



## **Cabinet Member Report for Housing**

### **Northampton Borough Council**

**7<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

#### **Working together to change people's behaviour**

In previous reports, I have described the way in which the Housing and Wellbeing Service has encouraged organisations to work together to deliver better, joined-up services that improve residents' life chances, protect vulnerable people and improve community wellbeing.

As well as encouraging a fresh and more innovative approach to tackling some of the borough's most complex and challenging housing problems, the Housing and Wellbeing Service is working proactively with other services and organisations to change people's behaviour.

This report includes some examples of the action that the Council is taking to change the behaviour of private landlords, managing agents and people who are sleeping rough.

#### **Developing a Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy**

On 5<sup>th</sup> February, the Housing & Wellbeing Service and Community Safety Team hosted a half day Workshop to kick-start the development of Northampton's 3 year Rough Sleepers Strategy.

Attended by more than 50 participants – representing around thirty services and organisations, including charities, faith groups, health and social care professionals, housing projects, advice and support providers, the neighbourhood wardens, the anti-social behaviour unit and the Police – the Workshop considered the causes and extent of rough sleeping, the action being taken to prevent and reduce rough sleeping, and the services that are helping rough sleepers move off the streets.

Acknowledging that rough sleeping is dangerous and seriously detrimental to a person's physical and mental health – and that some of the people sleeping rough in Northampton are choosing to sleep rough as a lifestyle and have said they do not want to come off the streets – everyone agreed that the problem of rough sleeping can only be resolved if all services and organisations work more effectively with one another, deliver a consistent message and actively encourage rough sleepers to engage with housing and support providers and leave the streets.

Everyone agreed, also, that more emergency accommodation is needed in the town and that much more can be done to improve access to housing and help people to sustain their tenancies.

It is hoped that the new multi agency Rough Sleepers Strategy will be published in June 2016.

#### **Encouraging Private Landlords to Behave Responsibly**

On 10<sup>th</sup> February, the Cabinet approved a new Enforcement Policy and Fees & Charges Policy that will help the Council to improve standards in Northampton's private rented sector, bring problematic empty homes back into use and tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords.

One of the key aims of these new policies is to change the behaviour of owners, landlords and managing agents by ensuring that offenders bear the full cost of any enforcement action and that, if an HMO is not licensed on time, the licence will cost more and may not last very long.

The Council's new multi agency, intelligence-led approach to licensing and enforcement will identify and target the owners, landlords and managing agents whose selfish and irresponsible behaviour is ruining local neighbourhoods and putting tenants' health and wellbeing at risk. It is essential, of course, that those who flout the law do not benefit from their non-compliance.

I am delighted that so many of the measures proposed in the Government's Housing and Planning Bill – including the national database of rogue landlords and agents, the introduction of Banning Orders and a new power for local authorities to impose financial penalties of up to £30,000 for certain housing offences – will assist and support Northampton's fresh approach to this issue.

### **HMO Training for Councillors**

Although HMOs play a vital role in helping to meet Northampton's housing needs, it is essential that they are well managed, are maintained in a good state of repair and, where appropriate, they have the necessary licence and/or planning permission.

On 9<sup>th</sup> February, Officers from the Housing and Planning teams provided Councillors with training on the action that the Council can take to control the quality and density of HMOs in the borough, especially where HMOs are operating without planning permission in the Article 4 area.

From their feedback, it is clear that all of the Councillors who attended the training found it very useful and most of them said that it had given them a much better understanding of what the Council can and cannot attach as conditions to an HMO licence or planning consent. Everyone welcomed the action that the Council is taking to change the behaviour of landlords and agents.

### **Landlord Forum**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February, the Council's Private Sector Housing Manager provided the Forum with a comprehensive overview of the new 'Right to Rent' legislation that requires landlords to carry out appropriate checks to ensure that their tenants have the right to be in the UK.

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing and Richard Dawson (Chair of the Northampton Student Landlords Network) described the Council's new Enforcement Policy and Fees & Charges Policy, the active role that landlords and agents played in shaping the new policies, and how the Council and the Northampton Student Landlords Network are planning to work with the University of Northampton's Students Union to improve and enforce standards in student housing.

### **CSE Training for Councillors**

On 25<sup>th</sup> February, Councillors were provided with a harrowing but informative insight into the nature and extent of Child Sexual Exploitation in Northamptonshire.

Assisted by the Manager of Northamptonshire's RISE (Reducing Incidents of Sexual Exploitation) Team and a representative of Rape Crisis, the training highlighted the impact of CSE on young people and the practical action that NBC (with its responsibility for housing, homelessness, licensing, neighbourhood wardens and community safety) can take, with other services and organisations, to tackle and prevent CSE in Northampton.

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