

To: Executive Board – 12 December 2005

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

### Environment Scrutiny Committee – 17 October 2005

#### **40. RIVER BANK MAINTENANCE**

Resolved to endorse the recommendations of the review group that and RECOMMEND the Executive Board that :

1. The Council works with other interested parties to develop an external funding bid to pay for the repairs to the Thames towpath and riverbank in Oxford;
2. The Council commits officer time to work with partners on this project.

*A report of the Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Riverbank Maintenance Scrutiny Review Group, is attached at Appendix 1.*

### Housing Scrutiny Committee – 31 October 2005

#### **77. USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION (TA) IN OXFORD**

The Acting Housing Services Business Manager had submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which detailed the use of temporary accommodation in Oxford.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To request the Acting Housing Services Business Manager to prepare a briefing note following his meeting at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to discuss the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation for submission to the Housing Scrutiny Committee;
- (b) To RECOMMEND the to Executive Board:
  - (i) To promote a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation in Oxford by agencies;
  - (ii) To encourage all agencies to only use regularly inspected Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO);
  - (iii) To encourage joint working between local authorities and agencies to achieve a balance use of TA accommodation across the region to reduce the impact on the community of Oxford and existing service providers;

- (iv) To promote a Forum for agencies to share information about households in TA in Oxford;
- (v) To encourage other agencies, particularly Health, the County Council and the other District Councils in Oxfordshire to acknowledge the increased burden placed on services in Oxford and the cost of this.

*The report is attached at Appendix 2.*

Oxford Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee – 31 October 2005

**45. AVIAN FLU PANDEMIC**

RESOLVED:

- (1) To thank the Public Health Team for their attendance and helpful presentation;
- (2) To note the contingency plans;
- (3) To ask The Vale of the White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council to provide a written report to the City Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee concerning their planning for a possible Flu Pandemic;
- (4) To ASK the Executive Board of Oxford City Council to examine the issue of Business Continuity for the City Council, following the model established by Oxfordshire County Council; and to alert the appropriate Portfolio Holder to the same;
- (5) To ask The Vale of the White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council to raise this issue with their respective Executive Boards or Cabinets (as appropriate);
- (6) To note that, in summary:
  - (i) Anyone in the vulnerable age or health group was advised to have a Winter Flu inoculation as normal;
  - (ii) There was only a slender chance of an Avian Flu outbreak;
  - (iii) It was safe to eat poultry dishes; and
  - (iv) Pandemic Flu had **not** started anywhere in the world.

*A report responding to recommendation (4) was not available at the time the agenda was printed and will be circulated as a separate document.*

Report to: Executive Board – 12<sup>th</sup> December 2005

<p><b><i>Report of: Riverbank Maintenance Scrutiny Review Group</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Report Author: Andrew Davies, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Riverbank Maintenance Scrutiny Review Group</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Lead Member Responsible: Councillor John Tanner</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility: Environment</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Key Decision: No</i></b></p>	<p><b>WARDS AFFECTED</b></p> <p>Hinksey Park, Carfax, Jericho and Osney, Wolvercote</p>
<p><b>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p> <p>This report gives members of the Executive Board an overview of the Riverbank Maintenance Scrutiny Review carried out by the Environment Scrutiny Committee. The Executive Board is asked to endorse the Environment Scrutiny Committee's recommendations that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council works with other interested parties to develop an external funding bid to pay for the repairs to the Thames towpath and riverbank in Oxford.</li> <li>• The Council commits officer time to work with partners on this project.</li> </ul>	

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Environment Scrutiny Committee established a review group to look into the issue of towpath and riverbank repairs along the river Thames from Iffley Lock in the South to Godstow Lock in the North of Oxford. There were two councillors on the review group, Councillor Susan Roaf and Councillor Susanna Pressel. Andrew Davies, Scrutiny Officer, supported the review group during their work.

1.2 The review group worked to the following terms of reference:

1. The Riverbank Maintenance Scrutiny Review should focus on the River Thames, from the A4074 Southern by-pass bridge in the south of the city, to Godstow Lock in the north.
2. The Review Group will attempt to establish who is responsible for the various stretches of the Thames riverbank from the A4074 Southern by-pass bridge to Godstow Lock.
3. The Review Group will interview a range of witnesses with interests in the management of the River Thames, such as City Council officers, County Council officers, representatives of the Oxford Waterways Partnership, the Environment Agency, the Countryside Agency and other interested parties still to be identified. The purpose of these interviews is to:
  - Establish what work has been done to improve the riverbank of the Thames in recent years
  - Establish whether any work is planned in coming years and whether there are budgets in place for this work
  - What the aspirations are for this stretch of the River Thames
  - Identify whether there are any external funding opportunities that can be used to improve the riverbank of the Thames
  - Highlight areas that need urgent attention
4. The Review Group will examine the remit of the Oxford Waterways Partnership to see how it plans to maintain, develop and protect waterways in Oxford.
5. The Group will conduct site visits as necessary to examine parts of the riverbank.
6. Examples of best practice in riverbank maintenance and partnership working will be used to inform the review.
7. The Review will not overlap with the work of the Oxford Waterways Partnership or the County Council review of Inland Waterways, but will attempt to complement this work.
8. The Review Group will develop a series of recommendations that will aim to enhance and protect the riverbank of the Thames in Oxford.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Central, South and West Area Committee had initially taken an interest in the issue of towpath and riverbank repairs between Iffley Lock and Godstow Lock. A survey of the area was carried out 2 years ago and presented to the Area Committee. The main points raised were:

- The riverbank and towpath is severely eroded in sections
- The total replacement value of the towpath is approximately £2.5 million
- It would cost £1.5 million to replace the damaged sections of the towpath
- The County Council is undertaking riverbank work between Riverside Court and Iffley Lock at a cost of £250,000, over a 7-year period. There is only funding for this up to 2005/06 (year 2 of the scheme). It is hoped a funding partnership can be established to pay for this work.

2.2 There are a couple of factors for the Executive Board to be aware of: firstly, as the survey is 2 years old the estimated costs have increased; secondly, efforts to establish a funding partnership to pay for the repairs, involving statutory agencies and riparian owners had not been successful.

### 3.0 Riparian Owners

- 3.1 The review was initially focussed on establishing the landowners on the towpath side of the river between Iffley Lock and Folly Bridge. This was done with the assistance of the Built Environment Business Unit, who provided records of ownership.
- 3.2 Land ownership on this stretch of the Thames is a complicated issue. Council records indicated that Magdalen College owned land between Iffley Lock and Folly Bridge. It has subsequently emerged that Brasenose College own the land originally attributed to Magdalen.
- 3.3 One thing that is clear is that Oxford City Council owns much of the land between Iffley Lock and Folly Bridge. There are also significant stretches owned by University College, as well as Brasenose College. Other landowners include Hertford College, Pembroke College, Oxford Brookes University and Greene King Brewery. There is a small section of land where the ownership is unknown.
- 3.4 According to the Environment Agency leaflet "Living on the Edge", riparian owners have a responsibility to "maintain the bed and banks of the watercourse" [to which their land is adjacent]. However, the City Council is responsible for maintaining the Thames towpath in Oxford under the Section 42 agreement with Oxfordshire County Council, as the towpath is included in this agreement. Although there is money in the City Council's capital programme to carry out towpath repairs, this work cannot take place at present because of the unstable condition of the riverbanks.
- 3.5 Given the costs involved in repairing the damaged towpath and riverbank, the review group was keen to focus efforts on meeting with stakeholders to see if agreement could be reached on the most

appropriate way to tackle the problem. The Oxford University Colleges with an interest in the towpath (as landowners), as well as City and County Council officers were invited to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2005 to discuss maintenance and repair of the towpath and riverbank in more detail. The main outcomes from the meeting were:

- That there wasn't an obvious lead authority for the maintenance and repair of the Thames riverbank and towpath:
  - The Environment Agency is responsible for the river corridor Oxfordshire
  - County Council is responsible for towpath maintenance (delegated to City Council under Section 42 agreement)
  - The Countryside Agency is responsible for the Thames River Trail
- There was further clarification on the landowners in the area (Brasenose College leased land to Queen's College - the Queen's College Sports Ground. It was originally thought that Queen's owned the land)
- That a meeting was held in September 2005, bringing together a wider group of interested parties to discuss responsibilities and funding opportunities to repair and maintain the Thames towpath and riverbank.

#### 4.0 The Current Situation

4.1 Following the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> July, a further meeting was held at the beginning of September 2005 with a number of organisations to discuss the Thames towpath and riverbank. The attendance at the meeting was wide ranging and included representatives from:

- Oxfordshire County Council
- Sustrans
- Falcon Rowing Club
- National Trails
- Environment Agency
- Brasenose College
- Hertford College
- University College
- City of Oxford Rowing Club
- Oxford University Sport

4.2 The tone of the meeting was positive and there was consensus that the towpath and riverbank needs to be repaired and that a radical solution was needed in order to do this properly. It was accepted that the

City and County Council would not be able to do this with current budgets.

- 4.3 The group agreed that the most likely way to achieve the funding needed to carry out the repairs needed to the towpath and riverbank would be via external funding. The possibility of a Heritage Lottery Bid was discussed, although it was accepted that the organisations around the table (including the City Council) would need to commit to contributing to the preparation of any such bid if it were to be successful.
- 4.4 At the meeting in September, Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, agreed to take the lead on a project to put together an external funding bid to enhance the Thames towpath in Oxford. A further meeting was held in November, which was attended by Julia Hanson-Abbott (City Partnerships Officer) and Andrew Davies (Scrutiny Officer) to work up plans to do this. An initial submission has been made to the Heritage Lottery fund to determine whether such a proposal would be eligible for funding. The results of the initial submission isn't known yet.
- 4.5 The riverbank maintenance review group has managed to bring together a wide group of organisations that have an interest in the Thames towpath and riverbank. This group is keen to work to bring in funding to ensure that the Thames towpath is enhanced so that it can be enjoyed in the future.
- 4.6 The review group has asked that the organisations represented at 1<sup>st</sup> September meeting consider committing to working on an external funding bid. At the same time, the City Council also needs to do the same, via the Executive Board. The Environment Scrutiny Committee believes that the towpath is a significant asset for Oxford and that it is worth investigating the feasibility of obtaining external funding for its enhancement and repair.

## 5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 The Environment Scrutiny Committee recommends the Executive Board to endorse the following recommendations:
  - The City Council should work with other interested parties to develop an external funding bid to pay for the repairs to the Thames towpath and riverbank in Oxford.
  - The City Council should commit officer time to work with partners on this project.

This report has been seen and approved by :  
Kate Chirside – Legal Services

Strategic Housing in Oxford Partnership  
Oxfordshire Members Group on Affordable Housing  
Housing Scrutiny Committee

**USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IN OXFORD**

		<b>WARDS AFFECTED</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<i>Acting Business Manager, Housing Services</i>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<i>Dennis Boobier Housing Needs Manager Telephone No: 01865 252660 e-mail: dboobier@oxford.gov.uk</i>	
<b>Lead Member Responsible:</b>	<i>Councillor Ed Turner Housing and Economic Development Portfolio Holder</i>	
<i>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</i>	<i>Housing</i>	
<i>Key Decision</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
<b>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
<p><b>Oxford has traditionally been a regional centre for services for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as Asylum Seekers, Homeless Households and people with Mental Health problems. This is primarily because of the availability of private rented accommodation in Oxford – currently 24% of the total housing stock.</b></p>		
<p><b>Many agencies such as the County Council, other Oxfordshire District Councils, Probation Services, Mental Health Care Trust, use accommodation in Oxford. In addition many providers of hostel or supported housing accommodation are located in Oxford and they provide housing related support meeting a need that is much wider than that of Oxford City.</b></p>		
<p><b>A large proportion of households placed in Oxford are not closely supervised, have no regular contact with the agency that place households in Oxford and/or rely on services in Oxford for help, support, advice and guidance.</b></p>		
<p><b>It is now recognised generally that having such a large proportion of vulnerable and disadvantaged households placed in accommodation in</b></p>		



**Oxford is impacting on the Council's ability to develop sustainable communities. It is also increasingly difficult for public services in Oxford to manage resources and meet demand when they are generally unaware of the placement and the support needs of households placed by agencies outside Oxford City.**

**All agencies placing households in Oxford must begin to develop alternative accommodation provision in other areas of Oxfordshire to ensure the burden on services in Oxford is reduced and to provide improved services that meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged households.**

**There also needs to be greater awareness among various agencies working in Oxford of the numbers and support needs of households placed in the City. The onus should be on those placing households in Oxford to 'manage' the placement and the support needs of these vulnerable households.**

**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:**

- 1. To consider the report.**
- 2. To promote a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation in Oxford by agencies.**
- 3. To encourage all agencies to only use licensed HMOs.**
- 4. To encourage joint working between local authorities and agencies to achieve a balanced use of TA across the County to reduce the impact on the community of Oxford and existing service providers.**
- 5. To promote a forum for agencies to share information about households in TA in Oxford.**

## Background

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.

The ODPM has encouraged practical initiatives by local authorities to address three positive outcomes on homelessness

- To reduce levels of repeat homelessness.
- To reduce levels of homelessness against main causes; and
- To reduce inappropriate use of temporary accommodation.

The outcomes which local authorities are working towards to reduce the inappropriate use of temporary accommodation are:

- Reducing the amount of time spent in TA.
- Reducing the number of moves a household has to make.
- Involving the applicant in planning their housing; and
- Increased use of in-borough temporary accommodation.

The specific initiatives local authorities are encouraged to adopt include:

- Arrangement to ensure that all households in TA have access to a GP.
- Arrangements to ensure that babies and young children have their regular health development checks.
- Ensuring that children have access to – and can travel to- schools, after school activities, Sure Start schemes, play groups, etc; and
- Providing access to training and employment advice.

The ODPM published an Advice Note for LA's, PCT's and other Partners on "Achieving Positive Shared Outcomes in Health and Homelessness" in April 2004. A number of suggested actions were included in the Advice Note, including:

- Putting in place a notification system for tracking homeless families in temporary accommodation and ensuring effective health checks, and referral between housing, social services and health services. In Oxford there is a multi agency Family Homelessness Group supported by an operational group of professionals from various organisations working closely with vulnerable homeless families.

- Undertaking a health needs assessment for homeless families in temporary accommodation; and
- Having a named social worker/health visitor with a dedicated homelessness prevention budget.

The ODPM's published Policy Briefing 8 in June 2004 and included guidance on "Improving Standards in Temporary Accommodation". ODPM have indicated that the Homelessness Code of Guidance will be revised to:

- Set out clearly the minimum standards that should apply to all forms of temporary accommodation.
- Set out additional standards for B&B hostels used as temporary accommodation.
- Provide guidance on arrangements to ensure that homeless households placed in temporary accommodation receive support to ensure that their health, education and welfare needs are met.

1.7 ODPM have recently issued guidance to local authorities on the increasing practice of imposing 'local connection' rules that effectively limits the opportunity for those from 'outside' a geographical area to access services. The guidance recommends this practice should cease. This practice does not happen in Oxford/Oxfordshire.

### The Facts

Below is a list of units of known agencies/housing providers/supported housing projects and other accommodation used in Oxford to temporarily accommodate vulnerable households, including those households who are statutorily homeless. Households occupy the accommodation in the short term e.g. 1 x night in O'Hanlon House (Oxford Nightshelter). Other 'tenancies' may last from 3 - 12 months e.g. probation hostels; and other accommodation is used long-term e.g. MIND Supported Housing Projects for a number of years.

- 2 x Probation Hostels - 36
- Various units of accommodation used by Oxfordshire County Council Social Services - 20
- Various units of accommodation used by Oxfordshire County Council Asylum Seeker/Refugee Team - 150
- Various units of accommodation used by other OXON DC's – 40
- Cherwell Housing Trust - Gateway YP project - 16
- Stonham - Cowley Road - 6
- Dolphin Project - Stonham - 10
- Roken House - Stonham - 13
- Ley Community - 40
- Nightshelter - 56

- Julian Housing - 60
- OCHA - Iffley Road - 5
- OCHA Refugee Project - 9
- Oxford City Council (OCC) - Nightly Charge Accommodation - up to 5 units
- OCC - Hostels - 60 units
- OCC - PSL properties - 250 units
- OCC - OSLA - 680 units
- OCC – Cherwell Housing - 59 units
- Oxfordshire Group Homes - 183
- Rectory Road Project - Stonham - 23
- Cherwell Housing Trust - Simon House - 51
- Cherwell Housing Trust - London Place – 5
- Cherwell Housing Trust – Mother and baby unit - 10
- ECHG - Lucy Faithful House - 61
- ECHG – various addresses - 31
- Stonham Housing Association - Lake St - 13
- East Oxford Houses - MIND - 18
- Micklewood House –MIND - 6
- Frideswide Project - MIND - 13
- New Internationalist Flat - MIND - 1
- Other MIND properties - 10
- Christina Life Service - 4
- Oxford Life House - 5
- OCHA Support Service - 57
- Magellan House - Stonham - 7
- Advance Housing - 4 x shared ownership + Supported Housing units
- Windmill House - Stonham - 21
- The Bridge Project - 23
- Oxfordshire Women’s Aid – 12

The list above is not exhaustive and only represents the temporary accommodation that is known to agencies in Oxford. It also does not take into account the various day centres e.g. The Gatehouse, The Gap, The Porch in Oxford. In addition NASS supports around 70 households living with friends, relatives and other households in accommodation use in Oxford.

This list totals over 2,000 units of temporary accommodation, including over 1,000 units used by the Council.

In addition there are a large number (unknown) of vulnerable households living in the private rented sector supported by various statutory agencies and ‘floating support’ services, e.g. NASS

### Oxford City

Over the last 2 years Oxford City Council has implemented a strategy to procure a supply of temporary accommodation with the aim of reducing costs and improving quality of accommodation. With the government agenda

of reducing the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation the Council has moved away from the use of B&B and other nightly charge shared facility accommodation. In 2002/03 an average of 60 units of B&B was used nightly to accommodate homeless households. By 31 March 2005 only 3 units of B&B were in use and it is anticipated that by September 2005 the use of B&B will be eliminated altogether other than in exceptional circumstances.

The Council's overall use of temporary accommodation is also reducing. The Council's projected use of temporary accommodation over the next few years is set out below.

YEAR Total	B&B	Hostel	PSL	OSLA	Other
2002/03(Mar 03) 1350	60	49	300	800	141
2003/04 1320	30	49	300	800	141
2004/05 1180	10	49	260	720	141
2005/06 1062	0	12	240	680	130
2006/07 962	0	12	220	630	100
2007/08 (Mar 08) 862	0	12	200	550	100

In January 2005 the Government set LA's a target of reducing the use of TA by 50% by 2010. Taking the 04/05 total, it means that the City Council must reduce its use of TA to 580 units of accommodation by that date.

The Council is able to reduce the use of its own hostel accommodation this year and is progressing the disposal of 10 properties; a large number of these are in the East Oxford area. The remaining refurbished hostels will be used to meet the need for emergency accommodation (eliminate use of B&B) as well as the need for other short-term accommodation.

The ongoing shift from shared facility accommodation to self-contained units has and will continue to take place with the support of private sector landlords who lease their accommodation to the Council. At the same time the Council has relinquished leased accommodation that no longer meet the identified housing need of homeless households. At the same time the Council has been successful negotiating with landlords to change the accommodation from shared facility to self-contained.

The effective management of homelessness over the last 2 years has had an impact on numbers in temporary accommodation. The indications are that less accommodation for homeless families will be required in the next few years, but that accommodation for single households will remain at a similar level over the same period.

The development of a 'rent deposit' scheme that has helped 170 households access the private rented sector in 2004/05 has provided alternative accommodation options for potentially homeless households.

The Councils' "Move on" Scheme is being reviewed with supported housing/hostel providers. Current demand for single person accommodation far exceeds supply, however, many of those on the 'move on' register are not ready for independent living. Therefore the proposal being recommended is to limit the opportunity to register to 'move on' to those who meet new eligibility criteria. This would mean that the majority of move on would take place within 6 – 12 months of going on the register rather than 2-3 years at present.

The City PCT has provided a Health Visitor resource to work closely with Housing Service to maximize the availability of health service provision to homeless and vulnerable households.

In partnership with the County Council's Social and Health Care Department, a Supported Lodgings Scheme is being developed to provide alternative housing options for young people.

### Local Situation

The large private rented sector in Oxford is acknowledged as being an opportunity to meet housing need that is not available to the majority of other

LA's in the country. It is also a convenient resource for agencies requiring much needed temporary accommodation.

The use of accommodation in Oxford by various local, regional and national agencies has and continues to be a contentious issue for service providers in the City. The resources available to agencies in Oxford do not take account of the demand on locally provided services such as, police, schools, housing and social services for households from outside the area.

It is estimated that 50% of those entering 'emergency' accommodation are from outside Oxford with a significant number from outside Oxfordshire. However, it is recognised that this is a 'county wide' resource, funded by various agencies including supporting people and Oxon district councils.

Supporting People funding for housing related support to voluntary and not for profit agencies working with vulnerable households in Oxford does not provide for the additional burden of households placed from outside Oxford.

There are many examples where Environmental Health Officers, Temporary Accommodation Managers and other public sector staff working in Oxford are finding households living in temporary accommodation in Oxford that were not known to agencies in Oxford. Many of these households have had little or no contact with the placing agency.

Other Oxfordshire District Councils are expected to meet Government targets for "reducing the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation". To place a family from outside Oxford in City accommodation away from support networks, local GP and school is considered to be inappropriate by the agencies in Oxford. The development of a local temporary accommodation market should be a priority for each LA to minimise the inappropriate use of TA in Oxford. Colleagues in Oxfordshire DC's only use accommodation in Oxford as a 'last resort'.

#### Observations/Issues raised by other Agencies in Oxford

Colleagues in the Youth Offending Team in Oxford believe it is definitely the case that TA in the City is used disproportionately by other agencies. One consequence of this is that, particularly in East Oxford, there is a high concentration of very high risk young people some of whom are having their problems significantly exacerbated by their move from their home area through exposure to class A drugs etc. A recent example of a placement by a district council in Oxford of a household with an ASBO highlighted the lack of communication; neither the police, social services, housing or environmental health were aware of this placement until a problem arose.

Various agencies including police and probation have raised the issue of where to house problem prolific offenders and that this may benefit from a multi-agency discussion to gauge the extent of the decision-making processes currently in place and how we might achieve a more joined up effective

approach for the whole County.

Thames Valley Police are concerned about the problems associated with large number of vulnerable young people housed in Oxford. A cross authority, multi-agency meeting took place on 8 July in Didcot to better understand the current situation and to begin to work together to improve the outcomes for all concerned. TVP are progressing this issue and a further meeting is to be arranged.

Quality of accommodation is a big issue. It is noticeable that many of the units of accommodation no longer used by the Council, either ex PSL's or old B&B accommodation are being used by other agencies to house people temporarily. Most of these properties are no longer used by the Council because of their poor quality and because they do not meet Environmental Health minimum standards. There must be a coordinated effort by all users of accommodation in Oxford to raise the standard/quality of accommodation for vulnerable households.

Even though the Council has and will continue to reduce its own use of temporary accommodation, there is still a large concentration in East Oxford. The situation in the East Oxford is exacerbated by the use of accommodation by various agencies – see paragraph 2 above, who invariably use a number of houses in a row in the same street to accommodate vulnerable households. The knock-on effect on the community of East Oxford in particular is obvious.

There is clear evidence that Oxford is increasingly used by the 'region' to house people, examples include; Probation Service placing people here from across their Thames Valley region (Windsor to Swindon); Other Councils - such as Reading and Aylesbury, directing people to Oxford to access the Night Shelter, etc. This excludes as well as people just being 'drawn' to Oxford (not least by the attraction of our new Night Shelter).

### Proposed Way Forward

The ongoing use by many agencies of temporary accommodation in Oxford is having a detrimental impact on communities, particularly in East Oxford area. The City Council has decided to minimise the number of HMO's in the City through the Planning process, as well as reducing the number of Council owned hostels used as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

Other agencies should be encouraged to:

- Review their use of 'temporary' accommodation in Oxford to minimise the number of HMO's in the City and to improve the quality of temporary accommodation.
- Ensure landlords provide good quality accommodation and meet minimum housing standards.



- Only use HMOs that are part of either the Mandatory HMO Licensing Scheme to be introduced during 2005/06 or part of the Council's Discretionary HMO Licensing Scheme. This will encourage the private rented housing market to improve standards and the quality of temporary accommodation.
- Ensure regular contact with households placed in Oxford and that appropriate support services are provided.
- Consider the use of more appropriate accommodation in other areas of Oxfordshire to meet Government targets and better meet the needs of homeless households.
- Ensure that the placement of vulnerable households in accommodation in Oxford is communicated to service providers in Oxford.
- A multi agency forum in Oxford should be set up to 'manage' households placed in Oxford and ensure that placement agencies are providing good quality services to those households they place. Agencies could consider funding a resource to coordinate information relating to all placements in Oxford for the benefit of all agencies.

An alternative approach is to clearly acknowledge the burden placed on services in Oxford and for agencies, particularly Health, the County Council and Oxfordshire District Councils to fully fund the provision of additional services to meet the needs of their clients placed in Oxford.

### Conclusion

Oxford has a large private rented sector used by many agencies to accommodate vulnerable households. It is recognised as a valuable resource for agencies that have a duty to accommodate households temporarily. There are concerns about the lack of investment to develop appropriate accommodation in other areas of Oxfordshire and the 'management' and support provided to households placed in Oxford. Agencies using accommodation in Oxford need to recognise the burden they are placing on service providers and the community.

Members are asked to consider the report and agree the recommendations.

<p>THIS REPORT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY:  David Higgins – Finance and Asset Management Business Unit  Jeremy King– Legal and Democratic Services Business Unit  Councillor Ed Turner – Housing Portfolio Holder</p>
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Background Papers:  
Oxfordshire District Council Homelessness Strategies 2003-2008

Policy Briefing 10 – Homelessness Statistics and Delivering on the Positive Outcomes  
Achieving Positive Shared Outcomes in Health and Homelessness  
Policy Briefing 8 – Homelessness Statistics and Improving the Quality of Hostels and other Forms of Temporary Accommodation