



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

12th March 2018

SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)

As Members will be aware, arrangements are in place to provide homeless people with emergency overnight shelter, in the Hope Centre, during severe weather.

During the latest period of very cold weather, SWEP was activated on 22nd February 2018 and, at the time of writing this report, I am expecting it to continue until 5th March 2018.

In response to the exceptionally cold daytime temperatures and the risk posed by windchill, special arrangements were put in place between 27th February and 4th March to ensure that, between 8.30am and 9.00pm, homeless people were able to stay somewhere safe, warm and dry. During the week, the Hope Centre and Nightshelter extended their opening times and, on the Saturday and Sunday, the Council's One Stop Shop operated as a daytime shelter.

On behalf of the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to the Hope Centre, Nightshelter, One Stop Shop and all of the staff and volunteers who have helped keep people safe (overnight and during the day) throughout this period of arctic conditions.

Maximising the supply of new homes

On 21st February 2018, Cabinet approved a new, 3-track approach to housing delivery that will deliver around 1,000 new affordable homes over the next 10 years and expand the range of options available to the Council to deliver new housing across all tenures.

This new approach – which will involve the setting up of a charitable community benefit society and the expansion of Northampton Partnership Homes' role to include the delivery of new housing (including affordable rented housing, market rented housing and housing for sale) outside of the Housing Revenue Account – is very exciting and I am delighted that we will soon have the flexibility and capacity to maximise the supply of new homes in the borough.

Northampton Landlord Forum

On 20th February 2018, more than 80 private landlords and letting agents attended a meeting of the Landlord Forum to receive updates and ask questions about the implementation of the Housing & Planning Act 2016, the expansion of the Council's housing enforcement team and government changes to the definition of Mandatory HMO.

The Forum also provided landlords with the opportunity to share their thoughts and put questions to more than 20 experts from housing enforcement, planning, fire safety and trading standards.

I am delighted by the success of the Landlord Forum which meets three times a year, is always well attended and helps us maintain a regular dialogue with landlords and agents, share best practice and information and, in doing so, create better conditions for tenants.

Extension of Mandatory HMO Licensing

The Government has now confirmed that the definition of Mandatory HMOs is being extended to include all houses in multiple occupation (not just those with 3 or more storeys) that are occupied by at least 5 people. This change comes into effect on 1st October 2018.

After 1st October 2018, it will be a criminal offence for landlords and managing agents to operate these larger HMOs without a valid HMO licence.

The Housing Enforcement Team is planning to publicise the changes to ensure that as many of the affected HMOs as possible (including, of course, those HMOs that are operating in the Far Cotton and Delapre areas) are licensed by 1st October 2018.

Anyone who fails to apply for a licence on time will pay more for their licence, may be offered a shorter licence (lasting 1 or 2 years, rather than the usual 5 years) and will be considered for enforcement action. Enforcement action – resulting in prosecution or the imposition of civil penalties – will be taken against as many offenders as possible.

Housing Enforcement Team

On 17th January 2018, the Cabinet approved a Business Case for expanding the Housing Enforcement Team to tackle criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords and managing agents who knowingly rent out accommodation that is unlicensed, substandard and/or unsafe.

I am delighted to say that, at the time of writing this report, Managers are finalising the appointment of the Housing Enforcement Manager and the 2 Intelligence Officers and are about to interview for the 4 Environmental Health Officer roles and the Tenancy Relations Officer role.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing