



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing

### Northampton Borough Council

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015

#### **Collaborative, Multi Agency Working**

One of the key priorities of the Housing and Wellbeing Service is to encourage organisations to work more collaboratively with one another to deliver better, joined-up services that improve residents' life chances, safeguard vulnerable people and promote community wellbeing.

I am very proud of the strong leadership that NBC is providing, both within the borough and across Northamptonshire, to improve joint working and achieve the shared objectives of the County Council, the Borough and District Councils and our partners.

This report provides recent examples of the collaborative, multi agency work that the Housing and Wellbeing Service is leading on.

#### **Countywide Protocol for Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds**

No single agency has sole responsibility for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people. Children's Social Care and local Housing Authorities have statutory duties to these young people, and other statutory and voluntary agencies provide a range of services to them.

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing has successfully negotiated the terms and conditions of a new Countywide Protocol that is designed to ensure that, in Northamptonshire, everyone works together to provide a consistent and co-ordinated response to 16 and 17 year old young people (including teenage parents and pregnant teenagers) who present as homeless and are in need of accommodation or accommodation-related support.

As well as helping to prevent homelessness and promote and safeguard the wellbeing of young people, the Protocol for Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds is being used as the basis for the development of other Protocols (including a Leaving Care Protocol) involving Children's Social Care and the local Housing Authorities. Joint training sessions will improve multi agency working.

#### **Improving Housing's Response to Domestic Abuse**

On 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015, NBC convened and hosted a half day workshop (attended by housing and community safety representatives from the 7 Borough and District Councils, together with the Police and members of NCC's Commissioning & Strategy Team) to agree on how best to develop a "comprehensive safe accommodation offer that incorporates crisis accommodation, move on accommodation and keeping victims safe in their own homes".

At the end of the workshop, everyone - including all of the Borough and District Councils – agreed 7 key action points, including the development of a countywide housing pathway for domestic abuse that is applied consistently (by all housing authorities and housing providers) in Northamptonshire. Other actions include the negotiation of a new countywide funding arrangement for the Sanctuary Scheme, the development of a new business model for the county's refuges, and initiatives designed to prevent homelessness and support move-on.

#### **Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

NBC has taken the lead in bringing together the Borough and District Councils to discuss the practical action we can all take to tackle CSE and how we can share the work between us.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2015, NBC's Chief Executive chaired a very successful working conference in the Guildhall, attended by 90 Officers with responsibility for housing (social housing, private sector housing and homelessness), leisure, licensing, town centre wardens and community safety. The conference was addressed by the Manager of the County's RISE (Reducing Incidence of Sexual Exploitation) Team and practitioners from two unitary authorities: Peterborough and Slough.

Feedback from delegates has been very positive and the Chief Executives of the Borough and District Councils have agreed a series of action points from the conference, including the appointment of a CSE Lead in each area, the development of a Countywide CSE Action Plan and Training Programme, and the achievement of a more consistent, countywide approach (where appropriate) to housing, leisure services, community safety and licensing.

### **Promoting Community Wellbeing**

At a meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015, more than 30 members of the NBC-led Northampton Wellbeing Partnership met for a briefing on 2 new initiatives (the procurement of a new computer system and the development of an online forum) that will assist and support joint working.

The new computer system will aid information sharing, monitor and measure customers' progress against agreed outcomes and enable customers to 'score' the service they have received. Commissioners will be able to monitor take-up of the service and financial commitments.

The online forum – devised by members of the voluntary and community sector, funded by NBC and hosted by Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire (VIN) – will make it a lot easier for members of the Northampton Wellbeing Partnership to communicate with one another to share ideas, information and expertise, and to discuss a wide range of issues relating to service delivery, funding, residents' health and wellbeing, and NCC's Wellbeing Community Interest Company.

Everyone who attended the meeting was very positive about the 2 initiatives and appreciated their potential for revolutionising the way in which wellbeing services are delivered in Northampton.

### **Developing Northampton's new Housing Strategy**

A half day workshop, organised jointly by NBC and Northampton Partnership Homes was held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015 to kickstart the development of our new Housing Strategy for 2016-21.

Registered Providers, private landlords and representatives from a wide range of organisations (including NBC, NPH and the Northampton Wellbeing Partnership) discussed 4 key issues:

- Affordable housing, new housing, regeneration and growth
- Northampton's private rented sector
- Helping people to achieve and maintain independence
- Reducing homelessness and meeting housing need

These discussions will help shape and inform the borough's housing priorities for the next 5 years and will form the basis of an overarching Housing Strategy that will be underpinned by a number of supporting strategies and policies, including the Homelessness Strategy, Rough Sleepers Strategy, Private Rented Housing Strategy, Empty Homes Strategy, Tenancy Strategy, Older People's Housing Strategy and the Housing Allocations Policy.

### **Tackling Modern Day Slavery**

Officers have been working with the Police, Northamptonshire County Council and other agencies to develop an agreed approach to tackling modern day slavery in Northampton.

The partnership is seeking to raise awareness of the problem of people trafficking and modern day slavery, identify the training needs of local organisations, provide a forum for agencies to share intelligence, best practice and what they are doing to tackle the problem, and ensure that victims receive the support and services that they need from all of the agencies they interact with.

In September 2015, NBC's Private Sector Housing Team was part of a multi agency team that carried out a series of raids on premises where modern day slavery was suspected of taking place.

### **Northampton's Landlord Forum**

On 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015, the Leader of the Council and I hosted a well attended meeting of the Northampton Landlord Forum in the Guildhall.

Landlords and rental agents were very interested in the presentations from Helen Reay (Housing Solicitor at the Community Law Service) – who described the protection that the Deregulation Act 2015 affords tenants against the practice of retaliatory eviction – and Debi Waite (NBC's new Private Sector Housing Manager) who provided a fascinating, but shocking, insight into the harm being done by criminal and rogue landlords and agents and the action that NBC and its partners (including Trading Standards, the UK Borders Agency, HMRC and the Police and Fire Service) will be taking to identify them, disrupt their operations, and prosecute them.

Where a tenant complains about the condition of a property, the landlord must now respond within 14 days, setting out what s/he intends to do about it and within what timescale.

If the landlord (a) fails to reply or (b) replies by serving a notice of possession or (c) gives a reply that is inadequate, the tenant may then complain to the local authority who must inspect the property. If the local authority then serves an improvement notice or carries out emergency remedial action, any notice of possession already served will be rendered ineffective and no further notice can then be served for 6 months. This will prevent retaliatory (revenge) evictions.

For tenancies which first began on or after 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 it will not be possible to give a Section 21 notice in the first four months of the tenancy. Taken together with the statutory notice period for assured shorthold tenancies (2 months), tenants will have some protection from eviction.

Additionally, a Section 21 notice can only be served if the landlord has issued the tenant with (a) an energy performance certificate, (b) a gas safety certificate and (c) a copy of the Department for Communities and Local Government's booklet entitled "How to rent: the checklist for renting in England". If the property is a licensable HMO, the property must also be licensed.

Once issued, a Section 21 notice must be used within 6 months.

### **Social Lettings Agency**

At the time of writing, Officers were preparing a fully costed business case for the social lettings agency. The merits of the social lettings agency were considered by Cabinet on 21 October 2015.

**Councillor Stephen Hibbert**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing**