

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 11 November 2020  
**Report of:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Title of Report:** Rough Sleeping report

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

<b>Appendices</b>
None

### **Introduction and overview**

1. At its meeting on 05 November 2020, the Housing and Homelessness Panel considered a report it had commissioned concerning the Council's activity regarding rough sleeping during the Covid-19 pandemic. A further briefing on the issue of hidden homelessness was also provided, but was taken as a separate item and the recommendations from that briefing are presented in a separate report.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, for attending the meeting and answering questions, Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager, for authoring and

presenting the report and Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing for supporting the meeting.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager, presented the report. Due to the fast-pace of developments in this area, a number of items in the report provided had significant updates. These included the announcement of a new national lockdown, where the government had provided no new duties on Councils regarding rough sleeping, confirmation from MHCLG that the planned November street count could proceed, the announcement by MHCLG of almost £1m in funding from the Long Term Accommodation Fund which, alongside other provision, would mean 45 bed spaces would be available for long term rough sleepers for move-on accommodation. Finally, the Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) had been updated and a briefing would be provided to Councillors on it.
4. In response to the report presented, the Panel raised questions about a number of issues:
  - Ensuring the concerns and feedback of rough sleepers were heard
  - Relations with neighbouring districts, where it was encouraged to hear of the progress in developing a county-wide approach and joint working
  - The current status of provision for those with no recourse to public funds
  - The impact of providing additional homes for former rough sleepers on the overall housing stock
  - The practicalities of delivering the SWEP in a socially distanced way
5. The Panel wishes to make one recommendation concerning awareness raising of the support available for those without recourse to public funds.

### **No Recourse to Public Funds**

6. The Panel had raised questions previously on the issue of emergency accommodation for those sleeping rough with no recourse to public funds previously when discussing the Housing Performance Report Q1. However, with the presence of the lead officer this issue was able to be discussed in greater detail.
7. Under the 'everyone in' policy by central government issued at the start of the original lockdown all rough sleepers, including those without recourse to public funds, were to be found emergency accommodation to take them off the streets. The Council was currently housing approximately 20 such individuals. The advice from MHCLG regarding ongoing support for people in this category in the new lockdown had been ambiguous, but until such time as the ambiguity was clarified provision was being made. Indeed, in recognition of the fact that at

some point the Council would cease to be allowed to provide support for those without recourse to public funds, special efforts were being made to develop longer-term support. To ensure it achieved this without breaching its own legal obligations the Council was working with Oxfordshire Homeless Movement, and by extension, a whole series of charities, faith groups and individual benefactors, to organise longer-term accommodation without needing to make recourse to public funding. This approach was welcomed by the Panel.

8. Whilst welcomed, one issue of concern for the Panel is that the approach taken locally is not one which has been implemented nationally. Reports in the national media have indicated that those rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds who seek help with accommodation may ultimately have their details passed to immigration officials, potentially starting a process of deportation. For those hearing such news clearly this has a highly dissuasive impact on their willingness to access support. This is particularly acute for people enduring domestic abuse, for whom these concerns are often weaponised by their abusers in order to prevent the victims from being able to extricate themselves from their situation. To overcome this disconnect between national news and local policy the Panel suggests that the Council must make its position clear to allay the legitimate fears of those without recourse to public funds hold in seeking emergency accommodation. The Council has previously made press statements that any individuals coming forward for support in relation to homelessness will not be reported to immigration agencies. The Panel seeks that something similar is done again as a matter of urgency.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council makes, as a matter of urgency, a public statement to clarify its position that it will provide emergency accommodation to all rough sleepers, including those without recourse to public funds, and that individuals receiving such support will not have their details passed to any immigration agency.**

### Further Consideration

9. The Housing and Homelessness Panel is not scheduled to hear further reports on this issue directly, but rough sleeping is a theme in a number of its forthcoming reports and further recommendations on specific issues may be made in light of those.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made on 05/11/2020 concerning the Rough Sleeping Update report**

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

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<p><b>1) That the Council makes, as a matter of urgency, a public statement to clarify its position that it will provide emergency accommodation to all rough sleepers, including those without recourse to public funds, and that individuals receiving such support will not have their details passed to any immigration agency.</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<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> <p>Whilst the council does not proactively pass details of individuals to immigration authorities, it will need to comply with any current or new statutory duties.</p>