

## **Divisions Affected – All**

# **OXFORDSHIRE HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD**

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

## **PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS DIRECTOR'S GROUP UPDATE**

### **Report by Director of Adult Social Care**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**The Health and Wellbeing Board is RECOMMENDED to note the report**

## **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 and a summary of current activity.

## **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 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.
  - A2Dominon
  - Aspire Oxfordshire
  - Connection Support

- Elmore Community Services
- Homeless Oxfordshire
- St Mungo's

4. The service provided fall within one of the following three broad categories, Prevention, Supported Accommodation and Outreach.

#### Prevention

Prevention in this context means to work upstream with clients to prevent them becoming homeless and rough sleeping in the first place. This could be by providing advice and support regarding their current home and tenancy or by enabling them to access another support service provided outside the Alliance, such as mental health or drug and alcohol services.

#### Outreach

Outreach provide advice and support to those rough sleeping now, with the aim of getting them into an accommodation option and/or accessing other support. Identification, monitoring and outcomes for rough sleepers are closely monitored.

#### Supported Accommodation

There are different types of supported accommodation and the intensiveness of support provided within varies depending on the clients needs. There are around 230 properties of supported accommodation across the County that are accessible from the Alliance pathway.

5. A more detailed report regarding the services provided, the partnership and funding arrangements was provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board in September 2024.

## **Progress**

### **Action Plan Progress**

6. As outlined in the report heard at the September meeting, there is an action plan to monitor progress of the providers in delivering services in accordance with the contract aims and improving and transforming services across the County. There are currently nine "priority" actions for delivery this year. The up to date action plan is an appendix of the report.
7. Of the nine priority actions, four are completed currently. Positive progress is being made on another three through current partnership work. With the new resource recruited, see paragraph 10 of the report, it is intended that two other actions area progressed relating to benchmarking by summer 2025.

8. The Action Plan will be reviewed in quarter 4 with the purpose of identifying new priority actions or reshaping existing actions that may no longer be current through a change in context or objectives.
9. A new resource has been recruited to work on behalf of the commissioners, to concentrate on coordination and delivery of the action plan. This resource started work in November 2024 and is hosted by Oxford City Council but is joint funded by the other commissioning partners.
10. Additionally, a new independent chair has been recruited to work with the Alliance Leadership Team (ALT). This has been part of the original contract but has not been in place until now. The new chair recently started in her role. It is hoped that this independence will have a positive effect on the decisions made and the overall delivery of service across the Alliance.

### **Highlighting Data and Trends**

11. The Alliance and District produce a data report each quarter, that is shared and verified with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) where appropriate. The current and available verified data at the time of the report is from Quarter 1 2024-25. The following is a summary of the main headlines
  - The number of people seen rough sleeping across the whole of Oxfordshire has risen during the first three months of this financial year, but it is still at a similar level to last year.
  - Oxford City sees the largest numbers of people sleeping rough. The majority are those who have a long history of rough sleeping, and those who have returned to rough sleeping.
  - At the beginning of Q1 Cherwell recorded more new rough sleepers than Oxford after almost matching numbers for the previous 6 months. However, in May and June, the figures have dropped off, with Oxford showing a significantly higher proportion of new rough sleepers during this period.
  - Demand from single person households for homelessness prevention advice from local authorities remains high, with 775 approaches recorded in Quarter 1. This compares with 678 in the same period in 2023, which equates to a 14% increase. Since Q4 last year, there has been a significant rise of approaches in Oxford, up from 167 to 278, while demand has plateaued/slightly decreased in the Districts.
  - In terms of homelessness prevention duties, there has been a marked increase in the number of cases accepted, almost doubling from 126 in Q4 to 245 in Q1 this year. There has been a marked rise from 20 to 91 such cases in Cherwell and also large increases in South and Vale. However,

only 15 cases were recorded in Oxford, which equates to 6.1% for the whole of Oxfordshire.

- In contrast Oxford continues to have the highest proportion of homelessness relief cases across the county - in Q1 79 out of 152 (52.0%) for the whole of Oxfordshire. This would suggest that the districts are being more proactive in dealing with people at risk of becoming homeless than the city, but also highlights the differences in the housing situation in the city where properties for single people are more in demand and rents are generally higher.

## **Transformation**

12. Part of the commissioning contract states that services provided through the Alliance should transform throughout the contracts term. As contexts and pressures change, it is important that services can change with them and, additionally, savings and repurposing of money saved can also occur.
13. A transformation programme commenced in summer 2024 and concluded in October 2024. The main workstreams were divided into the 3 main areas of Prevention, Outreach and Supported Accommodation, and additionally, there was a group that focussed on costs. Each group had ALT and commissioners from the Joint Management Group (JMG) represented.
14. Reports and recommendations were produced and have been agreed by JMG and will now be implemented by ALT for the forthcoming year. Some recommendations identify some savings and efficiencies, as well as service improvements, refocus or wider change. A summary of the main recommendations are outlined below.
  - Reviewing current supported accommodation provided within (and outside) the Alliance. Prioritising specialist supported accommodation provision over lower support, more general needs accommodation and moving towards a "Housing Led" approach.
  - Integrating the two outreach providers, Connections Support and St Mungo's, to generate efficiencies and ensure consistency across the City and County.
  - A more targeted approach to prevention, concentrating on those who would most benefit, such as single homelessness and those at risk of rough sleeping and deprioritising those who are not at immediate risk or could access support, such as tenancy related support, elsewhere. Such as through their social landlord.
15. The recommendations that are made will influence the Alliance budget setting process for next year, and thus what resources are assigned to each key delivery area and, in turn, each provider. It is expected that this will add an

additional layer of complexity to the budgetary negotiations, which are already protracted and can be challenging.

## **Future Funding**

16. There have been positive signals from the government regarding funding for homelessness in the Autumn Budget. It is projected that total spending from government, in the form of grants, will reach £1 billion in the next financial year. The Chancellor signalled an additional £230 million as part of the budget measures. It is currently unclear the form that this will take and whether it will be an extension to the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding, that funds a significant proportion of the project, or an alternative mechanism. The relevant Districts and City are in dialogue with their advisors from the MHCLG regarding this, to seek clarity at the earliest opportunity.

## **Financial Implications**

17. 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**

18. 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.
19. 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 Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

Background papers: Nil

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