



Cabinet Member Report for Housing & Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 6th June 2016

Developing a Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy

On 29th April 2016, the Housing & Wellbeing Service and Community Safety Team hosted a second half day Workshop to support the development of our 3 year Rough Sleepers Strategy.

Attended by more than 50 participants – representing around thirty services and organisations, including charities, faith groups, health and social care professionals, housing projects, advice and support providers, the neighbourhood wardens, the anti-social behaviour unit and the Police – the Workshop showcased the fantastic, innovative work being undertaken by the Council's new Outreach Workers, provided details of the town's plans for a temporary nightshelter and considered the themes, priorities and actions that need to be included in the new Strategy.

During the Workshop, Goodwill Solutions and Hope Enterprises (two local charities) pledged to work proactively with other organisations to help people who have been sleeping rough to rebuild their lives through a programme of volunteering, training and employment.

Everyone agreed that the problem of rough sleeping can only be resolved if all services and organisations work more effectively with one another, deliver a consistent message and actively encourage rough sleepers to engage with housing and support providers and leave the streets.

'Together we change lives' – our multi-agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton – will be considered by the Cabinet on 8th June 2016.

Preparing for Online HMO Licensing

When the Cabinet approved the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and Private Sector Housing Fees & Charges Policy in February 2016, I described the action that the Council would be taking to increase the number of licensed HMOs and ensure that enforcement action is targeted at higher risk, unsafe, substandard and badly managed housing.

One of the improvements I mentioned is the introduction of Online HMO Licensing.

At present, the Private Sector Housing Team is spending too much time processing paper application forms, rather than gathering intelligence, checking on the status of unlicensed HMOs and, where appropriate, taking enforcement action. Automation will speed up the licensing process, eliminate unnecessary delays, improve customer service and free up the Officers to concentrate on finding unlicensed HMOs and holding owners, landlords and agents to account.

When the system is fully operational, all applicants will be required to complete their application online and will only be able to submit their application when it is complete, all supporting documents and certificates have been uploaded and the appropriate licence fee has been paid.

HMO landlords and managing agents will be actively involved in the preparations for Online HMO Licensing in Northampton. The system will be fully operational by 1st September 2016.

Northampton's Landlord Forum

On 7th June 2016, the Landlord Forum will hear about the role that Northamptonshire's Trading Standards Team plays in regulating and improving standards in the private rented sector.

Landlords will also be provided with a demonstration of the Online HMO Licensing System that the Council is in the process of introducing in Northampton.

As usual, the second half of the Landlord Forum will be set aside for roundtable discussions with experts from a wide range of disciplines, including Housing Advice, HMO Licensing, Private Sector Housing, Planning, Revenues & Benefits, Trading Standards, the Police and the Fire Service.

Review of Sheltered Housing (now Older Persons' Housing)

Northampton Partnership Homes has recently completed its review of sheltered housing.

It recommends that 'sheltered housing' is rebranded as 'Older Persons' Housing' and that Northampton Partnership Homes and the Council:

- Enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible;
- Improve the quality of older persons' housing to enable people to live happy and healthy lives in an enriched community;
- Offer housing choices to meet the needs of current and future generations of older people; and
- Ensure that specialist housing and support is targeted to those most in need.

Northampton Partnership Homes' review, and its recommendations, will be considered by the Cabinet on 6th July 2016.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing