

To: City Executive Board
Date: 23 January 2018
Report of: Head of Housing Services
Title of Report: Draft Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To request the City Executive Board note the amendments made to the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 following 6 weeks of public consultation, and to approve the amended draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 (and its associated appendices).
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing
Corporate Priority:	Meeting Housing Needs
Policy Framework:	Housing Strategy 2015-18.
Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the amendments made to the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 in response to feedback from the public consultation; and 2. Adopt the amended draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 and its associated appendices. 	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 (amended) with sub appendices: A = Evidence base; B = Action Plan; C = National and Oxfordshire Context; D = Welfare Reform Summary of Main Changes since 2011.
Appendix 2	Initial Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 3	Risk Register
Appendix 4	Consultation feedback

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.
2. At its meeting on 19 September 2017, the City Executive Board approved the publication of the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, Action Plan and Appendices (a strategy to combine and replace all three current strategies) for a 6 week period of Public consultation. The consultation ended on 3 November 2017 and amendments have been made to the draft strategy to take into account the feedback received.

Development of the strategy

3. The City Executive Board (CEB) Report on 19 September 2017, highlighted the main successes of the previous strategies; the work to develop the new strategy, including consultation already held with internal and external stakeholders; and also the priorities and key strategic objectives of the new strategy i.e:
 - Increase housing supply and improve access to affordable housing
 - Prevent homelessness and meet the needs of vulnerable people
 - Make best use of private sector accommodation (including bringing empty properties back into use in the City)
 - Invest to create sustainable communities that are safe and healthy
 - Be an effective landlord and deliver quality services.
4. Public consultation on the strategy ran from 21 September to 3 November 2017. In accordance with the report to CEB in September 2017, the City Council convened an event to consult with 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. Councillor Rowley took a lead in this event and presented to the group on various housing issues to help stakeholders understand the key issues facing the City Council. Following on from this workshop and the increased publicity around street homelessness in general, a 'City Conversation' meeting was held on 28 November, the outcomes of which will inform the development of opportunities to collaborate and co-design new work streams in the future.
5. In terms of the consultation on the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, overall there was a mix of around 152 individuals and organisations who responded during the consultation period (of which approximately 26% responded via the online survey). This is a reasonable response within the 6 week timescale. The consultation process included public drop-in sessions arranged at Temple Cowley Shopping Centre, the Town Hall, and Leisure Centres. Officers also attended

meetings of groups who have protected characteristics (age, ethnicity, gender etc.) and groups who have lived experience of street homelessness and supported housing pathways. Workshops were arranged for City Council Tenants and City Council internal stakeholders to provide their views on the draft strategy and Action Plan. A Member Briefing was also held on 31 October 2017. A summary of the consultation feedback, along with officer response, has been provided as Appendix 4 to this report.

6. Consultation feedback has confirmed that the majority of people responding either strongly agree or agree with each of the main priorities set out in the draft Strategy (see paragraph 3 above) and the actions set out in the Action Plan. There was also strong support (98%) for the City Council to take formal action to bring empty properties back into use. Generally, people either strongly agreed or agreed (91%) that the Council should work in partnership and collaboration with statutory, voluntary sector and public services to successfully prevent homelessness and tackle rough sleeping. This feedback is reflected in the strategy and action plan. However, there were mixed views on the issue of Local Connection. Those who were homeless, had been homeless or were currently living in supported hostel accommodation, felt that the City Council should not apply a Local Connection criteria and should make the pathways simpler. Other respondents indicated that local connection criteria was important for social housing but in particular for people seeking intermediate housing (i.e. shared ownership/part rent part buy).
7. Amendments have been made to the draft Strategy and Action Plan in order to take into account the feedback received through the consultation process. These are set out below:
 - Amendments to take into account changes to Government Policy since the draft strategy was first written e.g. withdrawal of the policy to apply the single accommodation rate of Local Housing Allowance to social housing tenants; issue of Government guidance and funding allocations in respect of the new burdens associated with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act etc; Government consultations that have been launched; and recent Government announcements in relation to the outline Housing and Growth Agreement (changes also reflected in Appendix C of the Strategy).
 - A strengthened approach throughout the document to importance of collaborative working with a range of partners, and the involvement of people with lived experience of homelessness and supported housing pathways, in designing work streams to prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping (including the work to establish the 'City Conversation' mentioned in paragraph 4 of this report).
 - Changes for clarity, further explanation or to enhance the points being made, especially around researching best practice in the private and public sectors to inform the design and delivery of services.
 - Additional wording to the Action Plan to make the objectives clearer and to add measures of success.
 - Additional paragraphs within the strategy to ensure that important work is not missed e.g. enhanced communications on housing issues and the work of the City Council's Investigations Team to tackle tenancy fraud etc.

- Re-wording of the chapter on Empty Homes for clarity.
 - A shortened Chapter 10 – Conclusion.
 - In terms of local connection – this is set out in the current homelessness pathway criteria, legislation and Allocations Scheme. However amendments have been made to the strategy to explain this, and also how the City Council can communicate the complexities of Local Connection with customers to aid understanding. In addition, the City Council could explore how to secure affordable home ownership for people with a local connection to the City.
8. It is important to note that this strategy is an overarching document to set out the main objectives and actions that the City Council (in partnership with individuals, residents, partners and stakeholders) aims to achieve within public policy guidelines and within available resources. Some detailed activities and projects will form individual work streams under the key Action Plan objectives. In addition, some of the comments received during the consultation process would require a change of Government Policy or legislation in order to implement them. Therefore, it has not been possible to agree action where the comments/suggestions are not within the scope of the strategy or the control of the City Council. These comments are included in Appendix 4 to this report.
 9. The Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 and suite of appendices will be reviewed mid-point of the strategy term. This will allow the strategy and action plan to be as flexible as possible so that the actions taken towards delivery of the priorities are proactive, reactive and are relevant to the changing needs of the Oxford community and the changes in national and local policy.

Financial implications

10. 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). It includes the Government allocation of 'New Burdens' funding that was announced in November 2017 to help mitigate the cost of additional work associated with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Consultation on the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy happened concurrently with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) review process. Therefore any financial commitments in this final Strategy have informed part of the budget setting process. Should additional resources or funding be required, this will need to be secured as a separate City Executive Board report.

Legal issues

11. 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

12. Given the legal requirements set out in this report (para 11), it is considered that the comprehensive consultation process that has been undertaken, plus the monitoring arrangements set out in chapter 10 of the strategy, help to demonstrate that the Council's statutory requirements have been met.
13. If the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 is not approved, 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

14. 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

15. 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.

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Background Papers:	
1	Housing Strategy 2015-18
2	Homelessness Strategy 2013-18
3	Empty Property Strategy 2013-18

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