

Housing and Homelessness Panel October Feedback

PRS and Selective Licensing Update

Officer Hudson – Scrutiny Officer, gave an update to the Selective Licensing consultation in which Oxford City Council are seeking the views of both PRS providers and the general public in extending the HMO Licensing requirements to cover all providers of private rental properties. The proposal for a Selective Licensing Scheme will be examined in detail over the coming months but the overall decision on whether it would be given the go-ahead would ultimately lay with the relevant government department.

A key strength to the proposals was to ensure that any landlord that has had their HMO Licensing revoked would not be able to still rent single dwelling properties, in addition to ensuring that all private landlords pass the fit and proper person test. The Selective Licensing Scheme will give Oxford City Council greater powers to pressure private landlords over their property safety management certification, management of anti-social or criminal behaviour and to protect tenants from un-ethical behaviour.

Housing Services Performance Update

Officer Wood - Strategy and Service Development Manager, updated the panel on several key performance targets. Oxford City Council have been awarded just over £1m following a successful bid to the Next Steps Programme (NSAP) that will help OCC provide 118 units of interim accommodation for former rough sleepers and people who had been living in shared hostels before the pandemic. Mr Woods stated that they have continued to carry out important homeless prevention work throughout the Covid-19 crisis, both under 'Prevention Duty' and through other 'pre-prevention' activities which include, general housing advice from our housing options service, Welfare Reform Team case work, landlord/tenant liaison work, prevention work/advice provided by advice agencies and Shelter.

I asked Mr Woods if he could provide the Housing and Homeless Panel with a breakdown for what percentage of the latest government funding is being used for support services to ensure that rough sleepers physical, mental and health needs are being met. This will be provided at the next meeting. Under the 'Everyone In' scheme, where all rough sleepers, former rough sleepers living in communal spaces and those

at imminent risk of rough sleeping were (and are) offered accommodation, a total of 235 persons had been placed in emergency accommodation up to the end of August. Where people have rejected accommodation offers, the St Mungo's outreach team continue to engage to find accommodation options. The securing of YHA and Canterbury House means that there are accommodation offers for those sleeping rough.

The Council's landlord services have successfully adapted to meet the challenges of the pandemic. Essential services have continued for our tenants such as repairs and new lets through the pandemic. The team have also been integral to the success of the locality hubs, ensuring vulnerable tenants and our communities were supported through lockdown.

There are expected delays to our development programme due to the Covid-19 pandemic that saw work on sites across the city stop for a period of time, however sites are now reopened with only slightly reduced capacity due to the need to ensure social distancing.

Planning for the Future White Paper

Councillor Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery and Officer Ploszynski brought to the panel news of changes to the government planning requirements. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued the Planning for the Future White Paper on 6th August 2020 seeking views on a package of proposals for reform of the planning system in England. The Council's response is scheduled to go to the Cabinet meeting of 14 October 2020. The Panel is asked to consider the response and make any recommendations to Cabinet as required.

Councillor Hollingsworth explained to the panel that these proposals can only have negative impacts on Oxford. There is a lot of value in Oxford, which means that developments are viable whilst delivering 50% on-site affordable housing (80% of which is social rented), CIL and S106 obligations. The Housing and Homeless Panel was informed that the Oxford City Council can't see how an Infrastructure Levy set nationally could achieve as much, even if it is varied regionally, as it would never be varied at a fine enough grain to reach the full potential of cities such as Oxford. Also, local-level viability reports are needed to inform the setting of these policy

requirements. The delivery mechanisms seem to have far more risk than the requirement for on-site affordable housing. There is also concerns by how infrastructure funding will be prioritised.

A fundamental premise of the White Paper seems to be for a centralist approach to planning as opposed to seeking to decide at the 'local' level and having had due regard to local circumstances. This is evident from the stated intention to decide some matters at the national level, such as Development Management guidance provided at national level, the use of the National Design Guide to override local policies and the centrally set Infrastructure Levy. This does raise serious issues about 'local' democracy and engagement in the planning process.

What we have learnt is that the White Paper explicitly states that the changes will lead to 'more democracy'. The Oxford City Council consider that the opposite is true and that each proposal eats away at the democratic process embedded within the planning system, and at effective engagement of the public. We cannot support the proposals as currently set out. An important element of the current approach is that there are opportunities given to exceed requirements, if reasons for doing so justify it, and this has been justified recently in Oxford and South. It seems there will be no ability to put forward reasons for departing for the standard method, as can currently be justified if the criteria in the NPPF are met.