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Homelessness review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence Base

Summary/Vision document

Vision – “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.”

Foreword -

Oxford is facing a housing and homelessness crisis. The city has some of the most unaffordable housing in the country when compared to local incomes – both to rent and to buy. Rough sleeping levels increased over the last decade and have remained stubbornly high. Our statutory homelessness service are under ongoing strain, with many of the city's residents seeking help when faced with unaffordable private rents. The city's housing stock is not yet fit to meet the challenges of a zero-carbon future. More decent, affordable homes are needed, but developable land is scarce within the city boundary.

These problems have only be made worse by the current coronavirus pandemic; while at the same time the inequality in the city that drives these issues has become more obvious as the crisis has hit the most deprived and marginalised communities hardest.

The city is confronted with significant housing and homelessness challenges, but the scale of these challenges are matched by our ambition as a City Council to take on and solve them in order to make Oxford a better and more affordable place to live.

Oxford City Council, as the local housing authority, will lead this effort, working in partnership with key stakeholders, with our vision, priorities and actions captured in a new 5 year Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Oxford.

The process to develop and agree the new strategy is underway, and the crucial first step is to build the evidence to underpin our future approach. The Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Evidence Base, seeks to achieve this, combining the statutory homelessness review with a wider strategy evidence base, to form a full picture of the housing and homelessness situation in the city.

We look forward to hearing the views of residents and stakeholders in the coming months as the city comes together to have a conversation on the new vision for housing and homelessness in Oxford, and as we plan the actions needed to deliver it.

Cllr Diko Blackings and Cllr Alex Hollingsworth

Introduction -

This vision document summarises the ‘review of homelessness’ for Oxford and wider evidence base that has been written over recent months and that forms a full picture of the housing and homelessness situation in the city.

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This is the crucial first step in the development of a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy for Oxford and will inform and underpin the new strategy that will be developed in the autumn.

The review and evidence base includes areas such as the numbers of homeless people and families, who are homeless, and how services have performed to support homeless people. It also includes wider housing issues, such as the Council's role as a social landlord, what's happening in the private rented sector, the plans to build more affordable housing in the future, and the need to tackle the role housing plays in carbon emissions.

This document is intended to:

- Give you a good picture of housing and homelessness situation in Oxford and how it has developed over recent years
- Introduce our draft vision and emerging priorities that we have arrived at based on the evidence compiled in the review and evidence base
- Tell you how the new strategy will be developed
- Tell you how members of the public, partners and stakeholders can get involved and have a say throughout this process

What is a housing and homelessness strategy?

Homelessness strategies sets out how a council and its partners are to prevent homelessness, ensure that sufficient accommodation and support is available for people who are or may become homeless and seek to prevent them becoming homeless again.

There is a legal duty for councils to publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of a homelessness review at least every 5 years. The national Rough Sleeping Strategy further requires local authorities to include rough sleeping in their homelessness strategies.

A housing strategy sets out a council's vision for housing in the local area, in particular affordable housing, but also covers our role as a social landlord, and the private rented sector. There is no legal obligation for a council to have a housing strategy in place, but it is good practice to have one, and in particular for Oxford which faces significant housing challenges.

There is a strong link between the supply of housing and the level of homelessness, we chose to combine the Council's housing and homelessness strategies (including rough sleeping) in 2018. The current Housing & Homelessness Strategy for Oxford expires at the end of 2021 and the first steps of the process for the development of a new strategy are well underway.

What is a homelessness review?

A homelessness review is a comprehensive examination of homelessness in a local authority area, which is carried out to inform the creation of homelessness strategy for that area. The purpose of the review is 'to determine the extent to which the population in the district is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom, and identify what resources are available to prevent and tackle homelessness'¹. Because our strategy will cover housing and homelessness, the homelessness review has been joined with information on housing to ensure a full strategy evidence base is created.

¹ Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities, Chapter 2, para 2.15, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-2-homelessness-strategies-and-reviews>

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Why your voice matters at this stage in the strategy development process

We are launching a visioning consultation so that you can tell us what you think about homelessness and housing in your city. The views and feedback from the citizens of Oxford, businesses, partners and stakeholders are important to make sure that we include and look at all relevant evidence in relation to housing, homelessness and rough sleeping, and that we formulate the right vision and priorities for the new strategy.

What are the findings of the homelessness review and evidence base? And what does it tell us?

We have carried out a comprehensive homelessness review and evidence base for the City, and the findings are contained in the document 'Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence Base'.

We have summarised the main areas that are included in the review and what this tells us. If you are interested in seeing the full document, it is available on the Council's consultation page [insert link here when this is available].

- **Oxford's population, economy and housing market:**
 - Oxford's population is estimated to be 152,450. We expect continued population growth in future years based on modelling. The population of the city is younger and more diverse than the average in the country, and while there has been a strong economy in Oxford over the last decade – with more jobs that working age people – unemployment has increased through the pandemic.
 - It is expensive to live in Oxford. The median house price increased by 132% between 2002 and 2019, but median earnings for full-time employees only increased by 59% in the same period.
 - Renting a home in the private rented sector is also expensive, to rent a 3 bedroom house in the bottom quarter of rents in Oxford it would typically cost £1,300pm, compared to the English average of £625.
 - The private rented sector has grown in Oxford over the last 20 years and current modelling indicates that 49.3% of households rent their home from a private landlord.
 - Short-term lettings is potentially contributing to the shortage of longer-term housing available for those in need.
 - There is an acute need for affordable housing in the city. We need to deliver 678 such homes every year to meet this need. In the last 10 years, an average of 73 affordable homes every year have been delivered.

- **The extent of homelessness, and who is most impacted by homelessness**
 - In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was implemented across the country. The legislation brought about some of the biggest changes to the right of homeless people for over a decade. New duties were place on housing authorities and the introduction of these mean that we are now working with more households than before to prevent and relieve their homelessness. We accepted a duty to 564 households in 2019/20.
 - As a direct result of this new legislation, we are assisting more single people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This was one of the intentions of the legislation. The majority of single adults are male.
 - We have worked hard to prevent homelessness and there has been a gradual reduction to the number of households we accommodate in temporary accommodation over the last few years. The number of people experiencing

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rough sleeping has also reduced in the last two years, from 61 at its peak in 2017 to 19 in 2020.

- In 2019/20, 34.8% of households we have a duty towards were in full-time or part-time employment. This is higher than the national and regional average, but the other Districts councils in Oxfordshire had even higher rates of households in work. During the last year however, more households we work with were unemployed, a direct effect of the increased unemployment rate in the City due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - The black community is overrepresented in homelessness cases compared to the overall share of the population in Oxford – 18.3% of households owed a duty identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, whilst this group make up 4.6% of the overall population in Oxford.
 - People aged 35-44 were the largest age group for those we owed a duty to support in 2019/20.
 - We have carried out this homelessness review during a time when the country and our city have tried to manage the challenges to all parts of our communities due to the effects of the pandemic. We do not yet know the full effects of the pandemic, and are therefore cautious when using the trends in homelessness of recent years to project future rates, as we are concerned that the longer term effects of the pandemic will result in increased levels of homelessness. We must therefore be prepared and plan for our services to deal with higher demand in the near future.
- **The causes of homelessness in the City**
 - Structural factors such as high levels of unaffordability, high levels of deprivation in the city and changes to the Welfare System are significant contributors to homelessness in Oxford.
 - Individual factors, linked to ‘who becomes homeless’ factors, come together with these structural factors to make some households more likely to be affected by homelessness, such as personal crisis, mental health, or physical health
 - The ending of a tenancy in the private rented sector was the main reasons for homelessness for those we owed a duty towards in 2019/20. Although this is also the main reason for homelessness across the country, the rates were significantly higher in Oxford. 42.1% of households owed a Prevention Duty in Oxford lost a tenancy in the private rented sector in 2019/20 compared to the England average of 31.6%. 22.7% owed a Relief Duty lost a tenancy in the private rented sector compared to 12.3% average for England.
 - **What we do in Oxford to prevent and relieve homelessness**
 - We are broadly in line with national and regional averages with our success to prevent and relive homelessness. We helped 53.6% secure accommodation where we owed a Prevention Duty and 32.9% where we owed a Relief Duty. When we compared ourselves to other similar cities we were more successful in delivering prevention outcomes than most of this peer group.
 - We rely heavily on the private rented sector when preventing and relieving homelessness, both by helping households stay in their existing accommodation and moving to alternative accommodation. 65.2% of households helped to secure accommodation where Prevention Duty was owed were assisted to stay in or find alternative private rented sector accommodation. The same figure where Relief Duty was owed was 60.8%.
 - Whilst we have good success sourcing accommodation for homeless people through our private rented sector access schemes, we face future challenges ensuring people we support can afford private rents.

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- 20.4% of all social housing lets in Oxford were made to households on the housing register who were defined as homeless or at risk of homelessness
 - We have a diverse homeless prevention offer in the city, delivered both by the City Council and also by partners. We can build on this to enhance prevention with better co-ordination of activities.
 - There are extensive services available in the city to provide accommodation and other support to single homeless people and those experiencing rough sleeping. The City has a large commissioning programme for such services and funds for this have increased over the last 3 years, largely due to successfully securing funds from government schemes.
 - We have worked with our District Council neighbours, the County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a County-wide and multi-agency strategy for Oxfordshire. The strategy seeks to prevent and resolve homelessness so that no one has to sleep rough in the County. Our own new strategy will be aligned to the County-wide strategy.
 - In order to achieve our ambition to prevent more people from losing their homes and to seek to rehouse those who become homeless more quickly in the future, we will need to continue to build on and transform our services and approach.
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- **What we are doing to develop more affordable homes available in the city**
 - The years from 2018 to 2020 saw an increase in the number of affordable homes delivered in the city, following lower average rates of development through the middle of the last decade.
 - There are ambitious plans on identified sites to significantly increase affordable development over the next three years, totalling 1,036 affordable homes planned for the period 2021-2024 both through the Council's housing company and Housing Associations.
 - Oxford City Housing Ltd, the Council's housing company, plans to build approximately 1,900 new homes in the next 10 years
 - We are in the process of reaching agreements with our neighbouring Districts to help meet the unmet need for homes of Oxford
 - The greatest need for affordable housing is for 1-bedroom properties, linked to the increasing number of single people we are working with since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act
 - The council is looking to develop or support a number of innovative housing development solutions such as community led housing and the introduction of an "Oxford Living Rent".

 - **How we are performing as a landlord**
 - We are the largest social landlord in the City with 7,669 homes.
 - 34% of our 2+ bedroom properties are under-occupied, down from 40% in 2015.
 - We have a strong track record of tenant engagement, with an award winning Tenant Involvement team.
 - We welcome the new Social Housing White Paper that will require changes across the sector, including greater ability for tenants to influence decisions about their homes and neighbourhoods, and greater ability to scrutinize the City Council's work and decisions as landlord.
 - The pandemic has challenged us to rethink how we deliver our services in our neighbourhoods, with the locality based model used through the lockdowns offering us an improved way of delivering services closer to our communities in the future.

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- **What is the role of housing in the climate crisis**
 - A climate emergency was declared in Oxford in 2019. A large proportion of emissions come from domestic buildings.
 - Significant investment is needed to improve our own housing stock in order to be more energy efficient and we are developing an investment plan to retrofit our current housing stock.
 - The council has established an investment programme to meet a target of 95% of homes to be EPC level C or above by 2030
 - There are similar challenges in the private rented sector

Questions

- ? ***Have we included all the relevant context and evidence of housing and homelessness in the review? Is anything missing and if so what?***
- ? ***Does the information provided in the review give a good level of insight to understand why people are homeless and what the challenges to overcome homelessness are?***
- ? ***Do you have any other comments on the review and evidence base?***

Draft vision and emerging priorities

From carefully reviewing all of the information and learning gained from the review, we have drafted a vision and emerging priorities for the new strategy. This vision and priorities are focused on meeting some of the key challenges that we identified in the review, such as the acute affordability issues in the Oxford housing market, the need to tackle the carbon emissions from housing, and the need to go further to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping.

The feedback on the draft vision and priorities received through this consultation will help us refine and shape these in the coming months. The priorities, when agreed, will inform and lead the new strategy and other relevant policy and activity during the strategy period.

Our draft vision for the strategy is:

“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.”

Questions

- ? ***To what extent do you agree with our draft vision?***

The emerging priorities and areas of work that are likely to fall under these priorities are:

- **Building more, affordable homes**
 - Increasing the rate of affordable homes delivered in the city, in order to tackle the unaffordability local people face in the Oxford housing market.
 - The delivery of the council’s ambitious house building programme through its company Oxford City Housing Ltd, in building nearly 1,900

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- new homes in the next 10 years, many of which will be charged at a lower “social rent”, and 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 the homes outside the city to meet the unmet housing need of the people of Oxford.
 - **Great homes for all**
 - 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.
 - 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 implementing a comprehensive licencing scheme.
 - **Housing for a zero carbon future**
 - 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.
 - Ensure 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.
 - **Preventing homelessness and adopting a rapid rehousing response**
 - Putting the prevention of homelessness at the heart of all Council services, including the reconfiguration of the City Council’s housing services to support more people to stay in their homes. Ensuring every opportunity is taken across the organisation to prevent homelessness.
 - 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 accommodation, and enabling effective access for homelessness households to affordable social housing and the private rented sector.
 - **Ending rough sleeping**
 - Seek to end the need for anyone to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford by 2024 (in line with national objectives).
 - Establish a new countywide 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.

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- ? *To what extent do you agree with 'Building more affordable homes' as a priority for our new strategy?*
- ? *To what extent do you agree with 'Great homes for all' as a priority for our new strategy?*
- ? *To what extent do you agree with 'Housing for a zero carbon future' as a priority for our new strategy?*
- ? *To what extent do you agree with 'Preventing homelessness and adopting a rapid rehousing response' as a priority for our new strategy?*
- ? *To what extent do you agree with 'Ending rough sleeping' as a priority for our new strategy?*
- ? *Do you have any other comments on the emerging priorities?*

Next steps – what happens after the consultation?

Following our consultation on the draft Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence Base and the emerging vision and emerging priorities, we will update the review document, vision and priorities according to the feedback received. This 'visioning consultation' is an important part of the strategy development process, as it allows the public, stakeholders and partners to tell us if there are areas that are not sufficiently covered in the review, if the conclusions we have arrived at based on the evidence are right and if the emerging vision and emerging priorities reflect what we need to do in order to address homelessness and the housing crisis in Oxford.

Following the consultation and using the feedback received, we will then start to develop the draft strategy, accompanied by an action plan.

The draft strategy will be consulted upon, updated based on feedback and then finalised and implemented in early 2022. The timeline for the strategy development process is below.

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