

**To:** City Executive Board  
**Date:** 19 September 2017  
**Report of:** Head of Housing Services  
**Title of Report:** Draft Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21

| <b>Summary and recommendations</b>                                   |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Purpose of report:</b>  | To request that the City Executive Board approve that the Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 (and its associated appendices) can be published as a draft strategy for a period of public consultation. |
| <b>Key decision:</b>   | Yes   |
| <b>Executive Board Member:</b>                                       | Councillor Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing  |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | Meeting Housing Needs   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>   | Housing Strategy 2015-18.   |
| <b>Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board resolves to:</b> |   |
| 1.   | <b>Approve</b> the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 as a draft for public consultation in line with requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.   |
| 2.   | <b>Approve</b> that as part of the consultation process, a meeting of key stakeholders is convened to assess the causes and potential remedies for the rising levels of street homelessness.                        |

| <b>Appendices</b> |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Appendix 1        | Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 with sub appendices:<br>A = Evidence base;<br>B = Action Plan;<br>C= National and Oxfordshire Context;<br>D = Welfare Reform Summary of Main Changes since 2011. |
| Appendix 2        | Initial Equality Impact Assessment   |
| Appendix 3        | Risk Register  |

## Introduction

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires a Local Housing Authority to have a strategy in place that sets out its vision for housing and how it will prevent and tackle homelessness and meet housing needs across its administrative area. The City Council's existing Housing Strategy 2015-18, Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 and Empty Property Strategy 2013-18 (and associated Action Plans) are all due for renewal in 2018.

## A combined strategy

2. Previously, the City Council has produced separate strategies for housing, homelessness and bringing empty properties back into use. The Council now intends to produce a single strategy combining all three. The reasoning behind this is to present a clear and coherent overarching strategy, encompassing all three linked themes, which will improve focus and efficiency as well as being easier for customers and stakeholders to understand what the Council is trying to achieve in terms of housing and service provision, and how it intends to work with a range of partners.
3. The draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 sets out ambitious objectives across key priorities, designed to match the scale of the housing issues in Oxford, to be delivered as best the Council and its partners are able to. It covers, planning for the delivery of housing, delivery itself, managing homelessness and our role as an effective landlord.

The key strategic aims and priorities for this strategy are:

- **Increase housing supply and improve access to affordable housing**
  - Tackle the City's housing challenges by promoting high quality development in the City, and in locations near to Oxford that are well-connected to the City, working in partnership with others, to build the homes that Oxford needs.
  - Build more affordable homes, in partnership with others to meet the needs of different income and employment groups in the City, including those on low incomes and those who are vulnerable and need support.
- **Prevent homelessness and meet the needs of vulnerable people**
  - Deliver early intervention actions along with quality, holistic housing advice and effective partnership working to prevent homelessness.
  - Reduce rough sleeping and single homelessness with collaborative partnership working and effective supported housing pathways to help people to sustain their existing accommodation, and to provide accommodation and support for those in housing crisis.
  - Continue to reduce the number of homeless households that require emergency or temporary accommodation.
- **Make best use of private sector accommodation**
  - Bring empty properties back into use within the City – both residential dwellings and commercial buildings.
  - Improve access to homes available to rent in the private sector for people receiving low incomes.

- Improve the condition of homes in the private sector by working with private sector landlords and actively enforcing standards for private rented housing; improving energy efficiency; and managing the impact on neighbourhoods of Houses in Multiple Occupation.
  - **Invest to create sustainable communities that are safe and healthy**
    - Regenerate estates to continue to improve and make best use of Council-owned and private sector housing.
    - Improve the general environment of our estates by delivering our investment programmes and contributing to programmes designed to improve health and wellbeing of residents.
    - Take action to mitigate the impacts of Welfare Reform and the introduction of Universal Credit.
  - **Be an effective landlord and deliver quality services**
    - Retain, let and manage good quality Council-owned homes at affordable rents that residents can sustain effectively, and ensure that tenancy arrangements are aligned with new legislation.
    - Continue to improve the condition of Council stock through capital investment programmes focussed on regeneration and refurbishment projects.
    - Continue to support a resident-led approach to developing high quality and inclusive services.
4. The strategy sets out details of the challenges that drive these priorities, the key objectives and the actions the Council is taking, or plans to take, to address them.
5. Key actions identified in the strategy to deliver these priorities include:
- Facilitating development and delivery of more homes and affordable homes directly through the Council-owned Housing Company or with partners (for example, with Registered Providers, the University and other public bodies), and by encouraging developers to bring forward development through our Local Plan.
  - Working with other Oxfordshire Authorities to jointly plan and secure investment in housing to meet Oxford's unmet needs, and to agree the arrangements in respect of the mix of dwelling types, tenure, letting and management, and affordable housing nominations.
  - Further aligning service delivery and budgets to ensure that there are sufficient resources, skills and expertise to deliver more homelessness prevention activities and meet the requirements introduced by the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
  - Leading on the implementation of the £790,000 Trailblazer project to deliver targeted upstream homelessness prevention activities through outreach visits; enhancing services to help with personal and financial resilience; and developing a countywide homelessness champions' network across partner organisations to enhance understanding of the triggers of homelessness and to identify innovative solutions.
  - Preventing homelessness and respond to rough sleeping by working to prevent homelessness prior to the point of crisis by: working in partnership with a range

of statutory and non-statutory agencies, voluntary and community sector organisations to develop appropriate early interventions; improve work with health and criminal justice partners around hospital and prison discharges respectively; and reducing evictions from supported housing, especially where there is a need for mental health services to support individuals (No Return to the Streets).

- Developing stronger and broader working relations and new partnership approaches with stakeholders to facilitate a collaboratively co-designed City-wide framework and response to preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.
  - Reducing the number of empty dwellings in the city and therefore increase the availability of much needed accommodation.
  - Considering an increase in accommodation available for homeless households through expansion of our Real Lettings Scheme.
  - Investing £8.7 m in regeneration schemes for Blackbird Leys and Barton, and £4.2 million on our Great Estate project.
  - Delivering £15.5 million programme of refurbishment works, upgrades and improvements to City Council Homes, adaptations and energy efficiency.
  - Building on the success of our award winning Tenant Involvement Team to engage and empower tenants in improving our services, their living environment and their wellbeing.
  - Continuing to work to improve private rented sector properties and support the creation of sustainable communities e.g. licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation, regulation of single dwellings, enforcement action on unlawful dwellings, provide Disabled Facilities Grants and Flexible Home Improvement Loans, provide energy efficiency advice and information.
6. The strategy takes into account recent and emerging changes to legislation national and local policy, including:
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (which places greater emphasis on prevention and new duties for local housing authorities and public bodies).
  - Impacts of Welfare Reform – changes to benefits and rents.
  - Changes and uncertainties in national housing policy and impact of the Housing and Planning Act (2016) and the Housing White Paper (2017).
  - Oxford Local Plan Review (recognising that consultation on the Local Plan is underway).
  - Achievements of the Growth Board’s post-SHMA work and joint work with Oxfordshire Partners on strategic planning for growth and housing delivery.
  - Creation of the Council-owned Housing Company.
  - Reductions to County funding of Homelessness Services and recommissioning of homelessness pathways.
7. Given the scale of change impacting on housing, planning and welfare reform, it is considered more dynamic to produce a 3-year strategy, rather than one for 5 years. The Action Plan (Appendix B to the strategy) covers the first 12-18 months and both the strategy and action plan will be reviewed mid-point of the strategy term. This will ensure that the actions going forward continue to be relevant and responsive to change.

8. Considerable progress has been made over the term of the last three strategies with a number of achievements identified. A review of these is contained in the new strategy, and includes the following:

The Council has:

- Set up a Housing Company to facilitate the delivery of more affordable homes and agreed to invest £61m as a loan to facilitate this.
- Continued to drive forward housing supply at Barton Park, with more schemes being planned at Oxpens, the Northern Gateway, and through estate regeneration.
- Invested £10m to acquire temporary accommodation units for homeless households.
- Invested £5m in the Real Lettings scheme, to create a total fund in excess of £10m to acquire local property for rent to homeless families at affordable rents.
- Undertaken works as part of a £20m investment to refurbish the City's tower blocks.
- Been awarded the "Gold Standard" in Housing and Homelessness Prevention by the National Practitioner Support Service, being one of only 11 local authorities in England, to achieve this standard by July 2017.
- Successfully led on a funding bid to secure Government funding of £790,000 for a 2-year countywide pilot "Trailblazer" scheme focussed on innovation in homelessness prevention.

9. Work is underway to address the significant demands and challenges for the City Council in delivering more housing and effective, efficient housing and homelessness services. To support this, further reports are submitted to this City Executive Board meeting to take forward a range of initiatives that are already being driven forward, including securing more affordable accommodation; improving homelessness prevention; and commissioning more services for rough sleepers and vulnerable homeless people.

### **Development the strategy**

10. Work on this strategy, across many service areas, has been underpinned by a comprehensive evidence base (Appendix A to the Strategy) and stakeholder feedback which was received during initial consultation workshops run in March and April 2017. The draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy runs in parallel to the work on the City Council's Local Plan 2036.

11. To meet the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002, the City Council is required to carry out public and stakeholder consultation on the draft strategy and its associated action plan (See Appendix B). Subject to City Executive Board approval, consultation will run for a period of 6 weeks from 21 September to 3 November 2017. Consultation responses will be used to inform any changes to the strategy prior to an amended version being presented to the City Executive Board in January 2018 and Full Council at its next meeting thereafter. To support the consultation process, an appropriate communication and consultation plan has been designed to make use of a range of media formats with the aim to encourage the public and stakeholders to get involved.

12. As part of the consultation process, the City Council will convene a meeting of key stakeholders to assess the causes and potential remedies for the rising levels of street homelessness, including rough sleepers with no local connection to the City.
13. Consultation on this strategy will be happening concurrently with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) review process and any financial commitments in the final Strategy will have been agreed as part of the budget setting process.

### **Financial implications**

14. Chapter 9 of the draft strategy provides more detail of the potential and available funding to help deliver the strategy and action plan (Appendix B). Any new work streams arising from the action plan will be considered in light of available resources and funding outlined in the City Council's MTFP. Should additional resources or funding be required, this will need to be secured as a separate City Executive Board report.

### **Legal issues**

15. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to review homelessness in their local area and formulate a homelessness strategy that will address and prevent homelessness (having regard to its current allocations scheme under section 167 of the Housing Act 1996, and its tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011). Local Authorities are required to consult with the public, partner statutory and non-statutory agencies, and voluntary sector as appropriate in regard to the strategy and its action plan. The strategy must also be reviewed, kept up to date and a new strategy published within 5 years.

### **Level of risk**

16. If the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 is not approved as a draft for public consultation, this will result in a delay in the adoption of a new/replacement Homelessness Strategy when the existing one expires early in 2018. This may result in the City Council being unable to meet its legislative obligations under the Housing Act 2002. See Appendix 2: Risk Register.

### **Equalities impact**

17. The Equalities Impact Assessment initial screening form is attached as Appendix 3. No adverse equality implications are evident at this stage. Work streams arising from the action plan may require separate equality impact assessments prior to implementation.

### **Conclusion**

18. A new and combined Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 (that includes a strategy for bringing empty properties back into use) will enable the City Council to continue meeting its legislative obligations from 2018 and have an effective strategy in place to direct housing delivery and services going forward over the next three years.

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Report author</b>       | Frances Evans  |
| Job title                  | Strategy & Service Development Manager                         |
| Service area or department | Housing & Property Services                                    |
| Telephone                  | 01865 252062   |
| e-mail                     | <a href="mailto:fevans@oxford.gov.uk">fevans@oxford.gov.uk</a> |

**Background Papers:** None

This page is intentionally left blank