



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

18th July 2016

Ending the need to sleep rough in Northampton

On 13th July 2016, the Leader of the Council launched '**Together we change lives**', the borough's ambitious, multi-agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton.

During the Workshop that followed, around 60 participants – representing more than 30 services and organisations – worked together on the development of a comprehensive 3 year action plan that will underpin our strategy for tackling, preventing and reducing rough sleeping.

Although rough sleeping is a very complex and difficult problem to resolve, I have been impressed and inspired by the work that is being done and the difference it is making to people's lives. It has been fantastic to see what can be achieved when services work, develop and improve together.

Improving the management of student housing

As part of our strategy for improving student housing, the Council's Private Sector Housing Team has established a **good practice alliance** with the University of Northampton, the Students Union, DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) and the Northampton Student Landlords Network.

This new alliance has been set up in order to improve multi-agency working, share information, provide landlords and students with consistent messages about their rights and responsibilities, and improve the management of privately rented student housing. It will also make it much easier for the Council to identify and deal with properties that are unsafe, substandard, badly managed or operating as an HMO without a licence and/or planning permission.

Members of the alliance have agreed to produce new leaflets and posters (bearing the logos of all five organisations), review the content of all of their literature and webpages (to ensure that all messages and advice are consistent) and host a joint stand at this year's Freshers Fair.

Tackling anti-social behaviour in HMOs

In order to secure the support of the Police in preventing illegal evictions, the Council's Private Sector Housing Manager has provided training for more than 70 Police Officers in the borough.

These training sessions have not only improved the way in which the Police respond to tenancy disputes and illegal evictions but they have also encouraged the Police to contact the Private Sector Housing Team for help in addressing anti-social behaviour in licensed HMOs.

As it is a condition of the HMO licence that the licence holder takes effective action to prevent and manage any anti-social behaviour caused by the tenants of their HMO and/or their tenants' visitors, the Private Sector Housing Team will invite the licence holder to a case conference attended by the Police, any neighbours affected by the anti-social behaviour and, where appropriate, Environmental Services and/or the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

At the case conference, the licence holder is held to account for what is happening in their HMO and warned that, if they fail to resolve the problem, the licence may be revoked or not renewed. Sometimes, a member of the Northampton Student Landlords Network will attend the meeting to explain what good, responsible housing management looks like and offer the licence holder advice on what action they need to take to resolve the problem and manage their HMO better.

Rogue landlords and the Housing & Planning Act 2016

The Act received Royal Assent on May 12th 2016 and applies to landlords and property agents in England. It includes six measures designed to tackle rogue landlords and agents:

- Introduction of Banning Orders for the most prolific offenders
- Creation of a national database of rogue landlords and agents
- New powers to impose civil penalties of up to £30,000
- Extension of Rent Repayment Orders
- A tougher 'fit and proper person' test for landlords
- New data sharing arrangements to enable local authorities to identify landlords and private rented housing, using data held by the tenancy deposit protection schemes.

The various sections of the Act are due to come into force over the next 18 months.

Housing Conference 2016

In June 2016, the Head of Housing and Wellbeing and I attended the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual, 3-day Housing Conference in Manchester.

The Conference provided me with further insight into the wide range of products, services and innovative practice that have been introduced to improve the housing conditions, life chances and engagement of residents and communities. I was especially interested in the sessions on local authority housebuilding, joint ventures, modular construction, estate regeneration, fixed term tenancies, homelessness, welfare reform and the housing association right to buy pilots.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing