

Council
Monday 23rd July 2007

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing

Value for money public services

Council Tax

I have recently supported a campaign against council tax dodgers to ensure greater compliance and fairness for all residents of this town. This authority will be issuing bankruptcy orders against debtors owing over £5,000 who have the ability to pay. Northampton Borough Council offers advice and assistance to those who genuinely cannot pay their council tax, whilst acknowledging that it is unacceptable for others to refuse to pay for the services provided by the Borough and County Councils and the police.

I can report that by the end of May, Northampton Borough Council had signed up 48,943 people to pay their Council Tax by direct debit, the best ever level for the 8th week running, and I would like to congratulate staff for all their hard work.

Give people more say in their neighbourhoods

Good Neighbour Declaration

This authority has recently signed up to its own Good Neighbour Declaration, as part of the government's Respect initiative. Landlords and tenants will be expected to sign up to the Declaration as part of their tenancy agreements, giving a commitment not to tolerate criminal or abusive behaviour, or harassment of any kind. Landlords will have responsibility to take appropriate action to deal with neighbourhood nuisance, to ensure that the actions of a selfish minority do not spoil the lives of others within the community.

Choice-based lettings scheme

Northampton Borough Council has recently piloted a scheme in Spring Boroughs for single person accommodation to give potential tenants greater choice in their housing. The scheme allows individuals applying to the housing register to choose where they live. Based on the success of the pilot, the scheme is now being rolled out across town & will include more of those on the housing register.

Build homes people can afford to live in

Decent Homes

Meeting the Decent Homes standard will be a major challenge for this authority, and while some progress has already been made, I am keen to drive forward any improvements which will be beneficial to tenants. Kitchens, heating and roofs have been identified for priority attention, under a rolling programme. The council will also be revisiting sheltered accommodation properties previously fitted with double-glazed doors to fit newer, stronger pvc doors. Funding will also be channelled into empty properties to enable them to meet the Decent Homes standard.

Empowering people

Homelessness

Recommendations following work by the Overview & Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Rough Sleepers have been considered and are already being implemented, for example, NBC has now taken a lead of all agencies in the homelessness forums, and research is being undertaken on the provision of extra beds and halfway houses. The Borough and County Councils have an aspiration to review provision of extra beds during bad weather. The Borough has also informed neighbourhood wardens on the frequented locations of rough sleepers in order to monitor their numbers and advise on available beds.

Tenant Participation

All housing officers are now responsible for ensuring tenants are fully involved in decision making about council properties under the new Tenant Participation Agreement. For example, tenants will now be consulted on how money allocated to achieving the Decent Homes standard is spent and the Borough's allocations policy.

Revenues & Benefits

The Revenues & Benefits team have recently been nominated for the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) award for the Most Improved Team, and have just learnt that they have been shortlisted. The judges panel will be visiting them over the next two months before making a final decision, and on behalf of the council I would like to wish them good luck.

Sally Beardsworth
10th July 2007