

To: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Date: 05 October 2023
Report of: Head of Housing Services
Title of Report: Update on the Housing First Programme in Oxford

| Summary and recommendations | |
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| Purpose of report: | To update the panel on the Housing First programme in Oxford, including service delivery and outcomes. |
| Key decision: | No |
| Cabinet Member with responsibility: | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing |
| Corporate Priority: | Deliver more affordable housing; Support Thriving Communities |
| Policy Framework: | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 |
| Recommendation(s): That the Panel resolves to: | |
| 1. Note the contents of the report and agree any recommendations. | |

| Appendices | |
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| Appendix 1 | Housing First Principles |
| Appendix 2 | Risk Register (NSAP allocation, November 2020) |
| Appendix 3 | Risk Register (Expansion of the Housing First Programme, August 2023) |

Introduction and background

1. The Council implemented a Housing First programme in the City in 2021/22. This followed successful capital and revenue bids from two of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) rough sleeping programmes – Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP). The funds have allowed the acquisition of one-bedroom properties in the City as well as fund support services. Between these two funding streams, 35 people will be supported through Housing First by the end of March 2024.

2. In summer 2023, the Council was awarded further capital and revenue funding from Homes England under the Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP) to expand the Housing First programme. The funds will contribute to the acquisitions of one-bedroom properties in the City to be for Housing First, as well as fund support services. Through this funding stream, 17 people will be supported through Housing First over the next two years.
3. Housing First is an internationally evidenced housing intervention which has proved successful in supporting persons with a long history of homelessness and who may have multiple and complex needs to maintain housing. There is great need for this housing intervention in Oxford and the delivery of more Housing First is a key element of the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 as well as the Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26.
4. This report will provide further detail on the Housing First approach, how the provision currently being delivered in Oxford by St Mungo's and A2Dominion (funded through RSAP and NSAP) functions, and key outcomes.

What is Housing First and how does it operate in Oxford

5. The main premise of Housing First is to provide a stable and independent home without the need for a person to first prove that they are tenancy ready, or that they can sustain a tenancy. Instead, they are given a permanent offer of a home, with support provided to enable them to maintain the tenancy.
6. Homeless Link has produced guidance and best practice in relation to Housing First. This sets out 7 principles of Housing First and adhering to these has the best outcomes. The 7 principles are:
 - a. People have a right to a home
 - b. Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed
 - c. Housing and support are separated
 - d. Individuals have choice and control
 - e. An active engagement approach is used
 - f. The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations
 - g. A harm reduction approach is used
7. More information about the Housing First principles is also available in Appendix 1.
8. The Council's aim is for Housing First in Oxford to be delivered with high fidelity (i.e. closely aligned to the 7 principles). This is because the evidence from a range of projects nationally shows that high fidelity models have the best chances of success. Under the Housing First model, providers have been able to assist the most vulnerable people and/or those with the most chaotic housing history in the City into stable accommodation.
9. Housing First is aimed at long-term entrenched rough sleepers who have exhausted all traditional routes off the streets. The model is aimed at those who have not been able to manage in supported accommodation and who cannot manage a tenancy independently. Persons who are put forward for Housing First have normally experienced homelessness for a long period of time and struggle to maintain

accommodation, often linked to that person experiencing multiple and complex needs.

10. As such, Housing First is unlikely to be the right accommodation for all individuals who have a history of homelessness. Where an individual can manage either independent living in the social or private rented sectors, or living in the social or private rented sectors with some floating support in place, they are unlikely to be in need of Housing First accommodation and the support that comes with this. Likewise, there are a number of people in supported accommodation (either in a congregate setting or in a dispersed setting) where they are managing well.
11. Unlike traditional homelessness services, the only condition placed on the individual is a willingness to maintain a tenancy. Support is bespoke to the needs of the individual, and they are able to engage with this on their own terms.
12. To allow support workers to provide intensive and flexible support, Housing First support workers work with a lot fewer people than colleagues working in standard supported housing. In Oxford, a Housing First support worker works with a maximum of 6-7 persons at any one time. Relationship building between support workers and individuals is key; engagement starts before a person moves into the accommodation and continues when the person moves into the accommodation.
13. It should be noted that Housing First support workers are not experts in every field where a person may need support. An important part of the support provided and relationship with the person is to facilitate other support agencies to provide this. Many of the individuals currently in Housing First accommodation or those who are in need of Housing First accommodation are already working with other support organisations to some extent, for example substance misuse services such as Turning Point. However, due to having led chaotic lives, often due to trauma and not having a stable home, the support that can be provided by such services can be limited and ineffective. For example, people may use emergency health care, rather than primary care services. Through living in stable accommodation in Housing First and having a dedicated Housing First support worker that can help facilitate the relationship between more specialist services and the individual, the individual's wellbeing will improve and services provided by others will be more effective. By allowing people to live in a safe, secure physical environment, this creates the psychological space for people to recover from homelessness.
14. As stated above, the current Housing First programme in Oxford is delivered by St Mungo's and A2Dominion. A deliberate decision was made to commission two different providers to deliver the service, under two separate contracts, in order to provide choice to residents about which organisation they are supported by.
15. Close partnership work between the two providers of Housing First in Oxford is key and has thus far been highly successful. As commissioners of Housing First under RSAP and NSAP, the Council does not run the contracts as separate entities but instead as a single service, with 2 separate support teams that facilitate choice for the clients. The two organisations do not compete with each other, but work together well to assist and support each other to improve and develop the services. For example, St Mungo's and A2Dominion staff attend joint visits to homes and other settings, to ensure that the individuals feel supported.
16. To date, the Housing First programme has been highly successful in Oxford. As of 01 September 2023, a total of 24 persons are housed in Housing First with one

individual expected to move into accommodation by the end of September 2023. A further 5 individuals are currently being supported by St Mungo's and A2Dominion whilst properties are sought for them. Furthermore, we have recently opened referrals to expand the cohort further.

17. At the time of writing this report there have been no evictions or abandonments from any of the properties and some of the individuals housed have remained in the same accommodation for longer periods than ever before. However, there are significant challenges associated with housing individuals who are suitable for Housing First and we are unfortunately likely to see some individuals being evicted or abandoning their housing. There have been a number of challenges since the inception of the programme, including instances of anti-social behaviour, building up of rent arrears and individuals not coping well in general in their accommodation. Where possible, the concerns are being addressed by multi-agency working, but we are aware that not every tenancy can be saved. As noted in paragraph 22 below, we have a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of 80% tenancies sustained year-on-year, as the recognised standard for Housing First projects. This is to reflect how difficult the process can be for individuals to move away from homelessness after years of experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Monitoring and performance of the service

18. Both A2Dominion and St Mungo's have monitoring in place for their contracts. Monitoring is provided every quarter and monitoring meetings between the City Council as commissioners and the providers are held. Through this thorough and collaborative monitoring process, the proactive strengths-based work that is taking place with all clients and the positive impact that this has on the clients' lives is highlighted.
19. The monitoring also specifically addresses the fidelity of the model of Housing First and how closely services are adhering to it. Monitoring meetings also provide an open forum to discuss any barriers faced and how the service can be improved.
20. In addition to the quarterly monitoring meetings, we also hold fortnightly meetings with the two service providers to make sure that we are staying on top of all facets of the work. The meeting covers all things related to the allocation process and ensures that both the Council and the service partners are clear on how to proceed with each case. The meetings also cover individuals that are currently accommodated within the service and provides an opportunity to highlight any issues or concerns in respect of any of the tenancies. Off the back of this we will invite teams from within the Council to attend subsequent meetings to resolve the issues highlighted. To date the Income, ASBIT and Tenancy Management teams have attended to address specific common concerns.
21. The main aspect of the service that is monitored is if tenancies in Housing First are sustained. As stated above, the tenancy sustainment rate for the service thus far is 100%. Part of the approach to commissioning this service is not to be too prescriptive and allowing the service providers the freedom to support individuals in the flexible and intensive way that is needed. The only KPI that is attached to the service is therefore that 80% of tenancies should be sustained year-on-year.

22. In addition to the KPI, we are also asking St Mungo's and A2Dominion to provide other information so that we can work with them to ensure that the service is delivered on-track. The measures are:

| | 21/22 | Q1 22/23 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 23/24 | Q2 |
|--|-------|-------------|------|------|------|-------------|------|
| Number of people considered for Housing First | 18 | n/a | n/a | 16 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Number of clients being case worked | 18 | 16 | 16 | 32 | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| Number of new tenancies started that quarter | n/a | 2 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Number in accommodation | n/a | 2 | 9 | 16 | 21 | 23 | 25 |
| Number of evictions and abandonments | n/a | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tenancy Sustainment Rate | n/a | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Update on acquisitions

23. Key to the delivery of the Housing First programme is of course that the Council has properties available for people. As the high fidelity Housing First model calls for accommodation to be permanent, the accommodation really does need to be provided by social landlords, like housing associations or local authorities, where a person would be given a social tenancy.

24. The accommodation should also be self-contained and at a social rent so that the accommodation is affordable.

25. The location of Housing First properties must also be carefully considered. In Oxford, we aim to spread the units out across the city where we can, but we are limited to purchase properties in areas where this is affordable, or where the Council already owns properties. Location of properties used for Housing First is important - people accommodated in Housing First should be able to integrate and be part of the community where they live and they should be treated as individuals. Spreading properties across the city also means that there is less likelihood of potential anti-social behaviour in one or a few areas of the city, due to congregation of other people in the area, or clients' sometimes chaotic behaviour. It also means that the function of the Council's Tenancy Management is incorporated into every locality. This spreads knowledge of the service and what it is trying to achieve.

26. In addition to sourcing properties in the right location of the city, there are further considerations for the Council's Affordable Supply Team, which carries out acquisitions. The additional acquisitions into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) stock will likely lead to refurbishment work needing to be completed at some of the new units in order to bring them up to Decent Homes standards, as well as an EPC C rating. The Council avoids purchasing properties where the costs of bringing the unit to these standards is prohibitive. It will also require additional conveyancing work to be undertaken by Legal Services.

27. Under the NSAP and RSAP programmes, the Council received funding to enable support to be provided for up to 40 people. We received capital funding to purchase 15 units of accommodation and these properties are now part of the Council's housing stock.

28. The remaining units of accommodation are being released by Oxford City Council and A2Dominion housing stock. All clients under the Housing First programme receive support as described above.
29. There have been challenges to secure sufficient one-bedroom accommodation units for Housing First in Oxford, and in particular from Oxford City Council housing stock. This has meant that units have come online slower than expected and also that we will not be able to provide the 40 units that was originally hoped. There is great demand for social rented one-bedroom accommodation in the city, and this demand has to be carefully balanced in order not to disadvantage other groups in high housing needs, such as care leavers.
30. As of 01 September 2023, a total of 25 units are available for Housing First in the City under the NSAP and RSAP programmes, and we expect a further 10 units to become available by the end of March 2024.

| | NSAP/RSAP funded | Units available Sep 23 | Estimated units available Mar 24 |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Oxford City to purchase | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Oxford City to release from existing stock | 20 | 6 | 15 |
| A2 Dominion | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Total | 40 | 25 | 35 |

31. With additional funds sourced through the SHAP programme, a further 17 Housing First units will also be available over the next two years. 12 of these will be purchased by the City Council using capital funding and HRA funds. Therefore, there will be over 50 units of Housing First accommodation available in the city in the next two years.
32. There is high demand for Housing First accommodation and associated support in the city and we are likely to need more than the 50 units that current funding is enabling. We will therefore continue to bid for funding to enable this provision to expand further. The wider transformation of services for single homeless individuals and those who are experiencing rough sleeping that is currently delivered by the Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance, is striving to move some of the provision of more traditional forms of supported accommodation and congregate settings, to the provision of more Housing First and housing-led provision. In the longer term, this will meet the aims of the Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, it will contribute to a reduction in single homelessness and rough sleeping, and result in better outcomes for individuals.

Financial implications

33. The Housing First programme being delivered in Oxford at present is funded through two different government grants, as described above – NSAP and RSAP, with further units being acquired under the SAHP programme in due course. There

are financial implications for the Council to purchase properties to be used for Housing First, and these have been explored in the three different reports that have gone to Cabinet to seek approval to submit bids to these funds and/or to use these funds to acquire properties. In the most recent report to Cabinet in relation to SHAP funding, where the Council is required to also use HRA funds to fund the purchase of properties, it described that calculations have been made showing that the impact on the HRA Interest Recover Ratio is negligible and that it is able to cover the expected interest costs of borrowing using the rental income generated.

34. The support delivered by Housing First support workers in Oxford is as described above and funded through Government funding and does therefore not involve a direct cost to the Council. As people housed through the programme are well supported, improve their health and well-being, and maintain their accommodation, there are overall savings to the public purse, spread over local housing authorities, social and health care, public health, and mental health.
35. Although the overall savings to the public purse are significant, the up-front cost of commissioning Housing First is expensive. The provision of the support for Housing First is more costly than standard supported accommodation due to the staff-to-client ratio. As described above, Housing First support workers work with 6-7 clients, whilst support workers in other supported accommodation would work with more than that. Due to the cost of support, we have thus far relied on Government funding such as RSAP, NSAP and SHAP to enable the provision of Housing First in the City. We will continue to rely on such funding in order to continue to deliver the programme when the current funding comes to an end.

Legal issues

36. The procurement, commissioning and award of contracts for the Housing First programme, funded through the various Government funding streams, have been, and will be, undertaken in compliance with the Council's contract rules contained in Part 19 of its Constitution.

Level of risk

37. The Risk Registers for Housing First that have accompanied Cabinet reports requiring decisions in relation to Housing First are attached as Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Equalities impact

38. Housing First is an intervention targeted at some of the most vulnerable members of society. Housing first is contained in the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which had a full Equalities Impact Assessment carried out on it before its adoption by Council. The service will be subject to monitoring of its performance and impact on individuals, including matters of equality and diversity.

Conclusion

39. The enabling of the Housing First programme by Government funding is providing important housing and associated support to some of the most vulnerable persons in Oxford.
40. Delivery of support is person-centred, done in partnership with other services and resulting in good outcome for individuals.

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Background Papers: None