



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

11th December 2017

Northampton's Rough Sleepers Count

On 10th November 2017, the Leader of the Council and I took part in a borough-wide count of rough sleepers, meticulously organised by the Council's Housing Options & Advice Manager.

A total of 36 volunteers – representing a broad range of organisations, including local faith groups, Northampton Partnership Homes, S2S, Midland Heart, Northamptonshire County Council (Children's Services), SSAFA, the British Army, the Hope Centre and the Council – took part in the count, which covered all Wards and was carried out between Midnight and 3.00am.

The volunteers observed a total of 13 people (10 men and 3 women) 'bedded down' in the borough. On the night of the count, 11 men were staying in the town's Emergency Nightshelter.

All of the people found 'bedded down' were over the age of 25 and, of the 11 people who were identified during the count, 10 were already known to the Council's Street Outreach Team. Of these, 5 were refusing to engage with local services and 4 had recently been provided with accommodation but had lost it through their own actions.

This year's count was attended by a representative of Homeless Link (commissioned by the Government to monitor, observe and validate rough sleepers estimates and counts) who thanked all of the volunteers for their involvement and said that, of all the counts he had attended, Northampton's was the best organised and the only one that covered the whole of the borough.

Housing Enforcement Team

On 17th January 2018, the Cabinet will consider a Business Case for using the income that the Council receives from civil penalties and rent repayment orders to fund a significant expansion of the Housing Enforcement Team.

If the Business Case is approved, the expanded Housing Enforcement Team will be in a much stronger position to tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and managing agents who knowingly rent out accommodation that is unlicensed, substandard and/or unsafe.

Mandatory HMO Licensing

The Government has now confirmed that, on 6th April 2018, the definition of Mandatory HMOs will be extended to include all properties (not just those with 3 or more storeys) that are occupied by at least 5 people who are unrelated to one another.

As the Government intends to allow landlords six months' grace to license all of the HMOs that are affected by this change of definition, the Housing Enforcement Team is planning to publicise the changes to ensure that as many of the affected HMOs as possible (including those operating in the Far Cotton and Delapre areas) are licensed by 6th October 2018.

After 6th October 2018, it will be a criminal offence for landlords and managing agents to operate these larger HMOs without a valid HMO licence. Enforcement action – resulting in prosecution or the imposition of civil penalties – will be taken against as many of these offenders as possible.

SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)

As I explained in my last report, arrangements are in place to provide homeless people with emergency shelter, in the Hope Centre, during severe weather.

Although homeless people will continue to access the Nightshelter in the usual way, SWEP will become operational when it is forecast – by the Met Office – that the temperature in Northampton will fall below freezing for at least 3 consecutive nights.

Although the Council will continue to co-ordinate SWEP and provide funding and volunteers, the Hope Centre has agreed that, during the winter of 2017/18, it will host SWEP and take the lead in ensuring that everything runs smoothly on the nights that emergency shelter is required.

Northampton Partnership Homes

Once every 2 years, Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) is required to commission a survey, on the Council's behalf, to capture the views of tenants and residents on NPH's performance.

The survey, known as STAR (Survey for Tenants and Residents), is conducted independently and focuses on 7 standard core questions. This is the first STAR survey since NPH was created.

I am delighted to report that, since the creation of NPH, tenant and resident satisfaction has increased in every single area, with the improvement ranging from 4% (for 'Quality of home' and 'Overall service provided') to 12% ('Rent provides value for money'):

CORE QUESTION	2010	2012	2014	2017	Improvement since 2014
Overall service provided	78%	▼75%	▼72%	▲76%	4%
Quality of home	79%	▼72%	▼71%	▲75%	4%

Repairs and maintenance	72%	▼71%	▼67%	▲72%	5%
Neighbourhood	83%	▼72%	▼68%	▲72%	4%
Rent provides value for money	77%	▼70%	▼66%	▲78%	12%
Service charges provide value for money	N/A	51%	▲53%	▲61%	8%
Views listened to and acted upon	N/A	▼49%	▼46%	▲56%	10%

These results are a great testament to the Council's decision to create NPH.

Building new homes and improving existing ones

I am very pleased to report that Officers from the Council and Northampton Partnership Homes are close to recommending a delivery model that will enable at least 100 new council homes to be built every year for the next 10 years. Further details will be announced in January 2018.

In the meantime, NPH is continuing to build new council homes:

- Extra homes have been created (through the conversion and reconfiguration of existing buildings) in Eleanore House, Dovercourt and Woodstock;
- Construction work has started on Lakeview House to provide 45 homes in a brand new older persons' housing scheme);
- Construction work has started at Little Cross Street to provide 9 new flats and 9 new maisonettes; and
- Construction work is progressing well in relation to the 14 family homes being built at Lower Bath Street and the 2 large family homes being built at Althorpe Street, and these are due to be completed in February 2018.

Northampton Partnership Homes is establishing a pipeline of new development opportunities.

Planning consent has been granted for the demolition of 10 unfit, non-traditional homes at Toms Close, Collingtree and the development of 21 new family homes.

Implementation of the Council Garage Sites Strategy is ongoing. A contract to upgrade a number of garage sites has been let to Kiers and is progressing well. A number of redundant

garage sites have been evaluated for potential redevelopment with new family homes. These are in the process of being taken through the formal planning approval process.

NPH has been addressing fire and safety issues at Overslade House, Camp Hill and has decanted the scheme in preparation for major reconfiguration and refurbishment.

Work to regenerate Spring Borough is well underway, with works to upgrade the exterior of all blocks and to upgrade landscaping throughout the estate. Work to refurbish St Katherine's tower block – providing externally insulated cladding (all conforming to class 0 fire rating), new bin stores and an entrance lobby, upgrading all mechanical and electrical installations and installing a sprinkler system – will be completed by the end of March 2018.

External block refurbishment works at Kings Heath (including new balconies) have been completed, and landscape works are due to commence early next year.

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Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing