

Evaluating Oxfordshire Homeless Movement's NRPF Project – Invitation to Tender

About the NRPF Project

Oxfordshire Homeless Movement (OHM) commissioned a project to help people experiencing homelessness who have lost or don't have access to state-funded benefits and housing, supporting them to lead productive lives in Oxfordshire. They are often described as having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The project takes a housing led approach providing guests with housing, immigration advice, subsistence, and personalised support (mental health, substance misuse, language...). This is described in more detail in the appended Theory of Change document.

OHM committed to run the project for 5 years and it is now in its 4th year. We now need to decide whether to continue or wind down the project. To continue the project, we will need to convince funders that it is worthwhile. An evaluation of the project is a key input to help make a good decision.

This invitation to tender outlines the expectations for the evaluation and includes relevant contextual information to inform proposals.

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Questions we want to answer

The evaluation is intended to cover the whole period the service has been operating for.

Some of the questions we are looking to answer are:

Impact:

Is the project effective in helping its clients in the ways set out in the theory of change?

Implementation:

What aspects can be improved or refined?

Are there aspects of the project that don't add value?

Value for Money:

Does the project deliver good value for money compared to other interventions or doing nothing at all?

Implications:

Can the project be used as an exemplar for other areas?

What can the project tell us about public policy towards those with NRPF? What aspects of policy could be changed? E.g. granting those awaiting the outcome of an asylum application a right to work.

Relevance in relation to need

The need for the project and its potential continuation are set out later in this briefing and in Appendix 3. This appendix also sets the project into the context of wider housing need in Oxfordshire. In the evaluation you are invited to consider whether the assessment of need is valid and to comment accordingly.

Independent Consultants may propose the methods they consider appropriate for this evaluation to answer these questions.

Format: We are primarily interested in the conclusions and are not prescriptive on format. Most likely it will be a written report with an opportunity for a debrief discussion.

It needs to be able to support our decision making and be clear and professional in its presentation so that it can also be used to support discussions with our funders and partners.

Process for appointing a consultant

Independent Consultants are invited to submit a short proposal (no more than 4 pages) to neil@ohmteam.org with the Subject line 'NRPF project - proposal'.

Proposals should include:

- Your relevant experience to conduct the project. This is important in helping assess the credibility of the proposal and for the credibility of the evaluation for use externally to OHM with funders and policymakers.
- Proposed methodology and approach. This is the primary selection criterion.
- Budget – in selecting the proposal this will be a “qualifier” and “tiebreaker:” A qualifier because the amount needs to be affordable, a tiebreaker in that if two proposals are equal on the first criteria then budget will be the deciding factor.

Call for proposals open	25 th November 2024
Deadline for proposals	13 th December 2024
Decision and appointment	21 December 2024
First draft	15 February
Approval	28 February

Budget:

We expect to pay and understand that a thorough job will demand work and expertise. We also need to keep in mind the size of the project and the fact that it is philanthropically funded so what we spend needs to be proportionate.

You may want to include separate costs for different elements of a proposal e.g. a cost for an evaluation using available information only and cost for an evaluation that also includes interviews with project clients.

£5,000-7,000 would represent approximately 3% of our annual project cost.

Why this project? Needs and origin

The project began as the Everyone In initiative came to an end in 2021. Among the rough sleepers accommodated in Oxfordshire, were 21 with the NRPF condition. Ineligible for council support or accommodation, these people faced a return to the streets. OHM convened and sourced philanthropic funding for a project to:

- Find sustainable housing for people with NRPF, and provide support services to enable them to progress to become self-sufficient, contributing positively to the community in Oxfordshire
- Help resolve their immigration status, which is typically the principal barrier to enabling them to progress
- Develop and test a model of intervention and support that can be used to help other people with NRPF who become homeless in the future.

The programme is housing led and adheres as closely to Housing First principles as is possible for this group. Legal restrictions on this group, linked to their immigration status, limit the degree of choice and control that would typically be a key element of a Housing First project.

An individual plan based on each person's strengths and aspirations is at the heart of the Housing First approach, and this programme will help each person develop and make progress on their plan – in so far as legal constraints allow. Common elements of the plan will include:

- The resolution of each person's immigration status
- Enabling each person to become self-sufficient and contribute to society (in line with Housing First principles, the specifics for each person will be determined by their own aspirations and strengths)
- In some cases, a reconnection and informed, voluntary return to the person's home country.

It is possible that for some people, the outcome of the immigration process may be negative – and yet a return to the person's home country may not be possible due lack of travel documentation, dangers in the home country or other factors. In these cases, the person faces an indefinite future in the UK without benefits, support, or the right to work and rent a home. We believe that these people nevertheless have a right to a home, subsistence and a place in our community. We would strive to continue to support them on the programme.

The project is delivered by an alliance overseen by OHM:

Connection Support: An organisation providing supported housing across Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. For the project it provides project management, support workers and property services.

Edge Housing: A charity providing supported housing. It provides housing and support for 3 people in the project.

Asylum Welcome: An organisation providing support, advice and connections to legal services to refugees and asylum seekers. Asylum Welcome supports our clients to regularise their immigration status.

Soha: A housing association. Soha makes creative use of its property portfolio to provide 12 accommodation units to the project at a peppercorn rent.

Aspire: A charity providing supported accommodation and help with employability. In the early years of the project Aspire provided property services to the project.

OHM: An organisation focused on filling gaps in provision and improving collaboration across the public and voluntary sectors with the aim of ending rough sleeping in Oxfordshire. OHM provides governance/oversight and fundraising to the project.

The project now accommodates and supports 15 people and provides support services to a further 4 people who we are unable to house.

Measuring success: available data sources

We worked with CHI to develop a Theory of Change for the project (see Appendix). The most important outputs for the project are shown in the table below.

Outputs – results of activities	Outputs – change for individuals
People housed (within scheme)* People able to move on * Immigration status progressed or resolved* Entering work or feeling able to work* Success stories - perhaps summarise this as people achieving their goals	People feeling in a better place mentally People having a sense of belonging and community and feeling able to participate in community activities People feeling hopefully about the future People feeling safe People having more sense of freedom and choice People able to sleep better, rest an

*These measures are logged for each participant from the point that they enter to the point that they leave the project.

Stories are collected from clients on a voluntary basis – we have approx. 12 of these to date.

For the 18 months we have administered a survey every quarter to all clients to capture the ONS Wellbeing measures.

To track our progress, we:

1. Track our guests through the project from referral through to move-on. At the end of June 2024 we have supported 45 clients, accommodating 26 of them directly and arranging accommodation outside of the project for several others. 11 clients have so far been successful in resolving their immigration status.
2. We use the [ONS Personal Well-being](#) framework to assess how our clients perception of well-being is changing. This data is collected via a survey every quarter.
3. We commission a 3rd party to collect our clients' stories using the Most Significant Change method, sometimes referred to as [Storytelling](#). Sharing their stories is voluntary and some clients choose not to share them. The extract below illustrates the method and the kind of situation we are trying to alleviate:

*“When you are on a visa, there are rules. Even if I can go to people's houses and say, can I just do laundry for you, I'd be breaking my visa. So, there is no other way. I'm not allowed public funds, so if you are faced with a situation, it's so challenging that you need someone with a big heart and a support system...
 ...the company that brought me here had me doing care work. It wasn't paying much, and I was bullied and exploited. When I lost this job, 15th December 2023, it was a blow to my life – I had no income, no savings, no nothing. My money had been from hand to mouth. It went on rent, food and transport...
 ...Connection Support came to my rescue. I really appreciate the help that I'm getting because right now, I've got accommodation, they helped me with transport, which is a bus pass, they even introduce me to the food bank...referred me to other people, like Asylum Welcome, to see an employment adviser who could help me with my CV...
 ...I may be a victim now, but I'm not going to let that ruin me or define me. Even now, like when I'm still job hunting, I refuse to take myself as a victim. I consider myself as a survivor. Because if I manage to survive seven months without a steady income, you can't say that you're a victim, you're a survivor.”*

The most recent project report is appended. It contains the tracking metrics and Well-being survey results. The stories collected using the Storytelling method are also appended.

Financial data and information on the properties used and number of support worker hours will be provided for the evaluation.

Access to data

Consultants will have access to all of the data held for the project with the exception of personal data that could identify respondents. We can arrange interviews with clients and support workers subject to their consent.

Resources used

The project is entirely funded through philanthropy and is heavily reliant on a key funder who accounts for approximately 40% of the project's requirement. The cost of the project in the year to April 2024 was £211k split as follows:

Client support/supported housing*	£123k
Subsistence	£38k
Immigration support	£23k
Property management (inc. utilities)	£27k

*There are 3 support workers allocated part time to the project for a total of 2.8FTE and a project manager 0.5FTE. Our fee to Connection Support also includes an allocation for overheads and office costs.

12 accommodation units are provided by Soha at a peppercorn rent. Edge provides 3 further units in house it owns part funded by an interest free loan from a supporter of the project.

Barriers and facilitators

The project must overcome the barriers faced by our clients as well as the difficulties of securing resources. Other areas looking to replicate the project will need to address these. We invite the evaluation to expand upon and/or comment on these based on their observations during the evaluation.

Our clients can face many difficulties in common to all rough sleepers: the expense and scarcity of housing, mental health difficulties because of/worsened by experiences on the streets, physical health problems, lack of physical safety. The NRPF condition/immigration status means they also face difficulties that are a result of public policy:

- The lack of access to benefits/financial support leads to destitution.
- The lack of a right to rent accommodation prevents them finding a home even if they had the means. It also makes it difficult for others to assist with accommodation.
- The lack of the right to work, even voluntarily, means they cannot support themselves. It robs them of dignity and independence. It also makes them vulnerable to exploitation and illegal work.
- The length of time it takes to process asylum claims and appeals is a source of chronic stress, fear and uncertainty. The possibility of deportation only adds to this.
- Requirements to report to immigration centres, often at a distance from where they live, adds to stress and is a drain on any financial resources they do have.

As a result of this, much of what the project must address stems not from the intrinsic problems of the client but rather from the policy and legal constraints imposed by the government. Despite these constraints and despite, in many cases, living a life of destitution and street homeless for many years, the vast majority of our clients show no desire to return to their countries of origin and in most cases are afraid to do so. The progress that many of our clients have already made in obtaining status shows that, eventually, our system agrees they should stay. Therefore, if the aim of government policy is to persuade people to return home, it is not effective. The result is simply that years of what could be productive lives are wasted.

The project must also overcome the barrier of providing supported housing without access to housing benefits or other public funds. With the help of Soha this has been done by:

- Doing the legal due diligence to check that property can be let to an organisation for a project housing those with NRPF, and finding a precedent for that (Broadlands Housing Association in Norfolk)
- Soha being creative in considering voids and difficulty to let and finding properties it could make available at a peppercorn rent without disrupting its other operations.

We have not been successful in replicating this model with other housing associations despite several attempts to do so. This has limited our capacity and led to us not being able serve many new referrals.

Facilitators for the project have been:

- The willingness of the organisations involved to work together cooperatively with a shared passion to help this client group.
- The support of philanthropists and our public fundraising efforts.
- Within the legal constraints they must abide by, the Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils have been supportive and cooperative. They recognise that rough sleeping in the county cannot be ended without provision for this group.
- Our support workers have lived experience, have a passion for their work and go "the extra mile" in the face of difficulties.
- The CHI has been a great source of encouragement, advice and connections.
- The resilience and determination of our clients.

Future needs – outlook

Demand for the project exceeds our capacity – of the 45 people we have supported during the project, we have only been able to directly house 26. We try to avoid turning away those who are eligible and seek to find other solutions for those referred to the project whom we can't house. We don't advertise the project or encourage referrals.

We receive 10-15 referrals per year from outside Oxfordshire and we are unable to take those on.

We receive 10-15 referrals per year from people who have the option of Home Office accommodation and there is no obvious reason why this isn't an appropriate solution for them. We don't accommodate these people but may support them in other ways.

We have up to 5 cases per year where we don't provide accommodation for the individual for reasons including a lack of willingness to engage with assessments or an assessment that it would be a safety risk for our staff or other clients.

A continuing flow of people of people with the NRPF condition:

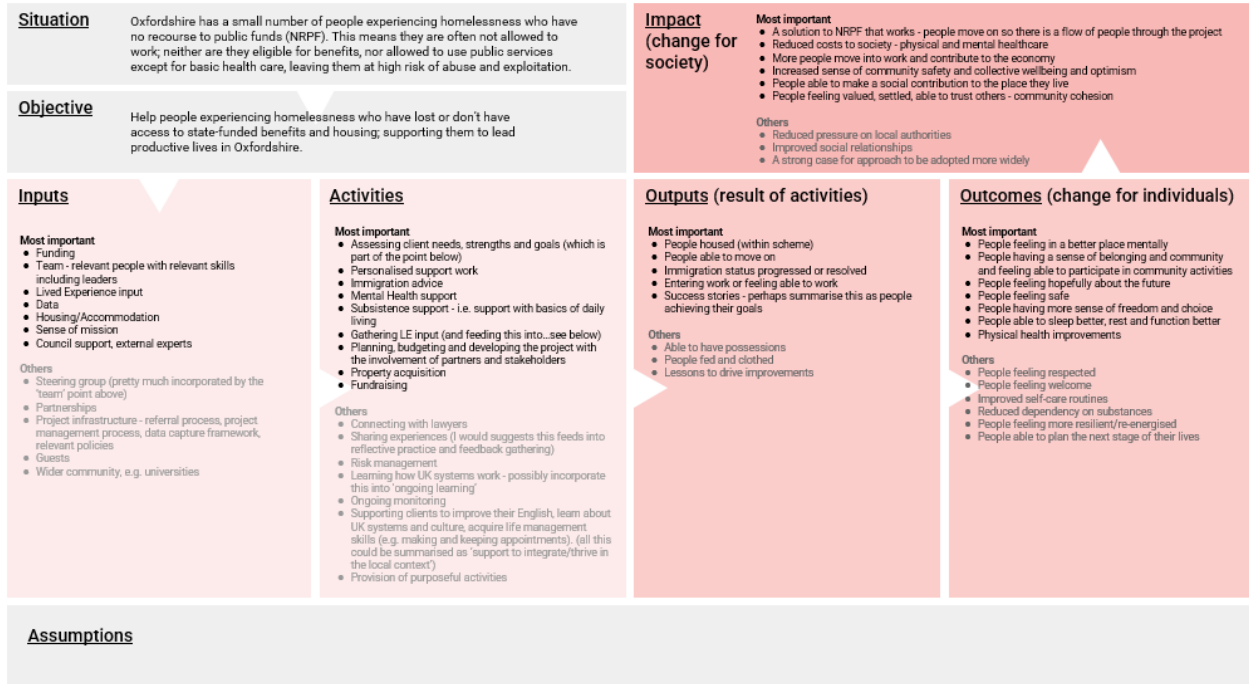
- The key elements of national policy towards this group have not changed as a new government has taken over. There seems little or no prospect of more government help for this group.
- The number of asylum claims remains at a high level – in the year to June 2024 there were 75658 claims involving 97107 people, and 118329 people were awaiting an initial decision: source Refugee Council (from govt stats) <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/top-10-facts-about-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum/>
- The growing number of workers recruited into the health and care sectors from outside the UK on restricted/sponsored visas. If they lose their jobs or if their sponsoring company gets into difficulty (e.g. by losing its license to sponsor workers' visas), they can have difficulty finding another and have few resources to return home.

Continued pressure on the Oxfordshire housing market

- Growing demand from the related but separate question of providing move-on accommodation for refugees <https://www.asylum-welcome.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/HBHO-REPORT-FINAL-1.pdf>
- The general pressure on the housing market arising in a city with a strong economy, two major universities, lots of tourists, and a high reliance on the private rental sector. Oxford City Council's housing register currently has 3000 people and just 5 per cent of those are offered social housing each year. See Appendix 3 on the Oxford housing market.

Appendix 1

Theory of Change



Appendix 2 – NRPF Project Q1 Report & Storytelling report



NRPF Q1 2024 Impact Report.pdf



NRPF Storytelling - stories document 2024 FINAL (1).pdf

Appendix 3

Oxford Housing Market – Recent Trends (OHM)

The limited supply in relation to demand and the high cost of housing in Oxford is well known and documented. As a city with a growing economy and a large student population but with limited space for new development, this is not expected to change. The city has a high reliance on the private rental sector compared with other areas. Recent indicators of high demand and cost are:

- In July 2024 private sector rents index at 118 compared with January 2021 (Finders Keepers <https://www.finders.co.uk/quarterly-report-Q324#/>). Demand for 1 and 2 bedroom properties is especially strong.
- Savills reports an increase in rents of 2.5% for Q3 2024 compared with last year (<https://www.savills.co.uk/landing-pages/local-property-insights/oxford.aspx>)
- A search of Rightmove on 24/10/2024 shows a total of just 53 1- and 2-bedroom properties (excl. house shares) available in Oxford for a monthly rental of up to £1200. Rentals for 2 bed properties can exceed £1500 per month.
- The range of opportunities open to property owners is illustrated by a search of Airbnb: Oxford/house-flat "entire home"/for a 3month period = Dec24 thru Feb 25 produces a list of 1000+ properties, many with "professional owners". Rentals are a minimum of £2000 per month.
- Savills reports the average sale price of a house in Oxford has reached £580k with prices increased 6.8% compared with pre-pandemic levels (<https://www.savills.co.uk/landing-pages/local-property-insights/oxford.aspx>)

The recent rejection of Oxford City Council's Local Plan on the basis that too many new homes were included, will not help to alleviate the situation.

Pressures and Demand for Affordable Housing

Demand for social housing massively outstrips supply. There are 3000 customers on the City Council's growing housing register. Only 5 in every hundred are offered social housing each year (<https://www.oxford.gov.uk/apply-social-housing/before-you-apply>).

This means continued reliance on the private rental sector where cost of living pressures combined with rising rents mean that more people are getting into difficulty. Indicators of this are:

- An increase in the number of households owed a prevention or relief duty for homelessness. For April 2023 to March 2024 the figure was 792 households, an increase of 90% v 2021/22. The surrounding districts are also under pressure. The corresponding figure for all of Oxfordshire was 2730.
- Increases in the numbers of households in temporary accommodation. In February 2024 the city provided temporary accommodation for 220 households and expected this to increase to 315 by July (<https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/1416/oxford-city-council-calls-for-urgent-action-on-spiralling-temporary-accommodation-costs#:~:text=Oxford%20City%20Council%20currently%20has,expensive%20hotels%20as%20temporary%20accommodation.>.) The council has 134 properties in its temporary stock, and therefore needs to use hotels and the private sector.

Move-On Housing

Given the conditions outlined above, sourcing property for those in supported accommodation to move on is problematic. Following Everyone In and the introduction of a new countywide strategy to address rough sleeping, progress was made in reducing numbers. However, as in other areas, there are signs the numbers are trending up again. In the year to August 2024 422 people in Oxfordshire experienced rough sleeping (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government/Oxfordshire Councils Rough Sleeping Data Framework). Of these, 96 were new to rough sleeping in the last 3 months. Approximately 1000* supported housing spaces are provided. The lack of move-on accommodation means that it becomes more difficult to help the flow of new rough sleepers.

Prognosis

In the long term a significant increase in the amount of social housing will be critical to meet Oxford's housing need. This will not be achieved in the short term and as a result those addressing homelessness and the need for temporary and move-on accommodation will be forced to source from a private rental sector where demand is very high. As a result, accommodation will be difficult to find and costly. Different elements of the "homelessness sector" may find themselves competing e.g. the council is appealing for socially minded landlords to come forward to help with affordable and temporary housing. Aspire has been exploring a social lettings scheme and together with OHM has been in discussions to encourage the colleges into social investment.

Oxfordshire Homeless Movement



Some social investment at scale could make a more significant difference, as was done with the initiative between Response, the City Council and social investment fund Resonance <https://www.response.org.uk/news/2023/02/resonance-response-and-oxford-city-council-providing-safe-affordable-homes-for-rough-sleepers-in-oxford>. This initiative was focused on supported housing for those with mental health issues.

*I was unable to find whether this includes the Mental Health Pathway as well as formerly homeless people. In either case it shows the pressure on the system.