

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 19 December 2019  
**Report of:** Housing Panel  
**Title of Report:** Mid-point review of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2021

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Housing Panel recommendations concerning the Housing and Homelessness Strategy
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the Housing Panel
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet member for Leisure and Housing, and Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet member for Affordable Housing
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Meeting Housing Needs
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 21
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

### **Introduction and overview**

1. At its meeting on 07 November 2019, the Housing Panel considered a mid-point update report on the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 21, detailing the progress made against the strategy to date, and suggested updates (including the creation of the Rough Sleeping Action Plan in response to central government's Rough Sleeping Strategy).
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillors Linda Smith and Mike Rowley for attending the meeting and presenting the report, Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, for supporting the meeting and compiling the report and Nerys Parry, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager for supporting the meeting. The Panel

would like to extend special thanks to the three members of the Lived Experience Advisory Forum for attending the meeting and sharing their invaluable insights.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, introduced the report, focusing on the delivery of affordable housing. At the mid-point of the strategy a large number of successes had been achieved, notably the commencement of the Oxford Housing Company on work to deliver over 500 affordable homes, with over 100 delivered in the previous year and including over 30 Council-owned homes in the Barton development. The challenge of delivering housing within a context of near nation-topping house-prices was recognised, and with over 2000 people still on the Council waiting list further work was required. A significant amount of resources had been deployed with the County Council and neighbouring District Councils in developing the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, which would act as a roadmap to meeting local housing need.
4. Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, introduced the progress made in relation to homelessness reduction. Notable achievements were identified as a significant increase in places for rough sleepers commissioned by the Council, securing additional government funding, the establishment of Oxford Homelessness Movement, the implementation of the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the trial of the Oxfordshire Trailblazer programme. Housing demand, the need to consider the Climate Emergency and relations with registered social housing providers and transforming provision of rough sleeping services to a county-wide approach were recognised to be areas of ongoing priority. Suggested changes to the strategy put forward included the inclusion of a separate document detailing the Council's Rough Sleeping Action Plan, greater cross-working throughout the County and the incorporation of Floyds Row and its associated services into the wider strategy.
5. In response to the report presented the Committee's particular areas of scrutiny focused on the following areas:
  - Service user feedback and involvement in supported housing and other service design
  - Embedding homelessness prevention corporately
6. The Committee makes three recommendations

### **Service User Feedback and Involvement**

7. The importance of supported housing in enabling successful move-ons for former rough sleepers was a particularly strong thread of discussion and backed up by multiple accounts from those present with lived experience of homelessness. Supported housing was credited to be a key step in transitioning to their current position of being a homelessness 'good news story' and being able to feed back their experiences to the Panel.

8. Though identified as of crucial importance in transitioning from homelessness to maintaining a tenancy, not all supported housing was deemed to be achieving its full potential. Likewise, questions were raised over the consistency of the level of support provided by different supported housing providers, with feedback indicating that some had – at least in the past –left tenants to their own devices and not provided sufficient support.
9. The recognition that previously the Council has not managed to hear the voices of service users as well as it might, and the steps planned by the Council to consult as part of the needs analysis to inform the transformation of homelessness services – service users, district councils, voluntary sector professionals and providers – are all welcomed by the Panel. However, in light of the feedback received in relation to the importance of supported housing and the variable quality of support, the Panel considers that securing the views of service users in greater volumes is central to understanding what approaches work, highlighting those organisations which are implementing best practice and ensuring the individuals that these services provide for are at the centre of the Council’s thinking. It is the view of the Panel that sharing such feedback with the Lived Experience Advisory Forum will provide an extra layer of sense-checking and valuable feedback.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council will develop an informed qualitative understanding of the support provided by supported housing providers commissioned by OCC, particularly through additional consultation with recent and current service users.**

10. More broadly, it is the view of the Panel that future planning around homelessness services will be enriched by greater interaction between the Council and those with recent experience of homelessness. It is suggested that the appropriate means through which to achieve this is through interaction with the Lived Experience Forum, though it is felt by the Panel that it should be up to the Council and the Lived Experience Forum to agree the most practical and mutually beneficial means of achieving this.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council will discuss with the Lived Experience Advisory Forum to agree the most appropriate means of ensuring those with lived experience of homelessness are involved in the transformation programme of homelessness services at strategic and service design levels, as well as the development the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy.**

### **Embedding Homelessness Prevention Corporately**

11. Overall the Panel was very satisfied with the progress made by the Council to date in its delivery against its strategic priorities. Whilst it was presented that government inspectors relating to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act had praised the degree to which homelessness prevention was embedded corporately, this assessment was questioned by those with lived experience of homelessness. It was suggested that the support provided by front-line staff who were not homelessness specialists was below its homelessness prevention potential. The experience of one reportee was that of reporting at the Council offices that they were homeless and the

only advice provided being to put themselves on the housing register, with no signposting to other support services.

12. Whilst it was recognised that the criticisms were historic and that the Council had done and planned to do further work to improve homelessness prevention work corporately, the ability of all services – homelessness specific and not - to support homelessness prevention was felt to have grown in importance due to the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Homelessness Reduction Act places a responsibility on Councils to be proactive in identifying and intervening in situations where people are at risk of homelessness. Due to the breadth of causes of homelessness and the risk thereof this could mean that many different, non-homelessness services within the Council would be likely to be engaging with homelessness prevention in the first instance on a more regular basis.
13. It was further pointed out that under the Homelessness Reduction Act other public bodies would be expected to refer those identified as at risk of homelessness to the Council. Again, depending on whether the referral was made to 'the Council', whether it was treated as, for example, a rent arrears issue, or whether it was treated as a potential homelessness issue the referral could be dealt with in the first instance by reception staff, rent arrears staff, or homelessness prevention specialists.
14. It is important to note the multiple mitigations – that when Floyds Row is operational it will act as a multi-disciplinary assessment hub, which will make referrals clearer, that a number of the suggestions made by the lived experience representatives were already being implemented, such as leaflets available at the front desk detailing homelessness support services, and the fact that homelessness prevention has become a far higher priority corporately and significant investment has been made to take steps towards ensuring nobody has to sleep rough in Oxford. Nevertheless, it is the recommendation of the Panel that having had negative feedback on the level of support provided by non-specialist services for homelessness prevention that the Council should satisfy itself that those at risk of homelessness but interacting with the Council in an alternative area are being given sufficient support to ensure the early intervention they receive has a meaningful impact.

**Recommendation 3: That the Council should map its expectations of how the various arms of the Council contribute to the homelessness prevention agenda, also to include the expectations of those organisations which are under a duty to refer people under the Homelessness Reduction Act and to take actions to ensure their efficacy.**

### **Further Consideration**

15. It is understood that work on developing the Council's strategy beyond the current strategy has already begun and will be subject to engagement and consultation. Should the Panel wish to revisit this topic, this would be an apposite opportunity.

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