

Divisions Affected – All

OXFORDSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

26 JUNE 2025

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING IN OXFORDSHIRE

**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 provides an update on the ongoing work to address homelessness across Oxfordshire, in a period when the county and the wider country is experiencing rising homelessness and temporary accommodation use. It outlines key developments in service delivery and strategic governance, including recent changes to the Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group (PHDG) and developments with the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The report also highlights progress made in tackling homelessness, identifies ongoing challenges, and updates on the work of the Oxfordshire Homeless Alliance.

Background

2. Homelessness support services are jointly commissioned through a partnership between the District and City Councils, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board, and the County Council, using a pooled funding arrangement.
3. Homelessness and rough sleeping are complex cross system issues. The District and City Councils have statutory responsibility to provide homes for certain homeless people, the County Council and NHS provide care and support services to homeless people who have mental and physical health needs, social care needs, and drug and alcohol dependency. Many homeless people have multiple needs that cut across statutory responsibilities, that requires joint commissioning and a common strategy.
4. This commissioning partnership oversees a delivery partnership of agencies working across Oxfordshire to provide non-statutory homelessness support

services for single homeless adults. The services they provide include prevention, outreach and supported accommodation. This group of service providers is known as **the Alliance**. The organisations that make up the partnership are listed below.

- A2Dominon
- Aspire Oxfordshire
- Connection Support
- Elmore Community Services
- Homeless Oxfordshire
- St Mungo's

5. Statutory homelessness services are provided by the City and District Councils. All eligible homeless households with a connection to Oxfordshire are owed certain homelessness duties by these authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness; and households with children, and for single/ coupled adults who reach a "priority need" threshold, are normally owed an accommodation duty, where temporary accommodation is provided.

Highlighting Data and Trends

6. All local housing authorities in England report data to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) regularly – data in relation to statutory homelessness is reported quarterly, and data on rough sleeping is reported monthly. Data is currently only published (verified) up to December 2024. Alliance providers produce monthly monitoring information for all services on a quarterly basis. Both data provided to MHCLG and Alliance monitoring data and information is used to tell us how we are making progress towards preventing and ending rough sleeping across the County.

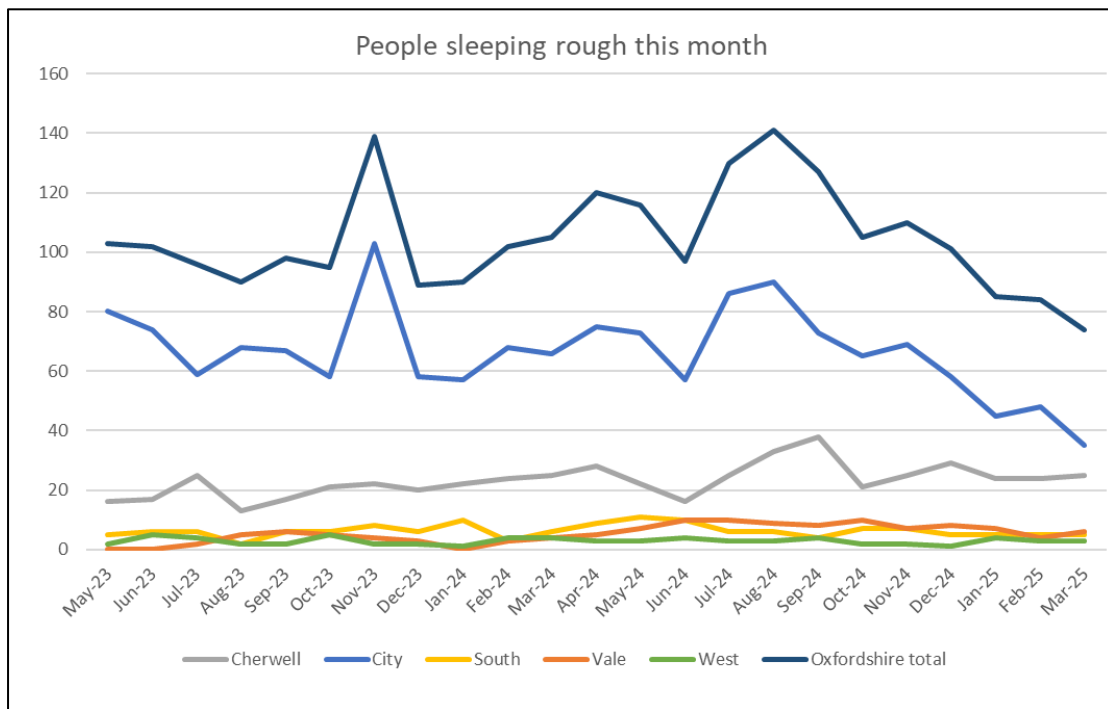


Figure 1

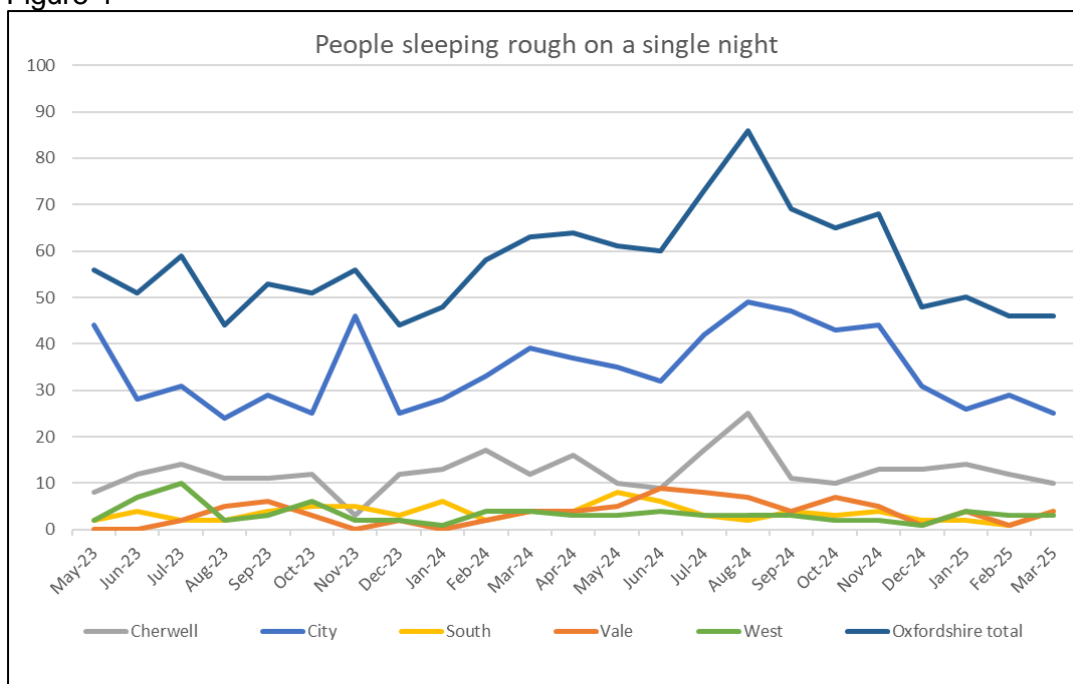


Figure 2

- During the winter months of January to March, there has been a further reduction in the number of persons seen sleeping rough over the month (figure 1), and on a single night (figure 2) overall in Oxfordshire.
- At the end of Q4, 46 persons were estimated to be rough sleeping on a single night across the county, compared to 48 at the end of Q3. The sustained lower number of rough sleepers across the county compared to periods before Q3, is driven by a reduction in numbers in Oxford, where the use of Winter Pressures Funding (WPF) has provided accommodation for long term and returning rough sleepers, and the opening in early

January of Oxford Winter Night Shelter, that provided space for up to 10 individuals per night.

- Numbers in Cherwell has also reduced slightly, whilst Vale of White Horse has seen a small increase in the number of persons rough sleeping on a single night compared to Q3.
- Oxford City continues to see the largest number of persons rough sleeping overall. Oxford City also has the largest proportion of individuals who have been rough sleeping long-term. Cherwell has seen an increase in the number of people returning to rough sleeping over the winter period. At the end of March 2025, Cherwell also had the highest number of people new to rough sleeping in the County.

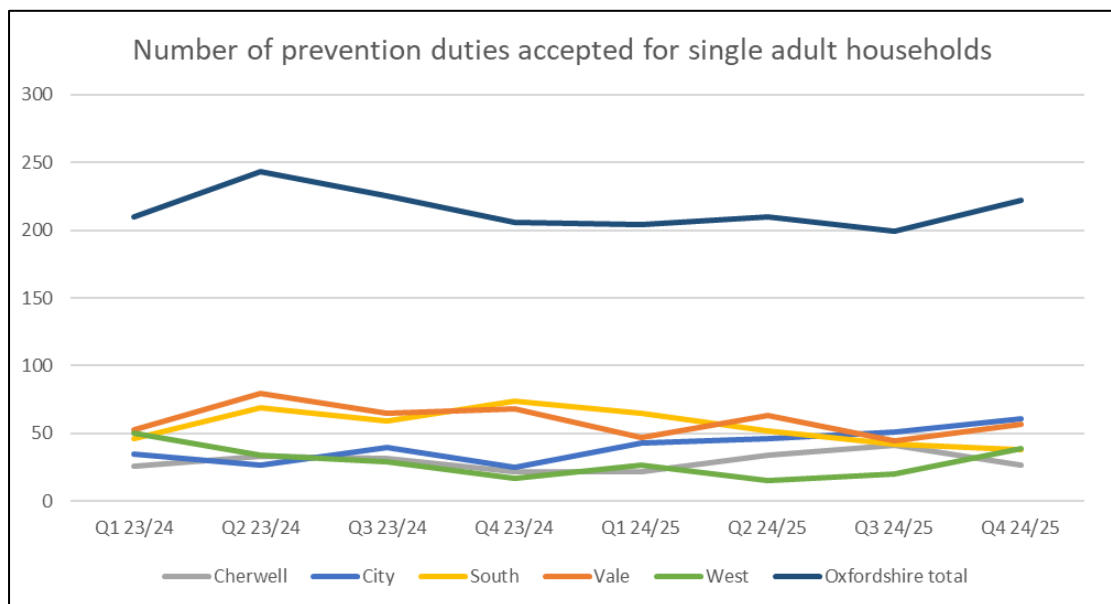


Figure 3

- Turning to statutory homelessness: The number of prevention duties (figure 3) accepted in the County saw an increase in the period January to March 2025, compared to the previous quarter. For this period, the number of prevention duties accepted for single adult households was at its highest level since the period September to December 2023.
- Challenges remain in preventing homelessness for single adult homeless persons. In Q4, 55% of all prevention duties ended successfully (i.e. existing or new accommodation sourced for a period of 6+ months) in the City. This figure was 63% in Cherwell, 56% in South Oxfordshire, and 88% in Vale of White Horse. This is most likely due to the different nature of housing and homelessness in the City, with the City having far greater numbers of people with a history of rough sleeping and more supported accommodation beds, while also having greater demand for one bedroom housing.
- There has been a large rise in temporary accommodation (TA) use in Oxfordshire, and the City and Districts are unable to source enough self-

contained accommodation for need, requiring many households, mostly singles, to live for prolonged periods in hotel and B&B accommodation. This is mostly impacting the City, but Districts also report these pressures; the City has over 150 households in hotel and B&B rooms.

- The increase in hotel and B&B use is creating new challenges, as a large number of single adults with complex and multiple needs are accommodated close together, with the need for the housing authorities to work more closely with Adult Social Care and health to ensure needs are met.

Challenges

7. A number of significant risks and challenges have emerged in the homelessness area over the past year to 18 months. The changing service delivery environment poses significant barriers to implementing the strategy and will require us to adapt and prioritise to best meet these risks.
8. Oxfordshire continues to experience high and rising homelessness levels, and a high temporary accommodation (TA) placement rate, in line with national trends, despite a small fall in rough sleeping numbers. The City and District Councils are taking steps to increase the supply of TA, while also trying to prevent demand and increase move-on. Despite this the councils have limited ability to change the overall rate of homelessness, which is principally driven by the broader economic and social factors, and the high costs of housing, particularly a shortage of affordable homes and prices in the private rented sector. The City and District Councils will continue to be exposed to high levels of demand and rising TA use and cost for the foreseeable future and need to continue to respond at pace.
9. The government has consulted on significant changes to local government funding for homelessness services (Homelessness Prevention Grant). If implemented, these will result in large funding reductions for all of the City and District Councils. This is due to the shift in the main measure of demand from homelessness duties to local benefit claim rates. Whilst designed to target resources to areas of the country with higher levels of deprivation, it does not reflect the particular challenges of places with high housing costs. The City Council has been engaging central government on the effect of these significant changes and seeking to raise awareness to influence governmental policy. This work is also currently funded via specific rough sleeping grants from MHCLG, the levels of these will be determined following the spending review.
10. The government is also in the process of making significant changes to the health system, and the structure of ICBs. This is removing resource from these structures, and is requiring significant transformation, creating some uncertainty.
11. The transformation of our approach to rough sleeping is facing a critical 12 months ahead. We have agreed a new budget and transformation plan for the

Homelessness Alliance for 25/26 to mitigate this risk, which will see fundamental changes to their accommodation and support offer. However, transformation covering six organisations, in a period of high demand, and stretched budgets brings considerable challenges. The government's short-term funding arrangements also pose a risk, and officers continue to engage with the government to advocate for a long-term funding settlement to tackle homelessness.

12. The supply of housing for single adults is insufficient in Oxfordshire. Already, the City and District Councils prioritise one-bedroom social lets to homeless people, care leavers, and those leaving the mental health pathway, but demand far outstrips supply. The private rented sector (PRS) does provide some units for single adults, and the Alliance's transformation aims to support those moving on from supported accommodation into the PRS with ongoing support. However, rental prices in Oxfordshire and the imbalance between supply and demand mean single adults with a history of homelessness can struggle to access accommodation even with support.
13. Local government reorganisation, in whatever form it takes in Oxfordshire provides an opportunity for better alignment between housing, social care and health care. In the short term it is critical that partnership working in this area continues to develop given the growing pressures. The current strategy is up for renewal in 2026, so the partnership will need to explore how we approach our joint strategy work moving forward.

Progress

PHDG Governance

14. The Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group (PHDG) has been in existence for around four years and was set up and came under the governance structure of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB). The governance changed in 2024 to the Health and Wellbeing Board.
15. In December 2024, a paper was submitted to PHDG proposing several changes to the group to enhance its effectiveness and promote interconnectivity across housing, health, public health, and social care, aiming to deliver more joined-up decision-making, cohesive commissioning, and effective service delivery.
16. With one year remaining of the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the increasing pressures on statutory and commissioned services, a strengthened approach to governance was needed to improve cross-system working and ensure the delivery of the objectives set out in the action plan.
17. In April 2025, PHDG was relaunched with an updated terms of reference, clarifying its role as the key interface between housing, health, and adult social care. Its renewed purpose is to provide strategic oversight and leadership to

ensure the transformation of services is integrated and mutually reinforcing across the homelessness system. Key developments include:

- **Leadership appointments:** Caroline Green (Oxford City Council Chief Executive) has been appointed as Chair, with Stephen Chandler (Oxfordshire County Council Deputy Chief Executive) as Deputy Chair. Caroline and Stephen's leadership profile brings opportunities to strengthen links with wider system partnerships, including key health and care interfaces.
- **Refreshed membership:** The group's membership has been reviewed to ensure continued representation from housing authority leaders, alongside strategic leads in health, public health, adult social care, children's services, and other key agencies.
- **Enhanced leadership role:** PHDG's work plan is focused on the strategic barriers to achieving the priorities of the countywide strategy, and with a clear focus on delivering key items of work aligned to the strategy.
- **Planning and delivery of BCF priorities:** The group is now designated as the planning and delivery forum for Better Care Fund (BCF) funding priorities.
- **Accountability for strategic implementation:** PHDG is responsible for driving forward key service improvement initiatives, including the Housing Summit Action Plan and the Countywide Homelessness Strategy, along with its associated action plans.
- **Alignment with the Joint Management Group (JMG):** Improved interface with JMG, which continues to provide operational leadership and drive the transformation of adult homelessness services, including through the Alliance model.

Housing Summit

18. In September and December 2024, two countywide officer housing summits were held, bringing together partners from across housing, health, and adult social care to explore key issues impacting homelessness across the county. These summits aimed to foster collaboration, identify shared challenges, and shape a collective response to improving housing pathways and support for people experiencing homelessness.
19. As a result of these discussions, several workstreams have been established to drive forward priority areas of action. Key priorities include establishing a strategic forum between councils and registered providers to drive joint solutions, exploring ways to increase housing supply for single adults, optimising the use of land assets, and addressing planning barriers.

20. Further priorities include adopting a strategic approach to land use by mapping underutilised public sites for potential development, aligning Section 106 contributions to support priority housing needs, and opportunity to refine planning policies (particularly for houses in multiple occupation) to enable greater flexibility for homelessness accommodation. Crucially, the work also emphasises the importance of wraparound support for formerly homeless individuals, ensuring tenancy sustainment through coordinated health, social care, and housing-led services.
21. To ensure these workstreams translate into meaningful action, PHDG will provide oversight and accountability, ensuring alignment with broader objectives and fostering collaboration across local authorities and partners.

Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan Progress

22. The Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan was revised earlier this year to realign priorities and reshape existing actions, ensuring they are better suited to the current landscape and more effectively focused on addressing homelessness across Oxfordshire.
23. The updated action plan is structured around five core areas that guide homelessness priorities across Oxfordshire: governance, commissioning, prevention, accommodation, and a person-centred approach.
24. The action plan will be continuously updated to reflect ongoing work across the county and will be reported regularly to both the Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group (PHDG) and the Countywide Homelessness Steering Group (CHSG). There is a strong collective commitment to driving progress.
25. With one year remaining on the current strategy, notable progress has been achieved, but further work is still required to achieve the strategy objectives.. Given the context of local government reorganisation, the future direction of the strategy and its next steps will be a key focus for the Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group (PHDG).

Improving Collaboration Between Statutory Services

26. Preventing and reducing homelessness requires a whole-system response that recognises the interconnected nature of housing, health, and social care needs. A key challenge facing statutory services—particularly local authority housing teams, health services, and Adult Social Care (ASC)—is how to improve collaboration and joint working in a way that delivers more effective, person-centred support.
27. Progress has been made in fostering better joint working, such as through the Out of Hospital project work, with embedded social workers in the Alliance service.
28. The increasing and evolving forms of homelessness in the county necessitate further efforts to align services and enhance collaboration. In particular, rising numbers of complex and dual diagnosis homeless clients in temporary accommodation throughout Oxfordshire and ensuring the right services are

supporting them. There is a significant opportunity to foster greater cooperation, both strategically and operationally, across these services.

29. This approach is central to our shared strategic ambition to prevent and combat homelessness, while also relieving the considerable pressure placed on housing, health and care systems by repeated and avoidable homelessness.
30. In recognition of this, this work has been identified as a priority for PHDG in 2025/26. Specifically, to agree and oversee a body of work that will support improved collaboration between statutory services and further progress towards a more joined-up and preventative approach to homelessness.

Alliance Transformation

31. The Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance is undertaking a transformation plan to enable service-level improvements and delivery, in line with our strategy. The PHDG will play a key role in overseeing this transition, ensuring the changes enhance the effectiveness of homelessness prevention efforts across the county.
32. The Alliance's priorities for the duration of its contract have been informed by:
 - Work of review groups carried out in 2024.
 - Oxfordshire's Countywide Homeless Strategy
 - Learning from Homeless Mortality Reviews
 - Data and related conversations as part of service monitoring

The Alliance's main areas of focus will be the development of a housing-led model with a lens on the following areas: prevention, outreach, Somewhere Safe to Stay, and specialist-supported accommodation services. These have been assigned task and finish groups to address the key priorities for each area, as outlined below:

- Prevention: Re-modelling prevention services by working towards providing a tenancy sustainment and floating support offer in line with a Housing Led approach.
- Outreach: Operate a high-quality and consistent outreach service across the County, able to respond to the diverse needs and challenges faced by clients.
- Somewhere Safe to Stay: Increase the Alliance's somewhere safe to stay offer so that we move people off the streets and stop them from sleeping rough as quickly as possible.
- Housing Led Support: Reduce the number of Alliance's generic supported housing units and redistribute funding either into specialist supported accommodation or into an increased tenancy support service to stop repeat homelessness.
- Move on options and private rented sector: Further current work reducing the length of stay of people in supported housing and encouraging people to move into PRS where possible, and diversifying move-on options by

upskilling the Alliance workforce to build confidence and knowledge around PRS and move-on.

- Housing First: Ensure the adoption of a high-fidelity Housing First model across all its Housing First properties and increase the number of Housing First properties across the county.
- Supported Accommodation Services: Reduce the number of generic supported housing units and identify and develop more specialist supported accommodation based on identified need.

Financial Implications

33. 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

34. The report provides a progress report on the work being undertaken to address homelessness across Oxfordshire and as such there are no specific legal implications arising from the same.
35. Nonetheless it is worth noting that, as stated above, District and City Councils have statutory responsibilities to provide homelessness and housing advice services and it is not permissible to circumvent the statutory framework for the provision of such services. It is possible however to utilise the authority's wider powers to support those with particular vulnerabilities or needs, and to support and promote the general well-being of the local population: for example, the prevention powers of S2 Care Act 2014, the powers as to improvement of public health of s2B (1) NHS Act 1996 and the general power of S1 Localism Act 2011.

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

Annex: Appendix 1 Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

Background papers: Nil

Richard Smith
Head of Housing
Housing Services

Cherwell District Council
01295 221640
Richard.Smith@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

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

June 2025