



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

2nd November 2020

Rough Sleepers' Rapid Rehousing Pathway

Since my last report, members of the Single Homelessness Forum have continued to develop Northampton's Rapid Rehousing Pathway and, in order to support these efforts, the Government has confirmed that it will provide grant funding of £607,400 to cover the net cost of the emergency housing that the Council is providing and establish a 'Somewhere Safe to Stay' Hub.

I am delighted that, by working proactively with the MHCLG and Keystage Housing (a Luton-based housing association that has been running a successful Hub since August 2019), we can now deliver the outcome that all Members voted for in a Council Motion in 2018: a permanent nightshelter with the capacity and facilities to provide men and women with shelter and support.

We are currently awaiting the outcome of our application for £2m of government funding to purchase and refurbish 15 one-bedroom flats and 3 five-bedroom HMOs (with ensuite facilities) that will be used to expand Northampton's Rapid Rehousing Pathway for rough sleepers.

At the time of writing, we are also awaiting a decision on Northampton's application for a share of Public Health England's Rough Sleepers Drug and Alcohol Grant funding which, if successful, will lead to the establishment of a dedicated Rough Sleepers Drug and Alcohol Team that will work intensively with people who are sleeping rough, or have a history of sleeping rough, and have a dependency on drugs and/or alcohol or are using them problematically.

I am pleased to confirm that, since moving from the hotels to the University's hall of residence at the beginning of July, the Council's Single Homelessness Team and local housing providers have helped 89 men and women (who were in emergency housing, sleeping rough or at imminent risk of becoming homeless) to move on into settled housing.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

The search for COVID-safe premises has proved very challenging. However, I am pleased to report that a suitable building has now been found and will be available, when needed, this winter.

Although emergency shelter may be provided for one or two nights if the weather is exceptionally severe, SWEP will normally be activated when the Met Office is forecasting that the temperature will be 0°C or below for three consecutive nights.

When SWEP is activated, emergency shelter will be provided between 9.00pm and 9.00am.

Homelessness Prevention and Temporary Accommodation

During the six months ending 30 September 2020, the Housing Advice & Options Team prevented a total of 539 households from becoming homeless by helping them remain in their existing homes or secure alternative accommodation.

Although the severe shortage of affordable housing has meant that homeless households are spending a long time in Temporary Accommodation (TA) and the use and cost of TA is much higher than we would like, Officers from the Council and NPH are continuing to do everything they can to improve the situation. The number of households in TA is currently 330.

Housing Enforcement Activity

The Housing Enforcement Team has continued to be very active in recent months. As well as supporting Police Scotland and Northamptonshire Police in their efforts to apprehend and prosecute members of an international people trafficking ring with links to Northampton, the Team has executed a large number of warrants, targeting a gang that has been obtaining private rented housing by deception and then creating substandard houses in multiple occupation.

The Team has continued with its intelligence-led approach to housing enforcement and, at a time when it has been working hard to support compliant landlords during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has imposed civil penalties totalling more than £120,000 during the first six months of 2020/21.

HMO Licensing

Throughout the pandemic, the Housing Enforcement Team has continued to support landlords with the licensing of their HMOs. It maintains the online HMO Licence Register (a list of all licensed HMOs) and, at present, more than 1,000 licensable HMOs have a licence.

The Housing Enforcement Team has helped to prevent, tackle and control the spread of COVID-19 by targeting specific advice and guidance (produced in a variety of languages) at the owners and tenants of HMOs in specific parts of the Borough. In October, the Team supported a 'virtual' conference for landlords of student housing which focused on ensuring that they have accurate and timely information about the impact of the pandemic on their properties and tenants.

Northampton Partnership Homes

Looking after its staff and the Council's tenants and leaseholders remains NPH's main priority.

Maintenance, compliance and safety works

Despite the continued challenges of COVID-19, NPH continues to undertake non-urgent repairs in tenants' homes. Risk assessments are carried out to ensure works can be completed safely.

The large backlog of non-urgent works that built up during the COVID-19 lockdown is being addressed and, although it could take up to six months to complete them all, the backlog has reduced to 1,251. A dedicated team is to be put in place to deal with this backlog.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, a number of the Council's properties did not comply with the gas safety regulations due to the tenants isolating or COVID-19 being present. NPH has confirmed that it is now continuing to be 100% compliant.

All neighbourhood investment works have been resumed following COVID-19.

Neighbourhoods and housing services

Although the Government's ban on evictions has now been lifted, six months' notice will normally need to be given for evictions, except in cases involving ASB or domestic abuse.

The Government has stated that, when scheduling the possession hearings, the Courts will prioritise cases involving ASB and other crimes, along with those where the landlord has not received any rent for more than a year.

The pandemic has caused a spike in requests for support and welfare relating to social isolation especially amongst people who are aged 70 or over. NPH is also seeing an increase in reports of domestic abuse compared with the previous year.

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Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing