

Joint Homelessness Review 2025



Contents

p3	1. Introduction
p4	2. National picture
p6	3. Statutory duties
p7	4. Which groups of people become homeless?
p9	5. South and Vale districts
p11	6. Housing in South & Vale
p14	7. Temporary Accommodation (TA)
p17	8. Rough sleepers
p18	9. Activities to prevent and relieve homelessness in South & Vale
p20	10. Demand on homelessness services in South & Vale
p22	11. Achievements during the lifetime of the last Homelessness Strategy
p24	12. Reasons for homelessness in South & Vale
p26	13. Who is becoming homeless in South & Vale
p30	14. Unmet demand for South & Vale's homeless service
p32	15. Future challenges facing South & Vale's homeless service
p34	16. Outstanding actions from the last Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy
p34	17. Summary and next steps
p35	Appendix

1. Introduction

1.1 This Homelessness Review is the first step in developing a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, a requirement for local authorities every 5 years¹.

1.2 The review analyses the current and projected levels, causes, and impacts of homelessness and rough sleeping in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse districts, as well as the scope of existing services and availability of accommodation. It identifies any outstanding actions from the current strategy, and the key challenges that need to be addressed in the new strategy.

1.3 The review was conducted using data analysis, stakeholder interviews and partnership engagement.

¹ www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-2-homelessness-strategies-and-reviews

2. National Picture

2.1 The National Housing Federation estimates there are 8.5 million people in housing need in England².

2.2 The cost-of-living crisis disproportionately affects lower income households who spend a higher proportion of their income on essential items including food, utility bills and rent – the cost of which have all increased significantly. The cost-of-living crisis also adds to household financial pressures that contributes towards an increase in relationship breakdowns and incidents of domestic abuse.

2.3 English councils supported 317,430 households to prevent or relieve homelessness in 2023 – a record high.

2.4 The number of households living in temporary accommodation in England is also at an all-time high. As of the end of 2023, 112,660 households were living in temporary accommodation, including 146,800 children³.

2.5 In 2022/23 councils in England spent £1.7 billion on temporary accommodation for homeless households.

2.6 High demand and a low supply of properties continues to keep rents high. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), average private rents in the UK increased by 8.6% in the 12 months up to July 2024⁴.

2.7 The number of homes available for rent is rising, but there are still 25% fewer rental properties available in 2024 compared to 2019.

2.8 The annual rough sleeping snapshot found an estimated 3,898 people were homeless on the streets on a single night in autumn 2023, an increase of more than 25% from the 3,069 people counted in 2022⁵.

2.9 The average age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 45 for men and 43 for women⁶.

2.10 In July 2024 Crisis reported that local authority frontline services had seen demand rise by 25% across Britain in the previous 12 months⁷.

² www.housing.org.uk/news-and-blogs

³ england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/record_145800_children_in_temporary_accommodation__up_15_in_a_year

⁴ www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/privaterentandhousepricesuk/august2024

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

⁶ www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/about-homelessness

⁷ www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/crisis-media-centre/demand-for-homelessness-services-soars-across-britain-as-charity-urges-party-leaders-to-tackle-unprecedented-challenges-1/

2.11 Homelessness approaches in England 2018/19 – 2023/24

	Total initial assessments	Threatened with homelessness within 56 days - Prevention duty owed	Of which: due to service of valid Section 21 Notice	Homeless - Relief duty owed
2018/19	292,690	147,880	19,380	121,630
2019/20	305,680	149,240	18,190	140,570
2020/21	284,330	119,880	8,950	150,670
2021/22	291,620	134,280	19,900	145,180
2022/23	324,650	141,970	24,410	158,940
2023/24	358,370	146,430	26,150	178,560

2.12 Prevention success in England 2018/19 – 2023/24

	Total number of households whose prevention duty ended	Total secured accommodation	Stayed in existing accommodation	Moved to alternative accommodation
2018/19	102,930	59,450	20,980	38,480
2019/20	139,790	81,520	29,970	38,480
2020/21	116,760	69,490	24,850	44,640
2021/22	122,770	68,940	22,730	46,220
2022/23	131,800	69,190	23,500	45,690
2023/24	135,180	68,930	23,500	45,110

2.13 This shows that while prevention duties rose between 2018/19 and 2023/24, the number of successful outcomes for clients has remained static since 2020/21. This has resulted in more households becoming homeless, many of whom have ended up in temporary accommodation.

3. Statutory Duties

3.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

3.2 The Homeless Reduction Act was implemented on 3 April 2018. The act places new duties on local housing authorities to intervene early to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, not just applicants that have a priority need. The Homelessness Reduction Act does not replace previous legislation; it introduces additional duties on local housing authorities and public bodies.

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

3.4 Prevention duty

3.5 Local authorities must award the Prevention Duty to households who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The duty is to take reasonable steps to prevent their homelessness.

3.6 Relief duty

3.7 Households who are already homeless will be awarded the Relief Duty. The duty is to take reasonable steps to relieve their homelessness, i.e. to help them to secure accommodation.

3.8 Main duty

3.9 Households will be owed the main housing duty if they remain homeless after the relief duty comes to an end, are in priority need, and have not made themselves intentionally homeless. The councils will have an ongoing duty to source suitable alternative accommodation for households who are owed the main housing duty.

3.10 S188 duty

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

3.12 Domestic Abuse Act

3.13 In January 2019, the government introduced the Domestic Abuse Bill 2017-19 following a consultation on transforming the response to domestic abuse. The legislation was reintroduced in March 2020 as the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21, and received royal assent on 29 April 2021.

3.14 The act created a statutory definition of domestic abuse and places a duty on local authorities to give support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and safe accommodation.

4. Which groups of people become homeless?

4.1 The following cohorts of people are considered more likely to experience homelessness, driven by a combination of social, economic, and structural factors:

4.2 Young people: Young people aged 16-24 are particularly vulnerable, with many facing homelessness and encountering difficulties when moving on from the care system, or having to leave home due to family issues. This group may lack support networks, financial resources or the skills required to secure stable housing.

4.3 People leaving institutional care: Individuals leaving institutions such as the care system, prisons, or hospitals can find it difficult to secure stable housing. This group may not have the family or community support necessary to avoid becoming homeless.

4.4 People with mental health issues: People with mental health problems are more likely to experience homelessness. Limited access to mental health services, or insufficient support following treatment, can lead to homelessness.

4.5 People with substance misuse issues: People with alcohol or drug addiction are also at higher risk of homelessness as addiction can lead to job loss, eviction and strained relationships, making it harder to maintain stable housing.

4.6 People who have experienced domestic abuse: Victims of domestic abuse, particularly women, are at high risk of homelessness. Many flee abusive situations without immediate access to safe housing and support services may not be easily accessible.

4.7 Rough sleepers: This cohort includes people who have experienced long-term or chronic homelessness. Some of these individuals may also face mental health issues, substance misuse problems, or histories of abuse.

4.8 Low-income individuals and families: Poverty is a major driver of homelessness, particularly in areas with high housing costs. Families who are unable to afford rent, or those who face an “income shock”, such as job loss or a reduction in benefits, can be at risk of homelessness. In recent years, cuts to welfare benefits and a reduction in statutory services have made this cohort more vulnerable.

4.9 Older people: While homelessness is often seen as an issue affecting younger people, older individuals are increasingly at risk. Factors like low pensions, limited employment opportunities, and a lack of affordable housing can leave older adults vulnerable to housing instability.

4.10 Refugees: Refugees who have been required to leave Home Office accommodation after receiving their status can face precarious housing situations. This group receive short notice periods to leave their accommodation, and some may experience homelessness.

4.11 Single parents: Single parents, particularly mothers, can struggle with housing stability due to financial insecurity. Limited access to affordable childcare and a higher likelihood of low-

wage employment can lead single parents to face barriers in securing and maintaining stable housing. Single parents living in overcrowded conditions with family members are vulnerable to homelessness because of family breakdown.

4.12 A variety of personal and structural factors contribute to homelessness:

4.13 Personal Factors

4.14 Mental Health Issues: People with mental health conditions may find it more difficult to maintain stable housing.

4.15 Substance Abuse: Addiction to drugs or alcohol can lead to job loss, relationship breakdown and financial instability making homelessness more likely.

4.16 Abuse: Experiencing abuse such as domestic violence, childhood abuse or sexual assault can lead people to become homeless.

4.17 Family Breakdown: Loss of family support i.e., through divorce, estrangement or being told to leave by family can lead to homelessness, particularly for young people.

4.18 Lack of Skills or Lack of Education: Individuals who lack job skills may find it harder to secure and maintain stable housing.

4.19 Structural Factors

4.20 Affordable Housing Shortages: A shortage of affordable housing renders lower-income households more reliant on the more expensive private sector.

4.21 Poverty and Unemployment: Structural economic issues such as poverty, low wages, and unemployment directly contribute to homelessness.

4.22 Lack of Support Systems: Reduced availability of statutory and charity services owing to funding cuts contributes to homelessness.

4.23 Criminal Justice System: Former prisoners face difficulties securing housing on release, making them more likely to become homeless.

5. South and Vale districts

5.1 Population

5.2 According to the Office of National Statistics, an estimated 151,820 people live in South Oxfordshire⁸. This is predicted to rise to 171,600 by 2031. 142,116 people live in the Vale of White Horse. 166,500 people are predicted to be living in the Vale by 2031.

5.3 South Oxfordshire

5.4 The district of South Oxfordshire covers nearly 260 square miles. Its boundary reaches from the edge of the City of Oxford in the north-west along the borders of Buckinghamshire and Berkshire to the outskirts of Reading in the south. It has four main towns: Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford, with Didcot becoming increasingly dominant as the main urban centre.

5.5 Much of the district is rural in nature, with the land in agricultural use. The main exception to this is the southeast where the wooded Chiltern Hills rise sharply from the Thames Valley. Most of the southern end of the district sits in either the Chilterns or North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The northeast of the district forms part of the Oxford Green Belt. In total, around 70 per cent of the district has a green belt or AONB designation. See below a summary of protected landscapes, nature reserves, important sites for nature and conservation target areas for both South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse.



South Oxfordshire health and wellbeing statistics:



⁸ www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2022

5.7 Vale of White Horse

5.8 The Vale of White Horse stretches from the edge of Oxford to the edge of the Cotswolds.

5.9 The district has three historic market towns – Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage – and also covers Botley, located on the edge of Oxford, as well as the large village of Grove, near Wantage. There are many picturesque villages set in the beautiful Vale countryside.

5.10 Only 60 miles from London and with good access links to the Midlands and the Southwest, the Vale is home to many cutting-edge businesses and has a thriving economy with a highly skilled workforce.



5.11 Health and Wellbeing in South Oxfordshire

Vale of White Horse health and wellbeing statistics:



5.12 In South Oxfordshire 54.9% of residents are aged 40 years+, higher than the national average of 50.7%.

5.13 In the Vale of White Horse 52.7% of residents are aged 40 years+, slightly higher than the national average of 50.7%.

6. Housing markets in South and Vale

6.1 South Oxfordshire

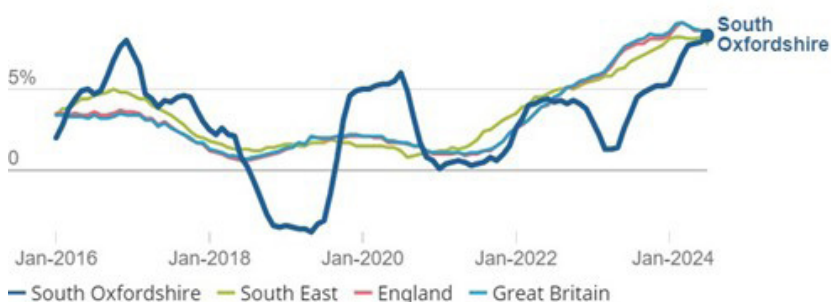
6.2 The average monthly private rent in South Oxfordshire was £1,285 in July 2024. This was an increase from £1,187 in July 2023, an 8.3% rise⁹.

6.3 The average price of a home bought with a mortgage in South Oxfordshire was £503,000 in June 2024 (provisional). This was higher than an average of £467,000 in June 2023 (revised). This makes South Oxfordshire the second highest place to buy in the country.

6.4 Open market rents in South Oxfordshire since January 2016

Annual change in rents in South Oxfordshire

Private rental price annual inflation, South Oxfordshire, January 2016 to July 2024



6.5 Vale of White Horse

6.6 The average monthly private rent in the Vale of White Horse was £1,233 in July 2024. This was an increase from £1,146 in July 2023, a 7.6% rise.

6.7 The average price of a home bought with a mortgage in the Vale of White Horse was £423,000 in June 2024 (provisional). This was higher than an average of £392,000 in June 2023. This makes the Vale of White Horse the third highest place to buy in the country¹¹.

6.8 Open market rents in South Oxfordshire since January 2016

Annual change in house prices in the Vale of White Horse

House price annual inflation, Vale of White Horse, January 2005 to June 2024



⁹ www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000179/

¹⁰ www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000179/

¹¹ www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000180/

¹² www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000180/

6.9 In 2024 across the South East, the average price of a home bought with a mortgage was £392,000, up from £383,000 a year earlier.

6.10 Across Great Britain, the average price for buying with a mortgage in June 2024 was £300,000, which was up from an average of £291,000 in June 2023.

6.11 Across the South East, the average monthly rent was £1,307, up from £1,212 a year earlier.

6.12 Across Great Britain, the average rent price in July 2024 was £1,279, which was up from £1,178 in July 2023¹³.

6.13 Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

6.14 In March 2020, the government froze the local housing allowance (LHA) rates, which set the amount of housing benefit that private renters can receive.

6.15 Local Housing Allowances in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse 2020 – 2024

March 2020 – March 2024	Oxford BRMA	Swindon BRMA	Aylesbury Vale BRMA
1-bed	772.89	548.51	673.14
2-bed	910.00	658.19	797.81
3-bed	1,096.98	792.83	1,047.11
4-bed	1,508.67	997.27	1,396.16

6.16 These figures were fixed for 4 years, whereas open market rents continued to rise. In December 2024 Zoopla reported that the average annual UK rental cost had risen by £3,240 since 2021 - a 27% increase compared to earnings growth of 19%¹⁴.

6.17 Local Housing Allowances in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse 2024/25

April 2024 –	Oxford BRMA	Swindon BRMA	Aylesbury Vale BRMA
Shared rate	548.08	450.10	441.44
1-bed	897.52	673.14	797.81
2-bed	1,121.90	782.86	992.29
3-bed	1,321.36	947.40	1,326.35
4-bed	1,745.21	1,296.45	1,645.50

¹³ www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland/previousreleases

¹⁴ advantage.zoopla.co.uk/research-and-insights/zoopla-uk-rental-market-report-december-2024/

6.18 Oxford BRMA vs. average open market rental prices 2024

	Shortfall vs. Oxford BRMA LHA	South Oxfordshire average rent	Vale of White Horse average rent	Shortfall vs. Oxford BRMA LHA
1-bed	70.48	968.00	673.14	9.48
2-bed	84.10	1,206.00	797.81	12.10
3-bed	192.64	1,514.00	1,047.11	70.64
4-bed	478.79	2,224.00	1,396.16	354.79

6.19 The uplift in LHA in April 2024 was largely welcomed by local authorities. This has undoubtedly helped renters on lower incomes, but the rate is still considerably below open market rents, particularly for larger properties, so it will affect families for a greater degree. Large areas of both South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse remain out of reach for many renters on low incomes.

7. Temporary Accommodation (TA)

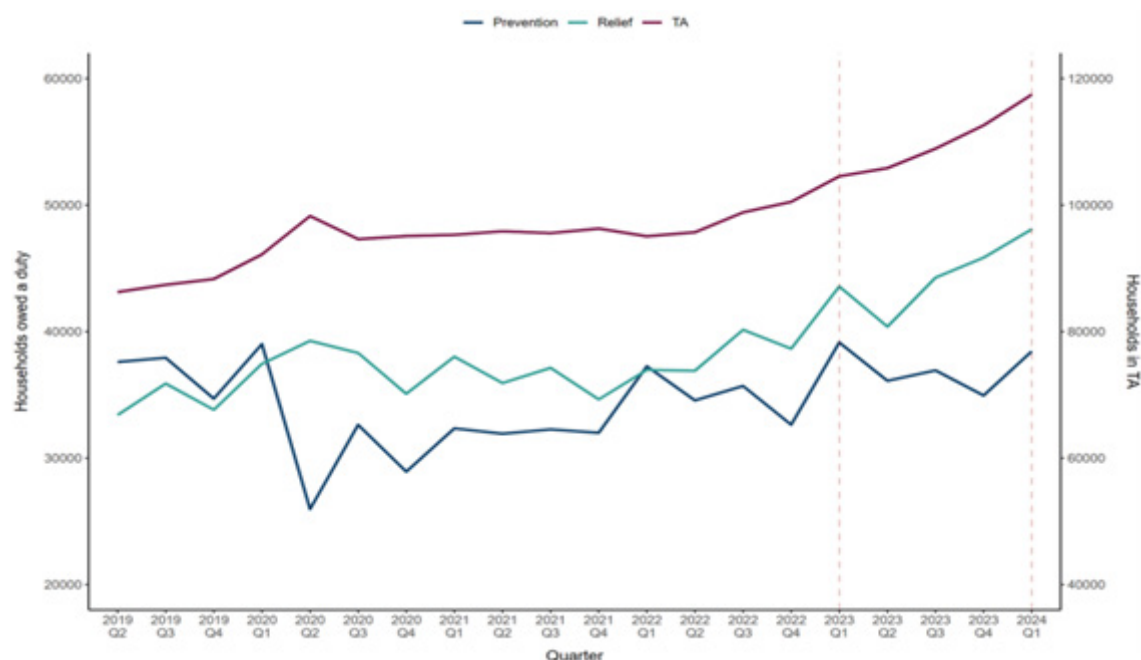
7.1 Temporary accommodation is at record levels across the country. On 30th June 2024, 123,100 households were in temporary accommodation, up 4.9% from the previous quarter and up 16.3% from the previous year. 78,420 of these households were families, a record high and an increase of 15.1% from 30 June 2023. Accordingly, the number of children in temporary accommodation has also reached record highs - 159,380 as at 30 June 2024¹⁵.

7.2 The law states that families should not be housed in non-self-contained temporary accommodation for more than six weeks. However, in England 3,770 families had been in B&B accommodation for more than 6 weeks at this time, the highest level recorded, and more than 50% higher than the previous year.

7.3 Local authorities are also struggling to find temporary accommodation in their own districts. In quarter 1 of 2023/24, 31.6% of households in temporary accommodation were in accommodation in a different local authority district¹⁶.

7.4 B&B temporary accommodation has also increased markedly for both singles and households with dependant children, increasing by 29.9% and 31.6% respectively between June 2023 and June 2024.

7.5 The increase in TA usage nationwide since 2019 is stark:



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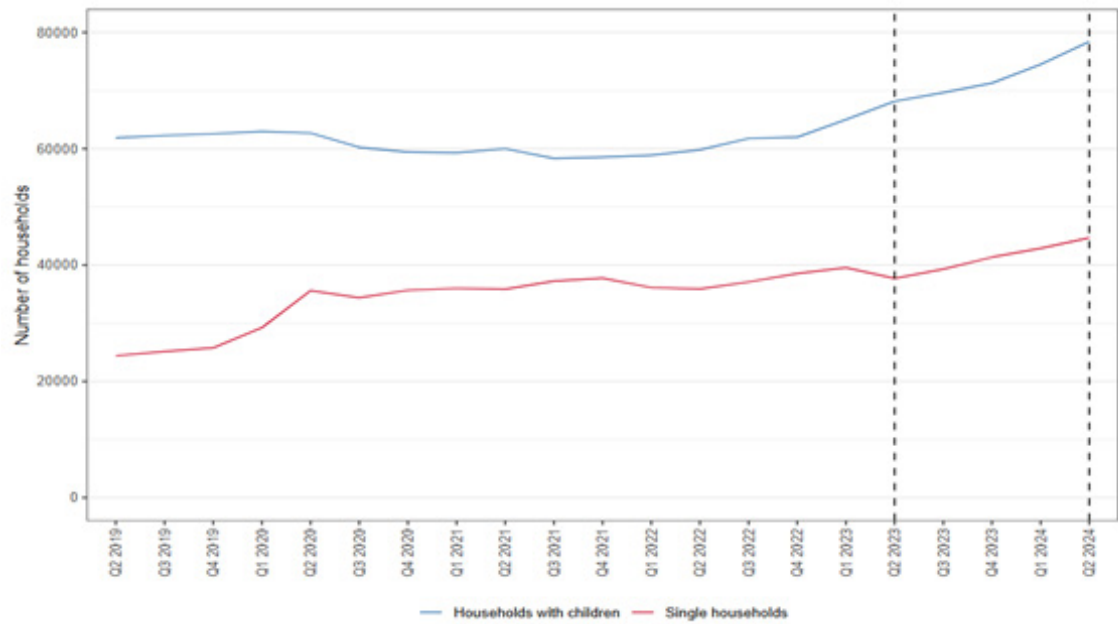
¹⁵ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2024-infographic

¹⁶ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024

¹⁷ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2023-24/statutory-homelessness-in-england-infographic-2023-24

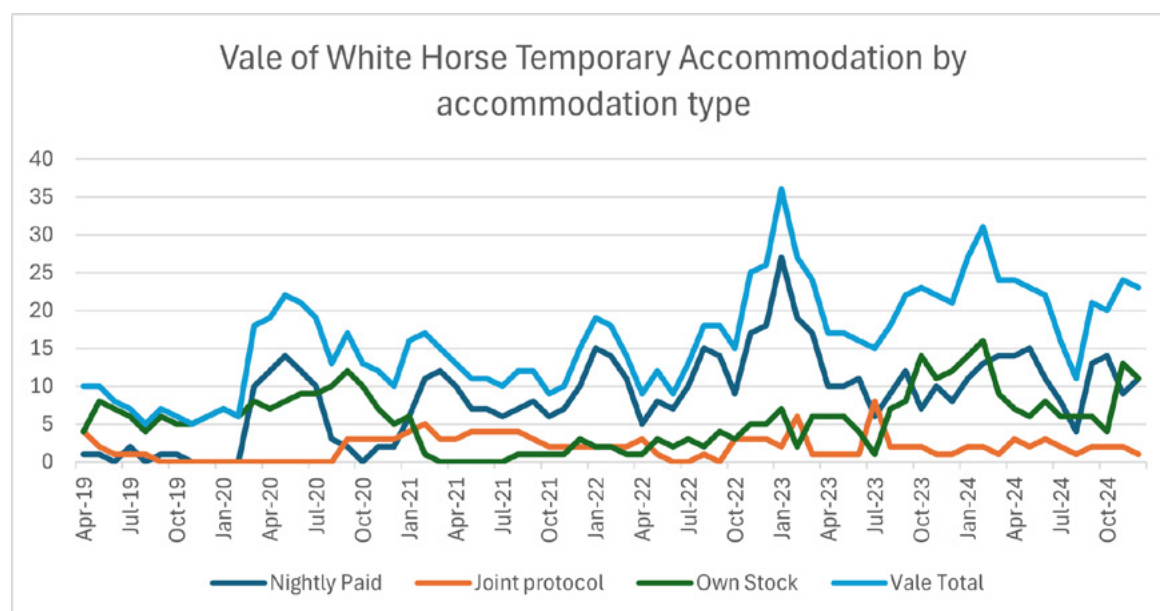
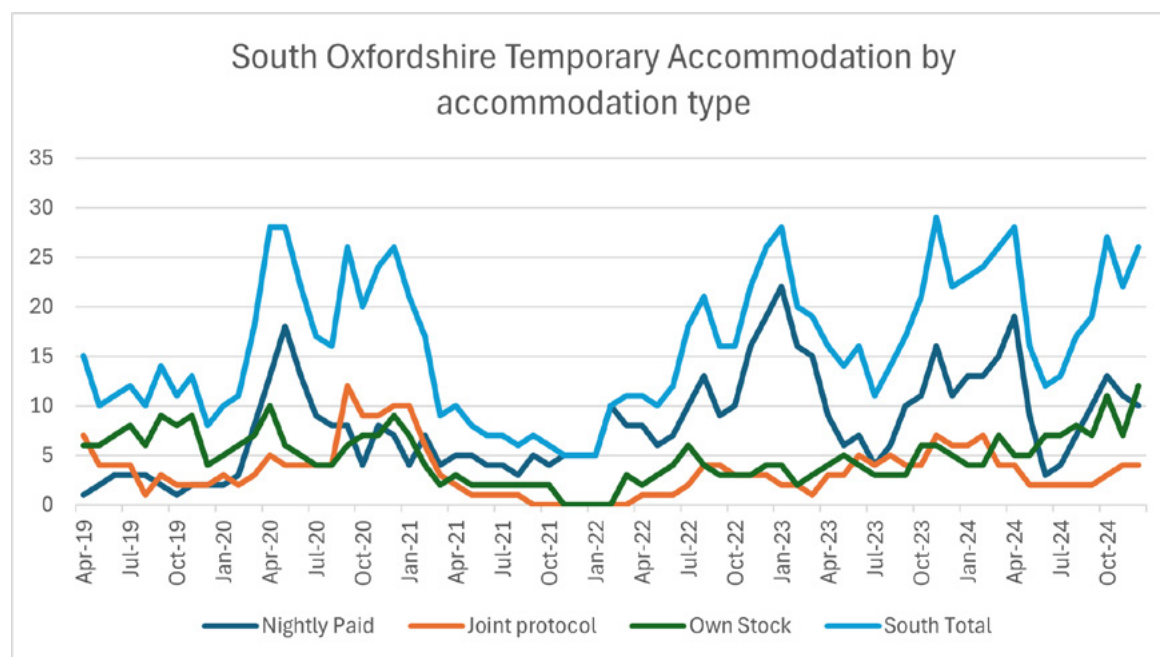
7.6 While temporary accommodation rates have risen for all household types, the greatest rise has been for singles. This is partly as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

7.7 As cases have gone through the courts, the threshold for priority need has softened as rulings have broadened the scope of who is considered vulnerable, compelling local councils to reassess their criteria and potentially accommodate a greater number of single homeless individuals:



18 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-july-to-september-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-july-to-september-2024

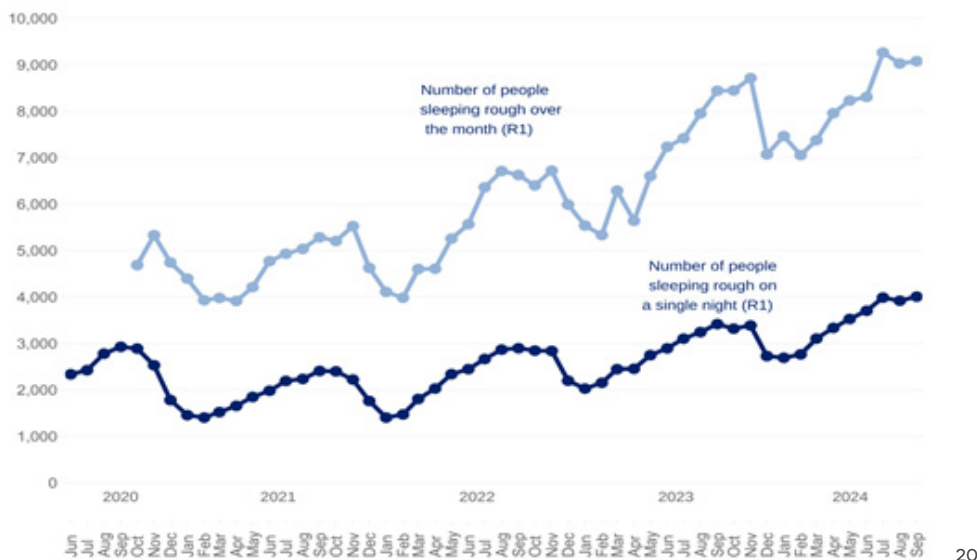
7.8 While South and Vale have also seen a sharp rise in temporary accommodation usage, the councils have fared well comparatively. Many local authorities report that their numbers continue to rise, whereas South and Vale have managed to stabilise the numbers. This has been achieved through working with clients as early as possible to prevent homelessness; concerted efforts to apply the legislation with care when considering whether to place households; proactive bidding for clients prior to and during placement; and the issuing of final offers which allow the councils to end their duties and secure permanent accommodation for vulnerable clients.



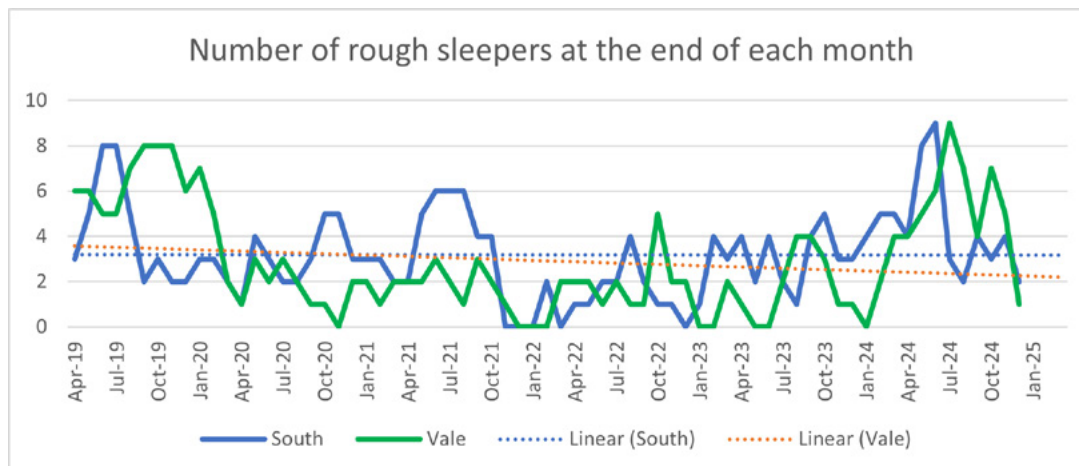
8. Rough Sleepers

8.1 Rough sleeping is increasing across the majority of local authorities in England (54%)¹⁹.

8.2 There were 4,008 people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in September 2024 in England, which is 3% higher than the 2023 annual snapshot figure. This is in addition to sharp rises in rough sleeping since mid-2020:



8.3 South and Vale have seen higher numbers in some months over the same period, peaking in Spring 2024 for both authorities. However, in recent months there has been a decline in both districts and the overall trajectory is downwards, contrary to the nationwide picture:



8.4 South and Vale’s dedicated Rough Sleeper Lead Officer has proved effective in offering advice and assistance to clients to resolve their housing need. Supported by the Outreach team, they are able to locate and support rough sleepers without delay. Once trust has been established, accommodation options can be explored.

8.5 Four rough sleepers were identified in both the 2023 and 2024 rough sleeper counts which take place in October each year. 2023: South = 1, Vale = 3. 2024: South = 2, Vale = 2.

¹⁹ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2024/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2024

²⁰ www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-data-framework-december-2024/rough-sleeping-data-framework-december-2024

9. Activities to prevent and relieve homelessness in South and Vale

9.1 Eight full-time Housing Needs Officers work across both districts, as well a full-time Rough Sleeper Lead Officer.

9.2 All officers work with clients throughout the process, from initial assessment to main duty acceptance or an offer of permanent accommodation. Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) are agreed with clients and all housing options explored in full. The officers employ motivational interviewing techniques to encourage clients and to manage expectations.

9.3 Regular contact is made by the officer, offering advice and assistance to resolve the client's housing need. The team is highly experienced and hardworking – officers receive regular training to update their skillsets and knowledge in line with changes to legislation.

9.4 The officers work closely with the Housing Lettings Team who manage the councils' housing registers and allocate social housing. The fast-tracking of housing register applications has proved pivotal in securing accommodation offers for clients, particularly those in temporary accommodation. Allocations Officers liaise with case officers to ensure that offers of accommodation are not missed.

9.5 The councils' Temporary Accommodation Team is responsible for the booking and monitoring of temporary accommodation placements, both for council-owned and nightly charged B&B accommodation. Many of these clients are extremely vulnerable and require the support of the team when settling into the accommodation, and to ensure that they meet any obligations to meet their rent or service charges.

9.6 The Rough Sleeper Lead Officer is responsible for referring clients into the Access Panel, a weekly meeting to identify which clients should be accommodated in supported housing projects in Oxfordshire and neighbouring districts. The lead officer must advocate for South & Vale clients in what is a competitive process for limited spaces.

9.7 The lead officer is supported by a rough sleeping outreach worker.

9.8 The council has a full-time Domestic Abuse Support Officer who works with clients who have experienced domestic abuse. The officers can complete DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-based violence) assessments to determine the level of risk to clients, and has links to accommodation schemes specifically for abuse victims, such as Places of Safety.

9.9 A dedicated Resettlement Team works with clients who have had to flee from overseas. In recent years this has included the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), and Homes for Ukraine which was promptly introduced following the Russian invasion.

9.10 The council has a dedicated in-house private tenancy service, White Horse Lettings (WHL), consisting of 2 officers. The service is similar to a lettings agency in many respects – private landlords with vacant properties approach the council for prospective tenants. The officers propose South & Vale homeless clients and negotiate with landlords to secure tenancies. The officers provide all their services – such as tenancy agreements, tenancy support, tenant finding – free of charge. White Horse Lettings can also issue deposit bonds to cover damages beyond fair wear-and-tear.

9.11 WHL has seen a significant decline in new tenancies in recent years, mainly due to LHA being well below open market rent levels. However, interest in the scheme has recently started to increase and more properties have been offered to the councils. This is partly due to the rise in LHA which was increased in April 2024 following a 4-year freeze. An effective marketing campaign with local advertisers has complemented this and prospects for the scheme are looking brighter.

9.12 For clients with the highest needs, Housing First is available. The scheme secures properties for clients through housing associations and provides intensive support to help them manage the tenancies.

9.13 For young people the councils fund a limited number of places within the Young Person's Supported Accommodation (YPSA) scheme. This is a network of supported housing units that is commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council. A housing officer leads on the project, attends regular meetings and supports other officers when dealing with young people.

9.14 There are several military bases in South and Vale, so the councils receive applications from service members and their families seeking housing assistance. The Council participates in civilian / military liaison meetings and veterans' forums to ensure the councils act in accordance with the Military Covenant and that the needs of this cohort are understood.

9.15 The councils are part of a benchmarking group with other local authorities which are deemed most comparable, as defined by central government.

10. Demand on homelessness services in South and Vale

10.1 The number of initial assessments between April 2018 and March 2024 increased by 22% in England. Over the same period, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse district councils saw initial assessments increase by 82% and 104% respectively.

10.2 The key rise in England is homeless relief duties which have increased by 47% since April 2018. South Oxfordshire saw relief duties increase by 19% from 2018/19, while the number of relief duties for the Vale increased by 62%.

10.3 Successful prevention since 2018/19

	England	South East	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
2019/20	58%	55%	82%	79%
2020/21	60%	55%	75%	78%
2021/22	56%	55%	88%	84%
2022/23	53%	54%	80%	75%
2023/24	51%	52%	77%	76%

10.4 Successful prevention levels have fallen 7% in England since April 2018, and 3% in the South East. Prevention levels have decreased by 5% in South Oxfordshire in this period, and 3% in the Vale of White Horse. However, both authorities have achieved successful prevention rates of at least 20% above both national and South East averages in every year since 2019/20.

10.5 Relief outcomes in England 2018/19 – 2023/24

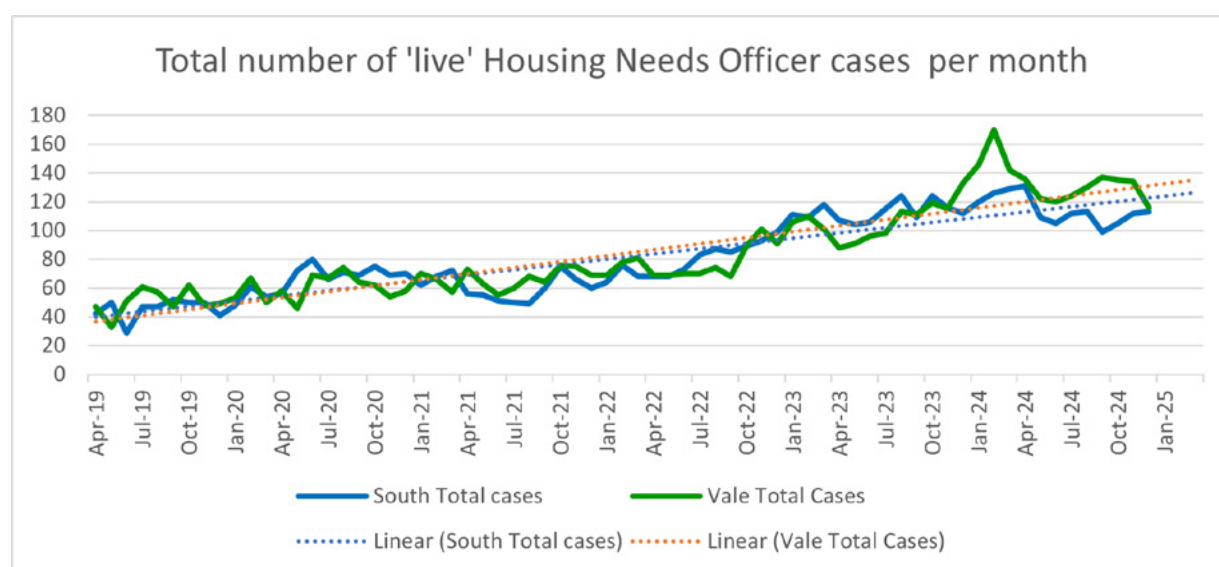
	Total number of households whose relief duty ended	Secured accommodation for 6+ months
2018/19	96,030	40,800
2019/20	155,390	62,060
2020/21	166,850	66,580
2021/22	161,400	62,920
2022/23	176,930	63,100
2023/24	199,120	64,010

10.6 Relief levels tell a similar story to prevention. The number of cases rose considerably to 2023/24, increasing more than 100% since 2018/19 – but successful outcomes for clients are at similar levels to 2019/20.

10.7 Successful relief in South & Vale vs. England and the South East

	England	South East (excl. London)	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
2019/20	40%	32%	53%	43%
2020/21	60%	35%	51%	58%
2021/22	39%	34%	59%	52%
2022/23	36%	31%	44%	46%
2023/24	32%	29%	40%	30%

10.8 Case officer levels since 2019



10.9 Overall caseloads rose between 2020/21 and 2023/24, before falling in 2024/25. However, while homelessness approaches and prevention cases decreased in 2024/25, the councils saw a considerable rise in the number of relief cases. It is generally more difficult to secure accommodation for clients under a relief duty because options for these clients have often already been explored under the prevention duty, but proved fruitless.

10.10 The councils have seen an increase in the number of presentations from clients with complex needs since 2020/21. It is widely recognised that cuts to support services have contributed to homelessness in recent years, as have gaps in Adult Social Care.

10.11 Fewer floating support services exist, and those that do often only have capacity to work with certain client groups. There is generally less support available to vulnerable clients, and the councils have seen an increase in approaches from clients who do not necessarily need housing advice or assistance, but do not know where to go to seek support.

10.12 The cost-of-living crisis has resulted in an increase in approaches from clients who are unable to afford their rent in South and Vale, as well as their bills and daily living costs. This had led to increases in the number of clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to rent arrears.

11. Achievements

11.1 High level of successful prevention – South & Vale have been consistently 20%+ above the national and South East averages, and well clear of South & Vale’s benchmarking group. This is despite the growing demand on the service.

11.2 Housing First – Successful implementation of the project which currently accommodates and supports 7 clients in the highest level of housing need.

11.3 Social landlord – In 2024 the councils became social landlords for the first time since 1997. Government funding was used to purchase 45 homes [27 in South Oxfordshire and 18 in the Vale] to accommodate clients in housing need.

11.4 Low temporary accommodation – The councils have managed to reduce temporary accommodation usage since January 2023 when it peaked for both nightly charged and council-owned temporary accommodation. While other local authorities have seen numbers continue to rise, South and Vale reduced overall numbers by 23% between January 2023 and January 2025. The number of households in nightly charged accommodation decreased by 57% over the same period.

11.5 New temporary accommodation units – The councils have purchased a number of properties to accommodate homeless households. This reduces the reliance of nightly charged hotels which are often expensive, do not have cooking facilities and are sometimes out of district.

11.6 Partnership working with stockholders – The councils have further strengthened their relationships social housing stockholders in the districts. Some providers can provide the councils with accommodation units at short notice when, for example, a household requires a certain property size or adaptation for medical or mobility reasons. Some stockholders are able to provide properties for the Housing First scheme.

11.7 Resettlement – A specialist Resettlement Team was formed to support vulnerable clients who have come to the UK under resettlement schemes such as ARAP, ACRS & Homes for Ukraine. As of May 2025, 299 Ukrainian households have been housed permanently by the team, and 111 Afghan households, 26 in permanent accommodation.

11.8 Domestic Abuse Support Officer – A full-time officer was appointed to support households who have experienced domestic abuse. Working across the Housing Needs and Community Safety Teams, the officer has been able to support both clients and officers when resolving the housing needs of abuse victims.

11.9 Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) – The councils continue to accommodate rough sleepers during periods of severe weather. In partnership with Oxford City Council, bedspaces are made available to clients who would otherwise be on the streets during severe cold, hot or wet weather periods.

11.10 Rough Sleeper Count – The councils have successfully organised autumn counts for rough sleepers each year. South and Vale were commended by Homeless Link – the agency that oversees the counts – who awarded the councils a green rating for the process, made no recommendations and described the collaboration with other agencies as “excellent”.

11.11 Empty Homes Policy – In March 2024 the councils published its Empty Homes Policy which sets out the incentives available to homeowners to bring homes back into use, to the benefit of the owner, potential tenants, and the wider community. By engaging positively with owners of empty homes, the policy aims to bring homes back into use, particularly for residents in housing need.

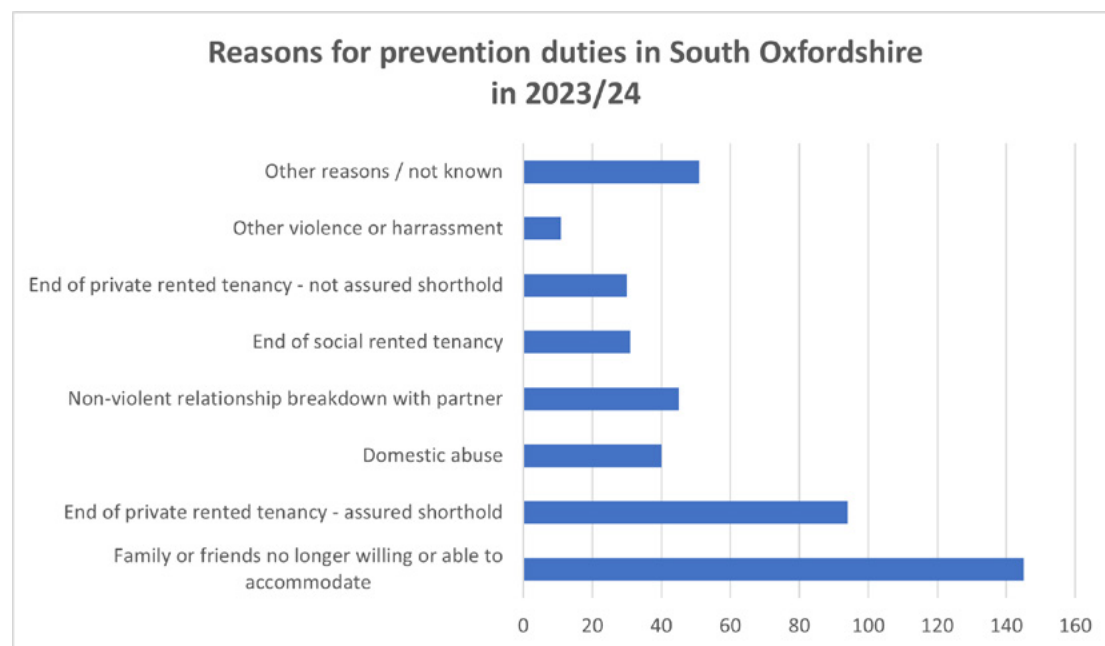
11.12 Safeguarding Adults Review (SARs) – The councils participate in the SAR review panel, a statutory review process for adults with care and support needs who have died or been seriously harmed through abuse or neglect. The review aims to find out what agencies did well as well as identifying systemic issues of multi-agency working, and how these could be improved. The SAR Board has developed a Homeless Mortality Review (HMR) process for reviewing the death of anyone who is homeless, and South and Vale participate in this.

11.13 Countywide Homelessness Steering Group (CHSG) – The CHSG is composed of representatives from district council homeless teams, the charity sector bodies working with the homeless, probation, safeguarding, public health and other relevant bodies. It meets to discuss strategic matters including funding, service commissioning, trends in homelessness data and demand on services. It also progresses the Countywide Strategy and Action Plan.

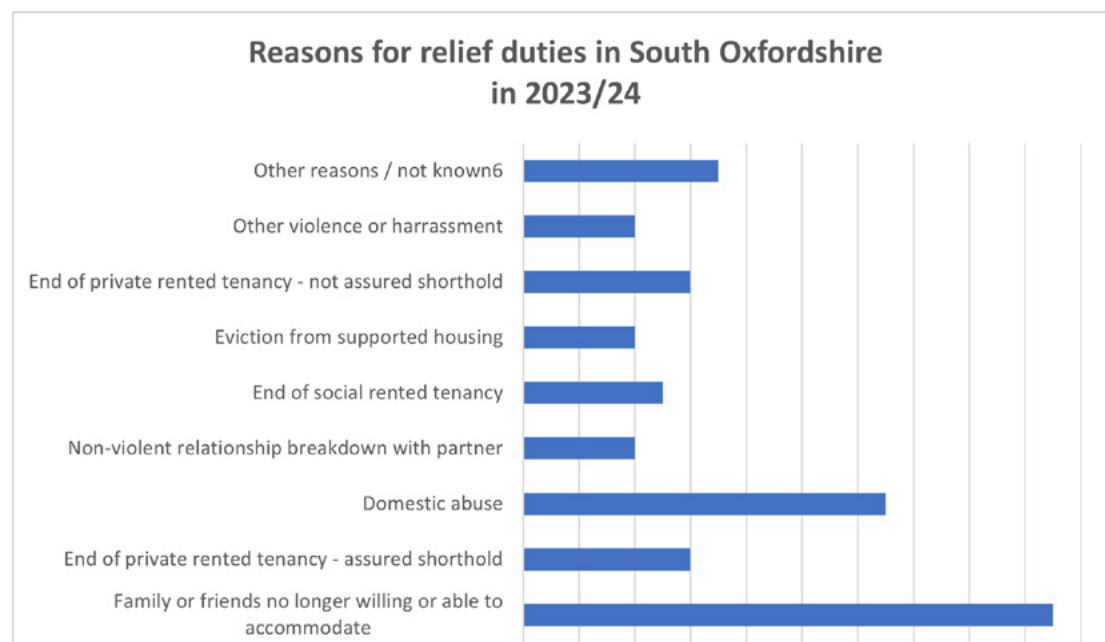
11.14 Joint Housing Steering group (JHSG) – The JHSG is composed of representatives from Oxfordshire County Council social care and district council homelessness teams. It meets to discuss matters relating to the housing needs of young people, including young people owed an accommodation duties as looked-after children, and young people leaving care or under homelessness legislation. This includes helping young people to move on from supported accommodation, creating joint protocols to align approaches to youth homelessness between the county and districts and sharing best practice.

12. Reasons for homelessness in South and Vale

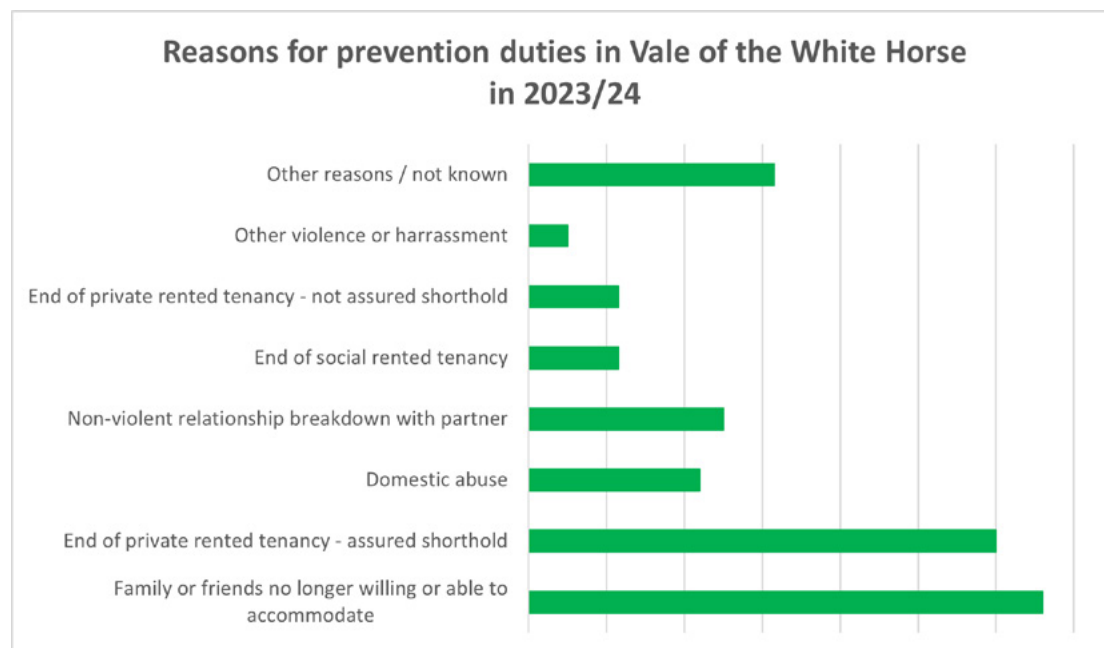
12.1 Reasons for prevention duties in South Oxfordshire:



12.2 Reasons for relief duties in South Oxfordshire:

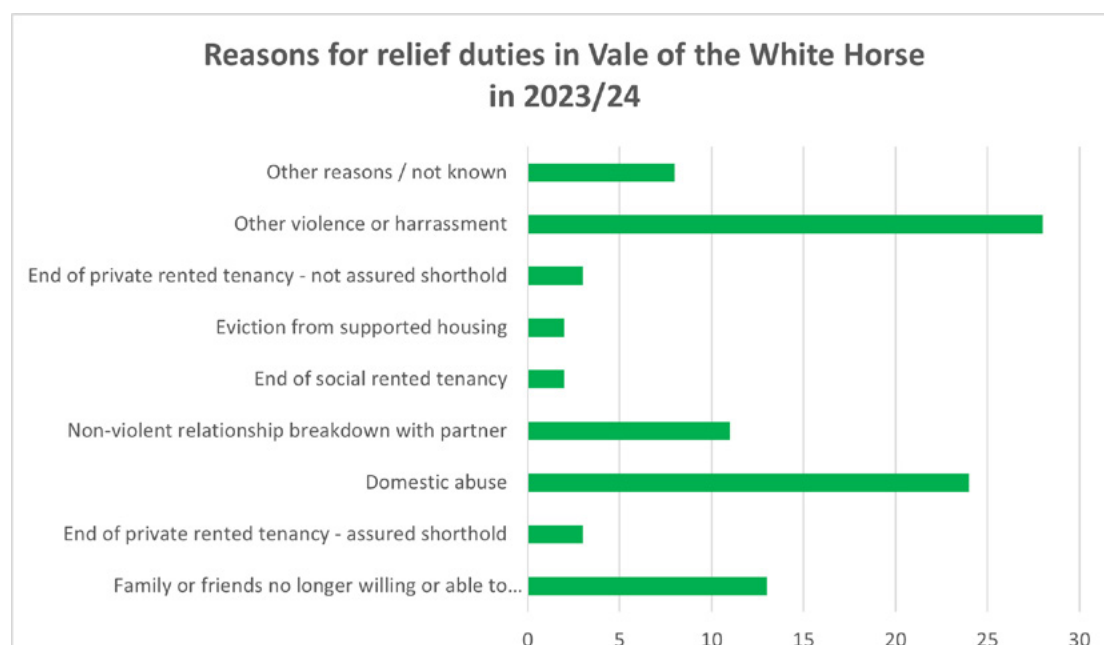


12.3 Reasons for prevention duties in Vale of the White Horse:



12.4 In 2020/21, the main reasons for homeless prevention duties were 31% friends / family eviction, 16% end of private tenancy, 15% domestic abuse. The sharp rise in end of private tenancies in the last 3 years is attributed to increases in evictions due to rent arrears, and landlords leaving the market.

12.5 Reasons for relief duties in Vale of the White Horse:



13. Who is becoming homeless in South and Vale?

13.1 South Oxfordshire

13.2 In 2023/24 57% of clients had recognised support needs, down 5% from 2020/21. The number of clients with mental health issues has increased by 35% in this time, while the number of clients with physical health issues rose by 47%.

13.3 85% of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty were aged 54 or under; no change from 2020/21.

13.4 89% of homeless clients are White. In 2021, 93.1% of people in South Oxfordshire identified their ethnic group within the “White” category (compared with 96.1% in 2011)²¹.

13.5 56% of prevention duties were owed to single households – 44% to households with dependent children.

13.6 74% of relief duties were owed to singles – 26% to households with dependent children. This represents very little change since 2021/22 when singles accounted for 78% of relief duties.

13.7 76% of single households are male – 24% female. This is similar to the figure in 2021/22, but higher than the national average which estimates that two thirds of homeless people are male.

13.8 In terms of employment status, 15% of clients owed a homeless duty were unemployed at the point of application, a decrease of 6% since 2021/22. 13% were not working due to long-term disability or illness. 28% were full-time workers, down from 32% in 2021/22.

13.9 10% of all clients owed a homeless duty were at risk of or had experienced domestic abuse.

13.10 2% of clients had experienced rough sleeping previously.

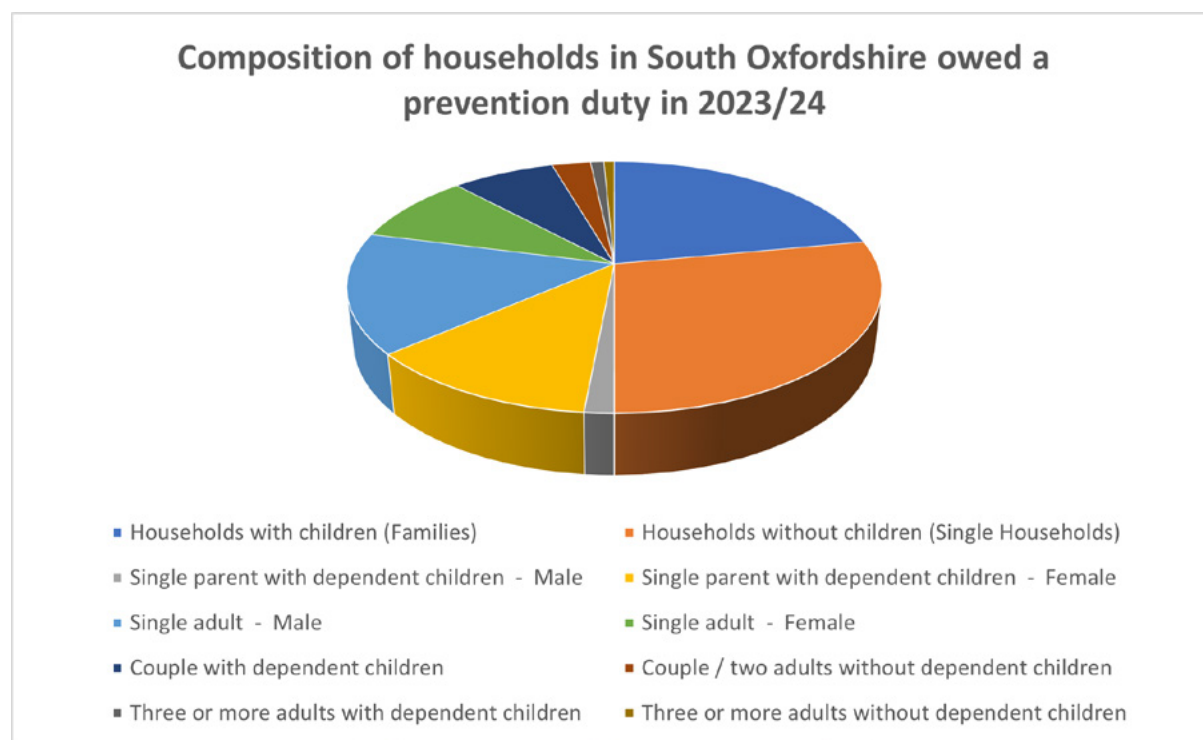
13.11 4% of clients were young people who required support to manage accommodation independently, no change from 2020/21, down from 7% in 2020/21.

13.12 7% of clients owed prevention / relief in Vale had drug or alcohol dependency, a similar level to recent years. 4% of clients had a learning difficulty.

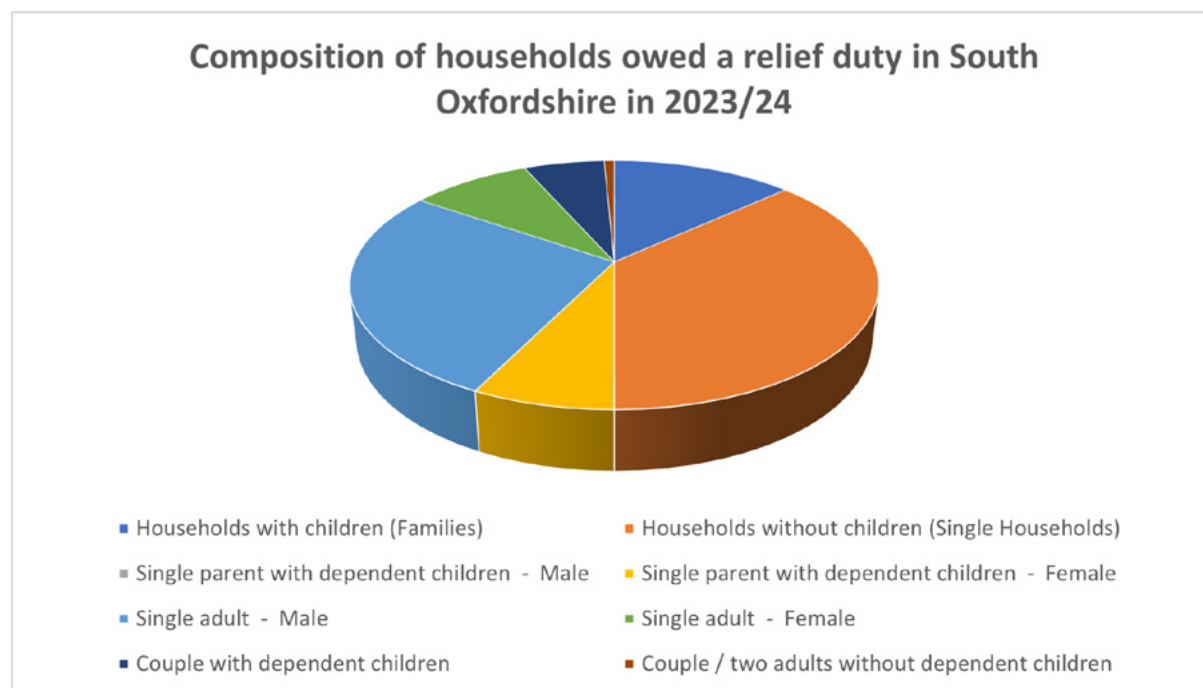
13.13 Less than 1% of clients had served in the armed forces.

²¹ www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000179/

13.14 Composition of households at risk of homelessness in South Oxfordshire:



13.15 Composition of homeless households in South Oxfordshire:



13.16 Vale of White Horse

13.17 In 2023/24, 86% of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty were aged 54 or under, a negligible change since 2020/21.

13.18 77% white of clients were White (82% in 2020/21). In 2021, 90.8% of people in Vale of White Horse identified their ethnic group within the “White” category (compared with 94.9% in 2011)²². 88% were UK nationals.

13.19 42% of prevention duties were owed to households with dependent children – 58% to singles.

13.20 45% of relief duties were owed to households with dependent children – 55% to singles. This represents a significant decline since 2020/21 when 77% of relief duties were owed to singles. However, it should be noted that the proportion of singles who are owed temporary accommodation duties was much higher in 2020/21 than previously, with singles accounting for approximately three quarters of clients in temporary accommodation.

13.21 In 2023/34 the top support need of households in Vale owed a prevention or relief duty was mental health (26%), a decrease of 5% since 2020/21.

13.22 17% of clients had physical health needs – a similar level to 2020/21 – and 13% of clients were at risk of or had experienced DA, same level as 2020/21.

13.23 Just 1% of clients owed a homeless duty had experienced rough sleeping, a significant change from 6% in 2020/21.

13.24 5% of clients were young people who required support to manage accommodation independently, no change from 2020/21.

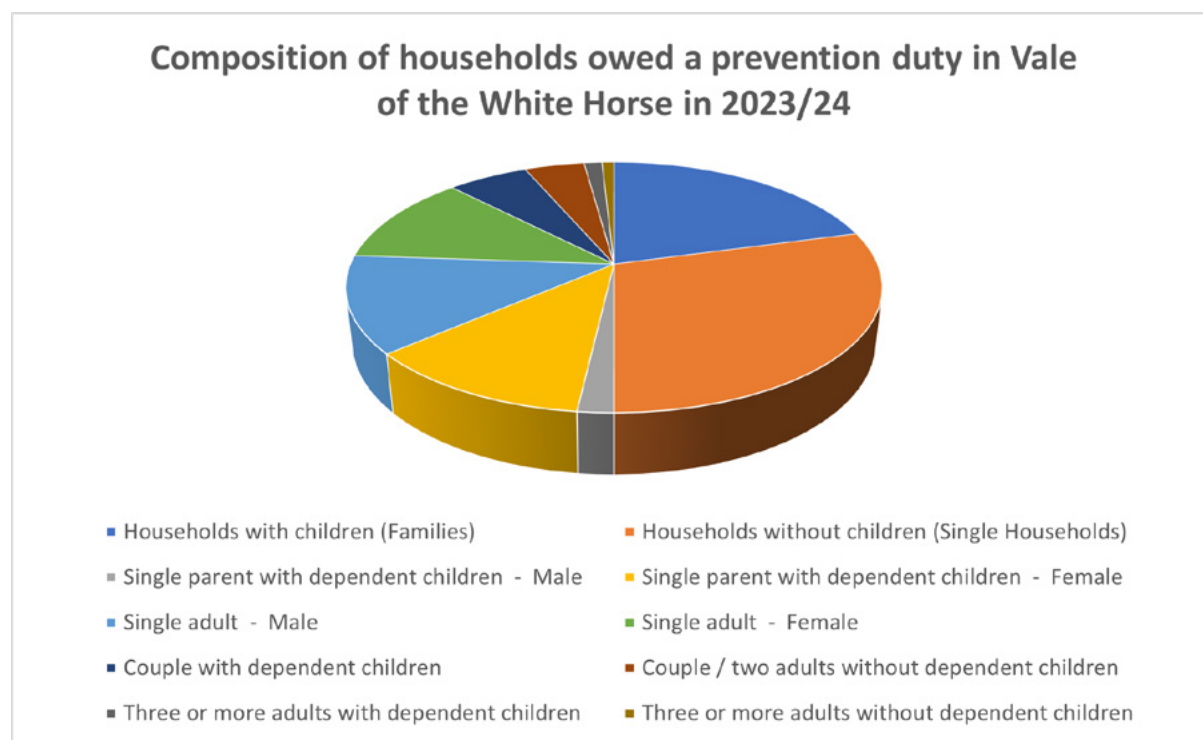
13.25 Less than 1% served in forces, a negligible change from 2020/21.

13.26 5% of clients owed prevention / relief in Vale had drug or alcohol dependency, down from 12% in 2020/21, but 5% of clients had a learning difficulty, which represents an increase of 2% since 2020/21.

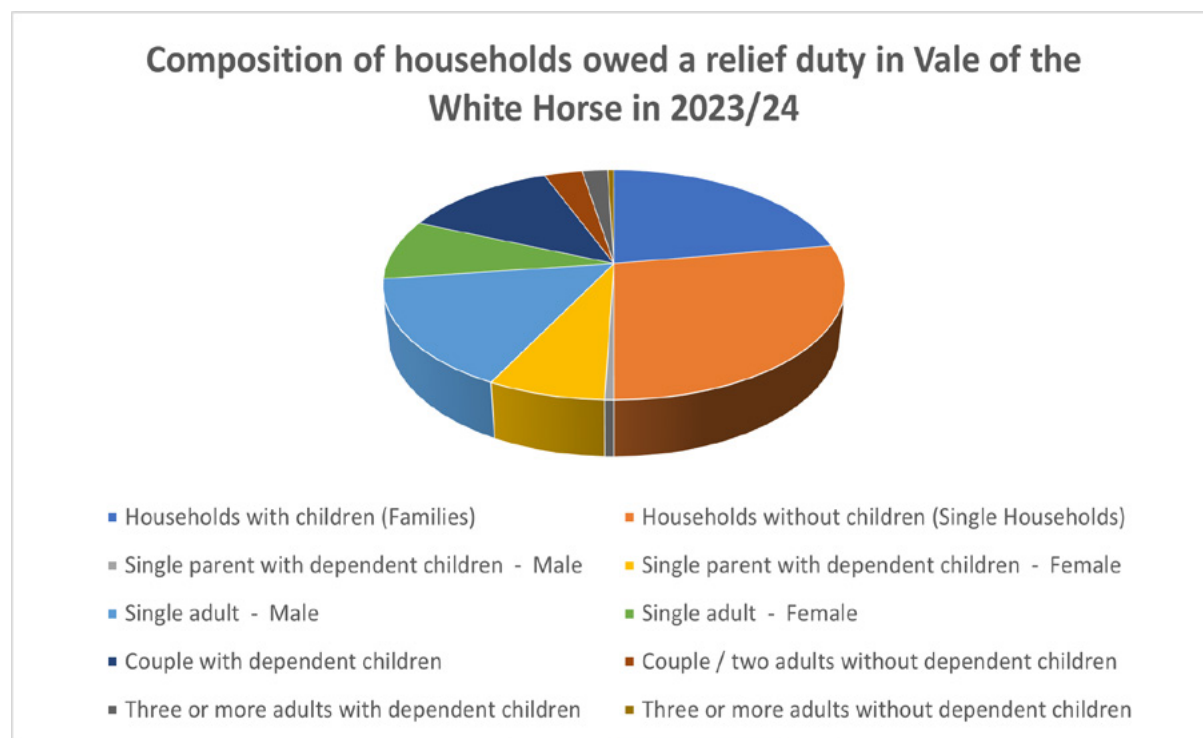
13.27 In terms of employment status, 19% of clients were unemployed, markedly down since 2020/21 (32%). 13% of clients were not working due to long-term disability or sickness, a 3% decrease over the same period, and 28% were full-time workers, an increase of just 1%.

²² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000180/>

13.28 Composition of households at risk of homelessness in Vale of White Horse:



13.29 Composition of homeless households in Vale of White Horse:



14. Unmet demand for South and Vale's homeless service

14.1 Single households – The councils have seen an increase in homeless presentations from single people, including those with complex needs. Single people are more vulnerable to homelessness, especially those who are living with friends or family, or in shared accommodation where they have fewer tenancy rights. Those living with family or friends may be asked to leave as a result of pressures on host households caused by cost-of-living.

14.2 Single people face difficulties accessing accommodation as a result of high rents for one-bedroom private rented accommodation and the lower level of benefit available to help with housing costs for single people under the age of 35.

14.3 1-bedroom properties advertised through the council's housing register often attract very high numbers of bids, especially for social rent accommodation. The scarcity of 1-bedroom accommodation can lead to significant waits for single people before securing permanent accommodation.

14.4 Large families – Large families face difficulties securing suitable long-term accommodation owing to the high demand for large properties in the private and social housing sectors.

14.5 Larger households are more likely to be affected by the benefit cap, which reduces the amount of benefit they can claim and can render housing unaffordable. New build social housing is increasingly advertised by housing associations at "Affordable" rents which are higher than traditional social rent levels. In order to ensure that new tenants are able to afford these rents, housing associations apply stringent affordability criteria to households, which can exclude tenants on lower incomes.

14.6 Households who require 4-bedroom properties might have to wait for more than 12 months before making a successful bid for accommodation, even those with the highest banding priority.

14.7 YPSA – Supported housing for young people in the districts has been provided by a number of agencies working under a contract commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, and supported by the districts. This has provided a suitable housing option for young people between the ages of 18 and 24 threatened with homelessness.

14.8 The availability of this accommodation has been restricted by changes to the scheme which have reduced the number of available placements and lowered the age limit for new referrals to 20. This will reduce the effectiveness of the YPSA as a means of preventing and relieving homelessness in the districts.

14.9 Lack of supported housing options – The availability of supported housing for people experiencing homelessness is limited. A number of short-term accommodation placements are available to people who are threatened with homelessness through the Somewhere Safe to Stay (SSTS) scheme. However, most supported accommodation options for homeless people are within the Adult Homeless Pathway (AHP). Places in the AHP are offered only to individuals who have been verified as sleeping rough in the districts and access is managed via a weekly panel meeting.

14.10 Lack of mental health supported accommodation – Specialist supported accommodation for people with Mental Health issues is limited. The councils did commission supported accommodation in South Oxfordshire, but the contract ended in September 2024.

14.11 The council is able to refer individuals to MIND/Response housing, and individuals can self-refer to Edge Housing, which is able to support people with lower-level mental health issues. However, demand for places is high, and there are often strict eligibility criteria which can preclude clients depending on their support requirements.

15. Future challenges facing South and Vale's homelessness service

15.1 The Renters' Rights Bill represents the most significant change for local authorities since the inception of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The bill is designed to reform the private rented sector by improving the quality of private properties, making them more affordable and increasing security for tenants. One of the major changes is the abolition of section 21 notices. Local authorities might see fewer incidences of homelessness for this reason. Increasing the mandatory threshold for eviction for arrears by 2 to 3 months will provide additional security for tenants on low incomes.

15.2 The proposed prohibition on rental discrimination may assist the council in its homelessness prevention work by increasing access to the private rented sector for households on low incomes. However, greater tenant protection may create challenges for private landlords - some landlords might exit the market due to perceived increased risk or administrative burden, which could lead to a reduced supply of rental properties. This could create homelessness as well as impacting on the councils' ability to use the private sector.

15.3 The proposed private rented sector database may impose additional administrative burdens on the council. However, it may offer the housing needs team an opportunity to access an additional supply of private landlords willing to use the councils' WHL scheme.

15.4 According to Zoopla, UK rents are expected to rise by 4% in 2025²³, with large cities and London lagging while rents rise in more affordable areas.

15.5 Projections suggest that high demand on homelessness services will continue to be a challenge for local authorities, including South and Vale. The supply of genuinely affordable properties in the districts is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the need across both private and social rented sectors.

15.6 As the cost-of-living crisis continues, the demand for housing is expected to increase owing to increased financial pressure on vulnerable households, brought about by increasing rents, food prices and energy costs.

15.7 The increase in approaches from single people with complex needs in recent years is expected to continue. The increase in the proportion of approaches from complex singles impacts the council in a variety of ways, including the availability of supported accommodation, rough sleeper numbers, risk factors and the suitability of temporary accommodation.

15.8 The high demand for 1-bedroom properties advertised through the councils' choice-based lettings system is set to continue.

²³ www.zoopla.co.uk/discover/property-news/rental-market-report/

15.9 Large families are expected to continue to face long waiting times for affordable housing owing to a lack of 4-bedroom or larger properties available on through councils' choice-based lettings system. This is compounded by affordability concerns related to the benefit cap, affordability criteria applied by providers and increased demand from resettlement cohorts with a greater composition of larger households (see below).

15.10 The delays for social housing properties to become available is often owing to the lag between a provider advertising a property, and the property being ready to let. These delays can lead to an increase in homeless presentations, as households in precarious situations are unable to sustain their housing arrangements. It also increases the time that households spend in temporary accommodation. This will remain a challenge for South and Vale until a new Homechoice Agreement is in place with registered providers.

15.11 Demand on the councils' resettlement team will likely continue. Asylum Dispersal units remain in both South and Vale, so the councils are likely to see further homelessness presentations from this cohort in future.

16. Outstanding actions from current strategy

16.1 The strategy published in 2020 contains five objectives comprising 47 actions, 39 of which have been completed or are ongoing as part of business as usual (BAU).

16.2 Five actions were not completed, so considerations have been made as to whether these should be carried forward to the new strategy.

16.3 Three actions became obsolete during the lifetime of the strategy.

17. Summary and next steps

17.1 The findings from this review will be analysed to identify potential objectives for a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

17.1 Proposals for the new strategy will be considered at internal, external, members and public consultations. The feedback from these consultation exercises will be considered before a new strategy is adopted and published.

17.3 The councils aim to publish the new strategy in October 2025.

Appendix

South Oxfordshire 23/24

Homelessness assessments made = **535**

Prevention duties owed = **466**

Relief duties owed = **68**

Vale of White Horse 23/34

Homelessness assessments = **561**

Prevention duties owed = **465**

Relief duties owed = **94**

South Oxfordshire 18/19

Homelessness assessments made = **294**

Prevention duties owed = **219**

Relief duties owed = **57**

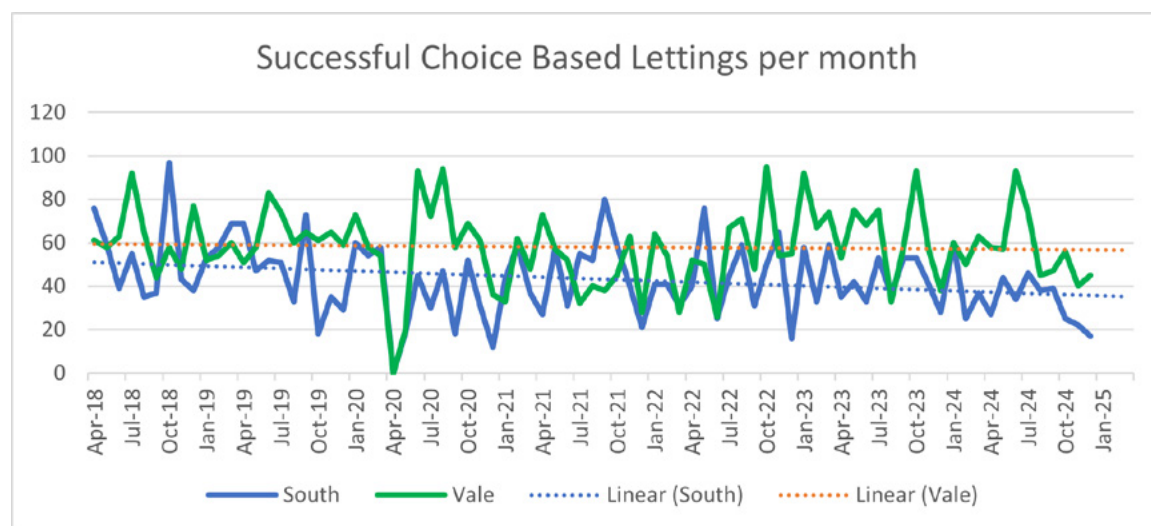
Vale 18/19

Homelessness assessments made = **275**

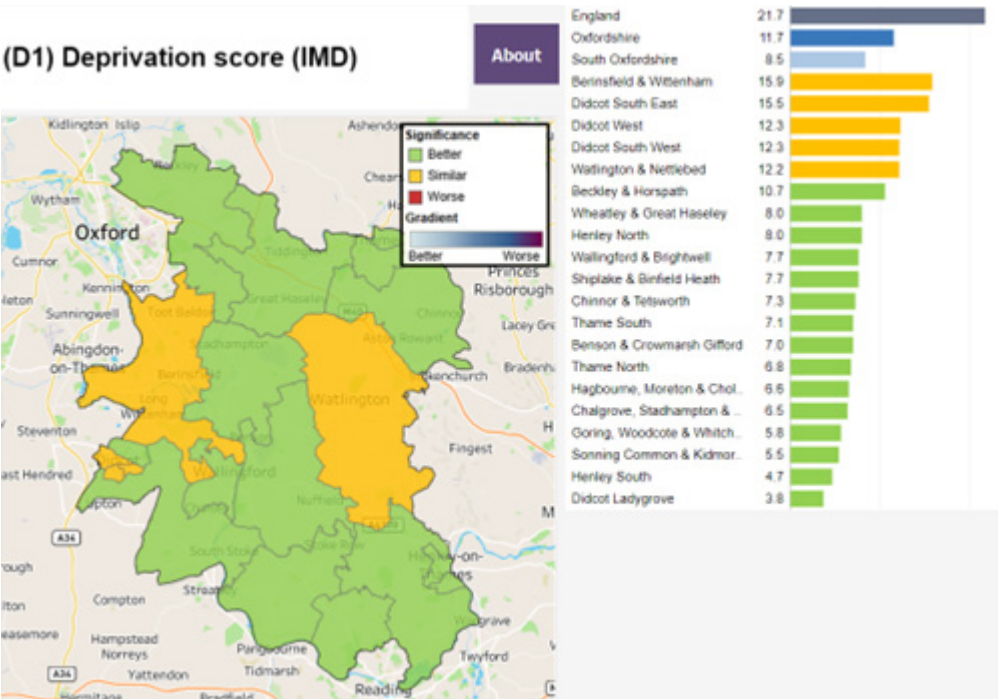
Prevention duties owed = **204**

Relief duties owed = **58**

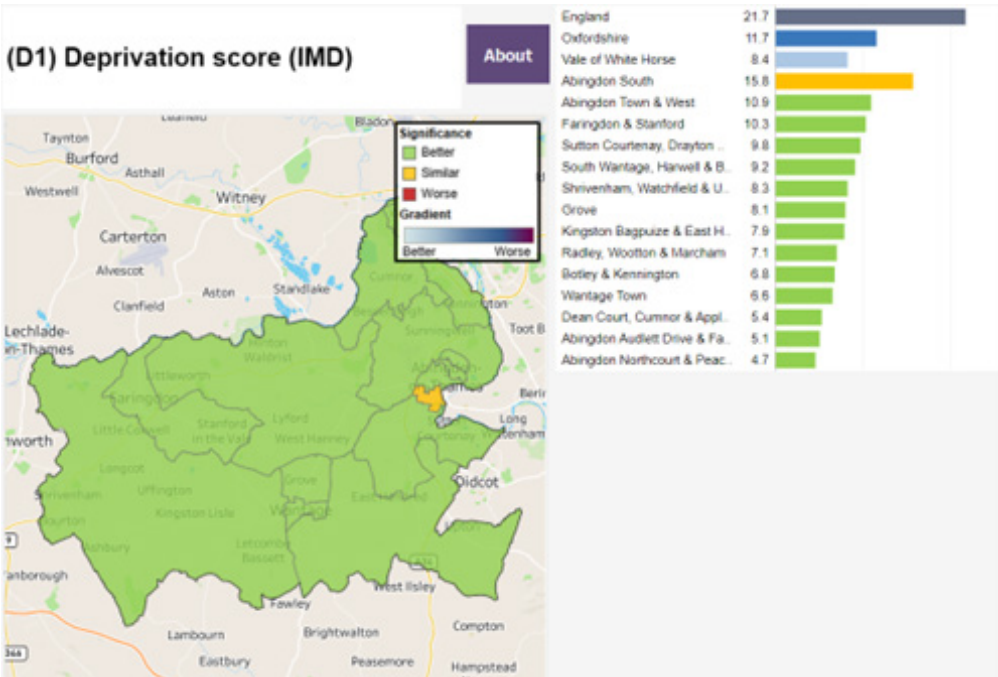
Prevention rates remain high despite a gradual decrease in number of social housing allocations since 2018/19:



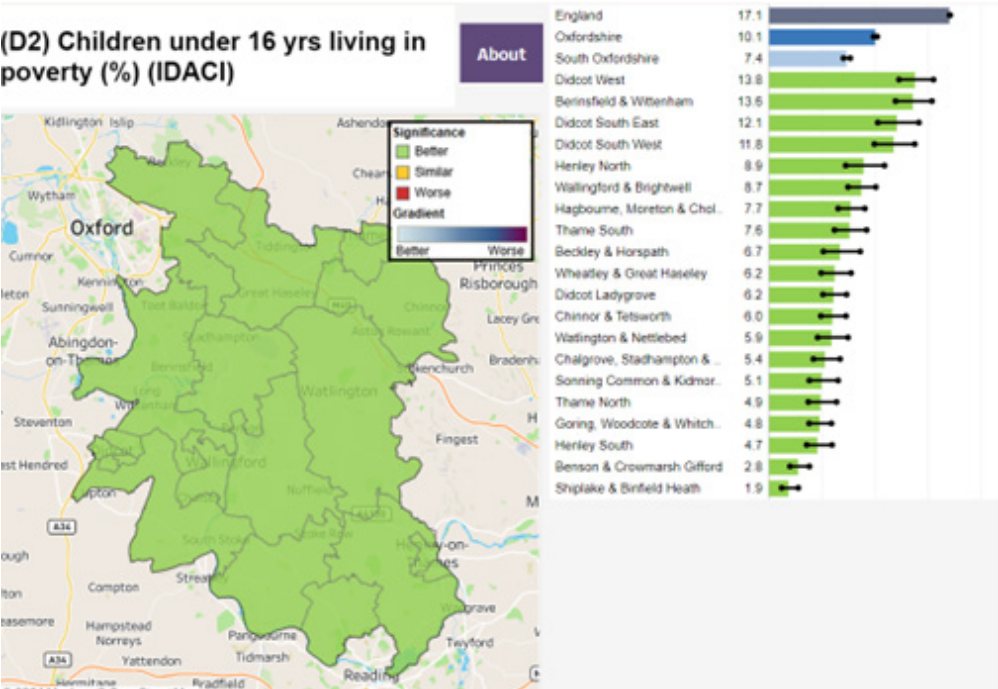
Deprivation in South Oxfordshire



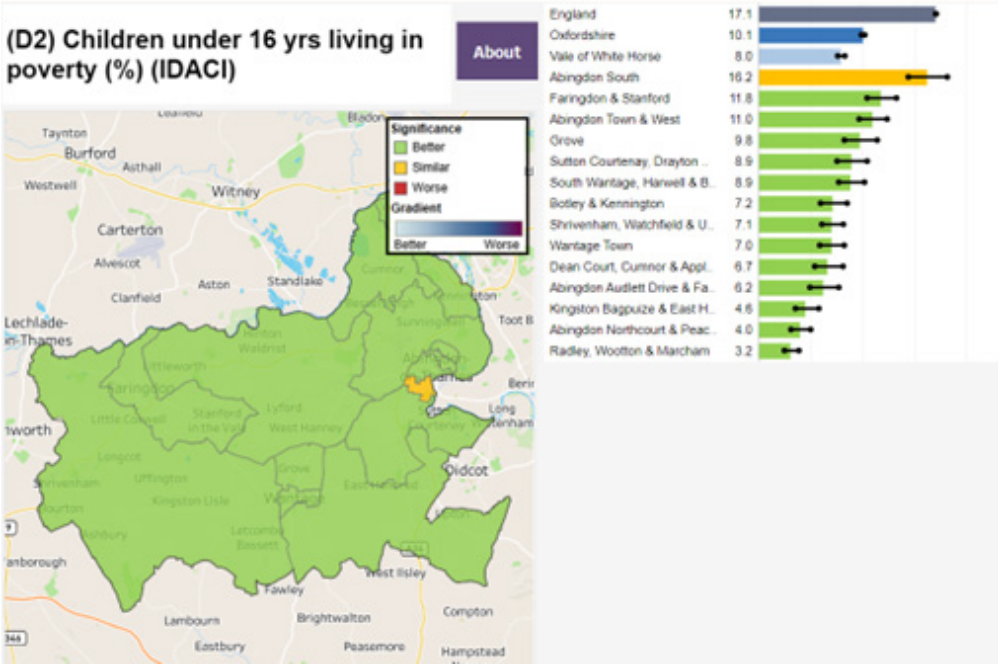
Deprivation in the Vale of White Horse



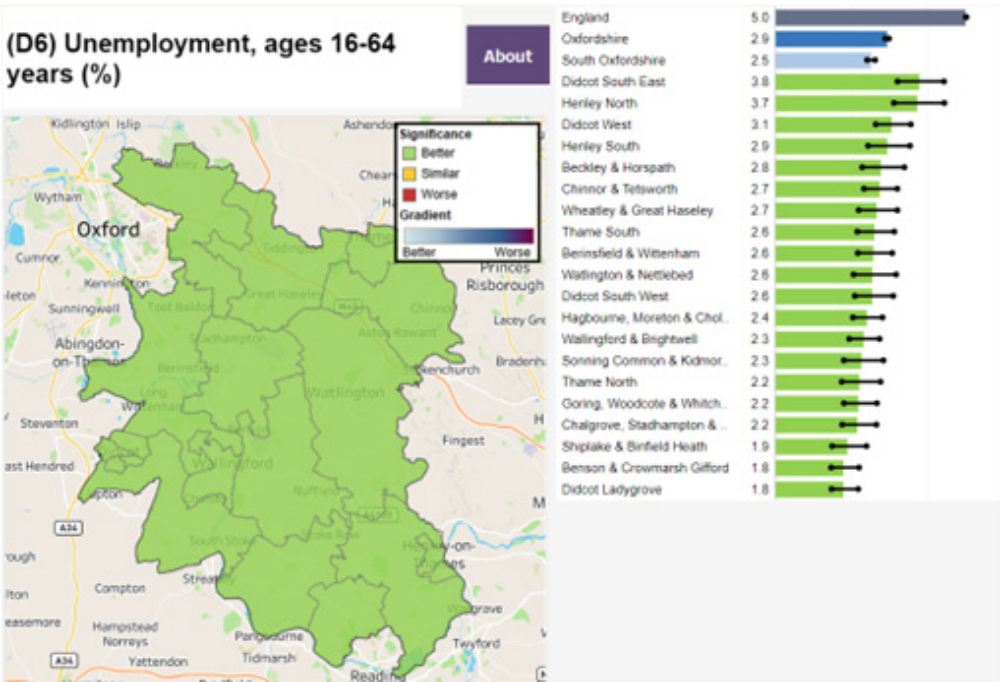
Poverty in South Oxfordshire



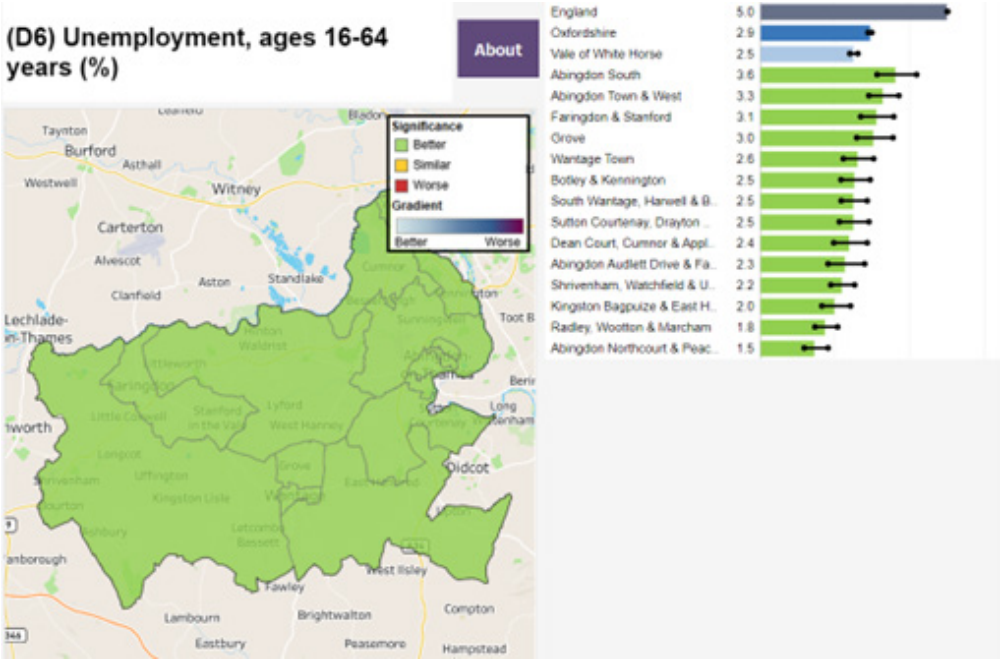
Poverty in the Vale of White Horse



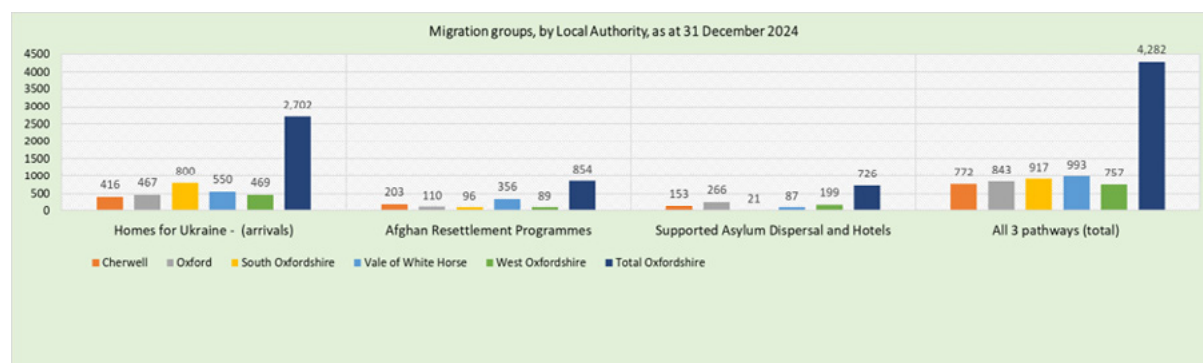
Unemployment in South Oxfordshire



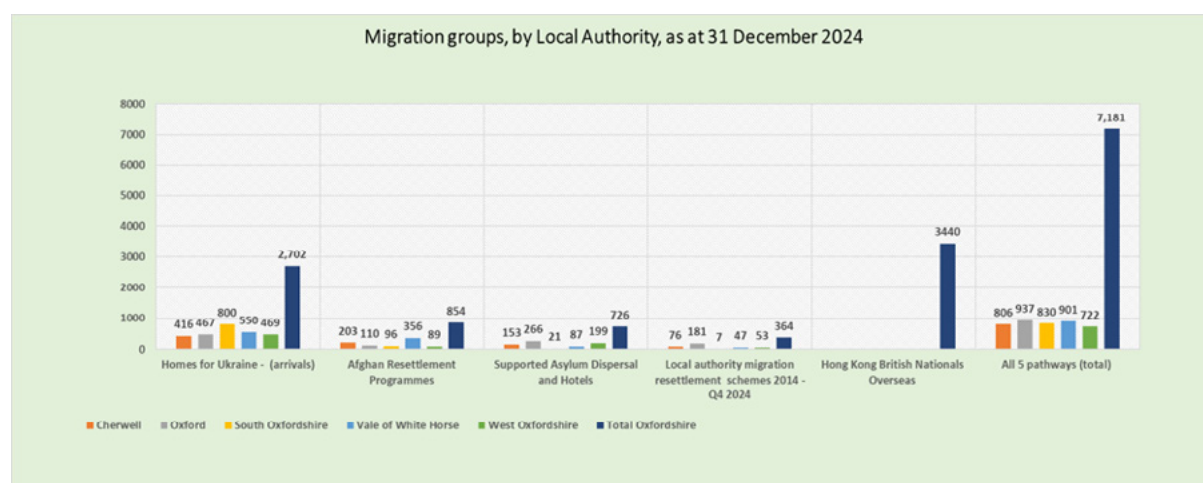
Unemployment in the Vale of White Horse



Migration groups in local districts (3 pathways)



Migration groups in local districts (5 pathways)



Homelessness and temporary accommodation usage in Oxfordshire for refugees and asylum seekers

Temporary accommodation usage in Oxfordshire:

End of Q2 24/25 = **484**

End of Q2 23/24 = **307**

Number of prevention and relief applications taken in Oxfordshire from refugees and asylum seekers:

End of Q2 24/25 = **756**

End of Q2 23/24 = **692**

Alternative Formats

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Housing Lettings team if you would like this policy in an alternative format – 01235 422 436 or email housing@southandvale.gov.uk

Communication and Contact Information

For further information about this policy, please contact the Housing Advice team on 01235 422 452 or email housing@southandvale.gov.uk

Change Record

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