



Cabinet Member Report for Housing

Northampton Borough Council

25th January 2016

Tackling, Preventing and Reducing Rough Sleeping

As I have previously explained, the increase in the number of people sleeping rough requires a fresh and innovative, multi agency approach to what is a very complex problem.

A multi agency project team has now been established to prepare for, and co-ordinate, a comprehensive rough sleepers count in February 2016. The count will cover the whole of the Borough and efforts will be made to engage every rough sleeper who is found on that night.

The rough sleepers count will inform the development of Northampton's 3 year multi agency Rough Sleepers Strategy which is being kick-started at a half day workshop on Friday 5th February 2016. .

Organised by the Council's Housing & Wellbeing Service and Community Safety Team, the Rough Sleepers Strategy workshop will be attended by a broad range of local organisations, including charities, faith groups, health professionals, advice and support providers and the Police. During the workshop, participants will share ideas and information and will be asked to consider, and sign up to, a fresh approach that will ensure that every organisation is doing everything it can to tackle, prevent and reduce rough sleeping in the borough.

Improving and Enforcing Standards in Private Housing

In order to support the Council's efforts to improve standards in Northampton's private rented sector and tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords, Officers have developed a new Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and undertaken a review of the fees and charges relating to HMO licensing and the Private Sector Housing Team's enforcement activity.

Cabinet will consider the new Enforcement Policy and Fees & Charges Policy on 10th February.

One of the primary aims of the new Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy is to improve housing standards and protect the health and safety of occupants by changing the behaviour of owners, landlords and managing agents. As well as prosecuting those who flout the law, we want to make it a lot more difficult for owners and landlords to profit from their non-compliance.

The new Fees and Charges Policy will ensure that criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords bear the full cost of any enforcement action and, if they fail to license their HMOs on time, they will be granted a one or two-year licence rather than a five-year licence. 'Early bird' discounts will be given to landlords who apply for an HMO licence (or renew their HMO licence) on time.

In December 2015, the Council hosted 4 focus groups to obtain the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including HMO landlords, student landlords, letting agents, a landlord accreditation scheme, the National Landlords Association, ARLA and Trading Standards.

Everyone who attended the focus groups was very positive about the Council's new approach and were especially supportive of the idea of making perpetrators pay, reducing the financial

burden on responsible businesses and providing Officers with the skills, confidence and training that they require in order to tackle poor standards of housing and management.

Licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation

Although HMOs play a vital role in helping to meet Northampton's housing needs, it is essential that they are well managed, are maintained in a good state of repair and, where appropriate, they have the necessary licence and/or planning permission.

The new Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and Fees & Charges Policy will encourage owners and landlords to license their HMOs in a timely manner, and new facilities will be put in place to make it easier for tenants, residents and businesses to inform the Council of any properties they suspect are operating as an HMO without a licence and/or planning permission.

In order to support and improve the licensing of HMOs, the Housing & Wellbeing Service is planning to introduce an online licence application process that includes the requirement for owners and landlords to pay the licence fee online at the point of application. This will substantially reduce the amount of time that Officers spend administering the process.

On 9th February 2016, Officers from the Housing and Planning teams will provide members of the Planning Committee with training on the action they will be taking to identify, and deal more robustly with, HMOs that are operating without planning permission in the Article 4 areas.

Review of the Housing Allocations Policy

The Housing and Wellbeing Service and Northampton Partnership Homes are currently reviewing the Housing Allocations Policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the Council's strategic objectives in relation to the allocation of affordable housing.

Although the review has only just started, consideration is being given to the ways in which the Housing Allocations Policy can be amended to support everyone's efforts to prevent homelessness, tackle severe overcrowding, safeguard children and vulnerable adults, facilitate move-on from hospital and supported housing, and the future growth of Northampton.

Celebrating NPH's First Anniversary

This time last year, I was a Director of Northampton Partnership Homes.

I have had to forego that pleasure but, one year on, it was a delight to attend the 1st Anniversary event in the Great Hall and to witness the fantastic progress made by the ALMO.

With the team now coming together and the continued involvement and support of the tenants and leaseholders, I believe that we can be really positive about the future of our housing stock.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing