



**To:** Housing Panel  
**Date:** 27 June 2019  
**Report of:** Head of Housing Services  
**Title of Report:** No Local Connection Review: Update on Progress Against Recommendations

| <b>Summary and Recommendations</b>  |   |
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| <b>Purpose of report:</b>   | This report provides an update on progress made in implementing the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee's No Local Connection Review Group, accepted by the City Executive Board on 14 November 2018. |
| <b>Key decision:</b>  | No  |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>  | Councillor Linda Smith, Leisure and Housing   |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>  | Meeting Housing Needs   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>  | Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21   |
| <b>Recommendation:</b> That the Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) resolves to note the progress made against the recommendations. |   |

| <b>Appendices</b> |  |
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| Appendix 1        | Summary of progress made in implementing the recommendations         |
| Appendix 2        | Detailed update on progress made in implementing the recommendations |

## Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee established the No Local Connection Review Group in July 2018 to investigate concerns regarding the number of people sleeping rough in Oxford without a local connection to the area.
2. The Scrutiny Committee tasked the Review Group to engage with stakeholders to examine the Council's Local Connection Policy, and develop recommendations for the Council that might improve or broaden the level of

support available to rough sleepers without a local connection to the City of Oxford.

3. The Review Group produced 26 recommendations, which covered a range of topics and issues as summarised at Appendix 1.
4. These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee, and submitted to the City Executive Board for decision on 16 November 2018. This report provides an update on the progress that has been made in implementing the 17 recommendations that were accepted by the City Executive Board. In practice, given that some of the 17 recommendations had a number of elements, 23 were accepted.

### **Context**

5. It is important to note that the Council is party – together with Oxfordshire County Council, the Oxfordshire District Councils and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group - to a countywide joint commissioning arrangement and pooled budget for housing related support services.
6. These arrangements deliver supported accommodation for single homeless people in the Adult Homeless Pathway. A Common Operational Protocol governs the management and operation of the Adult Homeless Pathway across Oxfordshire.
7. Any changes to local connection policy need to be reflected in the Common Operational Protocol and therefore requires the consent of the Housing Related Support Joint Management Group which oversees the joint commissioning arrangement and operation of the Adult Homeless Pathway

### **Related developments**

8. Much has happened in the field of rough sleeping and single homelessness since the No Local Connection Review Group met to consider the matter and make the original recommendations in November 2018.
9. Over the last 12 months the Council's Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness Team has led and supported several bids which have secured a total of £1,971,700 in external funding towards the development of services and support for rough sleepers and single homeless people.
10. For example, our successful bid for funding from the Rough Sleeping Initiative has enabled the Council to expand existing services and deliver a number of exciting new projects and initiatives, including a multi-agency service hub for rough sleepers and people at risk of sleeping rough, pilot projects for women and people with substance misuse issues, and two winter shelters which during winter 2018/19 provided shelter and support for 14 individuals including people with no connection to the City or recourse to public funds.

11. Following our latest successful bid to MHCLG's Rapid Rehousing Pathway Fund, the Council is now progressing plans for the delivery of a new Engagement & Assessment Centre for single homeless people at Floyds' Row. This will provide several different services including a winter-round night shelter, a Somewhere Safe to Stay, and Staging Post short term accommodation for people whose needs have been assessed but are not yet able to move on with their agreed Housing Plan. The Centre will also provide a base for a re-focussed outreach service which will focus on engaging with chronic and entrenched rough sleepers with additional support for some Navigators, also as a result of an additional funding bid.
12. All of these services will be available to people without a local connection to Oxford although the capacity to accommodate individuals without recourse to public funds at Floyds Row will necessarily be limited for financial reasons e.g. the loss of income from housing benefit. Individuals will not be required to engage with services in order to access the winter shelter, although they will be encouraged to do so whilst they are there. Individuals will be required to engage with services in order to access Somewhere Safe to Stay and Staging Post accommodation.
13. However, MHCLG funding in this area continues to be short term [current awards of funding run only to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020] and it is not clear whether and when MHCLG will provide further funding opportunities or whether these will be for a longer duration.
14. This is a concern given that the number of people sleeping rough in the City regrettably remains very high – a total of 48 rough sleepers were identified at the most recent street count May 2019 – and is one reason why the Council is working to promote a countywide approach to tackling rough sleeping over the coming years.

### **Implementing the recommendations - progress to date**

15. Overall, good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of which 20 of the 23 (17) recommendations that were accepted by CEB are currently being implemented or have already been implemented, including the use of a reconnections log by OxSPOT, positive work undertaken with Dogs on the Street (DOTS) to ensure provision for people with dogs at Floyds Row, and recording of decisions to award exemption from the local connection policy to individuals wishing to access Pathway accommodation.
16. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the implementation status of the recommendations. Appendix 2 collates Officers' more detailed comments on the progress towards implementation.
17. As highlighted above, any changes to local connection policy require the consent of the Housing Related Support (HRS) Joint Management Group (JMG) partners. HRS JMG set up a Task and Finish group to consider 3 of the recommendations that would require changes to the Common Operational

Protocol. The Task and Finish Group concluded in relation to Recommendations 3 and 4:

**Recommendation 3 - That the Council grants a local connection to people confirmed as sustaining a contracted voluntary role within the City for a period of 6 months.**

**CHANGE AGREED:** The Common Operational Protocol will be updated accordingly, for agreement in August at the next HRS Joint Management Group meeting.

**Recommendation 4 - That the Council extends the close relatives connection criteria to include first cousins, grandparents and grandchildren.**

**NO CHANGE AGREED:** It was felt that this could be an unwelcome change, given the difficulty of proving some family relationships, and the amount of work likely to be involved in determining the veracity of claims. However, Oxford City Council understands the strength of these concerns and will continue to make decisions on a case-by-case basis, and in circumstances where the existence of and strength of the family relationship are beyond doubt, this will be taken into consideration

18. The Task and Finish Group's response to Recommendation 1(a) however is less straightforward.

**Recommendation 1 (a) - That the protocol should be updated to reflect changes in the code of guidance, so that time spent rough sleeping or sofa surfing contributes towards establishing a local connection.**

19. Oxford City Council is already granting local connection status (for the purposes of access to Pathway accommodation only) for individuals who have been in the City for 6 months or longer, regardless of whether they have had settled accommodation and where they do not have a connection to another Oxfordshire District.
20. There are a number of cases of clients who were rough sleeping prior to April 2018. For these cases, officers are working with OxSPOT to prioritise those with complex needs, for access to the pathway as and when a space becomes available. The Pathway is currently full.
21. However, in implementing the revised statutory guidance and with regard to this particular recommendation, it is essential to work closely with the Oxfordshire District Councils to avoid creating a magnet effect which would quickly overwhelm services in the City. The Council is therefore seeking the Districts' co-operation on the principle that where people are sleeping rough in the City but have a connection to another locality, the relevant District Council retains responsibility for their placement in the Adult Homeless Pathway.

22. The Task and Finish group reserved judgement on the grounds that this would represent a substantial change to the Common Operational Protocol, as currently a pathway connection is only granted on the basis of last settled accommodation. It was felt that there is a need to clarify certain legal issues<sup>1</sup> and that there is a need to appraise the impacts on move-on from the Pathway and potential allocation of social housing.
23. The matter was discussed further at the HRS JMG Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> April where it was agreed that City Officers would track proposed changes to the Common Operational Protocol to incorporate Recommendations 1(a) and 3 to be considered for approval at the next HRS JMG meeting in August.

**Conclusion and future progress reporting**

24. Good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations however there is more work to do. Officers will continue to progress implementation of the agreed recommendations and will provide a further update on progress to the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

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