

To: City Executive Board
Date: 22 January 2019
Report of: Head of Housing Services
Title of Report: Review of Year One of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update the Board on progress of the Trailblazer
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Leisure and Housing
Corporate Priority:	Meeting housing need.
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
Recommendations: That the City Executive Board resolves to:	
1. Note the outcome of the review and the priorities for the year ahead	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Year One Trailblazer review
Appendix 2	Case Studies
Appendix 3	Risk register

Introduction

1. The Oxfordshire Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer is a multi-agency programme aiming to tackle systemic issues in the public sector which can increase the risk of homelessness to individuals throughout the county. The two year programme has been running from September 2017 to August 2019. It received £790,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and a further £100,000 from the Oxfordshire local housing authorities, providing a total of £890,000. Commencement of the programme was reported to CEB on 20 December 2017. The county-wide Trailblazer programme is managed by a small team based at Oxford City Council.

2. The broad objectives of the programme are to explore options for intervening as early as possible to prevent people at risk of homelessness ultimately reaching a crisis point. The review of the programme's first year can be found in full at Appendix One. The first six months was spent researching homelessness in Oxfordshire and planning the programme. This included analysis of homelessness data, a qualitative stakeholder consultation exercise and piloting system interventions.

Trailblazer Delivery

3. Key findings from the above data analysis informed the design of the Trailblazer services to be provided. This included the finding that the presence of a housing issue could lead to a significant delay in discharge from hospital once a patient is medically fit. Additionally, within the Oxfordshire prison system, 88% of people entering prison with no fixed address ends up leaving prison with the same status.
4. The stakeholder consultation included workshops involving front-line housing staff, people with lived experience of homelessness and a range of professionals from health, criminal justice and children's social care. People with lived experience expressed a sense of hopelessness about their situation and difficulties in accessing services, but reflected positive experiences of being supported by other people with lived experience. Professionals within the systems felt there was a significant need to improve connections and relationships across statutory and non-statutory services. Awareness of the housing options available to individuals and the local housing authorities' role in this process was low. As a result, early indicators of homelessness were not being acted upon.
5. Following the research three strands of work were developed. These were the embedding of specialist workers within the health, criminal justice and children's social services settings, a community navigator service to connect people at risk of homelessness to the services they needed, and a homelessness champions network to raise the profile of housing in stakeholder organisations.
6. Before commissioning Trailblazer services, some proof of concept activity was undertaken. The research that had been undertaken suggested that there may be some benefit from embedding housing experts in other statutory systems. One of the Trailblazer team piloted this approach in the John Radcliffe hospital, basing themselves with the discharge and social work teams. This trial proved successful by helping to speed the discharge of a number of patients. The Trailblazer team then developed an embedded housing worker(EHW) model with Connection Support, to provide two embedded housing workers in the health, criminal justice and children's social services setting. The embedded workers have been trying to identify people at risk of homelessness in each setting in order to carry out prevention work.

7. From April 2018 to September 2018 the embedded workers dealt with 338 referrals from the three systems they are working in. This breaks down as follows:
 - Health – 145
 - Criminal Justice – 126
 - Children’s Social services – 67

8. There have been fewer cases dealt with in children’s social services, as the second embedded worker only commenced working towards the end of August 2018. The outcomes for the embedded workers model are still emerging but in the first two quarters the team have reported 234 closed cases. 107 (46%) of these cases have resulted in a known prevention of homelessness, 24 (10%) have resulted in an unsuccessful prevention and the remaining 103 (44%) have been categorised as an unknown outcome. The nature of the EHW model (short, sharp interactions) means there will always be instances when the team is unsure of the impact of the intervention or advice provided. However in the second year of the programme we will be working to maximise the number of known outcomes from the work of Trailblazer.

9. The programme wanted to build resilience throughout the county and enable households and individuals to cope better with life and prevent housing-related crises. This built on the feedback from people with lived experience who had reflected a sense of hopelessness about their situation, and had struggled to access the services they required. A Community Navigator service was commissioned to act as a navigator of services to people at risk of homelessness. Aspire Oxford are delivering this part of the programme providing support, brokerage and advocacy to their clients, to empower them to engage with statutory services.

10. Within the first 2 quarters of the programme the Community Navigator team have reached out to both statutory and non-statutory services across Oxfordshire in order to receive referrals at the earliest possible opportunity. The team have also co-located the service in housing associations, GP surgeries and support agencies (e.g. drug and alcohol advice and job centre plus) to create a visible frontline for homelessness prevention.

11. In the first two quarters the community navigators have received 153 referrals. There have been 23 self-referrals and the rest have originated from the local housing authorities and 21 separate agencies. The breakdown of cases in terms of the perceived threat to homelessness is as follows:
 - Client may become homeless in more than 56 days: 92 cases (60%)
 - Client may become homeless within 56 days: 57 cases (37%)
 - Already homeless: 4 cases (3%)

12. To date 53 cases have been closed. Of these closed cases 35 have resulted in a successful prevention of homelessness. Of these, 30 households were able to stay in their existing home and 5 were able secure new accommodation. Four cases have resulted in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent homelessness and the remaining 14 cases are circumstances where the individual lost contact with the service or was unwilling to co-operate.

13. The third element of the Trailblazer is the homelessness champions network. The aim of this strand of the programme is to create a network of housing expertise across other statutory services. The network is facilitated by the Trailblazer programme team who have delivered training and network events on a bi-monthly basis. The network has been used to help design a single countywide process for the new “duty to refer” obligation brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017). This duty obliges a range of statutory agencies to refer people who appear at risk of homelessness to a local housing authority. All agencies with this obligation are represented in the champions network.
14. The Trailblazer programme has learning at its heart. It is breaking new ground in the connections it is enhancing between sector-wide partners in order to reduce the risk of local homelessness. The programme’s learning is externally facilitated by an organisation called Ratio. Practitioners within the services are brought together on a monthly basis to talk about their work, both what has worked, and what hasn’t. The focus is on the practice of the embedded housing workers and community navigators, and the system barriers that they encounter.
15. Now the services are firmly established, the second and final year of the programme will focus on developing the learning that has been achieved so far. This in order to leave a lasting legacy for the programme, through changing systems in order to continue the progress made in reducing the risk of homelessness, or in exploring options for new services based on the experience of the Trailblazer programme.

Financial implications

16. The funding outlined in paragraph one has all been received. Expenditure is reported on a quarterly basis to the Trailblazer steering group. There is currently a saving of £12,670 as well as projected ongoing quarterly savings of nearly £6,000 per quarter for project costs. This item acts as a contingency and gives the programme flexibility to utilise additional resources, which given its iterative nature is a likely requirement.

Legal issues

17. The Trailblazer programme operates with regard to the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017). The programme aims to engage with individuals prior to the timescale which triggers the Act’s duties. The Act requires local housing authorities to work to prevent homelessness if an individual appears to be at risk of homelessness within 56 days. When the programme engages with individuals who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under this act, the relevant authority is contacted and made aware of the individual’s circumstances.

Level of risk

18. A risk register is attached at Appendix 3.

Equalities impact

19. The Trailblazer programme only works with residents at risk of homelessness and so an impact assessment is not required.

Report author	Paul Wilding
Job title	Systems Change Manager (Homelessness Prevention)
Service area or department	Housing Services
Telephone	01865 252461
e-mail	pwilding@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

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