



DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Cherwell District Council Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020

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Foreword

Welcome to Cherwell's Homelessness Strategy. This strategy has been written at a time of a constantly changing landscape within local government and we want to be in the best position to help our residents. We know that the difference between good and bad housing can affect everything in our lives including our health, employment choices, educational chances and relationships.

The Homelessness Reduction Act will add to the pressures the council are already experiencing, but we have an aspiration to go beyond the advice and prevention that we are legally obliged to deliver. We aspire to develop a service that can truly respond to an individual customer's needs. We will embrace a holistic approach to meeting our resident's needs, which can often be complex and intertwined with many factors contributing to their homelessness. We know that for a solution to be sustainable it needs to be more than simply providing accommodation.

We want to support our residents to thrive and we cannot achieve this alone. We will continue to maintain our strong partnership with a range of organisations and stakeholders to deliver our aspirations. We also need to ensure we have a robust evidence base to monitor the impact of the new legislation and the service we provide. We need to monitor the resources needed to meet the demands on the service and acknowledge that partners play a crucial role in delivering these tailored solutions.

I would like to thank all of our partners who have worked with us to develop this strategy. This input has been invaluable and has really helped us to shape our priorities. We look forward to building on our successful partnerships to achieve the best housing outcomes for our residents.



Councillor John Donaldson
Lead Member for Housing

Executive Summary

Our strategy sets out our vision for homelessness services in Cherwell over the next two years. A holistic approach towards homelessness is vital since the causes and effects are complex and intertwined. Solutions need to be more than the simple provision of accommodation. They need to address the things that go wrong in people's lives - such as poor health, loss of income and relationship breakdown. Our strategy recognises the important role that relevant partners and stakeholders have to play in harnessing skills and delivering sensitive and tailored solutions to some of these issues within our communities.

The four strategic priorities for our Homelessness Strategy 2018-20 are:

Priority 1 - Prevent and relieve homelessness in the district

Priority 2 - Prevent single homelessness

Priority 3 - Ensure vulnerable people can access appropriate help and support

Priority 4 - Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation

1. Introduction

Cherwell District Council's two year strategy sets out our aims to tackle homelessness across the district. It details how we will provide open and effective access to a range of housing services, support and other opportunities for any resident affected by homelessness to help them rebuild their lives.

Our 2018-2020 strategy has been shaped by national policy, local context and informed by a comprehensive review, undertaken between December 2017 and April 2018, of homelessness and homelessness services in Cherwell district. As well as reflecting on our successes over the last four years, the review also identifies the challenges ahead and the ongoing needs to be addressed. This strategy should be read in conjunction with our [homelessness review](#).

We are producing this standalone homelessness strategy through to April 2020, to allow full implementation and monitoring of the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, which imposes significant new duties on the authority and partners. In July 2017 we became a shared housing service with South Northamptonshire Council (SNC), but our operational services remain distinct and will be subject to separate strategies. This is relevant as it has recently been announced that local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire will prompt a termination in the partnership between Cherwell District Council (CDC) and SNC. This strategy identifies a number of areas for joint projects and review which will allow our teams to focus effort on improving working practices, embedding good practice and ensuring excellent data collection to evidence need in both districts, to place us in a strong position in any new working arrangements. New housing strategies for CDC and SNC will also be produced before the end of 2018.

Defining homelessness

Homelessness does not just affect people visibly sleeping rough, but includes those living in a range of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, hostels and refuges as well as people staying temporarily with family or friends when they have no accommodation of their own. It includes those living in accommodation they have no legal right to occupy and those living in accommodation which it is not reasonable to continue to occupy, for example, because the property is in poor condition, or because of threats of violence. The new HRA 2017, places duties on local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage, to prevent homelessness in their area and to ensure that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness has access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance.

2. Achievements since our last strategy

The previous homelessness strategy for CDC was published as part of our housing and homelessness strategy, to cover the period 2012-2017. The main achievements of the last Homelessness Strategy, that demonstrates the work which has been undertaken locally to assist households who are threatened with homelessness is summarised below:

Helping Households to Remain

- We created a new role of Tenancy Relations Officer to support landlords and tenants to resolve tenancy disputes.
- We worked closely with our Revenues and Benefits Team to administer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), helping us to prevent homelessness. Between April 2014 – March 2018 £927,005 was committed to prevent homelessness within the district.

Helping Households to Move

- We provided five units of shared accommodation for homeless people which were part funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (now Homes England) 'Places of Change' programme.
- We revised our Allocation Scheme in 2018 to ensure it meets the housing needs within the district and complies with the requirements of the HRA.
- Since April 2014, we have delivered 1,256 affordable housing units in partnership with registered providers; 827 of which were for affordable rent¹ and the remaining 429 shared ownership or other home ownership options.
- We rebranded and improved our Cherwell Bond Scheme, which currently accommodates 190 households.

Targeted Help

- We published a Homeless Pocket Guide which identifies help and assistance available within the district for people who are homeless/rough sleeping or at risk of becoming homeless: <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/downloads/80/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping>.

Working in Partnership

- We re-tendered and awarded a new contract to Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northants to provide debt and money advice for all residents living in Cherwell District experiencing financial difficulties.
- We established a Financial Inclusion Group to share information with partners and community groups about changes that have taken place around welfare reform including Universal Credit and to identify help support available to support residents in financial difficulty.
- We continued to support voluntary sector agencies working within the district to access funding to provide services for people who are either homeless or to help prevent homelessness.

¹

"Affordable rented housing is defined by Government as:

Rented housing let by registered providers of social housing to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable Rent is not subject to the national rent regime but is subject to other rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent."

- We embedded specialisms within the Housing Options Team (HOT) to improve links with partners and ensure that key strategic areas in our previous action plan were developed.

Addressing the needs of rough sleepers and clients experiencing domestic abuse

- We have committed £75,000 (£25,000 per annum for 3 years) to help jointly commission Domestic Abuse services, in the county, for the period 2018-21.
- We have committed £188,100 (£62,700 per year for three years) securing access to 24 bed places to support rough sleepers with connection to Cherwell.
- We have also secured an additional 10 bed spaces at Simon House, Oxford to provide 24/7 support for people found rough sleeping with a connection to Cherwell and presenting with complex support needs.

Temporary Accommodation

- We employed a Tenancy Support Officer (TSO) until March 2019 to provide additional support to households placed in temporary accommodation.
- We contracted a local motel to provide up to 10 self-contained rooms which can be used as emergency accommodation for homeless households.

County-wide Initiatives

- We completed a joint review of the Young Persons Accommodation Pathway with the other Oxfordshire district/city councils and county council.
- We were part of a successful bid, securing £790,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Trailblazer Funding, to support the prevention of homelessness in Oxfordshire.
- We successfully led on a bid to MHCLG Single Homeless Fund on behalf of Oxfordshire and were awarded £227,000 to support the prevention of homelessness and improve services to those with an offending history.

Internal Change

- We undertook a service review and became a joint housing service with South Northamptonshire District Council (SNC), although the Housing Options Teams at both councils remain operationally distinct. The review added the role of a Senior Housing Options Officer to provide additional capacity to the team.
- We achieved the Bronze award as part of the National Practitioners Support Service Gold Standard in Homelessness.

The Homelessness strategy for 2018-2020 will build on the successes of our previous strategy.

3. Strategic Context

This section sets out the recent legislative and policy changes at a national, sub-regional and local level, and shows the interdependence between our homelessness strategy and other local plans, policies and strategies.

National

Homelessness legislation and policy

The homelessness legislation is set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and provides the statutory framework and duties for local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The legislation was amended via the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002. These amendments required housing authorities in England to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of a review of homelessness in their district. They also extended the groups of people who housing authorities had a homeless duty towards, now including homeless 16 and 17 year olds, care leavers aged 18-20, people who were vulnerable as a result of being in care, the armed forces, prison or custody and people who were vulnerable because they had fled their home due to violence.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into effect on 3 April 2018 and significantly reforms England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to every household who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, and not just those who are considered to be in 'priority need'. These duties include:

- An extension to the period that a household is considered to be threatened with homelessness in, from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage.
- A new duty to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for every household that is threatened with homelessness. This duty can generally take effect for a period of up to 56 days.
- A new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will take steps support households to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation. This duty can generally take effect for a period of up to 56 days.
- A new duty to refer, where public bodies in England will have a duty to refer an individual's case (with consent) to an identified housing authority. This duty comes into effect from October 2018 and is intended to encourage public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction Act is the key tool from Government to reform homelessness services. However, the Government has formed a Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel who will develop the national rough sleeping strategy.

Wider legislative and policy changes

Apart from the HRA, there have been significant, ongoing changes to the housing and welfare systems, which continue to impact on the affordability of accommodation and provision of services to people in housing need. The key changes are outlined in this section.

The Localism Act 2011 changed the powers and obligations of local authorities including:

- giving local authorities greater freedom to set their own policies about who should qualify to go on the waiting list for social housing in their area. This means that they are now able, if they wish, to prevent people who have no need of social housing from joining the waiting list. Authorities are still obliged to ensure that social homes go to the most vulnerable in society and those who need it most.
- allowing social landlords to grant fixed term tenancies
- enabling local authorities to end their homeless duty by an offer of good quality private rented accommodation

The Homes and Communities Agency's Affordable Homes Programme 2011-2015 introduced affordable rents. This allowed registered housing providers to charge up to 80% of local market rent for new affordable homes.

In February 2017 the Government's latest housing strategy was outlined in the White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market'. The White Paper recognises that the long term solution to the broken housing market is to build more homes but that this takes time to have an impact, so Government set out some steps to help people in the short term, these included:

- committing additional funding for affordable housing and investing on a range of tenures including affordable rent instead of just shared ownership
- improving the private rented sector: banning letting agent fees; raising standards; and promoting longer term tenancies in new build rental homes.
- increasing emphasis on a prevention focused approach for homeless services

Another key announcement from Government relating to homelessness was made in October 2017 and related to the funding of housing costs for people living in supported and sheltered housing. One of the key elements of this announcement was that from April 2020 short-term supported housing (accommodation provided for those in crisis such as fleeing domestic violence, homeless people with support needs and shorter term transitional help for those with substance misuse problems or vulnerable young people such as care leavers) will be funded through a new ring-fenced grant to local authorities in England. The amount of short term supported housing grant funding will be set on the basis of current projections of future need (as informed by discussions with local authorities).

Welfare reform

Over recent years as part of the government's ongoing austerity measures, there have been a range of welfare reform measures introduced under the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. The key changes that have had and will have a direct impact on homelessness services in Cherwell are:

- In 2013 a cap was introduced on the total amount of benefit that working age people can receive. For those living outside of London the benefit cap is £20,000 (£384.62 per week) for couples and families and £13,400 (£257.69 per week) for single adults.
- Under 35s are only entitled to local housing allowance at the shared accommodation rate i.e. the rate for renting a single room in a shared house.
- Working age benefits frozen from April 2016 until 5 April 2020.
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates were set based on the lowest 30th percentile of local private rents 30% of the market average as at 2018.
- Changes to the way the management of temporary accommodation is funded. The management fee that was paid by the Department for Work and Pensions to local authorities on a per household basis ended in March 2017 and has been replaced by an annual allocation of funding (Flexible Homeless Support Grant).

- Universal Credit (UC) replaces the 6 main working age benefits/tax credits (Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based), Employment & Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit) with one single monthly payment. In most cases UC is paid directly to the claimant, it is paid a month in arrears and all claims must be online. People will now be responsible for paying their rent and council tax and for many this will be for the first time in their lives. There is a concern that this could lead to increased levels of homelessness as households struggle to manage their finances. Full digital service was introduced in Oxford Job Centre Plus (JCP) area in October 2017 and Banbury JCP area in November 2017

County

Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 led to the establishment of Health and Wellbeing Boards, to promote more joined up commissioning of health, social care and public health services. The Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board has a Children's Trust, Adults Joint Management Group and a Health Improvement Partnership Boards reporting to it and public involvement underpinning the whole system. The Health Improvement Partnership Board has the purpose "to add life to years and years to life, focusing on the factors underpinning wellbeing, while levelling up differences in the health of different groups in the County". The Health and Wellbeing Board recognises the links between health and housing and this is reflected in one of their priorities being "Tackling the broader determinants of health through better housing and preventing homelessness". The Health Improvement Board takes responsibility for delivering this priority. The full Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy is available at:

<https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/aboutyourcouncil/plansperformancepolicy/oxfordshirejointhwbstrategy.pdf>

Local

Tackling homelessness is a priority for Cherwell District Council and there is a corporate commitment to make real improvements to the lives of local people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, this is reflected in the Council's strategies and plans.

Cherwell District Council Business Plan

The South Northants and Cherwell District Council's Joint Business Plan 2018/19 has three high level priorities and some specific objectives under these that relate to homelessness:

PRIORITY	Protected, Green & Clean	Thriving Communities & Wellbeing	District of Opportunity & Growth
OBJECTIVES (relating to homelessness)	Maintain the District as a low crime area (including incidents of rough sleeping)	Prevent homelessness Safeguard the vulnerable Deliver affordable housing & work with private sector landlords Deliver the welfare reform agenda	Deliver innovative and effective housing schemes

Homelessness Strategy

Our previous homelessness strategy formed part of our CDC Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012-17. New housing strategies for SNC and CDC will be produced by the end of 2018 and the priorities of the homelessness strategies reflected within them.

Cherwell District Council's Tenancy Strategy

The current Tenancy Strategy was produced in 2017. The strategy recommends that affordable rents are set at up to 80% of market rents, but capped at LHA levels. The tenancy strategy provides that registered providers should re-let a minimum of one third of general needs properties at social rents. It also specifies that rents of new supported housing properties are set at a level where the combined rent and service charge does not exceed the LHA level. A small number of fixed term tenancies had been provided in the district but this number is likely to increase over time. The tenancy strategy recommends an absolute minimum term of two years in exceptional cases, with a tenancy term of at least five years being the norm. Also where there has been no material change in the circumstances of the household, we would expect the tenancy to be renewed at the end of the fixed term.

The tenancy strategy includes use of the Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO), which allows the council to discharge to private rented accommodation, its duty to households accepted as homeless. This is considered a valuable housing option where applicants can exercise choice and control their own housing solutions. It is used where properties of suitable standard can be found at the right cost. To date, properties have been let for a minimum of 12 months, but under the HRA this can be reduced to six months.

Cherwell District Council's Allocation Scheme

The Council's Allocation Scheme is regularly reviewed to ensure it is effective in meeting the needs of our customers. The current scheme has been in place since July 2005. Recent amendments were made, pending a full review, to meet the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. These included:

- care leavers with a connection to the county are now considered to have a connection to the district and can be included on the housing register
- households who are owed the Prevention duty and are qualified to be on the housing register, will achieve a Band 2 priority – 'at risk of homelessness' households owed the Relief duty in temporary accommodation, who qualify to be on the housing register will be treated as 'statutorily homeless' and their applications will achieve a Band 2 'homeless' priority. They will be placed on auto-bidding and receive 1 offer under the scheme.

A full review of the scheme is currently underway to consider the effects of the HRA and ensure the scheme remains an effective homelessness prevention tool.

4. Homelessness Review 2018

Our Homelessness Review 2018 provides the evidence base for the homelessness strategy. It seeks to understand the causes of and trends in homelessness and the contexts within which we operate.

The review showed that the key threats and challenges for the council over the coming two years are:

- mitigating the homelessness impacts arising from welfare reform, especially the full implementation of UC
- HRA implementation
- the length of funding available to organisations to prevent homelessness and the prevalence of fixed term posts in key organisations
- appropriate accommodation and support for people sleeping rough
- affordability of accommodation for a range of people, not just those in receipt of benefit
- the requirement for people to travel from rural parts of the district to main residential areas where core services are provided
- the uncoupling of our joint service arrangement with South Northants Council in response to the abolition of Northants County Council, leading to new working arrangements in Cherwell.

The key findings from the homelessness review are outlined below:

Homelessness levels	<p>The number of homelessness decisions taken over the four year period has decreased from 160 in 2014/15 to 128 in 2017/18.</p> <p>The number of accepted duties as a percentage of applications has remained reasonably constant ranging between 48-54% of all decisions.</p> <p>There are a significant number of households who present as homeless having had no prior contact with the council. Although this has decreased from 100 'on the day' applications in 2014/15 to 64 in 2016/17, there is more work to be done on ensuring that people are aware of the advice and assistance available to prevent or relieve homelessness in a timely fashion.</p>
Household type of homeless households	<p>In each of the last three years, over three-quarters of the households accepted as homeless have been families with children, with those headed by lone parent females being the largest proportion.</p> <p>The number of single person households accepted has increased from 5% in 2014/15 to 12% in 2017/18.</p> <p>Both black and mixed race households are over-represented in homelessness acceptances, compared to the overall population.</p>
Causes of homelessness locally	<p>The main reasons for homeless acceptances are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ending of assured shorthold tenancy• Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate• Relationship breakdown, including 'violent relationship breakdown'. <p>Behind this sit secondary factors such as affordability and inability to find a home in the local market.</p>
Age profile of homeless households	<p>Almost two-thirds of households accepted as homeless in each year were aged 25-44 years old, there was a small decrease in the number of 16-24 year olds. Very few households aged 60+ are accepted as homeless as it is generally possible to deal with housing need from this age range through the register.</p>

Priority need of accepted households	The overwhelming reason that we accept a duty to accommodate homeless households is because they have dependent children or are pregnant. Other priority need reasons vary through the years.
Homelessness preventions	<p>The key prevention tools that enable us to assist households to remain in their existing homes are 'negotiation or legal advocacy' to remain in the private rented sector and 'providing other assistance' to enable someone to remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector.</p> <p>Our most effective tool, in assisting households to move to alternative accommodation is the housing register, via an offer of accommodation, made under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. In 2017/18, 44% of households facing homelessness were assisted in this way. We are also able to assist households to move to alternative accommodation via a move to the private rented sector, with help from our Cherwell Bond Scheme and other assistance, such as negotiation with landlords and budgeting advice. In 2017/18, 33% of households facing homelessness were assisted in this way.</p> <p>The effectiveness of debt advice as a prevention tool fell dramatically during the period of the review. Affordability of accommodation is an increasing cause of homelessness, so refocussing access to debt and money advice services will be a key strategic task to prevent homelessness.</p>
Households accommodated in temporary accommodation (TA)	<p>The number of households placed in temporary accommodation has remained fairly constant during the review period, at just over 100 households per year. Although the majority of all households are accommodated in self-contained accommodation in the long term, there has been an increase in the number of occasions when it is necessary to initially place households into B&B or motel accommodation. This is likely to be linked to the rate of homeless applications taken where the applicant has had no prior contact with our Housing Needs Team.</p> <p>Over the period of the review we did not need to increase the number of units used for TA. There was an increase in the length of stay during 2015/16 & 2016/17 but this trend reversed in 2017/18, due to a reduction in homeless applications and increased affordable housing delivery providing more re-housing options.</p>
Housing delivery	We have seen large amounts of new accommodation built within the district and the number of affordable rented properties delivered has increased significantly from 2014/15 to 2017/18. This increased level of delivery has enabled the council to both prevent homelessness and keep the number of people living in temporary accommodation to a minimum.

Private rented market	<p>Private rented sector housing is an important option. However, local rents are very high, partly because of our proximity to Oxford, one of the most expensive places to live in the UK, when comparing average earning to property prices.</p> <p>As incentives to private landlords, we offer Landlord Home Improvement Grants (LHIGs) to facilitate repairs if landlords then let to tenants from our register. We also offer the Cherwell Bond Scheme to assist households who are at risk of homelessness and do not have sufficient income to cover the costs of a deposit. The number of LHIGs granted and new tenancies let through the bond scheme fell considerably during 2016/17, before rising slightly during 2017/18.</p> <p>As a homeless prevention tool, the current scheme is restrictive and refreshing procedures to improve support to households in accessing the private sector will be a priority.</p>
Single homelessness and rough sleeping	<p>Over the period of the review the number of single households being accepted as homeless has increased from 5% in 2014/15 to over 13% of all cases for 2017/18, and the total number of homeless decisions being made for this group has increased. These will include people who are considered to be 'vulnerable' under homelessness legislation, for example, as a result of physical or mental illness or disability; substance abuse issues; or because they have previously been in the Forces, in care or are ex-offenders. We aim to collect better data on complex needs of those requiring assistance, as a result of new duties and enhanced case recording systems following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.</p> <p>During 2017/18 we verified 40 people as sleeping rough in our district. To assess year on year trends, our annual rough sleepers estimate provides a snapshot figure on one 'typical night'. We recorded 21 people sleeping rough on the 'typical night' in November 2015 but this reduced to nine people in November 2017.</p> <p>The new Single Homeless Pathway and allocated beds for people from Cherwell has helped reduce the number of people having to sleep rough within the district. In conjunction with the other Oxfordshire District/City Councils, each local authority provided a financial contribution into a pooled budget to preserve some of the supported accommodation for people sleeping rough and single homeless people. These arrangements will fund the Single Homeless Pathway in Oxfordshire until 31 March 2020. Our contribution ensures that until March 2020, people with a local connection to Cherwell have access to 11 complex needs (24hr support) beds based in Oxford, at O'Hanlon House, and 13 beds within our district for people with less complex support needs. We also share improved intelligence with partners about those who are genuinely sleeping rough, via the Vulnerable Adults Panel meeting</p> <p>Monitoring the effectiveness of the Pathway will be an important action over the period of our new strategy.</p>

5. Homelessness Strategy - Priorities 2018-2020

This chapter sets out the key issues and challenges relating to homelessness in Cherwell and our responses to overcome these under three priorities:

Priority 1
Prevent and relieve homelessness in the district
Priority 2
Prevent single homelessness
Priority 3
Ensure vulnerable people can access appropriate help and support
Priority 4
Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation

Priority 1: Prevent and relieve homelessness in the district

a) Demonstrate a corporate commitment to homelessness prevention

Our service has undergone considerable change over the last year, becoming part of the Shared Housing Service with SNC whilst implementing major new legislation (the HRA). We have undergone a thorough implementation project to prepare for our new duties and working practices. However, we will be reviewing our processes to ensure they are efficient, legally compliant and consider how they impact on people using our services. This will enable the housing team to demonstrate it is high performing and has a comprehensive prevention focused homelessness service. It will also feed into work considering whether our staff teams are adequately structured and resourced to meet the demands of our new duties. It should also provide a good baseline to progress the Council's aspiration to go beyond the advice and prevention that we are legally obliged to deliver and develop a holistic service that can provide a tailored service that can truly respond to individual customer needs.

The Government's welfare and housing reforms continue to impact on our residents, and Universal Credit (UC) has recently been fully implemented within the district. To prevent financial hardship and potential homelessness among affected households we will develop a corporate financial inclusion policy. This will ensure that collective action of the council does not unintentionally result in hardship and possible homelessness in the district and will focus on early intervention, preventative work for residents of all tenures and all ages, in line with the new homelessness prevention duty. We will ensure there is a cohesive approach and clarity of scope across the authority aligning work across the Revenue and Benefits Team and Communities Service and fits with our position in the new Wellbeing Directorate within the council

Proposed actions:

- Ensure Elected Members and Senior Managers are kept aware and engaged with local homelessness issues.
- Ensure that funding paid to the local authority from Central Government specifically for homelessness work is allocated for this purpose, this concerns: Homelessness Prevention Grant; Flexible Homelessness Support Grant; and HRA New Burdens Money.
- Complete a 'health-check' for the service to verify compliance with the new

requirements of the HRA, embed good practice and inform a positive customer journey, including NPSS self-assessment checklist and external review and mystery shopping.

- Complete a LEAN review of the end-to-end homelessness journey for customers to ensure efficient and effective work processes.
- Review of staff resources and team structure to ensure they are fit for purpose in light of the HRA and local government reorganisation.
- Prepare business case for adopting a 'Prevention Plus' approach to the delivery of homelessness services in Cherwell
- Take an active role in shaping new working arrangements with other Oxfordshire authorities to maximise the quality & availability of services for homeless households.
- Work with district and city councils in Oxfordshire, to deliver actions arising from the homelessness content of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Develop a corporate financial inclusion strategy to ensure that the collective action of the council does not unintentionally result in hardship and possible homelessness amongst residents of the district.

b) Prevent homelessness, whenever possible, through timely advice and information

The HRA introduced new legal duties on English councils, so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance. Our service is committed to the prevention of homelessness, but we will enhance this further and respond to additional guidance and case law as this develops. We will ensure that customers and partners are aware of the help and advice available from our team and able to access this at the earliest point possible, to maximise the opportunities for preventing homelessness. We will be reviewing the reasons for the high level of on-the-day homelessness presentations currently recorded, conduct an accessibility audit of our service and reshape the relationship between our Housing Team and our Customer Services Team to ensure that customers are able to access good quality housing advice at first point of contact. We will review and ensure that our self-help guide, that provides tailored information to people about their housing options, is meeting customers' needs.

We will review the corporate contract for debt and money advice to ensure that it is the best way to meet the needs of residents experiencing financial hardship within the district and how best to ensure this type of service continues to be available.

We will take an active role in the Oxfordshire Trailblazer project working with a range of statutory partners across the county including criminal justice services, health, social care to support early intervention and prevention of homelessness by giving advice before homelessness occurs.

Proposed actions:

- Fully implement the requirements of the new legislation (HRA 2017) and respond to new guidance and case law development and continue to develop a person centred culture working alongside people to help resolve their housing needs.
- Reshape the relationship between the Housing Team and Customer Services to ensure that customers are able to access good quality housing advice at first point of contact.
- Conduct an accessibility audit of the service.
- Complete a review of on the day homeless presentations.
- Communicate clearly, the services delivered by our teams and relevant partners, through a wide range of media and partnership meetings.

- Complete evaluation to ensure self-help materials, including the enhanced housing options module for customers, are effective.
- Evaluate options for in-house Money Advice Service provision within CDC's homelessness service.
- Review corporate contract for debt and money advice.
- Complete review regarding consideration of wider role for money advice services in debt prevention, upstream financial education work and social prescribing.
- Take an active role in the Oxfordshire Trailblazer project.

c) Focus homelessness prevention activity on tackling the common causes of homelessness locally

Our most effective tool, in assisting households to move to alternative accommodation is the housing register, via an offer of accommodation made under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. Since April 2014, 2349 households have been housed via the register, with 382 of these cases recorded as being homelessness preventions. We will review our Allocation Policy, to ensure it remains effective following the changes in legislation, practice and local demand.

The most common reasons for homelessness locally are:

- termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)
- family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- relationship breakdown, including 'violent breakdown of relationship'.

Behind these reasons sit additional factors, specifically the affordability and availability of local homes. Cherwell is a high demand, high rent area and affordable housing in the private rented sector (PRS) is in short supply. Households that are threatened with eviction from a PRS property find it difficult to obtain alternative accommodation that is affordable in their preferred location and may approach us for advice or at crisis point, when they are imminently homeless.

We will establish a Preventing Homelessness Fund, to assist households to remain in their existing homes or move to alternative accommodation, in the social and private rented sectors.

We anticipate that the requirements of the new legislation to work with households at an earlier stage, and for a longer period, will reduce the incidence of family/friends asking people to leave, as a reason for homelessness. Our team already undertake mediation between family members where this has a potential to prevent homelessness and allow time for a more planned housing move, but we will develop further the skills of team members in this respect. We will also work with local partners to develop a service that offers mediation and builds resilience for young single people facing homelessness as a result of relationship and family breakdown.

Proposed actions:

- Complete a comprehensive review and health check of our Housing Allocation policy to ensure it supports homelessness prevention.
- Establish a Homelessness Prevention Fund
- Continue to develop the existing skills and expertise within the team regarding mediation.
- Work with partners to develop a service that offers mediation and builds resilience for young single people facing homelessness as a result of relationship and family breakdown

d) Continue the development of effective partnerships with other departments within the council and statutory, voluntary and other agencies to prevent and relieve homelessness

We have a number of specific partnerships in place, but acknowledge we need to do more to pro-actively bring together the range of relevant partners who need to work together to focus on preventing homelessness for their specific service users. To this end, we will establish a Homelessness Prevention Network (HPN) which will meet regularly to ensure effective communication and understanding between partner services. The network will also have a vital role in establishing a forum for partners to regularly review and participate in progress against the objectives set out in this strategy.

As outlined above, we need to enhance the work we undertake with colleagues in the health sector to prevent homelessness and promote timely discharge among patients leaving hospitals and will work to support the Oxfordshire Trailblazer Project to help achieve this.

Many registered providers, including our stock transfer housing association, Sanctuary Housing have reorganised and become bigger organisations over recent years. We need to ensure they continue to work with us to meet our strategic priorities and statutory duties to homeless people and those in housing need.

Private landlords will be affected by new Energy Performance Certificate rules for rented properties and changes to tax liabilities relating to income from buy to let properties. We are concerned this may lead to a contraction of the sector and will work with colleagues in our Private Sector Housing Team to monitor the impact and identify any trends which may lead to potential homelessness.

Proposed actions:

- Establish a Homelessness Prevention Network (HPN) meeting to ensure effective communication and understanding between partner services.
- Work with colleagues in the health sector to prevent homelessness and promote timely discharge into suitable accommodation among patients leaving acute and community hospitals.
- Develop and reshape the relationship with key registered providers to incorporate a commitment to reduce and prevent homelessness in the district.
- Work with the Private Sector Housing Team to monitor the impact of new legislation for private landlords and resultant trends on homelessness.

e) Focus on early identification of households at risk of homelessness

The HRA will introduce, from 1 October 2018, a new Duty to Refer, whereby certain public authorities must notify a local housing authority in England where it considers that one of its service users may be homeless or at risk of homelessness and agrees to the referral. Public authorities are listed as:

- prisons (public and contracted out)
- youth offender institutions and youth offending teams
- secure training centres (public and contracted out) and colleges
- probation services (community rehabilitation companies and national probation service)
- jobcentre plus
- accident and emergency services provided in a hospital
- urgent treatment centres, and hospitals in their capacity of providing in-patient treatment

- social service authorities.

We will work with these authorities, and all other relevant partners to establish referral processes and provide training and guidance to ensure these work effectively for people in housing need. We will work with the Oxfordshire districts and city council to ensure that there is a consistent approach to referrals across the county, as many of the public authorities will cover more than one local authority area. We will also ensure that appropriate ICT services are in place to facilitate referrals.

Proposed actions:

- Develop a consistent approach across the county for the Duty to Refer under the HRA.
- Ensure appropriate ICT is in place to implement the Duty to Refer
- Extend the Duty to Refer principle beyond the statutory partners

f) Continue to improve collection and analysis of information about local trends in homelessness to enable intelligence led service delivery

Over the course of the last strategy we have collected a range of data on why people present to the council, but we need to continue to improve on this. We need to ensure we have a robust evidence base to monitor the impact of the new legislation on service demand to ensure our resources are adequate and to accurately demonstrate local need. This will be essential to inform commissioning decisions, shaping future investment and partnership working with other local government organisations.

The government also introduced the Homelessness Case Level Information Classification, 'H-CLIC', from April 2018 to replace the previous national system of P1E returns, on the commencement of the HRA 2017. H-CLIC will collect case level data and is intended to provide more detailed information on the causes and effects of homelessness, long term outcomes and what works to prevent homelessness. We will monitor what this new information tells us and will work to ensure that homelessness prevention actions taken by other teams are effectively accounted for.

Proposed actions:

- Support service monitoring by robustly and accurately recording data, to ensure compliance with new case recording practices.
- Ensure that reporting tools for the HRA module are adequate to allow robust and timely analysis of trends
- Ensure that all forms of homelessness prevention, including debt advice and DHPs which are managed outside of the HOT, are captured periodically.

Priority 2: Prevent Single Homelessness

a) Ensure services are available to meet the needs of local single homeless people and those who sleep rough in Cherwell

The Single Homeless Pathway (SHP) in Oxfordshire is a jointly funded partnership between Oxfordshire County Council, all Oxfordshire district/city councils and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. Cherwell have approved funding to this partnership to make sure services are available until March 2020 ensuring people rough sleeping from Cherwell can access support and appropriate services to enable them to move on to sustain accommodation independently.

The jointly funded partnership ensures that Cherwell have access to 24 bed spaces (11 at O'Hanlon House, and 13 beds within the district) in total to support people with connections to Cherwell. These 24 beds have enabled officers to support people rough sleeping into available bed spaces and off of the streets.

However, in recent times we have experienced difficulties in being able to support people to access bed spaces due to the SHP silting up and people not being ready to move on to live independently. As a result Cherwell entered into a contract with A2Dominion in April 2018 to provide an additional 10 bed spaces at Simon House in Oxford for rough sleepers with a connection to Cherwell for 12 months to provide additional capacity.

As a result of having direct access to bed places within the SHP, Cherwell has seen the number of people reported as rough sleeping within the district reduce from a high of 21 in November 2015 down to 9 in November 2017. Despite this reduction locally, Oxfordshire has seen an increase in the number of people sleeping rough, especially within Oxford City. We are aware that some of those found to be sleeping rough within Oxford have connections to Cherwell and have either migrated to the City due to the range of support services available or have been evicted from the SHP beds based within the City and have chosen not to return to Cherwell.

The SHP also provides a bed space for anyone rough sleeping during periods when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is activated. This currently provides 1 bed space within O'Hanlon House in Oxford. Cherwell do not have any other provision immediately available and rely upon securing accommodation within either B&B or motels which can be difficult to secure when individuals needing assistance have complex or multiple support needs. We will explore the options for winter shelter provision in the district.

During the period of this strategy, Cherwell District Council will need to decide how best to provide supported accommodation for people found to be rough sleeping beyond March 2020 and will also need to consider whether other types of accommodation are required.

We are aware that there is a small number of people who are considered to be entrenched rough sleepers within the district and refuse to accept the support available. In recent times 'Housing Led' models of accommodation have gained significant attention and may provide a new opportunity to assist some of the hard to support individuals currently sleeping rough within the district.

As well as accommodation, we will work to develop specialist support services for single homeless and rough sleepers within the district (rather than only in Oxford City).

Proposed actions:

- Complete a review of the Single Homeless Pathway
- Work with countywide partners to decide future commissioning arrangements for the Single Homeless Pathway
- Undertake an options appraisal for local SWEP provision
- Pilot development of bespoke services for single homeless/rough sleepers outside of Oxford City within the Cherwell area.
- Complete a desk-top review of the Housing Led models of supported accommodation for single homeless people, to assess relevance to CDC and inform future commissioning.

b) Better understand the needs of people who sleep rough in Cherwell

All local authorities are required to carry out either an annual estimate or count and report figures back to Central Government about the number of people known to be rough sleeping

within the district on a given night. As mentioned above we have seen the number of people reported as rough sleeping as part of the annual estimates reduce in recent years from a high of 21 down to nine in November 2017. We will continue to ensure that we complete this in accordance with national guidance and best practice to ensure the number of people recorded as rough sleeping in the district is accurately recorded and reflects current needs.

The review identified that we have not collated data on the different support needs of individuals sleeping rough or within the Single Homeless Pathway. We know that many people found to be sleeping rough require more support than just somewhere to live and need help from other services to help manage issues such as mental health or substance misuse (drugs and/or alcohol) but are currently unable to quantify how much of an issue these are to cause people to become homeless.

The review also identified that other agencies were unable to demonstrate this need with Turning Point not providing information to support the review and 'The Better Together Partnership' (Mental Health) advising that they had 8 clients recorded as being either homeless or NFA but recognised that the quality of the data may not be very accurate as many of their clients did not have their housing status recorded.

It is hoped that by improving our data collection we will be able to develop better working relationships with other partners to provide joined up services for clients with support needs.

Proposed actions:

- Undertake an annual rough sleeper estimate
- Improve data monitoring in relation to local people who are verified as sleeping rough

Priority 3: Ensure vulnerable people can access appropriate help and support

a) Ensure vulnerable households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can access appropriate help and support, through partnership working

Cherwell have supported a range of voluntary and faith groups over the period of the last strategy to provide a range of support services within the community to assist people who are:

- homeless or rough sleeping
- unsuitably housed
- victims of domestic abuse
- young people at risk of homelessness
- people in need of basic furniture to set up home in their new tenancies

These funding arrangements have helped to support additional provision to be available within the district and support some of the most vulnerable residents within the district.

In recent years we have only been able to award funding to partners for a year at a time due to uncertainty about the funding available to the council as a result of the national austerity measures being implemented by Central Government.

There have also been changes to the way the Homeless Prevention Grant is allocated to the council, having moved from being a ring fenced allocation to now being part of the council's main allocation (it is still identified as a specific budget heading). We have been fortunate

that elected members at Cherwell have been supportive of this money being used to support partner agencies to carry out services that support homelessness related issues.

In recent years we have also published a 'Homeless Pocket Guide' which has provided details about a range of different types of support people who are homeless or rough sleeping can access. The guide has been distributed to a variety of statutory, voluntary and faith groups to issue to individuals identified as being homeless. In total 1000 books have been printed and distributed to date and has been recognised as good practice by Victoria Prentis MP within the House of Commons. We will need to ensure this is regularly updated to ensure the information is still relevant and supports individuals to access the support available.

As part of the funding made available to voluntary sector groups, Cherwell have previously awarded funding to Reducing the Risk to provide outreach services for low and medium level victims of domestic abuse within the district. This service has been delivered to help clients to manage their current circumstances and to prevent them from having to flee from their home and support networks.

In 2017 Oxfordshire County Council undertook a re-commissioning exercise for Domestic Abuse Services which meant that the number of refuge beds available in the county would reduce and outreach provision would be included within the new service specification which included:

- refuge accommodation
- outreach
- IDAV/MARAC
- Telephone helpline services

As part of this re-commissioning process, all district/city councils were asked to make financial contributions towards the services to be procured. Cherwell agreed for the funding previously made available to Reducing the Risk to be added to the new pooled budget which would ensure that Cherwell Residents would have access to support for instances of domestic abuse. The new contract began on 4 June and will be provided by A2Dominion with Reducing the Risk providing some services in Cherwell also. The council will need to monitor the outcomes being delivered from the new contract to ensure it meets local needs and delivers requirements identified by the council.

Proposed actions

- Fund community & faith groups to reduce homeless by supporting vulnerable people
- Refresh and update Homelessness Pocket Guide
- Monitor the outcomes for the new domestic abuse contract for Oxfordshire and ensure value for money for Cherwell's financial contribution

b) Ensure future commissioning of support and help services is evidenced by robust data collection

Historically, we did not record data on the support and help needs of people approaching us for housing advice. We expect the new national homelessness data gathering system, H-CLIC, will facilitate more robust case level data collection and assist us in gathering data on specific support needs.

We also need to improve our understanding of the level of need among homeless households for support from services dealing with substance misuse, mental health, criminal justice and ex-armed forces personnel, in order to inform effective commissioning. We will

also be working with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure we are involved, at an early stage, in the commissioning and design of services, to ensure they meet our local residents' needs.

Proposed actions:

- Gather from personal housing plans and H-CLIC, case level detail about all support needs and review data to inform working practices and the commissioning of services
- Improve understanding of the level of need amongst homeless households for support from services dealing with substance misuse, mental health, criminal justice and ex-armed forces personnel.
- Work with Oxfordshire County Council to encourage early engagement with the council in the commissioning process to allow co-design of services to ensure the level of provision best meets the needs of local residents.

c) Provide help and support for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Our team incorporates a Tenancy Support Officer post, working with households who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. This post is vital in helping us to fulfil the duties of the HRA but is currently fixed term. We believe this should be a permanent resource for the housing service and as part of the development of this role, we are aware that we need to provide robust evidence of our outcomes to inform on-going service provision and design.

Proposed actions:

- Develop business case for permanent Tenancy Support Officer (TSO), within the Housing Needs Team and improve evidence of the impact and outcomes.

Priority 4: Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation

a) Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation in the social housing sector

Between 2014 and 2018, all 789 new build social housing units delivered in the district by registered providers were let at affordable rent level. This is generally 80% of the market rent, compared to social rent properties which are typically let at approximately 60% of the market rent. Our homelessness review highlighted concerns as to the 'affordability' of local social housing let at affordable rent level, but we need to evidence more robustly the extent to which this is an issue, to support future work with local providers in developing properties let at the cheaper social rent level.

We also want people applying to the housing register use the time they are waiting for a nomination to prepare for maintaining a home. We will ensure they have information about the full running costs of a property and have access to wider advice and training they may need to succeed and sustain a tenancy. This should help to prevent future instances of homelessness.

Proposed Actions:

- Improve our evidence base regarding the extent of affordability issues in relation to social housing.
- Explore ways with our registered provider partners to increase the delivery of social

- housing including both social rented and affordable rented properties.
- Support people on the housing register to develop the relevant financial and life skills to obtain and maintain a social tenancy.

b) Enable homeless households to access permanent accommodation in the private rented sector

The private rented sector is an important source of accommodation, providing choice of location, and it can be a quicker solution than awaiting a nomination from the housing register. It will be a main option for those who are not accepted onto the register, or who receive a low banding. However, accessing the private rented sector can be difficult as accommodation locally is in high demand and expensive. For households on a low income, in receipt of full or part Local Housing Allowance (LHA), there is likely to be a shortfall between LHA rates and local rent ranges. Also landlords generally require an upfront deposit and rent in advance payments, equivalent to at least a month's rent each, which will be unaffordable to most people in housing need. This is compounded by the fact that many private landlords are reluctant to let to those who they perceive may face payment difficulties.

To assist with this, we rebranded and improved our Cherwell Bond Scheme (CBS), which assists households who are at risk of homelessness and who do not have sufficient income to cover the costs of a deposit. 190 households are currently accommodated in private rented sector housing, through the CBS. However, the number of new tenancies entered into under the scheme has fallen in recent years and we are concerned that it is currently too restrictive to meet the needs of all those who could benefit from it and to meet the requirements of the HRA 2017, to prevent and relieve homelessness for a wider range of people.

Our Private Sector Housing Team offer Landlord Home Improvement Grants (LHIGs) to help landlords cover the costs of repairs and improvements, such as new kitchens, bathrooms or heating systems, to privately rented accommodation. In return for the grant, we receive rights to nominate tenants to the property for an agreed period of time, dependent on the amount of grant being awarded, up to a maximum of five years. Some of these properties are used to discharge our Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSOs) to households accepted as homeless and some are used under the Bond Scheme. However, there has been a reduction in the overall number of new LHIGs issued in recent years, and a corresponding drop in the number of PRSOs.

We will review and enhance our offer to landlords, and promote this through an effective marketing strategy. We will also explore with registered provider partners opportunities to grow their portfolio of private rented properties to increase access to affordable, good quality accommodation for local residents in housing need.

Proposed Actions:

- Review the Council's offer to private landlords (Bond Scheme and Landlord Home Improvements Grants)
- Develop a communications & marketing strategy to promote the Council's 'offer' to private landlords.
- Explore opportunities with our registered provider partners to grow their local private rented portfolio and increase access to these properties for local people in housing need.

c) Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary accommodation, minimising the use of bed and breakfast accommodation

The council has a duty to offer temporary accommodation to:

- households that present as homeless where there is reason to believe that they may be in priority need and they have nowhere to stay pending a homelessness decision
- households for whom, following an assessment, a full homelessness duty has been accepted.

Through effective homelessness prevention work and use of Band 2 of the housing register, we endeavour, where possible, to assist people threatened with homelessness to remain in their current accommodation until they can move into permanent accommodation. Where this is not possible, they will be provided with temporary accommodation. We have a small selection of temporary accommodation options available, depending on the urgency of the applicant's housing circumstances and availability of accommodation at the time of approach.

We have an agreement with Sanctuary Housing, our Large Scale Voluntary Transfer registered provider, to provide and manage 33 units of temporary accommodation on our behalf. Some of these units have been purpose built as temporary accommodation units and have the flexibility to be changed between a studio and two bedroom properties or to two one bedroom flats, depending on the need at any given time. However, where people approach in an emergency or with limited notice that they are to become homeless, the main option is a local motel in Banbury, with which we have a contract with to access up to 10 rooms throughout the year. Applicants placed here do not have to share facilities and have access to basic cooking amenities. When this accommodation is full we have to look further afield for accommodation, as the majority of B&B establishments within the district do not accept households placed by the council. Where we have needed to use B&B hotels the nearest is located at a motorway service station, within district, and very occasionally we have to place outside of the district.

During 2017/18 103 households were placed in TA, with 81 of these spending at least their first night in motel or B&B while 23 were placed directly in self-contained TA.

We have not needed to increase the number of units used for temporary accommodation recently, as we have seen the number of homeless applications reduce slightly. However during 2015/16 and 2016/17 people were experiencing longer stays in temporary accommodation, although this trend reversed during 2017 as a result of increased affordable housing delivery and a reduction in the number of people presenting to the council as homeless. With the extension of duties under the HRA we cannot be certain this trend will continue and we therefore intend to conduct a full review of temporary accommodation to ensure best use of resources and adequate, good standard provision. We are aware of the potential for the HRA 2017 to impact on demand for temporary accommodation and this will be carefully monitored. Finally, we acknowledge that we need to incorporate the views of people who have been placed into temporary accommodation.

Proposed actions:

- Conduct a full review of the provision and procurement of temporary accommodation to ensure adequate and appropriate provision and best use of resources.
- Produce an up to date TA strategy
- Undertake a post tenancy satisfaction survey for people who have been in temporary accommodation

d) Ensure people experiencing domestic abuse can access suitable accommodation

Under the newly commissioned domestic abuse service the majority of refuge accommodation is due to be provided in Cherwell district with a limited number of units

dispersed across other parts of the county. Local people who become victims of domestic abuse are very rarely accommodated within the district as it is usually unsafe. Therefore, the new service may disadvantage by severely restricting the options for Cherwell residents fleeing domestic abuse. Another potential disadvantage of most of the refuge provision being in Cherwell district is that many of these households are likely to either apply to the housing register or present as homeless to the council. We intend to work with other district/city council in the county to establish reciprocal arrangements that facilitate move-on from the refuge across the whole county (not just Cherwell) as appropriate.

Proposed actions

- Monitor the current refuge provision in Oxfordshire to ensure it meets Cherwell residents' needs
- Work with other Oxfordshire housing authorities to set up reciprocal arrangements for people ready to move on from refuge into permanent accommodation

6. Resources

This chapter details the main housing related resources available to tackle homelessness in Cherwell.

Staff Resources

The Housing Needs Team is responsible for homelessness and allocations. The Housing Needs Team currently consists of:

- 2 x Housing Team Leaders
- 1 x Senior Housing Officer

Homelessness

- 5 x Housing Options Officers
- 1 x Tenancy Support Officer

Allocations and Cherwell Bond Scheme

- 5 x Housing Officers
- 2 x Assistant Housing Officers

Additionally the service benefits from the support of a Homelessness Strategy Officer, Housing Partnerships Officer and Homelessness Strategy Facilitator in the Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team.

Homelessness Prevention Grant

Central Government gives local housing authorities funding for homelessness prevention work (Homelessness Prevention Grant) within the council's wider local government settlement. This funding has been used by the Housing Team to support a range of community and voluntary sector groups to provide services within the district that are focused on supporting the prevention of homelessness. For example, the provision of drop in centres for people who are homeless or unsuitably housed, outreach and verification for rough sleepers and outreach for low to medium level victims of domestic abuse. The Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation for Cherwell District Council is as follows:

Homelessness Prevention Grant		
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
£99,869	£100,211	£100,712

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) also provides Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) to local housing authorities. FHSG is paid to local housing authorities as a grant and can be used in any way a local authority sees fit, to better manage temporary accommodation pressures. The grant is ring-fenced for activities to prevent and deal with homelessness.

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant Allocation		
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
£178,538	£205,425	£265,225

Homelessness Reduction Act: New Burdens Funding

The government is providing funding to local authorities to help meet the new burdens costs associated with the additional duties contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The local authority allocations cover: 2017/18; 2018/19; and 2019/20 and Cherwell District Council will receive the following:

Homelessness Reduction Act: New Burdens Funding			
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total Allocation
£47,246	£43,277	£45,747	£136,270

Cherwell District Council did not utilise the Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens Funding for 2017/18 but has rolled this funding forward into 2018/19 so that the monies can be spent in line with the priorities within this new homelessness strategy.

In addition, to the above, all local housing authorities were allocated £9,200 as a one-off payment towards new ICT costs in relation to the new legislation. We used this money to pay for new homelessness ICT software.

New Homes Bonus

New Homes Bonus (NHB) is a grant paid by Central Government to local authorities to incentivise housing growth in their areas. Under the scheme Central Government matches the council tax raised on new build homes, conversions and long term empty homes brought back into use. The development of each additional affordable home attracts an enhancement of £350 per annum (over the period which the NHB is payable). Local authorities are not obliged to use the Bonus funding for housing development.

This funding is not currently used to support new initiatives to help prevent homeless within the district but provides an opportunity for the team to consider future requests if potential needs are identified that will support the prevention of homelessness within the district.

Other Commissioning

Cherwell District Council commissions a range of other services which are related to homelessness, these are listed below:

- Corporate contract with Citizens Advice Bureau (£252,000 per annum)
- Banbury Young Homelessness Project (£6,000 per annum)
- Faithworks (furniture turnaround project) (£15,000 per annum)
- contribution towards countywide domestic abuse services (£25,000 per annum)
- contribution towards Single Homeless Pathway (£62,700 per annum)
- procuring additional 10 bed spaces at Simon House, Oxford to provide 24/7 support for people found rough sleeping with a connection to Cherwell and presenting with complex support needs.

7. Consultation

We held a consultation event with partners and our Portfolio Holder in February 2018, discussing the findings of the review and agreeing initial priorities for the strategy. We continued to consult with partners as the strategy was being developed. Specific partners have also been consulted, contributed data and verified findings as relevant.

Comments

We welcome and comments or queries about this strategy. Please send them to:

Housing Strategy and Partnerships Team
Cherwell District Council
Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
OX15 4AA

Email: housing@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

8. Action plan and governance

We will establish a Homelessness Prevention Network of relevant stakeholders, which will regularly, monitor our Homelessness Strategy Action Plan to ensure we remain on target to deliver the strategy. The action plan will be reviewed annually to remain responsive to emerging local need, and Government legislation and guidance.