

Agenda

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Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

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This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Thursday 5 November 2020**

Time: **6.00 pm**

Place: **Zoom - Remote meeting**

For further information please contact:

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Committee Membership

Councillors: Membership 6: Quorum 3: substitutes are not permitted.

Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers
(Chair)

Councillor Shaista Aziz (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Michael Gotch

Councillor Sian Taylor

Councillor Elizabeth Wade

Councillor Dick Wolff

Councillor Mike Rowley

Cabinet Member for Affordable
Housing

Tony Buchanan

Apologies and notification of substitutes received before the publication are shown under *Apologies for absence* in the agenda. Those sent after publication will be reported at the meeting.

Agenda

	Pages
1 Apologies Substitutes are not allowed.	
2 Declarations of interest	
3 Housing Panel Work Plan For the Panel to consider and agree its work plan, having raised any questions concerning the proposed work plan presented.	7 - 8
4 Notes of previous meeting For the Panel to approve the record of the meeting held on 08 October 2020. The Panel is asked to review the draft minutes, identify required amendments and agree the approved minutes.	9 - 14
5 Rough Sleeping Update (including Hidden Homelessness) An update report on the Council's activities in relation to Rough Sleeping and hidden homelessness, particularly in light of Covid 19. Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing and Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager, will be attending the meeting to present the report. The Panel is recommended to consider the report and agree any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising from it.	15 - 24

6 Reports for approval

25 - 28

For the Panel to consider the draft report to Cabinet written in response to the report on Housing Performance Q1.

The Panel is recommended to agree the draft report, having raised any necessary amendments.

7 Date of next meeting

Meetings are scheduled as follows:

- 01 February 2021
- 04 March 2021

The Panel is also asked to note that members are invited to participate in the Housing element of the Budget Review Group meeting held on 06 January 2021.

All meetings begin at 6.00pm.

Information for those attending

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Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". The matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan

05 November 2020 - reports

Agenda item	Cabinet item	Description	Cabinet portfolio	Lead officer
Rough Sleeping Update	No	An update report on the Council's activities in relation to Rough Sleeping, particularly in light of Covid 19, to include consideration of Floyds Row, the impact of the 'everyone in' policy, and future plans around 'everyone in' (with specific reference to the availability of move-on accommodation).	Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing	Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager

01 February 2021 - provisional reports

Agenda item	Cabinet item	Description	Cabinet portfolio	Lead officer
Housing Performance 2020/21 Q3	No	An update on the Council's Housing Performance against its KPIs for Q3	Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing	Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager
Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funds 2021/22	Yes	A report to approve the allocation of homelessness prevention funds for 2021/22.	Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services / Director Housing Companies
Update of Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2021	Yes	Minor changes to allow clarification around discretionary grant and joint custody arrangements	Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing	Becky Walker, Home Improvement Agency Team Manager

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Additional HMO licensing scheme renewal	Yes	To report on the findings of the consultation and to seek approval for the next steps in relation to additional HMO licensing in the city	Affordable Housing	Gail Siddall, Team Leader , HMO Enforcement Team
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04 March 2021 - provisional reports

Agenda item	Cabinet item	Description	Cabinet portfolio	Lead officer
Housing and Carbon Reduction	No	A report to inform the Committee of the Council's current plans with regards to carbon reduction in housing, looking specifically at retrofitting plans and possible funding models for paying for improvements to energy efficiency, as well as new housing supply.	Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing	Rachel Nixon

Items with dates to be determined

Agenda item	Cabinet item	Description	Cabinet portfolio	Lead officer
Tenant Satisfaction	No	An update report on the results of the tenant satisfaction survey, and actions being taken in light of the learnings	Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

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Remote meeting

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Thursday 8 October 2020

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Committee members present:

Councillor Bely-Summers (Chair)

Councillor Aziz (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Gotch

Councillor Taylor

Councillor Wade

Councillor Wolff

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager (Revenue and Benefits)

Amanda Ford, Team Leader (Planning Policy)

Wendy Hind, Tenant Involvement Manager

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

Phil McGaskill, Revenues Manager

Carolyn Ploszynski, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager

Also present:

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery

Tony Buchanan, Housing Panel (tenant co-optee)

18. Apologies

None

19. Declarations of interest

None

20. Housing Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the proposed workplan for the remainder of the civic year, which was **AGREED**.

21. Notes of previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 03 September 2020 were **AGREED**.

22. Housing Performance Q1

The Panel **AGREED** to change the agenda order, to hear the Housing Performance Q1 item before the response to the Planning for the Future government consultation.

Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager introduced a report detailing the Council's performance across its housing activities. Before introducing the main issues it was explained that Covid had made target-setting and delivery more difficult.

The demands on homelessness-related services had increased over normal numbers, with elevated numbers presenting as homeless week on week. Nevertheless, despite higher numbers the Council had been successful in keeping the numbers in temporary accommodation within the targets set for a non-pandemic impacted environment. Some measures for work on rough sleeping had not been able to be provided with the provider having to concentrate on running the emergency accommodation required under the 'Everybody In' policy. Over the course of two weeks at the start of the lockdown period, it was necessary to find 121 rooms, which was achieved. Interim provision at Canterbury House and the YHA had also been established. The Council had successfully secured from central government approximately £1m for the Next Steps programme, to support that accommodation and additional move-on options also and had another bid in the pipeline for further long-term accommodation. The impact of the Council's efforts in implementing the 'Everybody In' policy meant that counts of street homeless showed a decrease in the number of individuals, with 25 at the last count.

In other areas of the Council, the demands of Housing Services had continued throughout the lockdown period, with the service needing to adapt its processes to enable new lets and repairs to continue, with the latter playing a key role in identifying and providing support for vulnerable tenants during the pandemic.

In the area of construction and the building of social housing, the pandemic had caused severe disruption, with work having to be paused during the lockdown on the majority of sites. This was due largely to the challenges of social distancing, but also because of disruption of supply chains. Following the lifting of lockdown, catch up work had commenced. The year to date delivery of affordable homes stood at the end of the quarter at 33, with an anticipated 93 to be delivered by the end of the financial year.

In discussion, the Panel discussed the following:

- The adequacy of the number of homes being delivered in comparison to the number waiting for housing. It was recognised that the number did need to increase, but that the Council was taking what steps were available to increase supply.
- The Council's responsibilities towards rough sleepers from outside the City's boundaries. It was explained that the Council would look to connect individuals with other districts responsible for supporting them at the point of assessment but would provide emergency accommodation if required while an individual's links to another area were established.
- Details of future bids for additional funding from government, which would be used, if granted, to supply an additional 20 Housing First homes at affordable

rents. This would focus on providing homes for those within the rough sleeping pathway, rather than broader issues around housing likely to arise from the pandemic.

The Panel also expressed concern at the prospect of provision of emergency shelter for those homeless people with particular vulnerabilities or difficulties accessing emergency housing, particularly those with no recourse to public funds and women fleeing domestic abuse. A protocol for providing emergency winter shelter for rough sleepers was being developed. The Panel suggested that it was necessary to monitor gender breakdowns of access through the 'Everyone In' policy to identify any in homelessness arising from domestic abuse. The Panel **AGREED** to make the following recommendations to Cabinet.

- 1) That the Council commits to continuing to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers over the winter period, including those with no recourse to public funds.**
- 2) That the Council carries out a gender breakdown regarding who has been housed through the 'Everybody In' scheme to enable a more detailed understanding of the gendered impact of homelessness during Covid-19.**
- 3) That the Council reviews the suitability of its emergency accommodation to those rough sleepers who have specific vulnerabilities and ensures the needs arising from those vulnerabilities are provided for**

23. Oxford City Council's response to the Planning for the Future White Paper August 2020

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Supply, introduced a report presenting the response by the Council's officers to central government's consultation on far-reaching changes to its planning rules, the Planning for the Future white paper. The proposals in the white paper were introduced as the most profound challenge to democratic management of planning since 1947 and would remove from both councils and local people the ability to have any meaningful say in the Planning process. Local policies, such as housing numbers and environmental standards, would be replaced with centrally mandated standards. Centralisation of s.106 funding would likely result in the reduction of affordable homes being built. Considerations of the purpose and impact of a building would be deprioritised in relation to its aesthetic appeal, with as-yet-undefined 'beautiful' buildings automatically being granted planning permission.

A concurrent consultation was also being undertaken by government, to which the Panel's attention was drawn. The key proposal was that the threshold of dwellings in a development required before the provision of or contributions towards social and affordable housing that would be required from developers would increase from 10 to 50. With Oxford's large number of small to medium size developments, this would have a very significant negative impact on the number of social and affordable houses being delivered within the City. Other losses to affordable housing numbers were expected to arise from another government proposal, to increase the number of 'starter homes' in developments, which would be taken out of the requirement for affordable housing delivery, thereby reducing the numbers further.

Carolyn Ploszynski, Planning Policy and Place Manager, and Amanda Ford, Team Leader (Planning Policy) introduced the technical elements to government's proposals and the Council officers' response. The overriding objective, according to the proposals, was that the government wished to see more high quality homes being delivered faster, but it was the view of the officers that these objectives are unlikely to be achieved through the proposals being suggested. In Oxford it could mean housing sites being lost to other uses, or conservation areas being put in blanket "protection zones" reducing the amount appropriate development.

In response to the report, the Panel discussed a number of issues including:

- The challenges of drafting a new Local Plan within 12 months and agreeing it within 30 months, which was suggested by Panel members and officers to leave little or no opportunity for public consultation or evidence gathering. Further, it was reported that the response from MCHLG to many practical challenges around implementation remained unclear.
- Whether it would be possible to bring in zoning proposals of sufficient granularity to prevent unsuitable development. It was explained to the Panel that it would be possible to bring in the necessary granularity, but only if a master-planning exercise was undertaken. However, the level of master-planning required to deliver such granularity was reported not to be deliverable within the 12 month period proposed by the government.
- What would happen under the proposals to viability testing. As with the paper as a whole there are lots of questions that remain unanswered but a regional infrastructure levy could render viability testing as presently known redundant. A key concern with this is that for Oxford, with its greater land values compared to its surrounding areas, a regional levy set at a generally viable level for all would mean reduced funding for infrastructure and affordable housing in Oxford.
- The criteria against which 'beautiful' buildings would be judged. No clarity on this issue had been provided by government, but there was particular concern that the focus was on the beauty of buildings solely, rather than the broader streetscape in which buildings would be situated.

The report was **NOTED**.

24. Date of next meeting

The Panel **NOTED** the date of the next meeting, 05 November 2020, and the invitation to participate in the Housing element of the Budget Review Group meeting on 06 January 2021.

25. Confidential Session

The Panel **AGREED** to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the press and members of the public during discussion of this item on the grounds that it might involve disclosure of exempt information as described in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

26. Domestic Arrears during Covid

Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits), and Phil McGaskill, Revenues Manager presented a report to the Panel on the Council's management of domestic arrears during Covid.

To date, the Council was reported to be tracking along a similar trajectory to 2018, but behind 2019. In 2019 the Council had implemented a strategy of engage and persuade, which had led to one of its most successful years of arrears reduction. If the impact of money sent to the Council regarding DWP but awaiting advice on which account to credit it to, the Council's arrears figures were doing better than in 2018.

With the opening of the courts, the Council had begun considering its approach to formal court proceedings. One area of growth in arrears related to those tenants over six months in arrears; for these tenants the intention was to begin serving notices seeking possession. Oftentimes, those not engaging with the Council's softer efforts to address arrears less formally would do so after receiving a letter seeking possession. The time delay between serving such a notice and going to court would be six months, allowing significant time for the tenant to start addressing their arrears. It was the Council's intention usually to seek suspended possession on terms, not evicting the tenant but giving them the opportunity to stay in the property if progress was made against the arrears.

Garage arrears had increased sharply at the start of lockdown, largely due to those wishing to surrender their garage tenancy being unable to present their keys back. However, with focus from officers these arrears had largely been cleared and were trending towards normal levels.

For the Rent Guarantee scheme, numbers were actually running at half the level of 2019.

The Panel sought more information about enforcement and the protection of vulnerable tenants facing enforcement. The Panel were informed that the Council had a very strict code for enforcement agent behaviour and a lot of work had been devoted to finding companies with the ability to deliver on those exacting standards. One aspect of the company was their strength in using technology and training for their operatives in identifying vulnerable tenants, and the Council had actually learned on a number of occasions of vulnerabilities that were previously unknown. Complaints were very low.

The question was raised whether there was capacity to track the level of people facing arrears who have language barriers. The team was in the process of adopting a new system of recording, which would be more sophisticated and provide the opportunity to track and interrogate a lot more fields. The Panel also examined in more detail the protections for those with English as a second language.

NB There are no confidential minutes for this item.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.50 pm

Chair
2020

Date: Thursday 5 November

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To: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Date: 05 November 2020
Report of: Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing
Title of Report: Rough Sleeping Update (including Hidden Homelessness briefing)

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel an update on the Council's activities relating to Rough Sleeping since the start of the pandemic, and consider issues around hidden homelessness
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
Corporate Priority:	Deliver more, affordable housing
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
Recommendation: That Panel considers the report and agrees any recommendations to Cabinet arising from it	

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Briefing on Hidden Homeless

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on work undertaken by the Council and its partners to tackle rough sleeping in the context of the Covid19 pandemic over the summer. A separate briefing on "hidden homelessness" is included at the end as an appendix.

Update on “Everyone In”

2. At the start of the lockdown, the government told local authorities to ensure that no-one was sleeping on the streets, in order to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. In addition the council was advised that facilities with communal sleeping arrangements could no longer be used. This affected the 20 spaces of “sit-up” provision in O’Hanlon House, and meant that Floyds Row had to be closed (which had 56 bed spaces). At the time the Oxford Winter Night Shelter was also running, with up to 20 spaces available, and this too had to be closed.
3. To meet this requirement, the Council used a mixture of hotels, university accommodation and Oxford YHA to accommodate people who were formerly homeless. These sites included Covid-Protect and a Covid-Care sites. When the lockdown began to ease in June, these hotels indicated that they would need to go back to their normal business. As such, new accommodation was required at short notice. The only available accommodation was a student block, Canterbury House, owned by A2 Dominion and utilised by Oxford Brookes. All parties worked very quickly to secure this additional accommodation by the end of July.
4. Last year the Council entered into an agreement with St Mungo’s to provide a range of services supporting rough sleepers from the new Engagement and Assessment Centre at Floyds Row. This agreement has been refocussed to deliver equivalent services in the different settings that have been used this year. St Mungo’s now manage both Oxford YHA and Canterbury House, as well as continuing to provide the Outreach service to engage with new and existing rough sleepers. Floyds Row is used to undertake triage assessments of new rough sleepers and place them in Canterbury House or the YHA.
5. The council has secured the use of Oxford YHA until March 2021, and Canterbury House until July 2021, a total of 118 units, which means that there are accommodation offers for all people who are rough sleeping. Sometimes the offers of accommodation are rejected, in which case the St Mungo’s outreach team continue to engage with people to try and find accommodation solutions.
6. The “Everyone In” initiative has seen 261 individuals accommodated (213 men and 48 women), of whom 103 have moved on to settled accommodation. There are 110 people currently accommodated in Canterbury House and YHA, with a further 48 people having left this accommodation due to eviction, abandonment or commitment to prison. Where these people remain in Oxford they will continue to be supported to find accommodation solutions.

Rough sleepers and street count

7. Our latest estimate (19 October 2020) is that 20 people are currently sleeping rough in Oxford. At the start of the “Everyone In” initiative it was recognised by the Council, Government and the police that people couldn’t be forced into accommodation. There are 12 people (of the 20) who have rejected all offers of accommodation. In addition there are other people rough sleeping who are either new rough sleepers waiting to be placed in accommodation, or people who have been evicted from or abandoned the temporary accommodation. The people in these last two groups change on a weekly basis.

8. The numbers of rough sleepers has been consistently in the low to mid 20’s since the beginning of May. The work we have undertaken with partners as part of the “Everyone In” initiative means that the data we have on people rough sleeping, and their circumstances is better than ever before. Throughout the pandemic we have been conducting weekly intelligence based estimates in collaboration with partner agencies. The numbers have fluctuated from 17 up to 26. Although the numbers have been consistent, the individuals change regularly. Additionally there are a number of people who may be seen on the street who appear to be homeless, but who are housed in temporary or permanent accommodation.

9. In the early hours of 23 September 2020, the first street count was undertaken since the start of the pandemic. The count found 23 rough sleepers bedded down. In the past there has been a significant difference between the number of rough sleepers counted, and the number estimated, with the estimate being approximately 50% higher). In this case the street count correlates closely to our estimates which indicates the better information we now have about people rough sleeping. Details of people found rough sleeping on the count are detailed below:
 - There were 18 men (78%) and 5 women (22%).
 - There was one new verification on the night of the count and one individual that refused to be identified
 - Of the cohort seen bedded down on the night, only 3 were known to be new to rough sleeping within the past 6 months.
 - 7 individuals had a local connection with Oxford City Council.
 - There were 9 individuals found on the count that had a known local connection with another Oxfordshire district council (39%). We are working closely with our neighbouring authorities to ensure that these people get the most appropriate housing and homelessness support
 - The number of EU nationals has fallen significantly from 10 in November 2019 to just 2

10. Those people who are new to rough sleeping tend to be accommodated very quickly. Four of the people identified in the street count were accommodated by the start of the following week. The main annual street count will be undertaken in November.

Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding

11. In the summer, MHCLG launched the NSAP, which provides two funding streams. The first delivers funding to local authorities to continue accommodating people housed under “Everyone In” on an interim basis. The second funding stream supports the development of longer term accommodation solutions for this cohort. At the time of writing this report MHCLG had announced awards under the first stream, but not the second.
12. Under the interim accommodation funding the council received the following:
 - Provision of accommodation at YHA/Canterbury House - £897,233
 - Development of Aspire’s Beckett Street project - £106,276
 - Winter provision - £36,036
 - Access to the private rented sector - £25,000
13. Aspire have been gifted five townhouses on Beckett Street on a temporary basis pending the redevelopment of Oxford’s West End. They have opened two of these as HMO properties for people who have previously been homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless. The NSAP funding will allow Aspire to refurbish the other three properties in order for them to be used on the same basis.
14. Funding has also been provided to support the additional costs of this year’s winter provision (see section below on SWEP) and to help secure access to the private rented sector. On this latter item we are partnering with the organisation Greater Change, who are match funding the £25,000. Typically this funding will be used to help with deposit and rent in advance payments.
15. The bids placed for longer term funding include capital and revenue funding to develop 20 units of Housing First properties at social rents, and three years of support costs for the three Beckett Street properties referenced above.
16. Housing First is a housing model which recognises that secure housing is a prerequisite for people to address the support needs they have. Many existing models of supported accommodation require people to “earn the right” to secure housing by engaging with support providers and progressing along different types of support model. Our Housing First project aims to accommodate entrenched rough sleepers, and people who have not succeeded in other types of supported accommodation.

Access Panels

17. Whilst the Rough Sleeping team have been focussed on the “Everyone In” work, the core function of managing the Adult Homeless Pathway (AHP) has continued alongside this. The AHP consists of 190 units of accommodation in two hostels and a number of dispersed housing projects.
18. Prior to the pandemic the team had introduced a number of access panels to improve the way access to the pathway is managed. Prior to the introduction

of the panels referrals to, within and out of the pathway were managed through bipartite conversations with referrers and accommodation providers by phone and email. This was overly bureaucratic and very time consuming for the AHP co-ordinators. The panels bring referrers and accommodation providers together so that all parties can discuss the best option for the person needing to be accommodated.

19. The pandemic has disrupted the development of these panels and they are still a work in progress. However, feedback from those attending is positive, and the panels promote a collaborative approach to managing homelessness which is essential.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

20. In winter the council operates SWEP in order to provide emergency shelter when the temperature is very low. The trigger to operate it last year was if the temperature was forecast to be zero or below on any given night. The provision of SWEP this year is more challenging as a result of the impact of Covid. In previous years SWEP accommodation has utilised communal sleeping spaces in O'Hanlon House and other large inside spaces. MHCLG has issued guidance which says that local authorities can operate such spaces for SWEP provision if they believe they can be operated in a Covid safe manner. However given the increasing infection rate and high risk of transmission in communal sleeping spaces, it is not intended to provide SWEP in this way this year.
21. The SWEP protocol is currently being drafted, but will seek to make use of separate rooms for everyone who needs to access SWEP. A couple of sites have been identified that can accommodate the current number of rough sleepers in the city. In the event of an increase in numbers, arrangements will be in place with local hotels to access additional rooms. It is proposed that the trigger for calling SWEP, will be the same as last year, as outlined in the previous paragraph.

Countywide Approach

22. Last year a steering group was established to oversee the development of a countywide approach to homelessness. The Group comprises the County Council (Commissioning, Adult Social Care and Public Health services), district councils, Clinical Commissioning Group, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (mental health) and SOHA Housing.
23. To inform its work, the steering group together with Crisis commissioned a report to consider how a Housing Led approach could work in Oxfordshire. The term "housing led" means to have a focus on getting people into mainstream housing as quickly as possible. This report is due to be published imminently, and will have a significant bearing on how homelessness is addressed in Oxfordshire.

24. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board's Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) report on deaths amongst homeless people also has implications for how the system currently works, and its recommendations for a system wide approach to tackling homelessness to reduce the risk of further deaths will also influence the development of the strategy.
25. The ambition is to ensure no-one needs to sleep rough and to significantly reduce homelessness from the levels experienced in recent times. The new strategy will focus on prevention to identify opportunities for early intervention across the whole system and facilitate rapid action where the risk of homelessness is identified. This will include close working with other systems (e.g. Health, Criminal Justice), to identify people at risk of homelessness as early as possible. All parts of the system will take joint responsibility for avoiding homelessness and ending rough sleeping.
26. A strengths based approach will be embedded across the system to ensure there is engagement with those who are homeless. All agencies involved will share data to develop solutions for each individual. The approach will be knowledge and evidence based.

Report author	Paul Wilding
Job title	Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager
Service area or department	Housing Needs – Housing Services
Telephone	01865 252461

BRIEFING ON HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

1. The definition of hidden homelessness is to be hidden from support, advice and statistics. As such, reporting on it presents a number of challenges, not least that there is no available data. The government's own statistical releases on homelessness notes hidden homelessness as a phenomenon but also states that they cannot quantify it.
2. The last piece of national research into hidden homelessness was undertaken by Crisis in 2011 which found a sizeable group hidden from view in squats, with friends, in police cells, with strangers, or sleeping rough in less visible locations. It found that single homelessness was synonymous with hidden homelessness. Since then no equivalent piece of research has been conducted. Last year Crisis estimated that 63,000 people in England were sofa surfing on any given night, as part of research into this issue. It is people in these circumstances that are most likely to constitute "hidden homeless".

Single Homelessness

3. In respect of single homelessness, much has changed since the 2011 research. The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 has introduced additional duties on local authorities to help meet the housing needs of single people. Last year 207 single adults in Oxford were owed a prevention duty by the city council. This duty applies when someone is threatened with homelessness within 56 days, and requires the council to work with the individual to prevent them from becoming homeless. Additionally, 126 people were owed a relief duty under the HRA, which applies when someone is homeless, and the council has 56 days to try and find them new accommodation. Prior to 2018 this help would not have been available to this group.

Sofa-surfing

4. If the Crisis figure for the number of people sofa-surfing, was distributed evenly throughout the country, there would be 175 people accommodated in this manner in Oxford. Whilst there isn't any data available on this, there are some proxies for it in the data on people approaching the council who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Prior to approaching the council, people living with family or with friends may well have been part of that number of people who are said to be sofa-surfing. Certainly the fact of their presentation to the council is an indicator that they were precariously housed. Table One below summarises the number of people accommodated in this way prior to asking the council for help.

5. **Table One. People who may have been sofa-surfing prior to approaching the council for housing assistance**

		2019/20		2020/21*	
Accommodation of those owed a prevention duty	Total	392	100.00%	504	100.00%
	Living with family	89	22.7%	132	27.00%
	Living with friends	36	9.2%	56	11.10%
Accommodation of those owed a relief duty	Total	172	100.00%	756**	100.00%
	Living with family	34	19.80%	80	10.60%
	Living with friends	15	8.70%	76	10.10%
*Figures extrapolated from 1st quarter data					
**The high number of relief cases are accounted for by the numbers of people housed under "everyone in", in respect of whom homelessness applications have been taken where possible					

6. The data shows that last year, of cases where people may have been sofa-surfing, 125 were given a prevention duty, and 49 people were given a relief duty. Unfortunately we don't know how many other people are accommodated in this vulnerable manner. The prevention data for the current year provides some further insight as we see approximately a 20% increase in the number of people owed this duty. A likely reason for this is the impact of Covid19. Many shared living arrangements came to an end as people sought to minimise the risk of infection. This had an impact on people requiring assistance from the council and the increase in prevention duties. It is difficult to imagine a more significant impact on vulnerable shared living arrangements than the current pandemic. It would be expected therefore that the first half of this year represents the peak, of people who are sofa surfing needing to approach the council for help with housing.

Conclusion

7. The availability of assistance with Housing has changed radically since the 2011 Crisis report on "hidden homelessness". Single people are no longer excluded from this provision, and are visible to housing services. This is especially the case in Oxford where we have a thriving homelessness sector. People who are new to rough sleeping are quickly identified, and are supported to access interim accommodation. We have great information about people sleeping rough in Oxford thanks to the collaborative work of the St Mungo's Outreach team, the Council's Community response team and Thames Valley Police. This is supported by an engaged public who regularly report incidences of people rough sleeping.
8. People who are sofa surfing are approaching the council for help when these arrangements come to an end. The impact of Covid19 on these numbers has not been that great, suggesting that there is a reasonable awareness of the help available from the council in these circumstances. Although we don't know the number of people who might not be aware of this help, the worst

outcome would be that someone ends up rough sleeping, and as described above, in this event support would be provided very quickly.

9. In 2018 and 2019, the city council led the Oxfordshire Trailblazer in homelessness prevention. This project took a partnership approach to identifying people at risk of homelessness and taking action early to stop this happening. The project worked with colleagues across the county in housing, health, childrens' social care and criminal justice. All partners recognised that there was a collective responsibility to tackling homelessness. Colleagues in partner agencies were the "eyes and ears" of the project and this allowed people to be identified, who may have previously gone unnoticed, and to get the support they needed to avoid becoming homeless. Such an approach further reduces the hidden nature of some forms of homelessness.
10. In order to end homelessness, it must first be understood. Understanding requires evidence, and the Housing Needs service is making more and more use of data, not just to understand the picture of homelessness today, but to try and identify those households that are likely to be at risk of homelessness in the future. In this way we can ensure that homelessness is visible to us, which will allow us to develop the right solutions to end it.

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To: Cabinet
Date: 11 November 2020
Report of: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Title of Report: Housing Performance Q1

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned report on Housing Performance Q1
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
Corporate Priority:	More Affordable Housing
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 08 October 2020, the Housing and Homelessness Panel considered a report it had commissioned concerning the Council's performance against its Housing targets in 2020/21 Q1.
2. The Panel would like to thank Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, for compiling and presenting the report, and responding to questions.

Summary and recommendation

3. Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, presented the report, outlining the key activities of Housing Services in the first quarter of the financial year 2020/21. The Panel were informed of the increase in numbers of people presenting as homeless over lockdown, the successes in securing greater number of people move-on accommodation the diversion of business-as-usual to deliver the 'Everybody In' policy and the funding secured from central government for the Next Steps programme, and additional bids being worked on. The demands on the landlord services team had continued throughout the pandemic, with significant reconfigurations of services such as new lets and repairs needing to be undertaken in light of Covid. Across the Council's construction, the pandemic had hit heavily with work on the majority of housing sites paused either due to social distancing requirements or supply-chain disruption. Nevertheless, since the ending of lockdown work had been increased to catch up.
4. In response to the report presented, the Panel raised questions about the sufficiency of the number of affordable homes being delivered in relation to number of people waiting for affordable accommodation, the degree of the Council's responsibilities towards rough sleepers coming in from other districts, the size of those bids in train and the degree to which they would meet the anticipated challenges arising from Covid on housing services,
5. The Panel wishes to make three recommendations regarding the Council's provision during winter for rough sleepers at particular risk: those without recourse to public funds, and those with specific vulnerabilities, particularly those escaping domestic violence.

Rough Sleepers At-Risk

6. The Panel noted that at the commencement of lockdown, the 'Everyone In' policy from central government effectively meant a suspension of issues around eligibility and recourse to public funds, but that looking to the future funding from government for this to continue was less certain. The Panel understands that a protocol is in the process of being developed to manage the challenges of providing emergency accommodation in non-communal settings but is keen that those without recourse to public funds be included within that provision. The Panel considers the dual threats to life of rough sleepers arising from cold weather and exposure to Covid-19 if left sleeping rough means that the provision of suitable emergency accommodation should be a priority for the Council, and that the mortal threat faced should supersede issues around recourse to public funds. Consequently, it seeks a commitment that the Council will continue to provide emergency accommodation to *all* rough sleepers over the winter period, and not only those whose nationality provides recourse to public funds.

Recommendation 1: That the Council commits to continuing to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers over the winter period, including those with no recourse to public funds.

7. In discussion of rough sleeping, information was not available regarding the gender breakdown of those being housed under the ‘Everyone In’ scheme. With an estimated 86% of rough sleepers being male in previous national estimates, the issue is often approached as a predominantly male issue.¹ One cause of homelessness, however, where women are thought vastly to outweigh men is domestic abuse which has, since lockdown, seen a surge of numbers of people – primarily women – seeking help on this issue, with the charity Refuge reporting in May increases of 957% for visits to its website.² The Panel considers it vital that the genders of those being housed through ‘Everybody In’ are counted and monitored, so that it can react more quickly to changes in the demographics and needs of its emergency accommodation services.

Recommendation 2: That the Council carries out a gender breakdown regarding who has been housed through the ‘Everybody In’ scheme to enable a more detailed understanding of the gendered impact of homelessness during Covid-19.

8. Building on the above, the Panel recognises that different causes of rough sleeping and homelessness require different provision. Taking the example of domestic abuse, women escaping domestic abuse may require accommodation which the public is not aware of, or they may require women-only environments. The Panel is keen that the Council review the suitability of its provision, so that those with specific vulnerabilities or who face particular challenges in accessing emergency accommodation are still able to do so.

Recommendation 3: That the Council reviews the suitability of its emergency accommodation to those rough sleepers who have specific vulnerabilities and ensures the needs arising from those vulnerabilities are provided for

Further Consideration

9. The Housing and Homelessness Panel is due to consider an update on housing performance up to and including Q3 at its meeting on 01 February 2021.

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¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781567/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018_release.pdf

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52755109> (It should be noted, however, that this was not replicated in police reports or reports to local domestic abuse services across the country.)

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made on 03/09/2020 concerning Selective Licensing

Provided by the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council commits to continuing to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers over the winter period, including those with no recourse to public funds.		
2) That the Council carries out a gender breakdown regarding who has been housed through the 'Everybody In' scheme to enable a more detailed understanding of the gendered impact of homelessness during Covid-19.		
3) That the Council reviews the suitability of its emergency accommodation to those rough sleepers who have specific vulnerabilities and ensures the needs arising from those vulnerabilities are provided for		