

Divisions Affected – All

OXFORDSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

4 DECEMBER 2025

PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS DIRECTOR'S GROUP UPDATE

**Report by Caroline Green, Chair of Prevention of Homelessness
Directors Group & Chief Executive (Oxford City Council)**

RECOMMENDATION

The Health and Wellbeing Board is RECOMMENDED to note the report

Executive Summary

1. This report sets out countywide progress over the last six months and priorities in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping across Oxfordshire. It highlights the work being driven by the Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group (PHDG) as the strategic leadership forum for housing, health, and social care partners working together to tackle homelessness. PHDG has been focused on five key priorities over the last six months, aligned to the Countywide Strategy:
 1. Agreeing the future of the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
 2. Improving collaboration between statutory services
 3. Addressing affordable housing supply challenges
 4. Exploring further joined up commissioning of Mental Health and Adult Homeless Pathways
 5. The transformation of the Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance

Background

2. Oxfordshire continues to experience high and rising homelessness pressures, particularly among single adults with complex needs. While rough sleeping numbers have stabilised compared to previous years, the use of temporary accommodation remains at record levels, with many individuals placed in hotels and B&Bs for extended periods. This creates significant challenges for housing authorities and places additional strain on health and social care systems.
3. The Oxfordshire Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was implemented in 2021 for a five-year period, following a feasibility study led by Crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was signed by all Oxfordshire local authorities—Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Cherwell, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire, and West Oxfordshire District Councils—

together with the NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board.

4. The strategy introduced a shared vision and five key priorities focused on prevention, rapid response, person-centred support, timely move-on, and securing the right home in the right place. Set against the backdrop of COVID-19, it built on lessons from the government's Everyone In scheme, which provided self-contained accommodation to those sleeping rough. Furthermore, it responded to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board's Thematic Review of Homelessness (2019), which examined the deaths of nine individuals experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness in 2018-19. This review underscored the need for a system-wide shift in how homelessness is prevented and addressed.
5. Homelessness support services are jointly commissioned through a partnership between the District and City Councils, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board, and the County Council, using a pooled funding arrangement. This commissioning partnership, a key innovation of the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, oversees a delivery partnership of agencies working across Oxfordshire to provide non-statutory homelessness support services for single homeless adults. The services provided include prevention, outreach and supported accommodation. This group of service providers is known as the Alliance, with the organisations listed below.
 - A2Dominon
 - Aspire Oxfordshire
 - Connection Support
 - Elmore Community Services
 - Homeless Oxfordshire
 - St Mungo's

Key updates

Future of the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2021-26)

6. Since 2021, Oxfordshire partners have made significant progress in embedding new approaches, strengthening collaboration, and aligning resources towards prevention and rapid response. The action plan was refreshed earlier this year to ensure it remains responsive to current challenges and emerging needs. In late 2024, a designated officer was appointed to further strengthen governance and drive delivery of the strategy.
7. The current strategy is now in its final year (2026). Despite progress, substantial work remains, and homelessness continues to be a major and complex issue across Oxfordshire and nationally.
8. An additional consideration is Local Government Reorganisation. Any future structure should create opportunities to integrate services further and build a more cohesive approach to tackling homelessness. However, with the new council(s) not fully forming until Vesting Day in 2028, it is essential that work

continues over the next two years, both to reduce homelessness and to prepare for the delivery of homelessness services within the new arrangements.

9. Therefore, the Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group (PHDG) has agreed on the following approach:

- Work to renew the strategy: Partners will review achievements and gaps, set new priorities and an action plan for 2026–2028, and renew the strategy to signal renewed commitment and clarity of purpose.
- Each of the seven partners will then need to consider the new strategy in their relevant governance structure, ensuring the appropriate sign offs.
- Countywide Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): To ensure transparency and measure impact, PHDG has identified and continues to develop a new set of countywide KPIs aligned to the refreshed priorities. These KPIs will track progress on prevention, rough sleeping reduction, accommodation pathways, and tenancy sustainment, enabling partners to monitor outcomes consistently across the system.

Improving Collaboration Across Statutory Services

10. Preventing and reducing homelessness requires a whole-system response that integrates housing, health, and social care. The strategy and PHDG have prioritised strengthening collaboration between statutory services to improve outcomes for single homeless adults with complex needs.

11. At the June PHDG meeting, partners agreed to explore how housing, Adult Social Care (ASC), and health services could work more effectively together. Oxford City Council and ASC undertook joint work to scope opportunities and identify systemic barriers.

12. Complex cases were jointly reviewed in August, involving individuals in temporary accommodation with unmet health or support needs. Common themes amongst those reviewed included:

- Evidence of multi-agency working in almost all cases.
- Mental health issues (psychosis, depression)
- Multiple and complex needs, often linked to substance misuse

13. Despite multi-agency involvement in five of six cases, housing outcomes remained poor in many cases due to:

- Homeless clients having the mental capacity to make relevant decisions but refusing or disengaging from support
- Limited options for accommodation suited to high-support needs
- Frontline officers struggling to communicate across organisations and did not necessarily have detailed knowledge about the role and function of different statutory agencies, resulting in misaligned expectations of follow-up actions and a lack of knowledge about how and when to escalate concerns if necessary.

14. Actions (agreed by PHDG):

- Further joint training for housing, ASC, and health staff to build mutual understanding and align expectations

- Communicate clear escalation routes for complex cases to ensure timely interventions.
- Dedicated resource: Establish a new role that can support multi-agency working, between the housing authorities, ASC and health services, supporting busy frontline workers to navigate the entire system to facilitate better outcomes for homeless clients with multiple needs (funding identified for a one-year pilot).
- Needs review: Oxford City with the support of health and social care partners, review any unmet needs in its temporary accommodation, in order to support PHDGs future planning and influence on what supported accommodation is needed in Oxford, as well as to help inform the design of services provided by other statutory agencies to ensure they are accessible and targeted for homeless people living in temporary housing – such as mental health, and drug and alcohol services.

Affordable Housing Supply Workstreams

15. In December 2024, a Housing Summit was held to explore and address the issue of housing supply across Oxfordshire. Rising numbers of homeless individuals, increasing reliance on temporary accommodation, insufficient affordable homes, and blocked accommodation pathways have created mounting pressures. Senior officers from local authorities (LAs) and Registered Providers (RPs) from across Oxfordshire attended the summit, and subsequently agreed to progress several key supply-related workstreams:

- Enhance collaboration between LAs and RPs
- Strengthen joint working between councils and RPs to enable supply and access to accommodation
- Adopt a countywide approach to land for development
- Map and consider alignment of Section 106 contributions across districts
- Provide wrap-around support for formerly homeless people being rehoused

16. Since the workstreams were identified, steady progress has been made across several priority areas, with positive steps taken to strengthen collaboration and explore new opportunities for housing delivery. Notably, a new Oxfordshire-wide RP Forum has been established, bringing together senior leaders from RPs and LAs. The forum is intended to act as a platform for open, consistent dialogue, enabling shared insight, strategic alignment, and the development of joint solutions. There has also been positive movement in resourcing housing-led services. Oxford City Council is funding a new pilot within the Alliance to provide tailored support for people with lived experience of homelessness who are moving into general needs private and social accommodation to sustain their tenancy. If the pilot proves successful, the model has the potential to be expanded and strengthened through transformation work and the redirection of Alliance resources in future years.

17. While good progress has been made in some areas, other workstreams have proved more challenging to advance, particularly those that rely on specialist skills and dedicated officer time across multiple councils, such as work on Section 106 opportunities and a countywide approach to land. These areas are complex, and organisational capacity constraints have limited momentum.

18. PHDG's focus for the next six months includes:

- Convening the first meeting of the RP Forum on 15 January, with future meetings held twice per year.
- Issuing the draft Housing-Led service specification with providers across the Alliance.
- Unblocking progress on Section 106 alignment and the countywide approach to land.

Increasing joined-up commissioning between providers of supported housing in Oxfordshire

19. Supported housing across Oxfordshire is delivered by a mix of commissioned and non-commissioned providers. Commissioned accommodation includes services jointly commissioned by the County Council and Oxford Health through the Mental Health Pathway (MHP), as well as provision commissioned by the County and City Councils as lead commissioners of the Homelessness Alliance (formerly the Adult Homeless Pathway). In addition to these two pathways, both councils and the district councils commission further accommodation to meet local need.

20. Providers and commissioners of supported accommodation for homeless individuals, and those accommodated due to their mental health, are currently facing rising challenges, including:

- Increasing complexity of clients requiring more than generic support.
- Lack of move-on from accommodation, due to a lack of affordable general needs accommodation in Oxfordshire, creating blockages in the system.

21. The strategic partnership hopes to develop commissioning relationships across organisations further, enabled by the deepening partnership that has been established through the countywide homelessness governance, to improve the accommodation and support offer for all our clients.

22. This approach has added benefit in the context of Local Government Reorganisation. Rather than wait until 2028 to take a joined-up approach to commissioning across the homelessness system, we want to ensure commissioning decisions now are informed by a joined-up cross-system view, helping future-proof commissioning approaches now.

23. This is timely, with commissioners in Oxford Health and the County Council currently making decisions on the future of the MHP, the largest supported accommodation pathway in Oxfordshire, while at the same time early planning is underway about the future of the accommodation offer for the Homelessness Alliance.

24. There is significant overlap in the client groups and current accommodation offer between these two pathways, with many clients in the MHP ready to move on to alternative accommodation, and others in Alliance accommodation with mental health conditions, so a joined-up approach to commissioning should create a better accommodation and support offer that meets needs in Oxfordshire.

25. A cross-Oxford Health, City Council and County Council group is now regularly meeting to oversee this work, reporting to PHDG. Further updates on its topic will be available in future reports.

Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance Transformation

26. The Alliance is finalising specifications to reflect the revision to service design and delivery based on transformation work conducted by review groups this past year. New services will be mobilised as of April 2026. Headline changes to services are:

27. Prevention

- The prevention service will be reframed to offer a more focused and effective offer.
- Clear differentiation between short-term intervention and long-term case work
- This service will operate as a single, county-wide crisis prevention service which is focused on preventing rough sleeping. The service will work with people who are currently in tenancies and those without tenancies, such as 'sofa surfers' and others who are at risk of rough sleeping.
- The service is not intended for people in supported housing, those without recourse to UK public funds, or those groups who can get assistance from more dedicated support options elsewhere (e.g. refugees, people fleeing domestic violence). People seeking support from these groups will be signposted to more appropriate services.
- Families: The service is not intended for families facing homelessness, who should be primarily supported by statutory homelessness services, though any families seeking support will be appropriately signposted as part of the triage and brief intervention element of the service.

28. Outreach

- The service specification is being developed to ensure that a more equitable service is delivered across the county, with different options on delivery models.

29. Somewhere Safe to Stay

- We are increasing capacity within our somewhere safe to stay service and offering more flexibility in how the service operates, in order to maximise its ability to move people quickly off the street.

30. Housing-led support

- The housing-led support service is being further developed to address the significant challenges in finding suitable and affordable move-on across the County, resulting in people staying in supported accommodation for far longer than needed. Individuals who no longer need to live in supported accommodation will be assisted to move on to more suitable independent accommodation, saving funds and increasing capacity in the system. There will be an ongoing support offer for these individuals, to help them sustain their new tenancy, and avoid repeat homelessness.

Financial Implications

31. The delivery of the action plan is dependent on the funding being available from all partners, linked to government announcements on local government funding and specifically homelessness grant funding, expected later in 2025

Legal Implications

32. The report provides a progress report on the multi-agency work being undertaken to address homelessness across Oxfordshire and as such there are no specific legal implications arising from the same.

33. It is worth noting however that, whilst it is not permissible to circumvent the statutory framework for the provision of homelessness services, it is possible to utilise the authority's wider, more general powers to support those with particular vulnerabilities or needs, prevent the development for needs for care and support and promote the general well-being of the local population: for example using the general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011 (s1).

Janice White
Principal Solicitor, ASC and Litigation

Caroline Green
Chair of Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group & Chief Executive (Oxford City Council)

Richard Wood
Housing Strategy and Needs Manager
Housing Services
Oxford City Council
01865 252002
rwood@oxford.gov.uk

Grace Hinde
Oxfordshire Countywide Homelessness Partnership Manager
01865 416861
ghinde@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers: Nil

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