

# **CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2018**

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# 1. Introduction

This Homelessness Review provides information on the needs of people who have approached us for help since the last Strategy. It considers what we have achieved, what has changed and how this relates to the changing environment and Government policy. It will inform our new Homelessness Strategy.

The previous Homelessness Strategy for Cherwell District Council was published in 2012 as priority five of the Housing Strategy which covered the period 2012-2017. This has been reviewed and updated on a regular basis and a Homelessness Prevention Action Plan produced with the most recent version covering 2016/17.

The Strategic Priorities of the 2012-2017 Housing Strategy were:

Priority 1	Increase the supply and access to housing
Priority 2	Develop financially inclusive, sustainable communities
Priority 3	House our most vulnerable residents
Priority 4	Ensure homes are safe, warm and well managed
Priority 5	Prevent homelessness
Priority 6	Maximise resources and be an investment-ready district

The Housing Strategy also supports the delivery of key objectives within the Council's Business Plan 2018/19, which are:

## **Thriving Communities & Wellbeing**

- Prevent homelessness
- Safeguard the vulnerable
- Deliver the welfare reform agenda
- Deliver affordable housing

## **District of Opportunity & Growth**

- Deliver innovative and effective housing schemes

## 2. What have we done since the last strategy was published?

### Homelessness prevention

- We have a strong focus on homelessness prevention which has enabled us to prepare effectively for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017)

### Helping households to remain

- We created a new role of Tenancy Support Officer (TSO) to support landlords and tenants to resolve tenancy disputes.
- We have worked closely with our Revenues and Benefits Team to administer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), which help the council to prevent homelessness. Over the period of April 2015 – March 2018 £655,769.20 was committed to prevent homelessness within the district.

### Helping households to move

- We have provided five units of shared accommodation for homeless people which were part funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (now Homes England) 'Places of Change' programme.
- We revised our Allocation Scheme in 2018 to ensure it best meets the housing needs within the district and complies with the requirements of the HRA.
- Since April 2014 we have delivered 1,256 affordable housing units in partnership with registered providers; 827 of which were for affordable rent<sup>1</sup> and the remaining 429 shared ownership or other home ownership options.
- We rebranded and improved our Cherwell Bond Scheme (CBS). 152 households are currently accommodated in private rented sector housing, through the CBS.

### Working in partnership

- We have re-tendered and awarded a new contract to Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northants to provide debt and money advice for all residents living in Cherwell District experiencing financial difficulties.
- We have established a Financial Inclusion Group to share information with partners and community groups about changes that have taken place around welfare reform including Universal Credit and to help identify support available to support residents in financial difficulty.
- We have continued to support voluntary sector agencies working within the district to access funding to provide services for people who are either homeless or to help prevent homelessness
- We embedded specialisms within the Housing Options Team such as domestic abuse, single homelessness, young people, vulnerable adults and temporary accommodation, to improve links with partners and ensure that key strategic areas in our previous action plan were developed.

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<sup>1</sup> "Affordable rented housing is defined by Government as:

*Rented housing let by registered providers of social housing to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable Rent is not subject to the national rent regime but is subject to other rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent."*

## **To address the needs of rough sleepers and clients experiencing domestic abuse**

- We have published a Homeless Pocket Guide <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/downloads/80/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping> identifying help and assistance available within the district for people who are homeless/rough sleeping or at risk of becoming homeless.
- We have committed £75,000 to help jointly commission domestic abuse services, in the county, for the period 2018-2021.
- We have committed £188,100 over three years, securing access to 24 bed places to support rough sleepers with a connection to Cherwell.
- We have also secured an additional 10 bed spaces at Simon House, Oxford to provide 24/7 support for people found rough sleeping with a connection to Cherwell and presenting with complex support needs.

## **Temporary accommodation**

- Our TSO post is a fixed term post up to March 2019 and provides additional support to households placed in TA, assisting them to identify items needed to set up home in their permanent accommodation and resolving issues whilst living in TA.
- We entered into a contract with the Musketeer Motel for the provision of up to 10 self-contained rooms which can be used as emergency accommodation for homeless households

## **County-wide initiatives**

- We completed a joint review of the Young Persons Accommodation Pathway with all other Oxfordshire District/City Councils and the County Council
- We were part of a successful bid which secured £790,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Trailblazer Funding to support the prevention of homelessness in Oxfordshire
- We successfully led on a bid to MHCLG Single Homeless Fund on behalf of Oxfordshire and were awarded £227,000 to support the prevention of homelessness and improve services to those with an offending history

## **Internal change**

- We undertook a Service Review and became a Joint Housing Service with South Northamptonshire Council (SNC), although the Housing Options Teams at both councils remain operationally distinct. The review added the role of a Senior Housing Options Officer to provide additional capacity to the team.
- We employed an Empty Homes Officer (EHO), a fixed term post shared with SNC; the EHO established the option of the council taking identified empty homes in to use as Private Sector Leasing (PSL) properties and this is being pursued with a small number of empty properties in the district.
- We achieved the Bronze award as part of the National Practitioners Support Service Gold Standard in Homelessness.

### 3. Changes in Legislation

Since our previous strategy, there have been substantial, ongoing changes to the welfare benefit system impacting the affordability of accommodation and provision of services to people in housing need. Significant change to the homelessness legislation, the HRA 2017, was announced and we have been implementing its requirements since April 2018.

#### 3.1 Welfare Reform Act 2012

The roll out of Universal Credit (UC) full, live service within Cherwell started in November 2017 though there are a few parts of the district that are due to roll out towards the end of 2018. There was a commitment, in the autumn 2017 Budget, to abolish the 7 day waiting period, reduce the wait for payment from 6 weeks to 5 weeks and extend the repayment of advances from 6 months to 12 months.

#### 3.2 Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 - the main changes provided by this Act include:

- A reduction of the benefit cap for claimants to £20,000 for couples and families and £13,400 for single claimants.
- A freeze on the level of certain working age benefits and tax credit amounts for the next four years (until 2020). Income support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Housing Benefit (HB), Universal Credit (UC), the individual child elements of Child Tax Credit (CTC) and most elements of Working Tax Credit have all been frozen.
- Limited entitlement to the child element of CTC and UC to a maximum of two children in each household. For CTC, the limit will only apply to third or subsequent children born after April 2017. For UC, the limit will apply to all new claims made after April 2017, unless a child element was payable for that child within the last six months. The 'family element' for CTC and the 'first child premium' for UC are also abolished.

In the Comprehensive Spending Review of November 2015 the Government announced that from 1 April 2018 Housing Benefit for tenants of social housing would be capped at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate.

LHA rates are used to calculate HB for tenants renting from private landlords. LHA rates relate to the area in which you make your claim. These areas are called broad rental market areas (BRMA). A BRMA is where a person could reasonably be expected to live taking into account access to facilities and services. LHA rates are based on private market rents being paid in the BRMA which can differ from advertised rents. In Cherwell, private rented tenants could live within one of two BRMA areas: Cherwell Valley or Oxford.

The decision to cap HB for social housing tenants was deferred until 2019. However, in October 2017 the government announced it would not be applying the LHA rate to supported housing and the wider social sector. This means that LHA rates will not be applied from 2019 to HB or UC for anyone in the social rented sector. This includes single people aged under 35 who would have been affected by the applications of the Shared Accommodations Rate (SAR) in the social rented sector. The SAR is part of the LHA scheme and therefore will not be applied in the social rented sector from 2019 as previously planned.

### **3.3 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The HRA was implemented in April 2018 and officers are working to fulfil the new requirements. The Act introduces two new duties for local housing authorities relating to homelessness:

- councils are now required to help people threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- councils now have a duty to help those who are homeless to secure suitable accommodation regardless of whether they are 'intentionally homeless' or in priority need.

## 4. The Overall picture

### 4.1. Who seeks help with housing?

We have a statutory duty to provide housing advice and information for residents in the district. This is undertaken by the Housing Needs Team (HNT) based in Bodicote. Enquiries are predominately received through applications to the housing register, telephone and email contacts and some drop-ins. The Customer Services Team undertake a triage role, for initial face-to-face and telephone enquiries and assist residents with form filling when necessary. All calls received by the council for housing related enquiries also go through the Customer Services team initially and are passed over to the HNT when more complex advice is required or the customer is advising they are at risk of homelessness.

Email enquiries can be sent to either the Customer Services Team or direct to the Housing inbox. Clients with an open housing register application can use their individual log-in to email updates on their circumstances direct to the council's housing case management system. The number of general housing advice enquiries taken is not recorded but data is available on the number of advice and prevention cases opened. The following figures are therefore based solely on Advice and Prevention (A&P) cases and not inclusive of other work done by both the HNT or by Customer Services. Our homelessness strategy will seek to improve and monitor its recording of general housing advice enquiries, in the future.

In recent years we have seen in the region of 700 to 1000 people a year approaching to request advice and assistance about their housing circumstances. Some of those approaching only require general one-off advice and are then able to resolve their situation on their own. Other households require intervention and additional support, through A&P, to help them to resolve their housing difficulties.

During the period of this review, an A&P case was only opened if a household identified themselves as homeless or threatened with homelessness. An allocated officer would then undertake casework until the case was closed. General enquiries were not included in A&P figures. The new legislation requires that we provide advisory services to anyone in the district and that we fulfil our prevention and relief duties to all eligible households.

**Table 1**

	A&P cases opened	Homeless applications made	Percentage making homeless applications
2014/2015	870	169	19%
2015/2016	1011	158	16%
2016/2017	830	154	19%
2017/2018	685	144	21%

Table 1 shows that approximately one fifth of all cases opened as A&P ended up as having to make homeless applications meaning that about 80% of cases were prevented from becoming homeless. In fact, not all homeless cases will come from A&P cases so prevention figures are actually even higher. In spite of this positive prevention work, table 1 also shows that we have seen a gradual increase in the percentage of people needing to make formal applications to the council over the past three years. The highest percentage of applications was made in 2017/18 despite the number of homeless applications that year being the lowest over the whole review period.

**Table 2**

	Advice and prevention cases completed	One off advice	Percentage closed as one off advice
2014/15	870	391	45%
2015/16	904	416	46%
2016/17	830	299	36%
2017/18	848	325	38%

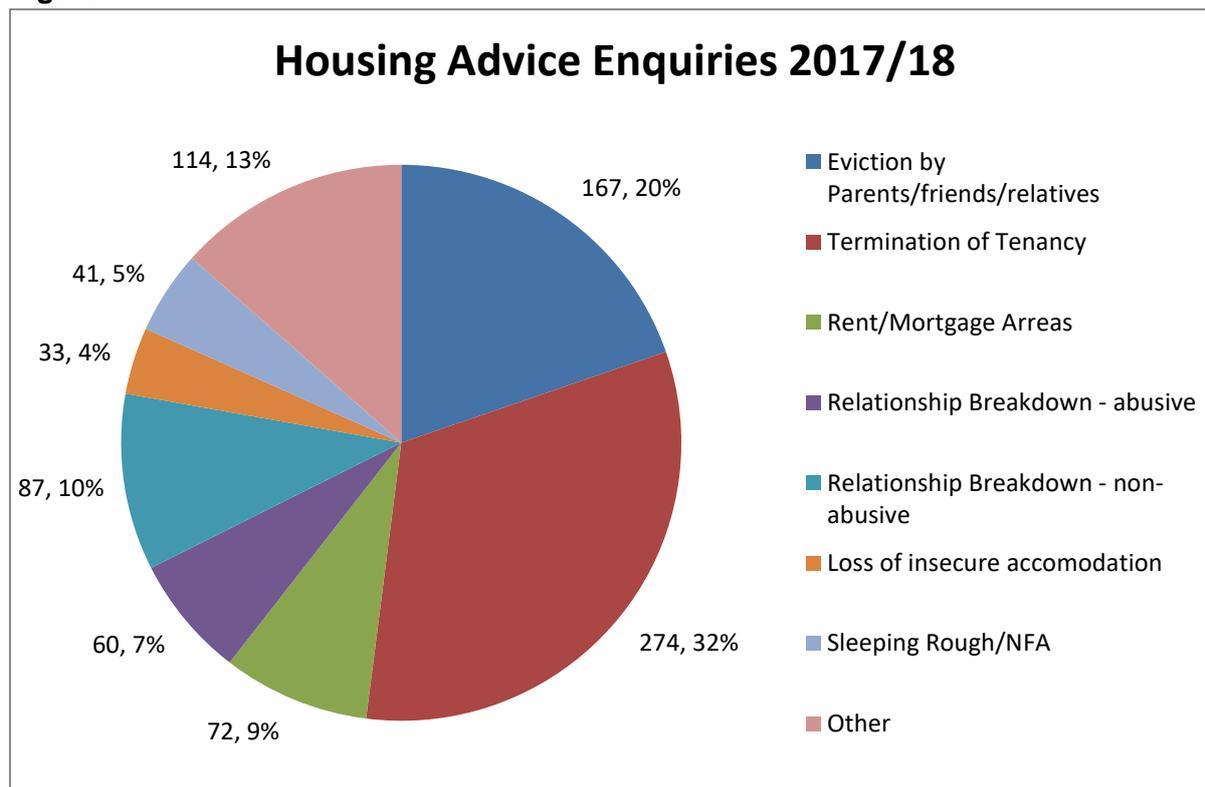
Table 2 shows all the cases that were completed regardless of the amount of casework undertaken. The number of cases varies from table 1 due to some cases being opened in one financial year and completed in the following financial year. The number of people approaching the council and being able to resolve their circumstances through a single piece of advice has reduced from the 2015/16 high of 46% of all cases opened to 36% in 2016/17 and 38% in 2017/18. This would suggest that people are presenting with more complex issues and needing greater assistance to resolve their circumstances.

During 2017/18 the Housing Needs Team completed 848 Advice and Prevention enquiries.

Figure 1 shows that the largest number of enquiries was from households being asked to leave a tenancy or being asked to leave by parents, friends or other relatives (440 enquiries). These reasons combined account for over half of all approaches (52%) and mirror the main reason for loss of last settled home for homeless applicants:

- Just under a fifth (147) of enquiries (17%) related to relationship breakdown (both abusive and non-abusive)
- 72 (8%) households were in danger of losing their property due to rent or mortgage arrears (8 for mortgage arrears and 64 for rent arrears).
- 'Other' incorporates all other reasons such as release from prison, hospital and HM Forces and disrepair. These enquiries accounted for 13% (114 enquiries).
- 5% of enquiries were from households sleeping rough or of no fixed abode. Some of these would have been duplications.

Figure 1



We have upgraded our existing casework management system to make sure that we comply with the new legislation. Details of the household composition are routinely recorded on this system, along with greater detail on reasons for approach, circumstances and housing need factors. The system will collate the case level data that is required under the new H-CLIC data requirements (replacement for P1E homelessness returns for central government) and we anticipate that analysis of approach by age, gender, household type and reason will be easily achieved through the new software.

In 2017 the council upgraded the housing pages of its website to ensure that it is more useful to residents in need of housing advice. The information contained on the website is regularly updated to ensure it is accurate and up-to-date and reflects the requirements and processes of the new homelessness legislation.

## 4.2 Homelessness Prevention

### 4.2.1 Homelessness prevention data from P1E and other council records

Our P1E quarterly returns to central government include information on the number of prevention measures that have enabled households to remain in their existing home and the number of prevention measures that assisted a household to move to alternative accommodation (see tables 3 and 5).

The key prevention tools that enable us to assist a household to remain in their existing homes are 'negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure someone can remain in accommodation in the private rented sector' and 'providing other assistance that will enable someone to remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector'.

Negotiation takes place with private landlords who have issued or have threatened to issue a section 21 notice and advice will be given on tenancy rights. We apply pre-eviction protocols and negotiate with landlords on non-rent arrears issues such as problems with affordability or tenant/landlord disputes.

**Table 3**

<b>Prevention measure to remain at home</b>	<b>2014/15</b>		<b>2015/16</b>		<b>2016/17</b>		<b>2017/18</b>	
Negotiation/legal advocacy PRS	34	21%	47	28%	58	34%	62	36%
Other assistance to remain in Social or Private	24	15%	19	11%	27	16%	34	20%
Conciliation with friends/relatives	25	15%	36	21%	26	16%	32	18%
Resolving rent issues in social or private	38	23%	61	36%	52	30%	22	17%
Crisis intervention	10	6%	1	1%	3	2%	4	2%
Mortgage issues/MRS	2	1%	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%
Debt advice	27	17%	4	2%	1	1%	0	0%

It is positive that 'Conciliation with friends/relatives' is widely employed by Housing Needs Officers and going forward all team members will be trained in such techniques. When mediating between disputing families the team aims to set out realistic expectations of what the council can offer via a homeless application or the housing register, and balances the options of remaining where they are and bidding for a property versus the upheaval of a homeless application and restricted choice of where they could be accommodated, if a duty is accepted.

Table 3 also shows that our use of debt advice, as a prevention tool to assist households to remain in existing accommodation, has fallen quite dramatically in the period of this review. During this period, affordability has been identified as an increasing cause of homelessness and going forward, refocussing access to debt and money advice services will be a key task in the prevention of homelessness

'Resolving rent issues in social or private sector' incorporates the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) which are administered by the Council's Revenues and Benefits Team. DHPs are for accessing or sustaining tenancies. They are available to assist households for an interim period whilst they resolve their circumstances and can be used to assist with clearing rent arrears, issues of affordability, benefit cap and in some cases for deposits or rent in advance to access new accommodation. The Revenues and Benefits team work closely with the Housing Team to ensure clients are receiving advice and support where homelessness is identified as an issue for requesting support with DHP.

Issues of affordability within the district have consistently been one of the main reasons for people seeking assistance with a DHP and affordability affects households in both the social and private rented sectors. The cost of private renting, LHA rates and shortfalls between the two are discussed in section 5.1. In the period of this review, over £650,000 was awarded to

residents in DHP payments. Table 4 shows the number of payments awarded and the central government contribution over three financial years.

**Table 4**

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Total DHP awarded</b>	<b>Central contribution</b>	<b>Government</b>
2015/2016	£160,506.88	£159,368	
2016/2017	£200,789.32	206,199	
2017/2018	£294,473.00	309,040	
<b>Total</b>	<b>£655,769.20</b>	<b>£674,607</b>	

If the central government contribution is not all spent then it has to be returned. So, although we may endeavour to spend as much of the allocation as possible, if DHP payments are not made during a financial year's payment run, they will come out of the next financial year's contribution. This explains some of the differences in amounts awarded against contribution total. Although it is not possible to analyse DHP expenditure on homelessness prevention cases, it is clear that awards of DHPs have risen over the three years.

**Table 5**

<b>Prevention measure through alternative accommodation</b>	<b>2014/15</b>		<b>2015/16</b>		<b>2016/17</b>		<b>2017/18</b>	
Part 6 offer Registered Provider	57	27%	101	38%	137	46%	87	44%
PRS with no landlord incentive	63	30%	65	24%	72	24%	52	24%
Friends and relatives	21	10%	47	17%	52	18%	27	12%
PRS with landlord incentive	32	15%	23	9%	9	3%	16	7%
Registered Provider offer outside of part 6	15	7%	2	0.7 %	3	1%	13	6%
Supported accommodation	17	8%	25	9%	20	6.7 %	15	3%
Hostel	3	2%	5	2%	3	1%	6	3%

Table 5 shows that by far our most effective tool to assist households to move to alternative accommodation is the housing register, via an offer of accommodation, made under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. This rise shows that there is a dependence on this type of accommodation being available to help prevent homelessness within the district.

The housing register is for people in housing need and with a connection to the district. People are assessed against an approved allocation scheme which identifies someone's priority for being considered for social housing based upon their current circumstances. Households are nominated to properties owned by Registered Providers (RPs) and allocated through a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) biddings scheme. CBL allows eligible applicants to

apply for up to three suitable properties each week that meet a household's housing need, anywhere within the Cherwell District.

During the period of the review we have seen the number of allocations to RP accommodation rise significantly. See table 6. This is due to an increase in new-build delivery in the district, particularly in Bicester and Banbury, outlined in section 4.2.

**Table 6**

Year	Number of allocations
2014/15	493
2015/16	584
2016/17	579
2017/18	693
<b>Total</b>	<b>2349</b>

Consistently over two thirds of all nominations made through the housing register are made to general needs applicants and on average 10% of nominations are for people who are accepted as homeless. Waiting times for all housing register applicants have increased as a result of more people joining the housing register so even if a household is under notice and threatened with homelessness they are unlikely to be able to gain a nomination within the notice period and avoid having to be placed in temporary accommodation.

Interestingly, table 5 shows us that the second highest prevention tool to assist households to move to alternative accommodation is a move to the private rented sector, with no landlord incentive. This is likely to be as a result of people securing the funding required to cover rent and deposits with support from friends or family or other means excluding the Council's Cherwell Bond Scheme (CBS).

There has been a reduction in the number of people being supported through the CBS with only a slight increase in 2017/18. The Housing Needs Team feel that this is because the current qualifying criteria for the scheme is quite restrictive and requires properties to be secured at the applicable LHA rates for the household size and location of the property. This is at a time when landlords are able to charge significantly higher rents and no incentives to offer landlords to work with the scheme and the majority are unwilling to accept households who are claiming benefits to cover their housing costs. Section 5.2 provides further information on the CBS.

Referrals into available supported housing options has also reduced over the period as services commissioned by other agencies such as the County Council begin to be reduced or prioritised specifically for their particular needs. In addition, there is concern from the Housing Needs Team that the low hostel prevention totals do not reflect the true picture as previously Cherwell did not take the lead on placements. It is hoped that reporting on hostel figures will be more accurate in the future.

## 4.2 Affordable Housing Delivery

In recent years we have seen large amounts of new accommodation being built within the district. The majority of the development has been in Banbury and Bicester with keys sites located at Longford Park, Hanwell Chase and Dukes Meadow Drive in Banbury and South West Bicester and Langford Park in Bicester.

As a result of these developments, we have also seen a significant number of affordable housing units being added to the housing portfolio for the district through Section 106 requirements. We have also supplemented this with a programme of building properties ourselves. This has enabled us to make more offers of accommodation through the housing register in recent years and in turn supported the council to prevent homelessness.

Table 7 shows that the number of affordable rented properties delivered over the period of the review has increased significantly from 2014/15 to the end of the last financial year. This increased level of delivery has enabled the council to both prevent homelessness and keep the number of people living in temporary accommodation to a minimum. This has been vital at a time when we have seen the number of properties the council are able to assist people to access within the private rented sector decline in recent years.

**Table 7**

<b>New delivery</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>2015/2016</b>	<b>2016/2017</b>	<b>2017/2018</b>
Affordable Rented Accommodation (social housing sector)	89	232	184	284

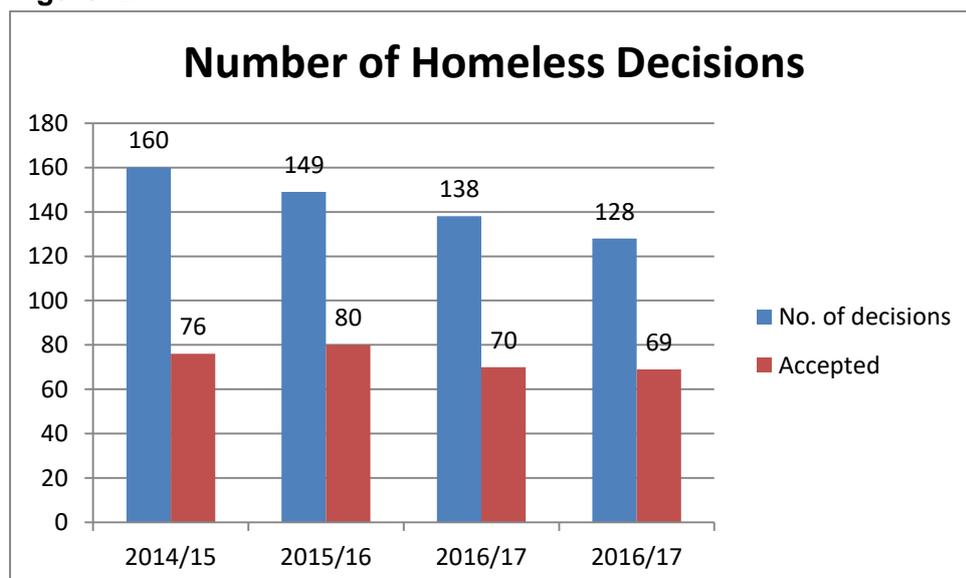
## 4.3 Statutory Homelessness

The numbers of households in our statutory homeless figures below represent a proportion of the full range of housing need, covering those who have no accommodation or are unable to remain in their property awaiting rehousing through the register at the point they approach for assistance.

### 4.3.1 Homeless decisions and acceptances

The number of homeless decisions made has decreased over the past four years, although in each year there have been a number of additional households who made an initial application but withdrew this before we concluded investigations. This amounted to ten households in 2015/16; 19 households in 2016/17 and 14 households in 2017/18. This appears to be related to a change in the allocation scheme in June 2015, which gave one offer only to applicants accepted as homeless, to ensure that there was no incentive to making a homeless application, in cases where housing needs could be resolved through the register. A number of households withdrew their homeless application when it became clear that they would only receive one offer of accommodation and that offer was not guaranteed to be in their preferred location.

**Figure: 2**



Figures for households 'accepted' refer to cases where we accept a legal duty to provide the household with accommodation. The proportion of acceptances compared to overall decisions has remained reasonably constant through this period, ranging between 48-54% of all decisions. The most common reason for not accepting a housing duty has been a decision that the household is either 'not in priority need' or that they have become 'homeless intentionally', as a result of actions which have led to them losing their last settled accommodation. A further proportion of cases have resulted in decisions that the household is 'not homeless', which will be issued if the household's homelessness was resolved prior to conclusion of investigations; effectively the household was 'no longer homeless' or that their homelessness was 'relieved'. Reasons for this will include that the household was nominated to a property via the housing register, or to suitable private rented accommodation through the Bond Scheme, or where the applicant was considered able to remain or return to their home, often after intervention from the officer.

**Table 8**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
<b>No. of decisions</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>128</b>
Accepted	76	80	70	69
Non Priority	26	25	30	25
Intentionally Homeless	26	28	23	20
Not Homeless	30	12	13	11
Not Eligible	1	4	2	3
198 Referrals	1	0	0	0

A significant issue for the authority is the number of households who present as homeless having had no prior contact with us, which is measured by whether or not an advice and prevention case had been opened prior to their homeless application being made. These numbers have decreased over the last four years, from 100 'on the day' applications in 2014/15 to 64 in 2016/17, but there is still more work to be done to ensure that people are

aware of the advice and assistance available to prevent or relieve homelessness in a timely fashion.

**Table 9**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
No contact prior to homeless presentation	100	82	66	64
Existing contact prior to homeless presentation	66	77	91	78

The lower row of figures in table 9 above records those households who had approached us for advice and assistance prior to making a homeless application. We would have worked with these households for varying amounts of time trying to find solutions to their housing need. For comparison, in 2017/18, we were able to prevent homelessness for 480 households we worked with, in addition to the 78 who went on to make a homeless application.

#### **4.3.2 Household composition**

For cases in which we have accepted a homeless duty:

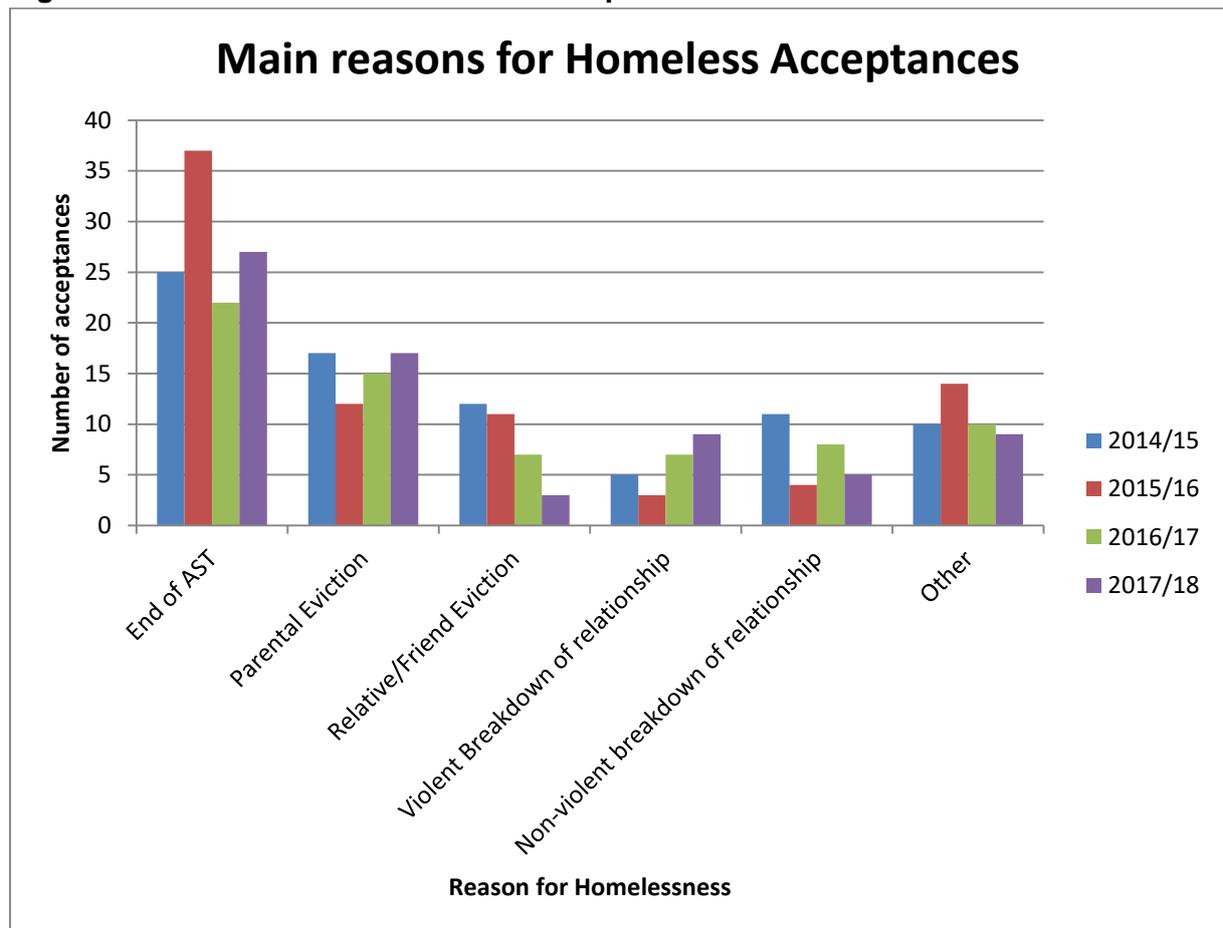
- Lone parent households have been the main household type in each year of the review; which correlates with household most likely to be in financial difficulty. However this percentage of overall acceptances has decreased from 71% in 2014/15 to 47% in 2017/18.
- Couples with dependent children were the next most common household type to whom we accepted a duty, at just over 30% of all applications over the review period.
- Single person households made up approximately 10% of accepted households over the period of the review but has varied over the years from 5% in 2014/15, 10% in 2015/16, 7% in 2016/17 and 12% in 2017/18.
- Almost two-thirds of households accepted as homeless are aged 25 - 44, most of whom will be supporting dependent children within their household.
- We have seen a small reduction in the number of young people (aged 16 – 24) to whom we accepted a duty, from 28% in 2015 to just under one quarter (23%) in 2016/17 and 2017/18 (a total of 16 and 17 applicants respectively in those recent years).
- Households where physical disability has been recorded as their reason for priority need has consistently been low ranging from 0% households in 2016/17 to a high of 7.4% in 2015/16
- Households where mental health has been recorded as their reason for priority need has also consistently been low ranging from 2.4% of households in 2015/16 to a high of 4.3% in 2016/17.
- Both black and mixed race households are over-represented in homelessness acceptances, compared to the overall population of the district. Black households accounted for 8% of all accepted cases in 2014/15 and 2015/16 and rose to 11% in 2017/18, compared to an average population for Cherwell of 1.3%, as per Census 2011 figures. The proportion of households accepted as homeless describing themselves as mixed race increased from 2% in 2015/16 to 7% in 2017/18, compared to 1.78% for the district, as per Census 2011 figures.

### 4.3.3 Main Reasons for Homeless Acceptances

As shown in Figure 3 below, termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy and family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, continue to be the primary drivers of homelessness, affecting between 60%-72% of all cases where we accepted a duty to accommodate, during the review period.

Behind this sit secondary factors such as affordability and inability to find a home in the local market.

**Figure 3: Main reasons for homeless acceptances**



Our data also records a small increase in the number of households to which we accepted a duty, who presented as homeless as a result of 'violent breakdown of relationship', which is the definition used by Government to collect statics during this period. These increased from three households in 2015/16, to nine households in 2017/18. Homelessness as a result of 'violent breakdown of relationship', can include approaches from people with a connection anywhere in the country, to ensure the individual/household are safe from any potential risk. Section 6.2 covers issues related to Domestic Abuse and relationship breakdown in more detail.

The number of households being accepted as homeless after being asked to leave by relatives or friends has shown a steady reduction. The HNT considers this to be as a result of the allocations scheme limiting people to one offer from the housing register if a homeless

application is accepted. The team have focussed on explaining to customers that if they are able to wait and apply to the register, they will have more choice about where they move to.

The number of acceptances as a result of 'parental eviction' saw a small drop in 2015/16 before increasing back to the same level as 2014/15.

The 'Other' category includes reasons such as 'left prison/on remand', left HM Forces or homeless in an emergency but are all of very small numbers individually and do not show any significant trends.

#### **4.4 Use and availability of temporary accommodation**

##### **4.4.1 Use of temporary accommodation**

The council has a duty to offer Temporary Accommodation (TA) to:

- Households that present as homeless where there is reason to believe that they may be in priority need and they have nowhere to stay pending a homelessness decision
- Households for whom following an assessment, a full homelessness duty has been accepted.

Households who present to us as homeless are usually placed in temporary accommodation whilst enquiries are made into their circumstances, and a decision is made as to whether or not we owe a duty to continue to provide accommodation.

Officers work with applicants as far as possible to enable them to remain in existing accommodation until suitable temporary accommodation becomes available; however this is less likely to be possible for households who present at the point that homelessness has occurred, and these households will be more likely to require emergency motel or Bed & Breakfast (B&B) placements. Officers aim to place applicants into self-contained temporary accommodation if this is available. If there is a need for an emergency placement, or self-contained temporary accommodation is not available, we make placements into B&B or motel accommodation in the first instance. In some cases, households will then move on from B&B/motel accommodation to self-contained temporary accommodation.

**Table 10: Number of households placed in TA, showing type of accommodation on first night of placement**

	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
B&B or motel accommodation	71	79	93	81
Direct to self-contained TA	38	31	11	22
<b>Total no. of households placed in TA</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>103</b>

Table 10 shows the type of accommodation secured for people approaching the council on the first night only. It shows that over the period of the review there has become greater need to initially place households into B&B or motel accommodation until more suitable self-contained accommodation can be identified.

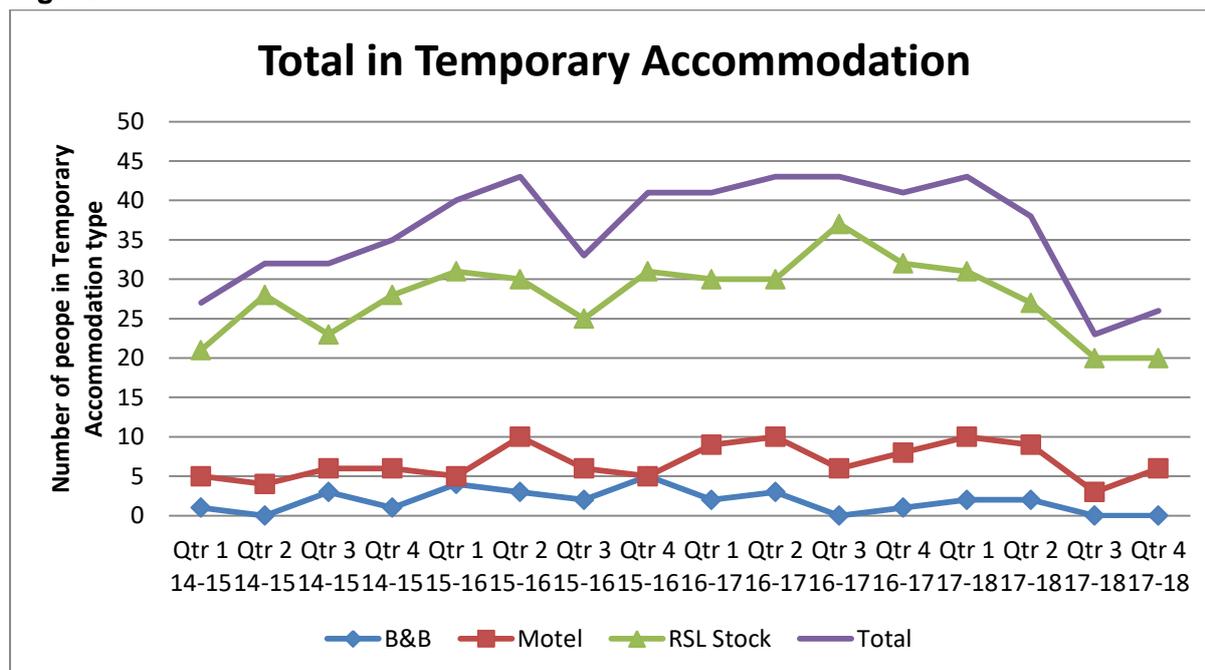
Despite this increase, the graph below (see figure 4) shows that the majority of all households needing to be accommodated by the council are accommodated in self-contained accommodation in the long term.

Over the period of the review we have not needed to increase the number of units used for TA as we have seen the number of homeless applications reduce slightly.

We have, however, seen that in 2015/16 & 2016/17 people were having to stay in TA for longer but this trend has reversed in the most recent year and is likely to be as a result of increased affordably housing delivery and fewer people presenting to the council. Section 4.4.3 provides more detail about the amount of time spent in TA.

Throughout the review period, we have seen fluctuations in the number of people placed in TA, increasing from 2014-15 to the end of March 2017, but decreasing again during 2017-18. Figure 4 below, shows the number of households accommodated in the different types of TA at the end of each quarter.

**Figure 4**



Under our allocation scheme we can give a preference for homeless or transfer applicants. We can add this to manage TA and meet the specific needs of certain households. However, this is only used very sparingly, for example when there is a lack of TA available, to ensure that others groups are not disadvantaged.

The drop in numbers in TA from Quarter 1 2017/18 was due to the use of homelessness preference quotas for the housing register to move households on to permanent accommodation, where a duty had been accepted. This corresponded with a natural move out of TA at the end of 2017 when, due to the length of time spent waiting on the housing register, households started to be put forward for nominations. We also benefitted from an increase in delivery of new build RP stock, which aids our ability to prevent homelessness via the housing register.

#### 4.4.2 Sources of temporary accommodation

##### B&B and motel accommodation

We have a small selection of options available to meet the needs of households requiring temporary accommodation. The option used will depend upon the urgency of the applicant's housing circumstances and availability of accommodation at the time of approach.

Where people approach needing accommodation in an emergency or with limited notice that they are to become homeless, the main option is likely to be B&B, which is paid on a nightly basis, or in a local motel.

We have a contract with one local motel in Banbury, which secures access to 10 rooms throughout the year and has some rooms that are inter-connecting, allowing for large households to be accommodated together if required. Applicants placed here have their own front door, do not have to share facilities and have access to basic cooking facilities, being supplied with a microwave and fridge in their room.

When this accommodation is full, officers have to look further afield for accommodation, as the majority of B&B establishments within the district will not accept households placed by us. We have occasionally needed to use B&B rooms at a motorway service station within our district, or rarely, outside of the district. These do not have cooking facilities for residents and breakfast is not covered by the council's booking. During 2016/17 a total of three households were placed out of area and in 2017/18 a total of five households were placed out of area for their first night of placement. Where out of area bookings are used, we strive to meet the requirements of households with work or school commitments close to our boundaries. Some out of area bookings have been made at the request of the applicant, usually for personal safety reasons. These are only used as a last resort for a short period of time, until accommodation within the district can be identified.

B&B is not considered to be suitable accommodation for families and the law says it can only be used in an emergency and for no longer than a maximum of six weeks. Over the period of the review we have not placed any families in this type of accommodation for more than six weeks; this applies also to families accommodated within the motel.

#### **Self-Contained Accommodation**

If a duty is accepted and the household have been placed in B&B or motel accommodation as an initial placement, officers will look to move the household into self-contained accommodation at the earliest opportunity.

We have an agreement with Sanctuary Housing, our Large Scale Voluntary Transfer registered provider, to provide and manage this accommodation on our behalf. Sanctuary provides 33 units of accommodation in Banbury and Bicester in the form of:

- 4 studios
- 12 1 beds
- 17 2 beds

Some of these units have been purpose built to provide temporary accommodation and have flexibility to be changed between a studio and two bedroom properties or to two one bedroom flats in depending on the need at any given time.

#### **4.4.3 Time spent in Temporary Accommodation**

We work to limit the amount of time households have to spend in TA. We provide support through our Tenancy Support Officer (TSO), who visits families to ensure they are maintaining their TA and applying for suitable properties available through our CBL system. If households are not applying for all suitable properties available within an advertising cycle, officers will place applications on suitable properties on their behalf, to ensure they move out of TA at the earliest opportunity.

During the review period, the majority of households remained in TA for under six months, with a very small number accommodated for over 12 months.

**Table 11: Duration of stay in TA by number of households accommodated**

<b>Time in TA</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Under 6 months	54	44	33	47
6 -12 months	13	29	33	34
1-2 years	3	1	0	1

#### **4.5 Cost and funding of TA**

##### **4.5.1 Expenditure on Temporary Accommodation**

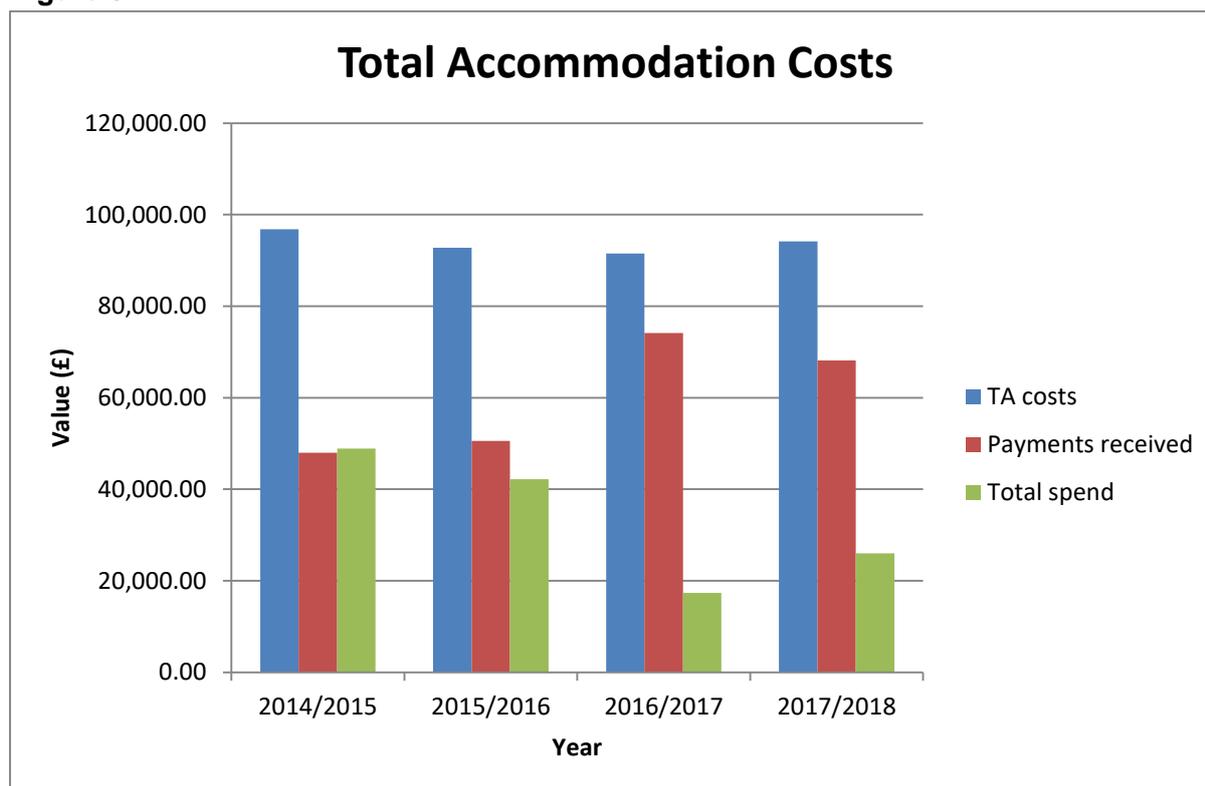
Figure 5 below shows that the costs for TA in Cherwell have remained relatively consistent at between £91,000 and £96,000 per year, over the period of the review.

Households placed into TA are charged rent whilst they are staying in the accommodation and can claim HB to assist with this if they are on a low income. They are also charged a small fee to cover services such as gas, electric and water which is not covered by HB. Once these payments have been recovered from the household, our overall expenditure is significantly lower.

The review has shown that in recent years the total cost to the council for TA has reduced from a high of £48,861 in 2014/15 to a low of £17,328 in 2016/17. However, TA spend in 2017/18 increased to £26,018 but this is likely to be as a result of the removal of the £60 per week/ household management charge claimable from HB.

This reduction in overall costs is as a result of improved collection of HB from households by members of staff and the introduction of the TSO to ensure that all supporting evidence is submitted to prevent households falling into arrears.

**Figure 5**



#### 4.5.2 Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG)

Until the end of March 2017, local housing authorities could charge £60 per week management fee on TA units. This was paid from the DWP to local authorities on a per household basis. From 1 April 2017, the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee (TAMF) subsidy payment was removed, restricting subsidy to the appropriate LHA Rate. The calculation of HB subsidy, for all TA, will in most cases be 90% of the appropriate January 2011 LHA rate for the property and not the household size. No subsidy is paid for UC claimants.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is responsible for the alternative funding, Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG). FHSG is paid to local housing authorities as a grant and can be used in any way a local authority sees fit, to better manage TA pressures. The grant is ring-fenced for activities to prevent and deal with homelessness.

**Table 12**

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant allocation – Cherwell District Council		
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
£178,538	£205,425	£265,225

#### 4.5.3 Homelessness Reduction Act: New Burdens Funding

The government is providing £72.7 million to local authorities to help meet the new burdens costs associated with the additional duties contained within the HRA 2017. The local authority allocations cover: 2017/18; 2018/19; and 2019/20. The allocation for Cherwell District Council is as follows:

**Table 13**

<b>Homelessness Reduction Act: New Burdens Funding</b>			
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total Allocation
£47,246	£43,277	£45,747	£136,270

We did not utilise the HRA New Burdens Funding for 2017/18 as we wanted to spend the monies in line with the priorities within our new homelessness strategy.

In addition, to the above, all local housing authorities were allocated £9,200 as a one-off payment towards new ICT costs in relation to the new legislation.

#### **4.5.4 Homelessness Prevention Grant**

Central Government used to give local housing authorities funding for homelessness prevention work via a ring-fenced grant. A few years ago the ring-fenced grant ceased and the funding was incorporated into the council's wider local government settlement but was visible as a discrete element of the total settlement. The Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation for Cherwell District Council is as follows:

**Table 14**

<b>Homelessness Prevention Grant</b>		
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
£99,869	£100,211	£100,712

This funding has been used by the Housing Team to support a range of community and voluntary sector groups to provide services within the district that are focused on supporting the prevention of homelessness. Examples of where this funding has been used include the provision of drop in centres for people who are homeless or unsuitably housed, outreach and verification for rough sleepers and outreach for people experiencing Domestic Abuse.

#### **4.5.5 New Homes Bonus**

New Homes Bonus (NHB) is a grant paid by Central Government to local authorities to incentivise housing growth in their area. Under the scheme, Central Government matches the council tax raised on new build homes, conversions and long term empty homes brought back into use. The development of each additional affordable home attracts an enhancement of £350 per annum (over the period which the NHB is payable). Local authorities are not obliged to use NHB funding for housing development.

This funding is not currently used to support to support new initiatives to help prevent homeless within the district but provides an opportunity for the team to consider future requests if potential needs are identified that will support the prevention of homelessness within the district.

#### **4.6 Accommodation outcome following acceptance of duty**

We discharged our duty to the majority of households we accepted as homeless, into social housing, predominantly by way of a Part 6 offer but occasionally to registered providers outside of their nomination agreements. Homeless households to who we accept a duty are placed on auto-bidding on our CBL scheme and will receive one suitable offer of accommodation as per our allocations scheme. Under our scheme we can add a preference for homeless or transfer applicants, to manage TA and meet the specific needs of certain households. However, this is used very sparingly to ensure that others groups are not put at a disadvantage.

We also discharge our duty by way of a Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO), where suitable private rented sector property is available. This is generally to private properties to which we have issued a Landlord Home Improvement Grant (LHIG), which contractually obliges landlords to let to a tenant from our housing register.

Our Private Sector Housing Team offers LHIGs to help landlords of privately rented accommodation cover the costs of repairs and improvements, such as new kitchens, bathrooms or heating systems. In return for the grant, we receive rights to nominate tenants to the property for up to a maximum of five years, dependent on the sum awarded.

There has been a decrease, since 2014/15, in the number of households accommodated under PRSO, in line with a reduction in the number of grants issued. Table 15 shows accommodation outcomes, but also shows that in 2017/18, 11% of households to whom we accepted a duty, left TA without moving into a property through our register. They either refused the offer; voluntarily vacated TA or were required to leave, ending the duty as they were found intentionally homeless from the temporary placement.

**Table 15: Accommodation outcome/ discharge of homeless duty**

Duty discharge	2014/ 15	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2017/ 18
Part 6 offer to RP (social housing)	50	72%	65	88%	51	81%	58	72%
PRSO	16	23%	5	7%	2	3%	12	15%
RP offer outside of pt 6 (sheltered/ extra care)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2%
Refused pt 6 offer	-	-	1	1%	4	6%	3	4%
Intentionally homeless from TA	-	-	2	3%	3	5%	1	1%
Voluntarily ceased to occupy TA	1	1%	1	1%	3	5%	3	4%
Refused offer of private rented	3	4%	-	-	-	-	2	2%

## 5 Other Housing Options

### 5.1 Access to Private Rented Accommodation

The private rented sector can be a realistic housing option for households in housing need. Although it is generally more expensive and offers shorter tenancies than the social sector, it can respond quicker to need and provide more flexibility. However, for those on lower incomes, including those in paid employment, the choice of suitable private rented accommodation can be limited as it is in high demand and expensive.

This expense is fuelled in part by Cherwell being well placed with good transport links to London, Oxford and Birmingham, all accessible within an hour by train. Oxford is recognised to be one of the most expensive places to live when comparing average earning to property prices. This causes people to look outside of Oxford for accommodation, increasing housing costs within our district.

For households in receipt of full or part Local Housing Allowance (LHA), there is likely to be a shortfall between LHA rates and local rents, as shown in the tables below. LHA rates were frozen from April 2016 - April 2018, when rates on some properties were increased by 3% (these were one and two bedroom properties in the Cherwell Valley Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA)).

**Table 16: Shortfall between LHA rates and local rents in Cherwell**

Property Size	LHA Rate: <b>Cherwell Valley BRMA</b> (£ pw) Rates unchanged since 2015	Average Rent for Banbury/Bicester (£ pw)	Shortfall per week (£ pw)
1 Bed	£130.06	£150.23/£168.23	£20.17/£38.17
2 Bed	£162.29	£185.07/£228.92	£22.78/£66.63
3 Bed	£187.87	£216.00/£266.76	£28.13/£39.89
4 Bed	£248.35	£373.84/£366.00	£125.49/£117.65

Property Size	LHA Rate: <b>Oxford BRMA</b> (£ pw) Rates unchanged since 2015	Average Rent for Kidlington (£ pw)	Shortfall per week (£ pw)
1 Bed	£158.90	£168.23	£9.33
2 Bed	£192.48	£228.92	£36.44
3 Bed	£230.14	£266.76	£36.62
4 Bed	£299.18	£366.00	£66.82

Data sourced May 2018 – Zoopla.co.uk

Whilst the average rent charged within the private rented sector varies based upon demand at any given time, the tables above provide a snapshot of the difference between the 'market/average rent' being charged within the district and the shortfall for residents requiring support from LHA towards their monthly rent.

This highlights the difficulty that many people on low incomes have with being able to identify accommodation they can afford and also demonstrates why many landlords are reluctant to accept tenants claiming benefits. We are aware anecdotally, of landlords stating that they are unable, as a condition of their insurance, to let to tenants in receipt of benefits, but we do not currently provide cover for this. We are aware that affordability issues are not limited to

those claiming out of work benefits, but also affects households where one or two members are in paid employment, but still find it difficult to afford local rent levels.

This situation is exacerbated because many letting agents require a deposit of 1.5 times the monthly rent plus an administration charge of between £50 and £200, as well as the first month's rent in advance. These upfront charges make it difficult for households on low incomes to access private rented sector accommodation.

## **5.2 Cherwell Bond Scheme (CBS)**

We offer the Cherwell Bond Scheme (CBS) to assist households who are at risk of homelessness and do not have sufficient income to cover the costs of a deposit. The scheme has operated since 2010.

Evidence shows there is a correlation between the number of deposit bonds issued through the CBS and the number of LHIGs issued, as landlords in receipt of LHIG are required to let to tenants via the council, during their contractual period. The CBS will, however, also apply to landlords who have not received LHIGs.

The current scheme requires properties to be affordable for the household being supported into the tenancy and needs to be at the applicable LHA rate for the area and size of property. Since 2014/15, the number of people we have supported through the scheme has decreased, to 14 households during 2015/16. This occurred as rental prices within the district increased and the amount of LHA households are able to claim towards their rental costs was frozen as part of the national welfare reform agenda. As a result, fewer landlords were willing to accept tenants through the scheme, as they could charge greater rents on the open market.

There was an improvement in the number of new tenancies granted during 2017/18, though the majority of these were re-lets with existing landlords who have already been working with the scheme, often where they have accepted a LHIG and are contractually bound to accept tenants for a set number of years.

**Table 17: No. of new tenancies issued under CBS and number of LHIGs issued**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of new CBS tenancies	45	25	14	29
Number of LHIGs awarded	19	14	5	11

Although the number of people being supported through the scheme has seen a reduction since 2014/15, officers do advise clients, outside of the scheme, about how to access the private rented sector through negotiation with private landlords/letting agents, budgeting advice to help them afford rents they felt were not affordable and apply for DHP to cover the rent/deposit required to access a new tenancy.

Our current scheme only covers properties let at LHA rates, available within the district and will not support clients identifying accommodation in other districts. It only provides for applicants who qualify under the housing register, so for example, excludes those with former tenant arrears. It provides a cashless bond which deters some landlords, and it requires that properties must be inspected by the Private Sector Housing Team, which ensures the safety of the property but can cause a delay if other prospective tenants are willing to take the property without using the scheme. The scheme does not cover incentives such as a finder's fee and does not cover Rent In Advance.

The team are aware that some landlords feel it may be more difficult to get rid of CBS tenants if they need the property back, as there is a belief that we will insist on court action.

However, in the three years to 2017/18, Oxford City Council (OCC) have placed 34 households into private rented accommodation in our district, through offers and incentives to landlords. This success suggests their offer may be more attractive to private landlords than the current schemes available at CDC. As a homeless prevention tool, our current scheme is too restrictive and some flexibility in how it works would improve how it can support households to access the private sector. OCC's success in working with the private sector in our area will need to be considered when reviewing the current resources available to encourage the private sector to work with us.

## 6. Households with specific housing needs

### 6.1 Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Many single person households find it difficult to access private rented or owner occupied accommodation because of the costs of housing within the district – difficulty in covering expensive rents or a mortgage and upfront costs on a single wage make this very difficult for many of the single people approaching the council to achieve.

Single people without dependent children generally only qualify for statutory assistance with housing if they are considered 'vulnerable'. Those considered 'vulnerable' include people with physical or mental health issues, care leavers and those who have served in HM Forces, as well as people with relatively complex needs, including drug and alcohol problems. Due to the complexities of the legislation and case law in this area, homeless applications from single persons may involve lengthy investigations while awaiting information from GPs and other agencies; this can result in single homeless people spending longer periods of time in temporary accommodation. If the outcome of the investigation is that the applicant is not considered to be 'in priority need', the authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance only.

The table below shows the number of applications made to the council by single people each year, which has accounted for between 25% and 30% of all applications.

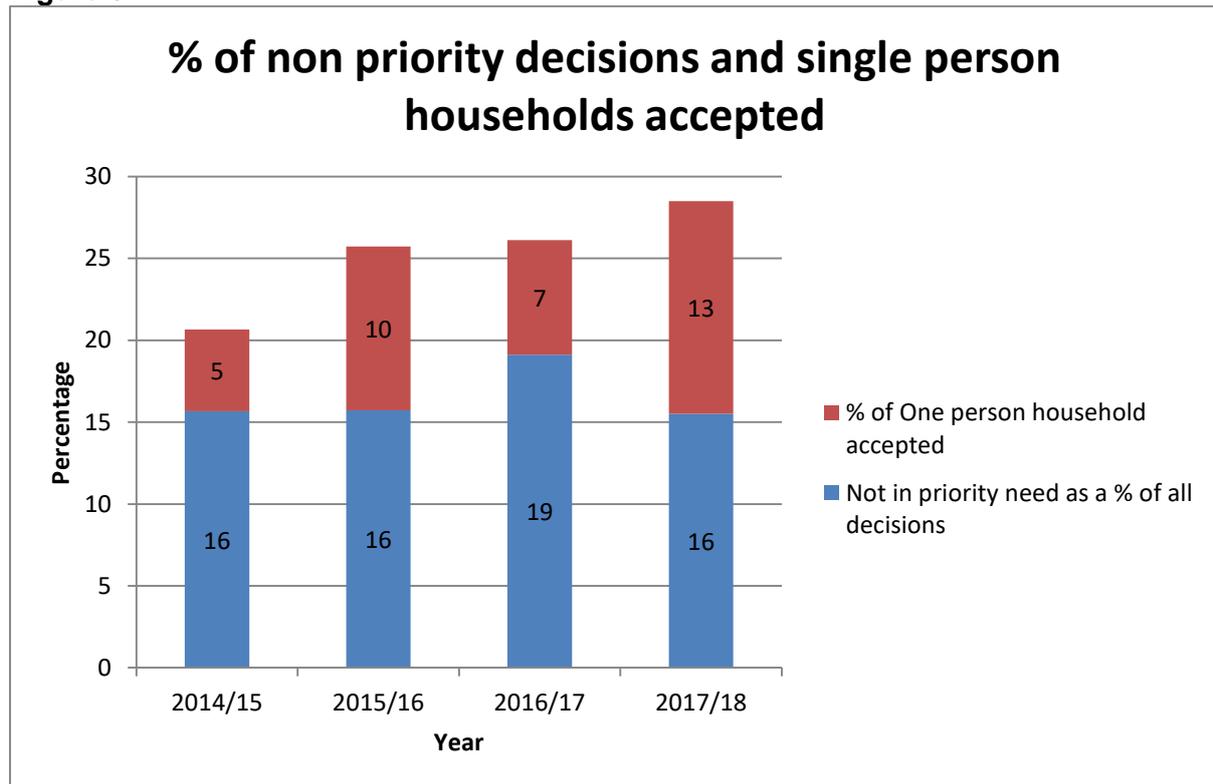
**Table 18**

	Total Applications Made	Applications made by single person households	% of all applications
2014/15	160	40	25
2015/16	149	40	27
2016/17	138	42	30
2017/18	128	34	27

Not all of these households will have been owed duties once enquiries have been made into how they have become homeless; details about the number can be found in section 4.3.

Figure 6 below shows the percentage of homeless acceptances that were of single households and the percentage of total decisions on homeless applications that were 'not priority need', which will mainly consist of single applicants.

Figure 6



The information shows that over the period of the review the number of single households being accepted as homeless has increased from 5% in 2014/15 to a high of 13% of all cases in 2017/18 whilst the amount of homeless decisions being made for this group has remained relatively consistent.

### People who sleep rough

We have a legal obligation to conduct an annual estimate of the number of people sleeping rough within our district. This is done as an intelligence-based estimate, rather than a street count as we are a predominately rural district. We use intelligence gathered by a range of local partner agencies, undertaken in accordance with national guidelines and verified nationally for the MHCLG by Homeless Link. The estimate is a snapshot figure taken on a 'typical night' agreed by all the city and district councils in Oxfordshire. Whilst the figure is only intended to provide a snapshot figure on the one typical night, it records an increase to 21 people in November 2015, and then a reduction down to nine people in November 2017. Reasons for this reduction include the introduction of bed spaces in Cherwell for people rough sleeping for the first time, improved intelligence with partners about those who are genuinely sleeping rough, via the Vulnerable Adults Panel meeting, and bed spaces for rough sleepers with a connection to Cherwell.

The table below shows the number of people verified as rough sleeping as part of the council's annual rough sleeper estimate. Since 2015 we have focussed on increasing the options available to rough sleepers and ensuring accurate verification of rough sleepers based on the agreed definition.

**Table 19:** Number of verified rough sleepers on each 'typical night'

	Nov 2014	Nov 2015	Nov 2016	Nov 2017
Number rough sleepers verified on 'typical night'	14	21	17	9

From our data we can confirm that in 2017/18 we had 134 individuals reported as rough sleeping. Of the 134:

- 40 were verified as sleeping rough
- 52 reports gave insufficient information to attempt verification
- 42 others were not found after attempted verification (Outreach makes 3 separate attempts) or were found to not be rough sleeping when the referral was checked.

Of the who were 40 verified:

- 22 were placed within the Single Homeless Pathway (SHP)
- 11 were assisted to other accommodation, not part of the SHP
- One was reconnected to return in their homeland within Europe
- One refused / did not engage with assistance
- 

Verification of reports of people sleeping rough requires additional staff time, but is vital to ensure that those actually sleeping rough are engaged with at the earliest opportunity.

In recent years there have been significant cuts in the amount of funding Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has provided for supported accommodation for rough sleepers in Oxfordshire. An initial reduction in funding occurred in April 2016, when the SHP was recommissioned. At this time funding was reduced from £3.8m to £2.3m per year and was due to be phased in over two years. The recommissioning of services saw Cherwell receive direct funding into the district for the first time with the provision of 13 bed spaces within the district. Before this time, anyone sleeping rough with a connection to Cherwell was required to access support in other parts of Oxfordshire.

During 2016 OCC announced further cuts to the funding available to support people rough sleeping and that they would be withdrawing their contribution funding beyond 2017.

In conjunction with the other Oxfordshire District/City Councils, we collectively ensured that provision for people sleeping rough continued and required each local authority to identify financial contributions to a jointly funded SHP in Oxfordshire. We have agreed to make contributions of £62,700 per year for the three years 2017 – 2020. A new pooled funding arrangement between all Oxfordshire District/City Councils, OCC and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissions Group began from 1 April 2017, to ensure the provision of support for these bed spaces until March 2020.

Despite the new funding from the District/City Councils there is still a significant reduction in the overall funding available for this type of accommodation and as a result a number of the hostels previously available needed to be decommissioned.

The SHP has 3 priorities for access:

- Priority 1 - Principle of No Second Night Out

- Priority 2 - Entrenched rough sleepers, who may have been through the pathway previously
- Priority 3 - Effectively no first night out referrals who would rough sleep without the SHP referral
- 

This pathway is not used as a homeless prevention tool for single people at risk of homelessness and is there only to support people who have unfortunately had to sleep rough or are at risk of sleeping rough tonight and have additional support needs.

For single people that are of No Fixed Abode (NFA) or are sofa surfing, the pathway is not an option and they will be supported with housing advice and assistance to join the housing register.

The option often available for single people is to identify one bed properties, or accommodation that is shared with others. As of 31 May 2018 there were 491 (46%) of applicants on the housing register with a one bed need. Whilst some of these applicants may be couples it indicates that there is a significant need for smaller one bedroom accommodation and shared facilities.

### **Provision in CDC**

Our new contribution ensures people with a local connection to Cherwell have access, until March 2020, to 11 complex needs (24hr support) beds based in Oxford, at O'Hanlon House, and 13 beds within our district for people with less complex support needs. In conjunction with the new SHP, this has helped reduce the number of people having to rough sleep within in the district. We are, however, aware that whilst the number of people rough sleeping in Cherwell has reduced, overall the number reported in Oxfordshire has increased with some local residents rough sleeping in Oxford City as services are more readily available there.

We are aware that Cherwell has a role to play in helping the county meet its collective needs and appreciate the pressures being experienced by our neighbouring authorities.

We secured additional capacity for the SHP and entered into a contract with A2Dominion for a 12 month period, from April 2018 to end of March 2019, to secure 10 further beds at Simon House for people sleeping rough, who have a connection to Cherwell. This has further reduced the number of people rough sleeping in Cherwell, and those with connections to Cherwell sleeping rough in Oxford City.

A full review is currently underway; to confirm the nature and type of provision required and inform negotiations for future service delivery, for people sleeping rough, beyond 2020.

### **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)**

We operate SWEP during periods where the weather is forecast to be 0 degrees or lower for three consecutive days. This is provided in partnership with all the other Oxfordshire District/City Councils and is overseen by OCC.

Additional spaces are made available within the SHP supported housing projects in Oxford City, to ensure people are off the streets during very cold weather. We make a financial contribution to Oxford City to cover the additional staffing costs incurred for providing this service. We provide financial support to anyone wishing to access SWEP beds, to cover their travelling costs to Oxford.

On the occasions that SWEP was triggered in winter 2017/18, one bed in Oxford City was used, on two separate occasions. During one period when people were unable to travel to Oxford as roads were inaccessible due to heavy snow, provision was offered locally and taken up by 10 people. This accounted for a significant increase on the number of placements made in previous years. There were a number of voids at the local motel we use as TA at the time SWEP was in place and we were able to utilise the bed places as SWEP beds, for clients who passed a risk assessment.

**Table 20: SWEP placements**

	15/16	16/17	2017/18
Offered placement	10	2	19
Accepted	1	-	12

### **Outreach and verification**

We fund Connection Support to provide outreach and verification for people reported to be rough sleeping within our district, to allow individuals to access the SHP and to provide advice and support about available options.

This funding is additional to our contribution to the SHP, but also covers verification and triage at the day centres operating in Banbury and Bicester (see below).

Connection Support receives referrals from a variety of different channels, including ourselves and Streetlink, which is an online service members of the public can use to report people sleeping rough. Connection Support have not previously identified the exact number of individuals being referred to them, as some reports will not be able to be verified and the referrer may not know who the person they are referring is. The Housing Needs Team Leader is working with Connection Support to improve monitoring.

Connection Support will also continue to carry out regular checks with those rough sleeping who decline to engage with the support available, to reconfirm the options that are available to them and how to make contact if they change their minds.

### **Triage Support at drop-in centres**

As part of the grant funding provided to Connection Support, they attend day centres in Banbury and Bicester twice a week to provide a triage service for individuals on a range of issues including housing, benefits, health, employment, training and education opportunities. The service is available by drop-in which can assist individuals who struggle to maintain appointments to access support.

Table 21 below shows the number of enquiries received by Connection Support at both locations.

The majority of enquiries the triage service receives are related to housing, homelessness and benefits and mirrors what has been seen through the Corporate Debt and Money Advice contract (see section 6.8), as the main themes for people needing advice and support.

**Table 21**

	Beacon Centre, Banbury	Salvation Army Bicester	Total
2014/2015	210	110	320
2015/2016	191	210	410
2016/2017	224	194	418
2017/2018	230	113	343

**Beacon Centre, Banbury**

We fund Banbury and District Housing Coalition (BDHC) to provide a drop in at St Marys Centre, Banbury. The centre is open 4 days per week and provides a place for anyone experiencing homelessness, mental health or substance abuse problems or feeling isolated to seek advice, support or just companionship.

The centre is a central place of support to people who are homeless or unsuitably housed and receives in the region of 4000 visits from around 400 individuals per year although there was a significant reduction over the last year. The Beacon Centre also provides a venue for Connection Support to provide their triage service and also has regular attendance from Turning Point, to provide advice and support to people with substance misuse problems.

**Salvation Army, Bicester**

The Salvation Army in Bicester operate the Bridges drop in centre from their facility at Hart Place, Bicester. The centre operates in a similar way to the Beacon Centre and is open two days a week with Connection Support attending on both days to provide triage. Turning Point also attend, providing drug and alcohol support on Fridays, in addition to a Drug and Alcohol support worker employed by the Salvation Army. The number attending the Salvation Army is significantly smaller than those who attend the Beacon Centre but over recent years has seen the total number of individual visitors attending increase from 58 in 2014 to 203 in 2016/17. This service has been funded by Cherwell since 2014/15 and is established as a place for people to seek support.

## 6.2 Households experiencing Domestic Abuse <sup>2</sup>

In Oxfordshire in 2017, Thames Valley Police recorded a total of 11,446 victims of domestic abuse crimes and incidents of which 2,999 were within Cherwell.

Incidences of recorded crime increased between 2016/17, with a slight decrease in 'non-crime occurrences' (these include those reported by a third party where the alleged victim either declines to confirm the crime or cannot be traced, and cases where the occurrence is being dealt with by another police force).

**Table 22: Reported incidences of domestic abuse within Cherwell**

	2015	2016	2017
Domestic Abuse non-crime occurrence	2143	2254	2221
Domestic Abuse recorded crime	818	775	888

Source: Safer Oxfordshire Partnership Strategic Intelligence Assessment 2018

At the end of 2017/18, there was a corporate commitment that our Community Safety Team would lead on domestic abuse partnership work in response to the level of need locally, and acknowledgement that domestic abuse is not primarily a housing issue but one that requires effective prevention, safety and safeguarding work. It is acknowledged that a person suffering from domestic abuse is at the most risk of serious harm when they are leaving, or preparing to leave their abuser; 75% of domestic homicides happen when someone attempts to leave or shortly after they have left an abusive relationship.

### **Cherwell Outreach Service**

Until the end of 2017-18 we commissioned a domestic abuse Outreach Service, exclusively for our district, from the voluntary sector organisation, Reducing the Risk. The service worked with medium and standard risk cases of domestic abuse, helping people to make positive choices and changes to avoid escalation of risk. The Outreach Worker was based at Banbury Police Station, occasionally visiting the Housing Needs Team office. Funding for the service ceased in April 2018 as part of county re-commissioning of domestic abuse services; arrangements for future provision were not clear at time of writing.

Outreach support was provided by phone or face to face, and included listening to the person suffering abuse and advising on immediate safety measures, with a view to making longer term changes, when they felt able to do so. The Outreach Worker was able to advise on measures to keep the person experiencing domestic abuse safe in their own home and legal measures to keep the perpetrator away, through criminal and/or civil procedures. This was intended to prevent the need for urgent rehousing, which can lead to increased risk to the person experiencing abuse, and can often lead to homelessness.

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<sup>2</sup> The Home Office defines domestic violence and abuse as:-

*“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality”.*

This can encompass but is not limited to psychological; physical; sexual; financial and emotional abuse.

Referrals to the Outreach Service were made by a wide variety of organisations, although only one referral was made by the Housing Team, during 2016/17. The Outreach Services' records showed that referrals covered all areas of the district, including rural areas.

**Table 23: Location of persons referred to the Outreach and Sanctuary Service**

Living in	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Banbury	57	73	47	47
Kidlington	15	14	17	4
Bicester	34	29	31	19
Rural areas	20	28	19	21

Source: Outreach Service data

**Table 24: Outcomes achieved by the Outreach Service**

Outcome	2016/17	2017/18
Supported through court process/civil/criminal	35	25
Referrals to Freedom Programme	20	18
Referrals to Recovery Toolkit/Springboard Programme/TAP	8	3
Referrals to Connection Floating Support	6	4
Referrals to Eve Project/Cleanslate	8	3
Sanctuary measures only	5	1
Refer to MARAC/IDVA	4	3
Declined support/unable to contact/moved out of area	14	17

Unfortunately information for earlier years of the review period were not available but demonstrates that many of the clients supported by Outreach were assisted with court action or referrals to the Freedom Programme, which helps victims to recognise the different ways people can be subjected to Domestic Abuse and begin to find ways to remove themselves from this behaviour.

**Table 25: Resolution of Outreach cases**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Supported to stay in their own homes with measures to keep them and their children safe	103 (81%)	109 (76%)	95 (83%)	79 (87%)

Source: Outreach Service data

Demand for the outreach service was high and the needs of service users often complex. Over half of those referred had additional needs including substance misuse, mental health issues or disability. By providing a flexible early intervention service and working closely with key partners, the outreach service was able to play a vital role both in reducing risk to the victims and preventing homelessness

### **Domestic abuse and homelessness**

In some cases, domestic abuse will lead to an urgent need for rehousing and other interventions, which can lead to temporary or longer term homelessness if the household has no other housing options.

Data on those accepted as statutorily homeless, shows a small increase in the number of acceptances as a result of domestic abuse, although the overall numbers are low. These increased from 4% of acceptances (three cases) in 2014/15, to 14% of acceptances (10 cases) in 2016/17 and then 12% (eight cases) in 2017/18.

However, the level of overall enquiries in relation to domestic abuse is much higher and in 2017/18 the team dealt with 116 enquiries about domestic abuse. The table below shows that 40% of these were dealt with through the housing register and 60% sought advice or assistance. Just over one-third (42 enquiries) were dealt with as one off advice, for example, clarifying options, or being advised about safety and legal measures. The team recorded that 19 of all these approaches had a 'positive outcome', such as an offer of accommodation via the housing register; via the Cherwell Bond Scheme or securing their own accommodation in the private rented sector. A further 16 households applied as homeless; we accepted housing to duty half (eight cases) of these.

The following table shows the incidence of approaches due to domestic abuse and a breakdown of where they originated.

**Table 26: Enquiries to the Housing Options Team from households experiencing domestic abuse**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Housing register	36 (32%)	32 (26%)	44 (35%)	47 (40%)
Presentations to Duty Desk	73 (66%)	84 (67%)	77 (60%)	67 (58%)
Out of hours emergency call	1 (%)	8 (6%)	4 (3%)	2 (2%)
MARAC referral	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	-	-
Total enquiries	111	125	128	116

Households placed on the register who are experiencing domestic abuse will be contacted by an Housing Options Officer, to offer immediate advice, regarding their safety and resolution of their housing issues in a planned way. They may be referred for legal advice, signposted to solicitors or the National Centre for Domestic Violence for free legal injunction advice. The Housing Options Officer focussing on domestic abuse attends MARAC.

#### **Homelessness applications as a result of fleeing Domestic Abuse**

The table below shows the number of homeless applications taken for each year of the review which were recorded as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.

It shows that in all years except 2016/17, at least half of all homeless applications taken as a result of domestic abuse came from residents who were living in the refuge based in Banbury. Only seven applications out of 23 were made by people living within the district, two were previously living elsewhere in Oxfordshire – the remaining 14 applications were from people fleeing from other parts of the country.

**Table 27**

	Total Presentations	From Banbury Refuge	Location of presentations
2014/15	3	2	London, Oxford & Warwick
2015/16	2	1	Hornchurch & Bicester
2016/17	10	3	Ipswich, Reading, Bicester, South Oxfordshire, Banbury x4, Milton Keynes, Leamington Spa
2017/18	8	4	Hitchin, Northampton, Birmingham, High Wycombe, Banbury, Waltham Forest, Tring, Manchester

## 6.3 Households with mental health needs

### 6.3.1 What do we know about homelessness for households with mental health needs?

Statistics suggest that people experiencing homelessness are more than four times as likely to experience mental ill health as those in stable accommodation:

*This is compounded by the fact that homeless people can often come up against significant barriers which can prevent them from accessing timely help and support with their mental health. There are also strong correlations between homelessness and the severity of mental and physical health problems, as well as prevalence' (research from Homeless Link and St Mungo's cited in "Mental Health and Housing" Mental Health Foundation 2016).*

The Mental Health Foundation report from 2016 goes on to advise that:

*for those with an established mental health problem and experience of homelessness who are in a position to take on an independent tenancy, tenancy support can be an effective solution to help them maintain that tenancy, and avoid a downward cycle to homelessness or crisis care.*

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT) delivers NHS mental health services outside of hospital, at home and within the community. OHFT helps those living with mental health needs to manage their current health and live independently. OHFT work in partnership with five charitable organisations, each specialising in specific areas of support and recovery:

- **Connection Floating Support:** Empowering individuals with varying needs and issues with specialist support to live independently in the community
- **Elmore Community Services:** high quality services for marginalised and disenfranchised people throughout Oxfordshire
- **Oxfordshire Mind:** advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem
- **Response:** one of the leading providers of home based mental health care in Oxfordshire and beyond
- **Restore:** supporting people with mental health issues in Oxfordshire to recover and get work.

Both Oxfordshire Mind and Response manage specialist accommodation for people experiencing mental health problems in Oxfordshire, which consists of 364 units across the county.

The Better Together Partnership provided information to suggest there were eight people recorded as living in Cherwell being supported by the Better Together Partnership who had been identified as being homeless or sofa surfing. This information is not completely accurate as not all patients had their accommodation status recorded.

### 6.3.2 What does homelessness data from P1E and other council records tell us?

The P1E system for collecting local authority statistics on homelessness only recorded one reason for a household being considered in priority need – generally if the household had dependent children for example, this would be the given reason and the prevalence of mental health issues has therefore been significantly under reported. It is expected that under the new H-CLIC monitoring that better information will be obtained and will provide

greater insight into the support needs of people who become homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Where an applicant has health or mental health issues, we will contact their GP or mental health worker as part of our inquiries, to obtain details of their current diagnosis, medication and how their health issues affect their day-to-day activities. We will determine whether the health issues experienced by the applicant are significant enough to deem them 'vulnerable' and in priority need.

Over the period of the review we accepted a homeless duty to 10 households who were recorded as being in priority need as a result of their Mental Health. This accounted for 3.3% of the 303 applications accepted over the review period.

### **Rough sleeping and mental health**

We are aware that a number of people sleeping rough suffer with some form of mental ill health which may be a reason for them becoming homeless and sleeping rough but we do not currently have a mechanism in place to record the number of people known to be rough sleeping or within the SHP, that are known to have problems with their mental health

#### **6.3.3 What does data from other sources tell us?**

The Oxfordshire SHP uses CHAIN to record people's progress through the pathway and into independent living. The system does identify support needs for clients accessing support but this is not currently monitored / reported within Cherwell.

Similarly information from the outreach team operating in Cherwell does not provide information about whether verified rough sleepers have identified that they are suffering with mental health issues.

## 6.4 Households with substance misuse issues

### 6.4.1 What do we know about homelessness for people with substance misuse issues?

We are aware that a number of people rough sleeping are using substances (alcohol or drugs) but information is not recorded about the amount of people sleeping rough or within the Single Homeless Pathway that are currently using one or more substances.

Turning Point is the integrated drug and alcohol service provider for adults, aged over 18 years within Oxfordshire. Operating under the name, Roads to Recovery, they deliver a range of services from service hubs in Oxford, Banbury, Didcot, Witney and Bicester, including:

- Acupuncture, Reflexology and other complimentary therapies
- Support with housing and benefits
- Outreach workers to support engagement
- Criminal Justice Services
- 1 to 1 key working
- Counselling
- Variety of evidence based group work programmes
- Opiate substitute prescribing
- Community alcohol detox
- Access to residential rehab
- Treatment and advice with any blood-borne viruses (such as HIV or Hepatitis)
- Access to mutual aid, peer mentoring, peer education and volunteering programmes
- Access to education, training, volunteering and employment opportunities.

The Banbury hub is open Monday to Friday and located at Banbury Health Centre, in a central town centre location. Evening appointments are also available on a Monday and Tuesday. All the prescribers are based in Banbury so the Banbury hub is the best location for those who are still injecting or wanting to move onto a maintenance script as groups and 1 to 1 support is more readily available.

The Bicester hub offers a fortnightly satellite service, from the Salvation Army Centre, Hart Place. Support that can be offered is quite limited as there is no needle exchange or prescribing of maintenance scripts so it is helpful for more stable clients.

Turning Point advise that people can self-refer to their services but if there is any information that may be useful for Turning Point to know beforehand e.g. risk factors, mental health needs, vulnerability etc. then a referral from the Housing Team or other agencies the client is known to, is advised, so that a better experience can be provided.

### 6.4.2 What does homelessness data from P1E and other council records tell us?

P1E data tells us very little about substance misuse within this district and could go un-recorded if there are dependent children within the household, as dependent children will always be the highest priority:

**Table 28**

<b>Priority need:</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Drug dependency	Nil	Nil	Nil
Alcohol dependency	1 (single)	Nil	Nil

#### **6.4.3 What does data from other sources tell us?**

We have requested but not received any data from Turning Point to evidence the number of clients accessing Banbury and Bicester service hubs, with a housing need. We therefore do not have an evidence based understanding of the level of housing need amongst this particular client group. We will address this data gap in our homelessness strategy and action plan.

## **6.5 Households including Ex-offenders**

### **6.5.1 What do we know about homelessness for households that include ex-offenders?**

Individuals living in, or wishing to live in our district and involved with the criminal justice system will be supervised either by the National Probation Service (NPS) or a Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). The NPS is responsible for dealing with the most dangerous and high-risk offenders. These are thought to represent approximately 30 per cent of the total criminal population as a whole. The remaining 70 per cent will be supervised by CRCs.

Cherwell sits within the Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company (TVCRC) area. On 1 February 2015 the ownership TVCRC transferred over to MTCnovo as part of the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) programme. TR is a programme of reform that changes the way service users are managed in the community. Under TR the CRCs are now also responsible for supervising service users on release from prison sentences of less than 12 months. These individuals were not previously subject to statutory supervision. Success in reducing reoffending will be rewarded by the Government on a payment by results basis.

### **6.5.2 What does homelessness data from the P1E and other council records tell us?**

Between April 2014 and March 2018, the council accepted a duty to accommodation three applicants (1 in 2015/16, 1 in 2016/17 and 1 in 2017/18) whose reason for loss of last settled accommodation was recorded as 'Left Prison/on remand'. This was from a total of 363 accepted households (0.8% of all acceptances).

### **6.5.3 What does data from other sources tell us?**

We were successful in receiving funding from the then DCLG Single Homeless Fund on behalf of all districts/city councils in Oxfordshire. The decision to award funding to Oxfordshire was announced in December 2014 to cover until March 2016 and was focused on preventing people with an offending history from ending up homeless.

The project worked in partnership between the district/city councils, TVCRC, Thames Valley Police, and Homeless Link and employed two Offender Housing Liaison Officers (OHLOs) on 18 month contracts. The OHLOs who were based within TVCRC offices to provide support and awareness of housing options and support available to help staff working within offending services (both within prisons and the community) and clients reporting to Probation and TVCRC.

As part of this work, the OHLOs began to monitor the needs of the county which had previously not been evidenced. The project worked closely with staff at TVCRC and also tried to establish links with the NPS, but was unable to gain access to data about their clients and housing needs, which was a limitation of the overall project.

The OHLOs managed to establish that for TVCRC clients between 120 and 130 clients were either living or stating they would be returning to return to live in Cherwell upon their release from Prison. The project also identified that 19% of all ex-offenders reporting to TVCRC in Oxfordshire were considered to be either homeless or vulnerably housed (no fixed abode, rough sleeping, sofa surfing, homeless pathway or other supported accommodation). Whilst this does not give an accurate indication of needs for Cherwell it would suggest that nearly a fifth of all ex-offenders living in Cherwell were either homeless or unsuitably housed and would amount to approximately 26 individuals – this needs to be considered with the unknown need of those working with NPS.

Unfortunately the role of the OHLO ended prematurely as both members of staff left their roles to take up more permanent opportunities after the first year and the reporting on this subject ended. The Oxfordshire Trailblazer Programme is working to embed specialist workers into different statutory services including offending services and it is hoped that a better understanding of the housing needs of ex-offenders can be re-established as this programme continues to develop.

## 6.6 Young People (aged 16 – 24) and Care Leavers

### 6.6.1 What do we know about homelessness for young people and care leavers?

Many of the welfare reforms mentioned earlier in this review have arguably impacted this group of people the hardest. The most notable of these is the increase in age for the shared room rate of Housing Benefit increasing from 25 up to 35 years old.

#### Single Person Households

Cherwell is covered by two Broad Rental Market Areas (these are areas in which Local Housing Allowance rates are set); the Cherwell Valley Rate (covering the north and Bicester) and Oxford Rate (which covers the most southern part of the district including Kidlington). The rates differ by over £40 per month for a room in a shared property (£319.51 - Cherwell Valley and £360.52 for Oxford). These rates were frozen for all property types between April 2016 and April 2018, whilst rental prices have continued to increase annually.

Young people have also been affected by the benefit cap and are now limited to a maximum benefit allowance of £13,400 per year, compared to £18,200 per year previously. The combination of the reduction in the maximum single young people can receive in benefit payments and the freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates is likely to be a driver for the increase in the number of single people approaching the council each year for assistance.

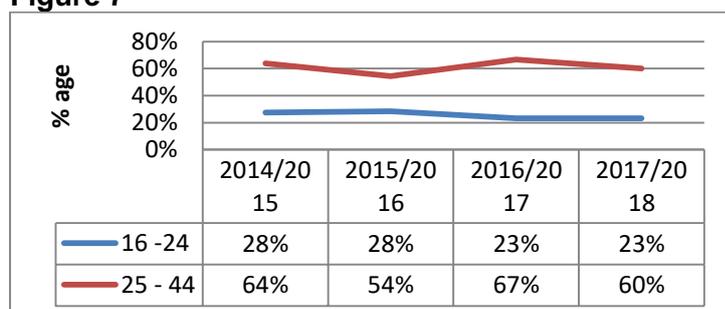
#### Young Couples/Families

Whilst young couples and families are not restricted to the same restrictions as single person households they still face significant issues when it comes to being able to secure accommodation as they are often on lower incomes and unable to afford the private rental costs within our district.

### 6.6.2 What does homelessness data from the P1E and other council records tell us?

The data submitted via P1E returns shows that the average number of cases accepted as homeless by the council within this age range has reduced as a total of all acceptances each year, from a high of over 28% in 2015/16 to just over a fifth of all cases in the current year, although this remains the second largest age group seeking assistance.

Figure 7



Although our data does not tell us how many of those within the 25-44 years age group were under 35 years old – a key age for Local Housing Allowance entitlements – it does show that between 82% (2015/16) and almost 90% (2016/17) of all cases are from households where the lead applicant is within these age groups.

The number of households applying as homeless as a result of parental eviction has consistently been the second most common factor, behind eviction from an assured shorthold tenancy.

## **16 & 17 Year olds**

If a young person aged 16 or 17 presents as homeless, every attempt is made to assist them to return home, where it is considered safe to do so.

All young people in this age category are initially referred to the Placement Duty Team within Social Services who have a Resettlement Team, to try and facilitate a move home wherever possible. If this cannot be achieved, an assessment will be carried out to establish whether the child is to be supported under S17 or S20 of the Children's Act 1989.

To support this joint working, in conjunction with the other district/city councils in Oxfordshire, we have signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to work in partnership to ensure the county are fully compliant following the Southwark judgement<sup>3</sup>.

The MOU identifies that all 16 and 17 year olds at risk of homelessness within the county are assessed under the Children's Act 1989 and ensures there is a pathway for care leavers, with housing options available to them. This arrangement has been positive in ensuring that no 16 or 17 year olds have needed to be placed into TA over the period of the review.

### **Accommodation Panel**

To support OCC in their duties to young people, we chair an Accommodation Panel meeting on a monthly basis with representation from a range of partners including OCC, Mental Health Services, YOS, Floating Support, Supported Housing Providers, and voluntary sector organisations supporting this group of people.

The meeting is to enable partners to provide updates on how children placed within supported accommodation are settling and progressing to be able to move on to their own accommodation. We will approve a priority on the housing register to those who have demonstrated they are able to sustain a tenancy independently and will also assist with a deposit if suitable private rented accommodation can be identified.

As result of the joint working between the partners, we have received no applications from anyone aged 16 or 17, or any former care leavers, aged between 18 and 20.

#### **6.1.1 What does data from other sources tell us?**

##### **BYHP (Banbury Young Homeless Project)**

BYHP are a local charity focused on support young people aged between 14 and 25 through a range of services and programmes they provide from within their community centre and also outreaching to children within a school environment. This can include support to access education, training or employment, to return to the family home, be referred to other statutory and support services such as drug and alcohol or mental health.

BYHP report that they see over 300 individual young people each year through the range of programmes and support they offer. The amount of work that relates specifically to homelessness is limited, but much of their work is about ensuring young people are empowered and resilient to some of the barriers they may face.

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<sup>3</sup> The Southwark Judgement requires children's services to provide accommodation to homeless 16 and 17 years olds

## **6.7 Homelessness experienced by Gypsies and Travellers**

### **6.7.1 What do we know about homelessness for gypsies and travellers?**

Gypsy and traveller households can be homeless if they:

- Own a caravan or mobile home but have nowhere legal to park it
- Are staying temporarily with family and friends, in their caravan or in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation and it is not reasonable for them to stay there or their family or friends have asked them to leave
- Have a home, but it's not reasonable to live there, for example, because it is unaffordable or in a bad state of repair or if the household is in danger there (e.g. because of domestic violence, or serious harassment).

National research in 2007 suggested that around one in four gypsies and travellers living in caravans do not have a legal place on which to park their home, and they are thus, in law, homeless.

OCC has a duty of care to all gypsies and travellers within the county and will address their welfare, health and educational needs. Gypsies and travellers are protected from discrimination by the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1998, together with all ethnic groups who have a particular culture, language or values.

Oxfordshire Gypsy and Traveller Services (OGTS) is based in Bicester and deals with unauthorised encampments. It also manages the six county council owned permanent sites, providing 89 pitches, and conducts consultation and negotiations between the traveller and settled communities. It also acts as agent for the five district councils and can act on behalf of private landlords. None of the six council owned sites are within our district but nine of the 21 privately run sites in the county are located within our boundaries:

- Ardley
- Banbury
- Wendlebury, Nr. Bicester
- Bloxham
- Caulcott
- Islip
- Launton
- Mollington
- Yarnton

All of these privately run sites have been open since January 2015 except Caulcott which had its first caravan count in January 2018. A caravan count is undertaken, by OGTS, on a biannual basis, one day in January and one day in July. The total number of caravans counted in each of the three calendar years from January 2015 to December 2017, was 260.

### **6.7.2 What does homelessness data from P1E and other Council records tell us?**

We are not statutorily required to record data on the number, if any, of approaches for housing assistance by people from gypsy or traveller communities, as it is not covered by ethnic monitoring. H-CLIC data requirements also do not report on gypsy and traveller households.

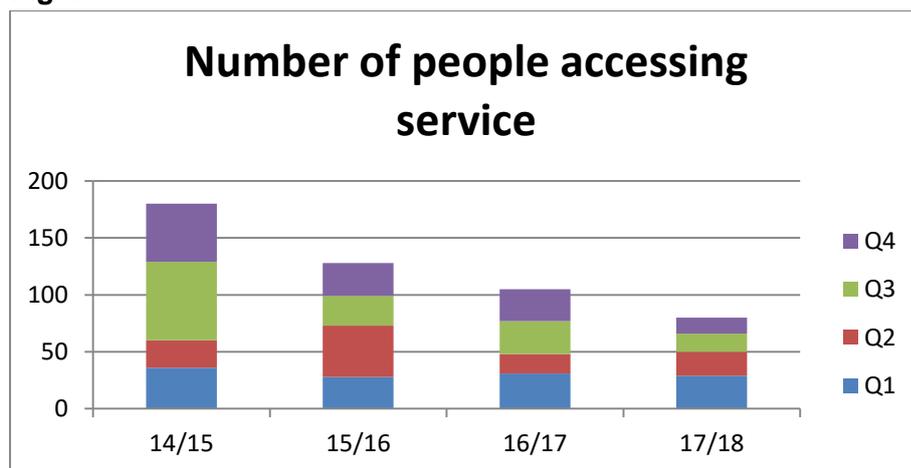
## 6.8 Services to households in financial difficulties

### Data and Specialist Housing Advice Service – Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northants (NOSN)

Over the period of the review we funded Citizens Advice NOSN to help prevent homelessness across our district. The funding enabled Citizens Advice to employ a specialist Housing Advice Worker, to provide in-depth housing related advice and support and to attend appointments at court, when necessary, to support clients.

In recent years we have seen the number of people accessing this service has reduced:

**Figure 8**



The service has also helped clients to improve their financial outcomes, to maintain accommodation. The table below shows the annual gains achieved for clients, but shows that this has varied significantly from year to year.

**Table 29 Annual Financial Gains achieved by the Housing Advice specialist**

	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18
Q1	£143,771	£58,803	£51,375	£51,244
Q2	£108,819	£84,485	£61,231	£30,324
Q3	£274,884	£29,917	£168,112	£48,427
Q4	£149,842	£72,629	£47,000	£41,088
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£677,316</b>	<b>£245,834</b>	<b>£327,718</b>	<b>£171,083</b>
Average per person supported	<b>£3762.80</b>	<b>£1920.57</b>	<b>£3121.12</b>	<b>£2138.53</b>

During the review period, we have also seen the number of cases open over a period of time increase significantly from roughly 30 to nearly 100 cases. This suggests that the issues people are being supported with by the service are more complex issues.

### Other debt and money advice provision within the district

We also hold a contract with Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northants (NOSN) to provide free and impartial debt and money advice to all residents living within the district. The service has supported over 5000 residents a year and allows anyone within the district to have access to free and independent advice about money and debt related issues.

**Table 30**

	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Total
17/18	1505	1704	1369	1640	<b>6218</b>
16/17	1707	1771	1624	1909	<b>7011</b>
15/16	1569	1883	1724	2039	<b>7215</b>
14/15	1201	1270	1343	1219	<b>5033</b>

A significant proportion of the work completed by this contract is providing advice and support to people approaching with enquiries about Benefits and Debt followed by issues around Housing. The table below identifies the number of residents accessing the service seeking support with these issues.

**Table 31**

	Benefits	Debt	Housing
17/18	2006	772	762
16/17	2417	879	882
15/16	1967	882	902

**Table 32**

		2017-18												Grand Total
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			
		April	May	June	July	August	Septem..	October	Novemb..	Decem..	January	February	March	
Benefits & tax credits	19 Employment Support Allowance	62	87	100	92	98	80	131	87	54	108	61	67	975
	21 Personal independence payment	58	55	90	68	63	66	98	79	84	95	108	108	903
	07 Housing Benefit	62	70	51	42	77	57	116	100	37	90	62	85	811
	99 Other benefits issues	47	59	63	79	55	48	62	47	42	53	73	72	687
	17 Attendance Allowance	18	25	34	31	25	39	46	42	47	39	42	64	429
	10 Working & Child Tax Credits	28	45	60	41	36	29	38	34	14	31	24	28	402
	23 Council tax reduction	22	18	19	17	28	25	38	38	21	48	20	58	344
	03 Pension Credit	15	16	17	12	15	18	26	23	11	31	29	23	223

The table above shows the main reasons people seek support from Citizens Advice for Benefit related issues.

**Table 33**

		2017-18												Grand Total
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			
		April	May	June	July	August	Septem..	October	Novem..	Decem..	January	February	March	
Debt	30 Mobile phone debt	7	7	10	6	5	3	3	6	1	6	8	5	56
	09 Council tax arrears	19	25	18	16	7	6	6	17	16	25	25	27	164
	13 Credit, store & charge card debts	25	16	19	11	24	15	14	18	9	17	20	11	163
	07 Rent arrears - housing associations	17	14	22	18	16	15	9	16	7	19	9	15	144
	49 Debt Relief Order	7	13	6	6	1	6	5	10	4	10	8	12	55
	99 Other	16	17	20	9	18	6	10	17	4	14	12	12	143
	04 Fuel debts	13	10	7	11	12	10	12	7	7	13	3	8	87
	14 Unsecured personal loan debts	13	9	13	13	14	13	8	5	4	10	6	5	93
	16 Water supply & sewerage debts	13	10	12	5	9	10	7	6	4	7	6	8	84
	12 Bank & building society overdrafts	13	5	9	10	10	5	4	5	2	9	5	5	71

The table above shows the main reasons people are approaching Citizens Advice in 2017/18 for debt related issues. It shows there is a mix of both priority and non-priority debts.

**Table 34**

		2017-18												Grand Total
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			
		April	May	June	July	August	Septem..	October	Novemb..	Decemb..	January	February	March	
Housing	08 Private sector rented property	17	29	11	24	31	15	19	20	12	19	21	13	215
	03 Threatened homelessness	20	19	16	14	19	13	10	11	2	19	11	19	151
	07 Housing association property	15	14	11	19	9	14	4	9	6	16	9	12	124
	05 Access to & provision of accomm.	8	13	8	10	9	5	7	10	3	20	14	12	111
	10 Environmental & neighbour issues	5	5	7	9	6	8	4	10	3	4	2	5	65
	99 Other housing issues	6	6	5	11	5	7	2	9	5	8	2	3	67
	Not recorded/not applicable							19	21	2	8	8		57
	09 Owner occupier property	6	7	5	6	3	5	1	4	2	7	4	4	54
	06 Local Authority housing	4	3	3	4	3	10	6	1	2	2	5	6	48
	02 Actual homelessness	1	3	3		4	1	2	2	5	9	6	2	37
	04 LA homelessness service	1	2		2	2		2	2	1	5	1		16
	01 Discrimination: Age		1											1
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>76</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>762</b>

The table above shows the main reasons people are approaching Citizens Advice in 2017/18 for housing related issues. It shows that people with problems with their private rented tenancies and threatened with homelessness are the two main reasons for people seeking support in 2017/18 and accounts for 48% of the advice provided for housing related issues.

Although the contract is not commissioned specifically to help prevent homelessness in Cherwell, it provides an additional support to ensure residents are able to resolve their problems before they escalate and potentially require help from our housing advice service.

The contract also requires Citizens Advice to support the development of Credit Union services into our district, to support availability of savings and loans at affordable rates and to provide Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) for individuals who are moved onto Universal Credit and are identified to be struggling to manage their income on a monthly payment basis.

### **Credit Union (Harvest Money)**

The contract we hold with Citizens Advice NOSN, requires the promotion of the local Credit Union (Harvest Money – formerly Northamptonshire Credit Union).

Figures for the end of the most recent financial year have not been provided by Harvest Money to date, but as of the end of December 2017, Harvest Money was supporting 34 local residents with affordable loans, preventing residents from having to resort to high interest payday loans or loan sharks. There were also 65 savings accounts opened by residents living in Cherwell.

### **Food Banks**

There are a number of locations providing or distributing food across the district. The main food banks are provided through the Trussell Trust in Banbury and Bicester. The Banbury branch is run by the Peoples Church, but provides food parcels from four different locations across the town:

- The Peoples Church, Banbury (Tuesday and Friday)
- St Joseph's Church, Edmunds Road, Banbury (Monday)
- Grimsbury Centre, West Street, Banbury (Wednesday)
- Hardwick Centre, St Francis Church, Highlands, Banbury (Thursday)

The Peoples Church also provide debt and money advice through Christians Against Poverty (CAP), and provide debt advice and counselling for up to 45 clients at any one time and are able to identify people regularly visiting the food bank.

The food banks in Banbury reported that they supported 2779 people in 2017, an increase of 387 from the previous year, when 2392 people were assisted.

Although evidence was not directly available at the time of writing this review the food bank advise that people seeking assistance with food are not indicating that they are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, but are seeking help due to issues related to budgeting, delays in benefit payments (in particular Universal Credit) and in cases where they are working on zero hour contracts.

There is also a food bank available in Bicester, at 29a Market Square, which is open Monday through to Friday. Information about the number of clients this food bank has supported was not available at the time of writing.

## 7. Future threats and changes

Headline data from this review was presented to local stakeholders at a consultation event in February 2018. Attendees representing public, voluntary and community sector organisations were asked to identify the main challenges for them and their clients over the coming two years. The key challenges cited were:

1. **Funding** –concern from some partners about the insecurity of CDC’s grant funding, provided on a yearly basis
2. **Affordability** – a lack of social and private rented affordable housing options within the district and accommodation for key workers and care workers
3. **The continued roll out of Universal Credit** – lack of awareness amongst potential claimants about delivery of the benefit and how to make a claim; difficulties in landlords requesting and receiving direct housing payments; landlords unwilling to accept those on UC; digital exclusion of clients
4. **Domestic abuse services in Oxfordshire** – uncertainties around future provision and funding of such services
5. **Public transport** – rural transport links are perceived as poor for residents wishing to access core services in the urban areas
6. **Customers with support/complex needs** – a need for increased accommodation and support services in Cherwell for people who sleep rough; support for clients to be tenancy ready to enable them to access and sustain their accommodation with social and private landlords.

As a local housing authority, the key threats and challenges for us, over the coming two years are:

- Homelessness Reduction Act implementation
- Universal Credit implementation and on-going welfare reform
- Uncoupling of joint service arrangements with South Northamptonshire Council, following the abolition of Northamptonshire County Council and the requirement for a new model for local government in Northamptonshire
- Fixed term contracts for key posts and partnerships
- Affordability of accommodation for a range of people, not just those on benefits
- Future supported accommodation provision for people who sleep rough

**The Housing Options Team has identified five priority areas for the next homelessness strategy:**

### **Affordability**

Households may experience financial difficulties in being able to access accommodation in the social or private rented sector or in trying to cover their housing costs and maintain an existing tenancy. Housing costs versus household income applies across all tenures.

Although we have low unemployment in Cherwell, the increasing cost of housing in Oxfordshire means there are affordability issues for those in low paid or insecure employment and increasingly those on average incomes. Private rented accommodation is often out of the reach of low to average income households, even without the additional expense of a deposit or rent in advance payment. The majority of social rented accommodation, built within the district in the past few years is at affordable, rather than

social rent levels, which excludes many households, on our housing register, as they do not pass the affordability checks, at nomination.

Improving the financial resilience of our clients by offering targeted financial support will help us to address this affordability barrier and is a key action within the strategy. We will also monitor the costs of affordable housing, encourage delivery of housing at 'social rents' and consider the delivery of shared housing solutions, in partnership with registered providers.

### **People who sleep rough and single homelessness**

We need to clearly establish the needs of Cherwell clients and a review of the single homeless pathway will contribute to greater intelligence on this client group. Although the numbers of people sleeping rough in Cherwell has decreased in annual estimates, numbers in Oxford City have seen worrying increases. This can be attributed to clients from rural areas, including Cherwell, migrating to Oxford to access support services not available in their local area or staying in Oxford if they are evicted from or leave supported accommodation in the City.

To support our City colleagues, during the period of the next strategy we will need to make significant decisions regarding what we collectively provide and fund across the county, and within our own district, for single homeless households and rough sleepers. Most importantly we need to look at affordable options for moving clients on from the single homeless pathway or diverting them away from it altogether if affordable and sustainable alternative options can be found locally.

### **Young people and care leavers**

We have successfully maintained robust partnerships and procedures to meet the legal requirements and statutory duties to young people and care leavers and ensure that no 16 or 17 year olds are placed in B&B accommodation. The Young People's Pathway is due for review in 2018 and it will be important for us to have a voice in the commissioning of any accommodation services to continue to meet the needs of these household groups.

### **Households experiencing domestic abuse**

Domestic abuse has been recognised as a significant issue in Cherwell where demand on police resources and reported incidents is on a par with Oxford City. Most victims do not want to secure alternative accommodation and instead seek help in staying safe in their current homes. We need to consider the implications of the newly commissioned countywide domestic abuse service for 2018/19, the resources that will be available and any gaps still remaining in supporting and ensuring the safety of victims of domestic abuse who are homeless.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

We utilise local emergency accommodation which provides crisis placements at very reasonable rates and we also have good quality self-contained accommodation under a working arrangement with Sanctuary Housing. We hope that demand for TA will not increase in the future but we need to be mindful of the new duties imposed by the HRA and ensure that our TA provision is flexible and secure enough to respond to any such demands.