



Cabinet Member Report for Housing

Northampton Borough Council

8th June, 2015

Housing and Wellbeing Service

The new staffing structure for the Housing and Wellbeing Service is now in place and Phil Harris (the new Head of Housing and Wellbeing) started work in March 2015.

We are in the process of recruiting a Housing Options Manager and a Private Sector Housing Manager, and filling a number of other vacant roles. It is hoped that all posts will be filled by the beginning of September 2015.

One of the priorities of the Housing and Wellbeing Service is to improve multi agency working and to develop a new and ambitious overarching Housing Strategy.

More Money for Refuge Services

A Northampton-led funding bid – which was supported by the refuge providers, Northamptonshire Police and all of the local authorities in Northamptonshire – has resulted in the Government awarding extra, one-off funding of £434,276 to help strengthen and improve the services that tackle domestic abuse in the County.

The extra funding will be used to create additional bed spaces, increase resettlement support and improve the availability of the out of hours service, as well as improving the sustainability of services by developing shared operations and joint working between the three refuge providers (Northampton Women's Aid, Wellingborough and East Northants Women's Aid and the Nene Valley Christian Family Refuge).

Community Wellbeing Company

Following Northamptonshire County Council's decision to set up a Community Interest Company that will commission and deliver Countywide community wellbeing services, Officers from the Housing & Wellbeing Service have continued to work closely with the County Council, NBC's partners and other stakeholders to support and influence the development of the new company and operating model.

Although it is too early in the process to report any significant progress, the County Council has commended NBC for its positive approach to developing new ways of delivering services and it has acknowledged that the Council and the Northampton Wellbeing Partnership have much to offer in terms of experience, ability and capacity, and that they have shown the willingness to innovate to deliver key wellbeing services across the borough and the County.

Social Lettings Agency

Work is underway to set up a social lettings agency that will let and manage private rented accommodation, on behalf of landlords, in return for a set management fee.

The primary purpose of the agency is to raise standards, increase the supply of good quality, lower cost private rented housing, prevent homelessness and help people who are unlikely to qualify for social rented housing.

Northampton's social lettings agency will invite landlords to hand over responsibility for their properties to the Council, which will then rent them out. In return for these properties, the Council will guarantee the rent (even if the property is empty) and ensure that the property is well-managed throughout the tenancy.

By entering into long-term management agreements with landlords, the Council will be able to lead by example and encourage longer-term lets lasting at least 2 years.

Northampton's social lettings agency will be created with the involvement and support of the National Landlords Association and local landlords.

Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation

At present, 223 three storey Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are licensed under Northampton's mandatory licensing scheme.

Since introducing its Additional HMO Licensing Scheme on 23rd November 2014, the Council has licensed a total of 96 two storey HMOs and is currently in the process of licensing a further 174 two storey HMOs.

Officers are working closely with the Fire Service and other agencies to identify licensable HMOs and are currently undertaking a programme of checks and visits to establish the status of more than 450 properties that are thought to be licensable.

A failure to licence will lead to prosecution and other enforcement activity.

100 New Council Homes

In March 2015, Barratt Homes and Persimmon Homes completed the option to purchase the Council's land in Kings Heath Ward. The option to purchase has been drafted to protect the Council's interest, and the Council can either seek to utilise the developers to build the homes and infrastructure or seek another contractor to build the homes if that provides better value for money.

The developers have submitted a planning application which is currently being given full consideration. When the process is complete, a full report will be presented to the Planning Committee. Officers are currently working on the mix and specification of the homes to be built with a start on site expected in this financial year should the planning application be approved.

Landlords Forum

Arrangements are being made for Officers and Members to meet with private landlords and agents to obtain their feedback on the introduction of Northampton's Additional HMO Licensing Scheme and Article 4 Direction, and to consult with them on the Council's plans to establish a social lettings agency in the town.

Disabled Facilities Grants

We continue to support the provision of amenities, aids and adaptations to enable people with disabilities to remain in their own homes.

Although the DFG budget is more than sufficient to meet demand and the Council has enough Officers to process and approve grant applications in an efficient and timely manner, it is taking longer than intended for the Occupational Therapists to issue their recommendations and, even after the DFGs have been approved, the improvements may be delayed further until the contractor is available to start work.

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing has met with the Chief Executive of Olympus Care to explore ways of reducing the amount of time it is taking to complete the Occupational Therapist assessments.

Positive Working Relationship with NPH

As expected, a very positive working relationship has developed between the Council and Northampton Partnership Homes. The NPH Board is operating well and its Chief Executive and Management Team are working very collaboratively with the Council's Officers and Members to improve services and make a real difference.

I have been especially impressed by the way in which the Housing and Wellbeing Service and Northampton Partnership Homes have dealt with the separation of roles and are working together to deliver better outcomes for residents and communities.

Multi Agency Working at Oasis House

The Council is working closely with the Hope Centre, Midland Heart Housing Association and NAASH to strengthen and improve multi agency working in preparation for the planned expansion of services at Oasis House and the development of a new multi agency Rough Sleepers Strategy that will tackle the problem of rough sleeping more effectively than ever before.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing