

To: Cabinet
Date: 16 June 2021
Report of: Executive Director of Housing
Title of Report: Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy – Homelessness Review and Evidence Base

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the findings of the homelessness review and strategy evidence base that will inform the drafting of the new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and to seek approval for the launch of a visioning consultation.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless and Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery
Corporate Priority:	‘Deliver more, affordable housing’ and ‘Supporting Thriving Communities’
Policy Framework:	Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21
Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence base; 2. Approve the launch of a visioning consultation to collect views on the review and evidence base and approve the draft vision and emerging priorities; and 3. Note the strategy development process and timeline described in the report. 	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence Base
Appendix 2	Visioning Document for consultation
Appendix 3	Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. Oxford City Council's current Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021 expires at the end of 2021 and the process for the development of a new strategy to replace the current one is underway. The strategy will cover homelessness, rough sleeping, the Council's role as a social landlord, affordable development, and other housing matters such as the link between housing stock and carbon emissions.
2. As a housing authority, Oxford City Council has a statutory obligation to develop and implement a homelessness strategy at least every 5 years, which should be based on the findings of a 'review of homelessness' in the local area. The national code of guidance stipulates a number of key stages for the development of a new strategy and what a review of homelessness should include. The new review of homelessness, and a wider evidence base covering housing matters, was recently completed as the first stage in the development of a new strategy.
3. This report describes the planned development process for the new strategy, summarises the key findings of the homelessness review and wider housing and homelessness and rough sleeping evidence base, as well as the emerging priorities and vision, and outlines the planned next step of a visioning consultation.

Strategy Development Process

4. All housing authorities have a duty to carry out a homelessness review and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of that review. The strategy is a single plan for the local area, providing strategic direction for the authority and its partners to prevent and relieve homelessness, including the provision of both accommodation and support. Oxford City Council's current strategy also incorporates the Council's former Housing and Empty Homes Strategies, which are non-statutory. This merger allows for the critical interdependencies between these areas and homelessness and rough sleeping to be strategically coordinated, and this linkage will remain for the new strategy,
5. The national Rough Sleeping Strategy, published in August 2018, added a further requirement that all local authorities update their homelessness strategies and 'rebadge' them as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies. Our current Housing and Homelessness Strategy incorporated a Rough Sleeping Action plan as an addendum following a mid-point review that was carried out during summer 2019, to comply with this new requirement. Therefore the new strategy will be a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
6. Another important development in the recent years, is the creation of a Countywide and multi-agency rough sleeping strategy for Oxfordshire, setting out the vision 'To prevent and resolve homelessness, so that no one sleeps rough in Oxfordshire'. It

will underpin a change in the way housing, social care and health services work together to and with people who are in need in housing and support. The strategy was consulted upon during winter 2021 and is due to be implemented in the second half of 2021. Our new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy for Oxford, will compliment and align with the Oxfordshire Countywide Rough Sleeping Strategy.

7. The current strategy for Oxford is a 3 year strategy. It was decided to cover this limited period due to the numerous changes to the national and local policy framework that were due to take place during the years following strategy implementation in 2018. The new strategy due to be implemented in 2022, will however be a 5-year long strategy, recognising the need for a longer term strategic plan for housing and homelessness. The strategy process will build in yearly reviews to monitor progress, and update the action plan, to ensure necessary flexibility over this longer time frame. This will be important through the pandemic recovery, allowing us to adjust the strategy to the longer term impacts on the city and its housing market as they emerge.
8. A homelessness strategy should be based on the findings of a 'review of homelessness' in the local area, and the national code of guidance instructs local authorities on what specifically should be included in this review. There is no obligation on local authorities to carry out a similar review for housing strategies. However, as our strategy incorporates housing, and because housing and homelessness are interlinked, information and data in relation to housing has also been included in the review document so it forms a wider evidence base.
9. The first step in the strategy development process – the review – was conducted during winter/spring 2021. The result is the combined Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence Base, that is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
10. Based on the information and findings in this document, and guided by the Council's wider strategic direction outlined in documents such as the Corporate Strategy, a draft vision has been written for the new strategy, as well as a set of emerging priorities, which are outlined later in this report.
11. The next step in the development of the new strategy is to launch a visioning consultation. The purpose of this consultation is to broaden out the conversation on housing and homelessness with the whole city, bringing in the views of stakeholders and the people of Oxford at an early point of strategy development. The consultation will allow us to collect further feedback on the review and evidence base to ensure that all the necessary information we need to inform the strategy are incorporated. The consultation will also seek views on the draft vision and emerging priorities to ensure that these are the right ones for the strategy, addressing the issues found in the review and evidence base, and reflect the work of the Council going forward.
12. A summary visioning document of the review, evidence base and our draft vision and priorities has been drafted. This document will act as a quick, easy to read source of information for the public on the work, to help them engage with the consultation. This draft document can be found in Appendix 2 of this report. Please note this document may be edited and will be professionally formatted ahead of the consultation.

13. Following the consultation period, responses will be used to finalise the review and evidence base, alongside the vision and priorities. These will then be used to shape the draft strategy, and accompanying draft action plan, during autumn 2021.
14. The findings from the visioning consultation, the finalised review, and the draft strategy and action plan will return to Cabinet in the autumn, before going out for further statutory consultation. Based on the consultation responses, the draft strategy will be updated as appropriate and then be brought to Cabinet and Council for approval in early 2022.

Achievements under the current strategy

15. As part of the creation of the homelessness review and evidence base, the Council's achievements under the current strategy period have been evaluated. Overall, the Council has done well to deliver an ambitious programme in challenging circumstances, not least since the Covid-19 pandemic started. Achievements are summarised here:
 - a. **To increase housing supply and improve access to affordable housing**, the Council has developed its own housing company to deliver new affordable homes; has increased the rate of affordable housing supply with more significant increases currently on track to be delivered on identified sites in 2021/22; worked with partners to secure funding through the Oxfordshire Growth Board for affordable housing; adopted a new Local Plan which includes opportunities to develop affordable housing across the city; worked with neighbouring Councils to formulate agreements on how they can assist to meet Oxford's unmet housing need.
 - b. **To prevent homelessness and meet the needs of vulnerable people**, the Council has secured funding from the government in the region of £5m since 2018 to implement programmes to prevent and tackle rough sleeping; developed a new accommodation and assessment hub at Floyds Row; successfully implemented the Homelessness Reduction Act; embedded a corporate commitment to the prevention of homelessness across the organisation; reduced the number of households in temporary accommodation; provided interim accommodation for those experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping through the 'Everyone In' scheme launched at the start of the pandemic during spring 2020.
 - c. **To make best use of private rented sector accommodation**, the Council has introduced a Rent Guarantee Scheme to rehouse homeless households; worked to ensure that accommodation in the sector in the city is of good standard, taken forward plans for new regulation of the private rented market; continued to bring empty domestic properties back into use.
 - d. **To invest to create sustainable communities that are safe and healthy**, the Council has continued to support households in financial hardship due to welfare reform by administering Discretionary Housing Payments alongside personalised support; progressed plans for the regeneration of Blackbird Leys with development partners; delivered considerable investment into Council owned housing and estates; set up community hubs during the pandemic to respond to the needs of the community.
 - e. **To be an effective landlord and deliver quality services**, the Council has progressed the refurbishment of the tower blocks in the city; rolled out a

resident ambassador programme to help deliver a tenant-led approach to our landlord services function, and successfully taken on the management of new housing at Barton Park and other development sites.

16. In addition to evaluating achievements under the current strategy, the strategy itself and how delivery of the strategy action plan has been scrutinised, has also been evaluated in order to adopt any learning into the new strategy. Three main themes have been identified and will be incorporated into the new strategy development process:
 - a. A shorter and more focussed strategy document is created that is informed by a thorough review and evidence base
 - b. The Action Plan is reviewed and updated annually to ensure the strategy remains relevant and plays a key role in driving work across the organisation. As the new strategy will be a 5-year strategy, this becomes even more important.
 - c. A clear governance and scrutiny process is established to ensure work under the strategy is consistently delivered.

Key findings of the homelessness review and evidence base

17. The Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence Base is an extensive piece of research and analysis, forming a narrative of the situation in Oxford. It includes the information prescribed in the code of guidance, including an assessment of current and future levels of homelessness, information on who becomes homeless and threatened with homelessness and reasons why, activities carried out by the Council and other organisations to prevent homelessness and support provided to those who become homeless as well as describing the resources available to the Council to carry out such activities.
18. The review and evidence base also includes information about Oxford, such as its population and housing market, and the legal and national policy context. Information and data in relation to key trends in the city's housing market and rates of unaffordability, the condition of the private rented housing market, the recent and future levels of affordable development in the city, the Council's role as a social landlord, and the crucial link between domestic dwellings and the climate crisis are also included.
19. Key findings of the review and evidence base are explained throughout the review and evidence base document. For ease of reading, key findings have also been extracted and included as a separate section at the start of every chapter. Below is a summary of some of the key findings.
20. The review considers the current state of the housing market in Oxford which is characterised by high demand for housing with challenges to increase supply. The existing established trends have continued over the last decade, such as a rapidly growing private rented sector. Current modelling suggests that as much as 49.3% of households in Oxford now rent their homes in the private rented sector, the biggest in the country; and the sector is increasingly unaffordable. The growth of the short-term lettings market in recent years, is potentially contributing to the shortage of housing for those in need, with housing that could be made available

for longer-term lets being lost to this market. The median house price in Oxford increased 132% between 2002 and 2019, whilst medial earnings for full-time employees in Oxford increased by 59% during the same period. The review considers the main drivers of unaffordability, such as the limited supply of new homes, a strong economy and labour market, welfare reform and wealth disparity.

21. There was an acceleration in the delivery of affordable housing in the city at the end of the last decade, exceeding most previous years since 2012. There are ambitious plans on identified sites within the development pipeline to significantly increase affordable development over the next three years. A total of 1,036 affordable homes are planned for the period 2021-2024 both through Oxford City Housing Ltd and Housing Associations.
22. Oxford City Council is the largest social landlord in the City. The Council as a landlord has a strong track record of tenant engagement, with an award winning Tenant Involvement Team. The new Social Housing White Paper will bring about a number of changes to how the sector engages and empowers tenants and communities as a landlord, including greater tenant ability to influence decisions about their homes, and more ability to scrutinize the Council's work and decisions.
23. A climate emergency was declared in Oxford in 2019, and the move to Zero Carbon is a key council priority. A significant proportion of Oxford emissions come from domestic buildings, so the housing strategy plays a crucial part in the delivery of carbon reductions. To improve the Council's housing stock, significant financial investment is needed to make it more energy efficient over future years. Similar challenges exist for the private rented sector. The energy standards of new build properties need to be improved, including the new homes delivered by OCHL.
24. The level of homelessness in the City is high, but stable or falling on most measures. This may be due to an increase in investment into our own service, as well as commissioned services, over recent years funded from government grants such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018, means that significantly more households receive statutory assistance from the Council, and at an earlier stage. The profile of those households that are assisted have changed, with an increase in the number of single people now receiving help. Before the pandemic, a high proportion of households who were homeless or threatened with homelessness were in full-time or part-time employment. There has been a gradual reduction to the number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation over the last 8 years, demonstrating our success in preventing homelessness. Since 2017/18 the number of people experiencing rough sleeping is on a downward trend after a large increase through the previous decade, but numbers are still high compared to other local authorities.
25. The core statutory services the Council delivers to support households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness achieve considerable success and outcomes are similar or better than other comparable local authorities. The rate of successful homelessness prevention and relief cases for Oxford is in line with national and regional averages. The use of the private rented sector for the purpose of rehousing households is of key importance in Oxford and exceeds the national rates. However continued increases in rents puts significant pressure on the ongoing viability of our private rented rehousing schemes. In comparison, there

are lower rates of social housing lets in the City allocated to households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

26. In addition to the statutory services the Council provides, there is an extensive network of services that deliver support and assistance to homeless people in the City, in particular to single homeless people and those experiencing rough sleeping. The Council commissions a substantial number of supported accommodation units for single homeless people, as well as wrap around services such as employment and training. Service provision for single homeless and those experiencing rough sleeping has expanded over the recent years due to successful bids by the Council for government funding. However, to achieve further and long-lasting progress, a commitment to a County-wide approach has been made by the County Council, the City and District Councils and the Clinical Commissioning Group. The approach focuses on greater prevention of rough sleeping, a multi-disciplinary response and more flexible and holistic support.
27. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on all of the Council's operations over the last 12 months. National schemes like furlough and a ban on evictions have helped limit the effects of the crisis to some extent; but the longer term effects are not yet known. We have seen increased pressure on the Council's Housing Services with more people seeking support, and a change in who approaches us for help, with knock on impacts on support required and demands for interim and temporary accommodation. Trends into the future are hard to forecast and are dependent on factors such as economic conditions and the courts system. However, we are very concerned that levels of homelessness will increase as the medium to longer term effects of the pandemic are felt, and measures to support people are removed. We will therefore need to be prepared to respond to the challenge of an increase in homelessness, and this will have to be a key consideration in the strategy development process.
28. Overall, the Council changed the way it worked to meet the needs of the communities during the pandemic, moving to a more locality based and holistic service. This has worked well, and a wider programme of service integration is due to take place this year to consolidate learning as we emerge from the pandemic. The learning from the pandemic, taken alongside the findings from the homelessness review, also points towards the transformation needed within both our homelessness services and wider council and statutory partner services to achieve our ambitions, with an even stronger emphasis on helping prevent more people from losing their homes, and for those who do lose their homes seeking to achieve rapid rehousing. This will require significant transformation in our services, such as our approach to temporary accommodation, private rented sector access, and the allocation of social housing, alongside the wider transformation delivered through the new County wide Strategy for rough sleeping and the recommissioning of these services.

Emerging vision and emerging priorities

29. Based on the findings from the review and evidence base, which have highlighted both the challenges and opportunities the Council and its partners face in the areas of housing and homelessness, and mindful of the Council's wider priorities, strategy and direction of travel, a vision statement and emerging priorities have been drafted to inform the next stages of strategic development and consultation.

30. Using the learning from the review and evidence base, the following draft housing and homelessness vision has been drafted, that reflects the main challenges and thinking in Oxford, while being aspirational yet deliverable: **“By 2030, meeting Oxford’s need for more affordable housing, improving the standard of housing in the city while lowering its carbon impact, with services and partnerships that are focussed on preventing people losing their homes, rapidly rehouse those who become homeless, and ending rough sleeping.”**
31. A set of emerging priorities have also been drafted to start a conversation with stakeholders and the people of Oxford about the direction the Council is taking to tackle the challenges of housing and homelessness:
- a. ***Building more, affordable housing***, which includes: the delivery of the Council’s ambitious housing building programme through its company Oxford City Housing Ltd., building nearly 1,900 new homes in the next 10 years, many of which will be charged at a social rent; deliver the ‘Oxford Needs Homes’ campaign; building on our existing good relationships with housing associations to encourage their investment in the city in order to scale up the delivery of affordable homes; working with our neighbouring districts to secure homes outside the city to meet the unmet housing need of the people of Oxford
 - b. ***Great homes for all***, which includes: greater empowerment of Council tenants, giving them more say on their homes and neighbourhoods, and greater ability to scrutinise and challenge the Council as a landlord; continued investment into Council owned homes and neighbourhoods, the implementation of a new locality based service delivery model, firmly rooted in the community, more responsive and assessable to the needs of clients; Improving the private rented sector by engaging with landlords and tenants, and seeking to implement a comprehensive licencing scheme.
 - c. ***Housing for a zero carbon future***, which includes: rollout of an ambitious investment programme in the council’s housing stock, retrofitting and in some cases rebuilding our homes to ensure they meet the standards required to meet the climate crisis; ensuring high standards of energy efficiency and build quality for new developments, in particular those delivered by OCHL; working to improve energy ratings in the private rented sector.
 - d. ***Preventing homelessness and adopting a rapid rehousing response***, which includes: putting the prevention of homelessness at the heart of all Council services, by ensuring every opportunity is taken across the organisation to prevent homelessness and reconfiguring homelessness services to emphasise prevention; delivering services and building partnerships that tackle the trauma of homelessness, repeat homelessness and avoiding the need to be rehoused through earlier and pre-emptive interventions; supporting people in both the social and private sector to sustain their tenancies, using data and networks to identify those in greatest need, with the ability to deliver suitable, effective support; a rapid rehousing/housing-led response to all forms of homelessness, so that homeless people can move to a stable and suitable home quickly, including minimising the use of temporary and interim accommodation, and enabling effective access for homelessness households to affordable social housing and the private rented sector.

- e. **Ending rough sleeping**, which includes: seeking to end the need for anyone to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford by 2024 (in line with national objectives); establish a new county wide approach to preventing and relieving rough sleeping, with new jointly commissioned arrangements across local government, voluntary sector partners and health in Oxfordshire; enable a housing-led approach to rough sleeping, rapidly moving people on from the street to a new settled home, with more use of flexible support and less use of interim accommodation.

Environmental implications

- 32. There are no environmental implications to this report, which only regards the review and evidence base, and seeks permission to go to consultation. However, the review does consider areas such as housing development and the energy efficiency of the existing social and private housing stock, and therefore the strategy and action plan that will be developed informed by the review will contain actions and commitments with significant environmental considerations. These environmental implications for any actions incorporated in the draft strategy will be assessed and their implications presented in future reports, in line with the next steps in the strategy development process.

Financial implications

- 33. There are no direct financial implications to the Council as a result of this report, but it is important that throughout its development process the new strategy is informed by the current financial context. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) needs to be taken into account when developing the draft strategy and action plan. The Covid-19 pandemic has had major financial impacts on the Council's finances, and this will also have an impact on the levels of funds that the Council will be able to allocate to deliver actions under the new housing, homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. However preventing and tackling all forms of homelessness is a priority for the Council and despite the financial pressures, both before the pandemic and currently, we have been able to increase spending on homelessness over the last few years, due to our success in obtaining external grant funding. The delivery of the strategy over the coming years will be contained within the current Medium Tern Financial Strategy.
- 34. The MTFS has identified estimated savings of £350k per year from 2022/23 from the current spend on homelessness. We are looking at implementing such savings through transforming our services to be able to maintain services levels and continue to deliver great outcomes for our clients. Savings to rough sleeping services have also been identified and are linked to the changes that will be brought about by changes linked to the County wide strategy.
- 35. In addition to this, we have relied heavily on funding from central government for our increased spending on homelessness, and in particular in relation to preventing and tackling single persons homelessness and rough sleeping, over the last few years. These funding pots have been short-term, which presents us and service providers with challenges as we cannot plan and commit funding to long term solutions. There is at present no commitment from government in relation to future and longer-term funding streams, and further information may not come until future national fiscal events, such as the anticipated spending review later this year.

Legal issues

36. We are required by law to have a homelessness strategy in place that is based on a review of all forms of homelessness in the local area, and that this strategy is refreshed at least every 5 years. The current strategy came in to place in 2018. As has been described above, the draft review has been completed and will be consulted upon, before the new strategy is developed and agreed, with an aim to have the new strategy in place in early 2022, well within prescribed legal timeframes. However unexpected delay in going to consultation, or delay with the further steps in the strategy development process, would risk the council not renewing its strategy within the 5 year legal requirement.

Level of risk

37. A risk assessment for the consultation and the strategy development process is attached in Appendix 3. A full risk assessment will be carried out on the future strategy and action plan and will be presented in a future report.

Equalities impact

38. At this point of the strategy development process, equality impacts have been considered only for the consultation process and review document, not the future strategy. The homelessness review development process has been completed with an aim to learn more about the equality impacts of our homelessness services, these findings can be found throughout the review document, but in particular in Chapter 6. The equalities learning gained through the review process will help inform onward strategic development, and we expect the addressing of emerging equalities themes to be prominent in the future strategy document and action plan. Equalities considerations have also been considered in planning the consultation. Measures will be put in place to ensure the consultation is fully accessible and we proactively seek the views of a range of different people and groups to get input from the most representative sample of the people of Oxford as possible in the consultation process to inform the future strategy.

39. A full Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed following the visioning consultation, considering the impact of the new strategy itself once the draft strategy and action plan are developed, and will be attached to a future report.

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Background Papers: None