

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 March 2023
Report of: Executive Director (Communities and People)
Title of Report: Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To seek approval of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and associated appendices
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing
Corporate Priority:	Deliver more, affordable housing and Supporting Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24

Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Note the progress made to develop the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan for Oxford following feedback from the statutory public consultation;
2.	Recommend to Council the adoption of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and its associated appendices;
3.	Recommend to Council the adoption of the Strategy's Action Plan for 23-24; and
4.	Recommend to Council that authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to update the Action Plan when required.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28, with sub-appendix A: Oxford City Council's Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence base 2021

Appendix 2	Action Plan
Appendix 3	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 4	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 and work has been ongoing to develop a new Strategy over the last 18 months and is now complete.
3. A previous report went to Cabinet in October 2022 which included the updated evidence base and draft strategy document, which updated on the development of the Draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, following a comprehensive review of homelessness in Oxford and an early visioning public consultation. Cabinet approved this draft, and gave permission to launch a full statutory consultation which subsequently launched in November.
4. This report seeks Cabinet approval for the Strategy and its action plan, ahead of consideration from Council. The report updates on the consultation process, provides a summary on amendments made to the strategy, and introduces the new action plan.

Strategy development

5. Following Cabinet approval a public consultation on the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was launched in November 2022 for a period of 6 weeks. This was a statutory consultation that is a requirement in order to develop and adopt homelessness and rough sleeping strategies before implementation. The focus of the consultation was to seek views on our draft strategy, and its commitments and plans to achieve the priorities we set out.
6. As part of the consultation we:
 - Launched an online public survey
 - Held 3 in-person stakeholder events, focussing on different priorities within the draft Strategy
 - Held an on-line stakeholder event, covering all 5 priorities
 - Attended community events
 - Held a session with individuals who have lived experience of homelessness
 - Attended a meeting with Tenant Ambassadors
 - Held a Member's briefing
 - The Economic Development Team encouraged attendees of the Economic Growth Board to engage with the consultation

- Details of the consultation were included in newsletters that are circulated to businesses and partners operating in the City Centre.
7. To raise awareness of the consultation, we launched a social media campaign, targeted online advertising, advertised on our Choice Based Lettings website and had a recorded message notifying people about the strategy when calling the Council.
 8. We received a good response to the consultation, receiving 103 online responses along with 4 written responses and 60 individuals attended the stakeholder events representing 27 different organisations.
 9. We had a positive response to our visions and priorities, with between 74% and 85% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with what we want to do. Feedback from stakeholders and communities was also very positive, agreeing with our priorities outlined in the Draft Strategy. Overall the feedback received confirmed that we were on the right track with respondents predominately supporting with what we have set out to do over the next 5 years.
 10. Following the closure of the public consultation in December 2022 we have carefully reviewed all feedback received. Overall the majority of feedback reflected our commitments and plans set out in the draft Strategy but we have further developed the strategy and made amendments, including:
 - Developed the strategy action plan informed by the priorities and insight gained from members of the public and stakeholders through the consultation process.
 - Updating the Strategy and evidence base with the most recent Census data.
 - Incorporated more detailed information in relation to the need for affordable housing.
 - Reaffirmed our commitment to provide a face-to-face offer of services to those who need it.
 - Further developed our approach to governance and monitoring of the Strategy and Action Plan.
 - We have included more context and explanation as to our limitations as a Local Authority in areas where we have limited influence, this includes supporting individuals with no recourse to public funds and implementing rent caps in the private rented sector.

Strategy Action Plan

11. As outlined above, the consultation and subsequent refinement of the strategy has allowed us to draft an action plan for the new strategy that outlines and details how we will implement the ambition and plans contained in the strategy.
12. In order to create an effective action plan that can drive delivery, we have worked closely with colleagues across the Council, Oxford Direct Services and OX Place to develop this Action Plan, and ensured that our actions are aligned with other Council strategies, business plans and work priorities. The Action plan contains 5 year objectives, alongside year 1 actions, to ensure gradual progress towards our stated goals.

13. The Action Plan will be used to monitor and report on our progress against our commitments in the Strategy. It will be updated yearly to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to changing context, and progress will be closely monitored and reported on.

Strategy governance

14. The strategy document outlines the governance arrangements that will be put in place to ensure progress against the strategy, accountability to those who need to deliver actions, and to support and inform the annual updating of the action plan over the 5 year period.

15. Routine monitoring of the strategy will be done internally, with identified Officer Groups responsible for the delivery of the Strategy. As large parts of the strategy sit across other departments and teams in the Council, regular review meetings will be established with relevant colleagues across the organisation to ensure connectivity.

16. Progress against actions will be updated on a quarterly basis with a report made to the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and the Communities and People Management Team.

17. A full review of the Action Plan and progress made will be completed on an annual basis. This will result in a monitoring and update report, and recommendations for revisions to the action plan, that will be presented annually to Cabinet for approval.

18. In line with normal process this report will also be available to the Council's Scrutiny Committee, and sub committees, to consider and provide recommendations to Cabinet, in line with the Council's constitution.

Next Steps

19. Subject to approval by Cabinet and Council, the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be implemented from April 2033. Work on the monitoring framework for the action plan will begin immediately, with the governance and reporting structure being established from the 1st April.

Environmental Implications

20. There are considerable environmental implications resulting from the actions contained within the new strategy, if not from adopting the strategy itself. The majority of actions contained within the strategy will either benefit or have no impact on the environment. This is because measures include considerable investment in energy efficiency improvements in our Council housing stock, higher standards for new builds being developed through our investment, and work in the Private Rented Sector to bring up standards. Any development brings benefits and costs to the environment, but the Council is clear in its Council Strategy that the delivery of more affordable housing is a priority to meet housing need, and therefore by developing to higher environment and energy efficiency standards this strategy is helping to lower environmental implications of future development. As significant schemes, projects and funding roll out in coming years that have significant impacts on the environment those that have to go to Cabinet to be approved will have individual environment impact assessments in line with the Council's Constitution, that can provide further detail.

21. The proposal complies with the City Council's policies and commitments relating to carbon and the environment and brings us closer to our commitment to becoming a zero carbon council by 2030.

Financial implications

22. Throughout its development, 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 Strategy. The current economic climate 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 Medium Term Financial Plan.
23. There are ongoing savings in the revised MTFP for Housing which are on track to be delivered. The MTFP identified estimated savings last year of £350k per year from 2022/23 from current spend on homelessness, which have already been achieved. 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.
24. The Council's budgeted spend across both the Housing Revenue Account which is 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							
				2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
				£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Council House Management & Maintenance							
	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

25. 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.
26. 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 with social rent increases capped at 7% for 2023-24, we may need to prioritise commitments within the Strategy. What we can deliver will be strongly influenced by levels of inflation over the next 5 years, and the government's formula to set social housing rent increases, where there is great uncertainty.
27. Our desire to improve energy efficiency standards for our homes are 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

28. 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 this strategy should be 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. There is no such legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy, however, it is seen as best practice. Due to the link between the supply of housing and levels of homelessness, the Strategies are interlinked and cannot be easily separated. We have therefore brought these interdependent strands together to create one cohesive Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
29. We are currently on track to deliver the Strategy by April 2023.

Level of risk

30. A risk assessment for the new strategy and action plan is attached at Appendix 4. Please note this risk assessment is for the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy itself includes many projects which will each have their own individual risk assessments.

Equalities impact

31. An equality impact assessment for the new strategy and action plan is attached at Appendix 2.

Report author	Amie Rickatson
Job title	Strategy & Service Development Manager
Service area or department	Housing Services
Telephone	01865 252665
e-mail	arickatson@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

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