



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

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

January 2021

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Executive Summary.....	3
3. Methodology.....	4
4. Responses and feedback.....	5

1. Introduction

This report sets out the key findings from Cherwell District Council's draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 – 2026 consultation carried out between 30 November 2020 and 17 January 2021.

The purpose of the consultation was:

- i. To inform the defined audience of the draft Cherwell Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy - its approach, its content and how the homelessness service review, data and research has informed its development
- ii. Gather feedback on the draft strategy (its identified priorities, the vision and principles) and the two-year draft action plan and use this to inform decision-making.

It was targeted at providers, key stakeholders, people who use services as well as residents and other interested parties on the vision and the key priorities as set-out in the strategy and the action plan.

Feedback and messages from this consultation will be considered and influence the final strategy due for adoption by Cherwell District Council in March 2021.

2. Executive Summary

In total, the council actively engaged with people on 73 occasions (it's possible that some individuals may have engaged more than once via the survey and the workshops throughout the consultation period. Twenty-two people completed the online survey (the focus of this report), 18 representatives of external stakeholders attended a Homeless Network workshop and 33 service users were contacted by telephone.

The survey responses highlighted that there is strong overall support for the draft strategy's vision, priorities and action plan. The strategy priorities received a variety of comments which will be highlighted further in this report.

Views on our vision

Nearly all (19) respondents agreed that the vision was right. A small number of people commented that the vision was challenging and aspirational, and that prevention work should continue to be a priority.

Views on the priorities

Broadly speaking, all the priorities were considered the right priorities to deliver the strategy. Where people commented, they were generally seeking clarification about how each priority would be delivered or providing nuanced information to further inform the delivery of the strategy.

Views on the action plan

Nearly all respondents (20) agreed that the actions in the action plan were right, with further comments reinforcing this. Some people added further comments about how the action plan could be strengthened and a small number of others expressed concern about how some of the actions could effectively be achieved.

3. Methodology

Between 30 November 2020 and 17 January 2021, Cherwell District Council invited comments on its draft strategy Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 – 2026.

Feedback was primarily sought using an online survey hosted on Cherwell District Council's website alongside copies of the draft strategy and action plan for background information.

- The consultation was actively promoted to a wide range of audiences using multiple channels, including a media press release, Facebook and Twitter.
- An email invitation to the consultation was sent to Oxfordshire's four other district councils, Oxfordshire County Council and to internal departments within Cherwell District Council.
- An email was sent to homelessness service providers and targeted voluntary and community groups asking for their support with making service users aware of the consultation and how to participate.
- Paper copies were made available to homeless service providers and targeted voluntary and community groups to share with service users.
- Hard copy documents were also available to members of the public and stakeholders on request.

A workshop was held on 9 December, attended by 18 people from the Homelessness Network which includes representatives of external stakeholders; charitable, voluntary and community sector organisations, service providers, Registered Providers, City Council, Health, Police and Social Care. This is reported under separate cover.

As we were keen to seek feedback from service users, the council made calls to 33 service users who were either currently receiving homelessness support services and accommodation i.e. living in temporary accommodation, or were service users who had previously been homeless and who had moved into longer-term accommodation after receiving advice and assistance from CDC housing services, to encourage them to engage. The current pandemic and the challenges this has brought to the lives of service users, means they have not fully engaged with this consultation in the same way they may have done during 'normal times'.

Five service users gave verbal feedback to officers on service specific issues related to their individual circumstances. These are outside the scope of this consultation and are being addressed directly by the council's housing service.

4. Responses and feedback

In total, 22 people completed the online survey. Half of respondents were professionals (11), representatives from voluntary or community sector organisations (6) or staff working for a support service provider (4). One respondent identified themselves as a person who is currently or have previously used homelessness services. Two of the respondents also identified themselves as a family member or carer (unpaid) of someone using or who has used Cherwell District Council's housing and homelessness services.

Not everyone answered each question (as was permitted) and this report focuses on the total number of people who answered each question. As is good practice, we have reported in numbers not percentages due to the low number of responses.

This report will be used as a background document to inform decision-making. Much of the qualitative feedback is quite nuanced, which has made thematic reporting challenging. Where commonality in responses has been identified this has been noted.

Views on Our Vision

Our Vision is: To work in partnership, with customers at the heart of our approach, to understand, prevent and resolve homelessness so that on one has to sleep rough in Cherwell.

The vision put forward in the draft strategy document was supported by nearly everyone (19 people), including 12 people who strongly agreed. Nobody disagreed and two people said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Six people provided comments to further support their response. These views included: a challenge around how the aspiration would become reality, that there needed to be more work around prevention and that the all partners should be working effectively, and finally we need to ensure feedback from people using services is ongoing.

Views on The Priorities

When respondents were asked to consider the six priorities put forward in the strategy as a collective, these were supported by nearly everyone (21 out of 22 respondents).

Only one person disagreed and specifically they felt that 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.’ was both unachievable and unrealistic.

Twelve respondents provided comments to support their positive support and these included suggestions about how the priorities could be achieved or strengthened such as:

- Further work to understand the underlying causes of homelessness and supporting people to move towards positive outcomes
- Including health partners
- Working with groups where housing has failed, including sofa-surfers, who often going on to be rough sleepers
- Working with landlords to provide properties to people who they may be currently excluding from tenancies, such as people receiving benefits
- Working to ensure enough housing is available.

Respondents were then invited to comment on each individual priority.

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.

All 22 respondents agreed with Priority 1, including 15 people who strongly agreed.

Twelve people commented further on this priority, with comments including:

- Prevention is a key element to this priority and there was strong agreement with a preventative approach
- Agreement for the need for cross sector working to address issues and develop a plan to support and solve root cause issues
- Identified greater role for health, both physical and mental health
- Support that this strategy is in line with the County-wide strategy, working with service users and using monitoring and evaluation of contracts and work practises to improve work
- Suggestion to work with counties bordering Oxfordshire

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

All 22 respondents agreed with Priority 2, including 16 people who strongly agreed.

Seven people commented further on this priority, with comments including:

- Suggested need to be flexible in the methodology of engagement, recognising that individuals have different levels of capacity to engage.
- Existing services, who have existing, trusting relationships could support effective engagement
- The link between health and social care and housing services are recognised as being important in order to prevent and address homelessness effectively in order to provide a more holistic and effective response.

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.

Nineteen people agreed with this priority, with 12 people strongly agreeing. Two people neither agreed or disagreed, and one person did not know.

Eight people commented further, with comments including:

- Concern about what developing 'housing resilience' would look like and should be more defined, with several mentions from responders
- Suggestion that the priority should be more specific
- Concern that the priority is more aspirational than practical, with reservations about how it will be achieved

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.

Nineteen people agreed with this priority, with 12 people strongly agreeing. Two people were neutral (neither agreed or disagreed) and one person disagreed.

Twelve people commented further about this priority, with comments including:

- Consideration should be made to the provision of services in the immediate locality of people's support network
- There was a strong sense of agreement to this priority, but acknowledgement that achieving the outcomes would be challenging, with question of how this would be achieved, with one responder stating that they felt this was unrealistic and possibly unachievable

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

Everyone who responded to this question (21 people) agreed with the priority including 13 people who strongly agreed.

Eight people commented further, with comments including:

- Acknowledgement for the need to have responsive and flexible services is important
- Suggestion that whilst COVID-19 is the current crisis, there could be a different crisis in the future to address, which should be mitigated for
- A comment that Health should be a part of the joined-up approach
- Suggestion that 'lessons learnt' should include working with the County and other Districts to carry out this assessment.

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.

Twenty-one of the 22 people who answered this question either strongly agreed (14) or agreed (7), that this priority was right, with one person neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

This priority attracted most comments with 13 people remarking further, with comments including:

- Concern that 'affordable housing' was out of reach for a great many people
- Working closely with private landlords to ensure that tenants are provided with suitable accommodation and that providers are educated in the needs of their tenants and in homelessness prevention
- Explore ways in which people are able to access suitable accommodation, being mindful that there is not always the range of accommodation available
- Question about how much can the strategy or any local authority really influence the local housing market and developers
- Agreement that, the city and all District Councils in Oxfordshire will need to work closely and in partnership over the coming year to agree and implement plans to meet unmet housing need in Oxford
- Whilst accepting that private landlords are a key element of this priority, there was voiced scepticism about their commitment to supplying suitable and affordable accommodation to vulnerable people

Views on the Strategy Action Plan

When asked whether the proposed actions contained in the Action Plan were right, 20 out of the 22 people who responded felt there were right, with two stating they were not sure.

Six people provided further comments, with comments including:

- Concern that all the actions are necessary and sufficient on their own to realise the objectives
- It was stated that the evaluation methodology is not clear for each action and who will oversee the whole programme
- Suggested that more should be done to ensure that individuals know how to refer if there have concerns about someone
- Suggestion that more work should be done to work with those evicted from YPP, AHP, or those declared intentionally homeless
- Suggestion that the action plan should be review more frequently than at the year 2 point
- Whilst there was broad support for the action plan, stating that it was very comprehensive, there was also a comment that it seemed excessive in relation to the numbers of homeless people in Cherwell

When asked if anything should be added, changed or removed from the action plan, five people answered 'yes', five people answered 'partially', seven answered 'no' and five answered 'not sure'.

Ten people added further comments including:

- A suggestion of more local services local - homeless shelters rather than Oxford centric provision for immediate and short term
- Better clarity around action point 4 was requested and that it focuses on working with a household, rather than telling a household how to be more resilient
- It was suggested that actions 2, 3 and 4 appear to be continuation of current activity and therefore did not constitute part of the action plan
- A suggested action around working closely with Registered Providers and other landlords to try and prevent homelessness when a customer is threatened with eviction
- A suggestion was made to provide more leisure activities to support people with mental health difficulties

When respondents were asked, they had suggestions for any new actions to be included in the strategy Action Plan in future years, 12 answered 'no' and 8 answered 'yes'.

In fact, nine further comments were provided, many reiterating comments made earlier, but other comments relating to the action plan included:

- Provide a night shelter in Banbury
- A comment that dual diagnosis is not mentioned, and this is a barrier for certain people accessing support
- A suggestion that a greater diversity of options of different kinds of housing should be available.
- Better joined-up partnership work for problem-solving and early intervention.
- A new approach to looking at client's past trauma and a more empathic approach to personal circumstances

- More flexibility on where clients are housed in Cherwell taking personal circumstances into account
- A more person-centred approach needed.
- To help people with previous financial problems and an unhealthy credit history to get into social or private rentals.
- To make sure all rental options are available to all
- Offering more resources to help mental health, but these activities need to start asap rather than waiting several years
- A suggestion that the action plan is reviewed more frequently
- Consulting with Homeless Charities for best intervention techniques

When invited, three people out of 21, commented on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

These were as follows:

- Two stated that they thought the strategy was an excellent initiative
- A comment to always consult the homeless as they know best what they need
- A final comment that there should be a broader community element to the plan

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21 January 2021