

To: Housing Panel
Date: 5 November 2019
Title of Report: No Local Connection Review: Update on Progress Against Recommendations

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:	This report provides a further 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.
Key decision:	No
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Leisure and Housing
Corporate Priority:	Meeting Housing Needs
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21

Recommendation: That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to note the further progress made against the recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Summary of progress made in implementing the recommendations
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. The Review Group produced 26 recommendations, which covered a range of topics and issues as summarised at Appendix 1.
- 1.4. These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee, and submitted to the City Executive Board for decision on 16 November 2018. The City Executive Board accepted 17 recommendations, some of which had a number of elements, so in practice, a total of 23 recommendations were accepted.

- 1.5. An update was given to the Housing Panel on the 27th June, setting out the good progress which had been made against the implementation of these 23 recommendations. This report provides an update on the further progress that has since been made.

2. Implementing the recommendations – further progress since 27th June 2019

- 2.1. Central to the Review Group's concerns was the view that an individual's local connection status should not be a barrier to accessing support. Consistent with this ambition, the Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Team's principle focus over the past six months has been on the development of the new Engagement and Assessment Service at Floyds Row, and the provision of interim services prior to that.
- 2.2. This will provide several different services including a winter-round night shelter, a Somewhere Safe to Stay (SSoS) assessment hub, 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 from Navigators. Currently, an interim service is operating from Simon House, providing 12 SSoS beds and 13 winter shelter beds.
- 2.3. All of these services will be available to people without a local connection to Oxford and there will be some capacity to accommodate individuals without recourse to public funds. Additionally, 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. These developments therefore reflect and go some way towards meeting the major recommendations of the review.
- 2.4. In terms of the individual recommendations, the status of these is now as follows:
- 14 have now been implemented or had already been implemented at the time of the last update;
 - 7 recommendations are in the process of being implemented
 - 2 recommendations have not been implemented and are not being taken forward at this stage.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of the implementation status of the recommendations.

- 2.5. Since our last update, key developments and areas of progress include:
- Designation of a women's' only unit in Matilda House, ensuring that female only provision in the pathway continues [Recommendation 15].
 - The launch of a new website by the Oxford Homeless Movement which provides information for people who need assistance but also people who want to give assistance [Recommendation 23]
 - Oxford Direct Services have been contracting RAW, so that people with lived experience are working on the development of Floyds Row

- Launch of the Lived Experience Advice Forum (LEAF), which has recently been formed with the help of Aspire. These two developments go towards meeting recommendations 21, 22 and 23.

3. Changes to the Common Operational Protocol

- 3.1. Changes to local connection policy require the consent of the Housing Related Support (HRS) Joint Management Group (JMG) partners in order to be implemented across the entire of the county – as proposed in recommendation 9b:

Recommendation 9(b):

*That the Council makes representations to the other Oxfordshire District Councils to:
(b) Adopt any changes agreed to Oxford's Local Connection Policy, and that any agreed changes be updated in the Oxfordshire Adult Homeless Pathway Common Operational Protocol.*

- 3.2. Earlier this year HRS JMG set up a Task and Finish group to consider the three recommendations [1a, 3 and 4] that would require changes to the Common Operational Protocol.

Recommendation 1(a):

That the Council extends the exemption criteria within the Local Connection Policy to provide a more comprehensive narrative and make clear that discretion may be used to offer a local connection to a person in circumstances where:

- (a) They are known by the Council to have slept rough or 'sofa surfed' in Oxford for a continuous period in excess of 6 months, with no clear prospect of reconnection to another local authority area.*

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.

Recommendation 4:

That the Council extends the close relatives connection criteria to include first cousins, grandparents and grandchildren. Deceased family members in the immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister or children) should also be explicitly referenced in the policy as providing a connection.

- 3.3. As reported in June, recommendation 4 was not accepted by the Task and Finish Group and this is not therefore being taken forward at this stage. However, it was agreed that changes to the protocol as outlined in recommendations 1a and 3 would be proposed by Oxford City Council, for agreement at the August JMG meeting.
- 3.4. Unfortunately, the suggested changes presented were not agreed. Whilst there was no objection to the content of recommendation 3, it was felt that any updates encompassing recommendation 1a needed further consideration in light of plans for countywide access to Floyds Row, and wider aspirations about a countywide access policy. Given that the County-wide Strategic Lead for rough sleeping was soon to start in post, it was felt that agreeing any changes at this time would be premature.

- 3.5. Importantly, Oxford City Council is already implementing both recommendation 3 and recommendation 1a - granting local connection status (for the purposes of access to Pathway accommodation) for individuals who have been volunteering or who have been in the City for 6 months or longer, regardless of whether they have had settled accommodation¹.
- 3.6. Thus recommendations 1a and 3 have been met however recommendation 9 – to formally adopt these changes across the county - has therefore not yet been met.
- 3.7. We have now set up a series of regular meetings with the Oxfordshire District Councils. With input from the new countywide strategic lead, we will be discussing how the Common Operational Protocol can be updated to reflect new processes created by and access arrangements for, the services at Floyds Row. This will encompass making changes to reflect recommendations 1a and 3.

4. Impact of Changes

- 4.1. The impact of the changes made is that a number of individuals who would have otherwise been unable to access the pathway have now been granted access, resulting in a positive move off of the street

For example:

- Client A – 53 year old, EEA National, Alcohol misuse problems; Generic/Complex needs; Physical or sensory disability; entrenched RS since 2007 (12 years). Has now been maintaining dispersed accommodation in Project 41 since the beginning of October.
- Client B – aged 43, white British male with history of prison, rough sleeping around the country since 2013 and Oxford for one year. Substance misuse, septic arthritis and Hepatitis C. Maintaining accommodation in Simon House/Matilda House since July.

5. Conclusion and future progress reporting

- 5.1. Officers will continue to progress implementation of the agreed recommendations.

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¹ Expect in cases where clients have a local connection to another Oxfordshire District.

Appendix 1 – Implementation summary

Recommendation	Status 27-Jun	Status 07-Nov
Recommendation 1: That the Council extends the exemption criteria within the Local Connection Policy to provide a more comprehensive narrative and make clear that discretion may be used to offer a local connection to a person in circumstances where:	Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress – subject to agreement of the changes in the common operational protocol, they will be communicated more widely.
a) They are known by the Council to have slept rough or 'sofa surfed' in Oxford for a continuous period in excess of 6 months, with no clear prospect of reconnection to another local authority area.	Implementation in progress	Implementation complete – Oxford City council is now applying this policy
b) They are known by the Council to be fleeing violence from another area within the UK, with no clear prospect of reconnection to another local authority area that is considered safe.	Implementation complete	Implementation complete
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.	Implementation in progress	Implementation complete – Oxford City council is now applying this policy
Recommendation 4: That the Council extends the close relatives connection criteria to include first cousins, grandparents and grandchildren. Deceased family members in the immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister or children) should also be explicitly referenced in the policy as providing a connection.	Not implemented <i>This recommendation is being taken no further at this time. 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</i>	
Recommendation 5: That a person's stay into institutions such as hospital, prison or rehab should not invalidate their local connection.	Implementation complete	Implementation complete

Specifically, time spent in these institutions should not affect a person's residency connection time (six out of the last twelve months or three out of the last five years), and entry and exit into these institutions should 'freeze' the accounting period.			
Recommendation 9: That the Council makes representations to the other Oxfordshire District Councils to:	a) Increase their funding for bed spaces in O'Hanlon House, particularly for those individuals with complex needs.	Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress Both Cherwell and South & Vale district councils have commissioned additional beds outside of the joint pathway, responding directly to demand issues in their respective areas. All Districts are currently working together to MHCLG funding bids.
	b) Adopt any changes agreed to Oxford's Local Connection Policy, and that any agreed changes be updated in the Oxfordshire Adult Homeless Pathway Common Operational Protocol.	Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress
	c) Collectively review the system for allocating bed spaces to remove procedural barriers to 'lending' beds between the Oxfordshire District Councils, to adjust for varying demand between the localities.	Already implemented	Implementation complete
Recommendation 10: That an individual's refusal to engage with the Council, or to reconnect to another area, should not restrict their access to the sit-up service, except in circumstances where they pose a risk to the safety or progress of other people using the service.		Implementation in progress	Implementation Complete. The Winter Shelter is opening at the beginning of November and will admit clients regardless of engagement or willingness to reconnect.
Recommendation 11: That the Council trials a reconnection log for 12 months to		Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress. Outreach officers have been keeping a log of reconnections however there is not yet

<p>monitor the outcomes and effectiveness of reconnections to other areas. The reconnection log should be presented to the Housing Panel when there is sufficient data to draw conclusions.</p> <p>Note: members raised that people being reconnected could also be asked to report back.</p>			sufficient data to draw any conclusions.
<p>Recommendation 12:</p> <p>That the Council commissions a report to be brought forward in 2019 setting out options for establishing a county wide reconnection service having regard to lessons that can be learnt from the London-wide reconnection service. Additional comment by Members to consider the pan-London reconnection approach and any lessons that can be learnt from there.</p>		Not implemented	
<p>a) Accept any person onto the General Register who is confirmed as having lived in supported accommodation continuously within Oxford for more than 6 months, including accommodation services that are recognised but not directly funded by the Council.</p>		Implementation complete	Implementation complete
<p>Recommendation 15:</p> <p>That the Council continues to commission at least one female only overnight accommodation provider in the Adult Homeless Pathway and keeps demand for this provision under review. Opportunities should be sought to extend this provision for women with no local connection where possible, if further spaces are needed to meet demand.</p>		Implementation in progress	Implementation complete – a cluster in Matilda House has been designated as female only
<p>Recommendation 16:</p> <p>That the City Executive Board, as part of its budget setting process, identifies provision for:</p>	<p>a) free room hire and refreshments for a female homelessness forum. The Council should also ensure these women's views are represented within the Council's decision making</p>	Implementation in progress	<p>Implementation complete</p> <p>A female homelessness forum has been meeting for several months now.</p> <p>See recommendation 23 for further comments on how the Council is working to ensure that the views of service users including women, are captured to inform commissioning and</p>

	process on homelessness issues.		the delivery of services.
	b) Free sanitary products to be available for women experiencing homelessness 24 hours a day. The location of distribution for these products should be agreed in liaison with women currently experiencing homelessness.	Implementation complete	Implementation complete
Recommendation 17: That the Council makes on site provision for domestic pets a material consideration as part of the supported accommodation commissioning process.		Implementation in progress	Implementation complete: The specifications for Matilda House and Floyds Row both make provision for dogs and this consideration will continue to be taken forwards with future contracts.
Recommendation 18: That the Council engages with Crisis and the City Conversation to see what further opportunities exist for piloting innovative Housing First and Critical Time Intervention programmes, given their rates of success and relative cost-benefit ratios.		Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress In 2019/20, Oxford City Council will be increasing the number of units in our Housing Led units, from 10 to 13. South Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils have also recently started Housing First projects. Further to this, we were successful in bidding for a "Supported Lettings" project with funding from the Rapid Rehousing Fund. This will provide supported access to five units of Oxford City Council housing for social rent, for clients moving on from the Adult Homeless Pathway but still requiring some support. We expect this to lead to further availability in Housing led projects. All Districts and Health partners are now engaged in the county-wide Transformation programme, in partnership with

		Crisis, to explore housing-led solutions.
Recommendation 20: That the Council writes to Central Government to welcome the new funding made available through MHCLG this year, and lobby for greater assurance about the necessity of long term funding to sustain new support services which will help deliver their Rough Sleeping Strategy.	Implementation in progress	Implementation complete – Susan Brown wrote to MHCLG in Summer.
Recommendation 21: That all future Council policy documents referencing homelessness should recognise the net positive contribution that people experiencing homelessness can make (e.g. the skills, experience and diversity they bring). Homeless people themselves should not be framed in a negative light and this should be reflected in the Council's communication's plans.	Implementation in progress	Implementation complete
Recommendation 22: That the Council recognises the value someone's homelessness experience can potentially bring to the employed officer workforce, and that it be given due weight in the recruitment process for staff supporting the homelessness function.	Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress – Oxford Direct Services has been working closely with RAW in the refurbishment of Floyds Row, demonstrating recognition of the value of lived experience. However there is further work to do in embedding these practises into Human Resources protocols.
Recommendation 23: That the Council revisits its approach to communicating with people experiencing homelessness, local service providers and the public to better convey information about the Local Connection Policy, how it is applied, and what wider support services are available in the City. Any significant changes (e.g a new notice board or public leaflet) should be presented to the Housing Panel for comment prior to implementation.	Implementation in progress	Implementation in progress – the Oxford Homeless Movement website is now live. Further details need to be added about the local connection policy once changes have been made to the common operational protocol.
Recommendation 25: That the Board Member responsible for Homelessness	Implementation complete	Implementation complete

considers attending the quarterly contract management meetings of the largest supported accommodation provider(s) commissioned by the Council.		
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