



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

### Northampton Borough Council

5<sup>th</sup> November 2018

#### **Annual Rough Sleepers Count**

Each year, the Council organises a Rough Sleepers Count to obtain a snapshot of the number of people seen sleeping rough in the borough on a particular night.

The Count is carried out strictly in accordance with government criteria and guidance in order to ensure that it is as accurate and consistent as possible and it can reasonably be compared across regions, local authority areas and over time. It can be an effective means of gauging the scale of the borough's rough sleeping problem and monitoring progress.

For the purpose of the Count, rough sleepers are defined as:

*“People sleeping, about to bed down or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments) or in buildings or other places that are not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or “bashes”).*

The definition does not include people in hostels or the nightshelter.

This year's Count will be co-ordinated from the Guildhall and, like previous years, it will cover all 33 Wards, it will be carried out between midnight and 3.00am, and it will be attended by a representative of Homeless Link which has been commissioned by the government to monitor, observe and validate counts.

#### **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)**

Everyone knows that sleeping rough is dangerous and reduces life expectancy. That is why it is so important that everyone in the borough does everything they can to encourage people who are sleeping rough to engage with housing and support providers and leave the streets.

During freezing temperatures – and during exceptionally high temperatures – people who are sleeping rough are at greatest risk. It is for this reason that, during severe weather, special arrangements are put in place under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

There is no strict definition of what counts as ‘severe weather’.

However, SWEP will normally operate when the temperature falls below freezing and is forecast (by the Met Office) to remain below freezing for a period of at least three consecutive nights.

SWEP is co-ordinated by the Housing & Wellbeing Service and complements the work of the Nightshelter, the Street Outreach Team and other local services and organisations. When SWEP is activated, overnight shelter is provided at Oasis House between 9.00pm and 7.00am.

Although overnight cover will be provided by specialist support workers, a team of volunteers will be needed to support the smooth running of SWEP during the evenings and mornings.

## **Midland Heart's vision for Oasis House**

On 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Midland Heart Housing Association (which owns Oasis House) announced the outcome of its nationwide review of its supported living service. It has said that, in future, its focus will be on delivering services that make the biggest difference and enable people with complex needs to move on successfully from supported housing to independent living. Midland Heart has confirmed that it wants to work more closely with the Council and other organisations to increase the amount of temporary accommodation in Oasis House and to deliver a range of services from the building that are designed to end the cycle of homelessness and promote independence, tenancy readiness and employment.

Although these changes will require the relocation of the day centre to alternative premises, I welcome the opportunity for the Council to work more closely with Midland Heart and, indeed, with any organisation that is committed to ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton and, very importantly, to ending the cycle of homelessness.

For more information about what the Council and its partners are doing to tackle rough sleeping in Northampton, please visit [www.northampton.gov.uk/rs](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/rs)

## **Reducing the use and cost of temporary accommodation**

High levels of homelessness, together with the severe shortage of affordable housing, have resulted in a sharp increase in the Council's use of temporary accommodation and the amount of time that homeless households are required to wait until they are offered settled housing.

During the past 2½ years (March 2016 – October 2018) the number of households living in temporary accommodation has more than quadrupled from 66 to 307.

The financial impact of these changes on the Council is exacerbated by the fact that around 80% of the temporary accommodation the Council uses is procured from suppliers at nightly rates that are a lot higher than it is able to recover through charges.

Although action has already been taken to minimise the amount of time that households spend in temporary accommodation and reduce the net cost to the Council, further action is urgently required to reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation.

On 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Cabinet will consider a report on a series of options that focus on the prevention of homelessness, the provision of less expensive types of temporary accommodation (including private sector leasing, council homes managed by NPH and properties purchased through the General Fund) and reducing the time spent in temporary accommodation.

## **New homes planned for Tanners Pub site**

I am delighted that, in October 2018, planning permission was given for the development of the Tanners Pub site to provide 17 new council homes, two commercial units and a community room, as well as 10 new garages and car parking.

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