



Cabinet Member Report for Housing

Northampton Borough Council

18th April 2016

Northampton's Rough Sleepers Count

On 24th March 2016, I took part in a borough-wide count of rough sleepers, organised by the Council's Housing Options & Advice Manager and a multi agency steering group.

A total of 32 volunteers (representing a broad range of organisations, including the Hope Centre, NAASH, Midland Heart, the Probation Service and the Council) took part in the count, which covered all of the wards in the borough and was carried out between Midnight and 3.00am.

Although it was too unsafe to enter the derelict St Edmund's Hospital site to check for rough sleepers, the volunteers observed a total of 21 people 'bedded down' in the borough.

The intelligence gathered during the count will help us develop our new Rough Sleepers Strategy.

Northampton's next rough sleepers count will take place in November 2016. I am hoping that, by then, our fresh approach to the problem will be bearing fruit and that the number of rough sleepers in the borough will have reduced to less than 10 and be as close as possible to zero.

Tackling, Preventing and Reducing Rough Sleeping

In my last report, I provided details of the half day Workshop that the Council organised in February to kick-start the development of Northampton's Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy.

During the Workshop, everyone agreed that all services and organisations need to 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 also agreed that more emergency accommodation is needed in the town.

Since the Workshop, the Council has recruited a couple of excellent Outreach Workers whose supportive, but assertive, approach to rough sleepers is already making a difference. Outcome focused and passionate about their work, our new Outreach Workers are playing a vital role in encouraging services to be more responsive, helping rough sleepers off the streets and, wherever possible, persuading destitute rough sleepers to return to their area or country of origin.

In order to provide more emergency accommodation in the town, the Council is planning to use the former British Rail Social Club in St Andrew's Road – which it has recently purchased as part of a long-term project to celebrate Northampton's heritage – as a temporary facility providing emergency overnight shelter for people sleeping rough in the town. Officers are now consulting with key stakeholders on the role that the nightshelter will play in reducing rough sleeping, the services that it will provide, how it will be run and how it will be funded.

Building on the success of the first Rough Sleepers Strategy Workshop in February, the Council's Housing & Wellbeing Service and Community Safety Team have organised another half day

Workshop – which is taking place on 29th April 2016 – to agree on the key themes, objectives, outcomes and actions that will underpin our new 3 year Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy.

Consequences for landlords who fail to license their HMOs on time

When I introduced the new Housing Enforcement Policy and Fees & Charges Policy at Cabinet in February 2016, I said that the new policies were designed to change the behaviour of owners, landlords and 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 it may not last very long.

Since 1st April 2016, any landlord who has been operating a licensable HMO for more than 26 weeks without a licence will be issued with a 2 year HMO licence, rather than the standard 5 year HMO licence. Furthermore, where the Council's inspection of that HMO identifies a Category 1 hazard and/or a breach of the HMO Management Regulations, the Private Sector Housing Team will ensure that the landlord is served with a Notice and issued with only a 1 year HMO licence.

One of the landlords who has recently fallen foul of the new rules has just paid £650 more for a 3 year HMO licence than they would have paid for a 5 year licence under the old system. By applying for a licence several months late, the landlord will be paying more than 3 times as much over the next 5 years as they would have done if they had applied for their licence on time

The Council's new multi agency, intelligence-led approach to licensing and enforcement is helping us identify and target the owners, landlords and managing agents who are flouting the law, ruining local neighbourhoods and putting tenants' health and wellbeing at risk. As part of this approach, the Private Sector Housing Team is working closely with the University of Northampton, the Northampton Student Landlords Network and DASH (Decent And Safe Housing) to identify, tackle and prosecute landlords and agents who are operating licensable HMOs without a licence.

Northamptonshire's Housing Protocol for Care Leavers

Following the successful implementation of the County's Homelessness Protocol (16 & 17 Year Olds) in November 2015, the Housing & Wellbeing Service has again played a pivotal role in the drafting and approval of Northamptonshire's Housing Protocol for Care Leavers.

This new Protocol – signed by the County Council's Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executives of the County Council and the 7 Borough & District Councils – is designed to ensure that 'looked after' children are prepared for independent living, leave care when they are ready and move on to settled housing (which may include social rented housing) in a planned way.

Effective from 4th April 2016, the Housing Protocol (Care Leavers) sets out the roles and responsibilities of Children's Social Care, the Leaving Care Team, the seven local Housing Authorities and the social housing providers. It describes the action that the young person needs to take to apply for social rented housing and what each Housing Authority will then do to ensure that the young person receives an offer of suitable housing when they are ready to leave care.

The Protocol also sets out what advice and support social landlords, Children's Social Care and the Leaving Care Team are required to provide in order to ensure that, when a care leaver is offered the tenancy of suitable social rented housing, they are able to sustain it.

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Cabinet Member for Housing