

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2003-08 - Progress Report

Report of:	Acting Business Manager, Housing Services	WARDS AFFECTED ALL
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Lead Member Responsible:	Councillor Ed Turner Housing and Economic Development Portfolio Holder	
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Housing	
Key Decision	No	
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
<p>The Oxford Homelessness Strategy was published in July 2003. A Delivery Plan was approved that identified the actions that statutory and other agencies in Oxford should undertake from 2003 to 2008. The Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed and a new strategy published by July 2008.</p>		
<p>Executive Board requested a report back annually on progress of implementation of the Delivery Plan since publication in July 2003.</p>		
<p>This report provides members with an update on progress relating to each action in the Delivery Plan since publication in 2003. It also highlights some of the successes and failures since the previous update to EB on 30 November 2004 and provides a comparison between the current performance and the targets approved in the Homelessness Strategy.</p>		
<p>Executive Board should note that overall there has been a great deal of progress and success in implementing the Homeless Strategy. Against a national trend of increasing homelessness numbers, the new Options Service has again reduced homelessness acceptances and further reduced the cost of homelessness to the Council in 2004/05.</p>		

There are no staffing implications for the Council.

The financial implications are as set out in this report.

The proposal will help deliver the Council's vision in terms of the provision of affordable housing and in enhancing community safety, by providing advice on housing/homelessness issues to the community, and will contribute to the financial stability of the Council by helping to prevent homelessness.

The proposal also accords with the broad themes of the Council's Community Strategy.

Recommendation:

Executive Board is asked to note the progress made by the Council and other agencies implementing the Homelessness Strategy since July 2003.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Oxford Homelessness Task Force, a multi agency group that included both members and officers from the County Council, the Oxford City PCT, the City Council, Thames Valley Police, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and representatives from Oxfordshire District Councils, RSLs and the Voluntary Sector, published the Oxford Homelessness Strategy in July 2003. The strategy was approved by the City Council on 14 July 2003 and has been adopted by the bodies that made up the task force.
- 1.2 Following publication of the strategy many organisations have been implementing the actions contained in the Delivery Plan. The multi agency Strategic Housing in Oxford Partnership monitors and reviews progress regularly and have endorsed this report that will be considered subsequently by partner organisations. The first update report was provided to members on 30 November 2004.
- 1.3 At Annex A Members will find an updated version of the delivery plan showing what progress has been made so far.

2 Homelessness Strategy Progress – Key Successes and Failures

2.1 Lessons Learned

- 2.1.1 Mediation process for people excluded from the family home did not work. The integrity of the mediation process precluded any specific outcomes being laid down by Housing Options, therefore mediation had little or no effect in keeping people in their home or reducing numbers presenting as homeless. However, a new service has been commissioned from April 2005. This

service will be monitored and an update will form part of the next report to Members.

- 2.1.2 There has been no progress on developing out of area referrals to other LA's for permanent housing. The timescale for achieving this has been postponed until June 2006. There are opportunities to learn from other LA's, particularly London Borough's who successfully nominate many households to move to permanent housing with housing authorities in the North of the Country, where there is 'low' demand for social housing.
- 2.1.3 The number of completed units of 'social housing' has increased again in 2004/05. There is an ongoing effort by the Council using the Regional Planning process to achieve a change in the green belt boundaries that is a pre-requisite to achieving the large-scale housing developments required. It is hoped that the redevelopment proposals for the West End of Oxford will also provide the opportunity for large-scale social housing provision. However, these are longer-term developments and without more social rented housing being provided over the next few years a significant number of households will remain in temporary accommodation in Oxford longer than they would if resident in other areas of the country.
- 2.1.4 One of the Government's key performance measures for homelessness relates to the standard of accommodation for homeless households. The Council has and continues to make improvements, but the overall standard of accommodation in the private rented sector needs to be monitored and improved. The ongoing use of the private rented sector to prevent homelessness and to provide an opportunity for the Council to discharge its homeless duty is vital to maintaining the reduction in costs and homeless figures over the next few years. The lack of resources in the Environmental Health Business Unit to deal with enforcement action in the private rented sector will be addressed by the increased staff budget. However, the recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff is proving difficult.
- 2.1.5 The ODPM has set additional targets for authorities that receive in excess of £50,000 annually from the Homelessness Directorate to "reduce the inappropriate use of temporary accommodation". This includes not placing homeless households away from existing support networks like family, friends, school, GP, etc. Other District Councils in Oxfordshire are also required to meet this target because of the level of funding they receive. Other Oxfordshire DC's currently places approximately 40 households in Oxford. It is considered that placements made by other Oxfordshire DC's in Oxford City are inappropriate and do not meet this target. Efforts made over the last year to reduce the use of temporary accommodation in Oxford by other district councils have had little or no impact.
- 2.1.6 A variety of agencies, such as NASS, Probation, and Oxfordshire County Council use 'temporary' accommodation in Oxford. The ongoing use of temporary accommodation in Oxford has a significant impact on the City's Social Services department, the Police and Housing Services. Again, efforts made over the last year to reduce the use of temporary accommodation in

Oxford have had little or no impact. Discussions with representatives of agencies are continuing to address this issue.

2.2 Successes

- 2.2.1 The introduction of a new Housing Advice Service provided by Turpin, Miller and Higgins Solicitors from April 2005. This service is supported by other Oxfordshire District Councils (currently excluding Cherwell DC).
- 2.2.2 The Home Choice Scheme continues to provide good value for money by helping significant numbers of families to be housed in the private rented.
- 2.2.3 Mediation in Action now provide assessments to young people excluded by family or friends
- 2.2.4 The City PCT has increased the provision of a Health Visitor post to 3 days per week to work closely with Housing Options to help households in temporary accommodation access health services.
- 2.2.5 The Government target for no families in B&B, except in an emergency continues to be met. Our current working practices ensure that families who are likely to be accepted as homeless are moved quickly (usually within a few days) to Private Sector Lease (PSL) accommodation.
- 2.2.6 There have been ongoing improvements in the Housing Benefit service over the last year. The average time taken to process new housing benefit claim is now 33 days, already below the target that must be achieved by 2008.
- 2.2.7 The Council has provided an additional £50,000 for Discretionary Housing Payments from April 2005, targeted largely, but not exclusively, at those suffering hardship in temporary accommodation and to help support households accessing the Home Choice Scheme.

3 Targets and Performance Measures

- 3.1 The Homelessness Strategy identified a number of key performance measures

- 3.1.1 **A 40% reduction in the number of homelessness acceptances by 2008.**

A reduction from 438 in 2002/03 to 382 acceptances in 2003/04 was achieved. Acceptances in 2004/05 were 363. **An overall reduction of 17%.**

- 3.1.2 **Increase the current number of homes available to meet housing need from 2004.**

A steady increase in new housing provision has been achieved since 2002/03. In 2002/03 around 100 units were completed and in 2003/04 there were 141 completions. **161 completions were achieved in 2004/05.**

3.1.3 Reduce the cost of homelessness over the life of the strategy from 2004.

In addition to the significant savings achieved in 2003/04, further changes in the use and provision of temporary accommodation resulted in the actual cost of B&B reducing to £228,517 in the year compared with an original budget of £1,089,246. The original budget for temporary accommodation managed by OSLA was £1,599,500 and the outturn was £857,336. The cost of temporary accommodation leased from private landlords was £2,226,242 compared with an original budget of £1,802,385. The actual cost of the Home Choice Scheme was £178,710 compared with a budget of £150,000. Overall the cost of temporary accommodation was £3.490m compared with an original budget of £4.641m

3.1.4 An end to the use of B&B for families except in an emergency for longer than 6 weeks.

This has been achieved and will continue to be met.

3.1.5 Levels of rough sleeping that are two-thirds below the levels recorded in 1998 or lower.

Rough sleeper levels have been maintained below the target set by Government again in 2004/05.

3.1.6 Reduce levels of repeat homelessness.

New BVPI introduced and data now being collected.

3.1.7 Reduce levels of homelessness against main causes

3.1.7.1 Family and friend exclusions

In 2003/04 43% of accepted households gave the reason for their homelessness as being excluded by family or friend. ***In 2004/05 this figure has reduced to 39%.*** This has been achieved by visiting the home of each excluded person to ensure the presentation as homeless is genuine, referring to more appropriate housing/support provider such as The Bridge Project and improving our liaison with colleagues in Social and Health Care.

3.1.7.2 Loss of private rented tenancies

In 2003/04 24% of accepted households gave the reason for their homelessness as loss of private rented accommodation. ***In 2004/05 this figure has reduced to 18%.***

3.1.7.3 Relationship breakdowns

In 2003/04 12% of accepted households gave the reason for their homelessness as relationship breakdown. ***In 2004/05 this figure has***

remained at 12%.

3.1.8 Reduce inappropriate use of temporary accommodation.

The reprocurement of PSL properties went a long way to improving the quality of the temporary accommodation used by the Council – a shift from shared facility to self contained accommodation. The ongoing reduction in the use of B&B to a level of around 3 units at 31 March 2004 has also helped. New working practices try to ensure that wherever possible households are accommodated near support networks, existing schools and health services.

3.1.9 Significantly improve services for homeless people.

A greater degree of choice both in support and accommodation by many agencies, particularly the City Council is significantly improving services for homeless households. The new O'Hanlon House and the City Council owned refurbished hostels have improved the quality of accommodation and services available. The new Housing Options service has also provided more opportunities and choices for people in housing need. Recent research has provided suggestions for further improvements to homeless households, particularly those from the BME community.

3.1.10 Provide a strategic framework for services to homeless people by March 2004.

The Strategic Housing in Oxford Partnership (SHOP) has created a number of multi agency sub-groups to oversee areas of housing and homelessness. There are two sub groups for homelessness - the Single Homeless Group and the Family Homelessness Group.

3.1.11 To reduce the average time taken to process new housing benefit claim by 20% by March 2004.

Achieved. Further improvements in 2004/05 -new claims now processed within 33.5 days compared with 55 days in 2003//04.

3.1.12 To reduce the average time taken to process new housing benefit claim to 35 days by 2008.

Already met by the Council's Housing Benefit service.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 An ambitious programme of actions was adopted in the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan published in 2003. There were also some tough but achievable targets set over the lifetime of the strategy. Generally the efforts of many agencies, particularly the City Council has achieved a great deal since the Homelessness Strategy was published. The Council has reduced the numbers of households accepted as homeless; reduced the cost of homelessness generally, improved its services to homeless people and

developed good working relationships with many agencies working with homeless people.

- 4.2 Having introduced successful measures for dealing with the loss of private sector tenancies the focus has shifted to the introduction of homelessness prevention measures that have an impact on family and friend exclusions – the main cause of homelessness in Oxford. The revised working protocol with social services, home visiting each exclusion case, the reintroduction of a ‘mediation’ service and the development of a ‘supported lodgings’ scheme, in partnership with Social and Health Care will have an impact over the next year.
- 4.3 The proposed outstanding actions in the Delivery Plan will be developed and implemented where possible. However, Executive Board should note that the current Review of Homelessness in all areas of Oxfordshire by Supporting People is expected to achieve a 15% budget saving over the next 3 years and may have serious implications for services for single households in Oxford.

<p>THIS REPORT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY: Councillor Ed Turner - Portfolioholder David Higgins – Finance and Asset Management Business Unit Sue Brown/Jeremy King– Legal and Democratic Services Business Unit</p>

Background Papers:
Oxford Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008