

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 July 2024
Report of: Executive Director (Communities and People)
Title of Report: Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide an update on the progress made in Year 1 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and to approve implementation of the Year 2 action plan.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Deliver more, affordable housing
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28
Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Note the progress made in Year 1 to implement the Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan and the emerging risks and challenges for delivery over next year and beyond;
2.	Approve the adoption of the new strategy Action Plan for 24-25; and
3.	Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to update the Action Plan when required.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan 2024-25
Appendix 2	Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. Following implementation of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 last year, considerable progress has been made towards actions within the Year 1 action plan. As part of the governance arrangements for the Strategy, a full annual review of the Action Plan and progress report has been completed.
2. Since the implementation of the Strategy, the Council has faced significant new challenges in this policy area, and to ensure the action plan reflects these challenges, we have revised it to ensure it is still relevant in the current climate but continues to drive in the direction outlined in the Strategy.
3. This report provides a summary of progress made on the Strategy in year 1 and seeks approval to implement its new year 2 action plan.

Progress on the 5 strategy priorities

Priority 1 – Providing more affordable homes

4. The affordable housing supply programme is currently forecast to meet its four-year delivery target of 1,600 by 26/27 and is expected to exceed its target for social rented units, with 1,046 units projected to be delivered.
5. Agreements have been signed with three District Councils on the allocation of Social Housing for Oxford's Unmet Need, with the one remaining agreement drafted and awaiting final sign off. These Councils have agreed to set aside 7,150 affordable homes over the next 10 years to help meet Oxford's housing need. The first units of accommodation are becoming available through the Vale of White Horse and work is underway to advertise this to the people in the City, and in Housing Services to proactively support more vulnerable, homeless households to access the Vale list.
6. Good work on property acquisition programmes continues, utilising funding through Social Housing Accommodation Programme and Local Authority Housing Fund to purchase 5 units of accommodation for Housing First, 9 units to accommodate households from refugee & resettlement schemes and 2 units for temporary accommodation, the purchase of a further 12 units is due to be completed over the coming weeks. We have also utilised right to buy receipts to purchase 11 units which will now be available at social rent to households on our general housing register.
7. We continue to work with Aspire to explore utilising social investment funds to bring empty properties back into domestic use through Empty Dwelling Management Orders. Over 20 properties have been identified and visited, and through our negotiations with landlords two properties have been put on the market and two are potentials for a management order. We are currently progressing and agreeing financial, legal and procurement requirements to establish sign off requirements for use of EDMOs.

Priority 2 – Great homes for all

8. We have seen significant change in regulations over the last 12 months in the Social Housing sector, with the implementation of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and the new Consumer Standards. To prepare for these changes we participated in a pilot assessment with the Regulator of Social Housing. The feedback received from this assessment has been critical to shaping the transformation of landlord services and we are implementing significant changes to service delivery and governance to ensure full compliance with new standards.
9. Work to enhance tenant engagement and involvement is continuing with a new Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Strategy to increase accountability and ensure tenants views influence decisions being made.
10. Our programme for delivering rolling annual stock condition surveys is progressing well with the first phase completed and the second phase underway. These along with our detailed, combined stock condition and energy retrofit assessments will be used to inform investment programmes for the next 5 years and beyond.
11. Work to ensure private rented properties are compliant with property licencing schemes continues, with enforcement of both HMO and selective licencing schemes now aligned and additional staffing in place to proactively inspect properties.

Priority 3 – Housing for a net zero housing future

12. OX Place is continuing work to develop their net zero carbon by 2040 strategy, the report from Etude has been completed and will be used to inform the Strategy.
13. OX Place has made further progress in reducing carbon emission levels and improving energy efficiency in new homes. With 75% (291 of 386) of on-site homes meeting the fabric standard and 75% (291 of 386) will be electrically heated. Carbon emission levels of 63% (242 of 386) of on-site dwellings will be 40% lower than national standards (Building Regulations 2021).
14. Once finalised our asset management strategy will inform our planned maintenance programme, which includes our approach to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C and Net Zero Carbon across the Council's existing housing stock.
15. A social media and marketing campaign ran over winter to inform residents about the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) funding, with marketing materials disseminated to community centres to encourage take up from homeowners. In March letter were sent out to 500 potentially eligible residents to promote funding. We continue to work with partners and the County Council to identify barriers and facilitate uptake of these funding schemes.

Priority 4 – Preventing Homelessness and creating a rapid rehousing response

16. Over the past 12 months Housing Needs has embedded its new structure and delivered its aims of increasing resource focused on the prevention of homelessness and achieved significantly faster move on from temporary accommodation (TA). This new approach to homelessness has resulted in us working with an increased number of clients before they become homeless and delivering a drop in 12month+ stays in TA.
17. Exponential increases in temporary accommodation demand over the last 12 months have shifted priorities to manage this demand and reduce the use of expensive nightly charge accommodation, with focus being put on actions that increase the amount of TA stock we have access to in the short and medium term, in particular one-bedroom units. Work is underway on new schemes to maximise TA stock on a longer-term basis.
18. Development of a Private Sector Leasing project to increase our TA stock in the short term has been developed and procurement of units is well underway, engaging with landlords in the City to make available more, quality TA stock for homeless households. We have shifted hotel booking to cheaper block booking arrangements.
19. Focus on move on from TA has been a priority for housing supply. Our PRS procurement team has had a great year delivering approximately 120 units by year end, the highest number for years. Our social housing allocations team have also responded, with a significant reprioritisation of lets to increase TA move on, that is seeing us now bring under control numbers of families in hotels.
20. In response to the national increased homelessness demand, we received an uplift of £411k to our Homelessness Prevention Grant to be used on homelessness services. This additional funding allowed us to recruit to additional posts, including dedicated provisions to prevent homelessness from the private rented sector and manage TA demand.
21. We have developed and implemented an online general housing register form which will be quicker and more accessible to most applicants and will speed up processing times, support will be available for those individuals who are unable to apply online. Over the next 12 months, we will look to develop our online offer to include transfer applications and homeless applications as well as seeking to procure a new Housing Needs system to support future transformation of services, increasing productivity.
22. The Refugee and Resettlement Team in Housing has grown and established itself this year and have proved critical in our response to the Home Office hotel in Oxford. Home Office evictions from asylum seeker accommodation is now the biggest source of homelessness in the City, but a strong staff response and commissioned services have helped us mitigate some of the pressures .

23. Additional funding has been secured from the Ukraine Response Scheme (UKRS), enabling operational work to continue over 24/25. In 23/24 170 families across Oxfordshire in hosting arrangements have been rematched to alternative households across the County through a team hosted by the City Council. Within the City we have rematched 69 families and we currently only have one Ukrainian household made homeless having left a hosting arrangement in temporary accommodation.

Priority 5 – Ending Rough Sleeping

24. We continue to play a leading role in progressing the Countywide Rough Sleeping Strategy and delivering the transformation of services to a more Housing-Led system. Progress has been made in the first two years, with the commissioning of the Alliance, the delivery of more Housing-led accommodation, and the general bedding in of Countywide working. We are now using our leadership role to push for more progress in wider transformation, through coordinating commissioners and supporting transformation in the Alliance. 24/25 will be a key year, with ambition to move faster on transformation, and the need to agree a new Rough Sleeping Initiative grant settlement with central government.
25. Good progress has been made against our commitment to provide 11 units of Housing First accommodation. Through a combination of acquisitions and releasing existing units from our and A2 Dominion's stock we have made available 30 units of accommodation for homeless individuals in the City. Over the next 12 months, we would like to continue the expansion of our Housing First offer, building on our previous success in reducing rough sleeping.

Emerging Risks and Challenges

26. A number of significant risks and challenges have emerged in the housing and homelessness area over the past year that both pose significant barriers to the implementation of the strategy and will require us to adapt our priorities and approach.
27. A strategic review of the Housing Revenue Account's 30 year Business Plan is currently underway to provide clarity and review priorities within the context of a changing landscape linked to the Social Housing Act. Further work to progress our asset management strategy and 5-year capital investment programmes to drive efficiency and value for money whilst also ensuring compliance with the Social Housing Act (SHA) and Decent Homes standards is also underway.
28. Compliance with the Social Housing Act, and the new Consumer Standards is a key area of focus for all aspects of Landlord Services and significant transformation work is underway and due to deliver in 24-25 across this area.
29. Housing Services continues to see high and rising homelessness in the city, leading to a very high temporary accommodation placement rate and significant pressure on the Housing Needs service. The next year requires work to deliver

planned mitigations, preventing demand, and progressing the delivery of a number of schemes to add to our temporary accommodation stock.

30. The transformation of our approach to rough sleeping has a critical 12 months ahead. We will be seeking to accelerate the Alliance's transformation in line with the Countywide strategy, whilst also negotiating a 25/26 budget and seeking a new RSI settlement from central government. Uncertainty about central government funding, the general election and the need for significant transformation, all while providers continue to see the impact of high inflation on their costs, creates a very difficult set of circumstances to make progress in, and City Council Commissioners will be closely working with Co-commissioners and providers to navigate this.

Year 2 Strategy Action Plan

31. As outlined above, we have made significant progress against our Year 1 action plan. A new year 2 action plan has been developed, updating the current action plan in light of progress, and to ensure the strategies actions and priorities adapt to the new challenges.
32. 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 as well as key external partners 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 2 actions, to ensure gradual progress towards our stated goals.
33. The Action Plan will be reviewed regularly to monitor and report on our progress against our commitments in the Strategy. To ensure it can respond quickly to emerging priorities, we have requested approval to revise the plan throughout the year as required.

Strategy governance

34. The strategy document outlines the governance arrangements that will be put in place to ensure progress against the strategy, outline 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.
35. Routine monitoring of the strategy is 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 are held with relevant colleagues across the organisation to ensure connectivity.
36. Progress against actions will be updated on a quarterly basis with updates made to the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and the Communities, and CMT.
37. 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.

Next Steps

38. Subject to approval by Cabinet, the Action Plan 24-25 will be implemented in July. Work on the monitoring framework for the action plan will begin immediately, with the governance and reporting structure resuming.

Environmental Implications

39. There are considerable environmental implications resulting from the actions contained within the 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 Councils Constitution, that can provide further detail.
40. 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

41. 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. Particularly, the significant increase in homelessness presentations over the last year has caused a sharp increase in demand for temporary accommodation, leading to the frequent use of expensive nightly charge accommodation. This will continue to be a significant financial risk to the Council over the coming years. 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, of which a net budget of £5.4million has been allocated for Housing services as below:

2024/25 Approved MTFP Budget

	Approved Budget
Strategy & Service Development	£853,427
Garages (Landlord Services)	£63,194
Homelessness Prevention	£494,092
Rapid Re-Housing	£2,050,844
Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness	£1,851,134
Other Housing Services	£86,001
Housing Services	£5,398,692

42. 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. Our current Rough Sleeping Initiative settlement comes to an end at the end of March 2025, so this will also come up for renewal/ replacement during the strategy period, and other pots of funding remain short term.
43. 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. Previous rent caps, high inflation and interest rates have put significant pressure on the HRA, whilst at the same time increasing the demands of what it needs to deliver and therefore the current strategic review is imperative to understand our position.
44. 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. Significant central government funding will be required in this area to fulfil ambitions.

Legal issues

45. 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 into place in April 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.

Level of risk

46. A risk assessment is attached as Appendix 4 for the new strategy and action plan. 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

47. An equality impact assessment is attached as Appendix 2, this has been reviewed following implementation of the strategy and development of the year 2 Action Plan.

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Background Papers:

- 1 [Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28](#)
- 2 [Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping 2023-28: Year 1 Action Plan](#)

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