

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

Introduction

The Housing Needs team sits within the Housing Services department at Oxford City Council. The team is the first point of contact for and provides a range of support and advice for people and households that have a housing need (e.g. at risk of losing accommodation or being homeless). This includes providing support and advice to prevent homelessness, help for people to find suitable homes and help to deal with tenancy sustainment issues.

This report outlines key aspects of our work and performance during 2018/19.

Homeless applications

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was introduced in England on 3rd April 2018. The Act is a seminal piece of legislation that shifts the emphasis from crisis management to early identification of homelessness and prevention.

The Act imposes additional duties on local authorities to help people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, not only those that have a 'priority need' under the Act. The first is the 'duty to prevent'. This means the local authority must provide help and support to enable people to remain in their home. The second is the 'duty to relieve'. When prevention has not been possible the local authority must help secure suitable accommodation for people to move into. In addition, we still continue to give housing advice to all people who approach us.

Our successful prevention and relief support has improved the outcomes of people asking for help with housing. This has resulted in fewer households being placed in temporary accommodation and requiring a homeless application decision.

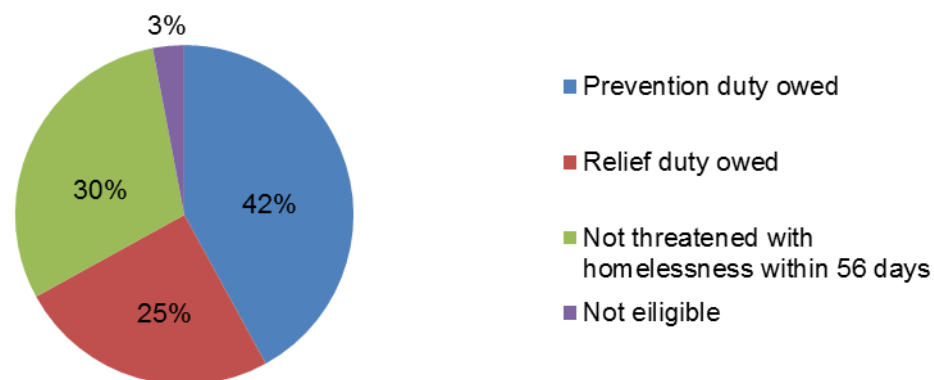
- We took 984 homeless applications under the new Act
- 651 of applications were assessed as being owed a duty – 409 were owed a prevention duty and 242 a relief duty.
- The Prevention duty ended for 257 households and we secured accommodation for 121 of those. The reasons for the duty ending for the rest were: household becoming homeless and we accepted a relief duty, withdrawn application, lost contact etc.
- The Relief duty ended for 201 households and we secured accommodation for 64 of those. The reasons for the duty ending for the rest were: main homelessness duty accepted (with the majority of them staying in temporary accommodation), refused offer of permanent accommodation, withdrew their application, lost contact etc.
- We accepted 74 households as statutory homeless.

The main reason for homelessness for cases where we accepted 'main duty' was loss of Private Sector Rented tenancy – 46%

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

Our prevention and relief support included - collaborating with variety of services to provide a range of activities; negotiating with landlords; budgeting support and coaching to help people remain in their private rented property; funding deposits and bonds to secure accommodation; working with our Welfare Reform team help to resolve housing benefit, welfare benefits and rent arrears issues; and to provide financial support temporarily for those affected by welfare reform. The Welfare Reform Team helped 43 people into work. We also referred 121 customers for either debt advice at Citizens Advice Oxford or to the 'Tenant Ready' course provided by Connection Support.

Households applying under the Homeless Reduction Act



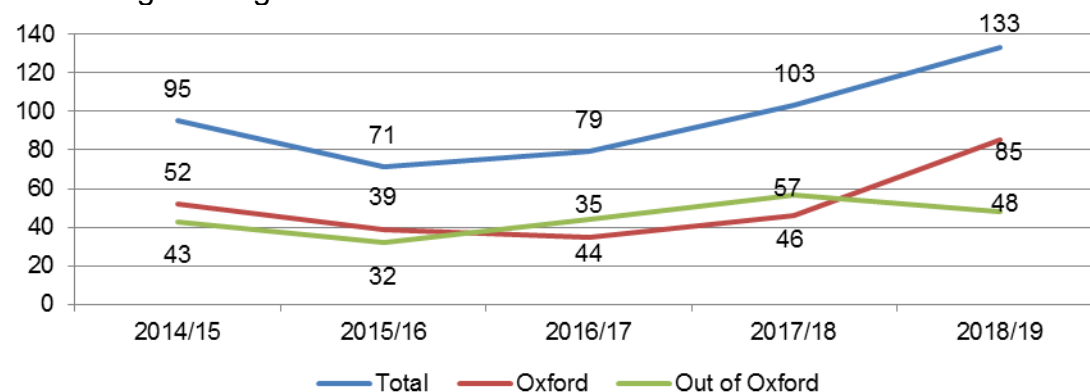
- We assisted a total of 133 households who were homeless or threatened with homelessness to access private rented accommodation through our 'Home Choice Scheme' (incl. Real Lettings, Rent Guarantee Scheme, Lord Mayor's Deposit Scheme). Some of those households are included in the figure above for preventing or relieving homelessness under the Homeless Reduction Act, some are households that had applied under the previous legislation.

As there is limited social housing becoming available for offers, we sometimes have 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

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

accommodation outside the city because of the high cost of private rented housing in Oxford.

New lettings through our 'Home Choice Scheme' since 2014/15:



The increase in lets within Oxford City from 2017/2018 onwards is linked to the development of the City's Rent Guarantee Scheme which offers guaranteed rent and other benefits to landlords who let their properties to tenants receiving housing benefit.

Temporary Accommodation

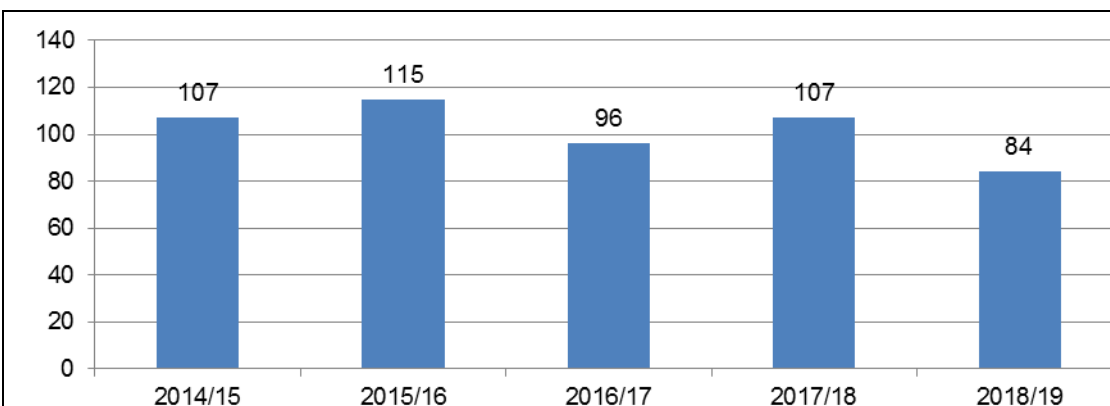
Under certain circumstances the Council has a legal obligation to provide temporary accommodation to homeless applicants. The introduction of the HRA and its increased earlier prevention activity has consequently seen the number of households in temporary accommodation staying low.

Our Accommodation & Sustainment team assist and empower households in temporary accommodation to develop independent living skills, so that they will be able to move on into permanent accommodation successfully.

- 84 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2018.

Number of households in temporary accommodation since 2014/15:

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance



Tenancy Sustainment

Our Tenancy Sustainment Team work with Council tenants to help those who may struggle to sustain their tenancy. The majority of the cases referred to the team because households have fallen into rent arrears or need help with debt and maximise the benefits. The team has seen an increase in referrals where tenants are affected by ill mental health or complex needs, and are struggling to maintain their tenancy and home.

Two embedded workers – from Connection Support and Oxford Health – are working with the team to assist tenants with ill mental health and complex needs.

- 314 cases where closed during 2018/19
- 95% of these cases had a positive outcome
- Overall tenant rent arrears was reduced by £84,000

Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness

The number of people sleeping rough in the city remains an on-going issue and we continue to fund and work in close partnership with a wide range of stakeholders to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. Our aim is to reduce rough sleeping in Oxford by 10% or more annually (from 2016/17 levels - 33 (Official Count) and 47 (Estimate) by end of March 2021, towards achieving the Government's target of ending rough sleeping by 2027.

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

In 2018/19 we committed Council funds of £1.8m to provide a range of support services and accommodation for rough sleepers and single homeless people in Oxford. During the year, we provided a total of 214 beds in a range of different services and settings including hostels, dispersed community-based accommodation, Winter Shelters and self-contained units for individuals in our Housing First and Acacia Projects.

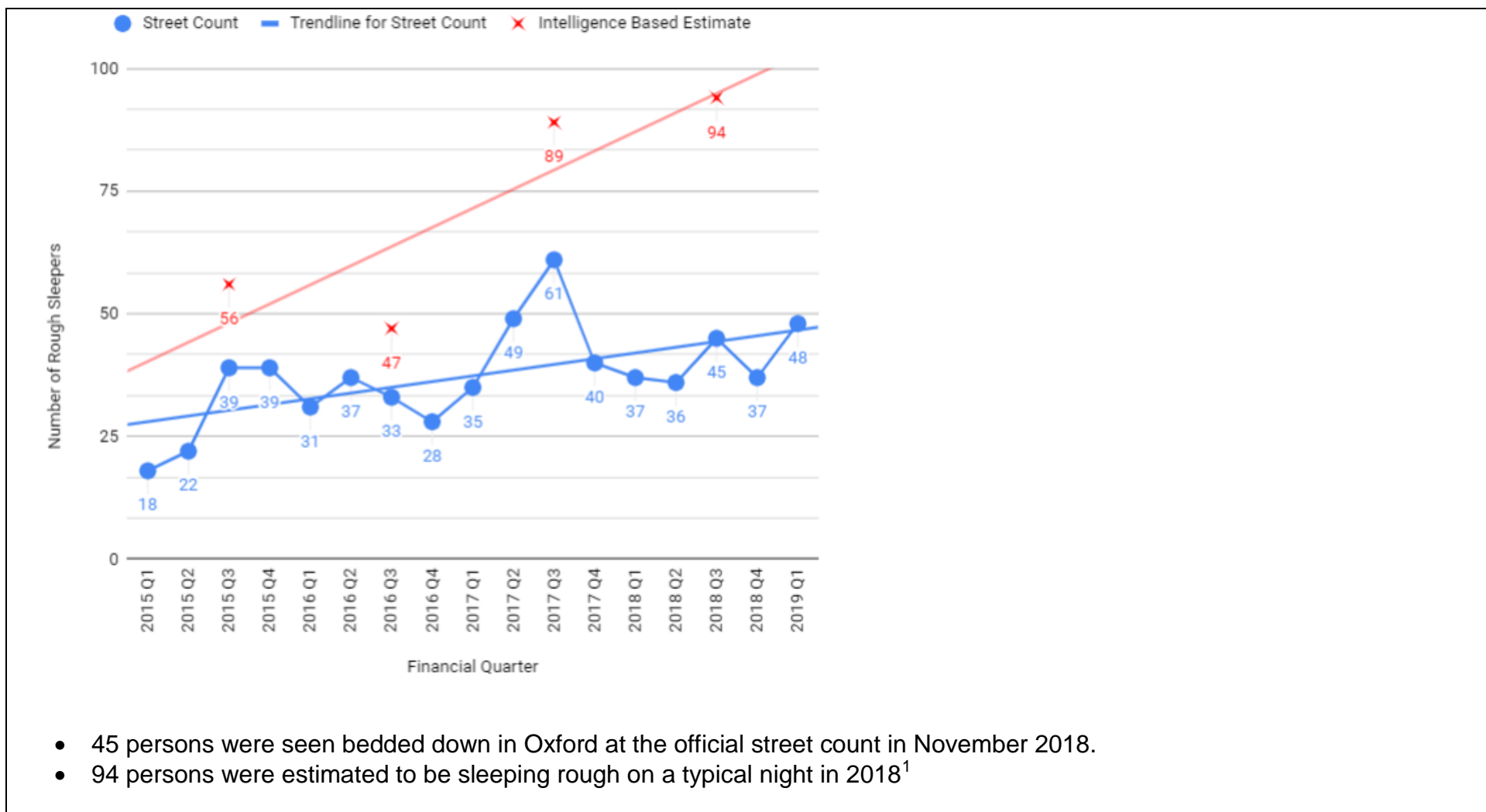
We also supported the ongoing development of the City Conversation on Rough Sleeping – now renamed the Oxford Homeless Movement – working with our partners to progress the development of a citywide Charter on Rough Sleeping and organising a highly successful diverted giving scheme at Christmas which raised a total of £96,000 for local homelessness organisations.

During the year, we led and contributed to a number of successful bids for government funding, including:

- **Rough Sleeping Initiative** - funding of £503,000 awarded in June 2018 for 2018/19. This helped fund 41 units of accommodation for rough sleepers and single homeless people in a range of projects, develop a new multi-agency service hub and deliver additional capacity for the City's outreach team, OxSPOT. We secured the continuation of this funding in 2019/20 with a further £511,000 awarded enabling us to continue the delivery of many of these services until Spring 2020.
- **Rapid Rehousing Pathway (Round 1)** – funding of £99,000 awarded for the creation of 3 Navigator Posts in 2019/20 to support targeted work with long term rough sleepers and people who have returned to rough sleeping after being accommodated.
- **Rapid Rehousing Pathway (Round 2)** – funding of £758,700 awarded in May 2019. This will help fund the transformation of a new Engagement & Assessment Centre at #1 Floyds Row (former Job Centre) which will provide a comprehensive assessment service supported by short term accommodation, together with a Winter Shelter, for up to 60 people. ; The funding is also enabling the delivery of a pilot Supported Lettings Project which will provide floating support to help people existing the Adult Homeless Pathway with ongoing support needs and a connection to the City to access and sustain tenancies in the Council's social housing stock.

Number of people sleeping rough since 2015/16:

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance



¹ In addition to rough sleeper counts, in the last four years Oxford City Council has 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 counts use different methodologies, both set out by Homeless Link.

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

Further data tells us that in 2018/19:

- 442 individual persons were seen bedded and verified as rough sleeping in Oxford city.
- 218 of the above were new rough sleepers
- There were 'successful interventions' with 391 unique rough sleepers for example, helping individuals to access hostel or other accommodation, or supporting a return to their local area.

Housing Register and Allocation of Social Housing

We have formed a partnership with Housing Associations that have properties in Oxford so that most social rented houses in Oxford are let through one single housing register. We manage this register. The number of households applying to be included on this register is high, with many more people applying than we can possibly help. A number of eligibility criteria for being included on the register apply, for example, applicants are required to have a local connection to Oxford.

- We received around 1,400 housing register applications in 2018/19

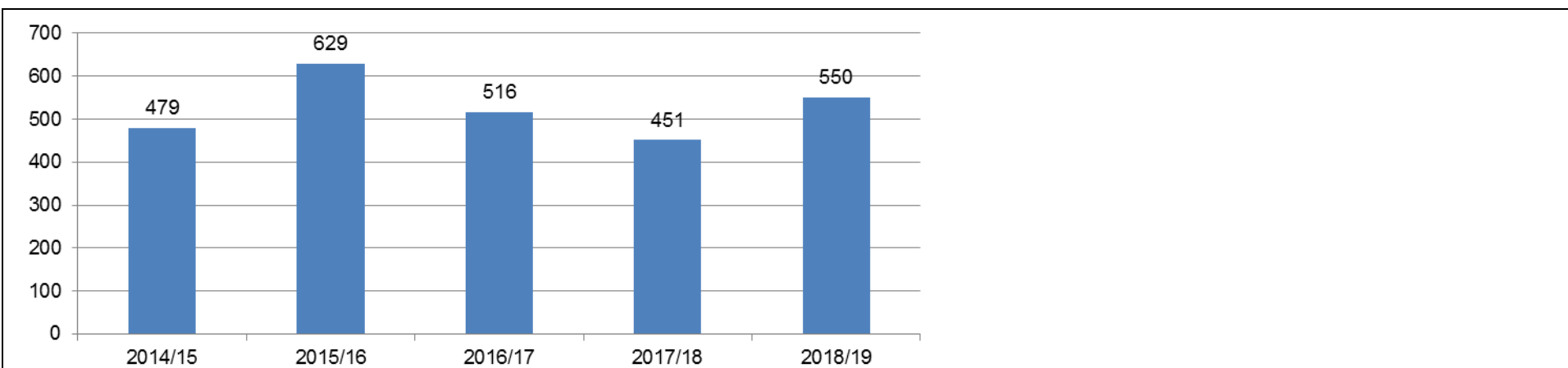
In March 2019, there were 2,340 households on our housing register – comprising of 1,430 on the general register and 910 on the transfer register. We keep the housing register up to date by sending out re-registration letters to all applicants on the register once a year, and cancelling applications where we don't receive a response.

When properties become available, these are allocated according to our Allocations Scheme.

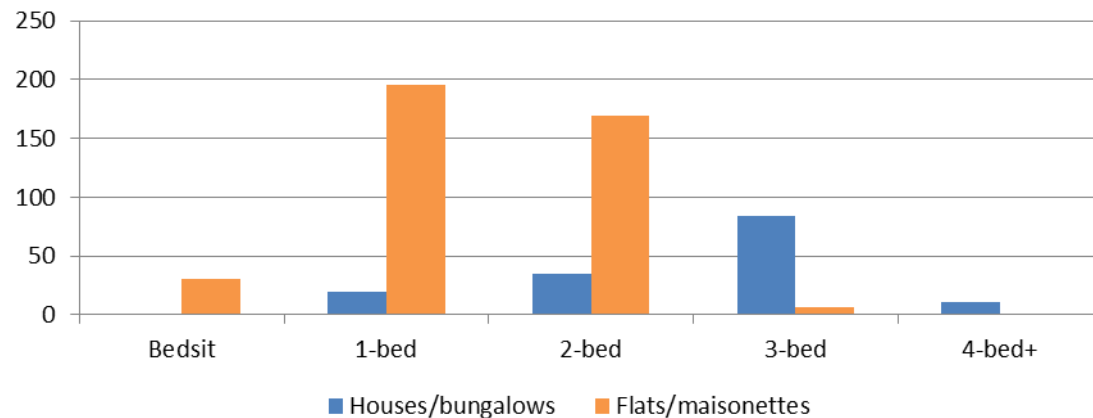
- 550 households were allocated properties in Oxford by the Council and our partner housing associations.
- 334 of these were Council homes;
- 194 were housing association homes.
- 22 were Oxford City Housing Company homes.
- Of the 550 properties let, 73% were flats/maisonettes; the majority of properties were 1-bed room.

Number of properties allocated since 2014/15:

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance



Properties allocated in 2018/19, by type:



In 2018/19 we assisted 173 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.

We helped to make 24 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.

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

These empty properties were then allocated to families in housing need.

Making more accommodation available for those in housing need

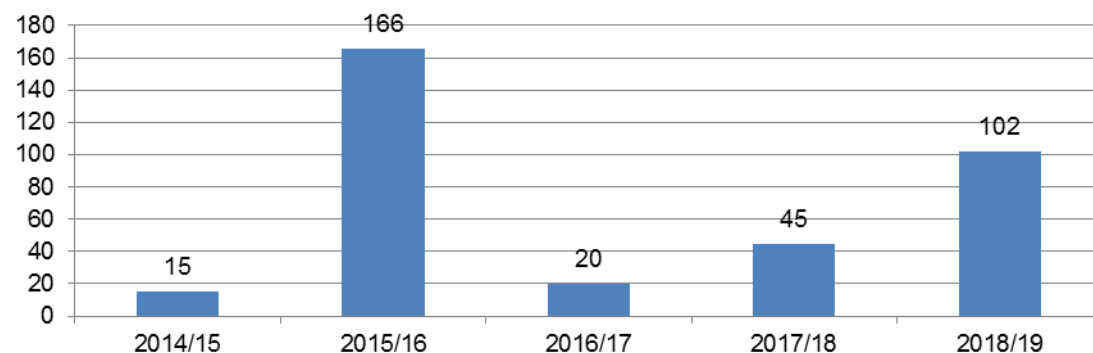
We have established a housing development programme in order to accelerate the delivery of affordable housing to meet the city's housing need. This includes development of sites both in the city and outside of the city. The programme will deliver in the region of 200 homes over the next five years, with all homes owned and managed by the Oxford City Housing Limited.

We have invested more than £10m into the National Homelessness Property Fund, in partnership with St Mungo's and Resonance. This means that we will have purchased 67 homes in Oxfordshire, available to households accepted as homeless, whilst also securing a return on the capital investment.

We have introduced a Rent Guarantee Scheme where we offer support to landlords and their tenants to sustain a tenancy in private rented accommodation. The scheme aims to support at least 120 households in the private rented sector, with the ultimate aim of making the tenants financially independent of the Council. The scheme has achieved 83 lets since the launch in 2016.

New affordable homes - 102 affordable units were completed or acquired in Oxford in 2018/19 – 97 for rent and 5 shared ownership.

New affordable homes since 2014/15:



Empty Properties

The number of empty dwellings in Oxford city averaged at around 300 last year. Whilst this is a small number in comparison to other

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

cities in the in the UK, the number is significant due to the acute housing needs in the City.

We work hard to encourage and enable owners to return properties into full occupation. There are usually a complex range of reasons why dwellings are left empty. Key to initiating action to bring an empty dwelling back into use, is to understand why it has been left empty.

- 20 dwellings were brought back into use in 2018/19.

Oxfordshire Homelessness Prevention 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's objective is to learn how to best identify early stages of homelessness, and intervene to prevent the situation escalating. There are three interventions to support this work.

- Embedded Housing Workers are based across the County's hospitals, prisons and specific areas of children's social services. They work with the professionals in these settings to help them identify people who are at risk of homelessness, and take steps to ensure the right support is put in place to prevent homelessness.
- A Community Navigator model seeks to build people's resilience and ability to find their own solutions with support from existing services. Referrals are taken from a range of organisations across the county, where early indicators of homelessness are identified.
- A 'Housing Champions' Network' has been 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.

In 2018/19 the programme supported 1,035 individuals. 410 cases were closed with a known outcome. 78% of those cases resulted in a positive outcome (prevention of homelessness), with either accommodation being sustained or new accommodation found. 264 cases were closed where the outcome was unknown.

The programme will end in August 2019, with an evaluation of being published later in the autumn.

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme

How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

We have continued to deliver the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (SVPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement scheme (VCRS). Families arriving in Oxford are housed in private sector accommodation in Oxford, mostly let at market rates. We commission Connection Support, refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome to provide a comprehensive support package for the families so that they can settle into Oxford communities well.

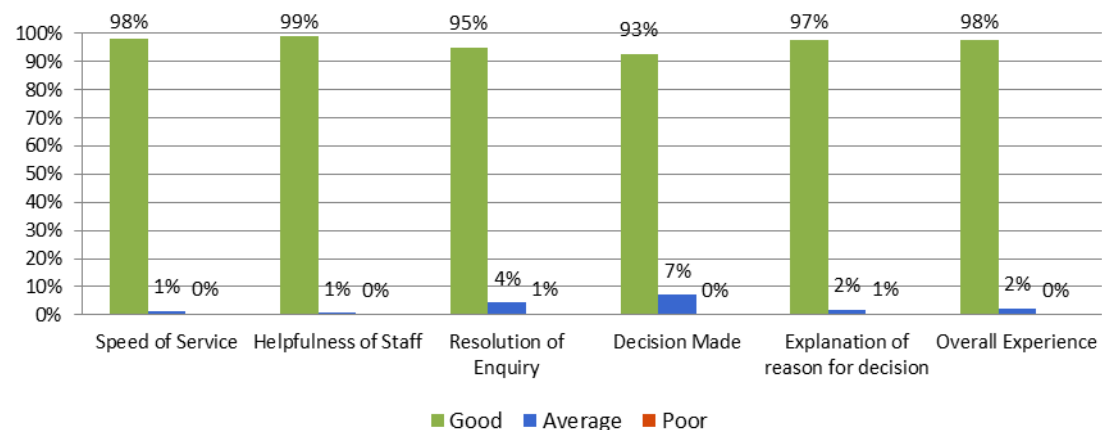
By the end of October 2018, we had successfully resettled 29 vulnerable refugee families – mostly from Syria but also from Iraq and Sudan. In addition, we have worked in partnership with a Community sponsorship group, approved by the Home Office, who welcomed a refugee family in January 2018. This brings the total to 30 families that have been resettled in and around Oxford.

The schemes are entirely funded by central Government.

Customer Feedback

We have asked customers who interact with the Housing Needs team for feedback since January 2015.

In 2018/19, 553 people completed the satisfaction cards. The best rating was for 'Helpfulness of Staff' which was rated as 'Good' 99% of the time.



How did we do in 2018/19? - Housing Needs performance

For further information about the Housing Needs service at Oxford City Council, please visit our website where you can find more in-depth information about what we do <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20010/housing>

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