

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Wednesday 2 August 2023

www.oxford.gov.uk



Committee members present:

Councillor Diggins (Chair)

Councillor Dunne

Councillor Fouweather

Councillor Rawle

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services

Amie Rickatson, Strategy & Service Development Manager

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager

Brendan Lewis, Senior Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project Officer

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Sandelson sent apologies.

10. Declarations of Interest

None.

11. Chair's Announcements

None.

12. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 05 July 2023 as a true and accurate record.

13. Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the Work Plan.

The Scrutiny Officer provided an update following the Work Plan discussion at the previous Panel meeting:

- The Housing First Acquisition Programme Progress/Outcomes report was scheduled for the October meeting.
- The draft scope for the proposed Operation of Housing Associations Within the City item was under development and would be presented to the Panel for approval in due course.
- The Housing Services Transformation (presentation) item was scheduled for the March meeting.
- The City of Sanctuary Accreditation report was scheduled for the November meeting (*or whichever date that meeting was rescheduled to if a change of date was agreed later in the meeting*).
- Officers had confirmed that the Implementation of the Selective Licensing Scheme report was feasible for Panel consideration in the current year; the Panel date for that item was being confirmed.
- It was proposed that the Housing and Carbon Reduction (in particular, the impact of decarbonisation on tenants) item be added to the list of items for next municipal year so that the Panel could consider a mid-project report on the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, subject to next year's Panel taking the item forward.
- It was proposed that the Financial Viability training/briefing take the form of an All Member briefing/training session initially, in order to benefit a wider group of Members; though the item would remain on the list of items for next municipal year in case of any follow-up.
- The Housing Performance Monitoring item had been scheduled in biannually as normal.
- The DSS Discrimination Motion Update standing item had been removed from the list in consultation with the Chair, as all actions were complete aside from the Tenants' Forum element, which was a standing item in its own right.
- The Scrutiny Officer was engaging with officers to understand when a Tenants' Forum Update report could be presented to the Panel.
- The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Mini-Review Update was due to be considered later in the meeting.

The Panel noted the update from the Scrutiny Officer and agreed the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack.

14. Report back on recommendations

The Panel noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families
- Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey

15. Expansion of the Housing First Programme

Cllr Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report, highlighting that the Council implemented a Housing First programme in 2021/22 to help resolve homelessness of some of the most disadvantaged people in the community. She added that the Housing First programme represented a valuable contribution to long-term homelessness prevention both in the City and worldwide; and, in particular, reported that there had been no evictions or abandonments in respect of individuals supported by Housing First in Oxford.

Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager added that the Expansion of Housing First in Oxford was a key element of the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy; alongside the countywide Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which sought to transform services across the county to end rough sleeping. She advised that there was a high level of need for Housing First provision within Oxford.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The Council held a large range of data about individuals who had rough slept in Oxford over the past few years and there were a set of key criteria which helped to target the limited resource to those most in need, which initially had seen a focus on supporting women.
- Equalities had been considered as part of the initial bid for funding, as it formed part of the application process.
- The Council undertook a full Procurement process in respect of the external providers of wraparound support; the Senior Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project Officer held bi-weekly meetings with both providers to monitor the support provision and help broker key relationships.
- The Council was confident that the two external providers were delivering the person-centred support that was needed and were working well together.
- Housing First properties were dispersed as evenly as possible across the City; mapping exercises were undertaken and efforts were made to ensure an even split across the different Tenancy Management patches.
- Officers would expand on the question about the impact of expanding the Housing First programme on other agencies involved in wraparound support and how they can support new individuals within the progress/outcomes report due to be presented to the Panel in October 2023.
- There were competing priorities in terms of availability of housing for different groups (e.g. Care Leavers) and demand for one-bedroom properties was particularly high; however the competing priorities were managed through the Allocations Policy and there was no additional impact as a result of Housing First.
- The Council could not address all of the current need through the programme, but it was a step in the right direction.
- The Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was working with Housing Associations across the county to develop a charter in terms of Housing First, which was receiving a lot of support.
- The two external service providers of wraparound support were keen to come and speak to the Panel at its October meeting.

The Panel **agreed** to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council reviews the information contained within the risk register at Appendix 2 to the report to ensure accuracy.

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager and Brendan Lewis, Senior Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project Officer left the meeting and did not return.

16. Update on Customer Complaints and Feedback [presentation]

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services introduced the presentation and highlighted that the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill had received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023 to become the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. She advised the Panel that further changes in relation to housing complaints nationally were expected in the near future as a result; and the Council had already received correspondence from the Housing Ombudsman.

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager delivered the presentation as set out in the agenda pack, which covered the period from October 2022 to March 2023.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The Complaints Officer coordinated information from different service areas to respond to Stage 1 complaints; Stage 2 complaints were responded to by the Head of Service. The next stage was referral to the Ombudsman.
- The Housing Ombudsman had written to local authorities following the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 receiving Royal Assent to set out the new responsibilities, which put complaints on a statutory footing.
- The Council was due to migrate to a different system for handling complaints, which would allow for live dashboard oversight of complaints and the tracking of, drill down into and analysis of complaint trends.
- The recently launched 'Localz' text messaging service allowed for the collection of feedback from tenants, which supported individual performance monitoring.
- The Housing Quality Network was a specialist housing training provider.
- The Council was undertaking some customer journey mapping and appreciative inquiry work.

The Panel **agreed** to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council seeks to gain more information relating to communication more broadly within the customer experience via Localz and other channels, to enable experiences to be tracked and analysed with a view to identifying and implementing improvements.

17. Action Plan Update on the Housing and Homelessness Panel Mini-Review on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services introduced the report, which set out an update on progress against the 19 recommendations made by the Panel in 2021/22 following its Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Mini-Review. Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager provided a summary of progress as set out in the agenda pack.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- It was not yet known whether the councillor casework system for housing issues (recommendation 17) would link into the Council's Housing Management System or be a standalone system.
- Feedback from tenants in relation to recognition which did not incur universal credit clawback or other benefit issues (recommendation 5) had been positive. In particular, the air fryer prize was very popular and the Christmas 'thank you' card to Tenant Ambassadors had been very well received.

- There were Tenant Ambassadors representing the views of frailer residents (recommendation 7) and the shift to online meetings had facilitated more engagement due to not having to travel to in-person meetings. The Council had provided Tenant Ambassadors with the infrastructure to join meetings virtually if they did not already have it, to ensure inclusivity (e.g. WiFi, device).
- To date, 5 Tenant Ambassadors had undertaken the training on the Housing Revenue Budget and budget consultation process (recommendation 15) to assist them in challenging the Council. Other Tenant Ambassadors had access to a video from the Finance Team.

The Panel agreed that it would be useful for the training on the Housing Revenue Budget and budget consultation process to feed into the wider All Member training programme; and asked for the video from the Finance Team to be made available to All Members. The Panel requested that the Scrutiny Officer follow-up after the meeting.

The Panel **noted** the report and progress against the recommendations.

18. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings and agreed to reschedule the 02 November 2023 meeting to 05 December 2023, 6pm via Zoom.

The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 7.29 pm

Chair

Date: Thursday 5 October 2023

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.