

**To:** Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)  
**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
**Report of:** Head of Housing Services  
**Title of Report:** Mid-point review of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	For the Housing Panel to consider the progress and achievements of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21; note the updated Action Plan; note the Rough Sleeping Action Plan
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Executive Board Member:</b>	Councillor Linda Smith, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing; Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Meeting Housing Need
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021
<b>Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:</b>	
1. Note and comment on the report	

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1	Updated Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 Action Plan
Appendix 2	Rough Sleeping Action Plan – addendum to Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21

## Introduction and background

1. The Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 was approved by Cabinet and adopted by Oxford City Council in January 2018.
2. The strategy agreed five principal objectives:
  - Increasing housing supply and improving access to affordable housing

- Preventing homelessness and meeting the needs of vulnerable people
  - Making best use of Private Sector accommodation
  - Investing to create sustainable communities that are safe and healthy
  - Being an effective landlord and delivering quality services
3. Oxford continues to face huge challenges in relation to housing and homelessness. Tackling these challenges is an absolute priority for the Council, and as such has included in its corporate priorities to increase housing supply and address all forms of homelessness in the city.
  4. The high demand for housing and the limited supply of new accommodation – primarily caused by constrained development opportunities – drives up housing costs and creates significant affordability issues. This impacts on our residents, who increasingly face financial hardship and increased risk of homelessness, as well as local businesses and services. Combined, this causes a real threat to the local economy and our communities.
  5. The report that went to Cabinet in January 2018 seeking approval of the strategy commits to a mid-point review of the strategy. The mid-point review was carried out as a desk-top review during June to August 2019.
  6. This report updates on key achievements identified in the review, and updates the Action Plan associated with the strategy.

### **Achievements**

7. The Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 Action Plan consisted of 5 priorities, with a total of 51 objectives and good progress has been made to deliver against these.
8. To increase supply of housing, the Council has worked with partners to secure funding through the Oxfordshire Growth Board, for the Housing and Growth Deal to the value of £60 million for affordable housing. This will support the ambition to build 100,000 new homes across Oxfordshire.
9. The Council's own company – Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL) – is now established and will develop in the region of 500 housing units over the next few years. A minimum of 50% affordable housing will be delivered in all OCHL developments. The Barton Park development has progressed and to date delivered 34 affordable homes allocated to households on the Council's housing waiting list. When finished, Barton Park will consist of 885 homes. 354 of these will be owned by OCHL and allocated to households on Council's housing waiting list.
10. 102 affordable homes were completed or acquired in the City in 2018/19. 20 empty dwellings were brought back into use in 2018/19 through the Council's Empty Property work. The Council has also developed and submitted the Local Plan 2036, which contributes to meeting a range of housing needs across the City.
11. To tackle rough sleeping in the City, the Council has increased commissioning of supported accommodation from £478,198 in 2017/18 to £968,950 in 2019/20 to

ensure there is sufficient accommodation for people with a connection to the City. Additional funds have also been secured through successful bids for government funding to maintain and develop services to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. £503,000 was secured from the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) in summer 2018 for a multi-agency service hub, additional capacity for the City's outreach team and 41 units of accommodation. Continuation of RSI funding (£511,000 for 2019/20) will see these services continue until March 2020. £99,000 was secured in round 1 of the Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) for Navigator Posts in 2019/20 to support long term rough sleepers. Another £758,700 was secured in round 2 to help fund a new Engagement and Assessment Centre at Floyds Row. The Council has continued to ensure that sufficient, additional emergency accommodation is available for all rough sleepers during severe weather.

12. The 'The City Conversation' on rough sleeping took place in November 2017, leading to the establishment of the Oxford Homeless Movement (OHM), a partnership of the many organisations working to address rough sleeping. OHM launched in October 2019, with a call to action to ensure nobody has to sleep rough on the City's street. A 'No Local Connection Review (Housing Scrutiny Panel) has also been conducted, investigating the Council's response to rough sleepers who may not be from Oxford. This review resulted in the adoption of several recommendations to improve access to accommodation and support for those rough sleepers who may not have a local connection to the City.
13. Other significant achievements to meet the priorities set out in the Housing and Homelessness Strategy include the successful implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The new legislation was introduced in April 2018 and is the most significant change to local authority homelessness responsibilities for 20 years. The Act sees the local authority response shift emphasis from crisis management to early identification of homelessness and prevention. As a result, 654 households were assessed as owed a housing duty by the Council in 2018/19, compared to 177 in 2017/18. Government representatives visiting the Council during summer 2019 commended the Council on the positive homeless prevention ethos embedded in staff culture.
14. The Oxfordshire Trailblazer Programme, funded by government through a successful bid in late 2016, has been delivered successfully across the County with known outcomes being 78% positive for the 1,035 supported in 2018/19. The number of households in temporary accommodation has been kept under 120 at any one time, with only 84 households in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2019. This is further evidence of successful homeless prevention work. To further enable use of the private rented sector for households in housing needs, the Real Lettings and Rent Guarantee Schemes have been evaluated and the Council has consequently continued these successful schemes. 133 households who were homeless or threatened with homelessness were assisted to move to a home in the private rented sector through these schemes in 2018/19.
15. The Council continues to rollout the resident ambassador programme to help deliver a tenant-led approach of council landlord services. A significant

investment programme has been carried out in Council owned homes, properties have been improved in line with Energy Efficiency targets and disability adapted extensions have been delivered.

## **Challenges**

16. Although the Council is making good progress and have achieved a lot since the implementation of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy in early 2018, the Council faces challenges ahead to realise future ambitions.
17. Meeting the high levels of demand for housing in the city with increased supply of affordable homes remains a huge challenge, which will require a ramping up of delivery in order for the Council to meet its aspirations. The Council is committed to fulfil the Growth Deal, increase OCHL's capacity and capability to deliver more affordable housing, and for the company to be able to compete on the open market, including for development outside the city boundary. Registered providers also play a key role, and the Council will look for increased joint working and the adoption of joint innovative practices to unlock more homes. The Council and housing company will also play a key part in meeting the challenge of the climate emergency, ensuring our housing meets environmental standards, while ensuring development of homes can continue.
18. Although the Council has a comprehensive commissioning programme in place, which delivers a diverse range of good services to rough sleepers, the number of people sleeping rough on the City's streets remains unacceptably high. To end rough sleeping in the city a step-change in approach is required, with a transformation to services and improved joint working. This work is underway and includes the new engagement and assessment centre at Floyds Row, and will continue for the life of the strategy and will inform the new strategy.

## **Mid-point review process and considerations**

19. The current Housing & Homelessness Strategy is comprehensive and the priorities set remain the right ones for the Council. Taking into account the Council's Corporate Objectives and Housing Service's Service Plan for 2019/20 it is evident that the strategy contributes to meet these objectives. The strategy also has sufficient scope to incorporate local and national changes over the lifetime of the strategy. In addition:
  - The strategy evidence base is updated annually - last updated in January 2019 (with minor additional amendments in May 2019). Updates do not highlight any significant trends that would warrant amendments to the main content of the strategy, or need for strategic objectives to change.
  - The process for developing the Council's next 3 year strategy – to come into effect January 2021 – has already started, and will include extensive consultation and data analysis.
  - There are a number of national developments that are awaiting resolution (Housing Green Paper, supported housing design and oversight measures, review of HRA etc.) within the lifetime of the strategy. Any development in these areas will be taken into account in the new strategy.

20. The mid-point review has therefore focussed on updating the Action Plan accompanying the strategy to ensure that this is in line with developments over the last year and sufficiently addresses future challenges. The review was carried out as a desk-top review.
21. In August 2018, the Government launched their Rough Sleeping Strategy that sets out the government's vision for halving rough sleeping by 2020 and ending it by 2027. The strategy outlines an obligation on all local authorities to:
- update current homeless strategies and re-brand them as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies
  - make strategies available online
  - report progress in delivering strategy and publish an annual action plan
22. As Oxford City Council already has a comprehensive Housing & Homelessness Strategy that covers homelessness and rough sleeping extensively, the Council already complies with this obligation.
23. However, following guidance from MHCLG, and to clearly demonstrate that the Council's work in this area is aligned with the national strategy, a separate Rough Sleeping Action Plan has been developed in line with the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 and as part of the mid-point review process.
24. Relevant objectives under Priority 2 of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy have been reviewed, updated and incorporated into the separate Rough Sleeping Action Plan.
25. The Rough Sleeping Action Plan will sit as an addendum under the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 for the remainder of the strategy cycle. The Council's approach to rough sleeping will be reviewed as part of the development of the new Housing & Homelessness Strategy.

## **The development of Oxford's Rough Sleeping Action Plan**

### Context of rough sleeping in Oxford

26. Rough sleeping continues to be a significant issue in the City. During the period 2013 to 2018, rough sleeping in the City increased by 137% – from 19 to 45 as measured by the annual November street count. Numbers peaked in November 2017 with a total of 61 people found to be sleeping rough.<sup>1</sup>
27. The Council also carries out an annual intelligence based 'estimate', drawing on knowledge and intelligence from multiple agencies working with rough sleepers. Any person believed to be rough sleeping on the night of the exercise is included in the estimate, rather than only those who are actually seen bedded down. The estimate is done in order to make comparisons with the other Oxfordshire Districts, who only undertake estimates – rather than street counts – due to their large and rural nature. The estimated number of people sleeping rough in the City in November 2018 was 94. Across the other Districts in the County, a total of 25 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in 2018.
28. A significant proportion of people sleeping rough in the City are from other areas of the County and/or Country, or have no connection anywhere: 16% of the 45

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<sup>1</sup> Street counts are one of two methods local authorities are advised to use in order to arrive at and report rough sleeping numbers to government annually. Street counts are carried out on a night in November, where people seen bedded down are counted.

people identified at the November 2018 street count had a connection to one of the District Councils in Oxfordshire; 24% had no identifiable local connection anywhere. 13% had a connection to Oxford City. Although the increase in rough sleeping is most visible in the City, the County as a whole has also felt the impact and seen a rise in rough sleeping.

29. Oxford City Council is party to a pooled budget and joint commissioning arrangement – together with Oxfordshire County Council, the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning and the Oxfordshire District Councils – for supported accommodation services for single homeless people and rough sleepers.
30. These arrangements were put in place in 2017, due to the County's reduction of funding, initially for a period of 3 years to 2019/20. They have recently been extended by agreement of the partners for a further 2 years to 2021/22. The City and District Councils also commission additional supported accommodation outside of the pooled budget arrangement, to meet local need and allow for a transformation of service provision. Oxford City Council currently commissions a wide range of other services for rough sleepers and single homeless people, including street engagement / outreach services, day services, support to access education, training and employment.

#### Transformation of services

31. Ending rough sleeping in Oxford requires a transformation in approach. As part of this public sector partners have recognised that there is a need to step up collaborative working to tackle rough sleeping across the County and the commitment to the continuation of the joint commissioning arrangements is recognition of that. The creation of a Countywide post to lead work on developing a strategy for rough sleeping and single homelessness in Oxfordshire is further testament to a 'step-change' in the way The Council is working with partner authorities to tackle the issue.
32. The development of a Countywide strategy will involve a comprehensive assessment of needs and services across the County and a transformational redesign of the Adult Homeless Pathway to ensure an effective 'whole systems approach' focused on prevention, early intervention and moving people on from rough sleeping is in place in the future.
33. Oxford City Council's development of a brand new service – Engagement and Assessment hub – at Floyds Row, funded through RRP funding, is an initial and important step towards this transformational approach. It will deliver a new way of working with people at risk of rough sleeping and those already doing so, with the aim of preventing and relieving homelessness.

#### National Rough Sleeping Strategy

34. The national Rough Sleeping Strategy, launched in August 2018, sets out a framework to end rough sleeping by 2027 in England, focussing on prevention, intervention and recovery. The City Council has a comprehensive programme around rough sleeping, which already meets many of the national strategy's measures for the three key areas. However, some new measures need to be incorporated in the Oxford Rough Sleeping Action Plan in order to align with the national strategy, including:
  - Work in partnership with Oxfordshire Adult Safeguarding Board and others to ensure reviews of near misses and deaths of homeless people

and rough sleepers are carried out and any recommendations from such reviews help improvements;

- Capturing a wide range of data (qualitative and quantitative) in order to better understand rough sleeping and being able to commission services that work;
- Working with partners to focus on prevention of rough sleeping;
- Delivering and evaluating projects delivered using government funding

35. The government has invested significant funds into prevention and tackling rough sleeping over the last 18 months. Oxford City Council has been successful in securing approximately £1.9M in funding from the government's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) schemes to develop and expand services in the City. These funding streams are however short term, ending in March 2020, making it extremely difficult to plan for the future.

36. The MHCLG recently announced there will be further funding available to continue investing in this work. While this is positive, a longer term funding stream with greater certainty is needed in order for effective solutions to be developed and implemented to end rough sleeping. We continue to call for this in our interactions with central government.

### **Action Plan update**

37. Following the desk-top review, the Housing and Homelessness Strategy Action Plan has been updated/refreshed according to the following principles:

- Objectives relating to rough sleeping and prevention thereof, have been removed and incorporated as appropriate into the Rough Sleeping Action Plan
- Objectives and/or measures of success that have been completed in full or are no longer relevant have been removed.
- Where objectives and/or measures of success have been completed but there is substantial follow-on work, the objectives and/or measure of success have been amended
- Measures of success have been updated where necessary to take into account any change in direction since the strategy came into effect in order to achieve the objective set

38. The updated Action Plan that will be in place for the remaining period of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021 cycle and sets out new and refreshed objectives refocusing work to meet our priorities on meeting housing demand and tackling homelessness, and builds towards the new strategy. It consists of 29 objectives, measured through 67 measures of success. The Rough Sleeping Action Plan consists of 8 objectives, measured through 34 measure of success.

39. The new Housing & Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and Rough Sleeping Action Plan (addendum) were approved by Head of Service (Housing Services) in October 2019 using delegated authority as outlined in the January 2018 Cabinet report.

40. Progress towards achieving objectives set in both the Housing and Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and the Rough Sleeping Action Plan will continue to be monitored regularly in-house, and any areas at risk of not being

delivered flagged appropriately. The current Housing & Homelessness Strategy cycle ends in early 2021. Development of a strategy to be in place from then has already started and will include extensive research, and comprehensive engagement and consultation.

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