

To: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: 3rd September 2015

Report of: Head of Housing and Property Services

Title of Report: Mid-point review of the Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018

Summary

Purpose of report: To inform the Scrutiny panel of progress made to date in respect of the Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018.

Key decision: No

Executive lead member: Scott Seamons

Report author: Frances Evans

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2015-19 Priority: Meeting Housing Needs

Appendix 1 – Homelessness Strategy 2013- 2018

Appendix 2 – Action Plan (Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018)

Appendix 3 – Performance Report – Oxford City Council Housing Needs Performance report 2014/15.

Appendix 4 – Feedback from the Stakeholder Workshop on 8 July 2015.

Background

1. Oxford City Council has a duty to carry out a review of homelessness in the area and to publish a specific Homelessness Strategy to meet needs, including:
 - Addressing the causes of homelessness
 - Introducing initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible.
 - Securing sufficient accommodation for homeless people or who may become homeless.
 - Ensuring appropriate support to prevent repeat homelessness.

2. The existing Homelessness Strategy 2013- 2018 (**Appendix 1**) and associated Action Plan (**Appendix 2**) was adopted by Oxford City Council in February 2013. The four strategic objectives are:
 - Preventing and responding to homelessness.
 - Preventing and responding to rough sleeping.
 - Developing partnerships and communications.
 - Deliver excellent homelessness services.
3. A mid-point review of the Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 has been undertaken. This report sets out the findings of the review and next steps.

Performance against the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2013-18

4. The Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 comprises of 4 strategic objectives with 23 key actions proposed to achieve these. The key actions are measured through 61 milestones, of which 45 have already been completed and 11 are on target to be completed within the lifetime of the strategy. Only 5 actions have been delayed and more detail on these has been provided in paragraphs 6-9 below. **Appendix 3** provides a general performance overview report on how the Council's Housing Services performed in 2014/15. This has been published on the Council's website. <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Library/Documents/Community%20Housing/Housing%20Performance%202014-15.pdf>
5. In addition to the work outlined in Appendix 3, key activities of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2013-18 are as follows:
6. **Strategic Objective One:** Preventing and responding to homelessness.
 - Maintained levels of households in Temporary Accommodation below 120 per year.
 - Funding has been secured to procure additional temporary accommodation.
 - Youth Ambition Plan has been developed.
 - New pathway implemented from 1st April 2015 to support young people and young parents (County Council and City Council approach).
 - Social enterprise opportunities in education, training and employment have been developed with partners to help meet the needs of single homeless people in the City.
 - Match funding provided to pilot an alternative approach to assisting single homeless households in securing employment and sustainable accommodation – working jointly with May Day Trust.
 - Oxford City Financial Inclusion Strategy developed and adopted.
 - Homelessness reduced through joint working with the Council's Welfare Reform Outreach team who work to address and mitigate the impacts of welfare reform (from a resident and a business standpoint).
 - Oxford Credit Union Service has been advertised to all tenants and Council officers sign-post people toward the Credit Union when customers seek welfare or money management advice.

7. Strategic Objective Two: Preventing and responding to rough sleeping.

- No Second Night Out project has been implemented and processes reviewed. Whilst this action has been completed – the on-going target to reduce the number of new rough sleepers spending a 2nd night out on the streets is currently not being met. This is due to an increase in representations and a lack of suitable ‘move on’ accommodation. Consequently, this has reduced the number of beds being made available in the homeless hub. Currently, the City Council is in a live tender stage with Oxfordshire County Council for the entire homeless pathway. Any changes to the current pathway and ‘Sit-Up’ provision may improve the flow of beds, therefore allowing the No Second Night Out targets to be met. This review and tender process was delayed from the original Homelessness Strategy Action Plan target date. The impact of significant reductions in available funding to partners needed to be considered before the tender process could commence.
- A review of anti-begging campaigns and messages has been undertaken; support provided to organisations who work to get people off the streets.
- Move-On Planning Protocol (MOPP) process has been set up. This is the main way of understanding and managing the flow of customers through the hostel system and helps to identify gaps in service, move-on options or support to individuals.
- A new Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (SPOT) contract is in place to develop services to support entrenched rough sleepers.

8. Strategic Objective Three: Developing partnerships and communications

- A communications plan has been developed and delivered with more targeted information about homelessness and housing options. The Housing Options leaflet has been updated and circulated.
- Data sharing across services (including mental health) has been improved – a joint database has been developed (CHAIN system) and this continues to be refined. A wider data sharing protocol is not yet in place as this requires signed agreement from all in the voluntary sector. Whilst a collective agreement has not yet been achieved, discussions with voluntary sector groups are on-going.
- Work is on-going in partnership with County and Health to develop effective pathways to enable people to turn their lives around and attain settled homes including adequate housing support when needed.
- Work is on-going to develop information and evidence bases for homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy Evidence Base is reviewed on an annual basis and published on the Council’s website.
- A review of existing, and introduction of new, pre-crisis protocols is planned. This includes a review to improve the effectiveness of hospital discharge protocols. A procedure has been drafted however agreement or implementation of any revised protocol requires approval from adult social care and the hospital trusts, and a meeting is to be arranged soon to facilitate this.

9. **Strategic Objective Four:** Deliver excellent homelessness services

- Work is on-going to ensure that homelessness services strive to meet the national Gold Standard. A peer review of Oxford City Council was completed in January 2015. Following the success of the peer review, the next stage is to complete 10 local challenges. Gold Standard Challenge 1 has been submitted for assessment. Submissions for the remaining challenges will be completed in phases with the final challenge being completed by the start of summer 2016.
- A bid for external expertise in developing partnerships in homelessness was successful in June 2013. The MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) one year pilot, to assist joint working between key commissioning partners, has been completed and will be refreshed in Autumn 2015.
- Officers continue to benchmark service delivery and performance with other Local Authorities and are currently working with HouseMark to obtain additional benchmarking data. Benchmarking assists in identifying good practice and value for money services.

Stakeholder Workshop

10. In addition to the above review of the progress against the strategy action plan, the mid-point refresh also included workshop discussions with stakeholders on 8 July 2015. The stakeholder group comprised officers of the Council and representatives from external partner agencies including Registered Providers, Oxfordshire County Council, Supported Housing Agencies and Homelessness Support Service Providers. The workshop was an opportunity to update stakeholders on progress and discuss current and future challenges in relation to delivering homelessness services. The feedback from the workshop is set out in **Appendix 4**.
11. The stakeholder feedback reinforced the need for the City Council to continue delivery and improve current homelessness and housing services. There was a strong message from stakeholders that in light of emerging Government policy changes and potential financial impact of these, that homelessness support and advice services continue to be funded, with joint commissioning of services where possible. Some suggested actions arising from the feedback, will need to be considered as part of the Council's service and budget planning before they can be agreed.
12. There was also a clear message from stakeholders that the Council needs to continue and improve communications with customers, partners and stakeholders in terms of its service delivery plans and funding opportunities. This is already highlighted in Strategic Objective 3: Delivering Partnerships and Communications, as an on-going action.

Other Strategies and Evidence Base

13. It is important to note that Oxford City Council's Housing Strategy 2015-2018 has recently been approved by the Council. The associated action

plan includes actions to assist in responding to and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.

14. The evidence base to support the Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 has also been refreshed in November 2014. This refresh did not highlight any significant trends that would support a change in the direction of homelessness services or the strategic objectives outlined in paragraph 2 above.

Next steps

15. The review demonstrates that the Homelessness Strategy and its associated Action Plan 2013-18 has been successful to date, with many of the milestones achieved and work now implemented as part of everyday service delivery. Work will continue to deliver the outstanding actions and make improvements to service delivery as new pathways are implemented and service users consulted.
16. More detail is required in terms of the impact of emerging Government policy changes. The Spending Review in the autumn of 2015 may also have other financial implications for local authorities. In addition, the Council is currently in the process of undertaking the Gold Standard 10 local challenges and aims to complete these by summer 2016. This will provide an opportunity to identify strengths and any weaknesses in the delivery of homelessness services.
17. Taking all these points into account, there is potential for significant change over the next six months. It is recommended that in the circumstances no changes are made to the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan at this stage. However a review should be undertaken in summer 2016 when more information will be available and the impact of any changes will be better understood. At that point, the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2013-18 can be revised, if required, to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose. Depending on the impact of proposed policy and funding changes, a further review of the Homelessness Strategy may result in a recommendation to bring a new and combined Housing and Homelessness Strategy forward in 2017/18.

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