



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

10<sup>th</sup> December 2018

### **Northampton's Rough Sleepers Count**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2018, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Birch and I took part in a borough-wide count of rough sleepers, meticulously organised by the Housing Options & Advice Manager.

A total of 36 volunteers – representing the Police, the Probation Service, Northampton County Council's Leaving Care Team, Amicus Trust, Bridge, NPH, a faith group and the Council – took part in the count, which covered all Wards and was carried out between Midnight and 3.00am.

The count was attended by a representative of Homeless Link (commissioned by the Government to monitor, observe and validate rough sleepers estimates and counts) and by journalists from BBC Radio Northampton and the Northampton Chronicle & Echo.

The volunteers observed a total of 26 people (22 men and 4 women) 'bedded down' in the borough. On the night of the count, 18 men were staying in the town's Nightshelter and around 20 – 25 people (mostly East European) were likely to be sleeping in tent encampments and makeshift shelters (which were too dangerous to visit at night) on the outskirts of Northampton.

Of the 20 people who were identified on the night, 19 were already known to the Street Outreach Team, 3 were not homeless (they had suitable accommodation) 2 had recently arrived in the UK and refused the offer of reconnection, 5 had been provided with B&B or a place in the Nightshelter but had lost it due to their own actions, and 6 had been offered the Nightshelter but had refused the offer or not moved in. Only 3 people were not engaging with the Outreach Team.

Although the date of the count is normally kept secret, it was unfortunately disclosed on social media by a local homelessness project and in the Chronicle & Echo. It is not known what impact (if any) this had on the number of people found 'bedded down' on the night of the count.

### **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)**

SWEP is co-ordinated by the Housing & Wellbeing Service and complements the work of the Nightshelter, the Street Outreach Team and other local services and organisations.

Although there is no strict definition of what counts as 'severe weather', a Winter Shelter will normally operate when the temperature falls below freezing and is forecast (by the Met Office) to remain below freezing for a period of at least three consecutive nights.

When SWEP is activated, men and women who are sleeping rough in Northampton will be able to access the Winter Shelter (and have a meal and a safe, warm place to sleep) that will operate from the Hope Centre on the ground floor of Oasis House from 9.00pm until 7.00am.

Although the Council will be providing overnight cover and Team Leaders for the evening and morning shifts, it is now appealing for volunteers who are willing to support the smooth running of the Winter Shelter from 8.30pm – 11.30pm and from 6.00am – 8.30am.

To volunteer for the Winter Shelter, please visit: [www.northampton.gov.uk/swep](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/swep)

### **Extending the definition of Mandatory HMO**

It is a criminal offence to operate a licensable HMO without an HMO licence.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018, the definition of Mandatory HMO was extended to include any property that is occupied by 5 or more persons who do not form a single household and are sharing kitchen, bathroom and/or toilet facilities. Prior to 1<sup>st</sup> October, it was only properties with at least 3 storeys.

As dozens 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.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018, the Housing Enforcement Team has processed 71 new HMO licence applications, most of which were submitted on time and qualified for an early bird discount.

Northampton's intelligence-led approach to housing enforcement is working well and, where it is suspected that a licensable HMO is not operating without a licence, it will be investigated in order of priority, offenders will be required to licence their HMOs and civil penalties will be imposed.

### **Northampton Partnership Homes**

I am pleased to report that good progress is being made on a number of important schemes:

- **Northfield / Eastfield regeneration** – After protracted negotiations, works have now started on the redevelopment of the site on the junction of Northfield Road and Eastfield Road which will involve the demolition of the defective concrete building and the construction of 5 new council houses.
- **Little Cross Street** – The redevelopment of the site (to provide 9 one-bedroom flats and 9 two-bedroom maisonettes) is due to be completed in December 2018. The scheme will be opened by the Rt Hon Andrew Lewer MP on 21 December 2018.
- **Thorplands regeneration** – Works have now commenced on environmental improvements, landscaping, external wall insulation and the replacement of doors and windows.
- **Overslade House** – Works have now commenced to redevelop the building as a family apartments scheme, with completion expected in Spring 2019.

I am pleased to report, also, that NPH has recently recruited 5 trade apprentices and 4 office apprentices, and its regeneration partner, Engie, has recruited 6 apprentices.

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