



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

22nd January 2018

Tackling criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords

On 17th January 2018, the Cabinet will consider a Business Case for using the income that the Council receives from civil penalties to fund the expansion of the Housing Enforcement Team.

If the Business Case is approved, the Council will recruit an additional 8 Officers (including a Housing Enforcement Manager, a Tenancy Relations Officer, 4 Environmental Health Officers and 2 Intelligence Officers) to tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and managing agents who knowingly rent out accommodation that is unlicensed, substandard and/or unsafe.

Subject to due diligence – and it being demonstrated that the additional cost will be met from the extra income generated in civil penalties – it is hoped that, later this year, we will be able to increase the size of the Housing Enforcement Team even further by recruiting another 4 Environmental Health Officers and another Intelligence Officer.

Extending the definition of Mandatory HMO

On 6th April 2018, the definition of Mandatory HMO will be extended.

At present, a Mandatory HMO is defined as a dwelling that has at least 3 storeys and is occupied by at least 5 people who share facilities and do not form a single household. From 6th April 2018, all of these larger HMOs will become Mandatory HMOs, irrespective of the number of storeys.

As hundreds of 2 storey HMOs will be included in the new definition, the change is expected to result in a significant increase in the number of licensable HMOs in the borough.

Although the Housing Enforcement Team is planning to go to considerable efforts to make landlords and managing agents aware of their new obligations, enforcement action will be taken against anyone who is operating a licensable HMO without a licence after 6th October 2018.

Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter

The Nightshelter has now been open for more than 11 months and, during that time, it has provided more than 150 homeless men with somewhere safe, warm and dry to stay while they work with local services to rebuild their lives and address their housing and support needs.

Since it opened on 6th February 2017, the Nightshelter has helped 88 of its guests to move on successfully into settled accommodation. During this period, 94 volunteers

have provided a total of more than 7,000 hours of their time to support the vital work of the Nightshelter.

I would urge all Members to make the time to visit the Nightshelter. Following a recent visit, one Member wrote: "The whole organisation, from conception to delivery, is exemplary and has been made possible due to the expertise, professionalism, dedication and humanity of all the staff and volunteers. I am so proud that NBC has the capacity and will to do this".

Finally, I would like to thank all of the individuals, groups and organisations that have donated and/or raised money for the Nightshelter during the year. Everyone has been very generous and we will ensure that all of the money that has been raised is used to improve the wellbeing and life chances of the homeless men who stay at, and move on from, the Nightshelter.

SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)

As I explained in my last report, arrangements are in place to provide homeless people with emergency shelter, in the Hope Centre, during severe weather.

Although the Council has continued to co-ordinate SWEP and provide funding and volunteers, the Hope Centre has agreed that, during the winter of 2017/18, it will host SWEP and take the lead in ensuring that everything runs smoothly on the nights that emergency shelter is required.

This winter, SWEP has operated on 2 occasions – for a 5 day period from 8-12 December and for a 2 day period from 27 - 28 December – and has been used by a total of 43 people, 24 (56%) of whom have accessed it for more than one night.

About half of the people who have accessed SWEP this winter are known to the Street Outreach Team and are either refusing to engage with local services or have recently lost their accommodation due to their own actions. Most of the people who accessed SWEP were not asked to provide details of where they were sleeping rough and only a small number of people sought advice and assistance with their housing after their stay in SWEP.

Improving hospital discharge and wellbeing

The 'Hospital 2 Home' (H2H) scheme – designed to provide patients with a holistic, wrap-around support service that is tailored to their specific needs – was set up by the Council's Housing & Wellbeing Service in May 2015 and, since then, has helped more than 300 vulnerable patients to be discharged from Northampton General Hospital and Berrywood Hospital in a way that is planned, safe and reduces the likelihood of readmission.

Officers from the Housing & Wellbeing Service attend weekly discharge meetings at both hospitals, assess each patient's needs and then work proactively and collaboratively with local housing and support providers to facilitate patients' safe discharge from hospital.

The scheme frees up hospital beds that can then be prioritised for those with a medical need rather than for patients with housing and/or social issues that prevent a safe discharge into the community. It provides comprehensive support for people with

complex needs, averts homelessness and prevents people from being readmitted to hospital in an emergency.

Homelessness and temporary accommodation

During the last couple of years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of households applying to the Council for assistance under the homelessness legislation and this has increased the Council's use of temporary accommodation, including Bed & Breakfast.

Even though the number of homelessness applications remains very high, the situation has been helped by a series of measures we have introduced to relieve the pressure on the Homelessness Service and improve the living conditions of households in temporary accommodation.

Between 30th August 2017 – 31st December 2017, the number of outstanding homelessness decisions was reduced by two thirds (from 205 to 66), the average caseload of each Homelessness Officer was reduced by 64% (from 50 to 18), and the waiting time for an appointment with a Homelessness Officer was reduced from 4 weeks to less than 3 days. During the same period, the number of households in Bed & Breakfast was reduced by 31% and the number of households in temporary accommodation outside the borough was reduced by 57%.

Northampton Partnership Homes

Building new affordable rented homes

Officers from the Council and Northampton Partnership Homes have been working very closely to develop a delivery model that will enable the Council and NPH to maximise the number of new affordable rented homes that are built over the next 10 years.

I am delighted to report that the Officers' recommendations – supported by Capita, which has been assisting the Council with its due diligence work and evaluation of the options – are due to be considered at a Special Cabinet Meeting that is taking place on 25th January 2018.

In the meantime, NPH is continuing to build new council homes. The homes being built at Lower Bath Street, Althorpe Street, Little Cross Street and Lakeview House are progressing well, and the first of these (at Lower Bath Street and Althorpe Street) are due to be completed next month.

NPH is continuing to develop a pipeline of development opportunities, and a series of schemes are being considered, as part of the pre-application process, with the Council's Planning Service.

Improving grounds maintenance and estate services

I am pleased to report that NPH has awarded a contract to Continental Landscapes to undertake all grounds maintenance works on all of the HRA land that is being managed by NPH. Tenants' views and involvement were very helpful in determining

the specification and the choice of contractor. The new contract will commence on 1st June 2018.

I am pleased to report, also, that NPH has awarded a contract to Just Ask to deliver estate services throughout Northampton. Deep cleaning of all communal areas has commenced and an enhanced cleaning specification is being implemented to improve communal areas and the quality of the service that tenants and leaseholders receive. Tenants' views and involvement were very helpful in determining the specification and the choice of contractor. The new estate services contract commenced on 1st December 2017.

Providing new office accommodation

Significant progress is now being made on the development of NPH's new office accommodation following the Council's acquisition of Horizon House, the former gas works site adjacent to the St Peter's Street roundabout. Officers from the Council and NPH are working very closely to determine how best to develop the site.

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Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing