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# Combating inequality

*Is Oxford City Council doing all it can to make Oxford a fairer, more equal place?*

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Report of the Inequality Panel

Commissioned by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee

July 2015

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## **Foreword by the Chair of the Inequality Panel**

These are difficult times. Reduced funding and increased poverty and social deprivation make it more and more difficult for councils to provide basic services needed by a growing number of vulnerable people in our communities.

Funding pressures are continuing. A seismic shift needs to happen. This requires ambition matched by innovation, led with political commitment to improve well-being, mental health and life-chances – directed at addressing the causes of poverty.

We know that there are large differences in life expectancy between the most privileged and the most disadvantaged social groups living in Oxford.

People with a good home, a good education, a good income and a strong network of family and friends have greater chances of being well and of leading fulfilling lives.

As a councillor for a ward in which one in four adults holds at least one degree, yet two out of every five adults are without any or hold very few qualifications, it is evident that educational outcomes impact upon life chances. A rise in the number of households without adequate or secure accommodation is placing further risk upon the educational opportunities of children from poorer families.

The better the social and economic standing of people, the better are the opportunities for children to flourish and overcome poverty.

Consequently, within our recommendations the Inequality Panel calls for:

- Increased provision of decent, truly affordable housing
- Improved provision of key worker housing
- Interventions to improve standards within the private rented sector
- Greater promotion and take-up of the Living Wage
- Extended use of social clauses within procurement contracts to assist people into good, sustainable jobs
- Improved partnerships for overcoming silos, through a multi-agency approach for addressing the causes of inequality
- Improved monitoring, measurement and reporting of the impacts of inequality

On behalf of the Inequality Panel, I express our sincere thanks for the input and evidence provided by individuals, community groups, single interest groups, academics, officers of Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. And, the panel is most grateful for the support of our Scrutiny Officer, Andrew Brown.

Van Coulter  
Chair for the Inequality Panel

## **Summary of recommendations**

**Recommendation 1 - We recommend that the City Council leads on the development of a long-term multi-agency inequality strategy for Oxford. This should be informed in part by the evidence gathered in this Inequality Review and enhanced when Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group produces its report on health inequalities. The Strategy should be supported by an Action Plan that includes any accepted Inequality Panel recommendations.**

**Recommendation 2 – We recommend that the City Council ensures it has sufficient staffing resources in partnership posts to play a leading role in working with partners to deliver on a multi-agency inequality strategy for Oxford (see recommendation 1). We envisage that savings are achievable from overcoming silos and working in partnership to tackle long terms issues associated with inequality.**

**Recommendation 3 - We recommend that the City Council commissions Professor Danny Dorling and the City Council’s Social Research Officer to develop an Oxford City Inequality Index based on aspects of inequality that that the City Council can influence either directly, or indirectly to a significant extent. Council Performance should be assessed against the movement of this index.**

**Recommendation 4 - We recommend that all strategy papers and major decisions should include an assessment of their short, medium and long term impacts on inequality. This assessment could be based on an Inequality Index (see recommendation 3), and guidance should be available to assessing officers.**

**Recommendation 5 - We recommend that the City Council progresses all options for boosting the supply of affordable housing, including by:**

- a) Continuing to push for a review of the Green Belt around Oxford as part of a wider county land review to identify sites for new housing,**
- b) Enforcing the City Council’s 50% affordable housing policy,**
- c) Considering greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to buy derelict land and properties that aren’t coming forward for development,**
- d) Evaluating the potential local impacts of the new Government’s housing policies, such as the extension of the Right to Buy scheme to housing association properties,**
- e) Encouraging ethical or institutional investors to rent good standard accommodation to people in housing need at affordable rates,**
- f) Aiming to make Oxford a centre of excellence in innovation for new social and affordable housing solutions, ensuring that its own policies (such as the Balance of Dwellings Policy) are compatible with this aim. Affordable Oxford could be asked to provide advice on what options would be viable in Oxford,**
- g) Considering whether there is scope for the City Council or the Universities to promote ‘inter-generational shared living’.**
- h) Considering whether there is a way the City Council could assist groups of older people in downsizing collectively while staying together as a**

community, perhaps by creating a group or register that people can join or sign up to.

**Recommendation 6 - We note the significant difficulties that schools, hospitals and universities (as well as businesses) face in attracting workers to settle in Oxford, and recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Gathers evidence as soon as possible to identify the best way of delivering new build keyworker housing within the 20% of affordable housing provided as intermediate housing,
- b) Seeks to extend its keyworker housing intervention to more teachers (this is currently offered to senior teaching staff),
- c) Considers whether there is scope to assist key workers (particularly teachers in priority schools) in accessing housing in the private rented sector, for example by encouraging registered landlords to offer 3 year tenancies and agreeing to raise rents by no more than the CPI measure of inflation.

**Recommendation 7 - We note that the City Council is developing a Private Rented Sector Strategy and recommend that this aims to extend the City Council's interventions in the private rented sector to address abuses in the student housing market and poor standards across the wider private rented sector. This should include the extension of discretionary licensing to cover more properties where possible, enhanced enforcement of the HMO licensing regime and further promotion of landlord accreditation to encourage take up.**

**Recommendation 8 - We recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Calls on the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford to provide reinvigorated engagement in Oxford's housing sector by learning from the Cambridge model and providing new accommodation to house academics.
- b) Tasks the new Assistant Chief Executive with working closely with the University sector and encouraging a greater degree of input into city matters, including financial contributions where appropriate.

**Recommendation 9 – We recommend that the City Council builds on its commendable work on addressing fuel poverty by:**

- a) Making a fuel poverty calculator available online that directs people in fuel poverty to contact the City Council for advice on what support they may be entitled to,
- b) Asking Trading Standards whether they would like the City Council to refer cases to them where an Energy Performance Certificate is required and whether they would be prepared to give the City Council any enforcement powers.

**Recommendation 10 - We recommend that the City Council builds on its work with Oxford Clinical Commissioning Group and other health partners by:**

- a) Supporting the delivery of more proactive health interventions in areas of multiple deprivations, such as contacting people who miss appointments,

- b) Working towards the concept of pooled budgeting in areas where evidence suggests that this approach can improve health outcomes.
- c) Utilising the City Council's assets (such as leisure centres) and the agencies we support to facilitate social prescribing, and encouraging more GPs to take up social prescribing,
- d) Working with partners to develop a single online point of access for multiple services in Oxford, including health, housing and social care.

**Recommendation 11 - We recommend that the City Council explores how factors around inequality and public health could be designed in to the planning and development of sites. These factors should include cycling and walking provision, the accessibility of parks, and the provision of a variety of housing within the street scene. Consideration should also be given to shaping new communities. For example, new communities should include a centre and shared open space.**

**Recommendation 12 - We recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Assists in bringing about negotiations with local health, housing and social care commissioners and providers so that a county wide discharge policy for people experiencing homelessness can be adopted as per best practice guidelines,
- b) Extends interventions aimed at supporting homeless people with complex needs (e.g. substance abuse and mental health issues), who are often excluded from accessing the services they need.

**Recommendation 13 - Oxford City Council is leading the way in defining, measuring and tackling fuel poverty and we recommend that the same priority should be given to the issue of food poverty. A part-time role should be created to tackle food poverty, which should involve facilitating the work of the not-for-profit and voluntary sector to maximise their impact, and developing a food poverty strategy for Oxford. This strategy should aim to replicate best practice established by Bristol to reduce food bank demand and increase access to good and affordable food across the city.**

**Recommendation 14 – We recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Identifies how it can provide a greater degree of funding security to Asylum Welcome. Consideration should be given to including their work within the remit of the Council's Community Grants commissioning programme, which awards funding for 3 years rather than annually. This will reduce Asylum Welcome's administrative workload and help to ensure that they remain viable over the medium term.
- b) Explores whether it could provide low cost accommodation to third sector organisations by utilising unused capacity in Council-owned assets such as Community Centres.

**Recommendation 15 - We strongly endorse the City Council's approach to combatting financial exclusion and recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Ensures that the Welfare Reform Team are fully and best deployed in order to provide greater assistance and proactively reach more people, particularly those moving on to Universal Credit,
- b) Moves towards implementing a 'single view of debt' in order to identify multiple debts owed to the Council, and where possible, consolidate these,
- c) Gives a high priority to continuing to protect the current level of funding for the advice sector over the medium term,
- d) Explores longer term funding options for a housing needs money advice caseworker, and evaluates the impact of this provision over time,
- e) Continues to work closely with CAB and other agencies to encourage the take up of unclaimed benefits.
- f) Aims to make full use of its Discretionary Housing Payments budget.

**Recommendation 16 – We recommend that the City Council establishes a reliable directory of charities for Oxford, setting out the aims, principle client groups and types of relief provided. This will help to ensure that local charities have a greater awareness of what other charities do.**

**Recommendation 17 - We recommend that the City Council continues to prioritise improving educational attainment in the city by:**

- a) Offering a new educational grant programme to which Head Teachers from schools serving deprived areas can apply. This programme would provide tangible output-based funding to reduce educational inequalities in city schools. The criteria for awards should be non-prescriptive but grants could be used to fund specific line items in School Improvement Plans focused on Pupil Premium and Special Educational Needs pupils, for example.
- b) Engaging with partners and considering whether it has a role in ensuring that eligible year 1 and 2 pupils are registered for the Pupil Premium so that their schools receive the additional funding they are entitled to.

**Recommendation 18 - We recommend that the City Council utilises skills within communities and works with partners to maximise every opportunity to provide employment and career paths for more residents living in areas of multiple deprivation, including by:**

- a) Seeking to influence and improve the provision of targeted careers advice in schools, extending this to younger pupils (years 7-8), as well as offering mentoring into adulthood,
- b) Extending the use of social clauses to create more and better opportunities for young people. Clarity is required as to how the City Council will ensure that developers deliver social clauses,
- c) Extending the offer of reduced fees for tutors to all Community Centres situated in areas of multiple deprivations. The City Council should also continue to make better use of Community Centres and promote them as vibrant local hubs.
- d) Maximising links with universities, private schools, the student hub and businesses to get more volunteer help for appropriate programmes. These opportunities could include coaching and mentoring to help

vulnerable people into work, assisting young people to whom English is not a first language, and broadening access to resources such as arts provision.

**Recommendation 19 - We recommend that the City Council calls on local employers to put an end to exploitative employment practices in the city. These practices include employers charging restaurant staff to wait tables, paying less than the minimum wage, and employing workers on zero hours contracts against their will.**

**Recommendation 20 – We recommend that the City Council continues to look to raise wages by:**

- a) Creating a Living Wage Hub in Oxford based around the Oxford Living Wage. This should involve a programme of activities to promote the Oxford Living Wage, and a distinct logo that Oxford Living Wage employers are encouraged to display. Ideally these activities should be led by engaged citizens but they may initially require some officer resource. The Hub could also look at other related employment issues such as pay ratios.**
- b) Identifying a public face of the Oxford Living Wage. This could be a member champion.**
- c) Working constructively with the Living Wage Foundation in promoting Living Wage Week and seeking to raise wages and improve working conditions in Oxford, particularly in low paid sectors such as hospitality, health and social care.**

**Recommendation 21 - We recognise that Oxford City Council is a major employer in the city, and recommend that the City Council continues to develop its own employment practices through:**

- a) More flexible recruitment practices such as accepting CVs and more widespread use of assessment centres,**
- b) An annual managed calendar of interventions targeting black and minority ethnic communities and other underrepresented groups,**
- c) Better targeting of constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants,**
- d) Interactive and accessible recruitment webpages with guidance for applicants,**
- e) Uplifting the salaries of lower paid staff at a higher rate than those of higher paid staff to ensure that the pay gap between them doesn't increase over time.**

## **Appendices**

*Appendix 1 – Terms of reference*

*Appendix 2 – Acknowledgements*

*Appendix 3 – Background documents*

*Appendix 4 – Responses to call for evidence*

*Appendix 5 – Letter from Healthwatch Oxfordshire*

*Appendix 6 – Overview of the City Council's contribution to combatting inequality*



## **Introduction**

1. The Inequality Panel is a cross-party working group that was established by the City Council's Scrutiny Committee during the 2014/15 municipal year. Its membership comprises four City Councillors:
  - Councillor Van Coulter (Chair)
  - Councillor Andrew Gant
  - Councillor Ben Lloyd-Shogbesan
  - Councillor David Thomas

## **Background**

2. Inequality is found in almost every community and most obviously refers to the disparity between rich and poor caused by unequal distributions of pay, income and wealth. Inequality also has a social dimension whereby opportunities, rewards and social resources are distributed unequally within society. A person's 'social capital', which is their access to valuable support networks, is an important element of this. A number of personal characteristics are strongly related to inequality, including gender, ethnicity and disability. These are among the 9 protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.
3. Oxford is a successful and vibrant city in many ways that benefits from having a resilient local economy and low levels of unemployment. Like any city, Oxford's dynamic urban environment presents challenges as well as opportunities. However, a number of factors are more specific to Oxford and contribute to inequality in the city. Foremost amongst these is the very high cost of housing. Oxford is the least affordable city in the UK in which to buy a house<sup>1</sup>, and the second least affordable city in the UK in which to rent a home<sup>2</sup>, partly due to Oxford's attractiveness to commuters working in London. This exacerbates the disparity between rich and poor and is having damaging effects on educational attainment and social mobility. As a result, many harder pressed residents are struggling to pay for essentials such as food and energy. Some are leaving the city altogether, or if asked cannot see how they will be able to afford to settle in Oxford in the long term.
4. Oxford City Council is a district council operating in a two tier local authority area. It is responsible for services such as housing, planning, leisure, environmental services, council tax and some benefits. A number of services that impact inequality, such as early years and childcare provision, education, social care and public health, are run by Oxfordshire County Council.
5. Oxford City Council's strapline is 'building a world class city for everyone'. The Council's Corporate Plan states that 'Oxford City Council does all it can to make Oxford a fairer, more equal place'. It also makes a policy commitment to 'narrow the gap between rich and poor'. A key ambition of Oxford City Council is to move beyond being a service delivery organisation to becoming a 'leader of place' through partnership working and collaboration. This means that the City Council

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<sup>1</sup> [Lloyds Bank Affordable Cities Review, Lloyds Banking Group, 27 March 2015](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Revealed Britain's most expensive places to rent a home, The Guardian, 1 May 2015](#)

wants to be recognised as being the leading authority and voice for the city of Oxford.

6. We believe that widening inequality presents problems for everyone, including top and middle earners, and that a continuous reduction in inequality should be one of the characteristics of a world class city for everyone.

### **Review scope**

7. The Inequality Panel was commissioned to undertake a time-limited review, drawing together a number of related topics that City Councillors wanted to explore, such as food poverty, child poverty and health inequalities. The Inequality Panel met on 13 October 2014 to agree a draft scope, before reporting back to the Scrutiny Committee for approval on 10 November 2014.
8. We agreed to review how the City Council contributes to combatting harmful social and economic inequality in Oxford, and whether there is more that could reasonably be done. By maintaining a focus on how the Council could improve outcomes for local residents, we felt that we could tackle this broad and wide-ranging scope in a manageable way. Our main aims were to:
  1. *Understand the scale, reasons and impact of inequality in Oxford.*
  2. *Identify specific areas where the City Council can make the most difference in combatting inequality.*
  3. *Make deliverable, evidence-based recommendations that are co-produced with local citizens or stakeholders where possible.*
9. The Panel recognised that the City Council was already doing a lot of good work to combat inequality. However, we wanted to test and challenge the claims in the City Council's Corporate Plan on behalf of all Councillors. We felt that a cross-cutting review of inequality would enable us to identify any gaps in provision or partnership working, and highlight areas of emerging need.
10. We were also mindful that, following a recent peer review exercise, the City Council received feedback as to how it could provide strong, effective and visible leadership in the city. We wanted to see whether and how this theme could be applied to the City Council's aim of making Oxford a fairer, more equal place.
11. Finally, our review was designed to complement, rather than duplicate, the work of local partners such as Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.
12. The full terms of reference for this review that were agreed by the Scrutiny Committee on 10 November are included as Appendix 1.

### **Methods of investigation**

13. Having agreed the scope of the review, the Panel issued a call for evidence. This was accompanied by a press release which received local media attention. A brief online survey was made available on the City Council's website for 2 months. It was also emailed directly to groups and individuals registered on the City Council's consultation system that had expressed an interest in consultations relating to equalities, housing, council tax and benefits, or community issues. 30 responses were received and these were all considered by the Panel. Representatives of several groups that responded were also invited to attend a meeting. The responses to our call for evidence are set out in full in Appendix 4.
14. The Inequality Panel held 5 public meetings between November 2014 and April 2015. These meetings were attended by representatives of Age UK, Asylum Welcome, Community Action Groups Oxfordshire, Cultivate Oxford, Healthwatch Oxfordshire, Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, and Oxford and District Child Poverty Action Group. We also spoke to social geographer and author Professor Danny Dorling and a local social enterprise focused on overcoming issues of low self-esteem in vulnerable young women.
15. The Panel held discussions with a number of City Council officers, including the Chief Executive and senior officers responsible for Housing Needs, Policy and Partnerships, Welfare Reform, and Communities and Neighbourhoods Services. We are very grateful to all those who provided evidence and informed the outcomes of this review. A list of acknowledgements is provided as Appendix 2.
16. We also reviewed a wide range of research literature and policy documentation, and a list of background documents is included as Appendix 3.

## **Inequality in Oxford**

### Context

17. Many cities think they have particular sets of issues and needs but Oxford is genuinely exceptional in terms of housing and education. Oxford-born Professor Danny Dorling advised us that if he was arranging a field trip to look at inequality in Western Europe, he would choose Oxford. Harmful inequality is evident at the lower end of the income spectrum, with more people experiencing homelessness, struggling to afford food and heating, seeing poorer educational outcomes for their children, and seeking advice for personal debt. However, the problems that inequality presents for top and middle earners – such as long term participation in the private rented sector - also need to be recognised and better understood.
18. Oxford benefits from having a strong local economy and low unemployment but the severe cost and limited supply of housing acts as a big social distorter and makes it extremely difficult for most people to make homes in the city. Nearly everyone we spoke to said that the lack of affordable housing is the major cause for concern in Oxford. High demand is exacerbated by limited land availability within the city and barriers to accessing this land. Last year the cost of an average house in Oxford rose by £30,000, yet a third of Oxford's working age

households were £1,594 worse off per year on average due to welfare reforms<sup>3</sup>. The cost of housing in Oxford is comparable to London but local employers do not pay London wages. Buying a home is now beyond the means of some 80 per cent of the local population.

19. More Oxford households now rent than own their own home, and of these, the majority live in the private rented sector<sup>4</sup>. The increase in the private rented sector has been the biggest change in Oxford's housing market in the last 10 years and puts a lot of newly forming households, young and vulnerable people outside of the home ownership market. Private rented housing is not only expensive due to undersupply driving up rental values, but much of it is of a poor standard and tenancies are often insecure. There are strong links between poor and insecure housing and poor physical and mental health. For many residents as well as students, sharing accommodation is the only affordable option. In more extreme cases, migrant workers and vulnerable young families have been found living in 'beds in sheds'. The welfare of people occupying these unsuitable and hazardous structures is a major concern.
20. The housing crisis in Oxford affects everybody. Many schools, hospitals and universities in the city are struggling to recruit a range of professionals and there is concern that if Oxford continues to become more unaffordable for the majority of people to live in, public bodies will only be able to employ people who are well off. In the meantime, many NHS staff and care workers are themselves living in poverty or struggling to get by. We also note that many businesses are also reporting similar issues in recruiting and retaining staff. These are acute problems in Oxford.

#### A life course of inequality

21. Inequality can be understood as a life course from early years through to old age. Some geographical areas of Oxford experience multiple levels of deprivation including low skills, low incomes, poor housing and poor health. Child poverty rates in the city are close to the UK average. However, poverty is dispersed very unequally across the city, with 72% of the 6,600 children living below the poverty line residing in 9 of the city's 24 wards, all of which are in the East and South East of the city. Health outcomes across the city differ widely too and there is a significant variance in average life expectancy across the city, particularly for men. This cycle of deprivation is very difficult to break.
22. Education could play a major role in improving social mobility and providing a route out of poverty. However, for some of the 75% of Oxford's young people who are not educated privately, their experience of education reinforces low aspirations and perpetuates inequality. The high cost of housing means that Oxford schools struggle to recruit and retain experienced higher and middle ranking teachers. Newly qualified teachers are easier to recruit but tend to rent for a while before leaving the city because they can't afford to settle here. The high turnover of teaching staff disrupts efforts to improve poor levels of educational attainment in a number of city schools. Professor Dorling advised us

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<sup>3</sup> [The impacts of welfare reform in Oxford, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, April 2014, p. 22](#)

<sup>4</sup> [More households now rent rather than own their home, Oxford City Council, April 2014](#)

that access to higher education amongst local students is higher in Blackpool than it is in Oxford.

### **Areas where Oxford City Council can make the most difference**

23. We have identified the City Council services and interventions that have the most impact on reducing inequality in Oxford and also sought to identify specific areas where there is scope for the City Council to reasonably do more, either within additional resources or with relatively modest additional spend. We sought to avoid focusing on areas where the City Council has no powers or little influence. Our overview of the City Council's contribution to combatting inequality is included as Appendix 6. This includes gaps and opportunities identified during this review by people who responded to our call for evidence, those who spoke to us in person, Council officers and scrutiny Councillors.
24. Due to the wide scope of this review, we were unable to look in detail at all aspects of the City Council's contribution and have highlighted some specific Council functions and services for further consideration at the end of this report. Having deliberated on all the evidence gathered we reached a number of specific recommendations. These are grouped into the following four themes and explained below:
- i. Taking a strategic approach to inequality
  - ii. Health & Housing
  - iii. Tackling social and financial exclusion
  - iv. Helping residents to fulfil their potential

### **Taking a strategic approach to inequality**

25. The City Council aspires to put inequality alleviation at the heart of everything it does. We endorse the laudable policy statement in the City Council's Corporate Plan and found that there is a lot of good work taking place across the authority to support this:

*Oxford City Council does all that it can to make Oxford a fairer, more equal place”  
– Oxford City Council Corporate Plan<sup>5</sup>*

26. The causes and drivers of inequality are complex, and there remains a risk that the long-term strategic direction of the council may inadvertently exacerbate rather than alleviate inequalities within the city. The recommendations of this report are in part an effort to mitigate this risk.

#### **A strategy for inequality**

27. We suggest that a multi-agency strategy for inequality should be developed to guide the priorities and work on this agenda. We think the City Council is well placed to lead on the development of this strategy, which should build on the findings of this Inequality Review and be further informed by Oxford Clinical

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<sup>5</sup> [Corporate Plan 2015-2019, Oxford City Council, February 2015](#)

Commissioning Group's study of health inequalities, as well as the input of all relevant agencies.

***Recommendation 1 - We recommend that the City Council leads on the development of a long-term multi-agency inequality strategy for Oxford. This should be informed in part by the evidence gathered in this Inequality Review and enhanced when Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group produces its report on health inequalities. The Strategy should be supported by an Action Plan that includes any accepted Inequality Panel recommendations.***

### **Partnership working**

28. The Council has strong links with a number of key partners, including the health sector and a range of voluntary and community groups. Given the extent of the problem of inequality in Oxford, there is a need for all agencies to work together and intervene effectively at all ages in order to make a lasting difference. This is the best way of tackling issues associated with inequality, and where effective, significant savings can be realised. The partner organisations we spoke to all recognised this need. We note that a management restructure is taking place and suggest that the City Council considers whether it has the resources it needs to play a leading role in working with partners to combat inequality in Oxford.

***Recommendation 2 – We recommend that the City Council ensures it has sufficient staffing resources in partnership posts to play a leading role in working with partners to deliver on a multi-agency inequality strategy for Oxford (see recommendation 1). We envisage that savings are achievable from overcoming silos and working in partnership to tackle long terms issues associated with inequality.***

### **Measuring and monitoring inequality**

29. The City Council's Social Research Officer produces a range of statistical information and analysis about Oxford and its population which provides some really valuable insights. We were also fortunate to speak with Professor Danny Dorling, a leading social geographer with extensive knowledge of issues of inequality in the city. We suggest that the City Council seeks to utilise this expertise by commissioning an inequality index for Oxford.
30. Council performance should be based in part on an assessment of how successfully it impacts the aspects of inequality over which it has direct influence, or significant indirect influence. We believe that a continuous reduction in Oxford's harmfully high levels of inequality should be one of the characteristics of a world class city for everyone.

***Recommendation 3 - We recommend that the City Council commissions Professor Danny Dorling and the City Council's Social Research Officer to develop an Oxford City Inequality Index based on aspects of inequality that the City Council can influence either directly, or indirectly to a significant extent. Council Performance should be assessed against the movement of this index.***

### **Council decision making**

31. Inequality alleviation could be more embedded within the City Council and its decision making and we would like all major Council decisions and development projects to be assessed on their expected aggregate impacts on inequality. This could include factors such as the quality of any employment contracts created and, if the project is intended to generate economic growth, how equitably this growth is likely to be shared. This assessment could be based on an inequality index and guidance should be provided to assessing officers.

***Recommendation 4 - We recommend that all strategy papers and major decisions should include an assessment of their short, medium and long term impacts on inequality. This assessment could be based on an Inequality Index (see recommendation 3), and guidance should be made available to assessing officers.***

### **Health & Housing**

32. The City Council is the housing authority for Oxford and provides a wide range of services aimed at meeting housing needs in the city, from presenting options in cases of statutory homelessness to building new social housing. Housing can directly contribute to health outcomes and the City Council also has a wider role in public health.

#### **Affordable Housing**

33. The lack of affordable housing is a major factor behind inequality in Oxford and the City Council is already aiming to increase the supply of affordable housing in the city in a number of ways. We support these efforts and have suggested a number of additional options that could warrant further exploration.

#### **Green belt review**

34. Restrictions on developing the Oxford Green Belt are a major barrier to the provision of new affordable housing. An assessment of the housing market in Oxfordshire found that the city requires 24,000 to 32,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031 in order to meet its housing needs<sup>6</sup>. However, an assessment of land availability found that the total capacity for new homes within the city over this time period is only 10,212 dwellings<sup>7</sup>.

35. Oxford's current and future housing needs could be met if a very small proportion of the green belt was developed. We believe that this would be preferable to, and more sustainable than focusing solely on expanding county towns, given that approximately half of Oxford's work force already commutes in to the city. We urge the City Council to continue to press for a comprehensive review of the Oxford Green Belt as part of a county-wide review of where new housing could go.

#### **50% affordable housing policy**

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<sup>6</sup> [Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Oxford City Council, March 2014](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Oxford's Housing Land Availability and Unmet Need Assessment, Oxford City Council, December 2014](#)

36. The City Council has a policy whereby planning permission will only be granted for residential developments of 10 or more units if a minimum of 50% of the new homes are provided as affordable housing, unless viability evidence demonstrates a need to reduce this. The City Council has been forced, through the changes to the Planning Practice Guidance, to only apply the 50% criteria to sites of 11 dwellings or greater. Developers of smaller sites are required to make a financial contribution to the provision of new off-site affordable housing. The 50% affordable housing policy is an important policy lever and we would like to see the City Council continuing to apply and enforce this policy where it can.

#### Compulsory Purchase Orders

37. We heard anecdotal evidence that some developers may be holding back sites for development in the expectation that the 50% policy will eventually be reduced or removed. If developers are holding on to derelict land or buildings then the Council has the option of using Compulsory Purchase Orders and there may be a case for pursuing this option more actively.

#### Right to Buy

38. The Council's spending plans assume that approximately 40 social housing units will be sold each year through the Right to Buy scheme and variations on this number represent a financial risk to the Council. It is difficult for the City Council to replace social housing stock lost to Right to Buy within the city limits. Housing need is high but just maintaining the current level of social housing provision is a significant challenge for the City Council. People with housing needs in Oxford are now as likely to be placed in the private rented sector as in the social rented sector but Right to Buy only benefits the latter group.

39. The new government is committed to extending the Right to Buy scheme to housing association properties and local authorities are being advised not to put their energies in seeking to avoid Right to Buy. The impact of the extension of Right to Buy is not yet known but is likely to represent a further challenge to the City Council. We suggest that the City Council evaluates the expected local impacts of government housing policy, including the extension of Right to Buy.

#### Institutional investors

40. Given the scale of the housing problem, the Porch charity which provides support to homeless and vulnerably housed adults suggest that the City Council should look at ways of encouraging institutional investors and ethical funds to invest in providing new good standard affordable accommodation in the city.

#### Innovative solutions

41. We suggest that the City Council should look at innovative ways of boosting the supply of affordable housing, through innovative funding, land access, delivery and ownership models. Based on the axiom 'necessity is the mother of invention', we would like to see the Council aim to make Oxford a centre of excellence in innovation for new affordable housing solutions. The City Council is already looking at investing in 'real lettings' and has invested a small sum in church groups to help them to make houses available on a small scale. We considered whether 'pod homes' and community land trusts could also form part of the solution.



### Pod homes

42. Pod homes could provide high density accommodation to potential first time buyers at affordable rates. We recognise that Pod homes would not solve the issue of land availability, and that significant developments of small units are not compatible with the City Council's balance of dwellings policy

### Balance of dwellings policy

43. The City Council's balance of dwellings policy dates from 2008 and requires that, in developments of more than 4 homes, a proportion of new units are larger units. It aims to shape the housing mix in the city in 2020 and deliver a balanced mix of housing to meet the projected future household need.
44. We received representations that the policy is unnecessary because Oxford already has a relatively high proportion of larger homes compared with other UK cities, and that people tend to make do with less space when prices are high. We heard that this policy is likely to be having some impact on house price inflation, which is having a corrosive effect on social inclusion and inequality. New larger properties completed since the policy was adopted represent 1.2% of the city's total housing stock, so any impact on house price inflation is likely to be fairly marginal. However, we came to the view that an evidence based review of this policy would be timely.

### Community Land Trusts

45. Community Land Trusts are independent, not-for-profit corporations that develop and run housing and other local assets on behalf of a community. This model has the benefits of providing genuinely affordable housing that will remain affordable in the long run and not be affected by rising land and rental values. Community Land Trusts may well provide one of the few robust ways the Council could protect new-build social housing from Right to Buy. We heard that the City Council hasn't explored this option but it is likely that the Council could provide the most units at the cheapest price itself.
46. We suggest that the City Council seeks independent advice on what types of affordable housing models would be viable in Oxford. A group such as Affordable Oxford could be asked to establish which innovative options could potentially form part of a wider, multi-faceted approach to increasing the supply of affordable housing.

### Intergenerational shared living

47. Age UK advised us that a number of older people are under-occupying large properties in Oxford and that home-share options have been under-exploited in the UK. Oxford has a large student population and 11% of all households in the city comprise of people aged 65+ living alone, some of whom are under-occupying and may be experiencing isolation and loneliness<sup>8</sup>. There is an opportunity for the City Council and the Universities to encourage a scheme that

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<sup>8</sup> [Needs Assessment for Older People in Oxford, Oxford City Council, October 2013](#)

matches students with under-occupying single over 65 households, in a way that has worked successfully in Lyon, France<sup>9</sup>.

#### Downsizing

48. Age UK advised us that there is a very narrow range of good and affordable housing options available to older people in Oxford. We note that the City Council is currently undertaking a review of older people's housing in the city. We have also been made aware of cases where groups of older people want to downsize and stay together as a community. We suggest that the City Council explores whether there is scope to provide a mechanism for enabling groups of older people to do this as it will make homes available while helping these people to retain their close social networks.

#### Housing out of area

49. Due to the scale of the housing crisis it seems likely that the City Council will be unable to meet Oxford's housing needs in the coming years, even with an extensive range of interventions. While it's not desirable, we recognise that it may be necessary for the City Council to look at options for delivering affordable housing to outside of Oxford.

***Recommendation 5 - We recommend that the City Council progresses all options for boosting the supply of affordable housing, including by:***

- a) Continuing to push for a review of the Green Belt around Oxford as part of a wider county land review to identify sites for new housing,***
- b) Enforcing the City Council's 50% affordable housing policy,***
- c) Considering greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to buy derelict land and properties that aren't coming forward for development,***
- d) Evaluating the potential local impacts of the new Government's housing policies, such as the extension of the Right to Buy scheme to housing association properties,***
- e) Encouraging ethical or institutional investors to rent good standard accommodation to people in housing need at affordable rates,***
- f) Aiming to make Oxford a centre of excellence in innovation for new social and affordable housing solutions, ensuring that its own policies (such as the Balance of Dwellings Policy) are compatible with this aim. Affordable Oxford could be asked to provide advice on what options would be viable in Oxford,***
- g) Considering whether there is scope for the City Council or the Universities to promote 'inter-generational shared living'.***
- h) Considering whether there is a way the City Council could assist groups of older people in downsizing collectively while staying together as a community, perhaps by creating a group or register that people can join or sign up to.***

#### **Key worker housing**

50. Key working housing is housing allocated specifically for people in key public sector jobs, such as clinical health workers and senior teaching staff. Additional

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<sup>9</sup> [Jacques is 86. His housemate is 18. BBC Radio 4, 19 May 2015](#)

key worker housing could help to alleviate the problems that schools and hospitals experience in recruiting and retaining staff.

#### Intermediate housing

51. Oxford City Council's 50% affordable housing policy stipulates that 20% of affordable housing should be provided as intermediate housing (affordable home ownership options). We would like to see this including more new accommodation made available exclusively to key workers. We suggest that the Council promptly gathers evidence on the types and affordability of key worker housing models, looking at how this has been delivered in Cambridge and elsewhere. As part of this exercise, the Council should also assess the impacts of losing other intermediate tenure models.

#### Shared equity loan scheme

52. The City Council has already made a significant investment in keyworker housing by offering a shared equity loan scheme to support recruitment to senior leadership posts in city schools, as part of its educational attainment programme. Given the very high turnover of teaching staff at all levels in certain schools, we suggest that the City Council looks at the case for extending this offer to more teachers.

#### Access to the private rented sector

53. The City Council should also explore the possible scope for working with accredited landlords to assist teachers and other key workers in accessing the private rental market, for example by offering longer, more secure tenures and capping rent increases.

***Recommendation 6 - We note the significant difficulties that schools, hospitals and universities (as well as businesses) face in attracting workers to settle in Oxford, and recommend that the City Council:***

- a) Gathers evidence as soon as possible to identify the best way of delivering new build keyworker housing within the 20% of affordable housing provided as intermediate housing,***
- b) Seeks to extend its keyworker housing intervention to more teachers (this is currently offered to senior teaching staff),***
- c) Considers whether there is scope to assist key workers (particularly teachers in priority schools) in accessing housing in the private rented sector, for example by encouraging registered landlords to offer 3 year tenancies and agreeing to raise rents by no more than the CPI measure of inflation.***

#### **Private rented sector housing**

54. The private rented sector is of particular concern in Oxford due to high costs, poor standards and some rogue landlords. There is a marked difference in the level of wrap-around services a tenant receives as a social housing tenant compared to a private sector tenant – the latter being at a significant disadvantage. The Citizens Advice Bureau advised us that people have greater regulatory protection when buying a toaster than when privately renting accommodation. Oxford Child Poverty Action Group said that expensive and insecure housing has an impact on educational attainment and is causing some

families to move away from the city, losing their support networks. Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group advised us that many health issues are largely dependent on housing issues, including; over-crowding, damp, lack of effective heating and insulation, and psychological problems from moving. The City Council is actively raising standards in this sector through licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation, operating a Landlord Accreditation Scheme and tackling unlawful dwellings, of which approximately 270 are estimated to be occupied in Oxford<sup>10</sup>.

#### Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

55. One in five residents now live in a house in multiple occupation (HMO), including an increasing number of families with young children. Standards in this sector are a major concern because poor housing can contribute to poor health outcomes, and this sector includes much of the city's worst housing stock. 90% of the 3,440 licensed HMOs in Oxford did not initially meet the City Council's minimum standards and it is estimated that there is a similar number of unlicensed HMOs across the city<sup>11</sup>. The City Council has required every HMO to have a license and we would welcome efforts to strengthen compliance.

#### Landlord Accreditation Scheme

56. Letting agents and private residential landlords are encouraged to join a voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme which aims to improve the condition and management of the private rented sector. However, fewer than 100 landlords and agents have taken up accreditation, which is low compared to the total number operating in the city. The Council has no powers to force landlords to become accredited, as will be happening in Wales<sup>12</sup>, but we would like to see further efforts to promote the benefits of this scheme to encourage take up. This could help to address the unfairness of some landlords benefiting from high rents while doing very little to improve the substandard and insecure living conditions of their tenants. We are also concerned about some particularly poor practices and conditions in the student housing market.

***Recommendation 7 - We note that the City Council is developing a Private Rented Sector Strategy and recommend that this aims to extend the City Council's interventions in the private rented sector to address abuses in the student housing market and poor standards across the wider private rented sector. This should include the extension of discretionary licensing to cover more properties where possible, enhanced enforcement of the HMO licensing regime and further promotion of landlord accreditation to encourage take up.***

#### **University engagement**

57. The presence of two universities has a significant impact on housing in Oxford. They bring with them some 32,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students, a significant proportion of whom live in the private rented sector<sup>13</sup>. The University of Oxford in particular is a major presence in the city in terms of its spending

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<sup>10</sup> [Unlawful Developments Progress Report, Oxford City Council, February 2015](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Houses in Multiple Occupation \(HMO\) Licensing Scheme, Oxford City Council, June 2015](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Landlord Accreditation Wales, 2015](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Student Numbers in Oxford, Oxford City Council, April 2012](#)

power, employment and the assets and property portfolio it holds. It is in the interests of the University that the city is successful and functioning well.

58. We note that the University of Oxford is looking to expand the post doctorate research sector and attract 1,100 senior academics to the city, which would put additional pressure on housing. We would like to see the universities actively housing more academics and students while providing new affordable housing (student accommodation does currently include a requirement for a financial contribution towards affordable housing). We note that some of the colleges hold low-grade agricultural land around Barton which is in the green belt but could potentially be developed as housing. The University of Cambridge recently built 3,000 homes, half of which have been allocated as key worker housing for University and College staff<sup>14</sup>. The new Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford should be encouraged to look at this example and provide a greater degree of input in housing matters in the city.
59. We understand that the City Council's new Assistant Chief Executive will be responsible for external affairs and hope that they will play a key role in engaging with organisations such as the University of Oxford, and where appropriate, urging them to make a greater contribution to the city. Oxford Brookes University already provides funding towards bus services and the University of Oxford should be urged to make similar contributions towards new schemes or services that are in its interests and have wider benefits to the city as a whole.

***Recommendation 8 - We recommend that the City Council:***

- a) Calls on the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford to provide reinvigorated engagement in Oxford's housing sector by learning from the Cambridge model and providing new accommodation to house academics.***
- b) Tasks the new Assistant Chief Executive with working closely with the University sector and encouraging a greater degree of input into city matters, including financial contributions where appropriate.***

**Fuel Poverty**

60. Fuel poverty in England is measured by a Low Income High Costs definition, which is driven by three components; poor energy efficiency, high energy costs, and low household income. We fully endorse the City Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy, which focuses on energy efficiency improvement work and complements the income maximisation activities detailed in the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy.
61. In the majority of cases fuel poverty affects people in private tenures living in properties built prior to 1974. It disproportionately impacts on vulnerable groups that tend to spend more time at home, such as the elderly, disabled, long-term sick and the very young. It can be difficult for people who may be in fuel poverty to know whether they are entitled to various forms of support. We suggest that the City Council should use a fuel poverty calculator, which should be made

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<sup>14</sup> [Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor break ground on £1bn North West Cambridge development, University of Cambridge, 20 June 2013](#)

available online for staff and the public to use, to determine who is eligible for support and to direct people in fuel poverty to contact the Council for advice.

#### Oxford City Council's Housing Stock

62. Lots of work has been undertaken within the Council's housing stock to improve energy efficiency and most of the quick wins, such as installing double glazing, gas condenser boilers and cavity wall insulation, have been completed. Further strategic investments in the Council's housing stock are on-going and the City Council is offering free energy audits to Council tenants.

#### Fuel Poverty in the private rented sector

63. The City Council has been working with landlords to prepare for national changes aimed at improving energy efficiency. From 2016, landlords can't refuse a tenant's reasonable request for energy efficiency improvements, and from 2018, only properties with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'E' or higher can be rented out. The City Council enforces where there is underperformance in the private rented sector and has been checking the EPC rating of 'F' & 'G' rated properties as well as those that have no EPC rating for excess cold. The County Council's Trading Standards service is responsible for enforcing where an EPC is required. Information sharing between the two authorities could potentially lead to better outcomes and we suggest that the City Council could also ask for powers to enforce where EPCs are required if this would reduce duplication or help to improve overall efficiency.

#### ***Recommendation 9 – We recommend that the City Council builds on its commendable work on addressing fuel poverty by:***

- a) Making a fuel poverty calculator available online that directs people in fuel poverty to contact the City Council for advice on what support they may be entitled to,***
- b) Asking Trading Standards whether they would like the City Council to refer cases to them where an Energy Performance Certificate is required and whether they would be prepared to give the City Council any enforcement powers.***

#### **Health**

64. Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (OCCG) advised us that they are commissioning a report into health inequalities. This will build up an evidence base and identify suitable measures and actions to address health inequalities because entrenched health inequalities aren't improving. Life expectancy is lower in the most deprived areas of the city and life expectancy gap is 8.8 years for men and 3.7 years for women<sup>15</sup>. Some families experience intergenerational poor health despite lots of effort from lots of people. Learning Disability and severe Mental Health are big issues in Oxford as outcomes are relatively poor. The worst health outcomes occur in the areas of deprivation, where take up of free health checks is low. OCCG work with the City Council to ensure that local health plans and community plans are joined up and to identify opportunities for potential joint project work, for example on self-harm.

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<sup>15</sup> [Oxford Health Profile 2015, Public Health England, June 2015](#)



#### Proactive health interventions

65. The high population turnover in the city means that many people slip through the net, so there is a need to set up more proactive health structures that can spot issues early on, such as people not taking their medication. At the moment the focus is on patients who do attend appointments but missed appointments cost the NHS some £9.5m a year in Oxfordshire<sup>16</sup>.

#### Pooled budgeting

66. A number of organisations impact on health outcomes and there is a need to ensure there is the same drive to reduce inequalities across all organisations, and to move towards pooling resources in areas such as planning, housing and transport. The culture of annual budget setting is a barrier to this aim.

#### Social prescribing

67. Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group advised us that the concept of social prescribing is been trialled in Gloucestershire and that they are keeping a close watch on progress. Social prescribing is where GPs prescribe activities that people might benefit from to address various health issues, including mental health disorders. We support this concept where evidence suggests that it can make a difference and hope that GPs will be encouraged to engage in this agenda. We suggest that the City Council should be prepared to utilise its own assets, such as by allowing prescribed access to leisure centres and swimming pools, together with the agencies it supports, to facilitate social prescribing in Oxford.

#### Online access to services

68. In discussion with Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, we identified that a single online point of access for multiple services in Oxford would be a welcome development. This could take the form of an 'assessment of needs' website that provides a way in to various services provided by a range of agencies, including; health, mental health, housing, social care etc.

***Recommendation 10 - We recommend that the City Council builds on its work with Oxford Clinical Commissioning Group and other health partners by:***

- a) Supporting the delivery of more proactive health interventions in areas of multiple deprivations, such as contacting people who miss appointments,***
- b) Working towards the concept of pooled budgeting in areas where evidence suggests that this approach can improve health outcomes.***
- c) Utilising the City Council's assets (such as leisure centres) and the agencies we support to facilitate social prescribing, and encouraging more GPs to take up social prescribing,***
- d) Working with partners to develop a single online point of access for multiple services in Oxford, including health, housing and social care.***

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<sup>16</sup> [The real cost of missed appointments. Oxford University Hospitals NHT Trust, 11 June 2015](#)

### **Planning new developments**

69. As the planning authority, the City Council can consider how factors of inequality and public health are factored in to the planning system. Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group advised us that open access, exercise, and cycling and walking should be built in to the planning and development of new sites. Consideration should also be given to the physical shape of these communities, to ensure that they are attractive places to live and have a sense of community, which can help to combat forms of social isolation. These are also some of the main messages in the Director of Public Health for Oxfordshire's Annual Report for 2015<sup>17</sup>.
70. Age UK advised us that there should be a greater variety of housing within the street scene in new developments so that older people may have the option of downsizing without having to leave their local area. The outside environment needs to be well lit, with good quality pavements and access to public toilets.

***Recommendation 11 - We recommend that the City Council explores how factors around inequality and public health could be designed in to the planning and development of sites. These factors should include cycling and walking provision, the accessibility of parks, and the provision of a variety of housing within the street scene. Consideration should also be given to shaping new communities. For example, new communities should include a centre and shared open space.***

### **Tackling social and financial exclusion**

71. Services and interventions that focus specifically on excluded groups can play a vital role in reducing inequalities. During our evidence gathering, we focused on a number of groups that are often 'below the radar', and identified some gaps in provision or areas where the City Council could play a greater role. The City Council also provides a range of services that focus on strengthening communities and promoting social inclusion, including community centres and grants to community and voluntary organisations. We suggest that the City Council's approach to community engagement and how it meets the needs of Oxford's diverse range of communities should be subject to a separate detailed review.

### **Homelessness**

72. Oxford has one of the highest rates of people experiencing homelessness per capita outside of London and homelessness is a big issue in the city. A number of homelessness services are located in Oxford including 3 large hostels; so many homeless people gravitate towards Oxford from the neighbouring districts. We are concerned that instances of rough sleeping seem to be on the increase. A street count conducted in November 2014 identified 26 rough sleepers, compared to 19 a year earlier. A more recent estimate, drawing on intelligence from local stakeholders, was 43<sup>18</sup>. The City Council spends £1.4m per year on a

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<sup>17</sup> [Director of Public Health Annual Report for Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire County Council, June 2015, p. 6 & 15](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Non-statutory single homelessness, Oxford City Council, March 2015](#)



range of homelessness services, and has committed to protecting the element of this funding that isn't government grant money over the medium term. At the same time, the County Council funding is reducing from £3.8m to £2.3m. The number of bed spaces is being maintained but the quality of support available is likely to drop.

#### No Second Night Out

73. Healthwatch Oxfordshire raised a number of concerns with us about the Council's No Second Night Out (NSNO) policy, which targets interventions at new rough sleepers, and proposed 5 recommendations for the Panel to consider (see appendix 5). A representative of Healthwatch advised us that much of the NSNO work on the ground was very good but there were issues with the forceful evictions of rough sleepers despite a lack of available hostel beds, hospital discharge processes, a high turnover of staff, as well as a need to address multiple complex needs.
74. The City Council's Head of Housing Needs reassured us that the first 4 Healthwatch recommendations were adequately covered within current provision and that the County Council has recently consulted on the re-commissioning of homelessness services. However, he agreed with the need for a county wide discharge policy for people experiencing homelessness, as per best practice guidelines. The cost of an additional night in a specialist Mental Health unit can regularly cost as much as £500. There are separate programmes aimed at entrenched rough sleepers, who are not the focus of the NSNO policy.

#### Complex needs

75. We heard that new rough sleepers are likely to engage in substance abuse if they haven't already, and many rough sleepers also have mental health problems. Having multiple complex needs means that many are denied access to the services they need. For example, people with mental health issues are unable to access alcohol treatment services and vice versa. The City Council now funds a complex needs service in conjunction with Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health. We strongly endorse this programme which focuses on those whose needs are not met by the Adult Homeless Pathway or the supported independent living pathway.

#### ***Recommendation 12 - We recommend that the City Council:***

- a) Assists in bringing about negotiations with local health, housing and social care commissioners and providers so that a county wide discharge policy for people experiencing homelessness can be adopted as per best practice guidelines,***
- b) Extends interventions aimed at supporting homeless people with complex needs (e.g. substance abuse and mental health issues), who are often excluded from accessing the services they need.***

#### **Food poverty**

*Food poverty can be defined as the inability to obtain healthy, affordable food: "worse diet, worse access, worse health, higher percentage of income on food"*

*and less choice from a restricted range of foods. Above all food poverty is about less or almost no consumption of fruit and vegetables” – Feeding the Gaps<sup>19</sup>*

76. Unequal access to nutritious food has a direct bearing on a person’s health and general wellbeing. We reviewed a report called Feeding the Gaps, which sets out the findings of a project researching food poverty in Oxford, and spoke to local experts on emergency food aid and surplus food redistribution. We heard that demand for emergency food aid was rising, although this local and national trend is difficult to quantify. The causes of food poverty in Oxford reflect the national picture, and include benefit sanctions and payment delays, low wages and the bedroom tax.
77. The Feeding the Gaps project identified and interviewed a diverse range of providers of food aid in the city, some of which cater for specific groups while others are open to all. The Oxford Food Bank employs an innovative and pioneering model of redistributing surplus food to 45 local food aid providers, 41 of which are based within Oxford. The use of surplus food is saving providers a lot of money and enabling them to provide genuinely healthy and nutritious meals. Currently, only a fraction of local surplus food is being used.
78. Most of these organisations have discarded the idea that providing emergency food aid fosters a dependency culture, instead many have reported that that seeking food aid generates embarrassment and stigma which can prevent people in need from accessing help. Some providers have overcome this problem by creating a strong cultural or community context in which meals are provided. There are lots of co-benefits to providing food aid. Some providers have found it possible to use meals as a way of hooking people into other services such as legal advice. It is also an effective way of providing people with skills and personal development, and for building communities.
79. Feeding the Gaps identifies a number of possible next steps aimed at building capacity in this sector and changing attitudes towards surplus food. We were pleased to learn that funding has been secured to progress some of this follow up work and address the five specific gaps in provision identified in the report:
- People in areas of deprivation, including Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill
  - Families with Children over 5, who are not eligible for support from Children’s Centres
  - People in low-paying jobs
  - People transitioning out of services
  - Asylum seekers and refugees
80. Emergency food aid is not an area that the City Council is directly involved in. However, having heard evidence from those with local knowledge and expertise in this area, we believe there is strong evidence that this should be an emerging area of policy development in the City Council’s efforts to address inequalities. We want to ensure that the local network is sustainable and can continue to address areas of unmet need. Since the restructuring of the Primary Care Trusts, there has been no network bringing together the local providers of

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<sup>19</sup> [D. Barling and T. Lang \(2009\) in Feeding the Gaps: Food poverty and food surplus redistribution on Oxford, Doireann Lalor, September 2014](#)

emergency food aid. Prior to this, the City Council was the lead agency. The City Council could again take the lead role in bringing together local food aid providers to better enable them to operate more efficiently as a network, share resources and best practice, and work towards filling the gaps in provision outlined above. The City Council has experience of capacity building in other sectors which it may be able to apply here. There may also be an opportunity to raise providers' awareness of services and support provided by the City Council. We note that Bristol has been cited as an example of best practice in terms of food policy.

***Recommendation 13 - Oxford City Council is leading the way in defining, measuring and tackling fuel poverty and we recommend that the same priority should be given to the issue of food poverty. A part-time role should be created to tackle food poverty, which should involve facilitating the work of the not-for-profit and voluntary sector to maximise their impact, and developing a food poverty strategy for Oxford. This strategy should aim to replicate best practice established by Bristol to reduce food bank demand and increase access to good and affordable food across the city.***

#### **Support for asylum seekers**

81. Asylum seekers are a specific group that are likely to be affected by issues of inequality. We spoke to Asylum Welcome, a group that supports refugees, asylum seekers and immigration detainees by providing advice, practical services, human-contact and food. Asylum Welcome receives annual grant funding from the City Council, as well as funding from donations, trusts and foundations. Oxford is not a designated dispersal city and has a relatively small number of asylum seekers. However, the Campsfield House immigration detention centre is nearby and some local people are very active, which means that Oxford is able to punch above its weight and influence the national debate.
82. Asylum seekers are unable to work while their claims are being processed. They are therefore more likely to be dependent on food aid and some are living destitute in Oxford. Of these, 3 or 4 have the status of having No Recourse to Public Funds which means that they have been through the asylum process as far as they can and are liable for detention and removal, even if they have children. This is a particularly vulnerable and hidden group that falls outside of the remit of Asylum Welcome. We heard that other asylum seekers often find they are turned away from services even when they do have certain entitlements. Many asylum seekers who do have accommodation have reported having tenancy issues.
83. Asylum seekers often need access to legal advice, for example when additional evidence becomes available to support their asylum claim, or when human rights claims are made, which are no longer covered by Legal Aid. Asylum Welcome advised us that there are now fewer lawyers operating in this field and that they have on occasion paid for lawyers.
84. The City Council has made a commitment to Oxford's mission to be a 'City of Sanctuary'. We asked what the Council could do to ensure that Asylum Welcome remains viable and continues to support asylum seekers in the city.

We heard that funding from the City Council is currently provided annually and that a longer-term funding settlement would provide more security and cut their administrative workload. Asylum Welcome are paying a commercial rent on their currently premises which is due to increase by over 10%.

**Recommendation 14 – We recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Identifies how it can provide a greater degree of funding security to Asylum Welcome. Consideration should be given to including their work within the remit of the Council's Community Grants commissioning programme, which awards funding for 3 years rather than annually. This will reduce Asylum Welcome's administrative workload and help to ensure that they remain viable over the medium term.**
- b) Explores whether it could provide low cost accommodation to third sector organisations by utilising unused capacity in Council-owned assets such as Community Centres.**

**Financial exclusion**

85. People who are financially excluded are often in poverty or experiencing disadvantage and as a result they may be unable to access affordable credit or bank accounts, struggle to manage money or pay bills, or are financially at risk. 11% of Oxford's population is indebted<sup>20</sup>. We strongly endorse the City Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan which aims to address issues of debt, income, housing and skills over the short and longer term. The City Council also offers a Council Tax Reduction scheme which people on low incomes may be entitled to and Discretionary Housing Payments. Many of these interventions are transformative and focused on changing lives rather than just income streams.

Welfare reform

86. Research commissioned by the City Council found that the majority of people affected by welfare reforms in Oxford were in work on low pay. Some 14,950 households were £31 per week worse off on average due to welfare reforms and 60% of these household have at least one person in work<sup>21</sup>. Two particular groups of concern were identified; disabled people and lone parents. We endorse the work of the Welfare Reform Team which has been involved in a national pilot project in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, actively helping people affected by welfare reform by providing personal budgeting support.

87. We note that Universal Credit is now being gradually phased in. A claimant's situation on the day of their assessment is what counts in calculating their entitlement, which will present difficulties for those in insecure employment or on zero hours contracts. We heard that this is hugely challenging but that the City Council is one of the best placed local authorities in the UK to support this transition. We urge the City Council to ensure that as many people as possible experiencing financial exclusion have the opportunity to benefit from the Welfare Reform Team's interventions.

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<sup>20</sup> [Financial Inclusion Strategy, Oxford City Council, 2014](#)

<sup>21</sup> [The impacts of welfare reform in Oxford, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, April 2014, p. 4](#)

### Single view of debt

88. We heard that a number of people in debt owe money to the City Council and often these include multiple debts (e.g. Council Tax, rent, charges). We support moves towards implementing a 'single view of debt' so that these multiple debts can be identified, and where possible consolidated into more manageable single payments.

### Independent advice

89. The Citizens Advice Bureau advised us that the four most common issues they deal with nationally relate to debt, benefits, housing and employment. The order and mix of these issues varies in different parts of the country and in Oxford the three main issues of particular concern are:

- i. Housing supply and the quality of the private rented sector,
- ii. The benefits system letting down chronically disabled people causing stress and strain,
- iii. Poor employment practices causing insecure employment. In particular, the employment rights of new arrivals are not respected and people do not know what they are entitled to.

90. We welcome the City Council's commitment to maintaining the level of funding the advice sector provides in recent budget rounds. To support this vital open-access provision, we would like to see the City Council making a commitment to protect funding for the advice sector over the medium term.

### Debt advice

91. We heard from the Citizens Advice Bureau that some debt advice is available but it's not enough. The provision of money management and debt advice in St. Aldate's Chambers increased from 4 days per week to 5 days per week in April 2015 but funding has only been allocated until March 2016. We suggest that longer term funding options are explored and also recognise the importance of monitoring the impacts of this provision over time.

### Unclaimed entitlements

92. We note that the City Council has provided funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau to help over 60s who don't meet the threshold for social care to claim benefits they were entitled to. This project brought an extra £1m into the local economy, with the average pensioner who benefited being £2-4k better off. We heard that CAB plan to continue this work.

### Discretionary Housing Payments

93. The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) scheme provides short term relief to applicants, for example those affected by welfare reforms, in order to prevent homelessness. The City Council administers this scheme in Oxford and focuses awards in ways that can reduce dependence and help people to find sustainable solutions to their financial situations.

94. The Council's funding allocation from central government has recently reduced significantly, perversely as a result of the unaffordability of private rented housing

in Oxford<sup>22</sup>, and there is also a high degree of funding uncertainty in future years. Previously, some unspent DHP funding has been returned to the government at year end. We note that the City Council has supplemented its DHP grant this year and urge the Council to make full use of its DHP budget allocation.

**Recommendation 15 - We strongly endorse the City Council's approach to combatting financial exclusion and recommend that the City Council:**

- a) Ensures that the Welfare Reform Team are fully and best deployed in order to provide greater assistance and proactively reach more people, particularly those moving on to Universal Credit,**
- b) Moves towards implementing a 'single view of debt' in order to identify multiple debts owed to the Council, and where possible, consolidate these,**
- c) Gives a high priority to continuing to protect the current level of funding for the advice sector over the medium term,**
- d) Explores longer term funding options for a housing needs money advice caseworker, and evaluates the impact of this provision over time,**
- e) Continues to work closely with CAB and other agencies to encourage the take up of unclaimed benefits.**
- f) Aims to make full use of its Discretionary Housing Payments budget.**

### **Support for charities**

95. We found that there is a wide range of charities operating in Oxford providing a various types of services and support. In many cases, they are unaware of what other charities and groups are doing and we heard from Community Action Groups Oxfordshire that there is no reliable local directory of charities. The Charity Commission website provides one option but is not always easy to use.

**Recommendation 16 – We recommend that the City Council establishes a reliable directory of charities for Oxford, setting out the aims, principle client groups and types of relief provided. This will help to ensure that local charities have a greater awareness of what other charities do.**

### **Helping residents to fulfil their potential**

96. City Council interventions can provide a key role in helping residents to fulfil their potential and participate fully in society. For example, the Council's Youth Ambition programme aims to help young people to broaden their perception of their own capabilities and stimulate ambition. The City Council has also invested significantly in improving educational attainment in struggling schools and is participating in the Business in the Community scheme where City Council employees provide mentoring to pupils at a city school. We would like the City Council to build on its role as a positive agent for change that can successfully transform residents' lives, particularly for those in areas of deprivation.

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<sup>22</sup> [Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, Oxford City Council, March 2015](#)

## **Education**

97. A number of people we spoke to including the Child Poverty Action Group, highlighted poor educational outcomes in some city schools as being a major cause for concern as it can perpetuate inequality and entrench intergenerational low aspirations. Education is a County Council function but the City Council has directed substantial resources at improving educational attainment in the city's poorest performing schools over recent years. These investments have been scrutinised elsewhere but we strongly encourage the City Council to remain involved in addressing poor attainment because well targeted intervention can have a real impact in reducing educational inequalities, particularly at Key Stage 1 and key Stage 2. Past difficulties in achieving effective interventions in educational outcomes should not be used as an excuse to disengage. The crucial role educational outcomes play in determining the life course of our children and their exposure to inequality are too great for this area to be overlooked.

### Educational grants

98. We suggest that the City Council prioritises offering a new non-prescriptive educational improvement grant programme which is accessible to schools in deprived areas. Head Teachers could for example apply for grant money to fund a specific line item in their School Improvement Plan focused on Pupil Premium or Special Educational Needs pupils. The funding should be output-based so that uses that demonstrate positive impacts are prioritised for further funding.

### Promoting take up of the pupil premium

99. We understand that since the introduction of universal free school meals for pupils in year 1 and 2, fewer parents of eligible pupils are registering their children for free school meals and schools are missing out on some of the Pupil Premium funding they are entitled to. The County Council is unable to access benefits data to determine which pupils qualify for Pupil Premium funding and we suggest that the City Council considers whether it has a role in solving this issue.

### ***Recommendation 17 - We recommend that the City Council continues to prioritise improving educational attainment in the city by:***

- a) Offering a new educational grant programme to which Head Teachers from schools serving deprived areas can apply. This programme would provide tangible output-based funding to reduce educational inequalities in city schools. The criteria for awards should be non-prescriptive but grants could be used to fund specific line items in School Improvement Plans focused on Pupil Premium and Special Educational Needs pupils, for example.***
- b) Engaging with partners and considering whether it has a role in ensuring that eligible year 1 and 2 pupils are registered for the Pupil Premium so that their schools receive the additional funding they are entitled to.***

### **Promoting opportunities**

100. The City Council can play an important role in promoting and maximising the opportunities available to residents in areas of deprivation.

### Careers Advice in Schools

101. We identified that careers advice in city schools is poor or lacking, particularly at years 7 and 8. While the City Council has no powers in this area, it could seek to exert some influence.

#### Social clauses

102. The City Council has been using social clauses to ensure that major development projects provide apprenticeship opportunities for young adults living in the more deprived parts of the city. We would like to see further use of social clauses to ensure that the benefits of development and growth are extended to all parts of the city. Assurance is also needed that developers contracted by the City Council deliver these commitments.

#### Discounts for tutors at community centres

103. We spoke with a social enterprise that was looking to provide an accredited course at Barton aimed at overcoming issues of low self-esteem in 12-15 year old girls and enabling them to build healthy relationships. We recognise that these types of issues require ground up solutions but feel there is a role for the City Council in providing facilitation that helps to make these types of solutions more viable. We note that Blackbird Leys Community Centre now offers substantial discounts to tutors hiring computers and providing educational opportunities, and that there are plans to offer these discounts at Rose Hill and Barton. We would like to see this offer extended to all Community Centres located in areas of deprivation.

#### Utilising partnerships

104. We suggest that the City Council should encourage more input from university students and sixth formers, including from private schools, in areas such as assisting younger children for whom English is not a first language, and in broadening access to resources such as arts provision.

***Recommendation 18 - We recommend that the City Council utilises skills within communities and works with partners to maximise every opportunity to provide employment and career paths for more residents living in areas of multiple deprivation, including by:***

- a) Seeking to influence and improve the provision of targeted careers advice in schools, extending this to younger pupils (years 7-8), as well as offering mentoring into adulthood,***
- b) Extending the use of social clauses to create more and better opportunities for young people. Clarity is required as to how the City Council will ensure that developers deliver social clauses,***
- c) Extending the offer of reduced fees for tutors to all Community Centres situated in areas of multiple deprivations. The City Council should also continue to make better use of Community Centres and promote them as vibrant local hubs.***
- d) Maximising links with universities, private schools, the student hub and businesses to get more volunteer help for appropriate programmes. These opportunities could include coaching and mentoring to help vulnerable people into work, assisting young people to whom English is not a first language, and broadening access to resources such as arts provision.***



## Employment

105. Oxford benefits from a buoyant economy and high employment but it also has a strong low wage economy, with a lot of low paying and insecure jobs. Poor employment practices in the city were highlighted by a number of people we spoke to including the Citizens Advice Bureau. These include employers paying less than the minimum wage, employing staff on zero hours contracts against their will, and some restaurants charging staff to wait tables. We were also appalled at reports that a number of people in Oxford were arrested on slavery charges in March 2015<sup>23</sup>. We suggest that the City Council seeks to utilise any influence it has in calling for an end to exploitative employment practices.

***Recommendation 19 - We recommend that the City Council calls on local employers to put an end to exploitative employment practices in the city. These practices include employers charging restaurant staff to wait tables, paying less than the minimum wage, and employing workers on zero hours contracts against their will.***

## Oxford Living Wage

106. The City Council is committed to promoting the Oxford Living Wage which is set at 95% of the London Living Wage and takes into account the high costs of housing and transport in the city. One of the biggest impacts that could be made on reducing inequality within Oxford is to lift the wages of as many people as possible to the Oxford Living Wage.

107. We spoke with the Living Wage Foundation about how they are developing the Living Wage. There are now 1,500 accredited Living Wage employers nationally. Future developments include an emerging consumer campaign, similar to the Fairtrade campaign, the introduction of Living Wage Hubs in university cities, and an interactive app.

108. We would like to see a Living Wage Hub in Oxford and a programme of events and activities, including visual branding for local employers to display, to promote the Oxford Living Wage. The Hub would ideally be managed by engaged citizens but we recognise that for this idea to get off the ground, the City Council may need to allocate officer time in the early stages. Once established, the Hub could look to expand on its remit by engaging in other employment issues, such as pay ratios and equal pay for men and women.

109. Consideration should be given to who would be the public face of the Oxford Living Wage, and we suggest that this could be a City Councillor.

110. The Living Wage Foundation has genuine appreciation for the work of the City Council in this area and wants to work constructively with us. However, there is a tension due to Oxford having its own Oxford Living Wage rate which is different from the national Living Wage rate. For them, this introduces complexity and can be confusing for employers. This runs contrary to what they are trying to do nationally. However, we believe that the very high cost of housing in Oxford

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<sup>23</sup> [Seven arrested after warrants carried out - Vale of White Horse and Oxford, Thames Valley Police, March 2015](#)

necessitates a higher living wage rate than other areas of the country with the exception of London.

**Recommendation 20 – We recommend that the City Council continues to look to raise wages by:**

- a) Creating a Living Wage Hub in Oxford based around the Oxford Living Wage. This should involve a programme of activities to promote the Oxford Living Wage, and a distinct logo that Oxford Living Wage employers are encouraged to display. Ideally these activities should be led by engaged citizens but they may initially require some officer resource. The Hub could also look at other related employment issues such as pay ratios.**
- b) Identifying a public face of the Oxford Living Wage. This could be a member champion.**
- c) Working constructively with the Living Wage Foundation in promoting Living Wage Week and seeking to raise wages and improve working conditions in Oxford, particularly in low paid sectors such as hospitality, health and social care.**

#### **The City Council as an employer**

111. The City Council is itself a major employer in the city and can have some limited impact on reducing inequalities through its own employment practices. In discussion with officers we identified measures that could extend employment opportunities at the City Council to the more excluded groups and communities, enabling the Council to build a workforce that is more representative of the diverse communities it serves. These include more flexible recruitment, outreach to under-represented groups, better online accessibility and guidance for applicants, and more targeted feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

112. We also considered whether there is scope for looking at salaries and the way salary increases are applied. If all employees receive the same percentage pay increase each year then the pay gap between higher paid and lower paid staff increases in cash terms. We suggest that there is a case for looking at increasing salaries of lower paid staff at a higher rate, in order to maintain rather than widen this gap over time.

**Recommendation 21 - We recognise that Oxford City Council is a major employer in the city, and recommend that the City Council continues to develop its own employment practices through:**

- a) More flexible recruitment practices such as accepting CVs and more widespread use of assessment centres,**
- b) An annual managed calendar of interventions targeting black and minority ethnic communities and other underrepresented groups,**
- c) Better targeting of constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants,**
- d) Interactive and accessible recruitment webpages with guidance for applicants,**
- e) Uplifting the salaries of lower paid staff at a higher rate than those of higher paid staff to ensure that the pay gap between them doesn't increase over time.**

## **Conclusion**

113. Our cross-cutting review of inequality found that the City Council is doing a lot of very good work to combat persistent patterns of inequality in Oxford. These issues are complex and difficult to solve even with a strong partnership approach. Doing so is particularly challenging, but arguably as important as ever, at a time when public finances are constrained. We have recommended a wide range of actions that we think are feasible and affordable. Taken together, these would enable the City Council to maximise its impact and make a significant additional contribution to combatting inequality in Oxford.

## **Further consideration**

114. We recommend that the Scrutiny Committee should consider adding the following items to its work programme:
- a) The Youth Ambition Programme
  - b) How well the Community and Neighbourhoods Team is meeting the needs of marginalised groups and communities
  - c) Fuel Poverty – uptake and results of thermal ratings surveys
  - d) Housing delivery models
  - e) Public transport costs

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