller shared schemes.
- 2.4** High rents in supported accommodation may make it unaffordable for residents seeking to transition from benefits into employment. There is a risk that income from entry-level or part-time work will be insufficient to cover these higher rents, particularly should there be potential shortfall's Universal Credit top ups.
- 2.5** Many of our residents, especially young people who have high support needs, do not wish to be relocated outside of our district or to lose contact with their own support networks in the area.
- 2.6** West Oxfordshire District Council therefore created an innovative project called the 'Our House' Project. By working with our local housing provider, Cottsway and specialist support provider Aspire Oxfordshire, accommodation is provided to address the needs of our local young people who are either rough sleeping, at threat of rough sleeping or are unable to remain at home with family or friends.

- 2.7 The Our House project now provides accommodation with support for up to 11 young people across 3 shared houses located within the district.
- 2.8 Funding was initially secured through government grants however once these were fully utilised, further funding was secured in November 2022 and 2024 from Housing Projects Reserve funds.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1 The current funding arrangements are due to end in October 2026. The cost for continuing the project and delivering the support element until 31st March 2030 is £329,950
- 3.2 In addition, the three properties have not been updated since 2020, and items such as furniture, carpets, and white goods are due for replacement. An additional contingency fund of £30,000 is recommended to fund improvements and replace worn items, bringing the total funding to £359,950.
- 3.3 Most referrals into the project are from young people who were either 'sofa surfing' or 'street homeless' and would otherwise be placed in unsuitable B&B accommodation.
- 3.4 As the residents have varying levels of need, a bespoke package of support is identified for each new resident prior to them moving into the property thus unlocking further potential by better managing the support required and their own personal journeys towards employment and independent living.
- 3.5 Most of the residents accommodated in the three properties have had complex and sometimes challenging support needs and mental health issues meaning that the project has often had to be very reactive to certain situations to help reduce further escalations. The continuation of the project in partnership with Aspire will provide experienced and diverse support with a greater variety of resources that cannot be delivered 'in house' by the Council.
- 3.6 The 'Our House' project provides much-needed single accommodation for young people within West Oxfordshire and has assisted us with discharging our homelessness duties. Using the 'Our House' project has significant financial benefits for both the Council and the residents, providing better outcomes for our young people.
- 3.7 Working in partnership with Cottsway means that each resident is paying on average around £300 per month in rent compared with an average of around £1300 per month within the wider supported accommodation pathways. By keeping the rents to such a low level, young people are not prevented from working due to affordability of high rents.
- 3.8 Residents have been able to access employment and training opportunities and work alongside independent work coaches to establish their own plans and goals towards employment. Given the nature of the project there have been challenges, but these have been overcome through the work of various partnerships the project has created.

3.9 The Our House Project does not have any minimum or maximum time limits set for how long a person can remain in the accommodation as each resident will have different needs to be addressed before they can move on, however the average length of their stay is around 12 months.

3.10 Of the current residents:

- Three have been fully supported through their journey from homelessness to ready for their own tenancy, with one waiting for their new property to be ready, and the other two actively bidding.
- Three of the residents are in employment or paid apprenticeships, which is only possible due to the low rents.
- Two are in full-time training with another waiting for a course to start in September
- And another two are actively looking for work after completing training

3.11 Without the level of support provided within this project, these young people in B&B type accommodation may not have been able to access these opportunities if they due to location, transport and personal contribution costs, and lack of settled address.

3.12 More information about Key Outcomes and the success of the Project so far can be found in the Our House Q4 update - Annex A

3.13 The cost of providing this accommodation with high level bespoke support averages out at around £166 per week per person. Should funding for the project not be agreed, the cost of providing emergency B&B accommodation would be in the region of £300 - £500 per week, plus additional staffing to offer support to the young people to maintain this.

3.14 Over the past five years, this project has provided accommodation for over 30 individuals, most of whom have successfully move on into their own accommodation or have been supported to return to their families.

4. PROPOSAL

4.1 Housing currently has sufficient funding to meet the costs of extending the Our House project in earmarked Housing Project Reserves from underspends in previous allocations of ring-fenced grants.

4.2 The remaining balance of the Housing Project Reserves will be used to fund additional Housing Projects such as expanding Housing First offers, expected rising costs of within Countywide Accommodation Pathways, and additional staffing to meet rising demands on the Housing service in general.

4.3 The ethos of the Our House Project meets the requirements set out in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation instructions.

- 4.4** Young people are achieving excellent results in securing education and training however with targeted support more could be achieved with securing employment. For 2026 – 2030 it recommended to include 2 additional ‘support days’ per week specifically to work with the young people on preparing them for employment.
- 4.5** There are currently no external funding opportunities however the Housing Team will continue to search for options for additional funding.
- 4.6** In addition, a separate amount is required to update some of the fixtures, fittings, furniture and white goods as many have not been replaced since 2020.

4.7 Proposed Support Package costs:

Year One	1 st November 2026 to 31 st March 2027	£39,500
Year Two	1 st April 2027 to 31 st March 2028	£95,000
Year Three	1 st April 2028 to 31 st March 2029	£96,600
Year Four	1 st April 2028 to 31 st March 2030	£98,850
Contingency Fund for property improvements		£30,000
Total		£359,950

- 4.8** Aspire are currently providing high level support and are achieving excellent outcomes for young people leaving the project. Due to the providers long-standing delivery of this highly specialist support package, their established expertise, continuity of care and proven outcomes present a strong case for a waiver to avoid disruption and risk that could arise from a full procurement process. Therefore, it is recommended that the continuation of the funding be awarded via a waiver.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1** Alternatively, the Executive may wish to consider not extending the funding for the project any further.
- 5.2** Should this be the case, the Council and Cottsway would have to issue notices to the 11 young people currently resident to leave their accommodation by 31st October 2026.
- 5.3** If the residents are not able to source their own accommodation, the Council would need to offer emergency accommodation in B&B until such time as alternative accommodation could be found.
- 5.4** Therefore, this option is not recommended due to the increased costs that would be incurred and the detrimental effect on the cohort of being moved from their homes into emergency accommodation.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are multiple complex funding streams supporting the work of the Housing Team particularly regarding homeless prevention and project work. Some of these funding streams are subject to bids and some are allocations. Often these come through at short notice and require officers to investigate options and put together work packages or bids within brief time limits.
- 6.2 The Our House Project is aimed at addressing the expectations set out by the government under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and maximising the use of available accommodation in the West Oxfordshire District. There are limited options and significant costs associated with the provision of emergency accommodation within the district, as well as a shortage of longer-term accommodation. Young people in particular can be disadvantaged in short-term B&B type accommodation and rarely thrive without additional support.
- 6.3 The proposal is therefore aimed at reducing the use and time spent in expensive short term, emergency accommodation, and increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome by utilising the funds from Housing Projects Reserves.
- 6.4 It is recommended that the £359,950 cost of extending the Our House project is met by the homelessness earmarked reserve, which is made up of the underspends of grant income received since 2017.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The council should exercise its functions regarding its duties to homeless persons under part vii Housing Act 1996.
- 7.2 The council has a statutory duty to follow the expectations set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to prevent homelessness and help people threatened with or who become homeless.
- 7.3 The council must also provide suitable accommodation where homelessness cannot be prevented.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The current residents of the Our House project will need to be served notice and alternative properties sourced for them if approval to extend funding for the project is not agreed.
- 8.2 West Oxfordshire has a shortage of social and affordable one bedroom accommodation and the private sector would prove to be unaffordable to those in minimum wage jobs, apprenticeships or training, therefore sourcing this type of accommodation is likely to be unachievable.

8.3 If move-on properties are not found for the Our House residents, this could force them into homelessness, emergency / B&B accommodation, or rough sleeping.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached – Annex B

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Please see the Climate Impact Assessment outcome as Annex C

10.2 The funding will support young people to improve many social outcomes including assessing education, employment and improving health.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None

(END)