

Appendix 2

Overview of Oxford City Council approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping

1.0 Services and assistance available to rough sleepers in Oxford

1. Oxford City Council believes that rough sleeping is harmful and dangerous to individuals and society. It is damaging to a person's physical and mental health and people should therefore be offered all possible opportunities to move off the street.
2. Life on the street is unhealthy and risky. We need to support people to escape the streets because anything else potentially leads to an early demise.
3. Oxford City Council has set a new strategy to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the city. The draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2017-22) addresses the city-wide impacts of what is a national issue and will see a net increase in the number of beds to be made available to support rough sleepers with a connection to Oxford.
4. The strategy is focused on early intervention and prevention approaches; ensuring suitable accommodation and support for people in housing crisis; and assistance to move-on. This includes a commissioning strategy that recognises the role of partnership working.
5. The Council recently launched a city-wide Conversation with a range of individuals and groups interested in helping to find solutions to the increase in rough sleeping in the city. Following the successful first meeting on 28/11/17, steps are being taken towards the formation of a city-wide partnership that can work together to deliver effective, long-term solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness.

Working in partnership with voluntary groups and charity partners, Oxford City Council already has developed the following principles to tackle rough sleeping:

- **No first night out** – working with partners to prevent people from ending up on the street.
- **No second night out** – a swift intervention to make sure that anyone we may have missed does not have to spend a second night sleeping rough.
- **No living on the streets** – personalised services so that every person routinely sleeping rough is treated as an individual and supported to get off the streets for good.

- **Provide an effective pathway** – so that there is accommodation and where necessary supported housing available to move people into for the long term after they've been temporarily in a hostel to get them immediately off the streets.
 - **No return to the streets** – to reduce evictions from supported housing, where those placements go wrong, by working even more closely with partners, particularly in mental health services.
 - **Crisis provision** – ensure we have enough crisis accommodation, including reviewing winter and severe weather provision.
 - **Reconnecting people with their home areas** – around 50% of people sleeping rough on our streets have no local connection. We will help them find the support they need in their own areas, rather than sleeping on Oxford's streets, or expecting a long-term solution in the city.
6. An assertive outreach service [Oxford Street Population Outreach Team] is commissioned by the Council and delivered by St Mungo's. The service makes contact with rough sleepers and assists them to access the services and support that will help them to escape from a life on the streets.
 7. The Council also commissions a wide range of other 'wrap around' services aiming to prevent homelessness in the first place, tackle rough sleeping and assist individuals who are moving off the streets to sustain their accommodation and move on to live independent lives.
 8. Services are commissioned using the Council's Homelessness Prevention Funds, currently at just under £1.4m per year, rising to £1.6m per year in 2019/20 (subject to consultation and approval of the Mid Term Financial Plan). All funded organisations are required to provide a service that fits within the strategic objectives of the Council's Homelessness Strategy.
 9. In March 2017, the Housing Team was awarded the 'Gold Standard' by the National Practitioner Support Service 'Gold Standard Challenge'. This puts the Council into the top 3% of all Local Authorities in England to have achieved this award.
 10. The Council also undertakes a considerable amount of other work to prevent and relieve homelessness across numerous teams. From April 2018, under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, statutory duties will also increase substantially, including giving the Council a greater duty to prevent and relieve homelessness for "non-priority" clients (including many single people that fall into this grouping).

2.0 Local Connection and the Adult Homeless Pathway

- 11.** In order to access supported accommodation for single homeless/rough sleepers in Oxford, an individual needs to have a local connection as set out in the City's Allocations Scheme. This reflects a national approach that recognises that - should a local authority do otherwise in this environment - there is a high risk that a large number of people from across the country, without a local connection to that local authority would go there, or be referred from other areas of the country (particularly those that offer fewer services). This would result in that local authority facing disproportionate burdens and cost – a burden that would fall on local tax-payers.
- 12.** If an individual does not have a local connection they may be able to access services by demonstrating that they have a 'pathway connection'. This is a less strict set of criteria that seeks to establish if the individual has a connection to Oxford, generally through having resided in (rough sleeping excluded) Oxford for a period of time, working in Oxford or having close family in Oxford. The pathway connection recognises that homeless and vulnerable people sometimes live chaotic and unsettled lives, but that this should not block access to the emergency housing that is provided through homeless accommodation.
- 13.** As outlined in the draft Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018 to 2021, the Council intends to continue to apply a 'local connection' approach to all its commissioned services, and will operate [via the Oxford Street Population Outreach Team] a reconnection service for persons that have a local connection to another area, reconnecting clients to services in those areas for help and assistance.
- 14.** As the County Council continues to withdraw from commissioning and funding services for the rough sleepers and the City Council has to step up its activities some of this reconnection work will now also take place within Oxfordshire back to other districts, as well as beyond it. The Council is also committed to exploring what options are available to feasibly accommodate and/or support those who have no local connection to Oxford or anywhere, and who have no recourse to public funds but who are homeless and sleeping rough on Oxford's streets. In addition, at times of severe winter weather, the Severe Winter Emergency Procedure (SWEP) provides accommodation for rough sleepers regardless of whether or not they have a local connection.

3.0 Profiles of the homeless population and rough sleeping population

15. Oxford has unfortunately seen high numbers of homeless people for many years, including high numbers of homeless people sleeping rough. This is due to a number of factors.
16. The most common cause of homelessness in Britain is the loss of rented accommodation, where the main reason is the ending of a private short-hold tenancy. What's happening in London, Brighton, Manchester, and Birmingham has been happening in Oxford for exactly the same reasons.

Other factors can drive individuals into the homelessness trap:

- Losing accommodation because of a relationship breakdown
 - Losing accommodation because friends or relatives no longer provide support
 - Vulnerability, including physical and mental ill health, alcohol and substance misuse and addiction, experience of care, and experience of the criminal justice system
 - Structural factors such as poverty, inequality, unaffordability of housing, housing supply, unemployment and underemployment, and social security changes and spending cuts.
17. The individual and structural factors frequently are interrelated. For example, individual vulnerability can arise from or be exacerbated by structural unfairness such as poverty. Similarly individual factors such as a relationship breakdown can be put under pressure by structural factors such as social security changes and spending cuts.
 18. The “homeless community” is a misnomer. The people on the streets of Oxford have a wide variety of needs. There are people from European Accession countries who have worked in the city for many years; there are those who view it as a lifestyle choice. Some have very severe mental health issues and will not access accommodation available to them. Some have very high substance misuse dependencies that affect their engagement with support agencies.

Profile of people on the street

19. As part of the Council's ambition to start a citywide conversation about homelessness, a number of steps have been taken, including the analysis of existing data and collection of additional or new types of data.
20. It's important to establish and then share the facts on Oxford's homelessness crisis, although they may be difficult to digest for many.

Three types of data have been established or drawn on:

Oxford CHAIN

- 21.** The number of people rough sleeping in the city is primarily monitored by the Oxford CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) database, with reports produced monthly and quarterly.
- A total of 518 different individuals were seen sleeping rough in the City during the period of April 2016 to March 2017. 325 people (62.7% of the total number) were seen sleeping rough for the first time.
 - Not every person seen begging on Oxford's streets will be sleeping rough. Of those that are sleeping rough, data from CHAIN tells us that the majority of rough sleepers in the city are male, white and British.

Street Count

- 22.** A street count undertaken on an annual basis for reporting the number of people seen bedding down to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). As required by DCLG, the count took place between 1 October and 30 November, and the figure uncovered reflects more or less the reality on Oxford's streets right now. All local authorities across the country follow the same guidelines.
- 33 people were seen bedded down during the street count that took place in 2016 but this has increased to 61 for 2017.
 - Of these, six had a connection to Oxford, 13 had a connection to other Oxfordshire districts, and 21 had no connection to any area of the county. A further 21 people were of unknown connection at the time of the count. The majority of people found on the count were UK nationals, and 11 were from other EU countries.
 - Only six people were new to rough sleeping or unknown to services, while 33 were already known to services and had spent between two nights and six months sleeping rough. A further 22 are known to have been rough sleeping for over six months.
 - In addition to the official street count, the Council and homeless organisations estimate that 89 people could be sleeping rough on any given night in Oxford, up from 47 in 2016.

Council engagement with rough sleepers

- 23.** Council officers and members of the Outreach team talk to rough sleepers in the city on a daily basis and are able to form a clear understanding of their needs. A very low percentage of people seen bedded down and assessed had no support needs.

- 68% of rough sleepers assessed by the Outreach team during the period January to March 2017 had mental ill health issues, often in addition to misusing alcohol and/or drugs.
- A snapshot of life on the streets over three days in March which was updated over a single day in October. The people identified in March were tracked in October to find out how the rough sleeping population was changing over a period of a few months.

March 2017: The needs of 82 people known to be involved in street culture in the city centre were identified. 13 were housed and 13 had no local connection to Oxford. Of those rough sleeping just under 50% did not engage with local services to support them back into the accommodation pathway or address their addictions. 58 people misused drug or alcohol, 19 of which were known to beg; no one else was identified begging.

October 2017: 45% of the people sleeping rough in March were still sleeping on Oxford streets. Three-quarters of those still on the streets had drug or alcohol misuse issues and 51% have mental health issues. Of those people who were not engaging with services in March, 42% are still sleeping rough, and 10 of these have a local or pathway connection. 14 people who were rough sleeping have been accommodated, six are in prison and tragically two of the original cohort have died.

Concluding Remarks on the profile of the rough sleeping population

24. These different types of data demonstrate that rough sleeping is not simply the result of a lack of affordable housing in Oxford and the wider county. It is a complex challenge and proposed solutions must address wider social issues (including drug and alcohol misuse along with complex mental health issues).
25. Above all, the scale and complexity of the challenge calls for a wide range of partners, ranging from the city and county statutory agencies, homelessness and third sector organisations, businesses, the universities and student groups, and the wider public, to work together towards the common purpose of ending rough sleeping in Oxford, giving support to vulnerable people affected by individual and wider social issues, and also maintaining community safety, including for vulnerable people sleeping rough.
26. Oxford City Council needs to encourage people sleeping rough to engage with support services. Just over half of the 67% rough sleeping with a local connection that entitles them to support services were in fact engaging those services. This is worrying because a large number of individuals identified in the snapshot exercises had entrenched addiction issues and approximately half experienced suspected mental ill health of various types.

27. If people choose not to engage with support services and get off the street, the Council has an extra responsibility to ensure that very vulnerable people are safe and free from intimidation and harm.

4.0 Provision of beds in the city

Homeless hostel provision

28. There are currently two homeless hostels in the city – O’Hanlon House and Simon House – with a total of 108 beds. From 1 April 2018 and until 31 March 2020, the following number of bed spaces will be funded for City Council use under the pooled budget arrangements:

- 27 in O’Hanlon House
- 22 in Simon House - the City Council has confirmed it will continue to fund around 22 beds at Simon House whilst a new 22-25 bed fit-for-purpose hostel (with 15 additional units of move-on housing) is built on a new site
- 31 in Connection Support dispersed housing
- 21 in Mayday Trust dispersed housing

Total 101 beds

29. In addition, the City Council provides beds from its own funds to meet demand in Oxford:

- 41 in dispersed housing Project 41
- 10 in Mayday Trust dispersed housing
- 5 in specialist housing adopting the ‘Housing First’ model
- 10 in Acacia Housing (also adopting the Housing First model)

Additional 66 beds

30. This total of 167 beds for rough sleepers with a connection to Oxford excludes a further 10 spaces in sit up services, as well as winter provision. The churches have also committed to provide 10 additional places for the latter from January to March.

31. The pooled budget also funds the following provision across the county for the District Councils:

- 29 in O’Hanlon House (beds proportioned between Districts for District use)
- 13 in Banbury for Cherwell District Council
- 6 in Chipping Norton for West Oxfordshire District Council

- 13 in Abingdon for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils
- 32.** Oxfordshire County Council decommissioned the Lucy Faithful House hostel in 2015 and its 61 beds have been re-provided through a dispersed housing service around the city run by Mayday Trust (31) and Connections (31). The building itself is in poor condition and no longer suitable as a modern hostel for the future. The City Council will be developing the site for much needed affordable housing. In October this year, the City Executive Board (CEB) considered a report requesting permission to demolish it and take forward the development via the Council's housing company.