



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

23rd January 2017

Northampton's Rough Sleepers Count

On 9th December 2016, I took part in a borough-wide count of rough sleepers, organised by the Council's Housing Options & Advice Manager.

A total of 27 volunteers (representing a broad range of organisations, including the Hope Centre, Midland Heart, Bridge, local faith groups 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.

The volunteers observed a total of 9 people 'bedded down' in the borough. This was less than half the number found during our last Rough Sleepers Count, held on 24th March 2016, when the volunteers observed a total of 21 people 'bedded down' in the borough.

Northampton's next Rough Sleepers Count will take place in July 2017.

Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter

In my last report, I explained that the building works and decoration are now complete and that we are seeking to recruit a Co-ordinator, Assistant Co-ordinator and a team of around 60 volunteers.

I am pleased to report that, at the time of writing, interviews are taking place for the Co-ordinator and Assistant Co-ordinator roles and formal written applications have been received from two thirds of the volunteers that are needed to run the Nightshelter.

Although the Nightshelter cannot open until the full complement of volunteers is recruited and trained – because we need to be sure that we can keep it open 7 days a week, all year round – Officers are working extremely hard to enable the Nightshelter to open on 31 January 2017.

I will provide a further update on the Nightshelter - and when it will open – at the Council meeting.

Anyone wishing to support the nightshelter (by becoming a volunteer or donating equipment, furniture or money) should visit the Northampton Nightshelter webpage on the Council's website:

www.northampton.gov.uk/northamptonnightshelter

Social Lettings Agency

I am very pleased to report that, at its meeting on 11th January 2017, Cabinet approved the Business Case and the establishment of Guildhall Residential Lettings, an in-house Social Lettings Agency that will help the Council to improve standards in Northampton's private rented sector, bring empty homes back into use, reduce its use of Bed & Breakfast and make it easier for people to access good quality, well managed, affordable private rented accommodation.

Recruitment of the Social Lettings Agency staff – including an Empty Homes Officer – is underway with a view to the full team being in place by the beginning of April 2017.

Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation

The Housing and Wellbeing Service has commenced the process for determining the need for an Additional HMO Licensing Scheme in the Far Cotton and Delapre areas.

An Additional HMO Licensing Scheme is being considered alongside an Article 4 Direction. As part of their appraisal of the need for an Additional HMO Licensing Scheme, Officers are gathering evidence from a variety of sources, surveying properties and speaking to residents to establish the number of HMOs in the area and the impact that HMOs are having on the local community.

On completion of the research, the Council will make a decision on whether or not the evidence supports the need for an Additional HMO Licensing Scheme. If the evidence supports the need for a scheme, an Additional HMO Licensing Consultation Report will be produced and this will form the basis of a robust consultation exercise of a minimum of 12 weeks.

Prosecution of HMO Landlord

I am delighted to report that, earlier this month, a private landlord was prosecuted and fined for failing to secure the appropriate licence for an HMO in Northampton.

At a preliminary hearing at Northampton Magistrates Court on 10 January, the landlord pleaded guilty to the charge of failing to licence a property as a house in multiple occupation. He was fined £1000 and ordered to pay the Council's full legal costs of £3760.22 and a victim surcharge of £100 within the next 28 days. The 4 tenants are now able to pursue a Rent Repayment Order, seeking the repayment of up to 12 months' rent.

The Council is committed to improving the private rented sector in Northampton by tackling criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords. This prosecution shows that we can take decisive, affirmative action to protect renters from the risks associated with unlicensed properties. We will continue to pursue legal action against irresponsible landlords wherever appropriate.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing