



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019

### Winter Shelter and the Street Outreach Service

After opening the SWEP Winter Shelter twice during freezing weather in January and February, the Council successfully applied to the Government's Cold Weather Fund for the necessary funding to expand its Street Outreach Service and meet the operating costs of an all-weather Winter Shelter during a 6½ week period in February and March 2019.

Between 14<sup>th</sup> February and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, the Winter Shelter provided somewhere safe, warm and dry to stay and the expanded Street Outreach Team spent every day, on the streets and in local services, talking to rough sleepers and doing everything they could to persuade them to leave the streets and access support and housing.

With the support of a fantastic team of around 60 volunteers, the Winter Shelter accommodated an average of 25 'guests' per night. Although a total of 110 people (96 men and 24 women) stayed in the Winter Shelter for at least one night, nearly half of this total (41 men and 13 women) stayed for less than 7 nights.

The youngest guest was 18, the oldest was 63 and the average age was 39. Of the people who stayed at least one night in the Winter Shelter, 43 were non-UK nationals.

Of those who stayed regularly in the Winter Shelter, the Housing and Wellbeing Team was able to help almost half to move on into more settled housing.

### Rough Sleeping Initiative funding in 2019/20

I am delighted to report that, following its success in securing assistance from the Cold Weather Fund, the Council made a successful bid for Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding and has been awarded £215,600 to fund the following posts for 12 months:

- **A Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator** – to direct and oversee all rough sleeping activity in the borough, ensuring that all services and organisations work collaboratively and proactively with one another to improve information sharing, joint working and customer outcomes
- **A Housing Transitions Officer (Prisons and Approved Premises)** – to work collaboratively and proactively with prison resettlement teams and Bridgewood Approved Premises to ensure that, when people are released from prison or move on from Bridgewood, they do so in a planned way and do not become homeless
- **Mental Health Outreach Worker** – to support the work of the Street Outreach Workers by carrying out a comprehensive assessment of the mental health and associated needs of everyone who is sleeping rough, including people who have drug or alcohol issues, and encourage a solution-focused, multi agency approach

- **Two Street Outreach Workers** – to complement the two permanent Outreach Workers and enable the Council to operate a 6-day-a-week (Monday – Saturday) Outreach Service from the beginning of April 2019.

In order to make the recruitment process as inclusive as possible, representatives of local services and organisations (including the Hope Centre, the National Probation Service and NHFT) have been invited to join the interview panels.

## **Reducing the use and cost of temporary accommodation**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019, Cabinet approved a 14-point action plan to reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation.

The action plan includes a series of workstreams that are designed to:

- Prevent private tenants from becoming homeless (and help tenants to secure alternative private rented housing) by negotiating with landlords and letting agents;
- Persuade applicants' families and friends to continue accommodating them (as part of the 'Homeless at Home' scheme) in order to avoid the need for the Council to provide temporary accommodation;
- Ensure that all homelessness decisions (including review decisions) are accurate and issued as soon as practicable
- Convert into permanent accommodation any council homes that are being used as temporary accommodation and are suitable to offer the current tenants as a discharge of the Council's homelessness duty
- Maximise the amount of suitable private rented accommodation that is offered to homeless households living in temporary accommodation in order to discharge the Council's homelessness duty
- Maximise the number of council and housing association homes that are let to homeless households
- Ensure that unexpected delays in the construction, repair or refurbishment of council and housing association homes do not result in homeless households spending an unreasonable amount of extra time in temporary accommodation;
- Make optimum use of the Council's temporary accommodation
- Increase the number of permanent council homes that are used as temporary accommodation for homeless households
- Reduce the nightly rates that the Council pays to housing suppliers for the self-contained, nightly purchased temporary accommodation that it uses
- Purchase or build a stock of temporary accommodation that will be owned by the council (in the General Fund and/or the Housing Revenue Account) in order to reduce the net cost to the Council

A multi-disciplinary Implementation Group (involving Housing, Northampton Partnership Homes, Revenues & Benefits and Finance) has been established and is due to meet fortnightly. The aim is to reduce, to 200, the number of households in temporary accommodation by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

## **Consultation on Additional HMO Licensing Scheme**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2019, the Council started a 10-week consultation on its plans to widen the area that is subject to licensing for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).

Northampton's existing Additional HMO Licensing Scheme was introduced in November 2014 and ends on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2019. If approved, the new five-year Additional HMO Licensing Scheme will come into effect on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2019.

Under the new licensing scheme, all HMOs (including self-contained flats) that are situated in the enhanced designated area and contain three or more occupants from at least two households will need to be licensed.

Landlords will need to apply for an HMO licence and failure to do so could result in either conviction and an unlimited fine through the courts or the imposition of a civil penalty of up to £30,000 through the Council's powers under the Housing and Planning Act 2016. They may also have to pay back up to a year's rent to the tenants (or to the Council if the rent was met through Housing Benefit) if a rent repayment order is applied for.

The consultation ends on Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Anyone wishing to download the report and respond can do so by visiting the One-Stop Shop in the Guildhall to view a paper copy of the report and collect a paper survey form or visiting the Council's website at: <https://www.northampton.gov.uk/HMOLicensingconsultation>

Member Briefings on this issue have been organised for 11<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

Cabinet will consider a report on the proposed scheme, including the results of the consultation, at its meeting on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

## **Northampton Partnership Homes**

### Neighbourhood Investment Programme

As part of the 2019/20 Neighbourhood Investment Programme, works started on site in Lings and Blackthorn in April and are due to start on site in Lakeview and Lumbertubs in June.

### Construction of new council homes

I am delighted to report that NPH's development of new homes is now progressing extremely well, with hundreds of homes in the pipeline. There are currently 130 properties in development on a large number of sites across Northampton and, in addition to these, NPH has secured planning consent for 59 homes which will commence on site during the summer months. Another 215 homes are currently in the pipeline.

### Berkeley House and St Mary's Court (Spring Boroughs)

Following an extensive consultation process, a full planning application has been submitted to the Council for the redevelopment of Berkeley House and St Mary's Court (which will be renamed "Roof Gardens"). The proposed regeneration of the site, and the results of the consultation, will be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration later this year.

## Redevelopment of key sites

I am pleased to provide updates on the following redevelopments:

- **Toms Close** – Work has started on the construction of 21 new homes (the second and final phase of the redevelopment of this site) with a view to all of the homes being completed during the early part of 2020.
- **Tanners Pub Site** - Work has started on the redevelopment of the site and the construction of 17 new council homes, a local shop and a community café.
- **Overslade House** – The work is progressing well and an official opening, by Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP, has been organised for Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019. The building is to be renamed Centenary House (in recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Addison Act) and, to help establish a sustainable community, all of the homes will be let in accordance with a local lettings policy and all of the tenants will receive training.
- **Belgrave House** - NPH has now concluded consultations and negotiations in relation to the remodelling and redevelopment of Belgrave House, enabling a planning application to be submitted. The development will be known as “The Clock House” and will contribute positively to the regeneration of the town centre. Cabinet is due to consider the proposed redevelopment during the next 2-3 months.

## Universal Credit

2018/19 saw the introduction of the Universal Credit (UC) full service to Northampton.

It was anticipated that the numbers of tenants in receipt of UC housing element would rise rapidly and, at the end of March 2019, 850 tenants had claimed UC housing element representing 7.57% of all live tenancies.

As tenants transitioned to the new benefit, it was expected we may see some negative impact on rent arrears. It is encouraging, therefore, to report that current tenants’ arrears at year end 2018/19 (£1.115m) were, in fact, £32k lower than at the end of 2017/18.

The reduction in rent arrears is very positive and reflects well on the preparations, planning and strategies introduced in Northampton to manage Universal Credit.

## Mobile Housing Unit

When the ALMO was created, a bus (a former mobile library) was transferred to NPH to support the Decent Homes Contracts.

The bus is now being transformed into a mobile housing unit to enable NPH housing staff to get out with greater visibility in the communities and visit more tenants in their streets.

## NPH Housing Support Team

Congratulations to NPH’s Housing Support Team which has recently been assessed by the Centre for Housing and Support as “Outstanding” for the service it provides.

The Team is the only team in the whole of Northamptonshire to be awarded this rating, and the accreditors said that they were “blown away” by the passion of the staff.

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