



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2017

### Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter

I am very pleased to report that, following the successful recruitment of the Co-ordinator, Assistant Co-ordinator and a team of around 60 volunteers, the Nightshelter opened on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The Co-ordinator has previously run a nightshelter in Salford for more than five years, and the Assistant Co-ordinator managed the Daylight Centre in Wellingborough for more than 18 months. Both of them have a lot of experience of working with large teams of volunteers.

Although not everyone is suited to the work at the Nightshelter – and, so far, only about 50% of the people who have expressed an interest in becoming a volunteer have actually gone on to fill in an application form, attend the interview and complete the training – we have managed to recruit and train a fantastic team of volunteers which includes health and social care professionals, specialists in mental health and substance misuse, criminal justice practitioners, support workers, counsellors, housing and homelessness specialists, and people who have previously slept rough.

We are grateful to the organisations that have had an input into the volunteers' training (including the Youth Offending Service, Goodwill Solutions, the Richmond Fellowship, Mayday Trust, the Hope Centre, Midland Heart and the Police) and especially to the teams at Aquarius and Maple Access whose excellent, bespoke training on drugs, alcohol and mental health have informed, reassured and inspired the Nightshelter's volunteers.

The Nightshelter has the capacity to provide temporary overnight accommodation for up to 20 men who have a local connection with Northampton and are homeless and ready to engage with local services to come off the streets and move on from the Nightshelter into more settled housing. It is already making a difference and the feedback received from guests has been incredibly positive.

As Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter is not a direct access shelter, everyone who wants to use it will need to be referred to it by one of the 5 approved referral agencies: the Council, the Police, the Hope Centre, the Bridge Project and S2S.

Anyone wishing to support the Nightshelter (by becoming a volunteer or donating equipment or money) should visit the Northampton Nightshelter webpage on the Council's website:

[www.northampton.gov.uk/northamptonnightshelter](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/northamptonnightshelter)

### SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)

For the first time this winter, the SWEP was activated and emergency shelter was provided in the Hope Centre for 7 nights from 20 January until 26 January 2017.

Approximately two thirds of the people who accessed SWEP are EU Nationals from Eastern Europe who have said that they are sleeping rough and do not appear to be engaging with local services or exercising their treaty rights. This is being addressed by 'TOGETHER we change lives' (Northampton's Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Strategy) and by the Nightshelter.

### Improving investigations and evidence gathering

As Members are aware, the Council has transformed its approach to private sector housing enforcement and, last year, we introduced new policies and procedures for dealing with criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and managing agents.

In order to support this fresh approach – and to provide Officers with the skills, confidence and tools they need to ensure the successful prosecution of offenders – the Housing and Wellbeing Service invested in specialist training in investigation and evidence gathering.

I am delighted to report that 9 of the Council's Officers (3 Officers in Private Sector Housing, 5 Officers in Housing Options & Advice and one Officer in Environmental Health) have successfully completed all of the course assessments and been awarded a BTEC Advanced Professional Certificate in Investigative Practice. Another 7 Officers have attended parts of the course in order to improve or consolidate their investigatory and evidence gathering skills.

Northampton is one of only a small number of local authorities that have trained their Officers in investigation and evidence gathering. It is hoped that, when faced with the Council's high quality evidence, many landlords will decide to plead guilty on the advice of their solicitor, as happened at a preliminary hearing in Northampton Magistrates Court on 10 January 2017.

### **Prosecution of Private Landlords**

Following January's successful prosecution of an HMO landlord, I am pleased to report that the Magistrates Court is now dealing with another 4 cases. Preliminary hearings were held last month and trials are scheduled for March and April.

These cases involve multiple offences by the same offenders involving illegal eviction, HMO management offences, failure to licence an HMO, failure to comply with licence conditions and failure to comply with an improvement notice. All 4 cases will be heard (at preliminary hearings) in Northampton Magistrates Court on the same day.

Last month, I attended a meeting of the Housing Standards Team to see, first hand, how the data and intelligence that Officers gather is used to determine the next tranche of investigations that will support the Council's rolling programme of prosecutions. I was really impressed by the Officers' expertise and professionalism, and by their commitment to hold landlords to account.

### **Northampton Landlord Forum**

On 21<sup>st</sup> February, almost 100 private landlords and letting agents joined us for what was probably our most successful Landlord Forum so far.

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing updated landlords and managing agents on the progress that the Council is making to establish a social lettings agency in the town.

The Private Sector Housing Manager provided the Forum with an overview of the work that the Empty Homes Officer will be undertaking and details of the various ways in which landlords, developers and investors can help the Council to bring empty homes back into use.

The atmosphere in the room was very positive, and landlords expressed a lot of interest in the Council's private sector leasing scheme and its plans to bring empty homes back into use.

**Councillor Stephen Hibbert**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing**