



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

4th November 2019

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

On 15th November, the Housing and Wellbeing Service will hold the last of three multi agency workshops to help shape the development of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The drafting of the new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is due to be completed by the end of December and will be followed by a 28 day consultation commencing on 2nd January.

Single Homelessness Forum

Northampton's Single Homelessness Forum – which was attended by a broad cross-section of services and organisations – had its first quarterly meeting on 15th October.

During the meeting, the Single Homelessness Forum considered a wide range of issues, including the rough sleeping strategy, the annual rough sleepers count, the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), the establishment of an 'alternative giving' scheme and a public petition calling on the Council to establish a 'safe area' for rough sleepers in the town centre.

At the end of the meeting, the Forum appointed the Revd Sue Faulkner (Vicar of St Mary's Church, Dallington and St James' Church, Northampton) as its Independent Chair.

Annual Rough Sleepers Count

During the second half of November, we will be carrying out our annual borough-wide rough sleepers count on one night between Midnight and 3.00am.

Last November, 36 volunteers (representing a broad range of organisations, including the Council, Northamptonshire Police and local support agencies) took part in the Count.

When the results of the 2019 Rough Sleepers Count are published, the Single Homelessness Forum will include a position statement confirming the number of people who are believed to be sleeping rough in Northampton on any one night. This will ensure that the number of people found 'bedded down' on the night of the Count will be set in context.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

Members of the Single Homelessness Forum are very supportive of the idea of changing the criteria that is used to determine when SWEP is triggered.

If there is enough support from the faith and community groups and we can attract enough volunteers, SWEP will be activated when the Met Office forecasts that the 'feels like' temperature (taking into account windchill) will be 0°C or below for at least three consecutive nights.

Restructure of the Housing Advice & Options Service

Since my last report, we have advertised all of the vacant posts and are hoping that most of the new staff will be in post by the beginning of January.

The restructure will improve the effectiveness of the Service, support the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, increase the number of households prevented from becoming homeless, and cut rough sleeping and the use and cost of temporary accommodation.

Designation of an Additional HMO Licensing Scheme

On 16 October, the Cabinet considered the results of the comprehensive 10 week consultation exercise and approved the designation of a five year Additional HMO licensing scheme.

The new scheme will come into effect on 1 February 2020.

A robust, multi-agency approach to housing enforcement

The appointment of a new Housing Enforcement Manager at the end of August 2019 has resulted in a marked increase in the amount of housing enforcement activity that is being taken against criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords in the borough.

The Housing Enforcement Team is working very closely with the Police, Fire Service, Gangmasters, Trading Standards and Immigration in order to provide a targeted, joined up approach and ensure that criminal landlords do not derive any financial benefit from their offences.

In recent weeks, the Housing Enforcement Team has undertaken joint visits with the Police Intelligence Team to properties where intelligence has indicated that they are licensable HMOs operating without an HMO licence and there are credible links to modern slavery. Visits have also been requested by the Fire & Rescue Service.

As a result of these visits, it has been possible to identify unlicensed and overcrowded HMOs, and basements that have no natural lighting or fire safety. Prohibition orders have been imposed and, where appropriate, landlords will be prosecuted or receive a civil penalty,

Northampton Landlord Forum

The next meeting of the Landlord Forum is on 19 November and will focus on the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme, the Article 4 Direction and fire safety.

Outstanding feedback for Call Care

Call Care's annual audit by the Telecare Services Association (TSA) has gone extremely well and will result in the team retaining accreditation by the leading Telecare services accrediting body.

During the two day audit, the TSA auditor observed the team, attended an installation, interviewed staff and customers, and assessed Call Care against the TSA's new Quality Standards Framework.

The feedback from the audit was that the Call Care team is outstanding, with strong, supportive and innovative leadership. The team has been asked to be a reference site and an example of best practice in a number of areas, including performance management and training.

Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH)

NCC's Supported Living Projects

Since Cabinet approval of NPH's involvement in the schemes, the Eleanor Lodge lease has been executed and planning applications have been submitted to deliver the two new build schemes at Moray Lodge and Billing Brook Road, Thorplands.

I am pleased to report that planning approval has been given for Moray Lodge and planning approval for Thorplands is awaiting finalisation of the flood risk assessment.

Works will commence on site at Moray Lodge later this month.

Council House New Build Programme

Planning approval has been granted for 'The Roof Gardens', the demolition of Berkeley House and St Mary's Court, and the construction of a new build scheme of 124 homes.

A report will be submitted to Cabinet in November, detailing the proposal and requesting final approval to proceed with the scheme.

Belgrave House

The proposal to convert Belgrave House (a former office block) in Northampton Town Centre into the Clock House to provide 126 homes is progressing.

To enable NPH to complete the design and de-risk the scheme, invasive investigation works are being carried to the structure and fabric of the building,

Planned Investment Programme

Planned investment works have commenced and are well underway at Lings, Lumbertubs, Lakeview and Blackthorn. Good, positive feedback is being received from tenants.

NPH Community Bus 'Daphne'

Following its launch on the Market Square in July, NPH's new "neighbourhood community bus" is now in full operation and is being well received by residents.

This new initiative has enabled NPH to take housing services direct to tenants in their neighbourhood. Tenants said they wanted NPH to spend more time in their neighbourhoods and, in response, NPH has fitted out a community bus. This will help residents meet Housing Officers to discuss what is affecting their homes. It will bring the Officers to them and provides an opportunity for Councillors to join the bus to meet tenants when it is out and about in their Wards.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing