

To: City Executive Board and Communities and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19 July 2010 and 22 July 2010

Item No: 4

Report of: Graham Stratford, Head of Community Housing and Community Development

Title of Report: Day Centre Review Recommendations

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To make recommendations on the future commissioning of homeless day centres.

Key Decision: No

Executive lead member: Councillor Joe McManners

Report Approved by:

Director: Mel Barrett

Finance: Gillian Chandler

Legal: James Pownall

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to note the content of the report and Members of City Executive Board are asked to approve the following recommendations:-

- a. To continue commissioning O'Hanlon House to provide the main day centre pathway away from rough sleeping up to and beyond 2011, subject to confirmation of homelessness grant funding.
- b. To continue commissioning Steppin' Stones to provide an empowerment and resource day centre up to and beyond 2011, subject to confirmation of homelessness grant funding.
- c. To not extend The Gap's contract beyond its current contract and to decommission the service from September 2010.
- d. To review the Gatehouse's funding at the end of the current contract, 31st March 2011.
- e. To continue the development of the Crisis Skylight.

Background

1. Following on from an initial report produced in January 2008 which essentially sought to review the City's homeless day centre provision for strategic relevance and from a safety and quality perspective, in September 2009 Oxford City Council asked Daniel Currie Associates to

advise on the nature and scale of homeless day centre provision it should commission from 2011 to meet the City Council's strategic aims and objectives in relation to homelessness.

2. This report is attached in Appendix 1.
3. Attached in Appendix 2 is an index and map showing the location of the day centres.
4. Currently, four day centres are commissioned through the City Council's grant budget. These are:-

Service	Contract Value
O'Hanlon House Day Centre	£133,432
Steppin Stones Day Centre	£51,250
The Gap Day Centre	£95,938
The Gatehouse	£9,502

5. Regardless of these existing commitments, the remit of Daniel Currie's report was to identify what provision would be needed in the future to deliver the Council's aims and objectives most effectively and respond to the national agenda.
6. It is also worth noting, that there have been a number of other significant changes to services in the City which have had or will have a direct impact on day centre provision for the homeless.
7. O'Hanlon House (previously known as the Oxford Night Shelter) was re-commissioned and a new 3-year service started on 1st February 2009 which provides 56 units of accommodation and a day service for residents as well as rough sleepers who have yet to secure accommodation. The building is open 24/7 and the day centre service runs between 9.00 and 4.00, with the wet room open from 7.30 until 10.30pm
8. From 1st February 2009, Bournemouth Churches Housing Association won the contract to provide 20 units of accommodation and a day service, now called "One Foot Forward" operating 24/7 from Iffley Road. This service is for young people aged 16-24 years old. This is a significant change from previous circumstances where the accommodation element was provided by The Bridge and the day service at The Gap.
9. Over the last 12 months, all young people services in the City and County were re-commissioned by Supporting People and the Children, Young People and Families Team at Oxfordshire County Council with a wide range of new services starting on 1st April 2010. These services include Windmill House which has also been rebuilt with significantly improved facilities for day provision. This service is now run by Bournemouth Churches Housing Association.

10. Oxford City Council was successful in attracting an initial grant of £2.4m from the Places of Change Programme, run by the Homes and Communities Agency to develop a Crisis Skylight – a learning centre for homeless people and those who are vulnerably housed, which focuses on engagement, education and employment. This project is currently in development with the opening scheduled for June 2011.
11. The Primary Care Trust have undertaken a major review of mental health services in the City, including the provision of mental health day centres. A framework for future commissioning is in place which significantly overhauls the mental health day centre provision with new services due to come on line from 1st February 2011.

Purpose of Day Centres - Policy Framework

National Strategy

12. The work of day centres in tackling rough sleeping is clearly documented in national government policy, which is set out in the document “No One Left Out, Communities Ending Rough Sleeping”. Day centres are expected to be “places of change” which are dynamic, engaging and progressive in their work in tackling rough sleeping and preventing homelessness.

Local Strategy

13. All day centre services commissioned by the Council should clearly reflect the Council's stated policy on homelessness, set out in Oxford City Council's *Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*.
14. Specific objectives which are particularly pertinent to day centres are:-
 - Increase the range of housing options and services available to prevent homelessness
 - Reduce the numbers of homeless people against key targets
 - Support rough sleepers into settled accommodation and develop clear pathways into independent homes, training and employment.
 - Support vulnerable young people in housing need to prevent homelessness.
15. Services commissioned by the City Council should contribute to these objectives.

Types of Day Centre Service

16. Day centre services are not homogenous but tend to draw on three different traditions
 - Containment and acceptance – where little is expected of the client beyond adherence to rules which are designed to ensure safety. Services provided are generally free, open-ended and open-door and tend to centre on food, hygiene facilities, a warm welcome and the opportunity to socialise.

- Rehabilitation and change – encourage clients to change their circumstances and to make changes in their lives. Often aims to assess the needs of all users, has specialist workers offering individual support and is likely to focus on social-work outcomes relating to housing, substance misuse etc.
- Empowerment and resource – also expects that individuals will want to make changes in their lives, but facilitates the client to do so by harnessing their own resources and those resources available in the local community. Is likely to focus on employment and training activity and outcome.

Principles for Commissioning

17. Oxford City Council should commission services which directly and powerfully contribute to its aims as set out in the homelessness strategy. Based on the report's evidence, the following recommendations have the best opportunity of achieving these aims:-
18. The City Council should not commission services which mainly provide containment and acceptance. All commissioned services should make some assessment of clients' needs, and require them to engage with services leading away from homelessness, as soon as possible after presentation.
19. The City Council should commission day centre-based rehabilitation and change services leading away from rough sleeping. Given the numbers of people involved and the size of Oxford a single service should be sufficient.
20. The City Council should commission day centre-based empowerment and resource (meaningful occupation) services on a sufficiently large scale to be able to deal with several hundred people over a year. It would make sense to provide two types of service, one that can be used by homeless people generally, and one that offers more structure, a drug/alcohol free environment, and a degree of distance from the other centres in town.
21. The City Council should also ensure that young people have a protected access point or points within these services, leading to accommodation, casework and meaningful occupation services, so that they are not forced into mainstream homeless day centre services.
22. Consider how best to meet the needs of the people who are not homeless, but who have significant support needs and who are currently using homeless provision.
23. Encourage good practice in day centre provision by requiring commissioned centres to adhere to minimum standards for their services types.

Recommendations for Commissioning

O'Hanlon House

24. O'Hanlon House is already delivering day centre-based rehabilitation and change services and it is recommended to continue commissioning O'Hanlon House to provide the main day centre pathway away from rough sleeping up to and beyond 2011.

Steppin' Stones

25. Steppin' Stones is already delivering day centre-based empowerment and resource services. It provides an excellent service to over 200 people a year within a more structured, drug and alcohol free environment, and away from other day centres and it is recommended that the Council continues to commission Steppin' Stone to provide this type of service up to and beyond 2011.

Gap

26. The Gap has delivered a number of roles over its lifetime but is unlikely to be able to deliver rehabilitation services better than O'Hanlon House, or to deliver empowerment services better than Steppin' Stones or a future Crisis Skylight. This report recommends that The Gap's contract is not extended beyond the end of September 2010 and is effectively decommissioned.

27. It is worth noting that the Gap receives significant funding from Oxfordshire County Council and the PCT. Over the last 18 months, the City Council has worked closely with commissioners from both these authorities as well as the provider and all are in agreement that the service should be decommissioned.

28. It is also worth noting that The Gap's current lease with Christchurch who own The Gap's building on Park End street is due to expire on 30th September 2010. The intention is not to renew this lease.

29. Commissioners have worked closely with The Gap over the last 6 months to understand further the number of people who might not easily fit in to other service provision should The Gap be decommissioned. This number currently stands at 8-10 and the intention is to provide intensive packages of support to help these people in to other services.

30. There are a number of "mini" services that operate from the Gap. These include laundry, needle exchange, address validation and dog health services. Commissioners will work with other providers in the network to facilitate the continuation of these services before the Gap is closed.

Gatehouse

31. The lack of assessment and requirement to engage as a condition of use means that the Gatehouse cannot meet the Council's need to offer rehabilitation and change services. It does provide an element of empowerment and resource but on a lesser scale than other services

but the biggest element of its service is containment and acceptance. It is recommended that that the funding for the Gatehouse is reviewed at the end of their current contract, 31st March 2011.

Crisis Skylight

32. The proposed Skylight is intended to provide day centre-based empowerment and resource services able to cope with several hundred people a year and it is recommended that the Council continues with plans to develop and support this service.
33. Between them, it is recommended that the three centres outlined above – O’Hanlon House, Steppin’ Stones and Crisis Skylight can deliver the mainstream day centre services which the Council needs.

Legal Implications

34. There are no legal implications for this report.

Financial Implications

35. The need to rationalise day centre services is part of long term strategic planning to maintain high quality homelessness services in times of significant budget pressures. Monies withdrawn from The Gap are not to be considered as savings but a contingency to be held within homelessness commissioning budget for re-allocation.
36. It should be noted that there is currently uncertainty with regard to the national homelessness grant from Communities and Local Government and the City Council’s own grant. Future commissioning can only be confirmed subject to confirmation of these grants.

Recommendation

37. Members are asked to note the content of the report and members of City Executive Board are asked to and approve the following recommendations:-
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Background papers:

➤ Day Centre Review Report – January 2008

Version number: 0.4



Report to Oxford City Council

Proposed Framework for

Day Centre Commissioning after 2011

4 September 2009

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Executive summary

- 1 Oxford City Council is seeking to commission day centre services which will make the greatest possible contribution to its strategic aims and objectives in relation to homelessness. These are essentially to prevent, mitigate the harmful effects of, and reduce the overall incidence of, homelessness in Oxford.
- 2 Day centres offer three broad types of service. 'Containment and acceptance' services focus mainly on food and a warm welcome. 'Rehabilitation and change' services offer social-work type interventions to help people deal with their support needs and move into accommodation. 'Empowerment and resource' services offer opportunities to become involved in volunteering, employment, education and training.
- 3 Evidence gathered by central government, local authorities, and Homeless Link (the national membership body for homelessness charities), suggests that the 'rehabilitation' and 'empowerment' approaches are most likely to be effective in drawing people away from homelessness and keeping them away from it.
- 4 Users of day centre services in Oxford echoed this view. They valued the life-sustaining services of all day centres, but also viewed them as services which can make it more difficult to escape homelessness, because they concentrate homeless people together, often contributing to the persistence of alcohol and drug problems. They thought this issue could be addressed by good quality services which persist in encouraging and supporting people to escape homelessness.
- 5 Oxford has a population of 50-60 people who are currently sleeping rough, or at high risk of so doing. In addition there is a population of around 300 in accommodation for homeless people, and perhaps a further 1,000 people at some risk of homelessness (for example because they have been homeless in the past).
- 6 The needs of homeless people in Oxford will be met by a range of different services, including street outreach, supported accommodation, and specialist health services. Within this network of provision, it is recommended that the City Council commission the specific day centre services which will contribute most strongly to its strategic aims.
- 7 It is recommended that the Council commission a single day centre providing rehabilitation and change services (moving people away from the streets), and two centres offering empowerment and resource services (for people who have started the move away). These should offer a progression from more to less chaotic lifestyles, so that they continue to draw people away from homelessness.
- 8 The services which are ultimately commissioned should be encouraged to record outcomes and adhere to the service standards set out by Homeless Link.

1 Background

- 1.1 Oxford City Council has asked Daniel Currie Associates to advise on the nature and scale of the homeless day centre provision it should commission from 2011 to meet its strategic objectives.
- 1.2 Currently there are four day centres which receive some level of Council funding. In addition the City Council is working to re-open the Old Fire Station in 2011 as a community arts centre and cafe, with a Crisis Skylight project at its core. Regardless of these existing commitments, the remit of this report is to identify what provision will be needed in future to deliver the Council's aims and objectives most effectively.

2 Methodology

- 2.1 The methodology for producing the final recommendations is set out below. This report delivers points 2.2 to 2.9, as follows:
- 2.2 **Establish the policy framework**, identify the City Council's high level policy and vision on homelessness and services for homeless people.
- 2.3 **Identify good practice in day centre provision and commissioning**, drawing on the experience of Homeless Link (the national membership body for homelessness agencies), central government guidance, and the experience of local authorities.
- 2.4 **Identify the overall pattern of need**, drawing on the City Council's own figures, and those provided by existing day centres.
- 2.5 **Review current thinking on good practice in commissioning**, as set out by the Office of the Third Sector.
- 2.6 **Prepare a draft of the commissioning principles**, setting out the overall pattern of day centre provision which would meet the city's needs, regardless of which agencies deliver it.
- 2.7 **Consult with providers**. The first draft was shared with the existing centres, and has been extensively modified in the light of their comments.
- 2.8 **Consult with service users** through a meeting with service users, whose views are reported in detail in section 9, and reflected in the rest of the report.
- 2.9 **Recommend commissioning principles** in section 11 of this report, which is hereby submitted to the City Council. These principles set out the services which should be commissioned, rather than the providers who should deliver them. The final stage, to be captured in an appendix to this report, will be to:

- 2.10 **Review current day centre providers**, consulting with individual centres about their current provision, their future capacity and aspirations, and the implications of the commissioning principles for their services.
- 2.11 **Draft specific commissioning recommendations**, setting out which providers should be asked to deliver the recommended services, and the implications of any changes.
- 2.12 **Consult with providers** about the recommendations.
- 2.13 **Make final recommendations for commissioning**, in the light of the consultation, and submit them to the City Council.

3 Policy framework

- 3.1 All day centre services commissioned by the Council should clearly reflect the Council's stated policy on homelessness, set out in Oxford City Council's *Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*. The Council's overall vision and aims are listed on page 3, and as every aspect of these statements is relevant to day centre provision, they are reproduced here in full:

3.2 Vision

The long-term vision for preventing homelessness in the city is to create choice by increasing opportunities for housing, training and employment, and to realise the potential of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness

3.3 Aims

- *Prevent homelessness from occurring*
- *Reduce the impact of homelessness on people's lives*
- *Ensure homelessness services provided in the city:*
 - *Are of high quality*
 - *Meet the needs of vulnerable people*
 - *Reflect the city's diverse population*
 - *Are delivered in partnership*
 - *Offer value for money*

- 3.4 Underneath these aims there are a number of specific objectives which are especially relevant to day centres. These are:

Objectives

- 1) *Increase the range of housing options and services available to prevent homelessness*
- 2) *Reduce the numbers of homeless people against key targets*
- 4) *Support rough sleepers into settled accommodation and develop clear pathways into independent homes, training and employment*
- 5) *Support vulnerable young people in housing need to prevent homelessness*

7) *Identify and address the specific housing needs of different groups in the city who are at risk of homelessness*

- 3.5 In addition to its own local policy, the City Council also contributes to national government policy, which is set out in the document *No One Left Out, Communities ending rough sleeping* (Department for Communities and Local Government, November 2008). This sets out an unambiguous commitment:

No one should have to sleep rough in twenty-first century Britain. Our vision is to bring an end to rough sleeping once and for all...This new strategy signals our intent to work with our partners to end rough sleeping by 2012.

- 3.6 The target of ending rough sleeping by 2012 is strongly supported by Homeless Link, the national membership body representing homelessness agencies in England, which was an early campaigner for its adoption.
- 3.7 Oxfordshire County Council is an important stakeholder in homelessness services funded by the City Council. In addition it currently funds the Gap, in conjunction with the City Council. Officers of the City and County Councils have met to discuss the County Council's strategic needs in relation to day centres, and it is expected that the City Council will continue to take the lead in relation to homelessness, while the County Council will continue to exercise responsibility for a range of social care provision. Further discussions will take place in the lead-up to the final report, to ensure that commissioning by the City and County Councils is complementary.

4 Day centre service types

- 4.1 Day centre services are not homogenous. They tend to draw on three different traditions, which were defined in the report *Community or Ghetto: An Analysis of Day Centres for Single Homeless People in England and Wales* (Walters J, 1992, Homeless Link). Walters outlined three different categories, which I have summarised here. She described centres functioning as places of:
- 4.2 **Containment and acceptance.** Little is expected of the client beyond adherence to rules which are designed to ensure safety. The services provided are generally free, open-ended and open-door, and tend to centre on food, hygiene facilities, a warm welcome, and the opportunity to socialise.
- 4.3 **Rehabilitation and change.** Encourages clients to change their circumstances and to make changes in their lives. Often aims to assess the needs of all users, has specialist workers offering individual support, and is likely to focus on social-work outcomes relating to housing, substance misuse etc.
- 4.4 **Empowerment and resource.** Also expects that individuals will want to make changes in their lives, but facilitates the client to do so by harnessing their own resources and those resources available in the local community. Is likely to focus on employment and training activity and outcomes.

- 4.5 These approaches are still clearly recognisable today, although in many cases they may be combined to create a hybrid service. Sections 5-7 consider the value of each approach to the Council's homelessness strategy, as a way of defining the services which will be needed in future.
- 4.6 It should be noted that day centres can also provide additional services and/or benefits, which are not encompassed by these models. For example, the Gatehouse runs a substantial volunteer programme, and Steppin Stone delivers environmental improvements. These benefits are somewhat outside the remit of this report, which is to recommend the optimal service provision to meet the aims and objectives of the Council's homelessness strategy, but they would be considered as 'wider benefits', as described in section 10.1.

5 Containment and acceptance

- 5.1 This was the original day centre model. Centres of this kind often grew up in response to night shelters and hostels evicting clients during the day, and/or in areas where street outreach and other services did not exist. In the context of today's extensive provision of services for homeless people, and attempts to persuade all rough sleepers to take up accommodation, there are concerns that this kind of service can be counter-productive.
- 5.2 The service users I consulted saw day centres generally as a mixed blessing: the benefits of life saving services such as free meals were reduced by the inevitability of coming into contact with many other people with similar problems (see 9.2-9.6 below). This issue can be addressed by providing access to services which lead away from homelessness, combined with persistent encouragement to use such services (9.7-9.9). A pure containment and acceptance approach fails to deliver this.
- 5.3 The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) is also concerned that "day centres aren't really part of the solution if all they do is sustain people on the streets rather than help them find a path out of rough sleeping - these "old-style" day centres can often counteract more strategic attempts by local authorities to reduce rough sleeping". CLG's current view is that where centres offer basic services (food, showers, laundry etc) without making access conditional on engagement with support services, they encourage people to remain rough sleeping rather than helping them to leave the streets.
- 5.4 This view is shared by local authorities I spoke to. Exeter is similar to Oxford in a number of ways. It is a university city which acts as a destination for homeless people from surrounding areas, and it has a normal street count of 8-9, which recently climbed to 15. Exeter has a containment and acceptance centre close to the cathedral. The council does not fund the centre, and has recently negotiated an arrangement under which regular access to basic services is only offered to clients after they engage with the street outreach team, and that where possible reconnection policies are applied.

5.5 The City of Westminster (population around 250,000) acts as a magnet for rough sleepers from all over the UK and beyond. Only 2% of people arriving on the streets have a local connection, and the numbers of new arrivals have been rising in recent years. Despite this, Westminster has been able to reduce the number of people sleeping rough on any given night by developing a consistent response across a network of services. Rough sleepers are encouraged to use day centre-based services, but access is dependent on a needs assessment, and usage of multiple centres is discouraged. All services are expected to reconnect people to their home areas wherever possible. One centre has withdrawn from the service network, and has lost its council funding as a result.

5.6 In addition to concerns about their impact on the number of people sleeping rough, it is questionable whether such services really offer homeless people the best possible service. Homeless Link's Day Centre Handbook summarises the case for a more interventionist approach in the following terms:

as one-day centre manager pointed out 'The days of tea and sympathy are over'. It is no longer deemed acceptable for services to simply 'contain' clients and to help them 'maintain' a life on the streets. It must surely be the case that service providers should encourage clients to have hopes, dreams and aspirations and be trying to help them in achieving their goals.

5.7 All of the day centres expressed the view that for at least a few of the people they see, it is impossible to achieve anything more than containment. In this context it is important to acknowledge the objective truth that some people never do improve their situation. However, I was struck by the views of the formerly homeless people I spoke to who were deeply grateful to the services which 'never gave up' attempts to help them off the streets. Containment which is seen as a temporary state on the road to something better is different from containment as the intended outcome of a service.

5.8 Implications for council policy

The containment and acceptance approach does little to increase opportunities for housing, training and employment, or to realise people's potential. It is insufficiently pro-active to deliver objective 4 (supporting rough sleepers into settled accommodation and developing pathways into independent homes, training and employment). Although in the short term it can reduce the impact of homelessness on individuals, there are concerns that by doing so it can help to prolong homelessness, and increase the number of rough sleepers in an area. It may therefore work against objective 2 (reducing the number of homeless people). Council policy will not be advanced by funding this type of service.

6 Rehabilitation and change

6.1 A proactive approach to working with homeless people and those at risk of homelessness has been central to successes in reducing rough sleeping.

- Publications from what is now the Department of Communities and Local Government, discuss this approach in detail. *Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers* (2001) and *More than a Roof* (2003) both stress the importance of taking services to homeless people and those at risk, understanding their needs, and addressing them as quickly as possible.
- 6.2 The service users I consulted were clear that they owed their resettlement (and in some cases their lives) to proactive services which addressed their multiple needs in a caring and non-judgemental way (further elaborated in 9.7-9.9).
- 6.3 Risk factors in homelessness are well understood; they include mental health problems, substance misuse, and learning disabilities (*Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers*, p5). Addressing any of these issues directly, or providing housing which will take these needs into account, requires a proper needs assessment by trained personnel.
- 6.4 Homeless Link's Day Centres Handbook discusses the need for day centres to deliver assessment and casework:
- How can a day centre provide an appropriate service without a clear understanding of what the needs are of the client? Most of the day centres visited had some system of assessment although most would confess to approaching it from an "informal, low key" approach. The problem with this more informal approach is that some clients are likely to slip through the net, and there is a real danger that staff time can end up becoming consumed by [the most] demanding clients not necessarily those in the most need.*
- 6.5 The handbook goes on to set out minimum standards for good practice in assessment, which are that:
- *Day centres have a policy setting out their philosophy of care.*
 - *The care/support provided is based on development of an appropriate, professional relationship between staff and clients.*
 - *Day centres have a system for recording the interactions between staff and clients.*
 - *There are attempts made to engage all of the clients that enter the day centre.*
 - *There is an agreed plan of action with each client.*
 - *Reflective working is encouraged through supervision and team meetings.*
 - *The day centre has some kind of system for recording outputs and outcomes.*
- 6.6 Where these standards are met, day centres have become a key frontline resource in tackling homelessness. This is notably the case in Westminster, which has moved beyond traditional street outreach models to operate 'Building Based Services'. This service approach aims to bring all rough sleepers into a day centre for a needs assessment as quickly as possible, to reduce the need to work with anyone on the street. For the majority, assessment is followed by access to services, while a small number will be directed away from day centre

services altogether. Strong pathways from day centres to hostels, and enforcement of reconnection policy are key features of the model.

6.7 Implications for council policy

Day centre services which offer needs assessment and casework are a good way to increase people's opportunities to obtain housing. They offer good potential to meet all of the Council's aims, especially if they follow the Homeless Link guidance, and they address all the Council's strategy objectives. The Council would benefit from funding day centre services which adopt this model.

7 Empowerment and resource

7.1 Once people's acute needs have been addressed, it becomes increasingly important for them to do something productive for themselves, and to be linked in to a supportive social network. The service users I spoke to clearly identified this need (9.10 – 9.11), which has also been emphasised in the evaluative literature.

7.2 In the words of *More than a Roof*:

Two of the most commonly reported factors in tenancy breakdown are debt and isolation. For people in education, training, and employment, the likelihood of these factors is significantly reduced. Also encouraging homeless people into courses, apprenticeships or jobs is a crucial part of helping them out of homelessness. Fifty three per cent of all London Big Issue vendors identified employment as the key to moving away from selling the magazine and homelessness. (p 21)

7.3 A similar theme appears in *Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers*:

Experience has shown that people who avoid homelessness, even when [they are at risk] have what are described here as protecting factors, [including] strong networks of family and friends [and being] employed, in training or in education. (pp5-6)

7.4 The most recent central government policy document, *Ending Rough Sleeping*, explicitly calls on day centres to deliver this kind of activity:

Day centres should be places of engagement, inspiration and involvement. Increasingly they can also be places that draw in the local neighbourhood and link people back into opportunities in the surrounding community. Partnerships with others in the area such as local learning providers or employment services could help day centres provide a wider range of services. (p29)

7.5 Although the ultimate goal may be paid employment, many day centres are doing creative things which are appropriate to people who may not be able to work, or may need considerable preparation. Interesting schemes in Oxford itself have

included creative writing at the Gatehouse, gardening at Steppin Stone, language learning at the Gap, and the creation of a local directory for resettled residents at the Nightshelter. Such schemes can reawaken people's interest in activities which enhance and protect life rather than damaging it.

- 7.6 As staff at Exeter identified, the challenge for services of this kind is to reach a wide audience, and prevent the formation of a small core group which monopolises services. Clearly only some people will want this type of service, as others will make their own arrangements to socialise, work etc, but a council-funded service should aim to support as broad a range of people as possible.
- 7.7 There is a strong argument that after people have been resettled away from the centre of the City, they can benefit from local services which are separate from those provided to people with higher needs at the start of the resettlement process. This is likely to help them to avoid being swept back into a homeless lifestyle by contact with people who are still involved in it. This view was endorsed by the service users I spoke to in Oxford.
- 7.8 Services should also address the minimum standards set out by the *Day Centres Handbook* for activities and meaningful occupation, which are:
- *The day centre regularly reviews the activities they offer and ensure they continue to meet the needs of services users.*
 - *Service users are involved in reviewing and developing new activities.*
 - *Activities fit in with the aims and objectives of the day centre.*
 - *Activities are offered with a clear purpose and, as much as possible, as part of a service user's care plan.*

7.9 Implications for council policy

This approach can directly provide or give access to opportunities for training and employment, and helps people to realise their potential. It also helps to prevent homelessness from occurring. It supports objectives 1 (increasing the range of...services available to prevent homelessness), and 4 (develop clear pathways into independent homes, training and employment). The Council would benefit from funding day centre services which adopt this model.

8 Pattern of need

- 8.1 From the *Homelessness Strategy* it is possible build up a snapshot of homelessness in Oxford. This report solely addresses the needs of single homeless people (ie those without dependent children), as homeless day centres cater exclusively to this group. Oxford seems to conform to a well-established pattern: there are a very few rough sleepers at the margins of a much larger group of people at risk, and the further away people are from the street, the larger the group in need or at risk. From high to low needs, the pattern is as follows:

- 8.1.1 Rough sleepers – a typical count is 6-13 on any given night, and there is a group of 50-60 people at immediate risk of rough sleeping, many of whom will be in the next category
- 8.1.2 Single people in temporary accommodation at any one time is likely to be around 100 (in December 2007 (*Homelessness Strategy*, 2.5.3 p12))
- 8.1.3 Single people (mainly rough sleepers and young people) in second stage accommodation is up to 278 at any one time (*Homelessness Strategy*, 2.5.4, p12)
- 8.1.4 People entering move-on accommodation during the year 2007/8 was 428 (*Homelessness Strategy*, 2.5.5, p12), and presumably there is a still-larger group of people who moved on in previous years. Some of them will continue to be at risk of falling back into homelessness, although the risk will diminish over time.
- 8.1.5 Taken all together, Oxford may have a population of around 1,350 single people who are homeless or at significant risk at any one time. One day centre thought this was a high figure: it should perhaps be viewed as a likely upper limit.
- 8.2 The figures from the existing day centres offer a different sort of snapshot. The difficulty is that their figures are not directly comparable, and it is hard to know what degree of overlap there is. Monitoring reports indicate that:
 - 8.2.1 Gatehouse – sees around 100 people per night. Absolute numbers are difficult to gauge because of the approach to collecting information, but there appears to be considerable overlap with Gap and the Nightshelter clients (the centres are open at different times). Clients have a mix of needs, ranging from rough sleeping to tenancy support: roughly one third of the Gatehouse’s guests in each case.
 - 8.2.2 Gap – sees around 500 people per quarter, with a considerable mix of needs. Around a third of their clients are young people aged 16-25. The Gap made 47 housing referrals for under 25s in the last year.
 - 8.2.3 Steppin Stone – sees around 150 people per quarter. These are generally resettled clients seeking work, training, or leisure activities, and social support. Stepping Stone improved housing for 12 people in the last year (though this is not a core activity for the centre).
 - 8.2.4 Nightshelter / Day Shelter – sees around 600 people per year, mainly rough sleepers or people with high support needs. The Nightshelter achieved 194 positive moves-on in the last year.
 - 8.2.5 These figures are consistent with the view that the current day centres achieve a good coverage of the target population, but it is not possible to achieve any additional degree of accuracy on the basis of these figures.
- 8.3 Geographically, as with most urban areas, rough sleepers are likely to be drawn to central areas for services. After resettlement they are likely to be located out of prime residential areas to the less wealthy suburbs (although in Oxford the less wealthy areas are still relatively expensive).

- 8.4 Young people represent a small but vulnerable section of the homeless population. It is usually desirable to work with them separately from services for older people in order to protect against exploitation and/or the tendency to acquire additional problems. At present daytime provision for young homeless people is offered by One Foot Forward, which is outside the scope of this report, and by the Gap, which is seeing around 150 young people each quarter. They are not seen in a young-people-only building, but they have their own discrete services within the overall service offering.
- 8.5 There are a number of people who use day centres who are not homeless (though they may once have been), but who have high support needs, and who do not fit easily into other services. These may be people with personality disorders which lead to highly anti-social behaviour, isolated elderly people without living relatives, or people who have spent long periods in institutions. Such people are perhaps most clearly visible at the Gap, though they may also use the Gatehouse and Steppin Stone. Their needs fit more naturally under a social services remit than a homelessness remit, but they are clearly in need of support.

9 The views of service users

- 9.1 When seeking to understand the actual and potential roles of day centres in meeting the needs of homeless people in Oxford, it is clearly important to consult users of such services. The Elmore Team kindly facilitated a consultation meeting with five people who have extensive experience of using homeless services in Oxford, including all four day centres. The three women and two men consulted had all been homeless, and had experienced a range of other problems, including mental ill-health, drug or alcohol addiction, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Despite these problems they had all managed to stabilise their lives and secure appropriate accommodation. For all these reasons they were exceptionally well-placed to comment on day centre services, and the interventions which help people to escape homelessness.
- 9.2 All five service users had a mixed view of day centres. On the positive side, they greatly appreciated the food provision, saying that day centres are:

fantastic because you would starve to death otherwise

This was particularly true for people with addiction problems, because:

if it's a choice between food and bottle – bottle wins every time

The provision of free food in day centres ensures that people can eat even when they are not able to choose food over alcohol or drugs.

- 9.3 Equally vital was the provision of a “place to go” for people who have no-where else. Day centres function as a temporary ‘home’ space for people sleeping rough, enhancing their ability to face the world. This is important because:

When you are homeless, sleeping rough or in a tent, when you wake up in the morning you are straight into the world.

- 9.4 For similar reasons, washing and laundry facilities are also highly valued

A day centre is a place to dry off and have a coffee...it's horrible to have to put on wet clothes.

- 9.5 Despite these benefits, all the service users identified a major drawback of day centres: their potential role in perpetuating addiction and other problems. Comments included:

When you are homeless you meet too many other homeless people – [it] perpetuates the cycle

The wet room at the Nightshelter is just a meeting place for people with problems

If I became homeless again and went back to the Gap or the Gatehouse, I would just be back with people who were using again. [A day centre is a] place where it's easy to supply your habit.

- 9.6 These remarks should not be seen as a criticism of individual centres, so much as a comment on an inherent feature of the day centre model. The issue exists despite the fact that all the day centres are vigilant about drug and alcohol use. One person explicitly stated that staff at the Gatehouse are very careful to try to stop people using or dealing in the centre. The problem was thought to be 'less intense' at Steppin Stone, presumably because of its policy of not working with anyone under the influence of alcohol or drugs. However, it is clear that if all centres went down this route, then a significant minority of homeless people would be excluded from all day centre provision.

- 9.7 I was keen to understand the role of day centres in helping people to move away from rough sleeping. In fact, this group had not primarily been helped by day services in this way. Two had found accommodation by being referred from the Nightshelter (rather than the associated day service, though the two are closely linked) to the Elmore team, which then found housing for them. One had been housed from hospital, and one had been persuaded to enter accommodation by the Street Services Team.

- 9.8 The person who had been helped to move on by Street Services stressed the importance of gentle persuasion in the face of her initial (forcefully expressed) resistance to being helped.

they chipped away at me until I accepted help – it took them nearly two years – they just didn't give up.

This was not seen as being at odds with the view that:

people only change when they are ready.

Indeed, it was felt that services should continue gently '*pushing*' people to change, precisely because they need to be on hand if and when the readiness to change appears. This was contrasted to the approach sometimes seen in day centres, whether because of philosophy or lack of resources

pushing is needed – most of the day centres don't do that.

- 9.9 The service users also reflected on the importance of intensive casework:

It's important to have help with benefits and medication, and other practical things. [You need people to] make calls for you, come with you to appointments. Help you interact with services. Day centres don't offer much of that.

In reality day centres may have insufficient resources to offer such services. However, service users acknowledged that day centres have a role as places where social-work-oriented teams can meet people, for example after release from prison or hospital discharge.

- 9.10 Asked about the features of an ideal service, people talked about how much they valued the opportunity to be consulted frequently, and to take part in the running of services, including those in day centres. One said of a mental health day centre he was using:

it gives you a sense of worth to work in the cafe.

The need to be involved in doing something productive of this kind is especially pressing for people after they have been resettled:

being homeless is a full time job...afterwards, your days are empty, so then you need something to do... You need ongoing support.

In addition there was a strong feeling that more and better information about the available services was needed.

- 9.11 In summary, the services users I spoke to saw day centres as somewhat contradictory places. They constitute a vital resource for people who are not currently engaged in trying to change, and yet:

for the likes of people trying to change, they are hard

The key to resolving this paradox appeared to lie in the provision of gentle but persistent encouragement to change, and access to services which can facilitate such change. Services which provide ongoing support post-resettlement, often on condition of some degree of abstinence, were also highly valued.

- 9.12 Service users were also quite explicit in stating that services attract homeless people, as well as vice versa:

A lot of people come to Oxford because there are good services here – it has a reputation all over the country: if you're homeless come to Oxford

This uncomfortable fact makes it imperative that services make every effort to move people on, so that they do not simply collect people with problems.

10 Good practice in commissioning

10.1 The recent report *A Better Return: setting the foundations for intelligent commissioning to achieve value for money* (Neitzert E, and Ryan-Collins J, 2009) published by the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning provides a good overview of current thinking on commissioning. It makes a strong case that commissioners can maximize value for money for the public purse by funding services which (p10):

1. *make the best use of financial and non-financial resources, including the time and skills of the service users themselves*
2. *generate positive and lasting service-level outcomes that both create value and prevent future costs*
3. *contribute to wider benefits across social, environmental and economic objectives.*

10.2 The importance of involving service users in delivery is well recognised. If homeless people are passive recipients of services, it is unlikely that they will develop long term autonomy and the ability to draw on their own resources. By contrast, where they are involved in service delivery those services are likely to promote self-reliance, and to be more attuned to the needs of other homeless people. This view was strongly endorsed by the services users consulted.

10.3 The emphasis on service outcomes would be a slight departure from the Council's current practice, in which numbers of users and numbers of service interventions have been more closely monitored than outcomes. There is a strong case for requiring more careful monitoring of outcomes: for example improved housing outcomes could be properly detailed as to the organisation providing the accommodation, the length of the tenancy etc. This would give the Council a better idea of what is being achieved, and how pathways away from homelessness are functioning. In addition it should focus organisations more strongly on achievement rather than activity, and bring practice into line with Homeless Link's recommendations.

10.4 I would not suggest that specific outcome targets are set at this stage, as payment-by-results is difficult to achieve without creating unwanted distortion in services. I would also advise against the use of Social Return On Investment (SROI) calculations as discussed in the report, as this discipline is still in its infancy, and easily subverted by anyone who is familiar with it.

10.5 The 'wider benefits' of commissioning are those which come from creating social benefits beyond reducing homelessness, for example creating jobs, or using sustainable approaches. One benefit which is clearly in evidence in the day centre

sector is the development of volunteers and volunteering. Clearly where services can deliver these benefits in addition to reducing homelessness there is a win-win for the Council.

11 Recommendations

- 11.1 Oxford City Council wishes to commission services which directly and powerfully contribute to delivering the aims set out in its Homelessness Strategy. These recommendations set out the day centre services which, in my opinion, based on the evidence in this report, will have the best chance of delivering those aims. In a mixed economy of statutory and voluntary service provision it is clear that services funded by the Council will only ever be a part of the picture. Other services will undoubtedly operate alongside those funded by the Council. These services will also impact positively, or even negatively, on the Council's aims. My recommendations are that the Council should:
 - 11.2 Not commission services which mainly provide containment and acceptance. All commissioned services should make some assessment clients' needs, and require them to engage with services leading away from homelessness, as soon as possible after initial presentation. In the event that it is not possible to avoid commissioning an element of containment, those services which provide the least containment will offer the best chance of delivering the Council's aims.
 - 11.3 Commission day centre-based rehabilitation and change services leading away from rough sleeping, and capable of working with around 50 people at any one time (the number of people sleeping rough and at immediate risk). Given the numbers involved, a single service should be sufficient. Two day centres expressed the view that a choice of services would be better than a single service. In my view the provision of one building-based (day centre) service combined with the Street Services Team is sufficient for the relatively small number of rough sleepers in Oxford. The day centre service will clearly need to have strong links with both the Street Services Team and the Nightshelter.
 - 11.4 Commission day centre-based empowerment and resource (meaningful occupation) services on a sufficiently large scale to cope with several hundred people over the year. It would make sense to provide two types of service, one which can be used by homeless people generally, and one which offers more structure, a drug/alcohol-free environment, and a degree of distance from the other centres in town.
 - 11.5 Ensure that the services described in 11.3 and 11.4 offer case work to address common support needs such as addiction, and mental or physical health problems. In case the centre(s) concerned cannot provide these services directly, they should ensure access to such services delivered by specialist agencies.
 - 11.6 Ensure that young people have a protected access point or points within these services, leading to accommodation, casework and meaningful occupation services, so that they are not forced into mainstream day centre services.

- 11.7 Consider how best to meet the needs of the people who are not homeless, but who have significant support needs, and who are currently using homeless provision (for example some chaotic clients with personality disorders). It may be that their needs are best met through social services commissioned by the County Council, provided that such services are sufficiently flexible to manage their chaotic behaviour.
- 11.8 Encourage good practice in day centre provision by requiring commissioned centres to adhere to minimum standards for their service types. It would make sense to use the standards set out by Homeless Link, and reproduced in sections 6.5 and 7.8 of this report.
- 11.9 Seek to maximise the benefits from commissioning day centres, by:
- a) Encouraging the involvement of current and former service users in delivery, wherever possible.
 - b) Requiring consistent and good quality outcome monitoring by providers. At this stage it is not recommended that the Council fund outcomes directly, but a proportion of contract funding (eg 10%) could be attached to adequate quality of monitoring.
 - c) Encouraging providers to deliver services which offer broader social, environmental and economic benefits, for example by using volunteers or environmentally sustainable approaches.

12 References

Coyne, B (2007 with updates), *The Day Centres Handbook*, Homeless Link

Oxford City Council, *Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*

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CLG, (2003), *More than a Roof*, Department for Communities and Local Government

CLG, (2008), *No One Left Out, Communities ending rough sleeping*, Department for Communities and Local Government

Neitzert E, and Ryan-Collins J, (2009), *A Better Return: setting the foundations for intelligent commissioning to achieve value for money*, Office of the Third Sector

Walters J, (1992), *Community or Ghetto: An Analysis of Day Centres for Single Homeless People in England and Wales*, Homeless Link

In addition I interviewed users of Oxford day centre services, staff at the Department for Communities and Local Government, and at Exeter and Westminster City Councils, and reviewed monitoring reports submitted to Oxford City Council by the four day centres.

Appendix - Implications for the Individual Centres

- 1 Following completion of the proposed framework for day centre commissioning, I met again with the four centres which are currently funded, to discuss what the report would mean for their individual funding and/or operations. If the framework is accepted, I recommend that the City Council commission day centre services in the manner set out below.
- 2 Because the recommendations cover a time period which extends well into the future, they come with an important caveat attached. A number of environmental factors could change, including the performance of individual centres, the award of related contracts, the local pattern of need, or the commissioning powers and responsibilities of local authorities. The recommendations set out here will only hold good if the environment remains stable.

Nightshelter

- 3 The Nightshelter is already delivering day centre-based rehabilitation and change services leading away from rough sleeping, as described in 11.3. It provides an excellent front line service, well-integrated with both street outreach services, and its own accommodation. It is well able to cope with around 50 people at any one time. The Nightshelter also works to provide an element of empowerment and resource services to people moving on from rough sleeping, and it therefore provides some additional value in that area.
- 4 I recommend that the Council continue to commission the Nightshelter to provide the main day centre pathway away from rough sleeping, up to and beyond 2011, subject to continued good performance, and a stable environment.

Steppin' Stone

- 5 Steppin' Stone is already delivering day centre-based empowerment and resource services, as described in 11.4. It provides an excellent service to over 200 people a year, within a more structured, drug-and-alcohol-free environment, and away from the other centres.
- 6 I recommend that the Council continue to commission Steppin' Stone to provide this type of service, up to and beyond 2011, subject to continued good performance, and a stable environment.

Crisis Skylight

- 7 The proposed Skylight in the Old Fire Station is intended to provide day centre-based empowerment and resource services able to cope with several hundred people each year, as described in 11.4.
- 8 I recommend that the Council continue with its existing plans to develop and commission this service.
- 9 Between them, I believe the three centres outlined above can deliver the mainstream day centre services which the Council needs.

Gap

- 10 The Gap has delivered a number of roles over its lifetime (originally intended to be eighteen months, but since extended over a decade). Today it offers a mix of different service types in an attractive but essentially unsuitable building. Because the Gap provides a range of services to clients with a variety of different needs, it is unlikely to be able to deliver rehabilitation services better than the Nightshelter, or to deliver empowerment services better than Skylight or Steppin' Stone.
- 11 I therefore recommend that the City Council decommission this service. The Gap is heavily dependent on City Council funding, and decommissioning is therefore likely to mean closure. This is clearly a matter for the Gap itself, but assuming that this is the case, the City Council should consider the needs of three separate groups of people who currently use the services.
- 12 Clients aged over 25, who are in need of rehabilitation and change services can be directed to the Nightshelter (and street services). Those in need of empowerment and resource services can be directed to Skylight and Steppin' Stone. Given the timing of the Skylight opening, it would make sense to commission the Gap up to 2011 in order to provide continuity. However, the Gap's current lease expires in September 2010, so operating up to this date would be contingent on an acceptably-priced lease extension being possible.
- 13 The Gap has historically provided services to young people under 25. Clients in the 16-18 age range will be picked up rapidly and routed away from homelessness by any services they come into contact with. However, young people who are approaching 25 may find it more difficult to access services as recommended in 11.6. For example they may be unable to obtain access to accommodation at One Foot Forward as quickly as one would like. It is impossible to be certain, but if the Gap closes there may be a small group of

young people who are forced back on unsuitable adult services. I recommend that the Council commission an existing provider to offer a separate access point for such young people on a trial basis from 2011. An existing (non-homeless) youth agency would be ideal. A trial of this kind would quickly show whether there was a long term need.

- 14 The Gap also provides some services to a small group of clients who are not homeless, but who do not fit in easily elsewhere (see 11.7). Such people may have personality disorders, for example. It is partly in recognition of this that the County Council also funds the service. Again, it is not clear whether there is a need for a separate service for such people, and a trial service offering a few hours drop-in each week could establish this. I would suggest that such a service could be well delivered by a mental health agency, and that the County Council could appropriately lead on commissioning it.

Gatehouse

- 15 The Gatehouse does not assess its guests, or require them to engage with rehabilitation services as a condition of using the centre, and as such it cannot meet the Council's need to offer rehabilitation and change services. It does provide an element of empowerment and resource services, but on a smaller scale than the other centres which focus on this area. The biggest element of its service appears to be containment and acceptance. As set out in 11.2, I recommend that the Council should not commission services of this type beyond the current funding period, as they are unlikely to advance Council strategy.
- 16 I therefore recommend that the City Council decommission this service. The Gatehouse is aware that I am making this recommendation, and is not prepared to further modify its service to bring it more into line with what I believe the Council needs, for example by assessing guests and requiring them to engage with rehabilitation services.
- 17 The Gatehouse has made it clear that decommissioning would not in itself threaten the future of the project. However, in the words of the director, withdrawal of Council funding "would offer no incentive to continue its partnership with the council, which it has always prized". It would be a shame for any service working with homeless people to be wholly outside the network, as it would reduce the options open to anyone who is only using that service. However, as individual guests are not monitored and the Gatehouse does not apply the Reconnection Policy, the impact of withdrawal is hard to estimate.