

Appendix 2: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 Draft Action Plan to 2023

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.

This Action Plan sets out the key objectives to be achieved over the first two years of the strategy. The plan will be reviewed with our stakeholders and with service users, and a new plan will be developed for the period from 2023. This ensures that the plan remains responsive to national, countywide or local policy context and available resources.

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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.

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
1	Work with partners countywide to explore the opportunities to implement an early intervention hub with locally accessible provision in Cherwell, to enable rapid access for all those sleeping rough or at immediate risk of rough sleeping, including a psychologically informed assessment of their specific needs.	<p>Participate to establish a project steering group, Terms of Reference and project scope and risk assessment.</p> <p>Establish what staff resources and budgets would be needed to progress with the project and where needed, proactively support joint funding bids for external funding to support a project feasibility study, and if supported, project development and implementation (including costs for additional staff resources to manage the project)</p>	Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning	<p>Participation and commitment of all councils</p> <p>Available external funding Strategic Countywide Co-ordinator resources</p> <p>CDC staff capacity to support the project Steering Group work.</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>External funding to resource the project</p>	December 2021
2	Continue to facilitate provision of accommodation with support for people who are homeless or rough sleeping and have complex needs (including emergency and cold weather provision during winter months).	<p>Monitor and review contract arrangements to provide up to 14 beds of supported accommodation in Cherwell district that provides a psychologically informed support service for people with complex needs.</p> <p>Operate a local Severe Weather Emergency Protocol in the district.</p> <p>Bid for available MHCLG Cold Weather Funding.</p> <p>Use Cold Weather Funding (or other available CDC funds) to facilitate provision of accommodation and support for rough sleepers during the extended winter months.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager with support from Housing Strategy	<p>Suitable accommodation continuing to be available.</p> <p>MHCLG or CDC homelessness funding availability.</p> <p>Continued need for (winter beds) service</p>	Staff time	March 2022
3	Engage in the development and delivery of services to accommodate and support Young People (including care leavers) and to help them to move on to, and sustain (including work to avoid eviction from), settled accommodation at the right time for them.	<p>Work with Oxfordshire County Council, City and District councils to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate existing provision Work with providers to get the best outcomes for young people Implement the care leaver protocol to prevent and resolve homelessness for this vulnerable group 	Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning	<p>All partners' available resources.</p> <p>Support to facilitate service user involvement.</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Long term housing options being available for care leavers and young people</p>	September 2021

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
4	Engage in the commissioning and delivery of Adult Homeless Accommodation and county wide floating support services to ensure that the right housing choices and a range of support options are available to prevent (including work to avoid eviction) and assist recovery from homelessness.	<p>Work with Oxfordshire County Council, City and District councils and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate existing provision. Develop specifications for a new service with feedback from service users to inform design. Jointly commission services (OCC leading) 	Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning	<p>All partners' available resources.</p> <p>Support to facilitate service user involvement.</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Pooled funding to commission services from April 2022</p>	April 2022
5	Review our Allocations Scheme and Nominations Agreements to make sure they do not create barriers to housing and prioritise households most in need. Ensure monitoring arrangements are in place to identify and address any inequalities.	<p>Work with stakeholders to review the council's Housing Allocations Scheme and use of 'reasonable preference groups' to ensure that scheme criteria do not create barriers to accessing social housing in the district.</p> <p>Review Nomination Agreements with Registered Providers and ensure robust monitoring arrangements are in place to demonstrate the equity of allocation of social housing in the district (new and re-lets) and rejection of suitable nominations are challenged.</p> <p>As part of a countywide steering group, consider the opportunities to develop a countywide allocations scheme for the future.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager with support of Housing Strategy	<p>Staff resources.</p> <p>Engagement of partners and Oxfordshire councils.</p>	Staff time	September 2021
6	Increase our homelessness prevention rates and improve our housing offer to single homeless customers by expanding the provision of Housing First and by building on a housing-led approach to meeting customer needs.	<p>Increase homelessness prevention rates annually from those recorded in 2020/21.</p> <p>Monitor delivery of existing Service Level Agreements and contracts on a quarterly cycle to make sure 16 Housing First units are provided in the district.</p> <p>Explore funding and delivery options and, subject to available funding, prepare a service specification with costs to deliver a more Housing First (higher support needs) units and a housing-led approach to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager with input from Housing Strategy	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Timely referrals to the service and engagement of customers</p> <p>Housing First and housing-led units being made available by RP partners</p> <p>MHCLG funding being made available after July 2021</p>	Staff time	July 2021

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
7	Support and expand the Cherwell Homelessness Network to ensure new representative groups e.g. Oxfordshire Homeless Movement, Lived Experience Advisory Forum and others, are able to participate in the design and delivery of local housing solutions and share the learning to inform future delivery of services.	<p>Hold regular engagement meetings with existing and new partners to promote the aims of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and identify how they are able to support delivery of it.</p> <p>Facilitate workshops and focus groups to enable participation in designing and delivering specific services or projects. Use this to inform commissioning of services and developing internal communications across CDC and OCC departments to improve the customer journey.</p>	Housing Strategy and Housing Options and Allocations Manager	<p>Engagement of partners and individuals who have lived experience of homelessness</p> <p>Suitable venues and inclusive methods for engagement</p>	Staff time including CDC and OCC departments	March 2021 onwards
8	Proactively work with each of our partner organisations to emphasise and promote how they can improve identification of customers with early indications of homeless and improve inter-agency referrals (through improved communication) to relevant advice services such as Debt and Money Advice Service and the council under the 'duty to refer'.	<p>Hold regular liaison meetings or information sharing sessions with each of the partner organisations (and internal departments) to understand processes and challenges they face and how they can identify early warning signs of the risk of homelessness; change working practices if needed; participate in the referral process (duty to refer); and where needed, establish information sharing agreements.</p> <p>Work with external partners to ensure protocols/ arrangements are in place, and build strong relationships with relevant co-ordinators within prisons, hospitals, mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse services, and Social Care services to ensure a referral for housing advice and homelessness prevention services is made at the earliest point.</p> <p>Maximise the opportunity to promote, through the Network, the opportunity for partners to refer households to access debt and money advice services and other local support provided e.g. Brighter Futures, Salvation Army, Faithworks, Beacon Centre etc.at the earliest point to prevent homelessness.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager with support from Housing Strategy	<p>Engagement of partners</p> <p>Staff resources</p> <p>Information sharing agreements</p>	Staff time	March 2021 onwards

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
9	Improve monitoring data from delivery of existing service contracts, Personal Housing Plans, successful prevention cases, and obtain input from people with lived experience of homelessness, to identify what works locally to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and deliver successful outcomes for the longer-term.	<p>Review findings from the countywide research into the feasibility of a housing-led approach in Oxfordshire, conducted by Crisis.</p> <p>Undertake quarterly quality assessments or reviews of Personal Housing Plans and prevention cases and seek individual feedback from customers on their experience of the service and identify what worked well or not.</p> <p>Use the findings from the individual reviews to promote quality standards and best practice approaches for staff (and where appropriate, provide feedback to external parties involved) and monitor the impact this has on homelessness prevention and relief statistics.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Engagement of customers to give feedback</p> <p>Engagement of external partners.</p> <p>Good quality data recording.</p>	Staff time	March 2021 and ongoing

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

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
10	Make sure our commissioning process includes a contractual requirement to support customer engagement in the design and delivery of homelessness prevention and housing-related support services.	Review existing wording of standard contracts and Service Level Agreements and work with CDC legal team to draft appropriate clauses for use within any new agreements.	Housing Strategy	Staff resources	Staff time Legal expertise	March 2021 onwards
11	Engage with service providers, statutory and voluntary sector organisations and faith groups to explore how the council can better engage and gain the trust of households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (including sofa surfers and others who may be 'hidden homeless'), and to deliver a strengths-based, person-centred approach to resolve housing issues.	Facilitate individual discussions or focus groups with Cherwell Homelessness Network of partners to establish what needs to change to build service users' trust and their engagement in council services and identify a clear action plan for change with regular communications with service users and partner agencies on implementation of the action plan e.g. 'You said, we did..', case studies of positive outcomes through engagement. Use feedback from the above to inform how Personal Housing Plans are put together in a way that maximises a strengths-based, person-centred approach to housing solutions and helps to develop a culture of mutual trust.	Housing Strategy with input from Housing Options and Allocations Manager	Staff resources Participation of partners Suitable method of engagement.	Staff time	March 2021 onwards
12	Carry out an equality audit on the council's housing service to identify improvements and actions to ensure the service and policies are fully inclusive and made more easily accessible to those who need them.	Identify resources required and scope of the audit and either commission relevant external support/ expertise to undertake the review, or, subject to available staff resources, work with internal departments to undertake an internal audit of services and prepare a report with recommendations for change.	Housing Strategy and Housing Options and Allocations Manager	Staff resources Input from other departments within CDC and OCC	Staff time Potential funding to commission independent review / relevant expertise.	March 2022
13	Build improved protocols and procedures with our statutory and non-statutory partner agencies to ensure that access to housing, health, social care and support services (including mental health and substance misuse services) are interlinked and referrals made between organisations are efficient, and the services are responsive to customer needs at the point of contact (including early interventions that will prevent or eliminate the risk of homelessness).	Work with countywide partners to review success of existing protocols and agree amendments or develop new ones to ensure there is a focus on access to: housing, health, social care services and support; and effective systems are in place to refer customers to appropriate services (with follow up) to effectively reduce or eliminate homelessness or the risk of future homelessness. This includes: hospital and prison discharge protocols; pre-eviction protocols; social prescribing to services and support; referrals to and from health and social care professionals.	Countywide project with Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning as CDC Lead	Staff resources Engagement of partners	Staff time	March 2022

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
14	Review and update the Homeless Pocket Guide and ensure this is widely promoted.	Review and update the 2019 Homeless Pocked Guide, publish and distribute along with appropriate communications to promote its use.	Housing Strategy Team	Staff resources	Staff time Funding to cover the cost of graphics, printing of hard copies and distribution.	December 2021

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.

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
15	Continue to invest in the provision of effective floating support and outreach services that will support households, not only to access and sustain accommodation, but to enable them to build personal resilience and independence from support in the longer term.	<p>Monitor and evaluate impact, outcomes and cost effectiveness of existing service provision 2020/21 - with input from people with lived experience.</p> <p>Identify future service needs and changes to the service that would enable customer personal resilience and independence and future commissioning.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to make efficiencies and to jointly commission services with countywide partners.</p>	Housing Strategy and Housing Options and Allocations Manager	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Engagement of partners and people with lived experience of homelessness.</p> <p>Availability of funding to support future commissioning.</p>	Staff time	March 2022
16	Expand our provision of Housing First and develop a housing-led approach to resolving housing crisis in Cherwell district.	See Actions set out in Item 6.	Housing Options and Allocations Manager with input from Housing Strategy	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Timely referrals and engagement of customers</p> <p>Availability of accommodation and funding</p>	Staff time	July 2021
17	Provide additional 'Tenancy Prepared' courses and, work with Registered Providers and private landlords to assign tenancies to homeless households that have appropriate support in place and are 'tenancy supported'.	<p>Review success of previous 'Tenancy Prepared' programmes via case studies.</p> <p>Work in partnership with Registered Providers, other Oxfordshire councils and voluntary sector organisations to identify opportunities to deliver additional courses or deliver tenancy support programmes.</p> <p>Work with Registered Providers across the district to secure agreements to accept nominations from the council where the tenant would have access to tenancy support services post occupation.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Appropriate venues or technology required to deliver the programmes to vulnerable people.</p> <p>Available funding to support delivery.</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Potential funding required to facilitate delivery and course materials.</p>	December 2022

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
18	Use a strengths-based and person-centred approach to personalised housing plans that puts the person at the centre of their housing solution.	<p>Review of 'on the day' presentations to the service to establish approach taken and quality of service from all partners involved with supporting the customer.</p> <p>Review Housing staff training and skill sets and provide update training to enable them to embed to ensure consistency and confidence in using a strengths-based approach to resolving housing crisis.</p> <p>Monitor implementation and quality of service - including feedback from customers.</p>	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Cost-effective, quality training being available</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Funding for staff Learning & Development</p>	March 2021 and ongoing
19	Ensure households in the private rented sector are able to receive early advice and money management support from the Debt and Money Advice Service provider, and support from the council's housing advice service to sustain their tenancy and avoid unnecessary evictions.	Develop a comprehensive communications plan to promote access routes to the housing advice and options services provided by the council and the commissioned Debt and Money Advice service.	CDC Communications Team with input from CDC Housing Service	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Engagement of service provider</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Potential costs of promotional materials</p>	March 2021 and ongoing
20	Evaluate the Cherwell pilot of Family Solutions Plus and implement the embedded housing worker into this service model to support early housing intervention with vulnerable families.	Complete the evaluation Work with countywide partners to establish funding and resources to implement embedded housing worker into the model.	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Engagement of partners</p> <p>Availability of funding</p>	Staff time	March 2022
21	Work in partnership with Cherwell Homeless Network partners to improve communications to all households about the housing information, advice and support available so that they can access it at the earliest point and avoid housing crisis.	<p>Work with Partners to establish preferred methods of communication and agree any joint communications.</p> <p>Work with CDC internal departments to design communications.</p> <p>As part of the wider communications plan, launch communications and monitor responses / impact on service i.e. any trend in early presentations to services.</p>	Housing Strategy and Housing Options and Allocations Manager with input from CDC Communications Team	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Engagement of partners</p> <p>Potential cost of communications (design costs, distribution)</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Potential cost of communications</p>	March 2021 and ongoing

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.

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
22	Maximise the opportunity to secure MHCLG and other funding to support the commissioning of services that will help to prevent and end rough sleeping in the district.	Build on existing relationships with MHCLG and proactively pursue and bid for all available funding to support homelessness initiatives to be realised in the district.	Housing Strategy and Housing Options and Allocations Manager	Staff resources Funding being available	Staff time	March 2021 and ongoing
23	Design feedback mechanisms for customers to comment on our services and engage with people with lived experience of homelessness and rough sleeping to ensure that we understand their experience of our services and use this to co-produce new responses.	Establish a focus group to include CDC Customer Services, stakeholders and people who have lived experience of homelessness and rough sleeping to design a scheme to effectively obtain feedback from customers and use their experiences to design new or improve existing service delivery.	Housing Strategy	Staff resources Technology available to easily support collation of feedback.	Staff time	March 2022
24	Participate in the county wide workforce transformation initiative that will support our staff to undertake training and develop their skills, engage with people who have lived experience of homelessness, and adopt a person-centred approach to service delivery.	Enable staff to attend any countywide training arranged and ensure that there are opportunities for service providers to participate. Ensure training covers: enhanced open interview techniques and strengths-based interviewing; understanding the needs of customers who have mental ill-health or have a history of substance misuse; other relevant training to enhance the person-centred and trauma-informed approach. Review case work (post training) to ensure learning is being implemented effectively.	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	Staff resources Availability and cost of suitable training Opportunity to secure MHCLG or other funding to roll out the training.	Staff time Cost of training	December 2021
25	Monitor the support provided by council services and voluntary groups to ensure the correct housing advice and information is being provided, and opportunities to signpost to complementary services are being maximised.	See Items 8, 18, and 24 above. In addition, monitoring of general customer contact with the council, commissioned services, case studies and feedback from customers will enable a full picture of the quality of service being provided by all.	Housing Strategy and Housing Options and Allocations Manager with input from Customer Services	Staff resources Engagement of partners	Staff time	March 2022
26	Embed learning from the Shelter Health Check and refresh the 'Lean Review' of end to end homeless processes, working with service users to identify opportunities for improvements and efficiencies.	Complete actions identified following the Shelter Review of CDC Housing Services and: Refresh the lean review, focussing on end to end customer journey to receive services through Housing Options, ensuring the process is accessible, streamlined and accurate data is recorded with clear outputs (homelessness preventions, relief and duty), to enable monitoring of service effectiveness and identify service efficiencies.	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	Staff resources	Staff time	December 2021

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

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
27	In partnership with other Oxfordshire Councils and stakeholders, we will undertake a 'lessons learned' review of our housing and support response to Covid-19 and implement changes to ensure that our service is flexible and equipped to deal with any future local Covid-19 outbreak or emergency, as well as monitoring the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on homelessness levels.	<p>Establish scope of the review and resources to complete it.</p> <p>Explore how we can further support people at risk of homelessness caused by job losses and income reduction as a result of the pandemic.</p> <p>Produce a report with recommendations for any proposed changes to housing services.</p> <p>Identification of resources needed and business case to support implementation of recommendations</p>	Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning	<p>Staff resources</p> <p>Engagement of other Councils and partners to complete the review and implement actions, including employment help and support</p> <p>Ongoing impact of Covid-19 on housing services.</p>	Staff time	July 2021
28	Refresh the business continuity plan and demonstrate how we keep staff and our customers safe, particularly customers in emergency and supported accommodation.	Business continuity plan updated	Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning	Staff resources	Staff time	July 2021

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

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
29	Maximise opportunities to attract Homes England, Growth Deal and other public subsidy to deliver a range of additional affordable homes – including more social rent tenure and suitable accommodation to meet the needs of single homeless households.	<p>Work with Registered Provider partners to identify new development opportunities or remodelling of existing accommodation to increase the supply of affordable housing.</p> <p>Provide strategic support of RP funding bids for Homes England Affordable Homes Programme or Growth Deal funding to deliver the homes to meet a range of needs, and particularly to provide accommodation that meets the needs of single homeless households, Extra Care or Supported Living accommodation for vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Proactively work with Registered Providers to secure funding to provide more social rent tenure in the district - enabling at least 30 new social rented homes in the life of the strategy.</p>	Housing Development and Standards Manager and Housing Strategy	<p>Staff Resources</p> <p>Availability of land, assets and opportunity.</p> <p>Engagement and investment of Registered Provider Partners</p> <p>Planning permission</p> <p>Available funding.</p>	Staff time	March 2026
30	Maximise the opportunity to attract MHCLG and other funding to provide the appropriate support services and housing solutions in Cherwell to meet a range of housing and support needs, including move-on accommodation from supported living.	Bid individually or jointly with other councils, to secure MHCLG funding such as Rough Sleeper Initiative, Cold Weather Fund, Next Steps Accommodation Programme or other programme of funding available that will enable the council to implement initiatives within this action plan to provide sufficient and suitable move-on accommodation from supported living as well as any other new initiatives that will support the council's aim of homelessness prevention, reduction and ending rough sleeping.	Housing Development and Standards Manager and Housing Strategy	<p>Staff Resources</p> <p>Availability of land, assets and opportunity</p> <p>Engagement and investment of Registered Provider Partners.</p> <p>Planning permission.</p> <p>Available funding.</p>	Staff time	March 2023

Item	Objectives	Actions	Lead Responsibility	Dependencies	Resources Required	Target Date
31	Widen accommodation options across Cherwell by capitalising on opportunities within the private market for Registered Providers or Build! to acquire additional affordable homes, or for the council to secure nomination rights.	Proactively explore all opportunities to deliver more affordable accommodation and in particular, move-on accommodation for people leaving supported accommodation or care including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New-build units secured via S.106 Agreements Registered Provider-owned or leased assets Council-owned or leased assets Assets owned by other public bodies Consider the most suitable option for use and length of term, and the opportunity to secure nomination rights for the council i.e. Options such as guardianship schemes, temporary conversion, upgrade/improvements and refurbishment etc.	Housing Development and Standards Manager and Housing Strategy	Staff Resources Availability of land, assets and opportunity Engagement and investment of Registered Provider Partners Planning permission Available funding.	Staff time	March 2023
32	Work with private sector landlords to maximise opportunities to accommodate refugees who are to settle in Cherwell area as part of the Global Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.	Proactively promote the package of support available to private sector landlords to secure additional suitable accommodation for refugee families in the Cherwell area. Gain feedback from existing landlords to demonstrate their experience of the scheme and if any improvements could be made. Ensure effective support is provided to refugee households to help them develop housing resilience and reduce the risk of homelessness in future.	Housing Development and Standards Manager and VPRS Officer	Staff resources Participation of private sector landlords Timely arrival of refugee households in the country (post covid)	Staff time	December 2021
33	Work with private sector landlords to secure more good quality properties to let to households who are working or receiving benefits, and to let them on longer-term tenancies through the Cherwell Bond Scheme, and to promote access to this viable housing option to households on our housing register or those who may not qualify for social housing but need to live in Cherwell district.	Proactively pursue opportunities to secure new lets and keep Cherwell Bond Scheme (CBS) offer attractive to landlords. Complete all residency and property checks on time. Proactively promote CBS and increase uptake of households on the housing register as an alternative housing option to social housing.	Housing Options and Allocations Manager	Staff resources Participation of private sector landlords	Staff time Bond/Rent guarantee scheme continuing to be available.	March 2021 and ongoing
34	Continue the work of the Housing Options and Housing Standards Teams to reduce risk of homelessness due to poor housing standards.	Investigate all housing standards concerns promptly and provide appropriate advice or take enforcement action to resolve the issue. Record actions and outcomes to assess effectiveness i.e. homelessness prevention; successful referrals to other advice and support agencies; reduced debt etc.	Housing Development and Standards Manager	Staff resources Participation of private sector tenants and landlords. Legal resources for enforcement action if required.	Staff time Legal resources	March 2021 and ongoing