

To: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Date: 05 November 2020
Report of: Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing
Title of Report: Rough Sleeping Update (including Hidden Homelessness briefing)

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel an update on the Council's activities relating to Rough Sleeping since the start of the pandemic, and consider issues around hidden homelessness
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
Corporate Priority:	Deliver more, affordable housing
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
Recommendation: That Panel considers the report and agrees any recommendations to Cabinet arising from it	

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Briefing on Hidden Homeless

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on work undertaken by the Council and its partners to tackle rough sleeping in the context of the Covid19 pandemic over the summer. A separate briefing on "hidden homelessness" is included at the end as an appendix.

Update on “Everyone In”

2. At the start of the lockdown, the government told local authorities to ensure that no-one was sleeping on the streets, in order to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. In addition the council was advised that facilities with communal sleeping arrangements could no longer be used. This affected the 20 spaces of “sit-up” provision in O’Hanlon House, and meant that Floyds Row had to be closed (which had 56 bed spaces). At the time the Oxford Winter Night Shelter was also running, with up to 20 spaces available, and this too had to be closed.
3. To meet this requirement, the Council used a mixture of hotels, university accommodation and Oxford YHA to accommodate people who were formerly homeless. These sites included Covid-Protect and a Covid-Care sites. When the lockdown began to ease in June, these hotels indicated that they would need to go back to their normal business. As such, new accommodation was required at short notice. The only available accommodation was a student block, Canterbury House, owned by A2 Dominion and utilised by Oxford Brookes. All parties worked very quickly to secure this additional accommodation by the end of July.
4. Last year the Council entered into an agreement with St Mungo’s to provide a range of services supporting rough sleepers from the new Engagement and Assessment Centre at Floyds Row. This agreement has been refocussed to deliver equivalent services in the different settings that have been used this year. St Mungo’s now manage both Oxford YHA and Canterbury House, as well as continuing to provide the Outreach service to engage with new and existing rough sleepers. Floyds Row is used to undertake triage assessments of new rough sleepers and place them in Canterbury House or the YHA.
5. The council has secured the use of Oxford YHA until March 2021, and Canterbury House until July 2021, a total of 118 units, which means that there are accommodation offers for all people who are rough sleeping. Sometimes the offers of accommodation are rejected, in which case the St Mungo’s outreach team continue to engage with people to try and find accommodation solutions.
6. The “Everyone In” initiative has seen 261 individuals accommodated (213 men and 48 women), of whom 103 have moved on to settled accommodation. There are 110 people currently accommodated in Canterbury House and YHA, with a further 48 people having left this accommodation due to eviction, abandonment or commitment to prison. Where these people remain in Oxford they will continue to be supported to find accommodation solutions.

Rough sleepers and street count

7. Our latest estimate (19 October 2020) is that 20 people are currently sleeping rough in Oxford. At the start of the “Everyone In” initiative it was recognised by the Council, Government and the police that people couldn’t be forced into accommodation. There are 12 people (of the 20) who have rejected all offers of accommodation. In addition there are other people rough sleeping who are either new rough sleepers waiting to be placed in accommodation, or people who have been evicted from or abandoned the temporary accommodation. The people in these last two groups change on a weekly basis.
8. The numbers of rough sleepers has been consistently in the low to mid 20’s since the beginning of May. The work we have undertaken with partners as part of the “Everyone In” initiative means that the data we have on people rough sleeping, and their circumstances is better than ever before. Throughout the pandemic we have been conducting weekly intelligence based estimates in collaboration with partner agencies. The numbers have fluctuated from 17 up to 26. Although the numbers have been consistent, the individuals change regularly. Additionally there are a number of people who may be seen on the street who appear to be homeless, but who are housed in temporary or permanent accommodation.
9. In the early hours of 23 September 2020, the first street count was undertaken since the start of the pandemic. The count found 23 rough sleepers bedded down. In the past there has been a significant difference between the number of rough sleepers counted, and the number estimated, with the estimate being approximately 50% higher). In this case the street count correlates closely to our estimates which indicates the better information we now have about people rough sleeping. Details of people found rough sleeping on the count are detailed below:
 - There were 18 men (78%) and 5 women (22%).
 - There was one new verification on the night of the count and one individual that refused to be identified
 - Of the cohort seen bedded down on the night, only 3 were known to be new to rough sleeping within the past 6 months.
 - 7 individuals had a local connection with Oxford City Council.
 - There were 9 individuals found on the count that had a known local connection with another Oxfordshire district council (39%). We are working closely with our neighbouring authorities to ensure that these people get the most appropriate housing and homelessness support
 - The number of EU nationals has fallen significantly from 10 in November 2019 to just 2
10. Those people who are new to rough sleeping tend to be accommodated very quickly. Four of the people identified in the street count were accommodated by the start of the following week. The main annual street count will be undertaken in November.

Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding

11. In the summer, MHCLG launched the NSAP, which provides two funding streams. The first delivers funding to local authorities to continue accommodating people housed under “Everyone In” on an interim basis. The second funding stream supports the development of longer term accommodation solutions for this cohort. At the time of writing this report MHCLG had announced awards under the first stream, but not the second.
12. Under the interim accommodation funding the council received the following:
 - Provision of accommodation at YHA/Canterbury House - £897,233
 - Development of Aspire’s Beckett Street project - £106,276
 - Winter provision - £36,036
 - Access to the private rented sector - £25,000
13. Aspire have been gifted five townhouses on Beckett Street on a temporary basis pending the redevelopment of Oxford’s West End. They have opened two of these as HMO properties for people who have previously been homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless. The NSAP funding will allow Aspire to refurbish the other three properties in order for them to be used on the same basis.
14. Funding has also been provided to support the additional costs of this year’s winter provision (see section below on SWEP) and to help secure access to the private rented sector. On this latter item we are partnering with the organisation Greater Change, who are match funding the £25,000. Typically this funding will be used to help with deposit and rent in advance payments.
15. The bids placed for longer term funding include capital and revenue funding to develop 20 units of Housing First properties at social rents, and three years of support costs for the three Beckett Street properties referenced above.
16. Housing First is a housing model which recognises that secure housing is a prerequisite for people to address the support needs they have. Many existing models of supported accommodation require people to “earn the right” to secure housing by engaging with support providers and progressing along different types of support model. Our Housing First project aims to accommodate entrenched rough sleepers, and people who have not succeeded in other types of supported accommodation.

Access Panels

17. Whilst the Rough Sleeping team have been focussed on the “Everyone In” work, the core function of managing the Adult Homeless Pathway (AHP) has continued alongside this. The AHP consists of 190 units of accommodation in two hostels and a number of dispersed housing projects.
18. Prior to the pandemic the team had introduced a number of access panels to improve the way access to the pathway is managed. Prior to the introduction

of the panels referrals to, within and out of the pathway were managed through bipartite conversations with referrers and accommodation providers by phone and email. This was overly bureaucratic and very time consuming for the AHP co-ordinators. The panels bring referrers and accommodation providers together so that all parties can discuss the best option for the person needing to be accommodated.

19. The pandemic has disrupted the development of these panels and they are still a work in progress. However, feedback from those attending is positive, and the panels promote a collaborative approach to managing homelessness which is essential.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

20. In winter the council operates SWEP in order to provide emergency shelter when the temperature is very low. The trigger to operate it last year was if the temperature was forecast to be zero or below on any given night. The provision of SWEP this year is more challenging as a result of the impact of Covid. In previous years SWEP accommodation has utilised communal sleeping spaces in O'Hanlon House and other large inside spaces. MHCLG has issued guidance which says that local authorities can operate such spaces for SWEP provision if they believe they can be operated in a Covid safe manner. However given the increasing infection rate and high risk of transmission in communal sleeping spaces, it is not intended to provide SWEP in this way this year.
21. The SWEP protocol is currently being drafted, but will seek to make use of separate rooms for everyone who needs to access SWEP. A couple of sites have been identified that can accommodate the current number of rough sleepers in the city. In the event of an increase in numbers, arrangements will be in place with local hotels to access additional rooms. It is proposed that the trigger for calling SWEP, will be the same as last year, as outlined in the previous paragraph.

Countywide Approach

22. Last year a steering group was established to oversee the development of a countywide approach to homelessness. The Group comprises the County Council (Commissioning, Adult Social Care and Public Health services), district councils, Clinical Commissioning Group, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (mental health) and SOHA Housing.
23. To inform its work, the steering group together with Crisis commissioned a report to consider how a Housing Led approach could work in Oxfordshire. The term "housing led" means to have a focus on getting people into mainstream housing as quickly as possible. This report is due to be published imminently, and will have a significant bearing on how homelessness is addressed in Oxfordshire.

24. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board’s Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) report on deaths amongst homeless people also has implications for how the system currently works, and its recommendations for a system wide approach to tackling homelessness to reduce the risk of further deaths will also influence the development of the strategy.
25. The ambition is to ensure no-one needs to sleep rough and to significantly reduce homelessness from the levels experienced in recent times. The new strategy will focus on prevention to identify opportunities for early intervention across the whole system and facilitate rapid action where the risk of homelessness is identified. This will include close working with other systems (e.g. Health, Criminal Justice), to identify people at risk of homelessness as early as possible. All parts of the system will take joint responsibility for avoiding homelessness and ending rough sleeping.
26. A strengths based approach will be embedded across the system to ensure there is engagement with those who are homeless. All agencies involved will share data to develop solutions for each individual. The approach will be knowledge and evidence based.

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