

Cherwell District Council

Executive

1 March 2021

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026

Report of Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning

This report is public

Purpose of report

To set out the key points from the consultation on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 and the main changes to the strategy and action plan made in response to the feedback received. In addition, the report requests Executive approval of the amended strategy and action plan.

1.0 Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

- 1.1 Note the changes to the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 and Action Plan following public consultation.
- 1.2 Approve the amended strategy and action plan in order to ensure that the Council meets statutory requirements and complies with good practice.
- 1.3 Delegate authority to the Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning in consultation with the Lead Member, to make any minor editorial amendments to the strategy as needed and to undertake a review and update of the Action Plan on an annual basis.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must carry out a homelessness review for their district and develop and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. The strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years and must set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing sufficient accommodation and support is, or will be, available for people who become homeless or are at risk of becoming so.
- 2.2 The adopted Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020 and associated action plan were developed at a time of reorganisation, when Cherwell District Council (CDC) was in the process of dissolving its partnership with South Northamptonshire Council and

developing a new partnership with Oxfordshire County Council. 65 out of the 70 actions outlined in the 2018-2020 strategy have been achieved which is a significant achievement given the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on the public and subsequently the increased demand for CDC's housing and homelessness services since March 2020. The term of the 2018-2020 strategy is coming to an end and in order to meet its statutory obligations, CDC must publish a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy by April 2021.

- 2.3 Consultation on the new draft strategy and action plan took place between 30 November 2020 and 17 January 2021. This report sets out the key points from the consultation and the main changes to the strategy and action plan in response to the feedback received. The final strategy is appended to this report (**Appendix 1**) along with the Action Plan for the first two years of the strategy term (**Appendix 2**).
- 2.4 In developing the new strategy, an Equality and Climate Impact Assessment was undertaken to consider the impact of the draft strategy on equality, climate change, diversity and inclusion. The impact assessment was published with the consultation documents and has since been refreshed as the draft strategy and action plan have been finalised. This meets with the Council's commitments set out in the 'Including Everyone: Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework'. The assessment can be found in **Appendix 6** to this report.

3.0 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 (Appendix 1)

- 3.1 In accordance with legislative requirements, to inform the development of the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy for 2021-2026 and the Action Plan for the first two years of the strategy term, a review of homelessness services was undertaken. The Review 2020 document can be found in **Appendix 3** to this report and considers the:
- Council's achievements during the lifetime of the previous Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020.
 - Actions outstanding from the previous strategy action plan (this has been done through the action plan monitoring process)
 - Demand on homelessness services
 - Council's current provision of homelessness services
 - Unmet demand for the Council's homelessness services
 - Future challenges facing the Councils' homelessness service.
- 3.2 A summary of the Review findings can be found in Section 4 of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 (Appendix 1).
- 3.3 In addition to the Review 2020, officers considered housing statistical data and the outcomes from the Shelter Health Check undertaken in August 2019. Shelter completed the health check with the Housing Options Team to map the customer experience and explore compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA). The health check comprised of mystery shopping and a file audit by a Shelter legal expert. Shelter provided recommendations to the Council for implementation and an action plan was developed for implementation. Of the 18

actions, 10 had been completed by July 2020. Work continues to implement the remaining actions, some of which have been incorporated into the new strategy.

3.4 Officers also considered the findings of the research jointly commissioned by Crisis, Oxfordshire County Council and the five district councils to explore the feasibility of moving to a housing-led approach in Oxfordshire, to tackle single homelessness countywide. The focus of the study was on single households because more than half of the homelessness presentations across Oxfordshire in 2018/19 were from this group. Family homelessness is also of concern, but prevention rates are slightly higher for families and the redesign of Children's Services aims to improve housing solutions for vulnerable families.

3.5 The global findings have informed CDC's vision for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 which is:

Our Vision is: To work in partnership, with customers at the heart of our approach, to understand, prevent and resolve homelessness so that no one has to sleep rough in Cherwell.

3.6 To deliver the vision, there are six strategic priorities:

Priority 1 Work with the County, City and District Councils and partner organisations across Oxfordshire to identify the causes of homelessness in our area, facilitate early interventions and responses to increase successful homelessness preventions, and make sure that no one has to sleep rough.

Priority 2 Proactively identify, engage with and assist households who have difficulty accessing and receiving homelessness services.

Priority 3 Proactively engage with and support households to develop housing resilience and when needed, to access suitable accommodation to meet their longer-term needs.

Priority 4 Engage and work collaboratively with people with lived experience of homelessness and commission the right support to reduce, prevent and ultimately end homelessness and rough sleeping.

Priority 5 Make sure that our service is flexible and equipped to deal with any future local Covid-19 outbreak or emergency.

Priority 6 Work in partnership to increase supply of affordable housing and make sure that accommodation in the private sector is good quality, that tenants are treated lawfully and fairly, and there is improved access to affordable private sector accommodation for homeless households.

3.7 In order to deliver these priorities, a series of commitments have been set out in Section 3 of the strategy. These are translated into the strategy Action Plan which can be found in Appendix 2 to this report.

4.0 Consultation and Feedback

- 4.1 Once the Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2021-2026 and associated Action Plan, a communications plan and consultation document had been developed, the documents were published with agreement of CEDR for a 7-week period of public consultation starting on 30 November 2020 and concluding on 17 January 2021. The consultation methodology and more detail on the responses received during the consultation period can be found in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 Consultation Report provided as **Appendix 4** to this report.
- 4.2 As part of the consultation process, the suite of draft strategy consultation documents was circulated to stakeholders prior to discussion at the Homelessness Network meeting on 9 December 2020. A brief workshop at that meeting enabled officers to capture the views of representatives of stakeholders and statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations who work with CDC to deliver homelessness support services. The majority (77%) of those who took part in the workshop agreed or strongly agreed with the strategy 'Vision', with a further 15% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with it. 93% either agreed or strongly agreed that the six strategic priorities were the right ones to deliver the strategy 'Vision'. Representatives were encouraged to give more comprehensive feedback via the online consultation survey and to also promote the consultation opportunity to service users to encourage them to get involved.
- 4.3 A similar presentation and workshop with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 January 2021, enabled councillors to give their feedback on the draft strategy and action plan. The majority (80%) of councillors either agreed or strongly agreed with the strategy 'Vision' and 100% either agreed or strongly agreed that the six strategic priorities were the right ones to deliver the strategy 'Vision'. When asked what councillors felt were the most important things to see in the strategy, their comments included:
- Private landlords to be looked at more closely
 - People from villages can have first choice on affordable housing
 - Do more to make builders keep social housing commitments
 - Engage with individual needs and aspirations of homeless people and canvass their opinion
 - A specific strategy for social housing (not just affordable housing)
 - Eradicate homelessness in Cherwell and provide support for those who need it.
 - Ensure we find sustainable solutions to homelessness and break the cycle of homelessness.
- The decision from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was:
1. That the draft strategy and appendices be noted.
 2. That the Executive be advised that the strategy should focus on Social Housing provision rather than Affordable Housing.
 3. That the Executive be requested to explore the potential of housing co-operatives.
- 4.4 Generally the responses from stakeholders, service users, Councillors of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the public demonstrated strong support for the strategy vision, the six strategic priorities and the actions set out in the Action Plan. Officers have considered all of the consultation feedback and prepared a

report in response. This can be found as **Appendix 5** to this report and it explains that most of the comments received had already been addressed within the draft strategy and action plan documents but minor amendments have been made to them to ensure there is clarity and emphasis where it was important to provide it (see main minor changes on pages 6, 9 -13, 15 and section 7 (Consultation) on page 20.

5.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 To ensure the Council can meet its statutory duties, it is recommended that the amended strategy and action plan be approved by the Executive at its meeting on 1 March 2021 with delegated authority to the Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning in consultation with the Lead Member, to make any minor editorial amendments to the strategy as needed and to undertake a review and update of the Action Plan on an annual basis. The Strategy and Action Plan will subsequently be published as the final version on the Council's website with a hard copy being made available to anyone on request.
- 5.2 Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan will be monitored by the Housing Strategy team, and the first review and update of the action plan will be undertaken in March 2022 to ensure that it remains effective and responsive to the changing circumstances and needs of customers and stakeholders. The Equality and Climate Impact Assessment will also be reviewed and updated in line with the aims of the Council's 'Including Everyone: Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework' to ensure continued delivery of inclusive services.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not having a strategy at all - This would result in the Council not meeting its statutory obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002, therefore this option is rejected.

Option 2: A single countywide strategy and no local strategy - A draft countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been published for consultation and provides an overarching vision for Oxfordshire, however there is no statutory requirement for it. CDC Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 already aligns with, and will contribute towards achieving, the overarching aim and objectives set out in the countywide strategy and vision. Each local authority area has different geographic, economic, social and political structures which require a more granular strategy aimed at meeting specific local needs. A countywide strategy alone will not provide this local detail and would also result in the Council not meeting its statutory obligations. On this basis, this option is rejected.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 to 2026 has been drafted within existing budgets and resources. Additional funding that may result from the implementation of the strategy will be dealt with through the budget setting process

Comments checked by:

Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner; 01295 221570,
Kelly.wheeler@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 The Homeless Strategy is a statutory requirement and takes account of the relevant legislation regarding housing. Where an outstanding or new project cannot be dealt with under delegated authority to the Officer, approval will need to be sought from the Executive in line with Cherwell District Council's legal and constitutional requirements.

Comments checked by:

Chris Mace, Solicitor; 01295 221808; christopher.mace@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Risk Implications

- 7.3 All risks will be managed as part of the operational risk register associated with the Housing Service and escalated as and when necessary to the Leadership Risk Register.

Comments checked by:

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes
Louise.tustian@cherwell-dc.gov.uk 01295 221786

Equalities Implications (Equality, Diversity and Community)

- 7.4 An Equality and Climate Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is provided with this report at **Appendix 6**. All projects undertaken to deliver the strategy action plan will be subject to individual risk impact assessments.

Comments checked by:

Robin Rogers, Head of Strategy, Robin.Rogers@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision:

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: Yes

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Housing that meets your needs: Finding new and innovative ways to prevent homelessness; Support the most vulnerable people; Deliver affordable housing; Raise standards in rented housing; Promote innovative housing schemes.

Healthy resilient and engaged communities: Working with partners to address the cause of health inequality and deprivation; Promote health and wellbeing in the community.

Lead Councillor

Councillor John Donaldson – Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix 1: Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026

Appendix 2: Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

Appendix 3: Homelessness Service Review 2020

Appendix 4: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 Consultation Report

Appendix 5: Officer response to consultation feedback

Appendix 6: Equality and Climate Impact Assessment

Background papers

None. The related Housing Strategy 2019-2024 and Action Plan are published on the Council's website.

Report Author and contact details

Frances Evans, Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader.

Email: Frances.Evans@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Telephone: 01295 227033