

To: Cabinet
Date: 16 March 2022
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Oxfordshire Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding report
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Diko Walcott, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless
Corporate Priority:	All
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 02 March 2022, the Scrutiny Committee considered the Cabinet Oxfordshire Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding report.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Diko Walcott, Cabinet portfolio holder for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless for attending the meeting, and Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager, for authoring the report and supporting the meeting.

Summary and recommendation

3. Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager introduced the report. He highlighted that this was an annual report which provided an overview of the allocation of funding to provide services for rough sleepers and single homeless people in Oxford in the financial year 2022/23. The provision of services was aimed at preventing and tackling rough sleeping and addressing single homelessness in the City. The pertinent issues within the report included a recommendation in the report for Cabinet related to the lease of Floyds Row, which was the homelessness engagement and assessment centre. Floyds Row was intended to be used as interim accommodation for homeless people while they were supported to access longer-term accommodation, but had not been used as such during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council was looking to return Floyds Row into interim accommodation imminently, which was addressed in the report. The Council planned to move towards its post-pandemic model of service delivery in relation to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness. The new joint commissioning arrangements with partners for Homelessness services would begin in April 2022, which was a key milestone. Overall, there was not much change from the previous annual report. The main change was that many of the services would now be part of the new countywide Homelessness Service.
4. Aside from the issues raised as recommendations, discussion was held over the overall number of street homeless individuals, and the reasons day services funding was being scaled back. The Committee makes two recommendations which relate i) concern over the modus operandi of Greater Change, and ii) to visibility and transparency over in-kind funding for Shelter at the Old Fire Station.

Greater Change

5. One of the grants made by the Council is a £25k grant to Greater Change. This organisation's model is to provide a crowdfunding platform for homeless individuals to pay for things that will help address their situation. Greater Change does clearly seek to address a number of issues: how to provide support for homeless people in an increasingly cashless society, and empowering individuals by enabling them to choose the support they seek. However, the platform also shares the downsides of crowdfunding, which the Committee is concerned about.
6. Ultimately, outcomes are determined by how successful an individual is in presenting their need, rather than the level of need itself. An attractive person with a well told backstory is more likely to receive help than someone with a more prosaic story to tell but is actually in greater need. There is the possibility, therefore, that the funding raised is inefficient, that it purchases fewer positive outcomes than it would if it were directed based on need. There is a counter-argument to this, that by attracting external funding more positive outcomes are generated even if they are individually less efficient.
7. A similar argument is made over what is funded through Greater Change. This is proposed by the individuals themselves. On the one hand it gives autonomy to

the individual, but at the same time it does mean that things are funded which, were it the Council's decision, would not be funded. This again introduces an inefficiency which must be overcome by attracting sufficient external funding. The Committee considers it important that knowing the return on investment is very important in this case.

8. It may seem that the Committee is being over-zealous in seeking close monitoring of the efficiency of £25k of grant funding. However, there is a more fundamental consideration, which is the dignity of those seeking help. If outcomes are dependent on successfully attracting funding there is likely pressure to share information publicly that they may want to keep private in exchange for support. It may be necessary to share pictures, or relate in public painful histories to garner sympathy and secure greater financial help. For some, doing this may be a rational calculus in return for support, but that belies a desperate lack of alternatives. The Committee has deep reservations over expecting an individual to be pressured to be so open publicly in return for support; the outcomes must be exceptional to be justified, and even then the Committee retains strong reservations. As such, it recommends that this funding be kept under particularly close review.

Recommendation 1: That the Council continues to monitor closely the outcomes and value for money of its grant to Greater Change

Transparency Over In-kind Funding

9. The Council is in an arrangement with the charity Crisis whereby it provides rent-free accommodation at the Old Fire Station in return for Crisis providing a number of valuable services to the homeless in the city. The Committee is very supportive of this arrangement. The issue it raises does not concern this directly, but the visibility and transparency of this arrangement. It is the view of the Committee that the work undertaken is very valuable, but because the mechanism by which it is funded is slightly opaque, that the Council does not get the credit and recognition it deserves. The Old Fire Station is a valuable building in the centre of Oxford, which the Council has historically made significant investment in and yet the link between the services provided and the Council is obstructed. For the purposes of visibility, recognition and transparency the Committee recommends that the in-kind benefit provided to Crisis is included in future Allocation of Homelessness Prevention funding.

Recommendation 2: That the Council recognises the financial value to Crisis of providing the Old Fire Station as part of its future reports on the Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding

Further Consideration

10. The Committee is likely to consider this topic in a years' time, and will be interested to follow up on the progress made by the county-wide alliance on rough sleeping.

Report author	Tom Hudson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 02/03/2022 concerning the Oxfordshire Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding report

Response provided by Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless, Councillor Diko Walcott

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council recognises the financial value to Crisis of providing the Old Fire Station as part of its future reports on the Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding	Yes	In future reports we will include details of the subsidy provided to Crisis and Arts and the Old Firestation in respect of the provision of the Old Fire Station building.
2) That the Council continues to monitor closely the outcomes and value for money of its grant to Greater Change	Yes	Monitoring will be undertaken of the grant provided to Greater Change,

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