

**To: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)**

**Date: 1 March 2017**

**Report of: Head of Housing and Property**

**Title of Report: Update on how the Council deals with and supports those rough sleeping**

## Summary

**Purpose of report:** To update the Housing Panel on how the Council deals with people sleeping rough, including those with no recourse to public funds.

**Key Decision:** No

**Executive lead member:** Cllr Mike Rowley

**Report author:** Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness Manager

**Policy Framework:** Homelessness Strategy

## Appendices

*Appendix 1 - Oxford CHAIN Quarterly Bulletin Oct-Dec 2016*

*Appendix 2 - Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funds in 2016/17, (CEB, Mar 2016)*

*Appendix 3 - Pooled budget arrangement for the commissioning of adult homeless supported accommodation in Oxfordshire, (CEB, Sep 2016)*

## Background

The Housing Panel requested a report to update them on how the Council deals with people sleeping rough in the City, including those with no recourse to public funds. The Panel is asked to note the report.

## **Context - rough sleeping in the City**

1. Oxford City has for many years had high numbers of people sleeping rough. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including local people falling out of accommodation due to relationship breakdowns or unaffordable rents, people with high support needs not being able to maintain accommodation, people arriving in Oxford to seek services or work opportunities for example.
2. The number of people rough sleeping in the City is primarily monitored using the Oxford CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) data base, with regular reports produced monthly and quarterly – see Appendix 1 for most recent Oxford CHAIN Quarterly Data Bulletin. More frequent and bespoke reports can also be produced.
3. A total of 433 different people were seen sleeping rough in the City during the period April 2015 and March 2016. 263, or 60%, were seen sleeping rough for the very first time. Quarterly data from 2016/17 however, shows that the majority of people rough sleeping in the City are already known to services from previous periods/instances of rough sleeping.
4. In addition to the data collected and monitored through Oxford CHAIN, Oxford City Council is also obliged to carry out a street count on an annual basis. The most recent street count took place in November 2016 and counted 33. The street count is carried out according to set guidelines stipulated by Homeless Link. All local authorities across the country follow the same guidelines and carry out either a street count or an estimate. The number arrived at following these guidelines is reported to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The DCLG then produces a report on rough sleeping on a national level using data reported by all local authorities across the country. According to this report for 2016, rough sleeping increased nationally by 16% from autumn 2015 to autumn 2016.
5. Since 2014 Oxford City carries out both a street count and an estimate. Only the street count number is reported to the DCLG. The estimate number is used as comparable data for rough sleeping across Oxfordshire, as all other local authorities in the County carry out estimates rather than street counts.
6. A baseline target for rough sleeping across Oxfordshire has been set by the Health and Wellbeing Board to not exceed 68. Estimates in 2016 had 79 people rough sleeping across the County on a typical night (Oxford City, 47; Cherwell, 17; West Oxfordshire, 0; South Oxfordshire, 7; Vale of White Horse, 8).

## **Profile of people sleeping rough in the city**

7. Data from Oxford CHAIN tells us that the majority of rough sleepers in the City are male, white and British. A very large proportion of rough sleepers in the City have a number of different support needs in addition to their housing need. 72% of rough sleepers assessed by the outreach team during the period September to December 2016 for example had ill mental health. 32% had ill mental health as

well as misusing both drugs and alcohol. This is key information to take into consideration as it shows that a very large number of people rough sleeping in the city do need support from a range of specialist agencies – statutory and non-statutory – in order to address their homelessness and sustain accommodation and a life off the streets in the longer term.

8. Data collected on last accommodation base before rough sleeping show that private rented accommodation was the most common accommodation, followed by family home, local authority housing, hostel, prison and with friends. Reasons for leaving last accommodation was eviction, relationship breakdown, leaving prison and abandoning accommodation.
9. Of the 186 different people rough sleeping in Oxford during the period September to December 2016, 37 identified themselves as foreign nationals, with 24 from European Economic Area (EEA) countries. The predominant nationality for foreign nationals was Polish (11). Data for this period is representative of data for previous quarters.
10. From data collected by the outreach service, the majority of EEA nationals the team work with and who are rough sleeping in Oxford at present have lived in the UK for more than 5 years, with many having lived in the UK for more than 10 years.
11. Some foreign nationals, including nationals from EEA countries, do not have recourse to public funds, and this restricts their options to access accommodation and support significantly. This often results in continued and prolonged periods of rough sleeping. Supported accommodation for example, will be unaffordable for a person who is not in receipt of Housing Benefit or who works and does not earn a decent wage. Rents for supported accommodation vary, but can be as much as £280 per week. Private accommodation is also unaffordable in the City and County, unless you are in stable and well paid employment, which rough sleepers are mainly not.

### **Services and assistance available to rough sleepers in the City**

12. Oxford City Council adopts the approach that rough sleeping is harmful and dangerous. It causes damage to a person's health and mental health and people should therefore be encouraged and offered all possible opportunities to move off the street. The outreach service that Oxford City Council commissions (see below para 18) is therefore an assertive outreach model, that will deliver these messages and be persistent in their approach to assist people to end a life on the streets.
13. Oxford City Council deal with rough sleeping in a range of different ways, primarily focusing on commissioning services and organisations that provide support services. Services are commissioned using the Council's Homelessness Prevention Funds, currently at just under £1.4m per year. All funded organisations need to provide a service that fits within the strategic objectives of the Council's Homelessness Strategy.

14. Services commissioned by Oxford City Council are normally referred to as 'wrap around services' and aim to prevent homelessness in the first place, tackle rough sleeping and to assist individuals who are moving off the streets to sustain their accommodation and move on to live independent lives. See Appendix 2 for full information of services funded in 2016/17.
15. Oxfordshire County Council funds supported accommodation for rough sleepers and single homeless through Housing Related Support Funds. At present, this supported accommodation, also referred to as the 'adult homeless pathway', consists of a total of 286 beds spaces (units) across the County. The majority of units – 252 of the 286- are based in the City, including the two homeless hostels O'Hanlon House and Simon House.
16. The adult homeless pathway is available for people who have a connection to one of the local authorities in the County, have support needs and have recourse to public funds. Priority is given to rough sleepers, but provision is also available for those who are at imminent risk of rough sleeping and who full-fill the above criteria. Rough sleepers who do not have a connection to Oxfordshire cannot access accommodation in the adult homeless pathway.
17. One of the key services commissioned by Oxford City Council is the Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (St Mungo's). The team work with rough sleepers on the street, provide a rapid assessment and depending on the individuals' support need/s and eligibility for services, will make an offer of suitable accommodation. Suitable accommodation can be the adult homeless pathway if the person is eligible.
18. If a person does not have a connection to Oxfordshire, an offer of 'reconnection' will be made. This means that the outreach team will work with the person to find suitable accommodation (and support) in the area where the person is from, have family or can otherwise access accommodation. If a person is not from the UK and does not have access to public funds (or for other reasons cannot access accommodation), the outreach team will offer assistance to the person to return to their country of origin if there are no other alternatives available than continued rough sleeping in the UK.
19. An individual who finds themselves rough sleeping should get in touch with the outreach team and make a referral, i.e. advice the team of where they are or will be rough sleeping. Members of the public who are concerned about someone rough sleeping, are encouraged to get in touch with the outreach team, either via the local contact details or the 24 hour staffed national help line and website Street Link, so that the service is made aware and can offer support.
20. The outreach team visits the said sleep site within 48 hours of a referral received to locate the individual and carry out a brief assessment.
21. The team work early morning shifts, as well as late night shifts and covers all ground within Oxford City Council boundaries. All referrals will be acted upon (sites visited) three times, before a referral is closed. This is to ensure that people

are found and assisted, as some people may not be at the said site, or bed down later/move on earlier than originally stated. As well as visiting sites flagged through referrals, the team also visits areas where rough sleeping is common in general.

22. The outreach team work in close partnership with specialist organisations such as Luther Street Medical Centre, accommodation providers, day centres, substance misuse services and employment, training and education organisations in order to ensure that all rough sleepers are offered and can access the relevant support they need in order to ensure a successful and sustainable future away from the streets.
23. Some rough sleepers do not accept or want to engage with the offers of accommodation, reconnection and other assistance offered by the outreach team or other services, and instead establish a street based life style in the City. In the recent past, areas where large number of rough sleepers who have not wanted to either engage with the outreach team or been willing to look at accommodation options, have congregated in tent sites on the outskirts of Oxford, and in certain streets of the City centre. The majority of these rough sleepers did not have a connection to Oxfordshire, and could therefore not access supported accommodation in the City or County. Offers of assistance have therefore been to move out of Oxfordshire.
24. Oxford City Council acknowledges that standard supported accommodation sometimes does not work well for individuals, and have therefore commissioned two small scale alternative projects to provide more and better options for people to be able to move off the streets. Julian Housing delivers Housing First and Acacia (total of 10 units), which focus on providing accommodation and intensive support to the most entrenched rough sleepers and those with multiple and complex needs, who have not been able to sustain any other accommodation options available.
25. Rough sleeping in itself is not banned or illegal in the City of Oxford. However, in instances where rough sleepers or rough sleeping causes anti-social behaviour, harassment, alarm and distress to others, is a risk to the individual or others, or denies others their rightful access to services or property for example, the Council and/or other enforcement agencies can and will take action.
26. For example, powers under the Public Health Act have been used to address the lack of sanitary provision in illegal campsites, where there has been evidence of human excrement. Land owners can take action against illegal camps through trespass action. Community Protection Notices can be used to tackle behaviours that adversely affect the environment and public safety.
27. Oxford City Council will always ensure that support services are informed of any enforcement action necessary to make sure that individuals who may be subject of such action can access this support, with the aim of the person or persons moving off the street and into accommodation.

28. Reasons why some of the 33 people found on the street count were rough sleeping on the particular night are stated below and demonstrates some of the complexities services face when working towards reducing rough sleeping.

- 3 were not previously known to services; 22 already known to services; 8 entrenched/rough sleeping for 6+ months
- 7 were not from Oxfordshire and refusing offers of reconnection to areas where accommodation can be accessed, or where the person is from. An additional 5 were not from Oxfordshire and were either waiting to source other accommodation options in the City or service working to find suitable location to reconnect to.
- 2 had returned to Oxford following a previous reconnection to another area
- 2 had very recently been evicted from the adult homeless pathway
- 11 had accessed accommodation in the adult homeless pathway at some point in the last 4 years.
- 2 were eligible to access, but had declined offers of accommodation in the adult homeless pathway
- 1 had access to accommodation on the night
- 6 had no recourse to public funds
- 5 had continuously refused to engage with services, often due to ill mental health or substance misuse
- 1 waiting for a bed to become available
- 4 were working with services to establish if they were eligible to access the adult homeless pathway (establishing if they had a connection to Oxfordshire; recourse to public funds etc.)

### **Future challenges**

29. Oxfordshire County Council made a decision in February 2016 to cut Housing Related Support, with cuts introduced gradually starting in April 2017 and with no funding available from April 2019. This would see all supported accommodation for rough sleepers in the County disappear from April 2019. However, City and Districts, together with County and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group agreed in autumn 2016, to enter into a pooled budget agreement for three years in order to continue to fund some of the existing provision. See Appendix 3 for full report to CEB in September 2016.

30. Funds available in the pooled budget will be significantly less than the current £1.5m per annum of Housing Related Support Funds and there will be a significant reduction to the number of units available for rough sleepers and single homeless people. This is likely to cause an increase in rough sleeping across the County, and particularly in the City.

31. Oxford City Council can only mitigate the effects of these cuts to some extent, and officers are currently working with partner organisations to secure a total of 150 units of supported accommodation based in the city to be available for people connection to the city. A proportion of these units – 78 – will be funded

from the pooled budget, but any additional units will have to be funded by the City's own funds.

32. In addition to this, officers predict that people accessing the adult homeless pathway in the near future and longer term will continue to be very complex needs. More specialist support from social care, mental/health and substance misuse services will therefore be essential. If this specialist input is not available and people do not receive the support they need, it is likely that a recovery from homelessness in the longer term is not realised.
33. Part of the longer term approach and ambition is to have extensive and comprehensive earlier prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping. Oxfordshire Districts and City (City as lead authority) successfully bid for funds from DCLG in late 2016 to trial innovative and ambitious ways to prevent homelessness and this will in the longer term reduce the number of people ending up homeless and ultimately rough sleeping.

## Summary

34. Oxford City has a high number of rough sleepers. It also has a large concentration of support and accommodation services, compared to the rest of the County.
35. The Council deals with people sleeping rough through commissioning services that focus on providing support and assistance.
36. If offers of assistance by services are consistently refused and where there are issues with crime or anti-social behaviour, enforcement action may be taken to stop such behaviour by a relevant organisation. Support and assistance will be offered to any individuals affected through any necessary enforcement activity.
37. Oxford City and County Districts face a challenging future as Oxfordshire County Council is cutting its funding to supported accommodation for rough sleepers and single homeless people. This is likely to increase rough sleeping in the City and put more pressure on existing services as well as City Council Homelessness Prevention Funds.

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