

To: Executive Board – 19 June 2006

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 12 April 2006

170. AN UPDATE ON ROUGH SLEEPING – PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (Previously circulated now appended) which provided an update on trends, progress and issues related to rough sleeping in Oxford.

Councillor Murray said that a great deal of good work was being undertaken to assist rough sleepers in Oxford. He asked if Mental Health Works attended the Tenants At Risk Group. In response Nerys Parry said that on the Tenants At Risk Group there was a better presence from Mental Health Workers than previously reported.

Councillor Rundle said that with regard to the Local Connection issue, the Housing Scrutiny Committee had supported the policy not to introduce this in Oxford, and that the Government had also expressed its unhappiness at the introduction of a “Local Connections” policies in other areas.

In response to questions on Local Connections, Nerys Parry said that there was a nationwide protocol on “Re-connection” which gave advice and guidance to Local Authorities on how to deal with rough sleepers coming to their areas and presenting themselves as homeless. She said that details were kept of the ages of rough sleepers and that while some Local Authorities may send people to Oxford to try and gain accommodation, some people came of their own free will.

Nerys Parry said with regard to people sleeping in tents, that this had increased dramatically and Officers were trying to deal with this as there had been a number of complaints received from the public and Councillors. She said that the Officers did not just want to move them on as this was just moving the problem, however Street Services were in contact with these rough sleepers, giving them advice on services available to them.

Councillor Fooks said that she was not happy with Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's) being issued to rough sleepers etc. and that she did not find Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's) helpful either. She said that it had been an exceptionally cold winter and that she knew of a person who had slept in a bus shelter, and that no complaints had been received from the public stating that this person had been causing a nuisance etc.

Councillor Murray said that too much time was spent on criminalising people in need with ASBO's and ABC's. Nerys Parry said that at the moment ABC's and ASBO's were only used if necessary and as a last resort. She added that the budget available to provide accommodation during cold

weather had been used to provide only an additional 31 nights accommodation.

Councillor Campbell said that he wanted to know if the introduction of the Alcohol Free Zones had impacted on the homeless.

Councillor Humberstone asked why people sleeping in tents were not classed as rough sleepers. In response Nerys Parry said that the Council followed the guidelines from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) which said not to include people in tents as rough sleepers.

Councillor Roberts said that it was sad that despite all of the funding available and Officers, that the situation of rough sleeping was getting worse. She felt that the Care in the Community Policy had not helped the situation as people were placed back into the community without the support they required. She further added that everyone talked about and supported a Wet Centre, but she despaired that despite this support there still was not a Wet Centre facility.

Councillor Fooks said that with regard to outreach working, Officers should again look at partnership working with the Salvation Army. Councillor Rundle added that this should not be limited to the Salvation Army, but all available organisations.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To inform the Executive Board
 - (i) Of the concerns of the Housing Scrutiny Committee with the increase in the number rough sleepers in Oxford;
 - (ii) That the Housing Scrutiny Committee strongly endorsed the creation of a "Wet House/Garden" facility, as a priority;
 - (iii) Of the Housing Scrutiny Committees continued opposition to the Local Connection Policy and to urge the Government to enforce its own pronouncements on Local Connection
- (b) To thank Officers on the low use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's) and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's)
- (c) To request the Community Scrutiny Committee to investigate the possible impact the introduction of the Alcohol Free Zones may have had on rough sleeping in Oxford.

The Executive Board is asked to note (a) above.