

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 November 2020
Report of: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Title of Report: Housing Performance Q1

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned report on Housing Performance Q1
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
Corporate Priority:	More Affordable Housing
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 08 October 2020, the Housing and Homelessness Panel considered a report it had commissioned concerning the Council's performance against its Housing targets in 2020/21 Q1.
2. The Panel would like to thank Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, for compiling and presenting the report, and responding to questions.

Summary and recommendation

3. Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, presented the report, outlining the key activities of Housing Services in the first quarter of the financial year 2020/21. The Panel were informed of the increase in numbers of people presenting as homeless over lockdown, the successes in securing greater number of people move-on accommodation the diversion of business-as-usual to deliver the 'Everybody In' policy and the funding secured from central government for the Next Steps programme, and additional bids being worked on. The demands on the landlord services team had continued throughout the pandemic, with significant reconfigurations of services such as new lets and repairs needing to be undertaken in light of Covid. Across the Council's construction, the pandemic had hit heavily with work on the majority of housing sites paused either due to social distancing requirements or supply-chain disruption. Nevertheless, since the ending of lockdown work had been increased to catch up.
4. In response to the report presented, the Panel raised questions about the sufficiency of the number of affordable homes being delivered in relation to number of people waiting for affordable accommodation, the degree of the Council's responsibilities towards rough sleepers coming in from other districts, the size of those bids in train and the degree to which they would meet the anticipated challenges arising from Covid on housing services,
5. The Panel wishes to make three recommendations regarding the Council's provision during winter for rough sleepers at particular risk: those without recourse to public funds, and those with specific vulnerabilities, particularly those escaping domestic violence.

Rough Sleepers At-Risk

6. The Panel noted that at the commencement of lockdown, the 'Everyone In' policy from central government effectively meant a suspension of issues around eligibility and recourse to public funds, but that looking to the future funding from government for this to continue was less certain. The Panel understands that a protocol is in the process of being developed to manage the challenges of providing emergency accommodation in non-communal settings but is keen that those without recourse to public funds be included within that provision. The Panel considers the dual threats to life of rough sleepers arising from cold weather and exposure to Covid-19 if left sleeping rough means that the provision of suitable emergency accommodation should be a priority for the Council, and that the mortal threat faced should supersede issues around recourse to public funds. Consequently, it seeks a commitment that the Council will continue to provide emergency accommodation to *all* rough sleepers over the winter period, and not only those whose nationality provides recourse to public funds.

Recommendation 1: That the Council commits to continuing to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers over the winter period, including those with no recourse to public funds.

7. In discussion of rough sleeping, information was not available regarding the gender breakdown of those being housed under the ‘Everyone In’ scheme. With an estimated 86% of rough sleepers being male in previous national estimates, the issue is often approached as a predominantly male issue.¹ One cause of homelessness, however, where women are thought vastly to outweigh men is domestic abuse which has, since lockdown, seen a surge of numbers of people – primarily women – seeking help on this issue, with the charity Refuge reporting in May increases of 957% for visits to its website.² The Panel considers it vital that the genders of those being housed through ‘Everybody In’ are counted and monitored, so that it can react more quickly to changes in the demographics and needs of its emergency accommodation services.

Recommendation 2: That the Council carries out a gender breakdown regarding who has been housed through the ‘Everybody In’ scheme to enable a more detailed understanding of the gendered impact of homelessness during Covid-19.

8. Building on the above, the Panel recognises that different causes of rough sleeping and homelessness require different provision. Taking the example of domestic abuse, women escaping domestic abuse may require accommodation which the public is not aware of, or they may require women-only environments. The Panel is keen that the Council review the suitability of its provision, so that those with specific vulnerabilities or who face particular challenges in accessing emergency accommodation are still able to do so.

Recommendation 3: That the Council reviews the suitability of its emergency accommodation to those rough sleepers who have specific vulnerabilities and ensures the needs arising from those vulnerabilities are provided for

Further Consideration

9. The Housing and Homelessness Panel is due to consider an update on housing performance up to and including Q3 at its meeting on 01 February 2021.

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¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781567/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018_release.pdf

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52755109> (It should be noted, however, that this was not replicated in police reports or reports to local domestic abuse services across the country.)

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made on 03/09/2020 concerning Selective Licensing

Provided by the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley

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<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council commits to continuing to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers over the winter period, including those with no recourse to public funds.	Yes	<p>Members have recently been circulated a briefing on the council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol which ensures accommodation is available over winter to anyone who is rough sleeping when temperatures drop to zero or below. All rough sleepers are eligible for this, whether they have a local connection or not, or have recourse to public funds or not.</p> <p>The council and its partners will work to find longer term solutions for all people who are rough sleeping, although this is more challenging for people with no recourse to public funds as they are unable to claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.</p>
2) That the Council carries out a gender breakdown regarding who has been housed through the 'Everybody In' scheme to enable a more detailed understanding of the gendered impact of homelessness during Covid-19.	Yes	<p>This work has been undertaken and reported to panel members. The gender breakdown for people accommodated under "Everyone In" is 48 Female (18.4%) / 213 Male (81.6%).</p>
3) That the Council reviews the suitability of its emergency accommodation to those rough sleepers who have specific vulnerabilities and ensures the needs arising from those vulnerabilities are provided for	Yes	<p>Prior to accessing emergency accommodation a detailed assessment is undertaken of rough sleepers so that vulnerabilities can be identified, and catered for. St Mungo's manage our emergency accommodation and have experience of dealing with people with complex needs in Oxford and elsewhere, and do so sensitively taking both a psychologically informed, and trauma informed approach to this work. Some residents will need specialist support which St Mungo's can't provide (e.g.</p>

		Substance misuse, mental health) but in such cases they will work with other agencies and organisations to facilitate access to appropriate services.
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