

Agenda Item 2

Oxford City Council Scoping Document The No Local Connection Review Group

This scoping template is designed to assist councillors and officers in establishing the focus of a scrutiny review group. Specifically, the scoping template emphasises the need for scrutiny review groups to have a clear purpose, rationale and focus for their work, and to make the best use of the resources available within a given time frame. This document will act as a reference guide throughout the review process to ensure the review does not deviate from its intended purpose.

Membership	Councillor Shaista Aziz Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers (Chair) Councillor Paul Harris Councillor Richard Howlett Councillor Tom Landell-Mills Councillor Craig Simmons
Officer support	The Scrutiny Officer will support the Review Group around existing work commitments. Approximately 10 hours a week will be dedicated to producing meeting notes, agendas, organising guests, research and drafting reports. Council officers within Housing Services will also provide technical advice, though their capacity to support the review may be limited among other commitments.
Background and rational	<p>With average house prices around 16 times the yearly average household income, Oxford is one of the most unaffordable cities in which to live in England. Changes introduced by new legislation, Government policy and reductions in national and county-level funding have meant the demand for City Council services has increased.</p> <p>Homelessness pressures are increasing, with over 100 households per month approaching the Council as homeless and requesting assistance. Despite these pressures, the council has been meeting its target of housing not more than 120 families in Temporary accommodation. Street counts of rough sleepers have however shown high and sustained levels in the City, with the most recent published data recording 61, and estimating 89, in November 2017</p> <p>The Council recently agreed a new Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, which has an 18 month Action Plan. Members of the review group will be encouraged to study this document before their first meeting. This Strategy states that the Council intends to continue to apply a local connection approach to most of its accommodation based commissioned services, and will operate a reconnection service for persons that have a better local connection to another area.</p> <p>There are however exemptions available to care leavers and victims of violence, for example, and the local connection policy does not apply in instances of severe weather. Many commissioned services do not require a local connection, including the Street Outreach service; Sit-Up spaces; Day Centres; Employment and Support services.</p> <p>The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities defines a local connection as having residence for at least 6 months in an area during the previous 12 months, or for 3 years during the previous 5 year period. Family connection to an area is also a factor in deciding whether there is a local connection.</p>

	<p>A 2015 Crisis report suggested that “<i>a much broader debate needs to be had as regards the appropriateness of using the Code of Guidance local connection criteria to restrict rough sleepers’ eligibility for accommodation and other building based services.</i>” This review will contribute to the conversation on this issue.</p> <p>Oxford City Council also uses this statutory definition with regard to eligibility to the Housing Register. Entry into the Adult Homeless Pathway is based around a less stringent ‘Pathway Connection’ being established. If a ‘Local Connection’ can also be established, then this is also recorded as it will open up more ‘move-on’ options at the end of the pathway.</p> <p>69% of homeless people recorded in the City’s 2017 street count did not have an identifiable or known connection to any of the local authorities in Oxfordshire. 21% had an identifiable local connection to one of the other district councils in the County and 10% had an identifiable local connection to Oxford City. There has been an increase in the number of people found rough sleeping in the City with no local connection and who are looking for work and somewhere to live.</p> <p>There has not yet been a detailed piece of work to assess what the impact of relaxing the Council’s local connection policy would mean for service users and the Council, and the Review Group’s work will seek to address this.</p>
Purpose of the Review	<p>The Review Group will carry out a review into the specific impact of the current local connection policy on those without a local connection.</p> <p>The purpose of the review is to produce recommendations that might improve or broaden the level of services available to those without a local connection. It is expected that any recommendations to change the Council’s policies will require the Review Group to consider the financial implications of such changes, and where funding might be made available. Specific areas to consider are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What provision is already in place to support rough sleepers without a local connection. 2. How homelessness services are funded. 3. The views of service users, services providers and experts on how the local connection policy impacts on homeless people with and without a local connection. 4. Understanding the reconnection process for those without a local connection. 5. Consideration of alternative service models that could provide further assistance to persons with no pathway/ local connection, either by way of reconnection, support or accommodation (including faith groups operating without public funding) and the likely impacts of this. 6. The implications of relaxing the local connection policy. This includes the risks, benefits, financial and resource implications. 7. National best practice, legislative requirements, and alternative approaches in relation to preventing and reducing homelessness. 8. Fact checking misconceptions about the provision of services.

Indicators of Success	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The majority of recommendations are agreed and implemented. 2. A strong evidence base is produced to support current or alternative arrangements in relation to the local connection policy. 3. Improving public awareness in relation to street homelessness matters, and informing the debate about homelessness in the City (being initiated within the 'City Conversation'). 4. Improving outcomes for homeless people, with the ambition of reducing levels of rough sleeping within the City. 5. Service users and providers feel that they have been listened to and their feedback taken on board as part of an open and transparent review.
Out of scope	Issues around the availability and affordability of housing in the city and the cost of living, while relevant, will not be central to the review. The Council has recently agreed a Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, and the Strategy as a whole will not be subject to a review, as time is needed for the action plan to be implemented.
Method / Approach	<p>The Review Group will carry out evidence gathering firstly by hearing from officers about current Council and third party provision for homeless people in the City. The Review Group will then undertake a series of evidence gathering exercises to meet the purpose of the review. This will involve meeting current and former homeless people to gather data on their experience, and recording anonymous case studies where relevant. The Review Group will then meet to feedback on their findings. The data collection process must be carried out in a robust and objective manner to ensure its credibility in supporting any recommendations.</p> <p>The Review Group will meet with service providers, experts and other guests to ask them about the current service provision for homeless people, the local connection policy, and possible recommendations that could be made. The group will meet with a variety of speakers across as many meetings as needed to develop a holistic and balanced understanding of the issues. The timeline agreed for the review may need to be reviewed where additional evidence is required.</p> <p>The Review Group will contact at least one other authority to consider their approach to supporting people without a local connection. Derby City Council has been highlighted. The Review Group will conclude by meeting to reflect on the evidence gathered, and agree its recommendations. Recommendations will be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART).</p> <p>The Scrutiny Officer will support the Review Group by producing a detailed report of its work, the evidence gathered, and the recommendations agreed, with an accompanied rationale for the recommendations made.</p>
Guest speakers	<p>As a starting point, the Review Group will want to hear from:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing, Oxford City Council 2. Dave Scholes, Housing Needs Manager, Oxford City Council 3. Rachel Lawrence, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager 4. Men and women who have experience of homelessness 5. Oxford City Council's Outreach Team 6. Crisis, national homelessness charity 7. Oxford Winter Night Shelter 8. Oxford Homelessness Project 9. Housing needs manager(s) at other authorities.

	<p>10. Professor Sarah Johnsen and Dr Anwen Jones (Authors of The reconnection of rough sleepers within the UK: an evaluation)</p> <p>11. Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick (Author of The homelessness monitor: England 2018)</p>		
Specify evidence required and documents	<p>Oxford City Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21</p> <p>Evidence for the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21</p> <p>Oxford City Council's spending commitment to homelessness services</p> <p>The Homelessness Pathway (March 2018 CEB report)</p> <p>Adult Homeless Pathway Map and Services Directory</p> <p>Operating protocols for the Adult Homeless Pathway (confidential)</p> <p>Quarterly homelessness count data</p> <p>The homelessness monitor: England 2018</p> <p>The reconnection of rough sleepers within the UK: an evaluation</p> <p>The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017</p>		
Specify Site Visits	Possible site visit to Derby City Council. There has been mention that this Council has relaxed its local connection policy, but clarity is needed.		
Projected start date	W/C 16 July 2018, subject to member availability	Draft Report Deadline	Report to 6 November Scrutiny Committee
Meeting Frequency	~ 6 meetings approx.	Projected completion date	Reports to 14 November CEB

Draft outline of meetings

Meeting 1 - Understanding the Local Context
The Review Group will meet with council officers to understand the current provision of services for homeless people in the City, and the wider homelessness pathway.
Meeting 2 – Meeting rough sleepers
Members of the Review Group, the Scrutiny Officer and an experienced frontline council officer familiar with interacting rough sleepers will engage with homeless people and record opinions and experiences in relation to the homelessness pathway and the local connection policy. For this to be meaningful, a robust and ethical research approach to interviewing/surveying individuals will need to be established, across a representative sample. This will require further planning before being undertaken.
Meeting 3 – Meeting service providers, experts and former rough sleepers
The Review Group will meet with service professionals from a range of organisations to gather data on their experiences of the local connection policy and the homelessness pathway. This may require a morning/afternoon, and for attendees to be staggered.
Meeting 4 – Meeting other authorities
Members of the Panel will meet with representatives from Derby City Council to discuss their views on relaxing the local connection policy. More clarity is needed in the first instance on the precise nature of the Derby policy.
Meeting 5 – Recommendations and Conclusions
The Review Group will review the evidence it has received and form recommendations.
Meeting 6 – Feasibility of recommendations (provisional)
To discuss with relevant officers the feasibility of implementing any significant resource/spending intensive recommendations, prior to submission to the City Executive Board.