



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

24th April 2017

Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter

I am delighted to report that, since opening on 6th February 2017, the Nightshelter has been making a huge difference to the lives of people who would otherwise have needed to sleep rough.

During the first couple of months, the Nightshelter accepted 61 referrals, provided emergency shelter for 50 homeless men, and helped 22 people to move on into suitable accommodation.

In order to build on the success of the Nightshelter, we will soon be establishing a series of 'task and finish' groups that will focus on the achievement of the other 9 objectives in 'TOGETHER we change lives', our multi agency strategy for ending the need to sleep rough in Northampton.

Anyone wishing to support the Nightshelter (by becoming a volunteer or making a donation) should visit the Northampton Nightshelter webpage on the Council's website:

www.northampton.gov.uk/northamptonnightshelter

Proposed Changes to Private Sector Housing Enforcement

In previous reports, I have described the changes we have made to the way in which we tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords, and I have explained how we have equipped the Officers with the necessary skills, confidence and tools to successfully prosecute offenders.

Since February 2016 – when the Cabinet approved a new Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy – the Government has introduced a series of measures (set out in the Housing & Planning Act 2016) to help local authorities to tackle rogue landlords and managing agents.

As the Government has now issued its guidance on the use of Civil Penalties and Rent Repayment Orders – two of the key measures in the Housing & Planning Act 2016 – we will be developing a Private Sector Housing Civil Penalties Policy (and updating our Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy) for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting in July 2017.

In order to inform our decisions on the content of the new policies, we will be holding a series of landlord focus groups – for landlords, managing agents, regulatory authorities and a wide range of other stakeholders – in the Guildhall on 26 & 27 April 2017.

Northampton is one of only a small number of local authorities that have been working with the Government to develop the guidance on the use of Civil Penalties and Rent Repayment Orders, and the Home Office and DCLG have expressed a lot of interest in our intelligence-led, risk based approach to housing enforcement and tackling criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords.

Social Lettings Agency

I am very pleased to report that the recruitment process is now complete.

Two of the 4 roles (the Social Lettings Agency Manager and the Lettings Negotiator) have been filled by candidates who have extensive experience of working in residential lettings businesses.

The Social Lettings Agency will support the Council's efforts to improve housing standards and management in the borough's private rented sector, bring empty homes back into use, prevent homelessness and reduce the number of households living in bed and breakfast accommodation.

In my next report, I will be providing more information about the action we are taking to set up a private sector leasing scheme (to reduce the Council's use of bed and breakfast) and to persuade property owners to employ the Social Lettings Agency to let and manage their accommodation.

Northampton Hospital Discharge Scheme

The 'Hospital 2 Home' (H2H) hospital discharge scheme was set up in May 2015 and provides holistic interventions that enable patients' safe and timely discharge from hospital.

Officers from the Council's Housing & Wellbeing Service attend weekly discharge meetings at Northampton General Hospital and Berrywood Hospital and work with the health and social care professionals (and local services and organisations) to assess patients' needs and facilitate their safe discharge from hospital. This frees up hospital beds that can then be used for other patients.

The primary outcomes of the H2H Scheme are to reduce the length of stay, and prevent readmission and homelessness. The secondary outcomes are to improve the customer experience of hospital discharge and to provide a wrap-around service when people leave hospital.

During its first 22 months, the H2H Scheme has dealt with 150 patients (87 men and 63 women), 88% of whom were under pensionable age. Almost two thirds of the people assisted under the scheme (including 19 patients who had previously been sleeping rough) were homeless.

Northampton Partnership Homes

NPH's annual Delivery Plan, published within the last few weeks, sets out very clearly the ALMO's achievements to date and its ambitious strategic objectives for the coming year.

I was very pleased to learn that, following a comprehensive tender process which involved extensive tenant involvement, NPH has now appointed a new investment contractor (Keepmoat), on a partnering basis, to deliver our planned investment works to the Council's existing council homes and estates for a period of up to 10 years.

I am delighted, also, that planning consent has been granted for the development of a brand new older persons housing scheme (comprising 45 homes) at Lakeview Close, and that the go-ahead is likely to be given soon for the installation of PV (photo-voltaic) panels to be installed on approximately 5,000 council homes in order to reduce tenants' fuel bills and tackle fuel poverty.

Working closely with the Council, NPH is undertaking a comprehensive review of service charges.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing