Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021 Summary
## Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chapter</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary, Our Vision and Priorities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendices

| Appendix B | Strategy Action Plan | 10 |
Foreword


With average house prices around 16 times the yearly average household income, Oxford is one of the most unaffordable cities to live in England. The high demand for housing and limited supply of it, primarily caused by constrained development opportunities, harms both Oxford’s residents and local businesses, causing increasing hardship for some people and threatening the local economy. In addition, changes introduced by new legislation, Government policy and unprecedented reductions in national Government and county-level funding mean that the demand for City Council resources has greatly increased. To deliver more housing and effective, efficient homelessness prevention services, the Council will need to prioritise activities to increase housing supply, improve access to quality affordable housing, and deliver more innovative approaches with existing and new partners.

This single overarching strategy sets out the Council's vision for housing and how it will work in partnership to prevent and tackle homelessness and meet housing needs. It combines what were previously three separate strategies, making it easier for our customers and stakeholders to understand how we intend to build on our achievements to address the housing challenges for Oxford.

The priorities in this new combined strategy will ensure that good quality housing and housing related services contribute towards improving and enhancing the health and wellbeing of the residents of Oxford, and have a positive impact on building sustainable and prosperous communities where diverse needs are met. We want Oxford to be a City where people have access to affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives within sustainable and thriving communities – contributing to "Building a world class city for everyone".

In terms of successes, significant progress has been made on the objectives set out in the Council’s individual Housing, Homelessness and Empty Property Strategies which are all due to expire in 2018. The Council’s Housing Service was awarded the “Gold Standard” in Housing and Homelessness Prevention by the National Practitioner Support Service in July 2017, putting Oxford City Council in the top 3% of all local authorities in England. In addition, the City Council has set up a Housing Company to secure delivery of more homes, funded by a £61m loan from the Council; invested £10m to acquire more temporary accommodation units; invested £5m in the Real Lettings scheme; and £20m in refurbishment of the City’s tower blocks. The Council has also led on a successful bid that secured Government funding for a countywide two-year pilot “Trailblazer” scheme, focusing on innovation in homelessness prevention.

The work to develop this draft strategy has been informed by stakeholder feedback, and runs in parallel to the work on the City Council’s Local Plan 2036. It has been published for a period of public consultation and your views are important to us. Please provide your feedback through the online survey or by attending one of the consultation events between Sept and Oct 2017 (see our website for details). We look forward to hearing from you.

Councillor Mike Rowley (Portfolio Holder for Housing)
1. Executive Summary, Our Vision and Priorities

1.1 Oxford faces huge housing challenges and tackling them is a top priority for Oxford City Council. The high demand for housing and limited supply of it, primarily caused by constrained development opportunities, creates significant affordability issues which impact upon both Oxford’s residents and local businesses, causing increasing hardship for some people and threatening the local economy.

1.2 Oxford key facts:

- The average house price of £491,900 is around 16 times the average yearly household income £29,400 (ref. Centre for Cities 2017).
- The number of people who own their own home is well below national average at 47% compared to 63% in England as a whole.
- The City has a large private rented sector (28%) compared to the South East and England (both approximately 16%), and a sizeable social rented sector (21%). 2% of households are living rent free.
- The median private rent for a three-bedroom house is £300 per week, over half median earnings and 30% above the Local Housing Allowance Rate of £230 per week.
- There are over 3,300 households on the City Council’s Housing Register.
- 7,702 families are overcrowded by housing circumstances (Local Insight 17/01/17).
- Homelessness pressures are increasing, with over 100 households per month approaching the Council as homeless and requesting assistance. Street Counts of rough sleepers also show high and sustained levels of rough sleeping in the city.
- Between 24,000 and 32,000 new homes are needed to meet Oxford’s housing need over the period 2011 to 2031, it is estimated that only 7,511 of these can be provided within the city.
- Oxford City has a population of 161,300 (ONS 2016 mid-year estimate) which is set to grow to 182,300 by 2031 (based on local population growth of 15,000 every 10 years).
- Oxford is currently the twelfth fastest growing city, with one third of the population aged 18-29 and a smaller (but growing) older population especially in the 85+ age group.
- 32,000 students are enrolled for full-time studies in two universities
- At least 46,000 people commute into Oxford for work.

(More information on Oxford’s housing profile can be found in Chapter 3 of the full draft strategy.)

1.3 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to have a strategy in place that sets out its vision for housing and how it will prevent and tackle

1 https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20131/population/459/oxfords_population
2 Data source: www.visionofbritain.org.uk/England & Wales Censuses
homelessness and meet housing needs across its administrative area. This Strategy combines and replaces the City Council’s Housing Strategy 2015-18, Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 and Empty Property Strategy 2013-18. It presents a clear and coherent, forward thinking approach to tackling the complex issues faced by Oxford and the City Council in delivering its vision for housing in the face of changing legislation, Government policy and austerity. The strategy aims to help customers and stakeholders to understand what the Council is trying to achieve and how it intends to work with a broad range of partners to deliver innovative approaches, take necessary actions and make real change.

1.4 New legislation and the lack of clarity on policy initiatives introduced by Government, as well as national and local funding pressures, create ongoing challenges for service delivery and uncertainty about how they will impact upon our services in the longer term. These include:

- A national 1% annual reduction in social rents for four years from April 2016; which will impact on money available for the Council’s housing services in the short and longer term.

- The proposed requirement for local authorities to pay a levy to Government, based on the sale of higher value council homes. This proposal is delayed from the expected start in 2017/18 and further clarification is needed as to whether it will continue or not.

- Changes to welfare, including changes to Local Housing Allowance and the roll out of Universal Credit as a single benefit payment made direct to tenants.

- Guidance from the Government on the mandatory introduction of flexible tenancies for Councils is pending. This will affect our Tenancy Strategy which is due for renewal in 2018.

- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – this new legislation will give Council’s additional duties to prevent homelessness. The Act is due to be implemented from April 2018 however the Homelessness Code of Guidance is yet to be published and the allocation of any Government ‘new burdens’ funding to support Local Authorities in the implementation of the new Act, will not be known until later in 2017/18. The Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer project aims to test innovative approaches to inform future change.

- Implications of the Housing and Planning Act (2016) and the direction of Government policy set out in the Housing White Paper (2017), could see changes to planning and a greater role for Councils in house building.

- Reductions to County funding of homelessness services and recommissioning of homelessness pathways.
1.5 In addition, policy developments in Oxfordshire have the potential to bring new challenges, opportunities and new approaches to housing delivery. These include:

- Development of a new Local Plan for Oxford to shape and guide the future development of the City to 2036.
- Joint work with Oxfordshire partners through the Growth Board on strategic planning, infrastructure and a potential place-based deal for Oxfordshire.
- The National Infrastructure Commission’s study on the Oxfordshire to Cambridge corridor which will make recommendations to government about investment needed to support economic and housing growth.

(More detail about the National and Oxfordshire context can be found in Appendix C of the full draft strategy document and throughout the chapters within the strategy).

Our Vision and Priorities

1.6 The City Council’s Vision is:

To build a world class city for everyone by creating successful places in which to live and work, and by supporting people to reach their potential. Working in partnership, we will create a strong local economy and a city in which all our residents can thrive.

1.7 We continue to pursue this ambition within the context of the challenges explained earlier e.g. unprecedented reductions in Central Government and county level funding; reductions in rental income from council housing; increasing demand for housing, homelessness and support services; and significant government policy changes particularly with regard to welfare reform and housing. Such challenges, place significant pressure on the City Council’s ability to deliver investment in affordable housing, deliver regeneration of our estates, and indeed could threaten the future of Council housing and growth of the economy in the city.

1.8 However, the City Council has set out within its Corporate Plan, a clear commitment to:

- Tackling the city’s housing challenges
- Building more affordable homes
- Improving conditions for private tenants
- Improving homes for our existing tenants
- Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping

1.9 The ambition of this Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 is:

Oxford to be a City where people have access to affordable and high quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.
1.10 To achieve this, our strategic aims are to:

1.10.1 **Priority: Increase housing supply and improve access to affordable housing**

- Tackle the City’s housing challenges by promoting high quality development in the City, and in locations near to Oxford that are well-connected to the City, working in partnership with others, to build the homes that Oxford needs.
- Build more affordable homes, in partnership with others to meet the needs of different income and employment groups in the City, including those on low incomes and those who are vulnerable and need support.

1.10.2 Chapter 4 explains more about the City Council’s challenges in delivering more housing and the actions that need to be undertaken, in partnership, to deliver a range of housing that will support the social and economic growth of the City and meet Oxford’s housing needs now and in the future.

1.11 **Priority: Prevent homelessness and meet the needs of vulnerable people**

- Deliver early intervention actions along with quality, holistic housing advice and effective partnership working to prevent homelessness.
- Reduce rough sleeping and single homelessness with collaborative partnership working and effective supported housing pathways to help people to sustain their existing accommodation, and to provide accommodation and support for those in housing crisis.
- Continue to reduce the number of homeless households that require emergency or temporary accommodation.

1.11.1 Tackling and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping in the City requires a significant amount of partnership working, especially where there are complex issues that require multi-agency approaches. More details about how the City Council works with partners to deliver effective homelessness prevention services, and provide accommodation and support for individuals and families, who are in housing crisis, can be found in Chapter 5 of the strategy.

1.12 **Priority: Make best use of private sector accommodation**

- Bring empty properties back into use within the City – both residential dwellings and commercial buildings.
- Improve access to homes available to rent in the private sector for people receiving low incomes.
- Improve the condition of homes in the private sector by working with private sector landlords and actively enforcing standards for private rented housing; improving energy efficiency; and managing the impact on neighbourhoods of Houses in Multiple Occupation.

1.12.1 The cost of private rented accommodation in Oxford is high however it can provide an alternative housing option to social rented accommodation. The City Council offers various rent deposit and rent guarantee schemes to
eligible households and also works with private sector landlords to improve access to good quality, affordable accommodation in Oxford. By supporting tenants to maintain their private rented tenancies and working with owners to bring their empty properties back into use, the City Council aims to increase access to private sector accommodation, reduce homelessness, and reduce the demand for social rented accommodation in the City. More details can be found in Chapter 6 of the full strategy document.

1.13 **Priority: Invest to create sustainable communities that are safe and healthy**
- Regenerate estates to continue to improve and make best use of Council-owned and private sector housing.
- Improve the general environment of our estates by delivering our investment programmes and contributing to programmes designed to improve health and wellbeing of residents.
- Take action to mitigate the impacts of Welfare Reform and the introduction of Universal Credit.

1.13.1 Chapter 7 of the strategy describes how the work of the City Council to:
- deliver planned major refurbishment and estate regeneration projects;
- regulate private rented sector properties (including Houses in Multiple Occupation);
- improve energy efficiency across all tenures;
- deliver projects to improve the health and wellbeing of communities;
- deliver tenancy support; and
- mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform changes on residents through proactive advice and intervention, can all help to create sustainable communities that are safe and healthy.

1.14 **Priority: Be an effective landlord and deliver quality services**
- Retain, let and manage good quality Council-owned homes at affordable rents that residents can sustain effectively, and ensure that tenancy arrangements are aligned with new legislation.
- Continue to improve the condition of Council stock through capital investment programmes focussed on regeneration and refurbishment projects.
- Continue to support a resident-led approach to developing high quality and inclusive services.

1.14.1 The City Council aims to maintain its high standard of service delivery and to enhance opportunities for Council Tenants to be more involved in developing services in the future. Chapter 8 of the full strategy document describes in more detail how we will do this and also further align our services to meet new legislation and emerging Government guidance; deliver our housing and landlord services to help tenants to maintain and sustain their tenancies; make best use of Council housing stock; and improve digital access to housing information by procuring a new housing management system and updating advice/information on our website.

1.15 We recognise that our vision and strategic aims are ambitious. However, we have set ambitious targets within previous strategies and have set out in Chapter 2 of the strategy, some of the significant achievements to date.
Chapter 3 of this strategy provides more detail on Oxford’s housing profile and accommodation needs of specific groups. It also provides more local context and narrative on the challenges that this combined Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 seeks to address. As explained earlier, Chapters 4-8 provide more detail about the priorities we have identified and the actions we will need to take, in partnership with other statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations, to address the challenges going forward. We will do all that we can to work towards achieving our vision and strategic aims within the national and local context (also see Appendix C for more detail on the national and local policy context), and the resources that are available to us. The available/secured funding and other potential funding sources are outlined in Chapter 9 of the strategy, however it is important to note that the City Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan will be reviewed and updated from time to time throughout the life of this Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

1.16 The overarching principles, in working towards achieving our vision and strategic aims, are that the Council must:

- Work in partnership with developers, registered providers, universities and the health sector, statutory partners, the third and voluntary sectors, businesses, and neighbouring District Councils to maximise resources and achieve the desired outcomes.
- Deliver efficient and effective services, and operate sustainably, whilst prioritising the protection of essential services.
- Target scarce resources to those who are most in need.

1.17 Chapter 10 of the full strategy document sets out the identified priorities of this Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 and a summary of the actions that we wish to take to deliver them. This is reflected in more detail in the Action Plan (Appendix B) which identifies the various work streams (including the partner agencies who may want to take a lead or assist in the delivery of them) over the next 12-18 months. The Action Plan will be kept under review and a new one produced in consultation with stakeholders prior to the mid-point of the strategy term. This will ensure that the actions remain relevant and responsive to change.

1.18 Underpinning the development of this strategy is an Evidence Base (Appendix A to the full document) with referenced data sources. Appendix A will be updated annually to assist in identifying any changes or trends in the local housing market and to support the mid-term review of this strategy and its associated Action Plan (Appendix B).