

Northampton Borough Council
Full Council Meeting – Monday 26th March 2007

Statement from Cllr. Yousuf Miah
Cabinet Member for Residential Operations

In addition to my regular meetings with the Corporate Manager and with members in the Housing Operations Team, I am pleased to report significant progress in the following areas of work within the portfolio.

1. **Fish Street Services Move to the Guildhall** - This move will enable us to bring some of the key services in the council together and in doing so, offer customers an improved level of service from the One Stop Shop. Undoubtedly, there will be changes and disruption will be felt both internally as well as by the customers however, our staff have approached the move in a positive frame of mind and we have met to look at the practicalities of the move. We will continue to meet regularly to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible and learn as we go along. It will be vital to monitor closely the way things work or don't work and rectify them.
2. **Choice Based Lettings** – The close workings of several areas, including VOIDS, allocations, repairs etc. have resulted in an excellent trial. We will now be undertaking an evaluation of the programme to see what could be learnt with all the early signals pointing to a very successful scheme to date. The interest and take-up has been both positive and welcomed by most people. The project plan for coming months will give us a clearer idea post the evaluation period as to how the future of our housing needs and allocations will be.
3. **Allocations Review** – Cabinet approved the review of our Allocations Policy with a move to limiting the number of offers made to people. In order to bring us in line with other good practices across the county and elsewhere, we are looking at a benchmarking exercise with this review. It will not just look at the current systems and measures in place in respect of the allocations policy but also look at ways we can help our customers help us, to help them. We have set up a sub-group to look at this, including members from N-TACT and we will discuss a raft of ideas and issues in the meeting scheduled for April.
4. **Sheltered Housing review** – Changes to the way we deliver our services to sheltered scheme residents will come into effect from April and a great deal of work has gone on in the past 18 months to determine the types and levels of support residents need and we will no doubt learn a great deal more from the next six months. It is important to point out that this review, from a housing needs point of view, is going to target residents and their individual needs as opposed to a common policy for all. In addition to receiving 24 hour service from the excellent Call Care service, many residents will now get an extra 30% more in way of support, 7 days a week. It's a flexible and more responsive service, allowing for reassessments of customers

changing need as and when it's required. We will no doubt learn a great deal in coming months.

5. **Rough sleepers Task and Finish** – Scrutiny's focus on this area has given us an insight into the diverse needs of many of our residents here in the town. This exercise has to date demonstrated the need for us to look the current and future housing needs of our town. Although not a huge percentage, rough sleepers are an increasing feature of many towns and cities. In looking at the issues surrounding homelessness, we need to focus on this area and recognise the serious shortage of hostel places available for ever increasing numbers of people who may not necessarily be from Northampton but do find themselves here because outside of London, Northampton is the first point of call for many unless they venture further north into Birmingham and Nottingham. DCLG have commended our work in the area of homelessness and as a result, we stand a good chance in being awarded additional funds to look at appropriate projects and we are working together to put a proposal together. We have met with representatives of DCLG this week.
6. **Travellers** – We continue our discussions in search of long term solutions in this area. Outside of the box thinking is required if we are to find suitable, acceptable solutions for the long term for the travelling community. Our work with other local authorities in the county is key and Northampton Borough Council is committed to working closely together in partnership to find a viable long term solution.
7. **Customer Pledge** – Our Customer Pledge was designed to offer clear roles, responsibilities and expectations of our customers and we as landlords. We need to ensure that the Pledge is working and closer scrutiny incoming weeks and months will tell us just how well it's working in practice. We will continue to look at ways to strengthen and support our tenant's representative group N-TACT to ensure we are working together and better and in doing so help them to increase their capacity and representation to truly reflect our diverse tenants.

In addition to the above, I have met with and regularly meet with our officers dealing with Performance Management, Housing Officers, cross Portfolio work particularly with colleagues and officers in Westbridge and the repairs section.

End.