



## ***Notice of a Meeting***

**People Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday, 19 March 2026 at 10.00 am  
Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND**

**These proceedings are open to the public**

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#).  
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

### **Membership**

**Chair:** Councillor Ian Snowdon  
**Deputy Chair:** Councillor Toyah Overton

**Councillors:** James Barlow                      Judith Edwards                      Georgina Heritage  
Will Boucher-Giles                      Lee Evans  
Imade Edosomwan                      Rebekah Fletcher

**Date of Next Meeting:** *4 June 2026*

### **For more information about this Committee please contact:**

Committee Officer: *Scrutiny Team*  
Email: *scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk*

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

March 2026

## What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee focuses on the following key areas: (a) all services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to adults in potential need of social care; (b) statutory functions in relation to, adult social care and safeguarding. Includes public health matters as they relate to adults where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (c) Council educational support for adults with learning difficulties

## How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am 4 working day before the date of the meeting.**

## About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 69 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 763,200 residents.

These include:

|                  |                      |                       |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| schools          | social & health care | libraries and museums |
| the fire service | roads                | trading standards     |
| land use         | transport planning   | waste management      |

Each year the Council manages £1.2 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 10 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

## About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

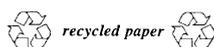
- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

## What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets up to 4 times a year or more. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

**If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting**

**A hearing loop is available at County Hall.**



# AGENDA

## 1. Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.

## 2. Declaration of Interests

See guidance note on the back page.

## 3. Minutes (Pages 7 - 16)

The Committee is recommended to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026 and to receive information arising from them.

## 4. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting, i.e. Monday, 16 March 2026.

Requests should be submitted to the Scrutiny Officer at [scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

## 5. Domestic Abuse - Safe Accommodation Provision in Oxfordshire (Pages 17 - 64)

Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet member for Public Health & Inequalities, Ansaf Azhar, Director of Public Health and Communities, Serna Abel, Interim Head of Public Health Programmes & Public Health Principal (Domestic Abuse), and Shajaat Hussain, Service Manager for Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, have been invited to present a report on Domestic Abuse - Safe Accommodation Provision in Oxfordshire.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

## 6. Committee Forward Work Plan (Pages 65 - 68)

The Committee is recommended to **AGREE** its work programme for forthcoming meetings, having heard any changes from previous iterations, and taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report.

## 7. Committee Action and Recommendation Tracker (Pages 69 - 72)

The Committee is recommended to **NOTE** the progress of previous recommendations and actions arising from previous meetings, having raised any questions on the contents.

## **Councillors declaring interests**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

### **Members Code – Other registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships
- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.

- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

### **Members Code – Non-registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

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## PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Thursday, 15 January 2026 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.15 pm.

**Present:**

**Voting Members:**

Councillor Ian Snowdon - in the Chair  
Councillor Toyah Overton (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor James Barlow  
Councillor Will Boucher-Giles  
Councillor Imade Edosomwan  
Councillor Lee Evans  
Councillor Rebekah Fletcher  
Councillor Laura Gordon  
Councillor Georgina Heritage

**Officers:**

Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services  
Isabel Rockingham, Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well  
Bhavna Taank, Head of Joint Commissioning – Live Well  
Jordan Marsh, Commissioning Officer  
Ben Piper, Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer

*The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.*

### 1/26 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Edwards, substituted by Cllr Gordon, and from Cllr Bearder, Cabinet member for Adults.

### 2/26 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(Agenda No. 2)

Cllr Fletcher declared a non-pecuniary interest, that her mother was a full-time unpaid carer, and that she and her wife both had caring duties.

### 3/26 **MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 06 November 2025, were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate record, subject to the correction of a typographical error on page 8, about the spelling on “approved”.

#### **4/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

#### **5/26 OXFORDSHIRE UNPAID CARERS STRATEGY**

(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee invited Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, Isabel Rockingham, Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well, and Jordan Marsh, Commissioning Officer, to present a report on the Oxfordshire Unpaid Carers Strategy.

The Director of Adult Social Services and the Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well presented a summary on the Oxfordshire Unpaid Carers Strategy. The Director emphasised the crucial importance of supporting unpaid carers and explained that recent efforts had made their support a system-wide responsibility across Oxfordshire. The Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well outlined the key points of the report, noting that unpaid carers contributed the equivalent of around 7.9 billion hours of care, which was vital to the health and social care system.

However, the Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well set out that fewer people were self-identifying as carers, making it harder for the Council to offer necessary support. The Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well stressed that the Council's statutory duties under the Care Act required assessment and support for all known unpaid carers. Strategic priorities were highlighted, including better identification of carers, improved access to information and guidance, and personalised support plans, all aimed at helping older people live independently at home.

*Cllr Boucher-Giles joined the meeting at this stage.*

Following the presentation, members engaged in an extended discussion with officers exploring the challenges faced by unpaid carers and the effectiveness of current support arrangements. A strong theme throughout the exchanges was the difficulty in reliably identifying carers across the county. Officers explained that while hospitals were a common route for recognition, increasing emphasis had been placed on primary care settings. Work with GP practices had helped encourage clinicians to flag unpaid carers on patient records, despite longstanding problems caused by incompatible health and social care systems. Carers Oxfordshire focused primarily on adults, but younger carers were usually identified through schools, health contacts or self-referral and were then supported by the children's team, which worked with families to assess need and coordinate tailored assistance.

Members highlighted residents' concerns about navigating the congestion charge exemptions for unpaid carers. Examples were shared of older carers who struggled with digital systems or were unsure whether they were eligible, particularly if they lived with the person for whom they cared. Officers recognised these concerns and stressed the importance of effective communication, between the Council and unpaid carers. Although many carers had been supported in the lead-up to the scheme's introduction, the system inevitably relied on people coming forward. Providers such

as Carers Oxfordshire were kept informed so that advice and signposting were consistent but officers accepted that more work was needed to ensure carers felt confident about entitlements and understood how to access them.

Questions were raised by members about how the Council responded when a person's care needs escalated beyond what family members or friends could reasonably provide. Officers described the coordinated approach already in place for those with significant health conditions, which involved multidisciplinary oversight through health and social care teams. Deterioration in need typically prompted a referral into adult social care, where a full Care Act assessment would determine what additional support was required for both the individual and the carer. Contingency planning formed a routine part of assessments, especially for people with learning disabilities, ensuring that arrangements were in place if the primary carer suddenly became unable to continue.

Members reflected on the fact that many unpaid carers did not recognise themselves as such and therefore remained unaware that they could ask for help. Questions were raised about misinformation in the community, including incorrect assumptions about council tax reductions. Officers acknowledged that, although online resources and local directories had been improved, awareness still varied widely. Increased work with GPs and health partners remained a priority, as did broadening outreach. However, Officers accepted that progress depended on making information easier to find and understand, particularly for those who were digitally excluded.

The discussion broadened into how support differed across age groups, genders and ethnic backgrounds. Officers emphasised that caring responsibilities could be influenced by cultural expectations, which made self-identification less likely for some ethnic minority groups. To tackle this, the Council had begun working with trusted community leaders on targeted communication campaigns aimed at encouraging people to recognise their caring role and seek support earlier. While the statutory offer acted as a baseline, services aimed to be as personalised as possible to respond to each carer's circumstances.

Members were keen to understand how effectively GP practices supported unpaid carers, especially those who regularly visited surgeries but did not know where to go for advice. Officers noted that a GP lead, Michelle Brennan, had helped champion better recording of carers on practice systems, and that the Council had reviewed GP websites to ensure the presence of clear information about Carers Oxfordshire. Printed materials remained important for residents who were less comfortable online, and, while improvements had been made, officers agreed that further steps were required to reduce inconsistency between practices.

The different experiences of rural and urban carers were also explored. Rural carers often faced practical constraints such as limited transport and longer travel distances, which could make it harder to attend support groups. Officers highlighted that commissioned services operated countywide and that telephone advice from Carers Oxfordshire offered an accessible alternative for those who could not travel. New support groups were emerging, though coverage remained uneven. Ensuring rural GP practices had strong information and signposting processes was seen as especially important, given that carers in remote areas frequently interacted with their

local surgery. The Council continued to gather feedback from carers to identify gaps and improve the reach of services.

Members sought clarity on how the forthcoming Carers Oxfordshire contract aimed to improve the overall offer. Officers explained that the new arrangements would introduce a carers strain index to help identify people in greatest need of respite or targeted support, shifting the service from a reactive model to one based on early intervention. Better use of data and stronger collaboration with health partners and the voluntary sector would help ensure that carers were identified when they first interacted with services. The contract was designed to evolve over its ten-year duration, allowing it to adapt to changing needs through regular consultation with carers.

Hospital discharge was another area where members shared concerns raised by residents. It was reported that carers often felt excluded from decision-making and were not always given the information they needed when someone returned home from hospital. Officers acknowledged this problem, noting that it had also been highlighted by Healthwatch. In response, a new patient-discharge leaflet had been produced collaboratively with health partners to ensure carers received consistent guidance. Additional measures, such as carers ID cards and flags on GP and hospital systems, were intended to support better identification and engagement. Staff training and the role of carers champions in adult social care were helping embed a culture in which carers' insights were recognised and valued.

Members explored how young carers were identified and supported, noting that their needs differed substantially from those of adult carers. Officers described the referral process, with schools, families and self-referrals acting as the main routes into the system. The children's team conducted family-based needs assessments, which could result in support such as help in school, access to after-school clubs or links with peer support groups. The approach aimed to be personalised, ensuring that each young carer's circumstances and pressures were properly understood and addressed.

The Committee considered whether surveys remained an effective way to gather carers' views. Officers explained that, although surveys were regularly used, response rates tended to be low and often reflected the views of the same group of registered carers. Many carers were simply too busy to complete lengthy questionnaires, and the Council wanted to avoid adding to their burden. It was felt that more useful insights often came through direct conversations, focus groups and partnership forums, which allowed for richer and more representative feedback. Officers acknowledged that balancing the need for data with the realities of carers' time pressures remained a challenge.

Questions were raised about discretionary funding and whether unpaid carers could benefit from schemes similar to the Blue Light card used by paid emergency and social care staff. Officers clarified that the Blue Light card was a national programme restricted to paid professionals, although attempts had been made in the past to include unpaid carers. Oxfordshire County Council currently offered discretionary payments of up to £300 per carer, which could be used flexibly for activities or items that improved wellbeing. Options such as the national Carers UK card, which offered

some discounts, were under consideration, though the Council already exceeded statutory expectations with its discretionary payments.

Members also asked how the Council assured the quality of commissioned services for unpaid carers and how feedback was gathered directly. Officers described the contract management process, which included regular performance meetings and discussions informed by carers' groups, surveys and ongoing engagement. Pilot initiatives, such as peer support groups in community hospitals, had provided convenient opportunities for carers to share experiences and shape future improvements. The Council aimed to build feedback mechanisms that were accessible, meaningful and capable of influencing service development.

Finally, members raised concerns that many support groups and activities were scheduled at times that clashed with caring responsibilities, such as mealtimes or bedtime routines. Officers recognised the issue and noted that while some carers could attend daytime sessions, others needed greater flexibility. The discretionary payment enabled carers to choose support that worked for them, but feedback on timing would be shared with Carers Oxfordshire to ensure future planning better reflected carers' availability.

The cessation of some Age UK Oxfordshire home-support services was also discussed. Officers clarified that these services had not been commissioned by the County Council and were not statutory care. Since the cessation of Age UK's support there had not been a significant increase in referrals, suggesting limited direct impact. The Council continued to distinguish between statutory responsibilities and wider wellbeing support, using contract reviews and partnership engagement to monitor any emerging gaps and respond where appropriate.

The Committee **AGREED** to recommendations under the following headings:

- That the Council works with the newly commissioned partner to review the timings of the support on offer, to ensure support is available outside of main caring duty times and consider what asynchronous support could be offered in addition.
- That the Council gives further consideration to the use of the Carers ID card and its participation in lifestyle offer schemes, and reports back to the Committee the rationale for joining or not joining such schemes.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- The Director agreed to check and clarify the requirements for unpaid carers to receive congestion charge exemption, following reports of inconsistent application, and to liaise with the relevant team.
- The Council would revisit GP practices to ensure they were effectively reaching out to all potential unpaid carers, including checking for physical leaflets and information, especially for those not using computers.

- Check the Carers Oxfordshire website was working correctly was raised, with a specific issue about broken links to support groups.
- It was agreed that data from the new Carers Strain Index, once available, would be brought back to the Committee for review and discussion.

*The Committee adjourned at 11:15, and reconvened at 11:20*

## **6/26 SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT HOUSING**

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee invited Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, Bhavna Taank, Head of Joint Commissioning – Live Well, and Jordan Marsh, Commissioning Officer, to present a report on Supported Independent housing.

The Head of Joint Commissioning - Live Well summarised the supported independent living report, highlighting current services for adults aged 18–65 with learning disabilities and autism. She noted challenges, including insufficient specialist accommodation and a fragmented provider market, but described ongoing improvements such as a strengthened provider framework and greater involvement of people with lived experience. Strategic priorities include expanding support for complex needs, increasing local provision for young adults, and reducing out-of-county placements. The Director added that, although Oxfordshire had been successful in supporting people at home, there remained a need for more specialist supported living units and continued strategic focus to address this gap.

Following the presentation, members held an extended discussion with officers that explored the cost, capacity, and operation of supported living services. The conversation began with concerns about overall value for money, given that the service's £56 million budget equates to nearly £86,000 per service user. Officers explained that many supported living residents have highly complex needs, requiring intensive levels of support that inevitably drive costs.

The Director noted that, in practice, delivering this provision in-house would likely be even more expensive because of staffing requirements. She acknowledged that the Council had not always managed the provider market as effectively in earlier years but emphasised that recent work had strengthened frameworks, set clearer expectations, and improved consistency across providers. She also stressed that every out-of-county placement was reviewed carefully, with the Council seeking local options wherever feasible.

Members then turned to whether the primary barrier to reducing out-of-county placements was the availability of suitable housing or the right support packages. Officers explained that, while both elements matter, the more significant constraint was the shortage of appropriate properties, particularly for people with the highest levels of need. New complex-needs accommodation was being developed in Witney, Faringdon, and Chalgrove, and the provider framework already included specialist organisations able to deliver the care required. As a result, the main bottleneck lay in securing and adapting buildings, rather than in accessing support providers.

Discussion moved to how the Council planned for young people transitioning from children's services to adult supported living, given the small but highly individualised nature of the cohort. Officers described a transition process that began at age 16, supported by link workers who assessed needs early and work with families to plan ahead. In the most complex cases, the Council collaborated with Homes England to obtain capital funding for bespoke properties. Although such cases were few in number, they represented disproportionately high costs. To understand future demand, the Council had commissioned a housing survey overlaying demographic data to forecast the need for specialist accommodation over the next decade. The Director observed that the process was complicated by the involvement of five district councils and that future local government reorganisation could streamline this work significantly.

Members also raised concerns about the challenges faced by residents when multiple teams and agencies must work together to deliver adaptations and support. One example highlighted the difficulty of coordinating the housing occupational therapy team, the children's disability service, private sector housing functions, and district council disabled-facilities processes. Officers recognised these issues and noted that, while working relationships with districts were constructive, the current arrangements were inherently fragmented and often slow. A unitary structure, they suggested, would remove many of these barriers and make the system easier for families to navigate.

Another point of discussion focused on how the Council gathers feedback from people using supported living services. Officers described several mechanisms designed to capture meaningful perspectives from those with lived experience. The Council commissioned My Life My Choice to run self-advocacy groups and carry out unannounced quality checks, ensuring that individuals' voices informed assessments of provider performance. The Learning Disabilities Improvement Board and the Oxford Family Support Network also offered regular insights from both service users and their families. In response to earlier feedback, the Council was re-establishing a specialist learning-disability team to strengthen reviews and improve support planning. Officers emphasised that people with lived experience frequently identified issues that professionals might have overlooked, making their involvement central to improving service quality.

The Committee next explored whether the Council provided assistance to families wishing to visit relatives placed in supported living outside Oxfordshire. Officers explained that financial support for travel was not normally offered. In most cases, decisions about out-of-county placements were made jointly by the individual and their family, and, when such choices were made, the expectation was that travel arrangements fell to those involved. The Council sought to provide in-county options wherever possible but ultimately respected the choices people made about where they wished to live.

Members also discussed the composition of the supported living provider market. Officers confirmed that the framework was open to both private companies and charitable or voluntary organisations through a full tender and vetting process. There was a healthy mix of provider types, and all must meet the same quality requirements and were paid at identical rates, preventing any premium pricing by private

organisations. People with lived experience were involved directly in the vetting of providers to ensure appropriateness and quality.

The final area of discussion centred on workforce pay. Officers confirmed that, as part of strategic contract reviews, the Council checked that all supported living staff receive at least the Oxford Living Wage<sup>1</sup> or the real Living Wage<sup>2</sup>. Procurement teams request evidence of compliance, and the wage level was considered affordable within the Council's fee structure. Officers regularly reviewed job advertisements to monitor pay levels and believed the framework now provided fair and equitable funding, above the national living wage and aligned with Oxford City standards. They noted that this marked a clear improvement on previous years.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- That user feedback and lived experiences, including input from people with learning disabilities and their families, would be brought to the Committee in future meetings.
- The Director agreed to provide a breakdown of the 58 supported living framework partners, specifying which were private and which were voluntary sector organisations.

## **7/26 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN** (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **NOTED** the forward work plan and considered a range of topics for future scrutiny.

Members proposed examining the support available to veterans as they transition to civilian life, with a focus on mental health. The interaction between transport management and adult social care was raised, alongside the need to explore the links between climate change and health, such as the impact of flooding and heatwaves on residents' wellbeing.

The Committee agreed to revisit the Carers Strain Index, including the lived experiences of carers, and requested a focused item on the Oxfordshire Way strategy and its implementation. An update on the transformation programme following the CQC report was requested.

Community cohesion was highlighted, with a suggestion to understand localities work, the role of immigration teams, and public health initiatives such as the Marmot approach. Members also sought updates on the Connect to Work programme, the CQC improvement programme, the development of neighbourhood health, community resilience, social prescribing, and medical equipment supply.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/living-wage/oxford-living-wage>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....

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## People Overview and Scrutiny Committee 19 March 2026

### Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Provision in Oxfordshire

#### Report by Director of Public Health

#### RECOMMENDATION

##### The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

1. Note Oxfordshire County Council's statutory responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, including the duty to provide safe accommodation for victim-survivors of domestic abuse; and
2. Note the role of the commissioned Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS) in meeting these duties and supporting the delivery of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025–28.

#### Executive Summary

3. Oxfordshire County Council has a legal responsibility under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to ensure that safe accommodation is available for victim-survivors of domestic abuse. These duties are delivered through ODAS, delivered by A2Dominion since 2018 (current contract 2023-2028) and guided by the county's Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025-2028.
4. Current provision includes refuge accommodation and Places of Safety (POS) delivered by A2Dominion, with specialist therapeutic support for children provided by SAFE!.
5. Demand for safe accommodation continues to rise with increased complexity of need and service utilisation is impacted by effective housing move-on pathways. Oversight of the system is maintained by the Safe Accommodation Working Group (SAWG), which reports directly to the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board (ODASB).

#### Statutory Duties and Local Approach

6. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires Oxfordshire County Council to assess local need and ensure safe accommodation for people experiencing domestic abuse and their children. This duty is delivered through the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025–28, overseen by the ODASB. The Strategy sets out a whole-system approach in which safe accommodation is understood not just as a physical place but as the

combination of safety, specialist support and pathways that enable recovery. It identifies refuge, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes and move-on housing as essential elements of this system.

7. To meet these duties, the Council commissions refuge and dispersed accommodation through ODAS, jointly funded by the County Council and district councils. District councils also provide sanctuary schemes and support housing pathways, reflecting the Strategy's emphasis on partnership and coordinated delivery across local authorities.
8. The Council reports annually to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on its activity, Domestic Abuse Grant expenditure and outcomes for victim-survivors accessing safe accommodation.

### **Service Delivery Model (ODAS)**

9. ODAS provides a trauma-informed, inclusive and countywide offer aligned with the Strategy's four pillars: Prevention, Provision, Pursuing and Partnership, and is key driver of the Provision offer.
10. The service provides a wide range of practical, emotional and therapeutic support for people fleeing domestic abuse, designed to meet immediate needs while also helping individuals and families recover and move forward. Alongside safe refuge and POS, staff work closely with adults and children to offer consistent one-to-one support, trauma-informed counselling and group-based interventions, helping people make sense of their experiences and rebuild confidence. Practical support is a core part of the service, including help with housing and resettlement, benefits and financial stability, GP and dental registration, school placements, legal advice and immigration issues.
11. Families are also supported with everyday essentials such as food through local arrangement with foodbanks, clothing, bedding, household items and white goods, reducing financial pressure at a time of crisis and allowing people to focus on safety and recovery.
12. Children and young people receive specialist, child-centred support that recognises the impact of domestic abuse on their wellbeing and development. This includes therapeutic one-to-one work, group activities and play-based interventions, as well as practical help to ensure children are connected with health visitors, schools, early years provision and specialist services where needed. Staff create opportunities for children to experience normality and enjoyment through creative activities, outdoor play, baking, trips and seasonal events, helping them feel safe, supported and valued. Improvements to children's spaces within accommodation, alongside structured activities, help create environments where children can express themselves and begin to recover from trauma.

13. The service is inclusive and responsive to different experiences of abuse, including support for male survivors, people with disabilities, older adults, and those with complex needs such as mental ill-health, homelessness or insecure immigration status. Male survivors are supported through safe accommodation where appropriate, counselling, peer and group support, advocacy and resettlement into longer-term housing, ensuring they are not excluded from help. For people with complex or overlapping needs, staff work closely with health, social care, housing, police and voluntary sector partners, providing coordinated safety planning, advocacy and ongoing support that adapts as circumstances change.
14. Strong links with local communities help reduce isolation and support recovery. People are encouraged and supported to access community groups, English language classes, wellbeing activities, faith-based support and local services, alongside organised social opportunities that foster connection and mutual support.
15. Together, these practical, therapeutic and relational elements within safe accommodation help people move from crisis toward greater stability, independence and long-term safety, ensuring that support addresses not only immediate risk but also the wider factors that help individuals and families rebuild their lives.

## **Access and triage**

16. The Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline operates Monday to Friday and provides a key access point. The Helpline supports early identification, risk assessment, safety planning and navigation to appropriate support, including refuge or POS where required. ODAS operates within the county's tiered response to domestic abuse, supporting those at medium risk, and working alongside Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the high-risk Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (IDVA) for high-risk cases. This integrated model and assessment of risk aligns with the Strategy's commitment to ensuring the right support at the right time across agencies.

## **Safe Accommodation Offer**

17. ODAS provides two forms of safe accommodation (appendix a):
  - Refuge accommodation for women with or without children, offering longer-term, supported accommodation to enable stabilisation and recovery. There are two refuges made of 16 units in Oxfordshire.
  - Places of Safety (POS), providing short-term, emergency accommodation for adults of any gender at immediate risk, including people with pets or needs that cannot be met in a communal refuge setting. There are 5 Units; a mixture of 3 houses and 2 flats in Oxfordshire.
18. District councils complement this offer through commissioning sanctuary schemes (allowing victim-survivors to use safety measures to remain in their

own homes) and housing pathways, supporting a coordinated approach to safety and move-on.

## Demand, Capacity and Performance

19. All households entering refuge or POS are issued with a six-month licence. Where suitable move-on accommodation is unavailable, or where immigration or support needs require additional time, licences may be extended at ODAS' discretion. While necessary to maintain safety, extended stays can reduce system flow and limit availability for new referrals.

20. In the past year, there have been a few examples where capacity pressures have been exacerbated where clients were mis-advised by housing professional to remain in accommodation beyond the notice period due to being on non-excluded licences. This resulted in bed-blocking, increased distress for residents and staff, and reduced service throughput, limiting the service's ability to support other victim-survivors of domestic abuse. This has since been addressed between ODAS and District Housing colleagues.

| Numbers supported in refuge and POS |           |           |                |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| Provision                           | 2023/24   | 2024/25   | 2025/26 (Q1-3) |
| Places of Safety                    | 12        | 8         | 9              |
| Refuge                              | 25        | 52        | 22             |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>37</b> | <b>60</b> | <b>31</b>      |

## Referral Volumes and Access to Accommodation

21. Overall referral volumes to ODAS remain consistent and high, with a growing proportion of contacts relating specifically to refuge or POS enquiries in 2025/26. The increase to 10.4% of all referrals in 2025/26 (Q1-Q3) indicates rising demand for safe accommodation, alongside increasing awareness of the service.

| ODAS Key Performance Indicators       |         |         |                 |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| KPI                                   | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 (Q1-Q3) |
| Total ODAS referrals                  | 2,596   | 2,462   | 1,942           |
| Refuge & POS referrals                | 206     | 168     | 202             |
| Refuge/POS as % of all referrals      | 7.9%    | 6.8%    | 10.4%           |
| Individuals supported in Refuge & POS | 37      | 60      | 31              |

## Referral Sources

22. Self-referrals remain the largest single source of enquiries, accounting for 43% of all refuge and POS referrals over the period. Self-referrals frequently come because of professionals signposting individuals to the service. Referrals from other domestic abuse services out of area form the second largest cohort. Referrals from housing services, while smaller in number, reflect acute

housing risk and place additional pressure on temporary accommodation pathways.

| Referral sources to Refuge & Places of Safety |         |         |                 |       |
|---|---------|---------|-----------------|-------|
| Referral Source                               | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 (Q1-Q3) | Total |
| Self  | 41      | 46      | 59              | 146   |
| Non-A2D Domestic Violence Services            | 15      | 15      | 27              | 57    |
| Non-A2D Housing                               | 7       | 16      | 13              | 36    |
| Children's Services                           | 6       | 13      | 8               | 27    |
| Health Services                               | 11      | 4       | 1               | 16    |
| Police  | 5       | 4       | 6               | 15    |
| Other / mixed sources                         | 16      | 12      | 14              | 42    |

### Declined Referrals and Access Barriers

23. Not all referrals result in placement within refuge or POS. Many rejections from the client are either because accommodation is no longer required or alternative accommodation has been sought. In terms of the client being rejected, this is due to the client requiring accommodation with greater support needs than can be provided within refuge or POS. An example of high risk being if they have high mental health needs and this is linked to suicidal ideation, a refuge with 24-hour support would be more suitable in this instance and a referral would be made. Over the past year, clients with high complex needs that have moved into refuge/POS, has resulted in higher levels of support needed. Whilst support staff try to mitigate risks, there have been clients who have had to be moved on due to breaches of their license agreements and not adhering to refuge rules to protect all residents safety.

24. A lack of capacity refers to instances where ODAS is unable to offer accommodation because the required number of bed spaces is unavailable and no suitable alternative flat is available at the time of referral. The process of referral for refuge or POS can be slightly delayed as ODAS request Police background checks to ensure the space is suitable for the victim survivor. This delay can result in some referrals not progressing as the service are unable to meet the timescale needed.

25. Where referrals are declined by the service, onward referrals will be made, with the individual's consent, to alternative or more specialist services better able to meet their needs.

| <b>Numbers of declined referrals</b>           |                        |                         |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Reason</b>                                  | <b>Client Declined</b> | <b>Service Declined</b> |
| No longer required / alternative accommodation | 71                     | –                       |
| Needs or risk too high                         | –                      | 32                      |
| No capacity                                    | –                      | 26                      |
| Location not suitable                          | 25                     | –                       |
| Unable to be contacted                         | 20                     | –                       |
| Other safety or suitability concerns           | –                      | 14                      |
| NRPF / no DDVC                                 | –                      | 11                      |
| Other reasons                                  | 39                     | 18                      |
| <b>Total</b>                                   | <b>175</b>             | <b>101</b>              |

### **Demographic Profile and Inequalities**

26. Ethnicity data shows that while White British households represent the largest single group supported, households from minoritised communities account for approximately 48% of those placed in refuge or POS. In particular, households from South Asian communities may face additional barriers linked to insecure immigration status, language needs and limited access to public funds. These cases often require intensive advocacy and specialist immigration support provided by ODAS in partnership with specialist agencies.

### **System Pressures, Risks and Emerging Challenges**

27. The most significant pressure on the system remains limited availability of suitable move-on housing. Housing shortages, property affordability, equity issues and a lack of specialist accommodation for people with complex needs result in longer stays in refuge and POS, reducing overall system throughput.

28. Rising complexity of need, including mental health issues, substance use, trauma and overlapping vulnerabilities, requires more intensive and sustained support. Households with no recourse to public funds face challenges, with delays in immigration processes and restricted access to benefits prolonging stays.

29. Operational challenges also arise from benefit administration and the interaction between temporary accommodation routes and housing benefit or Universal Credit, which can lead to short-term debt and anxiety for residents. The use of the 56-day homelessness prevention notification has supported earlier multi-agency planning, but allocation decisions often occur late in the process, increasing uncertainty and distress for victim-survivors. Extended stays, particularly within POS, can also contribute to isolation and negatively affect wellbeing, despite regular key-work sessions and daily check-ins from support staff.

## **Monitoring and Recent Developments**

30. Service delivery and performance are monitored through quarterly contract reviews, national reporting and oversight via the Safe Accommodation Working Group, which reports to the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board. This enables partners to identify trends, risks and inequalities and to agree collective actions.
31. Recent developments include the introduction of a complex need's worker and a cost-of-living move-on grant available to service users, directly addressing specialist support needs and financial barriers to move-on. A year three contract audit of move-on processes is being undertaken by ODAS currently, with the aim of using the findings to support improved data quality, clearer pathways and more effective system planning and inform future commissioning and delivery.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

32. Safe accommodation provision delivered through ODAS reflects the Council's values of prevention, partnership and supporting those most at risk. By maintaining oversight of demand, capacity and system pressures, the Council ensures that existing provision continues to align with its strategic objectives, meets statutory obligations under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, supports safer and healthier communities, and contributes to tackling inequality by providing access to safety and support for those disproportionately affected by domestic abuse.

## **Financial Implications**

33. This is a report for information only. There are no direct financial implications in the body of this paper.

Comments checked by:

Stephen Rowles, Strategic Finance Business Partner,  
stephen.rowles@oxfordshire.gov.uk

## **Legal Implications**

34. The Council has statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the Act) to assess local need and to provide support within safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and their children. These duties include publishing and regularly reviewing a Safe Accommodation Strategy informed by a needs assessment and ensuring that sufficient, appropriate provision is in place across Oxfordshire. The Act also requires the Council to report annually to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on activity, spend and outcomes related to safe accommodation support.

35. The arrangements described in this report, including operational oversight through contract monitoring and governance through the Safe Accommodation Working Group reporting into the ODASB, support ongoing compliance with the requirements of the Act.

Comments checked by:  
Jayne Pringle, Principal Solicitor – Contracts  
Jayne.pringle@oxfordshire.gov.uk

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

36. Domestic abuse affects some groups more severely than others, including women, disabled people, and minoritised communities. Safe accommodation provision plays an important role in addressing these inequalities by ensuring that those at greatest risk can access safety and support. ODAS and district-led sanctuary schemes support people across a wide range of backgrounds, and demographic monitoring helps identify and address any barriers to access. All provision is subject to Equality and Community Impact Assessment (ECIA) requirements to ensure services remain inclusive and responsive to diverse needs.

ANSAF AZHAR  
(Director of Public Health Oxfordshire County Council)

Annex: A - Refuge and Places of Safety comparison table

Other Documents: Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025-2028

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## Appendix A - Refuge and Places of Safety comparison table

| Feature  | Refuge  | Places of Safety   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Units / Provision (to complete)</b>         | Two refuges – 16 units  | 5 Units; a mixture of 3 houses and 2 flats.  |
| <b>Primary purpose</b>                         | Provides longer-term, secure accommodation for women (with or without children) fleeing domestic abuse.                                       | Short-term, emergency safe accommodation for victim-survivors at immediate risk, including those with pets.                              |
| <b>Who can access</b>                          | Women aged 16+, including those with children; may require recourse to public funds.  | Adults at immediate risk, including those unable to access traditional refuge settings (e.g., people with pets, urgent-risk situations). |
| <b>Length of stay</b>                          | Typically, longer-term to support recovery, stability, and move-on planning.  | Short-term crisis stay until safer long-term accommodation is arranged.  |
| <b>Maximum length of tenancy (to complete)</b> | 6 months license  | 6 months license   |
| <b>Support available</b>                       | Comprehensive support including emotional support, safety planning, practical help, counselling access, group work, and support for children. | Initial emotional support, risk assessment, safety planning, and signposting, with outreach follow-up.                                   |
| <b>Children's provision</b>                    | Dedicated emotional support for children living in refuge.  | Not specifically child-focused, though families can be accommodated in emergencies.  |
| <b>Specialist accessibility features</b>       | Building/environmental constraints may limit pets or complex needs.   | More flexible, explicitly includes accommodation for people with pets and urgent-risk needs.   |
| <b>Intended audience</b>                       | Women and children requiring safe, supported, longer-term accommodation.  | Any victim-survivor requiring immediate, emergency safety.   |

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Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse  
Strategic Board

# Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

## 2025 - 2028



# How to access immediate support

If you need immediate support, this can be accessed by calling the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS) on 0800 731 0055 or visiting <https://a2dominion.co.uk/services/domestic-abuse-support-services>

Alternatively, you can contact the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247.

**If you are in immediate danger, please do not be afraid to call 999.**

Alternatively, you can contact Thames Valley Police on the non-emergency telephone number 101 or visit your local police station to speak with an officer in confidence.

# Foreword

## Introduction

We are pleased to present the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy, refreshed for 2025-2028. Developed by the Safe Accommodation Working Group, a subgroup of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board, this strategy is a collaborative effort. It incorporates insights and contributions from partners across the County, including those who have shared their lived experiences.

## The Impact of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, leaving a devastating impact on victims-survivors, their families, and friends. It has long-term, multi-generational consequences, and children who witness domestic abuse are victims in their own right, facing lifelong challenges.

## Access to Safe Accommodation

Providing safe accommodation for victims-survivors and their families is a crucial first step in helping them escape their abusers and begin living a life free from fear.

## Collaboration

In Oxfordshire, multi-agency stakeholders work together to ensure the provision of appropriate emergency and safe accommodation with dedicated support for victims-survivors and their children.

## Building on Previous Successes

This new and refreshed strategy builds on our work over the last three years to improve the experience and outcomes for victims-survivors of domestic abuse. Ambitions set out in this refreshed strategy mirror those in the Overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy setting out Oxfordshire's approach to tackling Domestic Abuse under four pillars: Prevention, Provision, Pursuing, and Partnership.

## Achievements and Future Plans

Since 2021 Oxfordshire has commissioned organisations to provide essential accommodation, including safe supported accommodation in refuge spaces and places of safety for those unable to access shared accommodation. Oxfordshire partners have:

- created a smoother and more efficient housing pathway for victims-survivors moving on from safe accommodation by building effective partnerships within the Oxfordshire system, including people with lived experience.
- identified and addressed areas of need for accommodation through mapping the provision of available accommodation across Oxfordshire.

## Action Plan and Commitment

This new refreshed strategy will be translated into an action plan, driven by the multiagency safe accommodation working group. Together, we will work to support victims-survivors of domestic abuse and prevent abuse in the future.

Councillor Dr Nathan Ley  
Cabinet Member for Public  
Health, Inequalities and  
Community Safety

Kate Holburn  
Chair, Oxfordshire Domestic  
Abuse Strategic Board

Lisa Ward  
Lived Experience Advisory  
Group Consultant

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# Executive Summary

The Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy Refresh 2025-2028 reaffirms Oxfordshire's commitment to meeting the statutory duties of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Building on the achievements of the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024 strategy, this refreshed strategy reflects on progress made and sets out priorities to ensure that victims-survivors, including children, have access to safe accommodation.

Aligned with the Oxfordshire Overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy, this strategy focuses on the following four pillars to ensure continuity while adapting to evolving needs and legislative requirements:



**PREVENTION:** Preventing domestic abuse from happening and intervening early.



**PROVISION:** Providing high-quality, joined-up support for victims-survivors.



**PURSUING:** Holding perpetrators accountable and providing opportunities for change.



**PARTNERSHIP:** Working in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims-survivors.

This strategy has been shaped by stakeholder engagement, including input from victims-survivors through the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) and professionals working in local services.

Key gaps and challenges:

- **Access barriers:** Limited housing stock and insufficient tailored provision for specific groups, such as those with no recourse to public funds, male victims-survivors, and 'move-on' options.
- **Holistic support:** Inconsistent levels of support to meet specific needs, including insufficient child-focused services in refuges and support for people with complex need.
- **Data and accountability:** Limited data and feedback from service users on service outcomes and gaps in monitoring performance effectively.
- **Engagement:** Embedding true co-production in strategic work, actively striving to move up the ladder of co-production and enhance collaborative efforts with those who have lived experience.

Key priorities for the next three years include expanding access to diverse safe accommodation options, addressing gaps in provision, and embedding lived experience into decision-making.

The delivery plan for the strategy will be developed by the Safe Accommodation Working Group and approved by the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board.

By focusing on these priorities, Oxfordshire aims to deliver a coordinated, inclusive, and impactful approach to domestic abuse safe accommodation, empowering victims-survivors and their families to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

# 1.

**Why is the safe accommodation strategy required?**

# What is domestic abuse?

The Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board have adopted the statutory definition of domestic abuse established by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, outlined in Appendix A:

Domestic abuse is any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.

Abusive behaviour may consist of:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Psychological and emotional abuse
- Economic or other forms of abuse

This includes harmful traditional practices, including but not limited to 'honour' killings, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Personally connected means two people who:

- Are, or have been, married to each other

- Are, or have been, civil partners of each other
- Have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been ended)
- Have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been ended)
- Are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- Have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- Are relatives

## Children as victims-survivors of domestic abuse:

- Are those who see or hear or experience the effect of the abuse and is related to either person
- The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for the child
- The child and person are related
- Child means person under the age of 18 years

Throughout this strategy, the terms victim and victims-survivors has been used to denote a victim, survivor, or individual with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse. The terms can be used interchangeably recognising that every person who has been subject to abuse will have their own preferred language.

# Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which received Royal Assent in April 2021, introduced a statutory definition of domestic abuse (Appendix A) and protective legislation to support and protect victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their families.

The Act aims to:

- Raise awareness of the impact of domestic abuse on victims and survivors and their families.
- Strengthen support, particularly by statutory agencies, and ensure more comprehensive and coordinated responses to domestic abuse.
- Improve the justice system, ensuring better protection for victims and greater accountability for perpetrators.

## The Safe Accommodation Duty

Part 4 of the Act introduced a statutory duty on all local authorities to provide safe accommodation support services. Oxfordshire County Council is required to:

- Appoint a multi-agency local domestic abuse partnership board
- Assess the need for accommodation-based support for all victims and their children, including those from outside of their area
- Develop and publish a Safe Accommodation Strategy considering the needs assessment
- Implement the strategy through commissioning and de-commissioning decisions
- Monitor and evaluate local delivery and effectiveness of the strategy
- Report back to central government annually

“ Safe accommodation is more than bricks and mortar or a physical space - it’s about the journey to get into safe accommodation and what it offers rather than what it is.”

Victim-survivor of domestic abuse

## What is Safe Accommodation?

The Act defines safe accommodation as “solely dedicated to providing a safe place to stay for victims of domestic abuse including expert support.” It includes various types of accommodation, such as:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Domestic abuse safe accommodation
- Sanctuary schemes
- Second stage accommodation (‘move-on’)
- Other emergency accommodation

Privately-owned and managed temporary accommodation, like bed-and-breakfasts with shared facilities, are specifically excluded from the definition of safe accommodation. Full descriptions for different types of safe accommodation are included in the glossary.

Support provided under the Duty must meet the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Quality Standards, as well as standards from organisations such as [Women’s Aid National Quality, Imkaan Accredited Quality Standards](#), the [Male Domestic Abuse Network Service Standards](#) and / or the [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation Framework for Housing Providers](#).

# What type of domestic abuse support should be provided in safe accommodation?

The Domestic Abuse Act statutory guidance describes domestic abuse support within safe accommodation as:

- **Overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation** - including capacity building, support and supervision of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority. Such functions will often be undertaken by a service manager
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service - including scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities. Such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff
- Advocacy support - development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services e.g. GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers
- Domestic abuse prevention advice - support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation
- Specialist support for victims
- Designed specifically for victims with

relevant protected characteristics such as faith services, translators and interpreters, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and/or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQIA+ victims

- Designed specifically for victims with additional and/or complex needs e.g. mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support
- **Children’s support** - including play therapy, child advocacy or a specialist children’s worker e.g. a young people’s violence advisor, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) or specialist outreach worker
- **Housing-related support** - providing housing-related advice and support e.g. securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently
- **Advice service** - including financial and legal support, accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements
- **Counselling and therapy** - including group support for both adults and children as well as emotional support

Accommodation-based support does not include other types of support which may be provided to victims of domestic abuse in community-based locations.

Members of the Oxfordshire’s Lived Experience Advisory Group were invited to share their insights on what effective safe accommodation support should be. Their responses are summarised below:



**HOLISTIC**  
Considers wider living environment and all needs of self and family.



**PERSONALISED**  
Personalised to consider individual needs and experience.



**SAFE**  
Provides physical and emotional safety and security.



**QUALITY**  
Well-maintained accommodation that meets the needs of individuals.

## What is Safe Accommodation?



**CONNECTED**  
Belonging to a community and the ability to connect with family and services.



**SUPPORTIVE**  
Trained, trauma-informed compassionate services and staff that care.



**STABLE**  
Secure, stable and familiar accommodation that offers continuity.



**ACCESSIBLE**  
One-stop shop with clear and accessible pathways in areas of need.

## Who should be supported by safe accommodation?

Victims aged 16 or over, and their children, with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds or who identify as LGBTQIA+, must have access to safe accommodation and relevant support. See Appendix B for information on supporting all victims.

## What is the scope of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy?

The Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025-2028 is dedicated to ensuring that victims-survivors of domestic abuse can access safe accommodation and the necessary support to rebuild their lives. This refreshed strategy outlines our commitment to fulfilling the statutory duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and builds on the achievements of the 2021-2025 strategy.

Table 1: MHCLG grant funding allocation

| LOCAL AUTHORITY                               | FUNDING ALLOCATION 2023/24 | FUNDING ALLOCATION 2024/25 | FUNDING ALLOCATION 2025/26 |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Oxfordshire County Council (Tier 1 Authority) | £1,167,200                 | £1,189,222                 | £1,482,077                 |
| Cherwell District Council                     | £36,284                    | £36,967                    | £37,465                    |
| Oxford City Council                           | £38,820                    | £39,551                    | £40,084                    |
| South Oxfordshire District Council            | £35,392                    | £36,059                    | £36,545                    |
| Vale of the White Horse District Council      | £37,109                    | £37,808                    | £38,318                    |
| West Oxfordshire District Council             | £35,268                    | £35,932                    | £36,416                    |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>£1,350,073</b>          | <b>£1,375,539</b>          | <b>£1,670,905</b>          |

It focuses on strengthening existing services, developing more inclusive approaches, and working harder to ensure all victims-survivors, including children, can access a secure, supportive environment tailored to their individual needs.

This strategy is part of Oxfordshire's broader response to domestic abuse, outlined in the overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy, which addresses prevention, early intervention, and high-quality support for survivors and their families. The overarching strategy also includes measures to address perpetrator behaviour and will be refreshed in 2026.

Both the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy and the overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy action plans will be reviewed quarterly. This will ensure that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of survivors and incorporate new evidence and best practices.

## How is the Domestic Abuse Grant used?

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government grant funding allocations for 2023/24-2025/26 are detailed in Table 1. The funding is awarded to individual Tier 1 and 2 local authorities. At the time of writing this strategy, future MHCLG funding is anticipated to continue.

The grant supports safe accommodation provision and objectives outlined in the overarching domestic strategy.

# 2.

**What is the strategic and local context within Oxfordshire?**

# What is the wider strategic context?

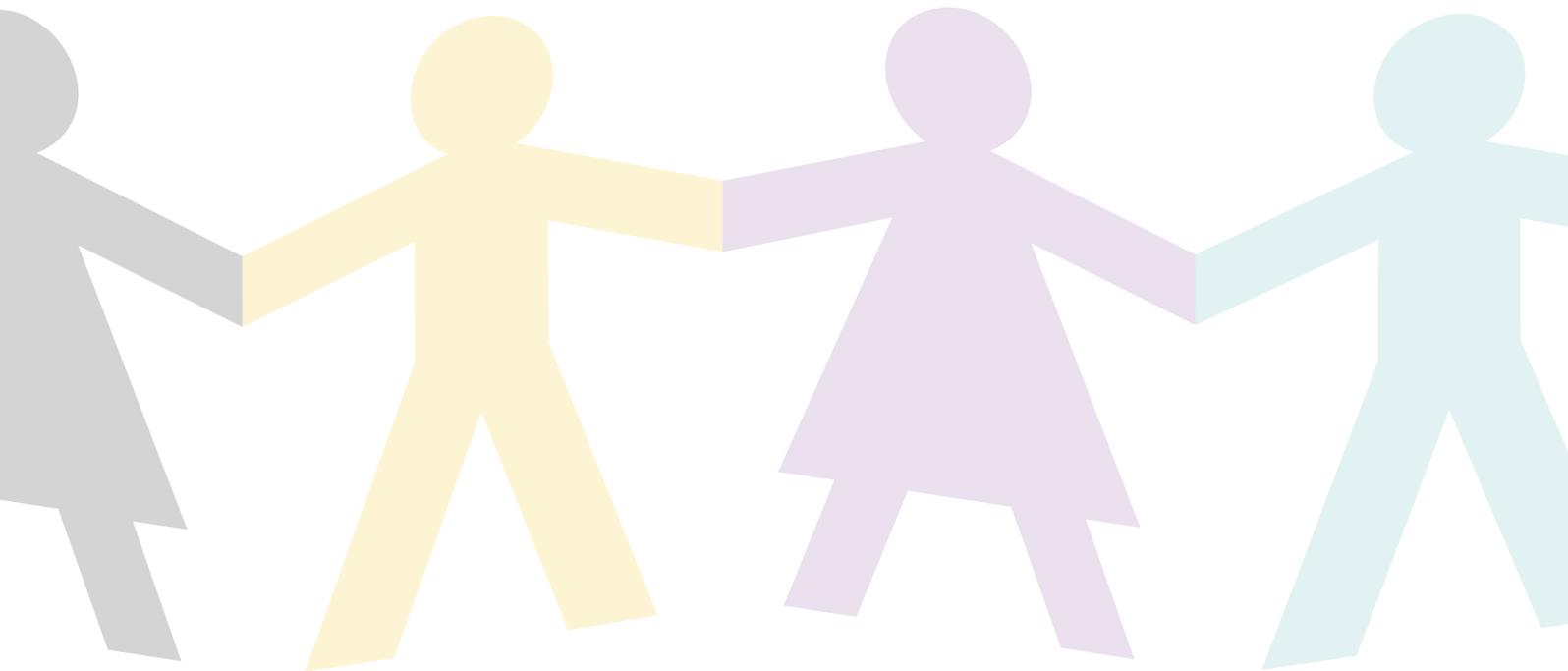
## Role of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board (ODASB)

The Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board (ODASB) provides leadership to address domestic abuse across the county. Its key aims are to:

- focus on preventing and reducing domestic abuse
- deliver high-quality support services for victims-survivors and their children.
- coordinate efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and encourage behaviour change.

- Meet local needs by allocating resources effectively to improve support for victims-survivors, especially within safe accommodation.
- remove barriers to accessing support and promote collaboration among all relevant services.
- ensure Oxfordshire's response to domestic abuse is effective and aligns with legal duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- communicate strategically and support local District authorities in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The ODASB reports to the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership and provides updates to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to meet statutory requirements.



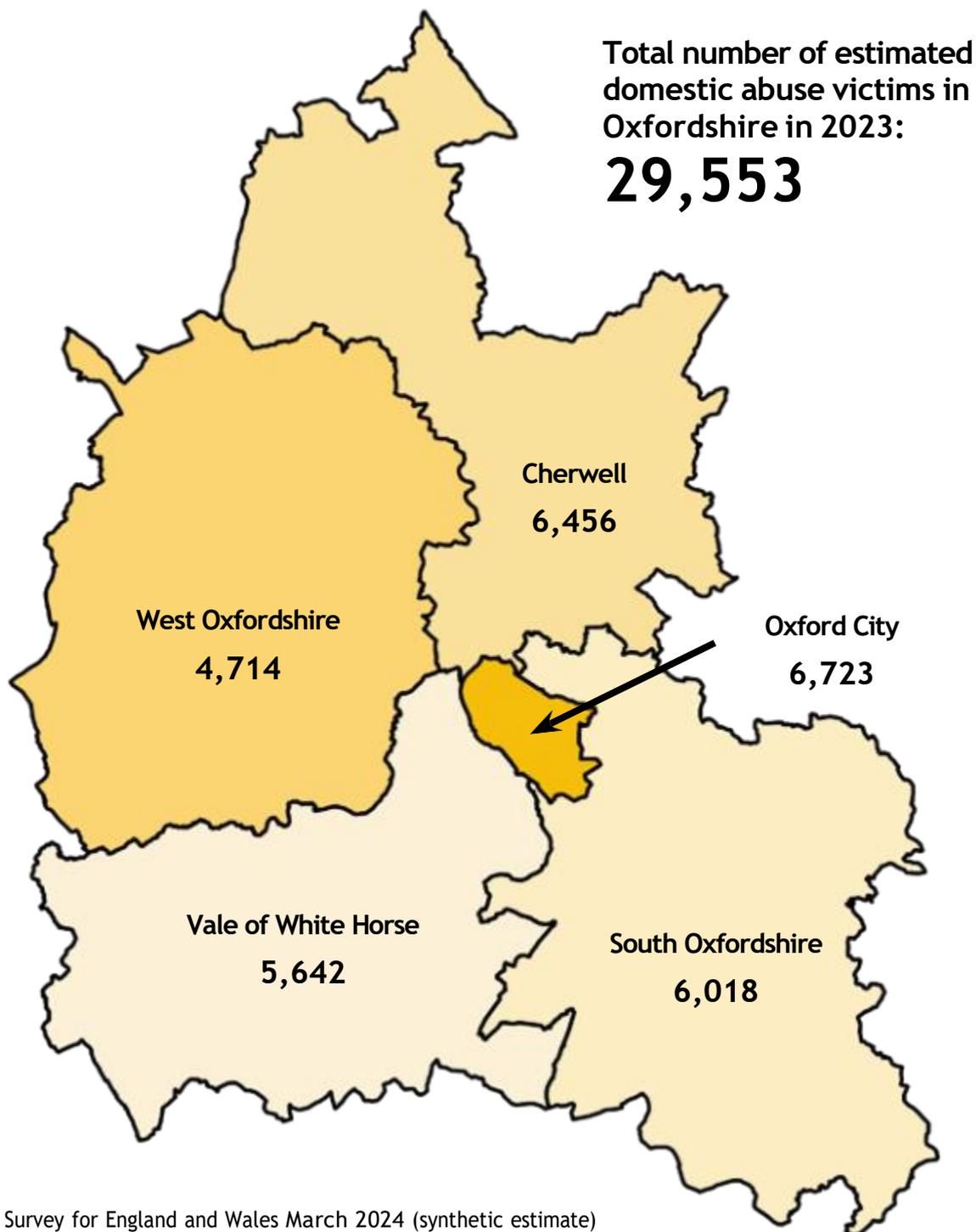
## What is the local context?

Oxfordshire County Council conducted a needs assessment looking at the number of victims of domestic abuse in Oxfordshire and the current provision of safe accommodation to support victims and their children in Oxfordshire.

The number of victims of domestic abuse in Oxfordshire is calculated using either national data which is modelled to produce a synthetic estimate for Oxfordshire or local data from police and crime datasets to produce a known number for Oxfordshire.

## What is the **estimated** number of domestic abuse victims in Oxfordshire?

Figure 1: Map of estimated number of domestic abuse victims by district



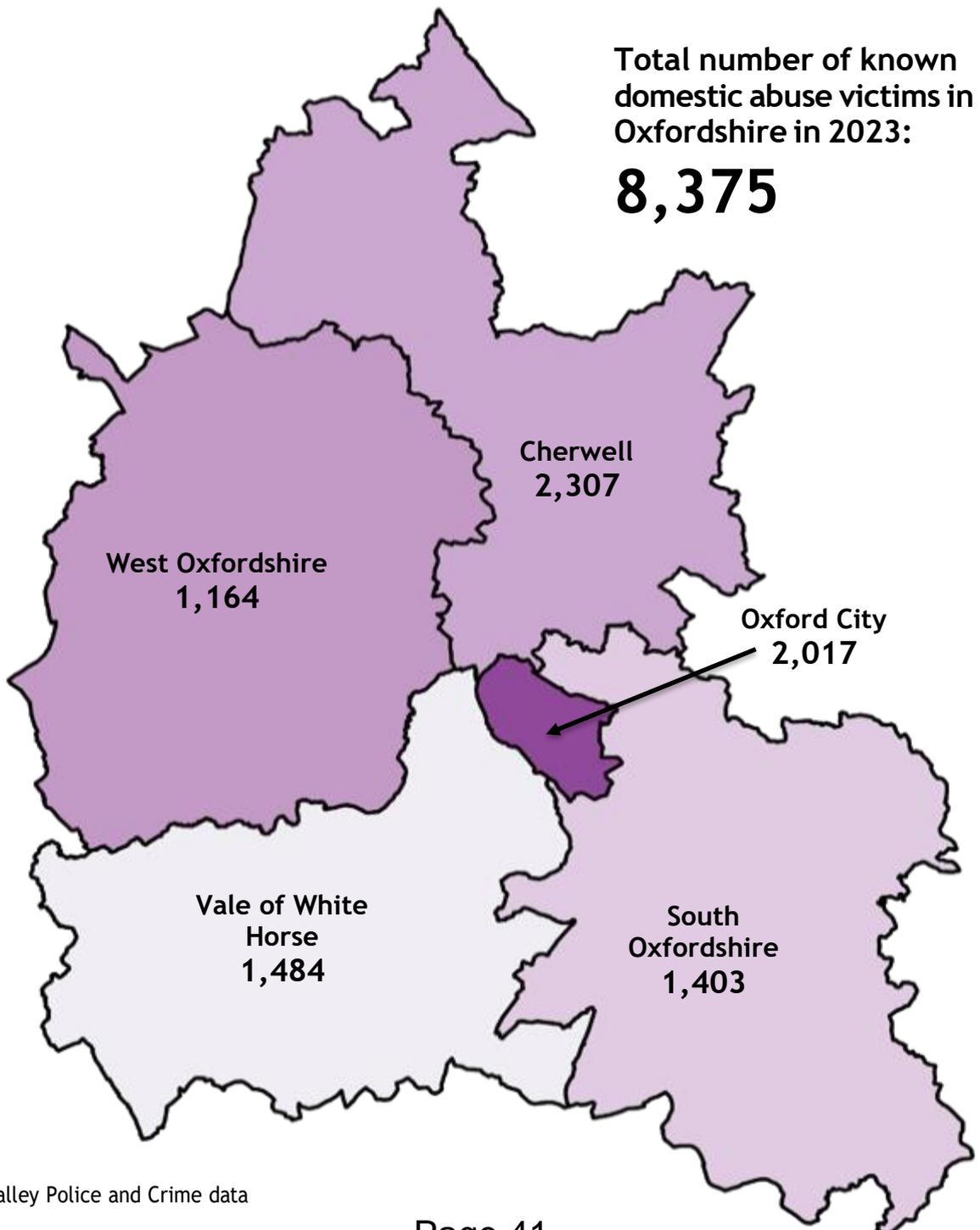
Source: The Crime Survey for England and Wales March 2024 (synthetic estimate)

# What is the known number of domestic abuse victims in Oxfordshire?

The synthetic estimate is significantly higher than the known number as only a proportion of victims report domestic abuse to the police. This highlights that the local dataset represents only a proportion of victims and therefore there is a large unknown number of victims of domestic abuse in Oxfordshire.

Figure 2: Map of known number of domestic abuse victims by district

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| ~68% female                                   |  | 57% aged 25-49  |  |
| ~29% experience domestic abuse multiple times |  | 218 new referrals to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference - a meeting for highest risk cases |  |



Source: Thames Valley Police and Crime data

# How many victims have accessed help in Oxfordshire?

## Access to refuge and dispersed accommodation



**33 adults** and **20 children** accessed refuge or dispersed accommodation in Oxfordshire between April 2023 and March 2024.

Source: Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS)

## Access to Sanctuary Schemes



Between April 2023 and March 2024, **126 victims** accessed sanctuary schemes:

- **33** in Oxford City
- **64** in South and Vale
- **29** in Cherwell and West Oxfordshire

Source: Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District, Councils, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District

## Out of area referrals



Most common referrals are from:

**Aylesbury, Slough, Reading, South Buckinghamshire, West Berkshire, and Windsor and Maidenhead.**

Source: ODAS data from 2021-2024

## Demographic data



Between April 2023 and March 2024, **26 victims** with **protected characteristics** and **18 victims** from **black or minority ethnic backgrounds** accessed refuge and dispersed accommodation. Sanctuary Scheme providers do **not routinely collate demographic data.**

Source: ODAS data from OCC MHCLG annual data return

## Other support accessed by victims



General support in accommodation: **53**  
Specialist support: **53**  
Children's support: **20**  
Counselling and therapy: **32**

Source: Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS)

## Victim views



Victims often struggle to understand the language used around domestic abuse, making it hard for them to recognise their own experiences as domestic abuse or be aware of the support services available in Oxfordshire.

Source: Victims of domestic abuse

# Partnership Working in Oxfordshire

Effective partnership working is essential in addressing the complex needs of domestic abuse victims-survivors.

The following case studies highlight how multi-agency collaboration across Oxfordshire is creating safety, stability, and tailored support, enabling survivors to rebuild their lives.

## Case Study: Sanctuary Hosting Scheme

### Background:

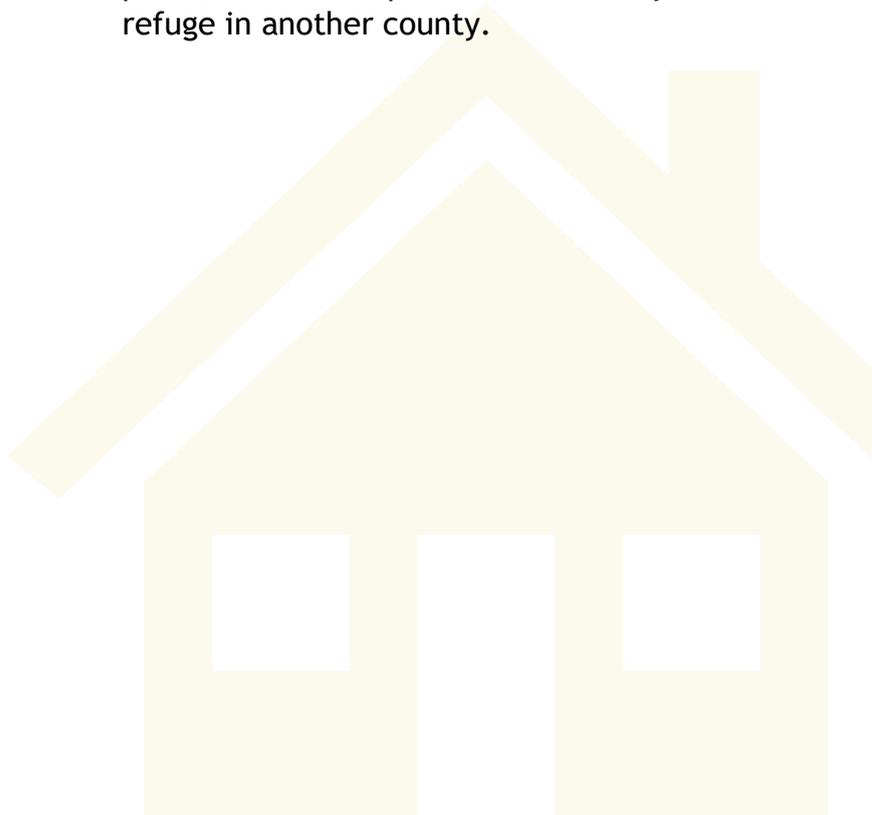
A foreign national came to the UK on a spousal visa after marrying a British citizen. Upon arrival, she experienced emotional, physical and economic abuse. Isolated and fearful due to misinformation and threats of deportation from her abuser, she sought temporary accommodation with a member of her community and self-referred for advice and support. As she was on a spousal visa, she had no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

### Interventions:

- **Multi-agency collaboration:** A referral was submitted to Asylum Welcome Sanctuary Hosting Scheme with additional support provided by Thames Valley Immigration Advice Service.
- **Culturally sensitive support:** A Sunrise Multicultural Domestic Abuse worker provided advice, emotional support and helped her navigate cultural barriers, ensuring she felt validated and informed about her rights.
- **Safety planning and legal support:** Detailed safety planning addressed immediate risks. She was advised about housing and refuge options, and supported in applying for recourse to public funds through the Vulnerable Migrants Domestic Abuse Concession.

### Outcome:

The Sanctuary Hosting Scheme enabled the woman to remain with the host for a month where she was supported by regular check-in calls from the Helpline and Access Team. The Vulnerable Migrants Domestic Abuse concession had been granted and the woman was able to access public funds. With these elements in place, she was helped to arrive safely at a refuge in another county.



# Case Study: Outreach team

## Background:

A woman and her child self-referred to Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS) and were moved to a Place of Safety. The Outreach Team supported the woman there, and it was revealed that she had experienced physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse with controlling harassment and threatening and intimidating behaviours. The perpetrator's financial control exacerbated her isolation, leaving her with no means to support herself or her child. The child started to display trauma-related symptoms, and the woman experienced severe levels of depression, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide.

## Interventions:

- **Legal and protective measures:** The ODAS Outreach Team collaborated with police and legal services to support the woman obtain a Non-Molestation Order, move back to the family home and put an injunction in place to keep the perpetrator away from the address.

- **Integrated emotional support:** Referrals were made to Bounce Back 4 Kids for the child, and for both mother and child received Trauma Counselling. The Power to Change support group provided the woman with emotional support, psychoeducation on power, control and coercive behaviours empowering her to regain autonomy.
- **Ongoing support:** The Outreach team maintained emotional support and monitoring to address mental health.

## Outcome:

The woman and her child were able to safely remain in the family home while legal and financial matters were resolved. Both engaged with counselling and support groups. Key protection and legal support were in place, and Children's Social Care and police remained in contact with the family. This case underscores how coordinated efforts across agencies—ODAS, police, legal services, and mental health providers—created a robust support network to address the complexities of domestic abuse and its impact on families.



# 3.

**What do our  
stakeholders say?**

# What do our stakeholders say?

As part of the strategy refresh, Oxfordshire has engaged with victims-survivors of domestic abuse through the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) and professionals working with local services. Perspectives from key stakeholders were gathered through in-depth

discussions, a collaborative workshop, surveys, and input from the LEAG. Recommendations were developed in partnership with the Safe Accommodation Working Group (SAWG) and informed by feedback from the LEAG. See what our stakeholders have to say about safe accommodation provision in Oxfordshire.

# What are the strengths?



## Rapid response to meet needs

*“The council has the ability to rapidly secure accommodation for survivors and victims fleeing domestic abuse and link the household to the appropriate range of support services”*



## Person-centred approach

*“We use a person-centred approach working with clients at all points of working with our service. Our refuges allow for us to support larger families and our places of safety allowing us to house victims of all genders and older children. We are [able to] provide counselling to both the adult and child within our provision”*



## Working together to ensure safety

*“The main strengths are the collaborative approach to making victims of domestic abuse safe and empowering people with support and knowledge. A multi-agency approach such as the MARAC to ensure high risk clients are carefully assessed and made safe through all services working together”*



## Overarching domestic abuse strategy

*“There is an Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy supported by a board that brings partners together to work collectively to tackle domestic abuse”*

# What are the challenges?

Integral to the strategy refresh has been hearing directly from victims-survivors and professional stakeholders on some of the challenges related to safe accommodation provision within Oxfordshire.

## Stigma and judgement

*“Don’t make them [victims] justify or undermine what they have been through...support to rebuild their lives and confidence”*  
**Victim-survivor**

## Lack of awareness of support available for men

*“I’m unclear what options for males are”*  
**Professional Stakeholder**

*“I know men aren’t aware they can access them too”*  
**Victim-survivor**

## Accessibility

*“Support should be easily accessible, and it wasn’t when I asked for help despite arriving with three young children”*  
**Victim-survivor**

## Supply and demand imbalance

*“Demand for safe accommodation exceeds supply and, in an emergency, sub-optimal temporary accommodation may need to be provided”*  
**Professional stakeholder**

*“The availability of safe accommodation across the District and City will continue to cause challenge”*  
**Professional stakeholder**

## Long-term support

*“Move-on is a difficulty for our clients, whilst we facilitate a planned move, in some cases, clients have to present as homeless at the end of the license which adds to the trauma of move-on”*  
**Professional stakeholder**

## Joint working

A professional described having the capacity to continue developing partnership working and keeping relations moving forward as a challenge.

## Disjointed client risk and needs assessment

Services have different approaches to assessing risk.

*“The assessment process of risk and need can be different or separate [according] to which service has made the assessment”*  
**Professional stakeholder**

# What are the gaps?



There is insufficient local information about the **gap between need,**

**demand and supply** of domestic abuse safe accommodation services, particularly for those with protected characteristics.

It is suspected that there is a large **undocumented unmet need** and those currently accessing services are only the tip of the iceberg.

There is a lack of **housing specific training** in available domestic abuse training for staff.

“Victims are most likely to flee at night or at the weekend”.

**Lack of out-of-hours provision or support.**



There is a high number of victims-survivors presenting to services with **mental health needs, particularly children.**

“Access to safe accommodation may be restricted for households with **no recourse to public funds**”.



*“There is a gap for victims with **complex needs**, such as serious mental health, addictions and those who require 24-hour support”.*

Victims experience **barriers in being able to ‘move-on’** from refuge or temporary accommodation due to owning assets, availability of suitable housing as well as debt and rent arrears.

There is greater scope for **embedding lived experience in decision making** and co-production of solutions.

**No housing pathways** or options for **perpetrators.**

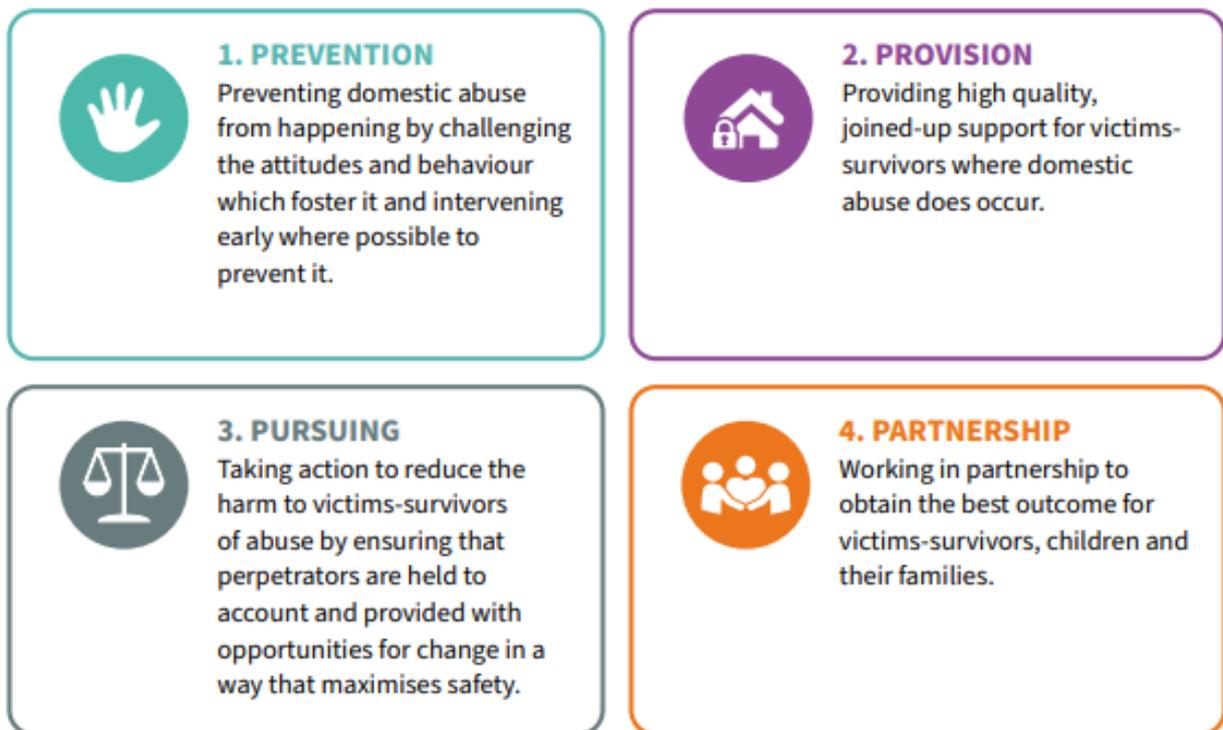
# 4.

**What are the key priorities in the safe accommodation strategy?**

# What are our key priorities?

This refreshed strategy outlines Oxfordshire’s commitment to fulfilling statutory duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, building on the achievements of the 2021-2025 strategy. It aims to strengthen existing services, enhance inclusivity, and works towards ensuring all victims-survivors, including children, have access to safe, supportive accommodation tailored to their needs.

Aligned with the forthcoming Oxfordshire Overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy refresh, this Safe Accommodation Strategy focuses on the following key pillars, ensuring continuity in service provision while adapting to evolving needs and legislative requirements:

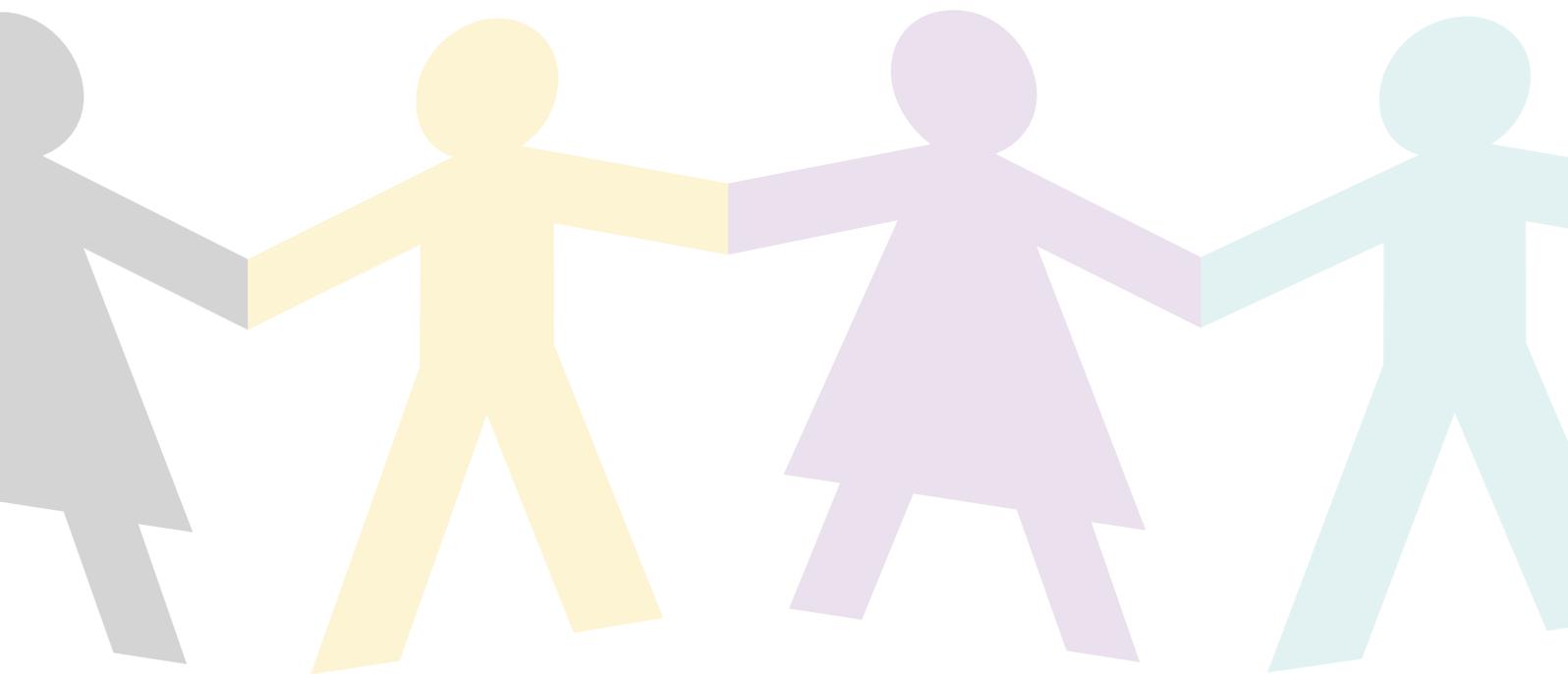


| PILLAR      | STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES TO INFORM THE ACTION DELIVERY PLAN  |
|-------------|--|
| PREVENTION  | <b>Increase Awareness of Support:</b> Explore innovative ways to raise awareness about domestic abuse safe accommodation support available in Oxfordshire, especially for underrepresented groups including male victims-survivors.  |
|             | <b>Establish Objective Metrics and Data Collection:</b> Define and agree on metrics to measure and monitor accessibility of safe accommodation, including increased referrals, faster access, and equitable services for victims-survivors. Identify additional data sources, especially from voluntary and charity sectors, to improve early identification of victims-survivors. |
|             | <b>Enhance Early Identification and Reporting:</b> Explore use of housing applications to identify those citing domestic abuse to identify opportunities for support.  |
|             | <b>Embed safe accommodation into training programs:</b> Understand how domestic abuse training in Oxfordshire promotes and raises awareness of safe accommodation. Consider ways to include this across all training offers to improve promotion.  |
| PROVISION   | <b>Improve Data Collection and Monitoring re Sanctuary schemes:</b> Promote and ensure consistent data collection district on Sanctuary Schemes. Explore options to standardise referral processes and ensure complete and consistent data returns across districts.   |
|             | <b>Enhanced specialist support:</b> Explore expanding and tailoring safe accommodation support options, including options to meet needs of children, those with complex needs and men.   |
|             | <b>Develop Coordinated Pathways and Overcome Barriers:</b> Explore opportunities to establish a coordinated county-wide move-on pathway for victims-survivors. Identify and address barriers to independent living for victims-survivors.  |
|             | <b>Emergency &amp; respite accommodation:</b> Develop an understanding using data around numbers of individuals in emergency and temporary accommodation in Oxfordshire related to Domestic Abuse, to identify additional support/provision needs.   |
| PURSUING    | <b>Perpetrator housing/ support programmes:</b> Explore models of accommodation options for low-medium risk perpetrators to reduce risk to survivors alongside community-based support.  |
|             | <b>Consider use of community safety powers:</b> Explore how district councils can enact tenancy injunctions around perpetrators to reduce risk.  |
| PARTNERSHIP | Centre the voices of adults, children, and young people with <b>lived experience of domestic abuse</b> and ensure it informs all decision making.  |
|             | Enhance <b>multi-agency collaboration</b> to strengthen and streamline service delivery.   |

# 5.

**How will the safe accommodation strategy be delivered?**

- The refreshed delivery plan supporting the new safe accommodation strategy will be developed, owned, and delivered by the Safe Accommodation Working Group (SAWG) and governed by the ODASB. The new delivery plan will be approved by the ODASB.
- The delivery plan will include key actions for each deliverable, timescales (i.e. short-term or longer-term), stakeholders involved, and monitoring and evaluation measures to monitor the impact of the strategy. See section 6 for possible monitoring and evaluation measures.
- The refreshed delivery plan for the Safe Accommodation Strategy will be aligned with the overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy.



# 6.

**How will we know we are  
making a difference?**

Oxfordshire's Safe Accommodation Working Group have developed and agreed baseline measures and targets to monitor the impact of the Safe Accommodation Strategy.

| INDICATOR   | DESCRIPTION   | SOURCE                             |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Total number of instances of adults supported in safe accommodation (refuge and place of safety) per quarter and each year. | If an individual stayed in a safe accommodation service multiple different times (for any period of time), each unique stay is recorded   | Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service |
| Total number of instances of children supported in safe accommodation (refuge and place of safety) per quarter.             | Children here are defined as those under the age of 18 who have come to a service with a parent or guardian. If a victim is under-18 but, came on their own, then they are recorded as an adult | Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service |
| Cumulative (works completed) number of Sanctuary Schemes established within a financial year per district.                  | Figure to capture Sanctuary Scheme activity   | District Councils                  |
| Average length of stay in Refuge  |   | Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service |
| Average length of stay in Place of Safety   |   | Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service |

# Acknowledgements

This strategy was led by Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health Team and developed in partnership with [NHS Solutions for Public Health \(SPH\)](#). The strategy has been shaped by the voices of victims-survivors of domestic abuse through the Lived Experience Advisory Group and key collaborators across Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council extends heartfelt thanks members of the Lived Experience Advisory Group. Their dedication and willingness to share their expertise have been invaluable in identifying gaps and guiding improvements in safe accommodation services to better meet the diverse needs of all victims-survivors.

We also acknowledge the vital contributions of the Safe Accommodation Working Group (SAWG) and the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board. Their input ensures we can better support victims-survivors. We are grateful all our partners for their ongoing commitment to delivering critical support to victims-survivors across the county. Their collaboration is central to ensuring safe supportive accommodation is accessible to those who need it most.

## Oxfordshire partners:



# Glossary

| TERM   | DEFINITION  |
|--|---|
| <b>Commissioning</b>                                 | The on-going process or cycle of planning, agreeing, and monitoring services. It involves lots of different activities, like researching need, designing services, buying services (procurement), checking how well things are working and making changes to improve them. This process is undertaken with partners.  |
| <b>Co-production</b>                                 | Where professional decision makers and people who use services work together to make decisions and plan, design and deliver services. This approach sees people who use services as best placed to help design them.  |
| <b>DASH Risk Assessment</b>                          | A tool that professionals use to find out how much risk a victim-survivor is at from a perpetrator/s of domestic abuse.   |
| <b>Dispersed accommodation</b>                       | <p>i. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self- contained accommodation with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in a refuge with communal spaces, and/or where peer support from other residents may not be appropriate, due to complex support needs, or where older teenage sons cannot be accommodated in a women only refuge, for example.</p> <p>ii. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self- contained ‘semi-independent’ accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support for victims who may not require the intensive support offered through refuge, but are still at risk of abuse from their perpetrator/s.</p> <p>In both types, where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex.</p> |
| <b>Domestic abuse safe accommodation</b>             | Specific types of housing and support structures designed to address the needs of victims facing domestic abuse. Accommodation such as Bed and Breakfasts are not considered relevant safe accommodation and are excluded in the regulations. Therefore, local authorities should refrain from commissioning support within these types of accommodation under the duty.  |
| <b>Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)</b> | Individuals who usually support victims-survivors who are high risk of serious harm or death due to domestic abuse. They have usually completed a special training course and have a recognised qualification.  |
| <b>Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG)</b>        | A group for residents of Oxfordshire who are 18+ and have experienced domestic abuse. They work with people and organisations to make important decisions about partnership systems and responses to domestic abuse in the county. It is led by an independent person who does not work for Oxfordshire County Council.   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>LGBTQIA+</b>   | Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual. The + means we are including other groups, like people who are ‘non-binary’ (they do not identify as male or female).   |
| <b>Marginalised communities</b>   | Groups of people who face discrimination / inequality in society and may be excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life. Not everyone who is from a marginalised community has protection from the Equality Act 2010.   |
| <b>Ministry for Homes, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)<sup>1</sup></b> | A central government department that provides grant funding for domestic abuse services linked to safe accommodation and published national guidance to inform service delivery. Oxfordshire County Council submits regular reports to demonstrate value for money and outcomes against national criteria about certain activities. MHCLG used to be called Department for Levelling Up, Homes, and Communities (DLUHC).                                 |
| <b>Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)</b>                          | A local process where information about victims-survivors who are high risk of serious harm / death is shared and safety plans are created.  |
| <b>Needs Assessment</b>   | A needs assessment is conducted to determine the level of support required within safe accommodation in the local area and seeks to identify the barriers that prevent victims-survivors with diverse needs from accessing support within safe accommodation, including those who share relevant protected characteristics or socio-economic factors such as household composition, education level and the varying levels of support needs and risk.    |
| <b>Offender</b>   | A person who has committed a recorded crime.   |
| <b>Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation</b>                    | A safe place (single gendered or single sex, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse) with domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation to enable victims to make informed decisions when leaving a perpetrator and seeking safe accommodation. For example, short term (e.g. 2-3 weeks) accommodation providing victims with the space and safety to consider and make informed decisions about the options available to them. |
| <b>Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS)</b>                                | A specialist domestic abuse service in Oxfordshire that is funded jointly by Oxfordshire County Council and city and district councils, and the Police and Crime Commissioner. They provide a helpline, 1:1 case management, support groups, outreach work, refuge and other safe accommodation.   |
| <b>Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board (ODASB)</b>                       | A strategic, multi-agency, professionals’ meeting where important decisions for the county are made to ensure improved outcomes for adults, children and young people affected by domestic abuse.  |

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Statutory guidance: Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services. Published 1 October 2021. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Perpetrator</b>   | A person who is or has used abusive behaviour in their relationship/s.   |
| <b>Protected Characteristics</b>                                 | The nine groups legally protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010. They are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.   |
| <b>Refuge accommodation</b>                                      | Offers single gender or single sex accommodation and domestic abuse support which is tied to that accommodation. Victims, including their children, have access to a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support from staff. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, but in both cases the service enables peer support from other refuge residents. The address is not publicly available.   |
| <b>Sanctuary Schemes</b>   | Enabling victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes, where it is safe for them to do so, where it is their choice, and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation, by providing additional security measures.  |
| <b>Sanctuary Hosting Scheme</b>                                  | A hosting scheme providing temporary accommodation for victims of domestic abuse at risk of homelessness. Victims are matched with volunteer hosts living in the local community who offer spare rooms rent free.  |
| <b>Second stage accommodation (sometimes known as 'move-on')</b> | Accommodation temporarily provided to victims, including their children, who are moving on from other forms of relevant accommodation and/or who no longer need the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but would still benefit from a lower level of domestic abuse specific support for a period before they move to fully independent and settled accommodation. Where second stage accommodation is in shared housing it should be single gender or single sex. |
| <b>Specialist safe accommodation</b>                             | Offers single gender or single sex accommodation, alongside dedicated domestic abuse support which is tailored to also support those who share particular protected characteristic(s) and / or who share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing. The address is not publicly available.  |
| <b>Victims / Survivors</b>                                       | A child or adult who is or has experienced domestic abuse.   |

# Appendix A: Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – Domestic Abuse definition

## Definition of “domestic abuse<sup>2</sup>”

(1) This section defines “domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.

(2) Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—

(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and

(b) the behaviour is abusive.

(3) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—

(a) physical or sexual abuse;

(b) violent or threatening behaviour;

(c) controlling or coercive behaviour;

(d) economic abuse (see subsection (4));

(e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

(4) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to —

(a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or

(b) obtain goods or services.

(5) For the purposes of this Act A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

(6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

(7) For the meaning of “personally connected”, see section 2.

## Section 2: Definition of “personally connected”

(1) Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies —

(a) they are, or have been, married to each other;

(b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;

(c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);

(d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);

(e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;

(f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));

(g) they are relatives.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if —

(a) the person is a parent of the child, or

<sup>3</sup>Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Statutory guidance: Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services. Published 1 October 2021. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services)

(b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

(c) In this section –

“child” means a person under the age of 18 years; “civil partnership agreement” has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989;

“relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

### **Section 3: Children as victims of domestic abuse**

(1) This section applies where behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is domestic abuse.

(2) Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who -

(a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse, and

(b) is related to A or B.

(3) A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if -

(a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or

(b) the child and the person are relatives.

(4) In this section -

“child” means person under the age of 18 years; “parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);

“relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

# Appendix B: Supporting all victims

The Act<sup>3</sup> states that victims with each relevant protected characteristic as per the Equality Act 2010 must be able to access the support that they need. Under this duty, they expect authorities to ensure sufficient appropriate support is available within relevant safe accommodation to meet the needs of all victims including those with relevant protected characteristics, additional and / or multiple complex needs, or whose support needs cannot be properly met within non-specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation, such as:

- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic victims (Including Gypsy Roma and Traveller)
  - Male victims
  - Female victims
  - Transgender and Non-Binary victims
  - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual victims, and others who may face barriers as a result of their sexuality
  - Disabled victims - includes but is not limited to victims who are deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired, autistic, wheelchair users, those with learning difficulties, as well as those with age-related disabilities
  - Young (aged 16-18 - including care leavers) and older victims (over 65)
  - Victims with an offending history
  - Victims presenting with complex needs
- including those with mental health and/or drug and alcohol use support need
- Victims with histories of sleeping rough
  - Victims with histories of offending
  - Victims facing multiple forms of abuse within the family such as honour-based violence and forced marriage
  - Victims from a particular religion and/or with a spiritual belief, particularly if facing barriers to support as a result
  - Migrant victims, including victims having insecure immigration status
  - Victims from isolated and/or marginalised communities, including where there is limited English proficiency.
  - Victims who have no choice but to move away from their local areas, communities, and friends to escape their perpetrator to stay safe and receive the support they need.
  - Children of victims (including adolescent male children) who need to move with their parent into relevant safe accommodation.
  - Victims accompanied by children, including large families and those with older adolescence boys (12+)
  - Pregnant victims

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Statutory guidance: Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services. Published 1 October 2021. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services)



Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse  
Strategic Board



## Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025 - 2028

Oxfordshire County Council Public Health Team

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

February 2025

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**Work Programme  
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Ian Snowdon, Chair | Ben Piper, Democratic Services Officer, [ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

| Topic   | strategic priorities       | Purpose  | Type                  | Report Leads                       |
|---|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>19 March 2026</b>  |                            |  |                       |                                    |
| Domestic Abuse Support and Accommodation – Focus on Provision | To be Fairer and Healthier | To scrutinise the support offered to domestic abuse victims receive effective, accessible, and accountable support services that meet their needs and promote safety and recovery.   | Overview and Scrutiny | Ansaf Azhar; Serena, Kate Holburn, |
| <b>04 June 2026</b>   |                            |  |                       |                                    |
| CQC: Response and Transformation                              | To be Healthier            | To scrutinise the Council’s response and plans for transformation following the “Good” CQC inspection report. The Committee will scrutinise how the Council intends to improve the four areas identified by the CQC as “Requires improvement”. | Overview and Scrutiny | Karen Fuller                       |
| Community Capacity Grants report                              | To be Fairer               | To scrutinise the Community Capacity Grants programme, focusing on equity of funding distribution, alignment with council priorities, and community engagement.  | Overview and Scrutiny | Karen Fuller; Laura Price          |

|   |                            |  |                       |                                |
|---|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Shared Lives  | To be Fairer and Healthier | To review to what extent is the Council's Shared Lives programme delivering equitable access, sufficient capacity and positive outcomes for people who need support particularly as the service seeks to broaden its offer including short breaks and improved pathways for people transitioning into adulthood/care leavers   | Overview and Scrutiny | Karen Fuller                   |
| <b>17 September 2026</b>                            |                            |  |                       |                                |
| Connect to Work                                     | To be Healthier            | To review the Connect to Work programme in Oxfordshire, a voluntary, UK Government-funded programme for people who are unemployed or at risk of losing work and who face barriers such as disability/health conditions and other specified disadvantages is being delivered in a way that provides equitable access, integrates effectively with local partners and achieves sustainable employment and what governance, performance measures and risk mitigations are in place as the programme goes live and scales up | Overview and Scrutiny | Karen Fuller                   |
| Oxfordshire Adults Safeguarding Board Annual Report | To be Fairer and Healthier | To receive a report from the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board to understand the trends over the last year across Oxfordshire, and how the Borads strategies have been impacting Oxfordshire residents.  | Overview              | Karen Fuller; Dr Chidgey-Clark |
| Oxfordshire Way Update                              | To be Fairer and Healthier | To receive an update, and scrutinise the development and future of the Oxfordshire Way   | Overview and Scrutiny | Karen Fuller                   |

| 03 December 2026                            |                            |   |                       |              |
|---|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Climate Change: (Mental) health & Community | To be Healthier            | Scrutinise how climate-related risks (heatwaves, flooding, extreme weather) affect physical and mental health.  | Overview and Scrutiny | Ansaf Azhar  |
| Marmot                                      | To be Fairer and Healthier | To scrutinise how the Council is reducing Adult Social Care Inequalities in Oxfordshire, through a Marmot-Aligned Assessment of IMD, Rurality and Access Gaps.  | Overview and Scrutiny | Ansaf Azhar  |
| 11 February 2027                            |                            |   |                       |              |
| Healthcare Equipment Supplier               | To be Healthier            | To what extent did the provider failure at NRS disrupt delivery, installation, repair and collection of community equipment, how were risks to residents (including hospital discharge and urgent need) managed during the transition, and how has the service been restored to business-as-usual performance | Overview and Scrutiny | Karen Fuller |
| Social prescribing & impact on community    | To be Healthier            | To scrutinise how Social Prescribing is being used in Oxfordshire, the impact it has, and the access residents have to social prescriptions.  | Overview and Scrutiny | Ansaf Azhar  |
| 22 April 2027                               |                            |   |                       |              |
| TBC   |                            |   |                       |              |
| TBC   |                            |   |                       |              |

***Note: It is important to recognise that the current Committee cannot bind a future Committee to any proposed programme of work. The incoming Committee retains full discretion to set and amend its own forward work plan. Accordingly, agenda items scheduled for meetings beyond March 2026 are indicative only and will be subject to confirmation by the Committee in the new Council year.***

**WORKING GROUPS**

| <b>Working Groups</b>                 |                                      |                    |                 |                |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>Name</b>                           | <b>Relevant strategic priorities</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Outcomes</b> | <b>Members</b> |
|                                       |                                      |                    |                 |                |
| There are currently no working groups |                                      |                    |                 |                |
|                                       |                                      |                    |                 |                |

**BRIEFINGS FOR MEMBER INFORMATION**

| <b>Member Briefings</b>                         |                                      |                    |                 |                |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>Name</b>                                     | <b>Relevant strategic priorities</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Outcomes</b> | <b>Members</b> |
|   |                                      |                    |                 |                |
| There are currently no planned Member briefings |                                      |                    |                 |                |
|   |                                      |                    |                 |                |

**Recommendation Tracker  
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Ian Snowdon, Chair | Ben Piper, Democratic Services Officer, [ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The recommendation tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress against agreed recommendations. The tracker is updated with the recommendations agreed at each meeting. Once an action has been completed or fully implemented, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker.

|            |                       |                     |                 |
|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b>KEY</b> | <b>Due to Cabinet</b> | <b>With Cabinet</b> | <b>Complete</b> |
|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|

**Recommendations:**

| Meeting date | Item                              | Recommendation  | Lead                               | Update/response                 |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 15-Jan-26    | Oxfordshire Unpaid Carer Strategy | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Council works with the newly commissioned partner to review the timings of the support on offer, to ensure support is available outside of main caring duty times and consider what asynchronous support could be offered in addition.</li> <li>2. That the Council gives further consideration to the use of the Carers ID card and its participation in lifestyle- offer schemes.</li> </ol> | Karen Fuller;<br>Isabel Rockingham | Presented to Cabinet: 24-Feb-26 |

**Action Tracker  
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Ian Snowdon, Chair | Ben Piper, Democratic Services Officer, [ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

|     |         |             |          |
|-----|---------|-------------|----------|
| KEY | Delayed | In Progress | Complete |
|-----|---------|-------------|----------|

| Meeting date         | Item                              | Action   | Lead                               | Update/response                                 |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Page 70<br>15-Jan-26 | Oxfordshire Unpaid Carer Strategy | 1. The Director agreed to check and clarify the requirements for unpaid carers to receive congestion charge exemption, following reports of inconsistent application, and to liaise with the relevant team.                | Karen Fuller;<br>Isabel Rockingham | Actions were passed on to Officers - March 2026 |
|                      |                                   | 2. The Council would revisit GP practices to ensure they were effectively reaching out to all potential unpaid carers, including checking for physical leaflets and information, especially for those not using computers. |                                    |   |
|                      |                                   | 3. Check the Carers Oxfordshire website is working correctly, specifically links to support groups.  |                                    |   |
|                      |                                   | 4. It was agreed that data from the new Carers Strain Index, once available, would be brought back to the Committee for review and discussion.   |                                    |   |
| 15-Jan-26            | Supported Independent Housing     | The Director agreed to provide a breakdown of the 58 supported living framework partners, specifying which were private and which were voluntary sector organisations.   | Karen Fuller;<br>Bhavna Taank      | Actions were passed on to Officers - March 2026 |

**Recommendation Update Tracker  
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Ian Snowdon, Chair | Ben Piper, Democratic Services Officer, [ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ben.piper@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The recommendation update tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress accepted recommendations. The tracker is updated with recommendations accepted by Cabinet. Once a recommendation has been updated, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker. If the recommendation will be update in the form of a separate item, it will be shaded yellow.

|            |                       |                       |                |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>KEY</b> | <b>Update Pending</b> | <b>Update in Item</b> | <b>Updated</b> |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|

| Cabinet Response Date | Item                               | Recommendation  | Lead                           | Update                         |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 15-July-25            | Co-Production in Adult Social care | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Council should, during the 2025/26 municipal year, require all staff within Children’s Services and within Adult Social Care to complete the Level 1 Co-production training.</li> <li>2. That the Council should encourage all councillors to complete the Level 1 Coproduction training during the 2025/26 municipal year.</li> <li>4. That the Council should adopt a Coproduction Charter committing itself to systemic and whole-hearted coproduction across Children’s Services and Adult Social Care.</li> </ol> | Karen Fuller;<br>Fulya Markham | Update expected in Summer 2026 |
| 18-Nov-26             | Oxfordshire Employment Services    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Council should explore whether an accreditation scheme would be an effective strategy to encourage businesses to work with Oxfordshire Employment Services.</li> <li>2. That the Council should expand and enhance the work of Oxfordshire Employment Services by increasing the Connect to Work programme target from 2,000 to 2,500 individuals over five</li> </ol>   | Karen Fuller;<br>Sam Harper    | Update expected in Autumn 2026 |

|     |                |                |         |
|-----|----------------|----------------|---------|
| KEY | Update Pending | Update in Item | Updated |
|-----|----------------|----------------|---------|

| Cabinet Response Date | Item | Recommendation   | Lead | Update |
|-----------------------|------|--|------|--------|
|                       |      | years, in recognition of the service's success and the wider social and health benefits of sustained employment. |      |        |