



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

### Northampton Borough Council

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018

#### **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act came into effect, extending the duties that housing authorities have towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amends the homelessness legislation by:

- Improving the advice and information available about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness
- Extending the 'threatened with homelessness' period from 28 days to 56 days
- Introducing new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and intentionality
- Introducing holistic needs assessments and personalised housing plans, setting out the steps that individuals and local housing authorities will take to find and keep suitable accommodation
- Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a duty to refer

Although the Council's Housing Options & Advice Team has worked very hard to adapt the way in which it delivers its services and works with customers, the new duties have substantially increased the amount of time that Officers spend in interviews and completing paperwork.

One of the Council's main concerns about the new legislation is the impact that the 'relief' duty is likely to have on the amount of time homeless households spend in temporary accommodation.

The Head of Housing & Wellbeing and Housing Options & Advice Manager will be delivering a couple of Member Briefings at the beginning of June 2018. During the sessions, they will describe the way in which the new service is operating and answer Members' questions.

#### **Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter**

Everyone who visits the Nightshelter is surprised by how calm it is and, during a recent visit, a local dignitary described it as "a welcoming, warm and somehow very special place".

With its positive atmosphere – and its excellent track record of restoring trust, promoting respect, improving self-worth and encouraging aspiration – it is, indeed, a very special place.

During the last few weeks, I have been talking to Officers about the future of the Nightshelter, including the merits and feasibility of relocating it to permanent premises and, in the longer term, setting it up as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). A Business Case will be prepared, for consideration by Cabinet, within the next few months.

In the meantime, the Nightshelter is continuing to strengthen its links with Goodwill Solutions which will soon be providing Nightshelter guests with easy access to its innovative lifeskills training programme and 'preparation for work' courses at its HQ in Moulton Park.

### **Rogue landlords and property agents**

On 6<sup>th</sup> April 2018, the Government introduced two new measures to help local authorities tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and property agents who knowingly let out private rented accommodation that is substandard, unlicensed and/or unsafe.

The national database of rogue landlords – containing the details of landlords and property agents who have received two or more civil penalties or have been convicted of a serious housing, immigration or other criminal offence – will enable local authorities to share information about offenders and target their enforcement action.

Landlords and property agents who are convicted of certain housing, immigration and criminal offences may also receive a Banning Order, preventing them from letting or managing accommodation for a period of between 12 months and life. Everyone who receives a Banning Order will have their details added to the national database and, if they ignore a Banning Order, they will face criminal sanctions, including up to 6 months imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

Impressed by Northampton's work with private landlords and its intelligence-led, targeted approach to housing enforcement, the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government has written to the Council's Private Sector Housing Manager, inviting her to provide the civil servants in the MHCLG's Homelessness, Leasehold & Private Renting Directorate with training and advice on what we are doing to improve Northampton's private rented sector.

### **Extension of Mandatory HMO Licensing**

As I explained in my last report, the definition of a Mandatory HMO is being extended, from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018, to include all houses in multiple occupation (not just those with 3 or more storeys) that are occupied by at least 5 people who are unrelated and share a bathroom or kitchen.

After 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018, it will be a criminal offence for landlords and managing agents to operate these larger HMOs without a valid HMO licence.

The Housing Enforcement Team has started to publicise the changes to ensure that as many of the affected HMOs as possible are licensed by 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018.

In June 2018, the Head of Housing & Wellbeing and Private Sector Housing Manager will be delivering a couple of HMO Briefings for Members. The sessions will focus on landlords' HMO licensing obligations, the requirements of the HMO Management Regulations and the action that is being taken against landlords and property agents who do not comply with the law.

### **Families move into new affordable rented homes**

I am delighted to report that, last month, 14 families moved into the new council homes that Northampton Partnership Homes has built in Lower Bath Street in Spring Boroughs.

In accordance with the Local Lettings Policy, the new homes were allocated to families already living in Spring Boroughs. This enabled the families to remain in the area, maintain their support networks and avoid the need for their children to change schools.

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