

Divisions Affected – All

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

26 September 2024

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING IN OXFORDSHIRE

Report by Director of Adult Social Care

RECOMMENDATION

- a) The Health and Wellbeing Board is **RECOMMENDED** to note the report.
- b) The Health and Wellbeing Board is **RECOMMENDED** to consider the frequency of further updates.

Executive Summary

1. This report provides a progress update on the work that has been undertaken in relation to homelessness services in Oxfordshire to improve support following the Safeguarding Adults Review in 2020, specifically “The Alliance”, which is overseen by the Prevention of Homelessness Directors’ Group. The report provides an update on progress made, a summary of current activity and an overview of current and future challenges.

Background

2. Across the Districts, City and County, there is a joint commitment to people who experience homelessness and rough sleeping is derived from the aim to create thriving communities for everyone in Oxfordshire where people live safe, healthy lives and play an active part in their community, providing services that enhance the quality of life in our communities.
3. Homelessness is a national issue and is a growing trend. National rough sleeping statistics show that is rouse 27% to nearly 4000 rough sleepers at the end of last year. This is only known rough sleepers, so the actual number will be higher still. Councils have seen a 14% rise in homelessness presentations over the same period. It is estimated that 1 in every 182 people in England are homeless.
4. The need for a system-wide response was also identified in the Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) published in 2020 which reviewed the deaths of nine homeless people in Oxfordshire in 2018 & 2019. One of the key findings from the SAR was that the approach to working with people experiencing multiple-exclusion homelessness (where they had mental ill-health, substance abuse

issues and/or were experiencing domestic abuse) was fragmented and required a coordinated, system-wide response. Following this review, the Alliance of homelessness services, the review process for scrutinising all deaths of people who were homeless, and the Prevention of Homelessness Directors' Group (PHDG) were all created. The PHDG comprises of senior colleagues from all the commissioning partners as well as other statutory agencies involved within the system, such as Health, Probation and The Police.

5. Homelessness support services are commissioned in partnership between the Districts and City Council's, which have statutory responsibilities to provide homelessness and housing advice services, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board along with the County Council through a pooled fund. This commissioning partnership oversees a delivery partnership between agencies working across the County and City to provide the support services. This delivery partnership is referred to as The Alliance. The providers that make up the Alliance are listed below.

- i. A2Dominon
- ii. Aspire Oxfordshire
- iii. Connection Support
- iv. Elmore Community Services
- v. Homeless Oxfordshire
- vi. St Mungo's

Services that are provided through the Alliance include;

Prevention

6. Aspire and Connection Support services work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. They work with around 1000 cases across a year.

The prevention Service provides:

- Support and empower people at risk of homelessness to manage debts & housing arrears.
- Access to benefits
- Access to mental health services and drug and Alcohol services
- Access to long term housing and support with advocacy when working with statutory and other services.
- Support people to link them to the right community services.

Outreach

7. St Mungo's and Connection Support provide support to those rough sleeping to access emergency housing, access to benefits and health services as well as connecting with other local authorities to refer for those with no local connection to Oxfordshire.
8. Rough sleeping statistics are reported to central government as part of mandatory local authority returns. The identification, monitoring and outcomes for rough sleepers are therefore closely monitored by local authorities and The

Alliance in turn. On any one night and as an average across Oxford and Oxfordshire, there are between 55 and 65 people sleeping rough. This is lower at times of severe weather, when additional services are offered through local authorities.

Supported Accommodation

9. There are around 230 properties across the County. Access to supported accommodation is through an Access Panel. There is a high demand for this accommodation, with an average of 22 referrals per month and the waiting list is around or in excess of 100. 30% of referrals are for the accommodation with the higher support levels where 24/7 support is available, at O'Hanlon House, Matilda House (both Oxford) and Mawle Court (Banbury). Around 25% of people have lived in supported accommodation for two years or longer, which demonstrates issues relating to move on and supply.

(This is a different pathway to those who require Temporary Accommodation, who are homeless and in Priority Need, such as families facing eviction. The responsibility for assisting these households would sit with the City and District Council's and be managed outside the Alliance contract.)

Some additional services are also provided, such as

- Women's Project (Oxford City)
- Survivors of childhood exploitation (New Beginnings)
- Embedded Housing workers
- Stepdown beds
- Housing First supported accommodation

10. The value of the contract is £3.8million per year, split between the partners. The contract has run for three years. There is a break clause for years four and five. In addition, there is the opportunity to renegotiate costs at year four which start on 01 April 2025. However, it has been made clear to the Alliance that there is no available funding to increase the budget.
11. Oxford City Council are the largest sole contributor, with 50% contribution, followed by Oxfordshire County Council at 24.6%. The contribution percentages and values are within the contract and are shown in the table below. See section 14 "Future Funding Challenges" below.

Party	2022/27 Contributions
Oxford City Council	£1,911,399
Cherwell District Council	£353,930
South Oxfordshire District Council	£69,370
Vale Of White Horse District Council	£69,370
West Oxfordshire District Council	£53,700
Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group	£150,000
Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (from Better Care Fund)	£273,117
Oxfordshire County Council	£940,000
Total	£3,820,886

12. With collaboration from all the District, City and County Council's, the ICB (Integrated Care Board), Oxford Health and University Hospitals, Probation, Lived Experience Forum and Thames Valley Police, a Strategy and Action Plan was produced. The Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan (2023-2026) has seven key strands. The Strategy and an operational version of the Action Plan are **Appendix 1 and 2 of the report.**

- i. Accountability
 - Accommodation & commissioning
 - Proactively prevent homelessness.
 - Timely move-on
 - The right home in the right place
 - Delivery of Service - Rapid response to rough sleeping
 - Focus on the person not the problem

13. The PHDG oversees the work of the Countywide Housing Steering Group (CHSG), who are a multi-agency group that comprises colleagues from all the involved agencies and that has responsibility for delivering all actions within the action plan.

14. It is to be noted that this model of service delivery is one of the only known models for service delivery of this kind in the Country.

Progress

Action Plan Progress

15. Work has commenced in delivering the action plan and its priorities outlined above. There are 9 “priority” actions for delivery this year. These identified priorities are summarised below
- i. Delivery of an effective case management system
 - ii. Improving the holistic support provided to vulnerable people that is appropriate for them
 - iii. Reviewing services to ensure they are housing led and where gaps in service may exist
 - iv. Ensuring consistency in approach on homelessness prevention and client experience across the City and Districts
 - v. Developing a range of options to address Countywide supply into the homelessness system
 - vi. Continuing rollout and development of the Housing First model
 - vii. Review and explore enhancement in services provided through outreach
 - viii. Transformation of supported accommodation schemes within the Alliance to be Housing Led.

Upon delivery of these priority actions, a new set of priority actions will be set for following years.

Governance

16. Strong and effective governance and reporting has been a challenge since the start of the Alliance. It has taken some time for the providers to establish some commonalities and fully understand and embrace the delivery partnership. This has however shown some improvement as the contract has progressed. There is an established Alliance Leadership Team (ALT), which makes the day-to-day decisions regarding the contract delivery. The lead commissioner (Oxfordshire County Council) and Oxford City Council have officers that attend this meeting.
17. On the commissioning side, an overwhelming positive of the Alliance process has been the cooperation between commissioning partners. The Commissioning partners meet monthly at the Joint Management Group (JMG) to discuss contract progress.
18. There has been a further meeting introduced between volunteered representatives of each group (ALT and JMG) to try to align and expedite certain evolving challenges as they arise.
19. ALT are seeking an Independent Chair, which is within the original contractual arrangement but has never been filled, to help provide independent governance. Recruitment is ongoing.

20. Another governance challenge that work has been ongoing to overcome has been the inconsistencies and integrity of data within the Alliance services. Improvements have been made with the inputs of commissioning officers at the County and City. A County wide data solution, potentially a database, has been agreed between partners, and is in the process of being delivered.
21. A new resource, working particularly on the commissioning side, has been agreed and commissioned jointly to provide greater delivery of the action plan and drive some of the changes and transformation required. This post holder is due to start in the Autumn and is being hosted by the City Council.

Cost control and adherence to the contract

22. The contract funding for the Alliance operates on a fixed fee model. During the last financial year, costs rose for suppliers, generally due to employee terms and conditions changes. These costs were met by efficiencies within the service areas rather than reduction in commissioned services. Significant and excellent work by colleagues at Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council ensured that a balanced budget was presented for this year.
23. However, there has been a general agreement that this process was challenging for commissioned services and led to strain in relationships between some ALT partners and with JMG partners in turn. It is an ALT responsibility to present a balanced budget, but they were unable to reach this without significant input from commissioners. Further challenges are expected in this area and are outlined in following sections.
24. Following the budget setting process concluding at the beginning of this financial year, a service transformation process began in the 3 key service areas, outreach support for rough sleepers, homelessness prevention services and supported accommodation as well as a group looking at cross cutting themes like costs and control. These 4 small subgroups that contain different ALT and JMG members are currently reaching a conclusion and are due to present their findings and recommendations to JMG in October 2024. Transformation of services is a part of the Alliance contract.
25. Despite some progress being made on the functioning of the Alliance partnership, demand on services within the homelessness system has grown since the start of the contract. This is a national picture as outlined in the previous section of the report. An area of particularly acute demand is around access to supported accommodation that the Alliance manages. This accommodation is accessed through a Panel and is significantly oversubscribed. The current waiting list is in excess of 100 people. This does inevitably lead to delays for vulnerable people accessing the support they need. The City and District Councils are all experiencing an increase in households that require temporary accommodation because they are homeless and in Priority Need, where the temporary accommodation duties on Councils are activated. This accommodation comes with no or little support, and the people housed are vulnerable. This is a potentially growing gap in service provision.

Despite these pressures, commissioning partners are positive with the delivery of services and are positive about the potential transformation process.

Future Challenges

Future Funding Uncertainty

26. Additionally, funding for the Alliance comes from the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). The future of this money beyond this year is yet to become clear. This in part is due to the change in Government at Westminster and thus reviews of departmental spending. If RSI grant is not continued, or another funding mechanism identified or offered, future funding beyond this year is unclear. This may lead to a service reduction which in turn could lead to non-delivery of the contractual objectives. Alliance partners are aware of the commissioning position on this and have been requested to make contingencies on this basis.

Service Pressures within Business as Usual

27. Should funding be in place to continue with the contract as it is currently into next year and future years, it is likely that services will remain under pressure. The rising costs that providers are incurring, particularly on staffing, have currently been met by finding efficiencies within operating models. It is believed that this will not be possible in future years as all possible efficiencies have been explored. JMG will be advising that there is no additional funding available (if the funding from government remains as it has been) and thus the JMG, with Alliance partners will need to examine the services being delivered carefully to ensure that the contractual obligations are met. Although the Alliance is a partnership, some partners could be disproportionately affected

Requirements of services to change, transform or act flexibly

28. Taking account of the aforementioned challenges, the situation within homelessness and rough sleeping services has changed since the beginning of the contract. The demands of single vulnerable people on services, the rise in rough sleeping, the rise in homelessness presentations to Councils and the associated rise in temporary accommodation usage have changed what is required from services. Following the transformation work, it may be necessary for some services to change or be flexible to meet the emerging needs of those requiring homelessness services within Oxfordshire. The ability of ALT to manage this change is not tested.

Demand and Housing Supply

29. As mentioned in earlier sections of the report, the demand on services is increasing. A key challenge for the system is housing supply and move-on opportunities for those in pathway accommodation. This is a common challenge among several pathways across the Housing and Social Care system. The

demand for social housing across the City and Districts is unlikely to decrease, and therefore this will remain a challenge. There are actions within the Countywide Action Plan that are underway to approach these strategic discussions, but this is a key challenge across the system.

Financial Implications

30. The delivery of the action plan is dependent on the funding being available from all partners.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

31. The report provides a progress report on the work being undertaken to address homelessness across Oxfordshire and as such there are no specific legal implications arising from the same.

32. Nonetheless it is worth noting that, as stated above, District and City Councils have statutory responsibilities to provide homelessness and housing advice services and it is not permissible to circumvent the statutory framework for the provision of such services. It is possible however to utilise the authority's wider powers to support those with particular vulnerabilities or needs, and to support and promote the general well-being of the local population: for example, the prevention powers of S2 Care Act 2014, the powers as to improvement of public health of s2B (1) NHS Act 1996 and the general power of S1 Localism Act 2011.

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Annex: Appendix 1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
Appendix 2 Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

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