

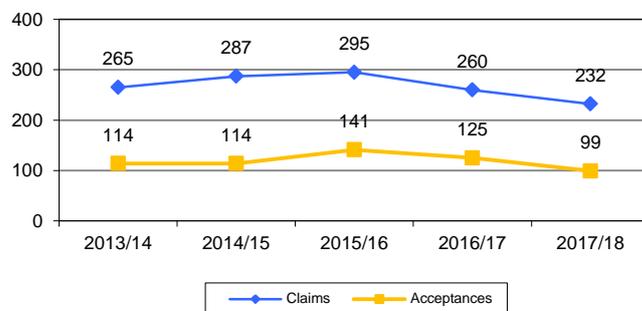
## Housing Needs Performance - How did we do in 2017/18?

The Housing Needs team in the Housing & Property service area provides a housing needs service including support and advice to prevent homelessness, help for people to find suitable homes, and help to deal with tenancy sustainment issues. It is the first point of contact for Oxford residents who are threatened with or are actually homeless. This report outlines our performance and work during the 2017/18 financial year.

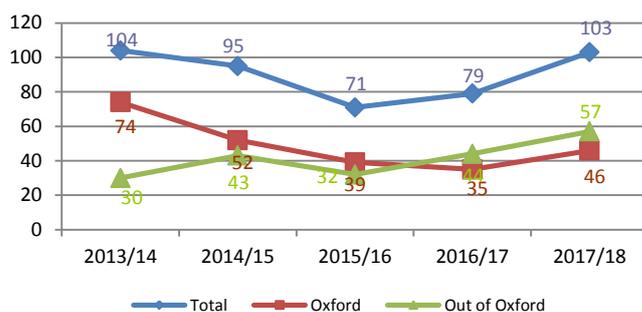
### Homeless Claims, Acceptances and Prevention

We saw around 1,200 people at the Housing Options Duty service in the last year and assisted 104 households to access private rented accommodation by helping with a deposit (via the Home Choice and Lord Mayor's Deposit Guarantee schemes). Through continued homelessness prevention work, the Council has tried to keep the number of people becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness as low as possible in spite of a challenging housing and economic environment. In 2017/18 we accepted 99 households as statutory homeless. This was a 21% decrease from 2016/17 when we accepted 125 households. Around half of all homeless acceptances are due to applicants losing a private rented sector tenancy.

#### Homelessness claims and acceptances



#### PRS new lettings through the Home Choice scheme (incl Real Lettings and Rent Guarantee scheme)



As there is limited social housing becoming available for offers, we are continuing to discharge our homelessness duty by offering suitable accommodation in the private sector (using powers introduced in the Localism Act). In some instances we offer accommodation outside the city because of the high cost of private rented housing in Oxford. The median rent for a 2-bed property is £1,175 per month<sup>1</sup>, but the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is only £834 per month. For a 3-bed property the median rent is £1,425 per month<sup>1</sup>, but the LHA is only £997 per month. In 2017/18, we discharged duty to 28 households accepted as statutory homeless by making an offer of accommodation in the private sector.

In 2017/18, the Council and its partners prevented 1,159 households from becoming homeless. This included: negotiations with landlords or other assistance to help people remain in their private rented property; assisting people to find private rented housing with the help of a deposit or bond; providing homeless prevention fund payments; helping to resolve housing benefit and rent arrears problems; providing a sanctuary scheme; and undertaking reconciliation work with families when they threaten to exclude family members.

To help our customers keep their accommodation and prevent their homelessness, the Council now tries to look more holistically at all of its customers' needs. We have developed excellent arrangements with Citizens Advice Oxford to help customers manage their debts. Housing Needs, Rents and Welfare Reform teams can refer customers at risk of homelessness to independent money advice, where help with managing debts would help customers to sustain their housing and avoid homelessness. We also fund a successful 'Tenant Ready' course. We referred 121 customers for either debt advice or the 'Tenant Ready' course over the last year. Shelter continues to provide an independent housing advice service each week at St Aldates Chambers on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which continue to be well attended.

The Housing Needs Team also works in partnership with the Council's Welfare Reform Team to help find solutions for customers affected by changes to their benefits. The Welfare Reform Team provides financial support to help tenants pay their rent while they find their own way of coping with the effects of welfare reform. In 2017/18 the team helped 66 customers into work and launched a new Springboard service to help Universal Credit claimants manage their digital claims and monthly payments.

The Council has, to date, invested £5m into the National Homelessness Property Fund, in partnership with St Mungo's and Resonance, with further investment making a fund for local purchases of over £10m. This has enabled the purchase of

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<sup>1</sup> Valuation Office Agency

47 properties in Oxfordshire so far, with the Council able to nominate households accepted as homeless to access these, whilst also securing a return on the capital investment.

We have also introduced a Rent Guarantee Scheme as part of our Home Choice Scheme where we offer support to private sector landlords and their tenants to sustain a tenancy in private rented accommodation. The Rent Guarantee Scheme is a 2-year pilot that aims to support at least 80 households in the private rented sector, with the ultimate aim of making the tenant financially independent of the Council. The scheme achieved 38 lets last year making a total of 51 since the pilot launch in November 2016.

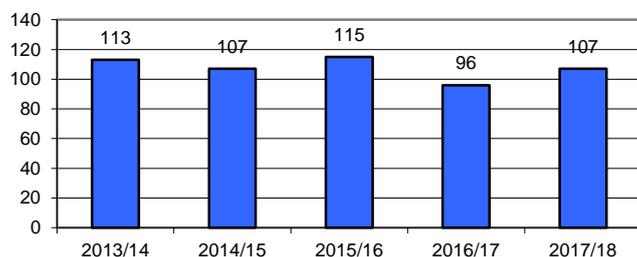
In June 2017 we were awarded the Gold Standard for our Homelessness service by the National Practitioner Support Service, meeting all 10 challenges – One of only 11 local authorities in England to receive this recognition.

## Temporary Accommodation

We have worked hard to keep the number of households staying in temporary accommodation (mostly households which have been found to be homeless by the council and to whom we have a statutory duty to house) low by arranging alternative suitable accommodation, where possible.

At the end of March 2018, the number of households in temporary accommodation was 107, an 11% increase from March 2017 when it was 96. We aim to keep the number of households in temporary accommodation at 120 or less during 2018/19.

### Number of households in temporary accommodation



The Accommodation and Sustainment Team work to assist and empower clients to develop independent living skills, so those clients can positively move on from temporary accommodation.

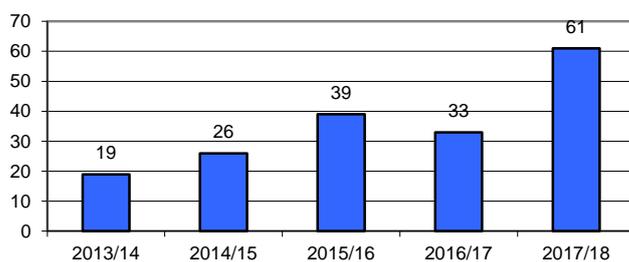
The Sustainment Team specifically work with existing Council tenants to help them sustain their tenancy. Many of the cases are referred to the team because

households who have fallen into rent arrears are experiencing difficulties maintaining their tenancy or their home. The team were successful in sustaining tenancies with 97% of the 195 cases closed during 2017/18 having a positive outcome.

## Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness

The number of people sleeping rough in the city remains an on-going issue and we continue to work in close partnership with agencies in order to address this. At the official count in November 2017, 61 people were counted sleeping rough.

### Number of people sleeping rough



In the last four years Oxford City Council has also undertaken estimates of the number of rough sleepers in order to have a comparable figure with the other local authorities in Oxfordshire County. Estimates and street counts use different methodologies, both set out by Homeless Link. The estimates of how many individuals slept rough in Oxford on a typical night were:

2014: 43

2015: 56

2016: 47

2017: 89

We commission a highly assertive outreach team (OxSPOT) to engage with rough sleepers and support them to get off the streets and to access support and accommodation. OxSPOT works closely with other agencies including Turning Point, the Council's Community Safety Team and Thames Valley Police.

Anyone concerned about a rough sleeper can either contact StreetLink on 0300 5000914 or [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk) and the Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (OXSPOT) will respond to this.

In 2017/18:

- 536 people were verified as rough sleeping in Oxford city.
- 301 people were verified as rough sleeping in Oxford city for the first time.
- Successful interventions were made with 304 individuals, supporting and enabling:

- 283 people to access the sit-up service, hostel or other accommodation (some people may have accessed more than once and more than one type of accommodation).
- 19 people without a connection to Oxfordshire were reconnected to their local area.

During this period we:

- Continued to fund a wide range of services and support for rough sleepers and single homeless people, including supported accommodation services, street engagement, floating support, day services and support to engage in positive activities and get into work or training.
- Increased our spending in this area from a total, original budget of £1.4M in 2017/18 to a total budget of £1.8M in 2018/19. This reflects increased spending of supported accommodation to help mitigate the effects of spending cuts by Oxfordshire County Council.
- Continued to commission a number of supported accommodation services previously commissioned by the County Council, including Simon House hostel, which would otherwise have closed. Instead, Simon House will stay open in 2018/19 pending the development of a new facility at Rymers Lane, Cowley, which will open in 2019.
- Initiated the 'City Conversation' on rough sleeping and related issues, bringing together a large and diverse group of stakeholders to explore how together we can work together to end rough sleeping in Oxford. We convened an Interim Steering Group to oversee the ongoing conversation, and have commissioned Oxfordshire Community Foundation to support the next phase of work to deliver in Autumn 2019, a Rough Sleeping Charter and Partnership for Oxford.
- Coordinated delivery of our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) during prolonged sub-zero winter weather, ensuring that any rough sleeper who needed to could come in from the cold.. During winter 2017/18 SWEP was open for a total of 36 nights, providing emergency accommodation for 141 individual rough sleepers, 827 separate stays,

## **Trailblazer Programme**

Trailblazer Oxfordshire, which focusses on the early and upstream prevention of homelessness, was launched in September 2017. It is a 2-year programme, with a budget of £890,000 which focusses on the prevention of homelessness and system change across health, criminal justice and children's social service. The programme is run as an appreciative enquiry (i.e. identifying what is working and

doing more of it) where the voices of people who have lived experience, alongside people who work on the front line, shape the programme. We are currently testing an Embedded Housing Worker model (with housing workers based across the County's hospitals, prisons and specific areas of children's social services) and a Community Navigator model (which seeks to build people's resilience and ability to find their own solutions with support from existing services). In addition, a Champions' Network is being established with statutory and voluntary organisations, with the aim of training partners on housing law and legislation, early indicators of homelessness and what prevention options are available.

## Housing Register

The number of applicants applying to be included on the Housing Register is high, with many more people applying to us for housing each year than we can possibly help. We received around 1,300 housing applications in 2017/18. We keep the housing register up to date by sending out re-registration letters to all applicants on the register once a year, and cancelling applications where we don't receive a response.

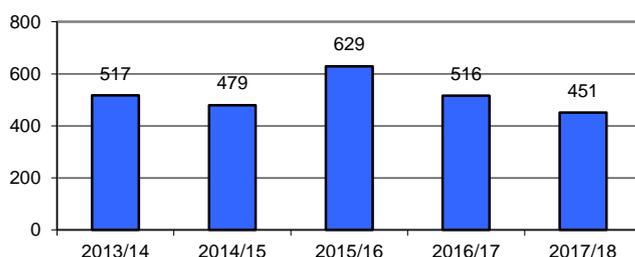
In March 2018, there were 2,509 households on our housing register – comprising of 1,601 on the general register and 908 on the transfer register.

We allocate properties in accordance with our Allocations Scheme, which can be found on our website. Applicants are required to have a local connection to Oxford in order to be on the housing register (though exemptions apply).

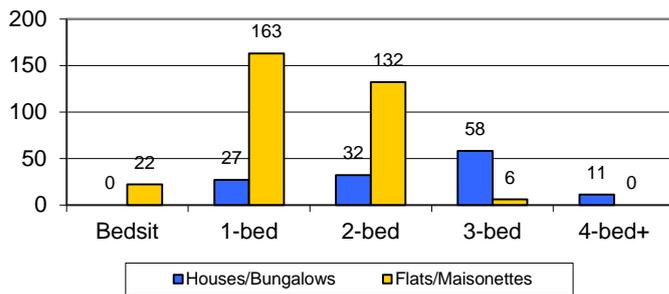
## Allocations

Over the last year, 451 households were housed through the Choice-Based Lettings scheme and allocated new tenancies in Oxford by the Council and our partner Housing Associations. We allocated 321 Council homes and 130 Housing Association homes. We allocated more flats and maisonettes than houses and bungalows - 72% flats/maisonettes compared to 28% houses/bungalows. 50% of the households housed were families; the majority of them were allocated two-bedroom properties.

### Number of properties allocated



## Properties allocated in 2017/18: Breakdown of Houses and Flats



Over the past year, we assisted 149 new Council tenants by furnishing their new homes to help them settle in. The cost of this service is recovered through additional rental charges for the following five years on those properties furnished.

The Council helped to make 38 more properties available to let to families in need, by assisting existing “under-occupying” tenants in two, three and four-bedroom properties to move and downsize to smaller more suitable properties through the Removal Expenses Incentive Scheme. The empty properties were then allocated to families in housing need.

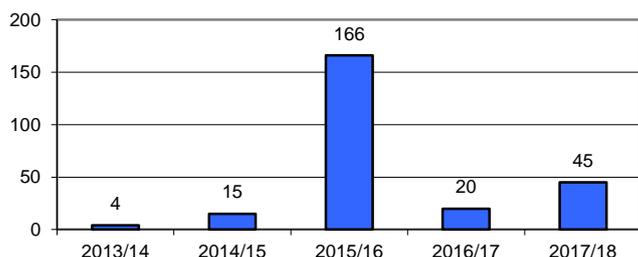
Each year, the Council agrees lettings targets to help prioritise accommodation across the different housing lists. For example, we aim to allocate 50% of all two bedroom properties to applicants on the General Housing register, with the remaining property allocations split between applicants on the homeless and transfer lists.

## New Affordable Homes

In 2017/18 there were 45 new affordable homes completed or acquired – 27 rented and 18 shared ownership homes.

In 2018/19 we are expecting 135 affordable homes to be completed, of which 126 will be rented properties and 9 will be shared ownership. Development work is on-going at the Barton Park scheme and the first affordable housing units will complete in summer 2018, with more units coming through in the following years. We are also working in partnerships to bring forward strategic sites such as Northern Gateway and Oxpens.

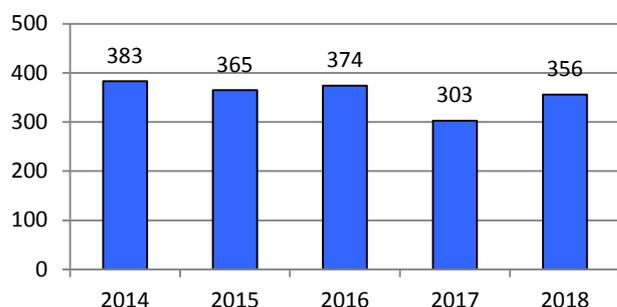
## New affordable homes



## Empty Properties

Oxford does not have a considerable number of empty homes compared to other areas, but recognising the acute housing needs in the city, the Council works hard to encourage owners to return properties into full occupation. As at March 2018 there were 356 long term empty homes (over 6 months empty) in Oxford. Properties identified as 'Long Term Empty Premium' (over two years empty) are charged an additional 50% Council Tax. As at March 2018 there were 82 such dwellings.

### Number of long term empty homes (over 6 Months)



There are usually a complex range of reasons for a dwelling to be unoccupied, and we work in various ways to encourage owners to act to bring empty homes back into use. In 2017/18, 23 homes were brought back into use through the work of the Council. On occasion the Council takes formal action to ensure a property is brought back into use and initially this may be by getting owners to improve the appearance or secure a property.

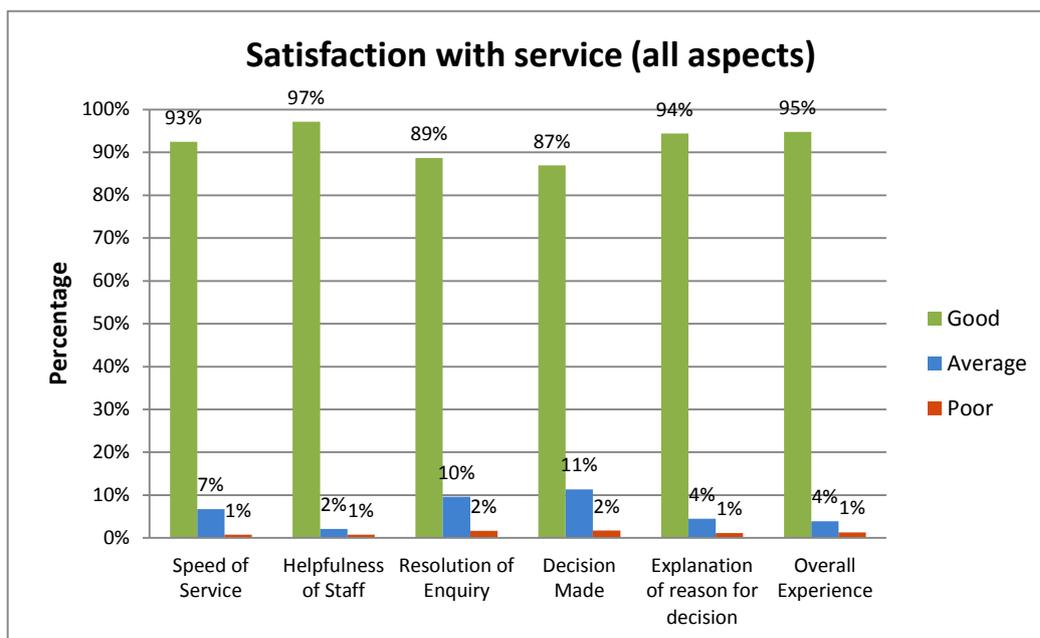
## Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme

We have continued to deliver the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (SVPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement scheme (VCRS). SVPRS and VCRS are entirely funded by Central Government and families are housed in private sector accommodation in Oxford rented mostly at market rates. A comprehensive support package for the families is commissioned by Oxford City Council and is provided by Connection floating support and Asylum Welcome.

Phase 2 was completed in August 2017 and phase 3 started in December 2017. At the end of March 2018 we had successfully resettled 23 vulnerable refugee families mostly from Syria but also from Iraq and Sudan. In addition, we have worked in partnership with a Community sponsorship group, approved by the Home Office, who welcomed a refugee family in January 2018.

## Customer Feedback

Since January 2015, customers using the Housing Needs service have been asked to complete a short customer satisfaction survey. In 2017/18, 397 people completed the satisfaction cards. The results have been good, with many customers also taking the opportunity to personally compliment the officer that dealt with them. 95% rated the overall experience as 'Good', with only 1% rating it as 'Poor'. The best rating was for Helpfulness of Staff which was rated as 'Good' 97% of the time. The least satisfaction was for Decision Made, though as many as 87% rated that aspect as 'Good'.



## New Housing & Homelessness Strategy

We have developed a new Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, which has been adopted by the Council and came into effect on 29 January 2018. The strategy can be found on our website. We have also consulted on a draft Tenancy Strategy 2018-23. The new Tenancy Strategy will come into effect from July 2018.