



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

4th June 2018

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

As I explained in my last report, the Homelessness Reduction Act has extended the duties that housing authorities have towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Although the Housing Options & Advice Team is still adapting the way in which it works with customers in response to the new legislation, the Council's recruitment of a Single Homelessness Adviser (based at the Guildhall) is already helping to prevent homelessness.

Working closely with the Street Outreach Workers and Tenancy Relations Officer, the Single Homelessness Adviser has already prevented more than a dozen people from being evicted, without a valid notice, from houses in multiple occupation. She has also negotiated with friends, relatives and landlords to allow people more time to secure alternative accommodation.

On 25th July 2018, the Head of Housing & Wellbeing and the Housing Options & Advice Manager will be delivering a Homelessness Reduction Act Briefing for Members. During the session, they will describe the Act, explain how the new service is operating and answer Members' questions.

Housing Enforcement Team

On 2nd May 2018, Northampton's Magistrates Court ordered the rogue landlord of an unlicensed HMO in Whitworth Road, Northampton to pay a fine of £36,000 (plus the Council's costs of £2,850.22 and a victim surcharge of £170) when he pleaded guilty to 12 charges.

The landlord had been served with an improvement notice but had failed to comply with it and, when the Housing Enforcement Team visited, they identified a large number of offences, including dangerous electrics, obstructed fire exits and poorly maintained communal areas.

This prosecution shows why we need to continue taking a hard line with criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords who think it is acceptable to put their tenants' health and safety at risk.

On 15th May 2018, Officers from Wolverhampton's City Council visited Northampton to learn about the Council's approach to criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and the Housing Enforcement Team's intelligence-led, targeted approach to enforcement. From their feedback, it is clear that they were impressed and inspired by what we are doing in Northampton.

Overview & Scrutiny review of homelessness and rough sleeping

I welcome the work that the Scrutiny Panel will be undertaking to review the way in which the Council and its partners engage with rough sleepers, consider the best way in which 'Housing First' can be used to reduce rough sleeping in the borough, and understand the nature and extent of 'hidden homelessness' and how it can best be addressed.

I do hope that, with the input and commitment of all of the key stakeholders involved, everyone will work even harder together to reduce rough sleeping and, in doing so, prevent the premature deaths of hundreds of people who spend weeks, months or even years on the street.

I look forward, also, to receiving the Scrutiny Panel's findings and recommendations in relation to 'hidden homelessness' and how it can best be addressed.

HMO Briefing for Members

On 25th July 2018, the Head of Housing & Wellbeing and the Private Sector Housing Manager will be delivering an HMO Briefing for Members. During the session, they will describe landlords' obligations in relation to licensing and the HMO Management Regulations, explain what action is being taken to identify and punish those who break the law, and answer questions.

Better temporary accommodation for homeless families

Despite the sharp rise in the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation, I am pleased to report that good progress has been made in reducing the number of households placed in Bed & Breakfast and out-of-borough accommodation.

Since 31st March 2017 – when 95 homeless households were living in Bed & Breakfast and, of these, 51 were living in temporary accommodation outside the Northampton Borough – the Council has procured a large stock of self-contained, nightly-purchased accommodation in Northampton. By doing this, it has been able to reduce its use of Bed & Breakfast by more than two thirds and reduce its use of out-of-borough accommodation by more than 80%.

On 13th June 2018, Cabinet will consider a report that recommends changes to the way in which the Council calculates the amount it charges households for temporary accommodation.

Northampton Partnership Homes

Annual Tenant and Leaseholder Conference

NPH's third annual conference, held at the Derngate Theatre on 24th April 2018, was a great success and, as well as receiving updates on progress and achievements, delegates learned about and celebrated the work that is being done in the community.

One of the highlights of the conference was the presentation of two Community Hero Awards that recognise people who go 'above and beyond' to support their neighbours and communities. This year's winners are Rose Agarm (who won the 'Community Champion' category) and Maggie Kirton (who won the 'Great Neighbour' category).

I congratulate Rose and Maggie on their awards and thank all of the nominees for the support that they have given, and continue to give, to their neighbours and communities.

Northampton break dancer and role model shortlisted for national photography award

I am delighted to report that Leigh Evelyn ('Swifty') – a tenant and community champion who has worked tirelessly to get more young people involved in dance – has had one of his photographs shortlisted for this year's National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) Photography Competition.

Visits to new council homes in Lower Bath Street and Lakeview Close

At an official opening of the scheme on 27th April 2018, Andrew Lewer MP, the Leader of the Council and I had the pleasure of meeting some of the 18 families who have recently moved into the new council homes that Northampton Partnership Homes has built in Lower Bath Street. It was heartening to see the real and lasting improvements being made in Spring Boroughs.

Earlier that day, the Leader of the Council and I had been given a guided tour of the older persons housing scheme being built at Lakeview House. We were both very impressed by the facilities that are being provided and by the speed with which the construction is progressing.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing