

To: Cabinet
Date: 19 October 2022
Report of: Executive Director (Communities and People)
Title of Report: Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To approve the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 for public consultation
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing
Corporate Priority:	Deliver More, Affordable Housing and Supporting Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28
Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the progress made to develop a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Oxford; 2. Approve the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 at Appendix 1 for public consultation; 3. Approve the launch of statutory 6 week public consultation to collect feedback on the draft strategy; 4. Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make any necessary editorial corrections, minor amendments, and updates to the draft strategy and strategy evidence base prior to the public consultation launch. 	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28
Appendix 1A	Oxford City Council's Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence base 2021
Appendix 2	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every housing authority to have a homelessness strategy. As the housing authority for Oxford, 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.
2. Oxford City Council's current Housing and Homelessness Strategy has now expired, therefore the process to develop a new strategy has been underway, and a consultation was carried out over summer 2021 to collect the views of the public. The strategy will cover homelessness and rough sleeping, but also our broader approach to housing in the city, including the Council's role as a social landlord, the private rented sector, affordable development, and the link between housing stock and carbon emissions.
3. This report updates on the progress made on the development of the strategy, including the outcome of the public consultation, and summarises the new draft strategy, seeking approval for the launch of a new statutory public consultation to seek views on the draft strategy, ahead of its finalisation.

Strategy development

4. A previous report went to Cabinet in June 2021, and updated on the work underway to develop a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Oxford. The report explained that the new strategy would continue to bring together the Council's former Housing, Homelessness and Empty Homes strategies, to ensure critical interdependencies were considered together and delivery could be prioritised. It also updated on the new statutory requirement that meant that Rough Sleeping strategies also need to be agreed by each Local Authority, and that this would be incorporated into this new broader strategy.
5. Since the last strategy was agreed, the Council has also taken a leading role in the creation of a new Countywide Homelessness Strategy, which commits Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and District Councils, and Health partners, to joint working across Oxfordshire to tackle homelessness, including joint commissioning of rough sleeping services and a move towards a housing-led approach. Therefore our new Housing and Homelessness Strategy will also need to align with this strategy.
6. The previous Cabinet report shared the new Homelessness Review for Oxford and highlighted its key findings, as part of the wider evidence base for the new strategy. The creation of this document was a crucial first step in the development of the new strategy. Cabinet approved this document, and gave permission to launch a "visioning" consultation where we shared the review/ evidence base and our draft priorities for the new strategy, to allow for early feedback from the public and partners on the evidence bases findings and our proposed vision and priorities. The review and evidence base carried out in 2021 is attached as an appendix to this report. An up-to-date version of this will be published together with the draft strategy as part of the public consultation
7. The "visioning" consultation launched last July and was open for 6 weeks. It included an online public survey which received 52 response, 2 stakeholder events where 23 different organisations attended, and other specific events for Councillors,

tenants and those with lived experience of homelessness, such as the Lived Experience Advisory Forum.

8. The overall feedback emerging from the consultation was positive, 87% of people responding to the survey approved of the draft vision for the new strategy and each of the 5 proposed new priorities were supported with between 79% to 85% levels of support. This feedback has confirmed that the development of the strategy is on the right course. The wide range of useful views and comments collected in from the public and stakeholders has been used to develop the updates to the evidence base that will be published ahead of the next consultation, and has also been used to feed in to and shape the draft strategy document.
9. Following the closure of the public consultation, work has been ongoing through the Winter and Spring to use the feedback collected to inform the new strategy; and with the vision and priorities supported by the consultation response, to develop the strategy itself. A significant amount of work has gone on across Council departments to develop the detail of the new strategy, and to ensure alignment with the Council's other strategies. Further engagement has also been carried out with key partners such as Oxfordshire County Council, and Housing Associations to inform the new strategy. This work has resulted in the development of the new draft strategy, attached in the appendices of this report.

The new draft strategy

10. The draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 sets out five priority areas that will drive and focus the Council's work to realise our vision for Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

These five priorities are:

- **Providing more, affordable homes**, which includes:
 - Building 1,200 new Council homes in the next 10 years, through the Council's housing company OX Place, many of which will be charged at a social rent
 - 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
 - Ensure a range of tenure models are developed for affordable homes, such as shared ownership, available to meet the needs of those struggling to afford private rents in Oxford.
 - To work with our neighbouring authorities to progress housing developments across the county that help meet housing need in Oxfordshire and create strong communities with good local amenities and sustainable transport links into the city
 - Continue to bring empty homes back into use
- **Great homes for all**, which includes:
 - Transform the services we deliver to our tenants, to improve tenant satisfaction about their homes, their neighbourhood and the services we deliver to them.

- Improve the quality of Council homes and the surrounding neighbourhoods through increased levels of investment into homes, communal areas and estates, ensuring high standards of compliance, good maintenance, higher levels of energy efficiency, and guided by tenant voices and views.
- Work to drive up standards in Oxford's private rented housing sector, through use of our regulatory powers and the implementation of a comprehensive Selective Licencing Scheme.
- **Housing for a net zero carbon future**, which includes
 - Improve the energy efficiency of Council owned domestic buildings through a significant investment programme.
 - Build more than 2,000 new homes across Oxfordshire over the next 10 years through the Council's housing company OX Place, that will be built to low carbon standard.
 - Bring improvements to energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector in Oxford.
- **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
 - Adopting a rapid rehousing/ housing-led response to all forms of homelessness, so that homeless people can move to a stable and suitable home quickly with the right support, 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.

- **Ending rough sleeping**, which includes:
 - Seeking to end the need for anyone to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford ensuring that where rough sleeping cannot be prevented, it is brief, rare and non-recurring
 - Further establish the 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.
11. The strategy document lays out the ambition and priorities the Council has to tackle the key challenges of the City's housing market and how we will tackle homelessness. Alongside each of the 5 priorities is a clear set of objectives, and a list of high level activities the Council and its partners will take forward to deliver these objectives. It is proposed following the public consultation and finalisation of the strategy document the document will be joined with a detailed delivery action plan, to ensure progress can be tracked.

Strategy governance

12. The new strategy will cover a 5 year period, which is to enable long term planning, but we acknowledge that we are setting this new strategy in a period of significant uncertainty, with the cost of living crisis just one example. Therefore to balance the need for long term thinking, alongside the need for flexibility to a changing local and national picture, it is proposed that a report will be returned to Cabinet on an annual basis, updating on progress of the strategy, and with it bringing updates to the action plan to ensure the strategy stays relevant, flexible and responsive to changing context.

Next Steps

13. The new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy will be a statutory document, and to comply with legislation the next step in its development is to go out for further statutory consultation on the draft strategy. This report is seeking approval to launch this statutory consultation. This is planned to go live in the autumn subject to Cabinet approval, and will be open for 6 weeks. The consultation will again feature an online survey, but also in-person stakeholder events, events for Members, Council tenants, community groups, and users of a range of homelessness services.
14. Following the public consultation feedback will be considered, and further changes will be made to the draft. Once ready it is then planned for the strategy to return to Cabinet and Council for final approval, alongside a detailed action plan and finalised evidence base, ready for implementation over the next 5 years.

Environmental Implications

15. There are considerable environmental implications from the new strategy, including significant actions contained within the strategy that will benefit the environment. Measures include considerable investment in energy efficiency measures in our council housing stock, higher standards for new builds being developed, and work in the PRS to bring up standards. Once the strategy is finalised following the public consultation the full environmental impact will be considered as part of the papers going to Council.

Financial implications

16. Throughout its development process the new strategy is informed by the current financial context the Council finds itself in. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been taken into account when developing the draft strategy. The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis has had, and will have, major financial impacts on the Council's finances, and this will also have an impact on the levels of funding 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, 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 Term Financial Plan, which will be updated by the Council in 2023, and will take on board comments that arise from the consultation on the new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
17. The MTFP identified estimated savings last year of £350k per year from 2022/23 from current spend on homelessness, which have already been achieved. The homelessness commitments within the strategy are principally based on the transformation of services within similar funding levels as present, rather than requiring higher levels of investment. However, it must be acknowledged that more significant reductions in homelessness funding from either national grants or the Council budget in future years, would make parts of the strategy difficult to deliver, and therefore this pressure will be monitored and reported on.
18. The Council's budgeted spend across both Council Housing Management funded largely from council house rents and Housing General fund services such as homelessness which attracts some grant funding from Government with the net amount funded from council tax is shown below:

Spend on Housing Services					
Council House Management & Maintenance		2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
		£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Revenue		47,899	50,721	57,980	58,886
Capital		195,000	139,907	164,716	120,829
		242,899	190,628	222,696	179,715
General Fund Housing Management inc homelessness					
Revenue Spend		10,548	10,172	10,112	10,115
Revenue grant funding		-3,845	-3,845	-3,844	-3,845
		6,703	6,327	6,268	6,270
Capital spend		60,421	30,973	56,260	16,898
Total Housing Spend		310,023	227,928	285,224	202,883

19. We have relied heavily on funding from central government for any increased spending on homelessness, in particular in relation to preventing and tackling single person 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. We now have a longer term Rough Sleeping Initiative settlement to 2025, but this will also come up for renewal/ replacement during the strategy period, and other pots of funding remain short term.
20. Many parts of the new strategy are dependent on significant investment into the Council's housing stock or into new Council homes from the Council's Housing Revenue Account. The current high levels of inflation are putting pressure on the HRA, and the Government is now consulting on capping rent rise levels on Social Housing rents. Depending on levels of inflation versus any potential rent cap when agreed, this could have a major impact on planned investment, and may mean parts of the strategy will become impossible to fund and will require prioritisation.
21. Our desire to improve energy efficiency standards for our homes is ambitious, and it is important that we make good progress on this to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. However, the work that needs to be carried out to meet the commitments outlined in this strategy requires significant levels of investment. The Council operates in an increasingly challenging financial position, impacting all providers of social housing, and at the same time as we need to invest in our housing stock overall. We are therefore faced with difficult budget choices, and will have to prioritise our investment. Therefore Central Government will have to step up and support providers of social housing with the necessary funding for us to meet our carbon reduction targets.

Legal issues

22. 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, therefore we are required to agree a new strategy by 2023. We are currently on track to deliver this, but any 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

23. A risk assessment is attached for the new strategy and public consultation.

Equalities impact

24. An equality impact assessment is attached at Appendix 2. This document is a draft, and will be updated following the public consultation and any changes to the strategy.

Report author	Richard Wood
Job title	Housing Strategy and Needs Manager
Service area or department	Housing Services
Telephone	01865 252002
e-mail	rwood@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None
