

JOINT HOUSING AND HOMELESS STRATEGY FOR VULNERABLE
YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES IN OXFORDSHIRE 2019-2024

Introduction and Why We Need a Strategy

There is common agreement that safe and suitable housing is a basic human right for children, young people and families. Conversely transient lifestyles and inappropriate housing have been identified as one of the risk factors on the pathway to harm¹.

Our Housing Needs Analysis for vulnerable young people and families highlighted the difficulties Oxfordshire faces in terms of cost and availability of housing. While there are intense building programmes around the county, affordability is still an issue and the number of homeless people is increasing. Young people in our supported housing pathway have increasingly complex needs and progress through the pathway is hampered by a lack of suitable places for them to move on to. The increasing number of looked after children is creating an ongoing pressure on places in the pathway. We need increased support and housing for vulnerable families as evidenced by the number of families in temporary accommodation. We also need specialist housing provision for young people with disabilities and more support for young people in the youth justice system.

The government is helping local councils and developers work with local communities to plan and build better places to live for everyone. This includes building affordable housing, improving the quality of rented housing, helping more people to buy a home, and providing housing support for vulnerable people.² In addition, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 with the Duty to Refer requires us to tackle the causes of homelessness further upstream.

Oxfordshire County Council Housing Strategy 2015-2018 identified the following objectives under the priority 'Support the Growth of a Balanced Housing Market.'

- Improve housing market operation;
- Increase the supply of public sector land to deliver new homes; and
- Bring forward key strategic sites to support City Deal and meet housing need.

There are practical reasons why it makes sense to clarify the key issues and requirements.

- To be able to influence the spatial planning agenda and ensure that the housing needs are reflected in Local Growth Plans and housing strategies. 'Up front' work ensures these needs are not overlooked.
- To provide clarity for senior managers about the key priorities to try and resolve them.
- To assist housing and planning officers in each district and the city to know the housing needs of young people and families so that they can reflect these when advising and agreeing new affordable housing planning applications.
- To allow housing providers to know the housing needs of young people and families so that they too can consider such provision when building

¹ Pathways to Harm, Pathways to Protection: Triennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews 2011-14'

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/housing>

or buying new homes or when considering how to re-model existing stock.

- To provide a consistent and clear set of needs to the property services and planning departments within the City, District and County Councils.
- To enable all relevant agencies to make a more convincing case for capital grant or land subsidy both within the county council and the district councils.

Vision

Our Vision is that every child and young person in Oxfordshire should have access to a full range of housing services and the opportunity for a decent and affordable home suitable to their needs; and that vulnerable families should be enabled to live in safe and suitable housing as a basis for supportive family relationships and thriving communities.

There are three broad components to achieve improved housing. These can be summarised as:

- the right buildings,
- appropriate support services and
- clear 'pathways' that enable young people and families to access such housing.

The right buildings

- The District, City and County Councils will work in partnership with, housing and other providers, to ensure that the 'bricks and mortar' to supply new homes are built to the correct design, in the right locations and at an affordable price.
- Where possible and appropriate we will increase new specialist housing capacity by conversion of existing buildings that may no longer be fit for their original purpose, or may be empty.
- We will ensure that buildings are fully inclusive and accessible to consider the needs of families with disabled children, young people and adults. Advice from occupational therapists will be considered in planning the right buildings for the future.

Appropriate support services

- We will enable creative and flexible wrap-around services for young people and young families in the pathway.
- We will provide support to landlords working with families in danger of eviction and provide targeted support to vulnerable families.

Clear pathways

- We will devise clear pathways to ensure the right people access the right housing for their needs.

- There is a well-developed multi-agency pathway in place for young people, but there needs to be more creative planning to ensure there is a range of suitable supported accommodation and sufficient move on options.

Our Key Objectives are:

- 1. To support vulnerable families to maintain secure and long-lasting housing.**
- 2. The provision of a range of housing options, with support and intervention, for Care Leavers and other vulnerable young people including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and young people involved with the Youth Justice System.**
- 3. To increase the supply of affordable housing options to meet the needs of families and single young people; and optimise the use of available property.**
- 4. To maintain partnership working between District and County Councils, housing providers, specialist support services and other stakeholders including young people and families.**
- 5. To resource early prevention work with families and young people at risk of homelessness.**
- 6. To support landlords to mitigate negative perceptions of social care service users and/or benefit claimants**

We will tackle these in the following ways:

- 1. To support vulnerable families to maintain secure and long-lasting housing.**

An iMPower analysis into the work of Oxfordshire Children, Education and Families teams revealed a lack of knowledge and engagement with housing issues among front line staff. In response to this we will:

- 1.1 Equip front line social services teams working with families to identify housing issues at an early stage and support families to maintain their tenancies, thus avoiding eviction and disruption to schooling and family networks.
- 1.2 Target support for families deemed intentionally homeless to enable them to have a second chance.

2. The provision of a range of housing options, with support and intervention, for Care Leavers, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), young people involved with the Youth Justice System and young people with a range of disabilities.

The increase in the number of Looked After Children and Care Leavers has necessitated a review as to how to effectively support all our vulnerable young people to the point of being able to manage an independent tenancy. The proportion of young people with complex needs in the Supported Housing Pathway has increased.

There is also a need for a range of provisions for young people involved in the Youth Justice Service.

In addition, the sharp increase in arrivals of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children has accentuated the need for increased accommodation and support within the county for this vulnerable group.

In response to this we will:

- 2.1 Optimise the use of available resources to creatively support young people with complex needs and those with lower level needs.
- 2.2 Find creative solutions for vulnerable young people on the edge of care including re-unification with family where possible or supported lodgings with other trusted adults.
- 2.3 Make specific provision for young people involved in the Youth Justice Service.
- 2.4 Enable more consistent use of intervention services such as Mental Health services for young people who need these up to age 25 in the Supported Housing Pathway.
- 2.5 Support Care Leavers to develop independent living skills including the maintenance of a tenancy and regular employment.
- 2.6 Ensure planners are aware in advance of the specific housing needs of young people with disabilities in each district and the city.

3. Increase the supply of affordable housing options to meet the needs of both families and single young people; and optimise the use of available property.

Supply and demand

The overarching concern is the overall lack of supply of housing - both specialist and generic - and fully inclusive and accessible. Whilst the needs and issues may be different for families, care leavers and vulnerable young people, the housing gaps are a common theme.

In response to this we will:

- 3.1 Seek to influence potential use of empty council buildings for families and young people.

- 3.2 Embed a mechanism across the partner organisations to quantify the types of housing needed and level of demand for families and young people.
- 3.3 Provide clear forecasting of requirements for various types of property including family housing, accommodation for young single people and adapted housing for people with learning disabilities or physical disabilities including those in need of ceiling track hoists.
- 3.4 Seek to influence local planning in a timely manner to enable suitable housing to be located within a reasonable distance from services, schools, colleges and places of work.
- 3.5 Build priorities for young people, young adults and families into the district council Growth Plans and the Joint Strategic Spatial Plan for Oxfordshire 2050.
- 3.6 Work with providers to develop creative solutions for older young people with learning disability such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Affordability

Oxfordshire's extremely high rents increase the vulnerability of both single people and families who may become reliant on benefits to afford a home. The housing benefit element of Universal Credit is unlikely to cover the full cost of rent. For care leavers there is an additional impact when their housing benefit drops at aged 22.

In response we will:

- 3.7 Assist families and young people with budgeting to maintain regular rental payments as a build-up of rent arrears greatly adversely affects their chances of a future affordable tenancy.
- 3.8 Help Care Leavers to hold realistic expectations of the type of property available to them when they leave the supported housing pathway.
- 3.9 Plan early to allow care leavers to move to affordable accommodation prior to the reduction in their benefit.

4. To maintain partnership working between District and County Councils, housing and support providers and other stakeholders including young people and families.

Joint working between housing authorities, social services and other statutory, voluntary and private sector partners is required by a range of legislation relating to homelessness, social care and children. (see Appendix 1 Needs Analysis pages 8-9)

In response to this we will:

- 4.1 Hold quarterly meetings of the Joint Housing Steering Group with representatives from the City and each District Council along with key operational and commissioning staff in the County Council. Through this we will problem solve issues which affect the delivery of this strategy and aim to provide an effective and co-ordinated response

- to prevent homelessness amongst vulnerable young people, and families.
- 4.2 We will escalate issues, concerns and gaps in service provision to senior officers and members as appropriate to ensure they are informed and able to influence local provision and developments.
 - 4.3 Engage with city and district councils, registered social landlords, letting agencies, private landlords and other community and faith groups to develop solutions using properties they may no longer wish to keep.
 - 4.4 Develop creative partnerships with skills providers and employers.
 - 4.5 Develop co-location opportunities for members of different teams, local authorities and support agencies.
 - 4.6 Work to remove the “catch 22” situation around housing allocation for potential foster carers.

5. Resource early prevention work with families and young people at risk of homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction Act and the Duty to Refer, encourages early intervention into the causes of homelessness by obliging a range of statutory services to address housing issues with families or individuals and to make referrals to the appropriate authority.

In response to this we will:

- 5.1 Increase channels of communication between social services staff and housing and support providers to enable timely intervention.
- 5.2 Increase awareness of housing related issues amongst frontline staff and increase staff confidence in assisting families facing housing issues.

6. Support landlords to mitigate negative perceptions of social care service users and/or benefit claimants

There can be negative perceptions of social care service users by private and social landlords due to issues relating to rent arrears, damage to property, behaviour and disturbance to other residents. Strategies to prepare and support landlords are needed to help mitigate these issues as well as to support and ensure young people and families have the right skills and best chances to sustain their tenancies.

In response to this we will:

- 6.1 Develop a clear programme of support for landlords of social care users with well-defined roles and responsibilities and make sure this is well publicised.
- 6.2 Initiate early conversations with landlords regarding issues with tenants known to social services with a view to providing early intervention to support families and young people at risk of losing a tenancy.

- 6.3 Provide initial financial support to enable vulnerable young people and families to take on a tenancy or move into temporary accommodation.
- 6.4 Provide guarantees/contracts to help a young person secure a tenancy and pay for damage.

Action Plan

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
1. To support vulnerable families to maintain secure and long-lasting housing.			
1.1 Following on from the current model of an embedded specialist housing worker in front line Children, Education and Families teams, provide a programme of training and resources for front line teams in identifying and tackling housing issues. including a network of housing champions.	Earlier intervention in housing issues including "Duty to Refer". Locally based housing knowledge and connections available to all front-line Children, Education and Families staff	Oxford City Trailblazer programme until funding ends in 2019 and County Council Housing and Immigration Team	County Council champions recruited, Training taken place, Housing referrals made
1.2 Develop an agreed programme of support to enable families deemed intentionally homeless to have a second chance at maintaining a tenancy.	Families supported into secure tenancies.	Cherwell District Council / County Council Local Community Support Service and Housing and Immigration Team	Agreed programme in each district. Number of families supported into secure housing
1.3 Ensure all staff across partner organisations are aware of funding streams that are available for support e.g. Troubled Families Resources Budget, flexible use of pupil premium budgets.	Optimum use of available funds to support vulnerable families.	County Council Housing and Immigration Team	Training and information on funding given and disseminated
2. The provision of a range of housing options, with support and intervention, for Care Leavers and other vulnerable young people including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and young people involved with the Youth Justice System.			
2.1 Review existing supported	Knowledge of what is working	County Council	Recommendations for new

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
housing pathway provision	well and changes in nature of provision that may be necessary	commissioning team	service written
2.2 Recommission the supported housing pathway in consultation and conjunction with all stakeholders including the providers of the Adult Homeless Pathway.	An effective, safe and value for money service which enables vulnerable young people to move into independence, or other appropriate accommodation in a timely manner.	County Council Commissioning Team/ City and District Councils/provider organisations	Number of young people who move through the pathway and gain independent accommodation
2.3 Create additional provision for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	Local and safe accommodation with wrap around support for UASC	County Council Commissioning Team/Cherwell District Council	Additional provision available
2.4 Ensure that Mental Health support is available to all young people in the supported housing pathway.	Vulnerable young people are supported towards independence	County Council Commissioning Team/Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group	Number of young people in pathway supported with mental health
2.5 Explore the potential to redirect funding to support young people's identified housing and support needs including piloting council tax exemptions	Optimum use of available funds	County Council Operational Team, Cherwell District Council	Increased funding for housing and support needs. Council tax exemptions in place for care leavers in some or all Districts.
2.7 Consider options for additional support for young people in the Youth Justice Service including the recruitment of a team of high tier foster carers.	Appropriate support to keep these young people safe and minimise the risk of re-offending.	Youth Justice Service, County Council Fostering team	Crisis provision for young people in youth justice service in place
2.8 Recruit additional Supported Lodging providers to offer flexible support options for care leavers	Out of term time accommodation for care leavers at university with appropriate level of support.	County Council Commissioning and Care Leavers' team	Additional flexible provision for care leavers with low level support needs
2.9 Negotiate with partners to	Effective and timely intervention	County Council	Specialist professionals ready

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
provide a 'Team around the Worker' to support the lead professional in the supported housing pathway through specialist consultation and advice.	for young people with complex needs.	Commissioning/ partner organisations/pathway providers	to provide support in flexible way to worker with best relationship with young person
2.10 Ensure pathway providers are equipped to identify signs of domestic abuse in the pathway and resourced to support victims and keep them safe.	Young people in the Supported Housing Pathway are safe and know how to obtain support.	County Council, Pathway providers, Action on Ending Violence against Young Women and Girls	Greater awareness of potential Domestic abuse in pathway and prevention strategies in place.
2.11 Start earlier to plan for young people to return to their family where possible and invest resource on whole family approaches such as Family Group Conferences and restorative practice.	Maximise chances for family re-unification and take fewer children into care.	County Council	More children and young people leaving care to return to families
2.12 Provide support for young people with low level needs such as Asperger's Syndrome and their families to prevent the young person becoming homeless	Vulnerable young people and their families are supported to stay together.	Housing Authorities and Commissioned Services for support to families	Fewer young people with low level needs in supported housing pathway
2.13 Work with young people on the edge of care to secure private arrangements with trusted adults where re-unification with family is not possible	Vulnerable young people are cared for by adults they know and trust and pool of approved care providers is widened.	County Council Residential and Edge of Care team	Fewer young people referred into the supported housing pathway
2.14 Develop "The House Project" to support a group of care leavers to take on HMO tenancies and	Young care leavers equipped to take on independent tenancies	County Council	Young people supported to live in nominated properties and begun to move on

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
develop necessary skills to live independently.			
2.15 Work with employers to develop pathways to employment in addition to gaining housing related skills such as DIY, painting/decorating, maintenance, and furnishing.	Young care leavers equipped with employment related skills and able to take on independent tenancies	Pathway providers, County Council "House" project manager	Young people from pathway gain employment in related fields
2.16 Work with planners and Disabled Facilities Grant departments to ensure buildings are fully accessible and inclusive and consideration is given to factors like electric wheelchair accessibility, up to date technical aids to facilitate independence for young people, storage, sound proofing, planned adaptations so that a disabled child can live and play safely.	Adequate supply of appropriately adapted housing in the locations where it is needed	City and District Councils, County Council	Timely supply of appropriately adapted housing
2.17 Consider opportunities for pooled budgets and targeted commissioning to meet housing need for specific groups e.g. learning disability, mental health.	Financially efficient sustainable support for the people who need it.	County Council, Clinical Commissioning Group	Housing developed for specific named groups using pooled budgets
3. To increase the supply of affordable housing options to meet the needs of both families and single young people, and optimise the use of available property.			
3.1 Identify existing data sources, plot pathways and identify gaps. Draw up sustainable mechanism to gather information	Ongoing accurate information on forthcoming needs	County Council	Required data available from LCS or another identified regular source

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
3.2 Look at Oxon and national statistics to identify trends.	Ongoing accurate information on forthcoming needs	County Council	Needs Analysis reviewed at end 2020
3.3 Following the review of empty buildings and land ownership assessment which has identified empty/underused spaces/buildings both by county council and partners and explore the potential to include this in the county council Place Reviews.	Increase supply of sustainable property options for young people and families	City and District Councils, County Council	Underused buildings become available for young people or families
3.4 Work with specialist architects and estate agents to develop community solutions to housing such as building conversions leading to longer term more sustainable solutions such as housing co-operatives or emergency/transitional accommodation like container homes or empty building conversions.	Additional housing through optimising use of existing buildings	City, District and County Council	Increase in available properties, through this route
3.5 Work with specialist providers to clarify what delivery of homes for young people with learning disabilities such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder might look like.	Plan in place	City, District and County councils	Supply of houses built to specification
4. To maintain partnership working between District and County Councils, housing and support providers and other stakeholders including young people and families.			
4.1 Review use and scope of move on agreements with city and district councils in relation to	Joint working across districts and social work teams leading to joined up plans for young people	City, District and County Council	Extended group of care leavers given support

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
extended responsibilities for care leavers up to 25.			
4.2 Improve and increase the use of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management plan (MARAMP) to manage risk more effectively in placement planning particularly in the Supported Housing Pathway	Increased and effective use of MARAMP	Pathway providers, County Council Care Leaver team	Fewer evictions from the pathway
4.3 Develop the role of the 'Team around the Worker' to support lead professionals with specialist advice and consultation in areas such Mental Health and specialist substance misuse.	Specialist advice is in place and used effectively. Workers more confident about response and support/interventions they can offer	County Council Commissioning and operational staff/partner organisations/pathway providers	Specialist professionals ready to provide support in flexible way to worker with best relationship with young person
4.4 Housing providers to be part of the Team Around the Family (TAF)	Housing issues addressed at an earlier stage and support offered.	County Council, City and District Councils and other housing providers.	Fewer homeless families because of earlier, joined up support.
4.5 Agree a protocol between Housing Authorities and Children, Education and Families teams to allow potential foster carers to move into suitable properties to house foster children.	Increased number of Council foster carers leading to a reduction in use of high cost independent fostering agencies	Cherwell District Council, City and other District Councils and Oxfordshire County Council	Increased number of Council foster carers.
4.6 Increase lines of communication between Housing Authorities and Children, Education and Families teams regarding kinship foster carers need for housing.	More children cared for by wider family through access to suitable housing.	County Council operational teams City and District Councils and housing providers	Increase in kinship foster placements

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
5. To resource early prevention work with families and young people at risk of homelessness.			
5.1 Put in place a programme of training and resources to enable front line social services' staff to identify and address housing issues at an early stage.	Housing issues are recognised at earlier stage and homelessness prevention work carried out	County Council, Oxford City Trailblazer	Fewer homeless young people and families because of earlier, joined up support.
5.2 Promote the use of the ALERT portal for referrals of anyone who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness in Oxfordshire.	Young people and families threatened with homelessness are identified earlier and receive support into accommodation	City and District Councils Oxfordshire County Council	Fewer homeless young people and families because of earlier, joined up support.
5.3 Initiate earlier communication and a programme of support for families in danger of making themselves intentionally homeless.	Families threatened with homelessness receive timely advice and support	Cherwell District Council/ Oxfordshire County Council, City and other Districts	Fewer homeless families because of earlier, joined up support
5.4 Initiate earlier conversations between supported housing pathway providers and CEF team regarding rent arrears and other behaviours which are detrimental to gaining an independent tenancy.	Young people are more able to access independent accommodation	Oxfordshire County Council operational teams/pathway providers	Greater throughput through the supported housing pathway
5.6 Work with housing providers to ensure they are part of Team Around the Family meetings, joint visits etc.	Housing issues addressed at an earlier stage and support offered	County Council, City and District Councils and other housing providers.	Fewer homeless families because of earlier, joined up support.
6. To support landlords to mitigate negative perceptions of social care service users and/or benefit claimants.			
6.1 Institute a mechanism for early conversations with landlords and programmes of support for people	Young people and families are supported to maintain a tenancy	City and District Councils, housing providers, County	Fewer evictions and fewer homeless families

Action	Desired Outcome	Lead Organisation/s	How Success will be measured
in danger of breaching their tenancy agreements.		Council operation teams.	
6.2 Make funds available, following strict criteria, to allow families to access temporary accommodation, or private rental accommodation through the provision of deposits, rent in advance and rent for families who are subject to immigration law	Families are supported to gain secure housing and children remain with family.	Oxfordshire County Council Housing and Immigration team	Number of families supported into secure housing
6.3 Work with Registered Social Landlords and the Care Leavers Forum to create a junior tenancy course to help young people sustain housing.	Young care leavers equipped to take on independent tenancies	City and District Councils and Care Leavers Association	Course compiled and delivered