Vale of White Horse District Council

South Oxfordshire District Council

Listening Learning Leading

Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

July 2020

FOREWORD

“Homelessness has a shattering effect on the lives of individuals and families. It could happen to any one of us: through illness, loss of employment, the breakdown of a relationship, through no fault of our own. The councils have a duty to do all they can to help people who find themselves homeless or at risk of it and this homelessness strategy is a vital part of that plan”.

Councillor David Rouane
Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment
South Oxfordshire District Council

“Prevention is better than cure when it comes to homelessness. The homelessness strategy focusses on helping people avoid the devastation of losing their home but also puts in place support services if they do”.

Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment
Vale of White Horse District Council

“South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are achieving a high prevention and relief success rate when compared to the national average which is pleasing to see”.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Directorate
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a legal requirement for Local Housing Authorities to publish a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy every five years that sets out the scale and cause of the problem and how to prevent and tackle it.

Since 2010 homelessness and rough sleeping has risen significantly in England. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have not witnessed a similar rise, despite the increasing demands placed upon the homelessness service.

The councils have a proactive approach to tackling homelessness, with a strong focus upon prevention, early intervention and increasing access to sustainable accommodation. These actions have helped maintain low levels of homelessness and rough sleeping in the districts.

The joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 retains a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness; or if prevention is not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

The new strategy increases the support and accommodation available for homeless households and rough sleepers in the districts.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed new duties upon local housing authorities to prevent homelessness; to intervene early and to increase support for homeless households.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse adopted this approach during the lifetime of the previous strategy. The new strategy refines and builds upon these principles.

The strategy has been developed following a review of services that included a series of stakeholder engagement exercises with councillors; the public; service users and partner organisations.

The review considered the councils' achievements during the lifetime of the previous strategy; the current demands on the homelessness service, and the ability to meet these demands in the future. The review findings informed the aims and objectives of the new strategy.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, supported by a detailed action plan, has three aims:

- to prevent homelessness whenever possible
- to end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- to end the need for rough sleeping

Five strategic objectives have been identified to support the achievement of the aims:

1. To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness.

2. To minimise the use of temporary accommodation.

3. To further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

4. To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers.

5. To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

The success of the strategy will be measured against Key Performance Indicators and targets will be set annually.

The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and the findings published on the councils' websites.

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2. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness has a highly detrimental effect upon individuals, families and communities. It causes disruption and distress in the short-term and, if not quickly resolved, has a negative impact on the wellbeing and life opportunities of homeless households.

The councils recognise the importance of treating persons at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless with sensitivity and respect. The councils will also protect the identity of homeless persons.

The common perception of homelessness tends to be persons living on the street. Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, however it is a much broader issue affecting many thousands of households across the country.

Homeless households may be accommodated in emergency shelters, refuges, hostels and in temporary accommodation provided by the local authority.

In November 2018, the homelessness charity Shelter estimated that there are at least 320,000 people recorded as homeless in Britain. These figures however do not include the larger number of households referred to as the "hidden homeless". These households may be living with friends and not have a bedroom, known as "sofa-surfing", or they may be living in statutory overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing.

The most common reason for homelessness in England is family or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate. The second most prevalent reason is the termination of a private rented tenancy[1].

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 sets out how South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils will tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the next five years.

The strategy has been developed following a review of homelessness services that included a series of stakeholder engagement exercises.

The strategy will be published and progress against key performance indicators and the action plan will be reviewed annually.

[1] Ministry of Housing, Community and Housing; Statutory Homelessness, October to December (Q3) 2019:England.

3. THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT 2017

The Homeless Reduction Act was implemented on 3 April 2018. The act places new duties on local housing authorities to intervene early to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness[2] for all eligible applicants, not just applicants that have a priority need.[3]

The Homelessness Reduction Act does not replace previous legislation, it introduces additional duties on local housing authorities and public bodies.

The aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act are to improve the quality of housing advice; to refocus local housing authorities on prevention work; to increase support for single people and to strengthen links between public bodies in order to prevent homelessness.

The main duties introduced by the Act can be summarised as follows:

- The extension of the period someone is threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.
- A duty on local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for all eligible households regardless of priority need.
- A duty on local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible households regardless of priority need for 56 days.
- A duty on local housing authorities to carry out a holistic assessment of an applicant's housing needs and to produce a Personalised Housing Plan for each applicant.
- A duty on named public services to notify the local housing authority of potentially homeless households.

The 1996 Housing Act (Part VII) establishes what duties may be owed by the local housing authority to provide temporary accommodation. The type of duty owed is dependent upon whether the applicant is eligible for assistance; whether they are homeless; if they are in priority need and if they are intentionally homeless.

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[2] Appendix 2: Definitions of key terms Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

[3]The main priority need categories are: households with dependent children; pregnancy; persons aged 16 or 17; care leavers aged 18 to 20; and households who are vulnerable as a result of old age, physical disability, mental health problems, fleeing domestic abuse or time spent in care, prison or the armed forces. The priority need categories are defined by the 1996 Housing Act (Part VII) and the Homelessness Act 2002.

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

4. THE REVIEW PROCESS

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is informed by a detailed review of homelessness services in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

The review considers the:

- councils' achievements during the lifetime of the previous strategy
- actions outstanding from the previous strategy
- demand on homelessness services
- councils' current provision of homelessness services
- unmet demand for council homelessness services
- future challenges facing the councils' homelessness service.

The review included engagement exercises with key stakeholders:

Stakeholder workshop event	Date(s) held
Housing needs team	18 March 2019 21 March 2019
Internal and external partners[4]	18 June 2019 21 June 2019
South Oxfordshire councillors	25 June 2019
Vale of White Horse councillors	26 June 2019

Telephone interviews were conducted with eight households in temporary accommodation to receive feedback from services users.

5. ACHEIVEMENTS DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE PREVIOUS STRATEGY

The key achievement of the previous strategy was to help reduce homelessness. This was during a period when nationally homelessness and rough sleeping increased significantly.

[4] Appendix 1: Partner organisations attending stakeholder workshops

The introduction of new services and work processes focussed around the prevention of homelessness were central to achieving this result.

The main service improvements introduced during the lifetime of the previous strategy can be summarised as follows:

- Enhanced Housing Options (EHO)

  EHO is a web-based self-help tool that allows households to answer a series of questions and receive a personalised housing plan. The plan provides tailored advice and information to help the household either maintain their current accommodation or secure alternative accommodation. In the last two years 4234 EHO assessments have been completed in South and Vale.

  An important feature of EHO assessments are that if the applicant indicates they are at risk of homelessness, they will be contacted by a Housing Needs Officer to be offered help with their housing situation.

  Enhanced Housing Options has increased the capacity of Housing Needs Officers to focus resources upon the more complex and vulnerable homelessness cases.

- Front-to-end customer service

  A new model of working has been introduced to streamline and accelerate housing advice and assistance. The traditional service delivery method of a customer contacting a housing assistant, being referred to a Housing Needs Officer and then potentially a homelessness officer, was replaced by a direct line to a Housing Needs Officer who becomes the caseworker for that person.

- Adult Homeless Pathway

  In 2017/18 South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils entered into a funding agreement with Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to support the Adult Homeless Pathway. The pathway provides over 200 supported beds for homeless households.

- Outreach support for rough sleepers.

  In 2017 the councils entered into a joint contract with Connection Support to provide an outreach service for rough sleepers. The service offers rough sleepers intensive and holistic support focussed on securing sustainable accommodation.

- Housing First Project

  South Oxfordshire District Council are working in partnership with SOHA and Aspire Oxfordshire to provide support and accommodation for rough sleepers. The Housing First Project has accommodated six former rough sleepers in sustainable long-term housing.

- Oxfordshire Trailblazers

  In 2016 the Government funded a network of homelessness prevention trailblazers. South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse were part of a successful bid led by Oxford City Council. The Oxfordshire Trailblazer brings together key partners to prevent homelessness. The trailblazer had three workstreams: targeted upstream prevention, resilience services and a Homeless Champions Network.

  Funding for the project ends in 2019, however South and Vale worked with trailblazer partners to ensure a legacy for the project.

- Goldrose Supported Accommodation Project

  From September 2018 the councils entered into an agreement with Mind Oxfordshire to provide support for eight households with mental health issues. The accommodation is provided by Advance Housing.

- The Gold Standard

  The National Practitioner Support Service[5] issued the Gold Standard challenge to local housing authorities in England. The Gold Standard was ten service standard challenges for housing advice services. In April 2018 South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse became the first councils with a shared housing service to achieve the silver level award.

- Partnership working with advice agencies

  The council has established rapid referral protocols with debt advice agencies to help customers quickly access specialist benefits and debt advice.

- The Duty to Refer

  South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse worked in partnership with public bodies across Oxfordshire to successfully introduce a new web-based referral system.

[5] The National Practitioner Support Service supports local authorities and their partners to deliver early intervention and prevention-focussed housing option services

6. THE STRENGTHS OF THE COUNCILS' HOMELESSNESS SERVICE

- Dedicated Officers who offer a high-quality service to partner agencies and customers.
- Effective partnership working with Registered Providers, statutory agencies, advice agencies and volunteer groups.
- A practical, problem solving approach to tackling homelessness
- Protocols with partner agencies to provide timely support to homeless households.
- White Horse Lettings[6] provides an excellent service to both private landlords and prospective tenants.
- An innovative approach to providing sustainable accommodation for homeless households and rough sleepers.
- Effective participation in county-wide partnerships including the Adult Homeless Pathway and Housing Support Advisory Group.

The feedback received from service users on the overall housing needs service

"Very good, lovely, very impressed. Kept me updated".

"Handled my case very well, placed me in temporary accommodation after initial meeting, made a successful bid shortly afterwards"

"absolutely fine, very informative"

"Happy with how quickly I was offered accommodation after a house fire"

"Very well handled, felt looked after, felt there was someone on my team, would say 95 per cent positive"

"Handled my case well"

"Dealt with extremely well, good communication"

"Can't fault initial advice from caseworker. Set up plan straightaway"

[6] White Horse Lettings is the councils' in-house social lettings agency.

7. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The review identified six areas for further development:

- Closer county-wide partnership working.

  Build upon the strong relationships with county-wide partners to develop a strategic county-wide approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping that will deliver a more consistent service and share best practice across Oxfordshire.

- Build upon the strong existing relationships with Registered Providers and private landlords to increase access to sustainable accommodation.

- Review the provision of temporary accommodation

  Vale of White Horse District Council owns 19 units of temporary accommodation. The council owns three houses in Abingdon and two hostels in Wantage and Faringdon that have shared bathrooms. South Oxfordshire District Council does not own any temporary accommodation.

- Increase support and accommodation for rough sleepers

  Connection Support provides a high-quality outreach service in South and Vale, however the councils should consider increasing the support available to rough sleepers.

  The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) in Oxfordshire provides emergency accommodation to rough sleepers in extreme weather conditions.

  The councils have provided a trial winter shelter in 2019/20. The local shelter accommodated persons rough sleeping in South or Vale. Rough sleepers accessing the receive intensive support to rapidly secure alternative accommodation.

- Better consultation with service users

  Develop a customer feedback framework to promote continuous service improvement.

- Raise awareness of the homelessness service

  Aim to promote the quality of its homelessness services in the media and provide a practical guide to councillors on rough sleeping.

8. FUTURE CHALLENGES

The review identified a number of challenges facing the homelessness service. The main challenges can be summarised as follows:

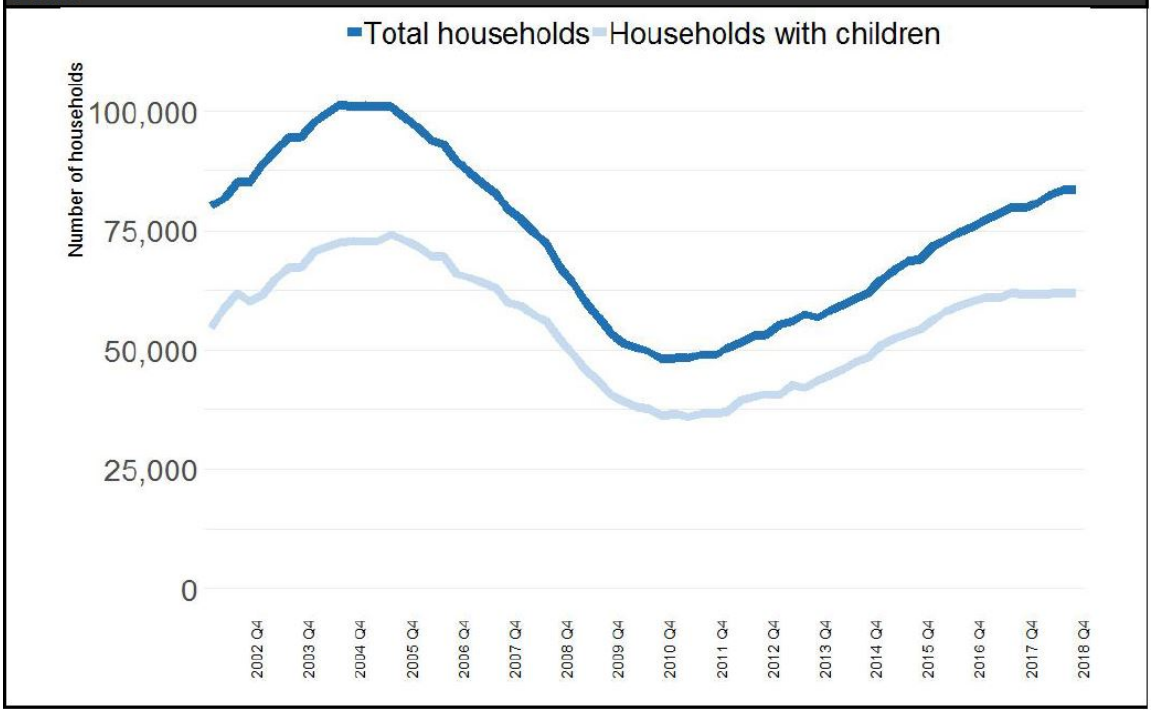
- The increasing demand upon the homelessness service to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- The greater complexity and increased vulnerability of homeless cases.
- The increased administrative burden of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- The increasing demand for affordable rented housing.
- The rising cost of home ownership and open market renting.
- The impact of welfare reform, particularly the four-year freeze on local housing allowance.
- The continuing roll-out of Universal Credit.
- The rise in household debt and rent arrears.
- The reduction in county-wide funding for housing related services.
- The withdrawal of private landlords from the housing benefit market as a result of the divergence between market rents and local housing allowance.
- The affordability of “affordable rent” tenancies for the lowest income households.

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

9. HOMELESSNESS – THE NATIONAL PICTURE

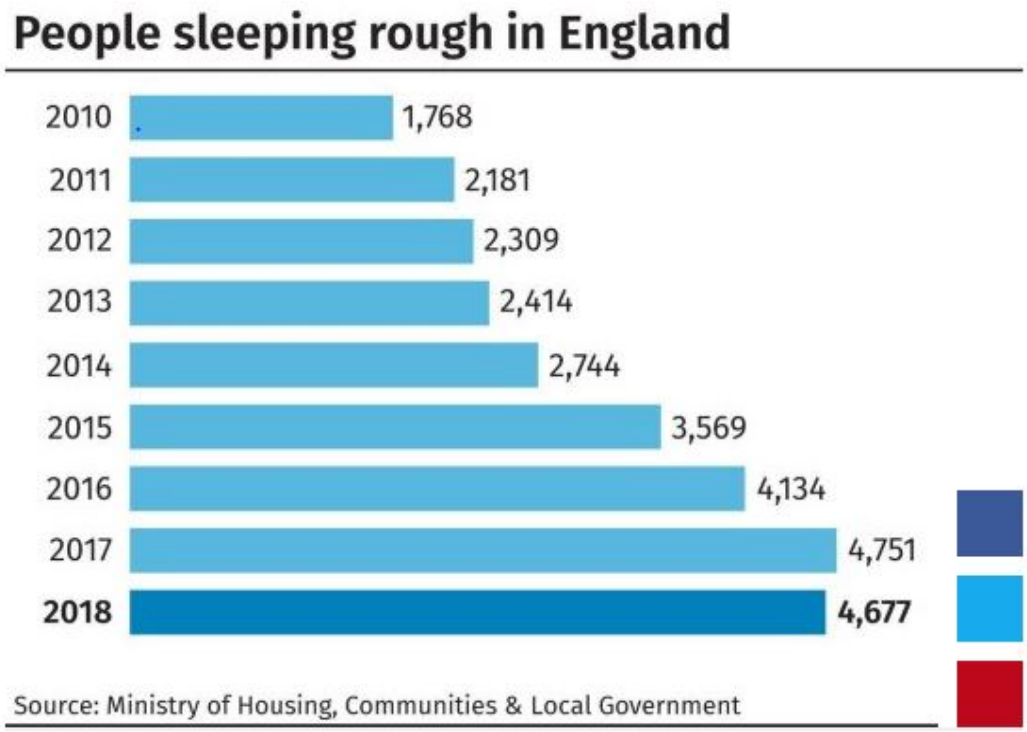
Since 2010 the number of households in temporary accommodation has risen significantly in England. By 31 December 2018, the number of statutory homeless households in temporary accommodation had increased by **63 per cent** from 50,400 to 83,700. By 31 December 2019, the number of households in temporary accommodation had risen further to 88,380.

Figure 9: Number of households in temporary accommodation, 2002 to Q4 2018



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The number of rough sleepers in England since 2010 has increased by **165 per cent.**



The number of rough sleepers recorded in November 2019 fell slightly to 4266.

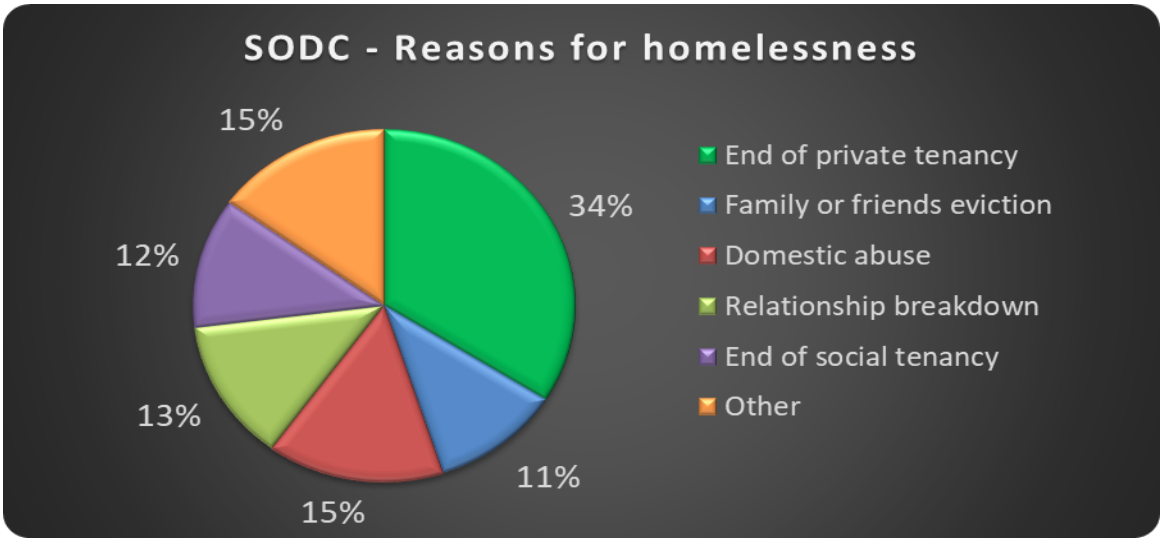
The rise in homelessness and rough sleeping nationally has not been reflected in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, despite the increasing demand on the homelessness service.

Homelessness in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse

10. REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

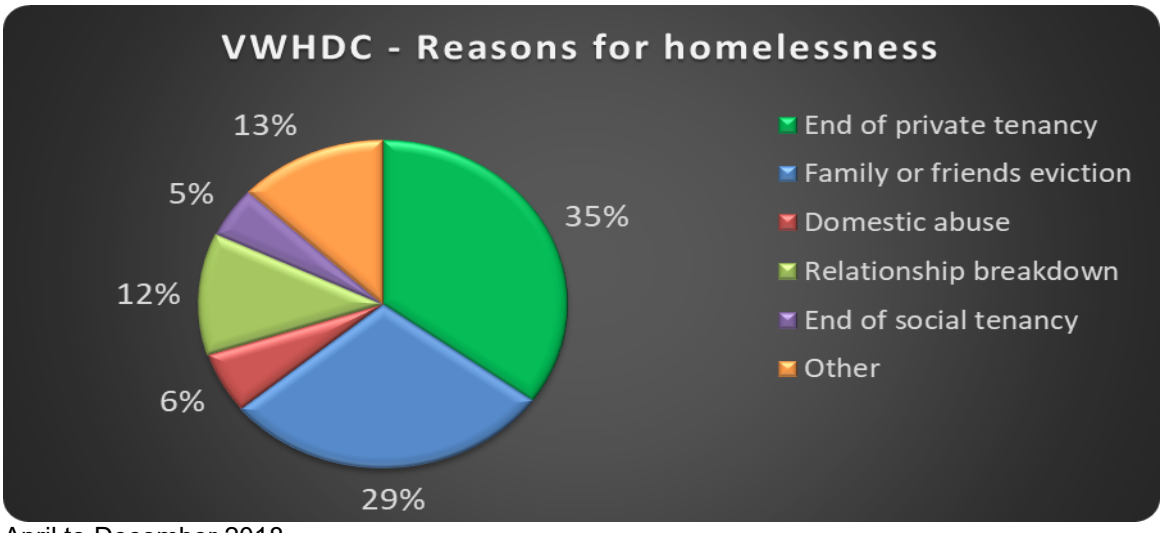
The main reasons for being at risk of homelessness in South Oxfordshire between April and December 2018 was the loss of private rented accommodation, followed by domestic abuse and relationship breakdowns.

The loss of private rented accommodation is an increasing cause of homelessness. Private landlords can secure significantly higher market rents in comparison with Local Housing Allowance.



April to December 2018

The loss of private rented accommodation is also the main cause of homelessness in the Vale of White Horse, followed by family or friend evictions and relationship breakdowns.



April to December 2018

The main reasons for homelessness in South Oxfordshire from October to December 2019, were loss of an assured shorthold tenancy, followed by domestic abuse and family or friends not willing to accommodate.

The main reasons for homelessness in Vale of White Horse from October to December 2019, were loss of an assured shorthold tenancy, followed by family or friends not willing to accommodate and non-violent relationship breakdowns.

11. HOUSEHOLDS WITH SPECIFIC HOUSING NEEDS

Households experiencing domestic abuse

Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services (ODAS) offers emotional and practical support to victims suffering or fleeing domestic abuse. The support may include; phone support, face to face meetings in a safe environment, safety planning and access to a refuge where women (with or without children) can stay temporarily in order to escape an abusive relationship.

The councils provide a Sanctuary Scheme to allow persons experiencing domestic abuse to remain safely in their home with enhanced security measures.

The councils have a specialist Housing Needs Officer who leads on domestic abuse issues. The role includes attending Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and multi-agency tasking meetings with partner agencies.

Persons experiencing domestic abuse can be referred to Independent Domestic Violence Advisors for specialist support.

SODC and VWHDC are members of the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership. The partner organisations are the Police; Social Care; Health Services; Probation and housing providers. The partners work together to tackle crime and safeguard vulnerable people in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

The South and Vale Community Safety Partnership provides funding to target-harden properties to help people feel safe and remain in their own homes, for example victims of domestic abuse or exploitation.

The monthly joint tasking meeting, managed by the Community Safety Team, brings together multi-agencies to enhance partnership working and make best use of resources. Cases of concern are discussed to identify appropriate actions to support vulnerable residents.

Households with persons who have mental health needs

Research by the homelessness charity Homeless Link reports that 86 per cent of homeless persons suffer from mental health issues. 44 per cent have a formal diagnosis of a mental health condition.

In South Oxfordshire, between April and December 2019, a total of 42 households at risk of homelessness had mental health issues. In the Vale of White Horse 37 households at risk of homelessness had mental health issues. This equates to 47 per cent of households in South Oxfordshire and 40 per cent of households in the Vale of White Horse.

The Oxfordshire Mental Health Pathway provides supported accommodation for persons with high mental health support needs.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse recognises that persons at risk of homelessness with low to medium mental health issues may not be eligible for supported housing.

In September 2018 the councils entered into an agreement with Mind Oxfordshire to support eight households with mental health issues in accommodation provided by Advance Housing.

Households Leaving the Armed Forces

The councils have developed strong links with the Armed Forces in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

A specialist Housing Needs Officer attends events and forums held by the Armed Forces to promote the housing assistance available from the councils. The councils work closely with SSAFA, the armed forces charity, to offer housing advice and support to members of the armed forces community. This proactive approach reduces the number of persons leaving the armed forces who become at risk of homelessness.

In 2018/19 South Oxfordshire were approached by six households leaving armed forces accommodation at risk of becoming homeless. All six households avoided becoming homeless, and secured alternative accommodation with the assistance of the housing needs team

The Vale of White Horse were approached by twelve households leaving armed forces accommodation at risk of becoming homeless. The housing needs team helped secure alternative accommodation for ten of the households and one household left the area.

Households with persons who have substance misuse issues

The number of homeless households with substance misuse issues is significantly higher than in the general population. Research by Homeless Link reports 41 per cent of homeless households have drug issues and 27 per cent have issues with alcohol.

In South Oxfordshire, between April and December 2019, a total of 16 households at risk of homelessness had substance misuse issues. The same number of households at risk of homelessness and suffering substance abuse issues approached the Vale of White Horse. This equates to 18 per cent of households in South Oxfordshire and 17 per cent of households in the Vale of White Horse.

There is local support available for persons experiencing substance misuse. Turning Point is a social enterprise that supports persons with drug and alcohol issues. It has a support hub based in Didcot and offers weekly drop-in sessions in Abingdon and Henley.

Young Persons in housing need

Oxfordshire County Council has a statutory duty to provide support and accommodation for looked after children[7] in Oxfordshire.

The Young People's Supported Housing Pathway provides supported housing for 16 to 24-year olds. It is delivered by Oxfordshire County Council in partnership with the five district councils. The pathway provides accommodation for vulnerable young people, including those owed a statutory duty by the County Council. There are currently 227 units of accommodation in Oxfordshire, including 11 units in South Oxfordshire and 21 units in the Vale of White Horse.

The councils refer vulnerable young persons into the Young Persons Pathway.

Oxfordshire County Council recently published its Housing and Homelessness Strategy for Vulnerable Young People and Families in Oxfordshire. The strategy has three broad aims; to provide the right buildings for young people, to provide appropriate support services and to offer clear housing pathways.

[7] A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. Looked after children are also referred to as children in care.

The strategy and a service review has informed the recommissioning of housing provision for young people in Oxfordshire in 2020. The supported housing pathway model is being replaced by "Young People's Supported Accommodation" (YPSA).

South and Vale are active partners in the co-commissioning of services for young people in Oxfordshire, led by Oxfordshire County Council. This reflects the close working relationship between Oxfordshire County Council and the district councils to jointly deliver housing-related services for vulnerable young people.

The new delivery model focuses upon intensive intervention to ensure that young people access the support they need and then move on to independent accommodation.

The YMCA Henley also provides 31 units of supported accommodation for young people aged 16-25 with a local connection to Henley or the surrounding area.

In South Oxfordshire, between April and December 2019, a total of 44 young persons at risk of homelessness approached the council for housing assistance. The number approaching the Vale of White Horse for assistance was 40.

12. DEMAND FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

A key indicator of demand on the council's homelessness service is the number of successful homelessness prevention cases.

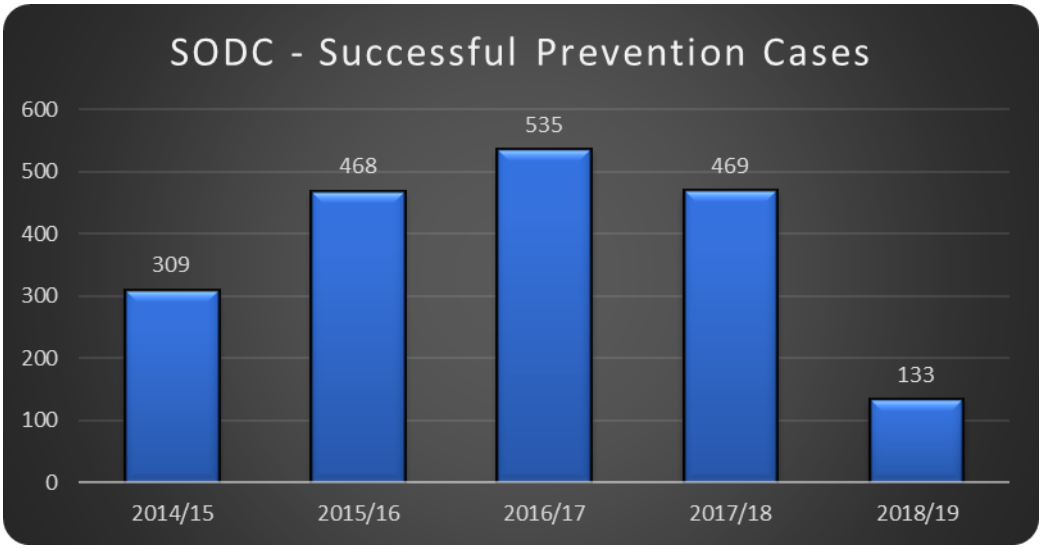
The Homelessness Reduction Act changed the definitions of homelessness prevention and relief and introduced new reporting standards. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of recorded successful prevention cases from April 2018 onwards.

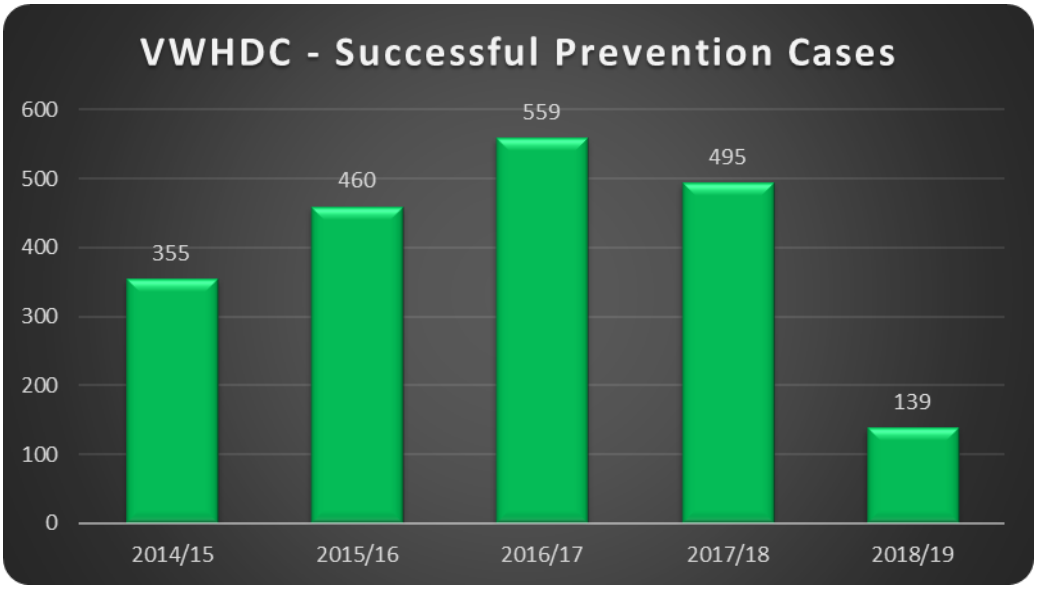
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have a proactive, early intervention approach to prevent homelessness.
The new reporting standards do not include upstream prevention work undertaken before the statutory 56-day period. The new standards also redefine certain cases previously recorded as successful prevention as successful relief cases.

A consistent indicator of demand between 2017/18 and 2018/19 are the number of Enhanced Housing Options assessments completed

Households at risk of homelessness complete an on-line Enhanced Housing Options assessment. The assessment helps inform the Personalised Housing Plan completed with the caseworker.

The number of EHOs completed increased from 882 in 2017/18 to 915 in 2018/19 which equates to an increase of 4 per cent.





The Local Government Association has highlighted the additional casework generated by the Homelessness Reduction Act:

"There have been significant new burdens associated with the Act's implementation. Local Housing Authorities have seen increasing footfall, and an increased administrative burden associated with each case"[8].

This quotation reflects the experience of South and Vale Housing Needs Offices.

[8] Local Government Association: Homelessness Reduction Act: one year on. Submission to Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee 5 April 2019

13. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND OUTCOMES

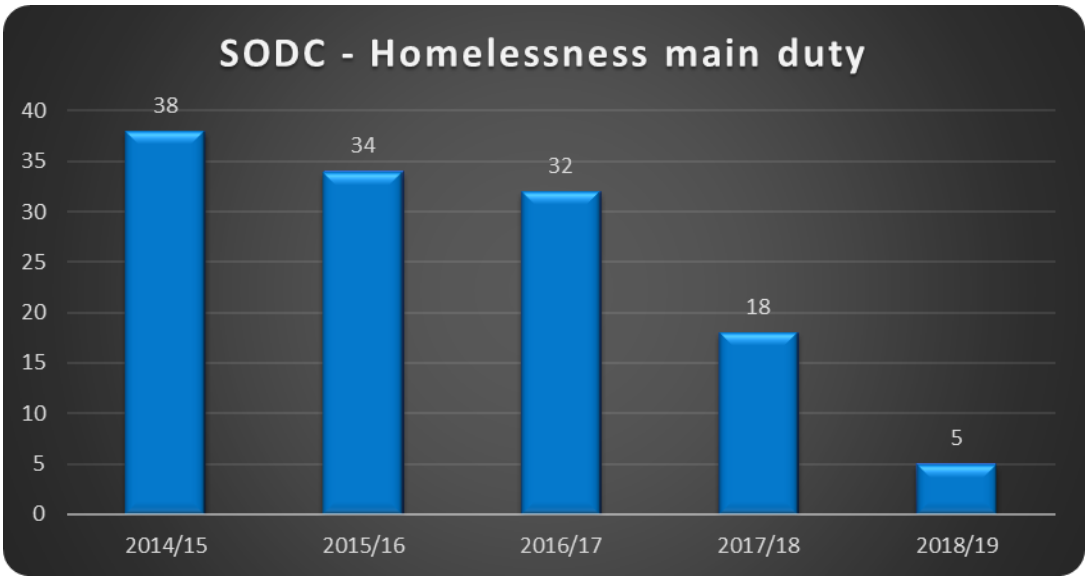
Despite rising demand, South and Vale continue to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness. The number of cases where the councils have failed to prevent or relieve homelessness has fallen significantly.

The Homelessness Reduction Act requires local housing authorities to focus upon preventing or relieving homelessness. The authority cannot make a main homeless decision until they have been unable to relieve homelessness within 56 days.

The main duty decision determines if the applicant is owed the main housing duty. The decision assesses whether the applicant is homeless, if they are in priority need and whether they are intentionally homeless.

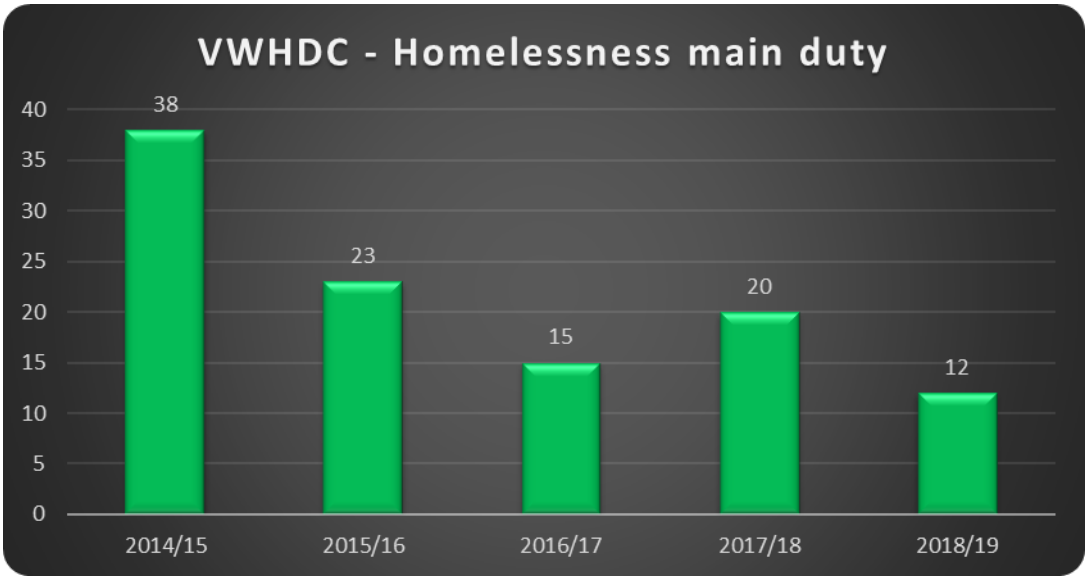
An applicant who is homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless is owed the main housing duty. The council will have an ongoing duty to provide temporary accommodation until they secure suitable alternative accommodation.

The councils are focused upon preventing or relieving homelessness in agreement with the household before making a main duty homelessness decision that may affect them adversely.



South Oxfordshire completed 16 homelessness assessments during 2018/19. The table below shows the type of decision.

Decision type	Number of decisions
Main duty	5
Not homeless	3
Not priority need	5
Intentionally homeless	3



Vale of White Horse completed 26 homelessness assessments during 2018/19.

The table below shows the type of decision.

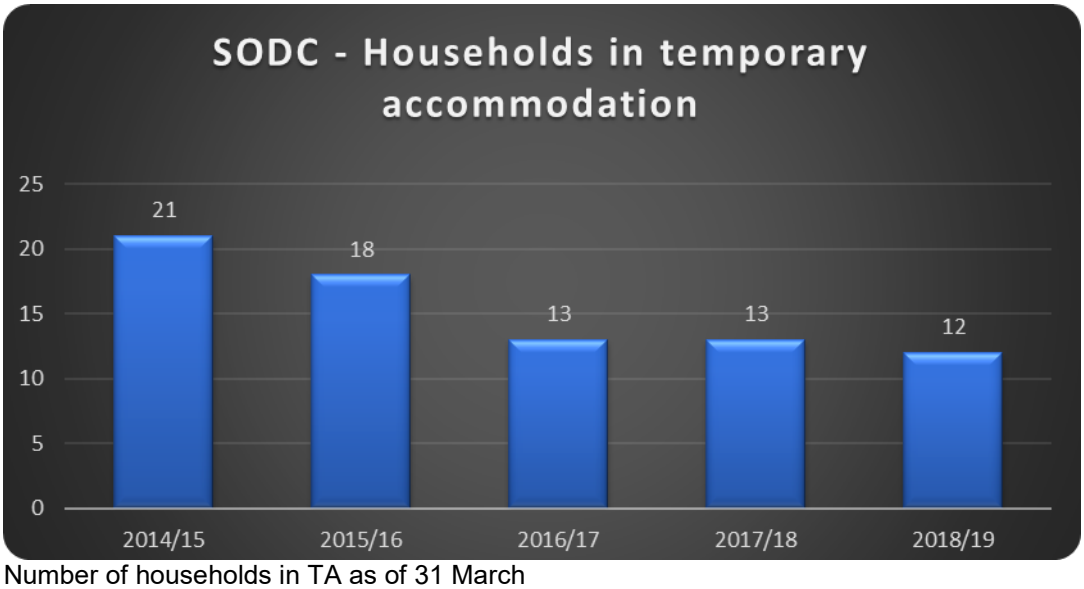
Decision type	Number of decisions
Main duty	12
Not homeless	1
Not priority need	5
Intentionally homeless[9]	8

South and Vale continue to work with intentionally homeless households to secure a housing solution and are exploring options with Oxfordshire County Council to improve housing outcomes for intentionally homeless families.

[9] Applicants are considered intentionally homeless if they have lost their previous accommodation as a result of a deliberate act or omission on their part and the accommodation would have been available and reasonable to continue to occupy.

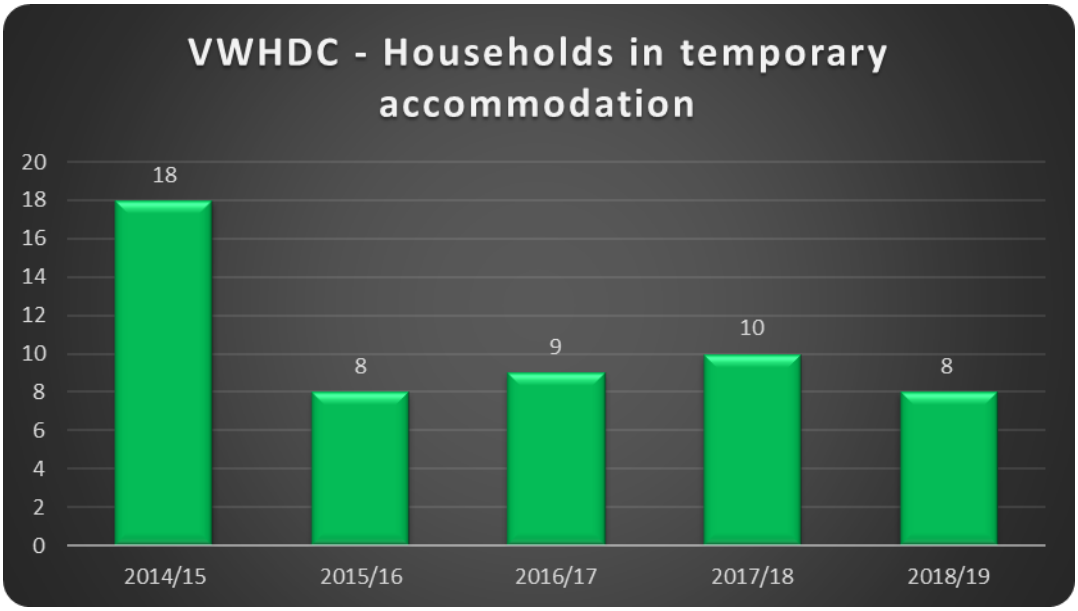
The success of the councils in preventing or relieving homelessness is further evidenced by the decreasing number of households in temporary accommodation.

The provision of temporary accommodation is often disruptive to homeless households, who do not normally have a choice over the type or location of the accommodation. It may limit their access to support networks and affect work and school arrangements. The councils' approach is to minimise the use of temporary accommodation by securing alternative accommodation in agreement with the applicant if prevention is not possible.



Number of households in TA as of 31 March

The number of households in temporary accommodation in South Oxfordshire fell by **43** per cent in the last five years.

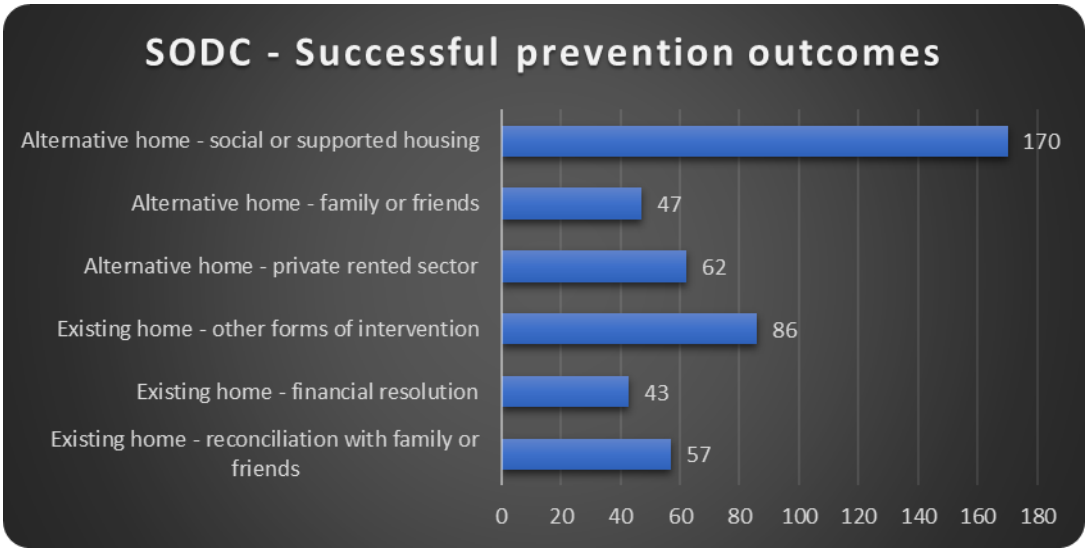


Number of households in TA as of 31 March

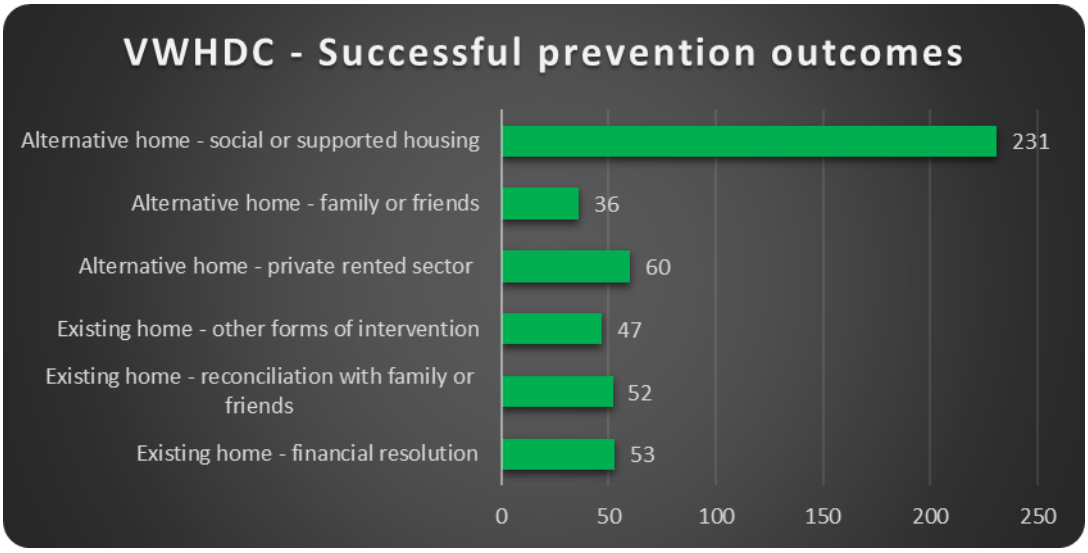
The number of households in temporary accommodation in Vale of White Horse fell by **56** per cent in the last five years.

The councils can prevent or relieve homeless by either enabling the household to remain at home or by securing suitable alternative accommodation.

In 2017/18* the three main outcomes for households at risk of homelessness in South and Vale was to securing social housing, to be able to remain at home, or securing accommodation in the private rented sector.



2017/18

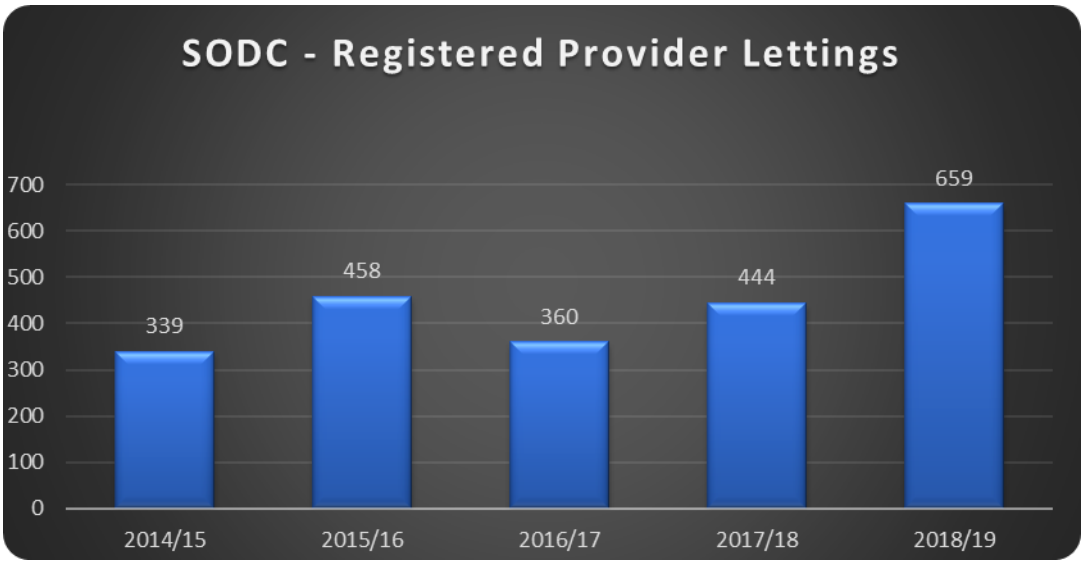


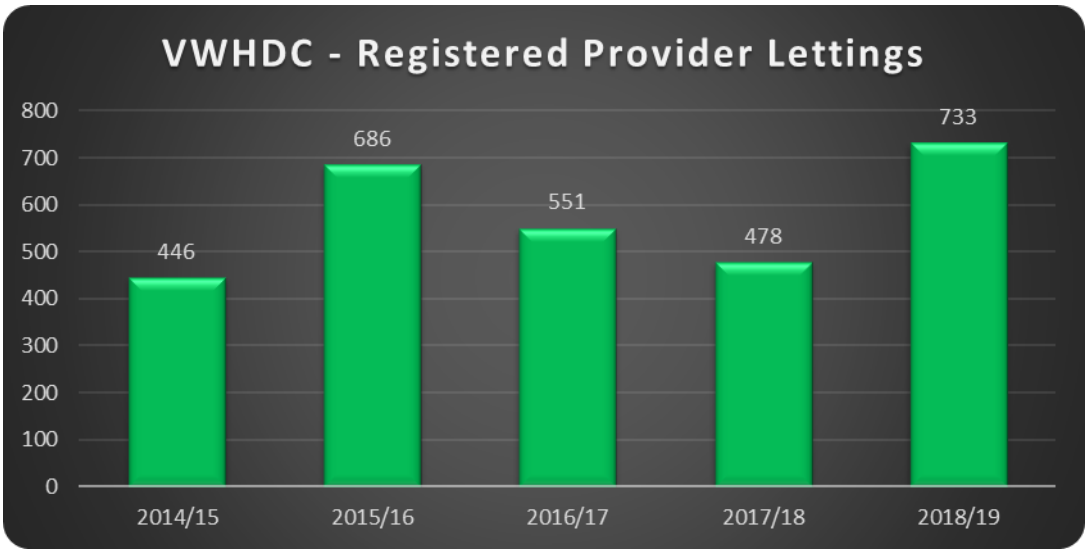
2017/18

* 2017/18 are the most recently available published statistics.

Lettings by Registered Providers

The supply of social or supported housing lettings is a key tool for preventing or relieving homelessness. The number of lettings by Registered Providers has increased significantly over the last five years.





Private Lettings

The councils both maintain a housing register for applicants to apply for social housing. Eligible applicants are placed in one of four priority bands[10] and bid for Registered Provider properties advertised on the Choice Based Lettings website.

As of 31 March 2019, there were 859 applicants in housing need on South Oxfordshire's housing register and 725 applicants in housing need on the Vale of White Horse's housing register.

The length of time an applicant may wait to make a successful bid varies depending upon their priority banding and the areas for which they are bidding.

It is often the case that households at risk of homelessness may have insufficient priority or waiting time to make a successful bid through Choice Based Lettings. It is therefore essential that the councils can secure affordable tenancies in the private rented sector.

White Horse Lettings is the councils in-house social letting agency. It works closely with private landlords to secure affordable tenancies for households at risk of homelessness. White Horse Lettings offers a range of free services to landlords including tenancy support, a rent deposit scheme and rent-in-advance loans to tenants.

Over the last three years White Horse Lettings has secured 112 new tenancies in South Oxfordshire and 115 tenancies in the Vale of White Horse.

In 2018/19 White Horse Lettings worked with 15 new landlords in South Oxfordshire and 30 new landlords in the Vale of White Horse.

Remaining at home

To enable households at risk of homelessness to remain safely at home often requires the skilled intervention of Housing Needs Officers.

It may be necessary to mediate and negotiate with friends or family to allow the household to remain safely at the property.

The household may need legal or financial advice to help them remain in the property. The councils have a rapid referral protocol with Citizens Advice and strong relationships with independent advice agencies.

[10] Band 1: Exceptional Need,; Band 2: Urgent Need; Band 3: Significant Need; Band 4: Adequately housed

Rough sleeping in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse

A key aim of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is to end the need for rough sleeping in the districts.

The Government's definition of rough sleeping is as follows:

- People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments)

- People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes").

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.

14. REASONS FOR ROUGH SLEEPING

Connection Support provide an outreach service for rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. Connection Support produces a weekly report to the councils on rough sleeping in the districts.

Many of the rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse have chaotic lifestyles. In most cases the complex nature of rough sleeping is further complicated by substance misuse or mental health issues. There are also incidents where rough sleepers are not willing to engage with services or have been excluded from hostel accommodation.

The outreach service is focussed upon supporting rough sleepers into secure, sustainable accommodation. This may include suitable accommodation with family or friends, private rented accommodation or access to the Adult Homeless Pathway.

15. LEVELS OF ROUGH SLEEPING

In 2018/19 Connection Support received 61 referrals for rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and 47 referrals for the Vale of White Horse.

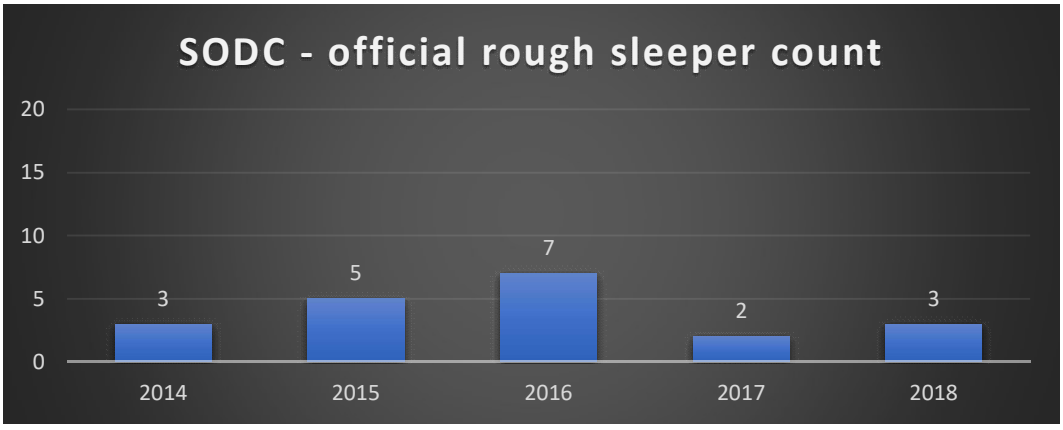
The tables below illustrate the gender and age of rough sleepers referred to the council's outreach service in 2018/19.

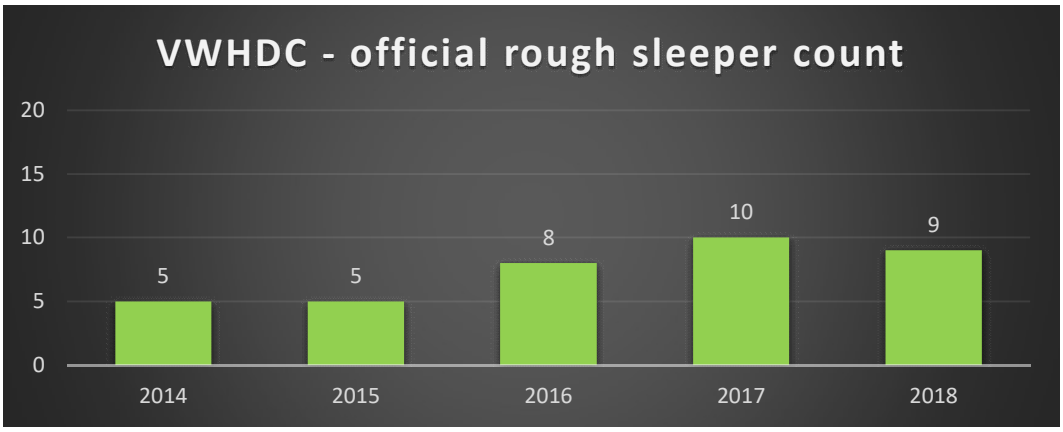
Gender:	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Number SODC:	38	9	14	61
Number VOWH	30	8	9	47

Age:	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	Unknown	Total
Number SODC:	10	8	11	5	2	1	24	61
Number VOWH:	7	7	5	6	3	1	18	47

Connection Support have reported increasing demand for their services over the last four years. In 2019/20 the number of referrals increased in South and Vale to 103 and 92 respectively.

The official annual rough sleeper count, undertaken by all local housing authorities, shows a low level of rough sleeping in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. These figures reflect the success of the councils, in partnership with Connection Support, in resolving incidents of rough sleeping.





The 2019 official count recorded four rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire and three in the Vale of White Horse.

The outreach service provides a more accurate, intelligence-led estimate of rough sleeping in the districts. The number of persons recorded as believed to be rough sleeping in the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire at the end of June 2019 was six persons in each district.

Persons of no fixed abode

There are homeless persons who are not rough sleeping but do not have a permanent address. These households are described as having no fixed abode and are sometimes referred to as “sofa surfers”.

This “hidden homelessness” is significantly more prevalent than rough sleeping, but due to its nature is difficult to quantify.

As of 30 June 2019, there were 46 persons on South Oxfordshire’s housing register and 64 on Vale of White Horse’s register who were either of no fixed abode or lacking a bedroom. This figure however only reflects households who have applied to the housing register.

16. SUPPORT FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS

The councils continue to increase support and accommodation for rough sleepers.

The councils financially support the Adult Homeless Pathway in Oxfordshire. The funding secures twelve high support hostel beds in Oxford and thirteen supported flats in Abingdon. The Pathway provides short to medium-term accommodation for rough sleepers and supports them into sustainable long-term accommodation.

In September 2018 the councils entered into an agreement with Mind Oxfordshire to support eight households with mental health issues in accommodation provided by Advance Housing.

South Oxfordshire District Council, working in partnership with SOHA and Aspire Oxfordshire, have launched a Housing First Project. The project provides six units of accommodation with intensive support for former rough sleepers. The project offers long term accommodation in a supportive and sustainable environment. Vale of White Horse District Council are exploring options with Registered Providers to develop a Housing First project.

The councils support female rough sleepers, with access to female only temporary accommodation and will provide sanitary products in an emergency.

The councils, when necessary, can also arrange temporary accommodation for pets belonging to homeless households while attempting to secure sustainable accommodation for their owner(s).

The increasing support and accommodation available to rough sleepers supports the strategic aim to end the need for rough sleeping in South and Vale.

17. STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This strategy, supported by a detailed action plan, has three central aims:

- to prevent homelessness whenever possible
- to end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- to end the need for rough sleeping

Following stakeholder engagement exercises and a review of homelessness, five key objectives have been identified to achieve the strategic aims:

Objective 1: To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness.

- Further develop county-wide partnership working to improve the delivery of homelessness services.
- Improve partnership working with key agencies to prevent homelessness.
- Improve engagement with councillors.
- Develop a communications strategy.

Objective 2: To minimise the use of temporary accommodation.

- Prevent the need for households to access temporary accommodation.
- Assist households to move quickly into suitable and sustainable accommodation.
- Review the provision of council-owned temporary accommodation.

Objective 3: To further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

- Further improve the quality of housing advice offered to customers.
- Improve performance monitoring and service development.
- Create a customer feedback framework to promote continuous service improvement.

Objective 4: To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers.

- Improve access to emergency accommodation for rough sleepers.
- Improve the support available for rough sleepers.
- Better data collection to tackle rough sleeping.

Objective 5: To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

- Improve the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable persons.

- Encourage private landlords to let their properties to households at risk of homelessness.

- Bring empty properties back into use for households at risk of homelessness.

Measurable Outcomes

The success of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be measured against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- The percentage of successful homeless prevention cases.*
  The KPI target for 2020/21 will be 80% successful prevention cases**

- the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation
  The KPI target for 2020/21 will be a ceiling of 15 households per council.

- the length of stay for homeless households in emergency temporary accommodation.
  The KPI target for 2020/21 will be a ceiling of 42 days.

- The number of rough sleepers.
  The KPI target for 2020/21 will be a maximum of six rough sleepers in each district at month end.

* The definition of a successful homelessness prevention case is that the household has suitable and sustainable accommodation available for a minimum of six months.

** The reported figure will include the number of successful cases as well as the percentage of successful cases.

The most recent South East regional figure for successful homelessness prevention[11] is 56 per cent.

[11] Average of quarterly figures from Jul-Sep 2018 to April-June 2019

Vale of White Horse District Council

South Oxfordshire District Council

Listening Learning Leading

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

18. Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

ACTION PLAN

1. Improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness

Objective	Key Actions	Timescales	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Further develop county-wide partnership working to improve the delivery of homelessness services	• Develop with county-wide partners proposals to improve the delivery of homelessness services in Oxfordshire. The proposals will consider the potential benefits of county-wide partnership working, including pooled budgets and co-commissioning.	Year 1	Office time	HNM*
	• In partnership with Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, recruit to the position of an Oxfordshire Homelessness Co-Ordinator to help develop proposals on county-wide working	Years 1 - 2	FHSG**	HNM & HATL
	• To work in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire district councils to improve housing services for vulnerable young people through co-commissioning of services and the development of the Young Persons Housing Strategy.	Years 1 - 5	Officer time FHSG	HATL
	• Work with Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to commission and deliver the Adult Homeless Pathway in 2020/21 and 2021/22.	Years 1-2	FHSG	HNM & HATL

	• To work with partners from "Oxfordshire Homeless Prevention Trailblazer" to maintain and develop links with probation services, hospitals and Oxfordshire County Council children's services to prevent homelessness through early intervention.	Years 1-5	Officer time	HNM & HATLs
	• Work with Oxfordshire County Council to develop better housing outcomes for families found to be intentionally homeless.	Year 1	Officer time	HNM
Improved partnership working with key agencies to prevent homelessness	• Work with supported housing providers to increase move-on options for their residents to help them move into sustainable, independent accommodation.	Years 1 – 5	Officer time	HNM & HATLs
	• Host an annual Registered Provider Forum with a focus upon support for tenants at risk of homelessness.	Years 1 -- 5	Officer time	LTL
	• Develop a protocol with the Police, Community Safety and housing providers to ensure a co-ordinated response for victims of modern slavery.	Year 2	Officer time	HATL
	• Host an annual Homelessness Forum for partner agencies.	Years 2 – 5	Officer time	HNM
	• Work with the Police to develop a rough sleeper housing protocol.	Year 1	Officer time	HNM & HATL
	• Participate in the development of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy and assist in securing accommodation for victims of domestic abuse.	Years 1-2	Officer time	HATL

	• Build upon our links with the Armed Forces by attending local events and forums and providing specialist housing advice from a designated Officer. • Host an annual Private Landlord's Forum to promote White Horse Lettings.	Years 1-5 Years 1-5	Officer time Officer time	HNO HATL
Improved engagement with councillors	• Provide guidance for councillors on reporting and supporting rough sleepers. • Publish an annual review of the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.	Year 1 Years 1-5 Ongoing	Officer time Officer time	HATL HNM
Development of a communications strategy	• Increase the awareness of our homelessness service with partners, support agencies, service users and the public by developing a communications strategy. • Promote the success of the housing needs service through traditional and social media.	Years 1-5 Years 1-5	Officer time Officer time	HNM HNM

2. Minimise the use of temporary accommodation

Objective	Key Actions	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Prevent the need for households to access temporary accommodation	• Maintain focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness in the first instance, including the early identification of at-risk households with specific housing requirements. e.g. large families or households with disabled persons.	Years 1 – 5	Officer time	HATLs, LTL & HNOs
	• Maximise the opportunities through White Horse Lettings for households at risk of homelessness to secure alternative accommodation.	Years 1 – 5 Ongoing	Officer time	HATLs & HNOs
Assist households to move quickly into suitable and sustainable accommodation	• Proactively work with households in temporary accommodation to identify and secure suitable alternative accommodation.	Years 1 - 5	Officer time	HNOs, WHL & LTL
	• Review and update temporary accommodation procedures with a focus upon the early relief of homelessness.	Years 1 – 5	Officer time	LTL
	• Produce an exit plan for all households entering temporary accommodation and monitor on a weekly basis.	Years 1 - 5	Officer time	HATLs & LTL

Review the provision of council-owned temporary accommodation	• Undertake an options appraisal for the future provision of council-owned temporary accommodation, including the needs of disabled households.	Years 2 3	Officer time	HNM and property team
	• Review joint protocol arrangements with Registered Providers.	Year 1	Officer time	LTL

3. Further develop our homelessness service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity

Objective	Key Actions	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Further improve the quality of housing advice offered to customers	• Review the Homelessness Reduction Act procedures to ensure they are structured around securing practical housing solutions as well as compliance with the legislation.	Year 1	Officer time	HATLs
	• Develop individual training programmes for Housing Needs Officers.	Year 1	Officer time	HATLs
Improve performance monitoring and service development	• Complete the development of the housing needs dashboard that provides weekly and monthly key performance data.	Year 1	Officer time	HNM

Create a customer feedback framework to promote continuous service improvement	• Design and promote a questionnaire to capture customer feedback. • Ensure service improvement actions are taken in response to customer feedback.	Years 2-5 Years 2-5	Officer time Officer time	HNM HNM & HNOs

4. Improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers

Objective	Timescale	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Improve access to emergency accommodation for rough sleepers	• Establish access to a winter shelter for rough sleepers. • Recruit to a winter shelter co-ordinator role that will help rough sleepers accessing the shelter to secure alternative accommodation. • Investigate options for providing a local winter shelter.	Year 1 Year 1 Year 1	Officer time FHSG Officer time FHSG Officer time FHSG	HATL HATL HATL
Improve the support available for rough sleepers	• Provide a dedicated, specialist Housing Needs Officer to casework rough sleepers.	Year 1	Existing resources	HNO

	• Recruit to a floating support role to support vulnerable households at high risk of homelessness. • Organise bi-annual operational meetings for rough sleeping support services and accommodation providers. • Review the outreach service provision for rough sleepers.	Year 1 Year 2 Year 2	Officer time FHSG Officer time Officer time	HATL HATLs HNM
Better data collection to tackle rough sleeping	• Use the Government statistical returns on homelessness (HCLIC) to analyse the support needs of rough sleepers.	Year 2	Officer time	HNM & HATL

5. Improve access to sustainable accommodation for households at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

Objective	Key Actions	Timescale	Resources required	Responsible Officer
Improve the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable persons	• Complete the evaluation of Housing First in partnership with SOHA and Aspire Oxfordshire. • Explore the option to develop Housing First projects with other Registered Providers. • Review our current provision of supported accommodation for persons with mental health issue.	Year 1 Year 2 Year 1	FHSG FHSG FHSG	HNM & HATL HATL HATL

Encourage private landlords to let their properties to households at risk of homelessness	• Review the incentives offered to private landlords to let properties through White Horse Lettings. • Promote White Horse Lettings services at the private landlord's forum.	Year 2 Years 1 – 5	Officer time Officer time	WHL WHL
Bring empty properties back into use for households at risk of homelessness	• Create a private sector housing database of medium to long term empty properties. • Develop a package of incentives for owners that includes both White Horse Lettings incentives and private sector team incentives. • Implement a programme for contacting empty property owners.	Year 1 Year 1 Years 1 - 2	Officer time Officer time Officer time	PSH PSH PSH
Develop a marketing strategy	• Work with the Communications teams to develop a marketing strategy for White Horse Lettings.	Year 1	Officer time	WHL

* Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. This is a Government grant that is ring-fenced for the purposes of preventing or relieving homelessness.

** HNM Housing Needs Manager
HATL Housing Advice Team Leader
LTL Lettings Team Leader
HNO Housing Needs Officer
WHL White Horse Lettings
PSH Private Sector Housing

20. APPENDICIES

Appendix 1: Partner organisations attending stakeholder workshops

Appendix 2: Definition of key terms: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Appendix 1: Partner organisations attending stakeholder workshops

A2 Dominion
Abingdon Foyer
Catalyst Housing
Community Safety team
Connection Support
Department of Works and Pensions Oxfordshire
Housing lettings team
Mind Housing
Oxford City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Oxfordshire NHS Foundation Trust
Private Sector Housing team
SOHA
SSAFA Oxfordshire
Silva Homes
Turning Point
Wantage and Grove Foodbank
Wantage Independent Advice Centre
YMCA Henley

Appendix 2: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: definition of terms

Households who are statutorily homeless are owed legal duties that fall into three main categories:

- **Prevention duties** include any activities aimed at preventing a household threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This would involve activities to enable an applicant to remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. The duty lasts for 56 days but may be extended if the local authority is continuing with efforts to prevent homelessness.

- **Relief duties** are owed to households that are already homeless and require help to secure settled accommodation. The duty lasts 56 days and can only be extended by a local authority if the households would not be owed the main homelessness duty.

- **Main homelessness duty** describes the duty a local authority has towards an applicant who is unintentionally homeless, eligible for assistance and has priority need. This definition has not been changed by the 2017 HRA. However, these households are now only owed a main duty if their homelessness has not been successfully prevented or relieved.