



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

20th January 2020

Annual Rough Sleepers Count 2019

On 28th November, I joined the Leader of the Council, Councillor Beardsworth, Councillor Birch, Councillor Russell and dozens of volunteers in completing a 'snapshot' of rough sleepers.

A total of 49 volunteers (representing a broad range of organisations, including the Council, Northampton Hope Centre, Probation, Churches Together, NAASH, Bridge Substance Misuse Programme, Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter and Northamptonshire County Council) took part in the Count between Midnight and 3.00am.

The Count was attended by a representative from Homeless Link (commissioned by the Government to monitor, observe and validate rough sleepers estimates and counts) and by a journalist representing BBC Radio Northampton and BBC Look East.

During the borough-wide Count, a total of 28 people (21 men, 3 women and 4 people whose gender was not known) were found 'bedded down' in the borough and, of the 24 people who could be identified, a total of 21 were known to the Street Outreach Team.

Earlier that week, the Street Outreach Team visited several encampments (assessed as being too dangerous to visit at night) and found 12 people who were sleeping rough on those sites. On the night of the Count, 16 men were booked into Northampton's Nightshelter.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

In my last report, I explained that members of the Single Homelessness Forum – including the Council – would like 'windchill' to be taken into account in determining when SWEP is activated.

Arrangements are in hand to operate the SWEP Cold Weather Shelter from the Salvation Army Building in Tower Street, Northampton (instead of the Hope Centre which is much smaller and needs to be vacated early in order to be ready for the day centre to open at 8.30am) if it is needed from the end of January 2020.

When the Salvation Army Building is available, shelter will be provided from 9.00pm until 9.00am when the Met Office is forecasting that the 'feels like' temperature (taking into account windchill) will be 0°C or below for at least three consecutive nights. During exceptionally cold weather, consideration will be given to opening the shelter based on the forecast for just one or two nights.

This winter, the Hope Centre has extended the opening hours of its day centre, and the New Covenant Church in Kettering Road, Northampton is operating a nightshelter for women.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

The draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is now complete and, as soon as it has been signed off by key stakeholders, a 28 day consultation will commence.

Implementation of the Strategy will be overseen by the Housing and Wellbeing Team and will be monitored by the Single Homelessness Forum and the Family Homelessness Forum.

Northampton Landlord Forum

A successful meeting of the Landlords Forum took place on 19th November.

More than 50 local landlords attended the meeting and heard presentations from Council officers and the National Landlords Association on recent housing enforcement activity, the new Additional HMO Licensing Scheme, consultation on the proposed Article 4 Direction, and new legislation affecting private landlords and letting agents.

The Landlord Forum provides the opportunity to learn, exchange ideas and information, and encourage good practice. It also provides good, responsible landlords with the reassurance that the Council is dealing robustly with the criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords who are undercutting them and knowingly letting substandard, unlicensed and unsafe accommodation.

Implementation of the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme

Following Cabinet approval in October, the new Additional HMO Licensing Scheme comes into effect on 1st February 2020. To support the licensing process, we have introduced an online licensing system and, as an additional incentive, we are offering an 'early bird discount' for the first 150 licence applications that are received and complete.

Government funding to support multi-agency housing enforcement

I am really pleased to report that the Council has been successful in its bid for an Innovation and Enforcement Grant of £196,000 to tackle criminal landlords.

The Council is committed to raising standards in the private rented sector, using its enforcement powers and working with partners to tackle serious organised crime, and we are proud of our innovative intelligence-led, targeted approach to housing enforcement.

This extra funding has enabled us to set up a Special Operations Unit that will work proactively with the Police, Fire & Rescue Service, Trading Standards, Immigration and the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority to spend three months targeting the property portfolios of Northampton's biggest and worst criminal landlords through intelligence led, multi-agency housing enforcement.

We are very keen to build on the success of a large, multi-agency operation that the Council and its partners carried out in November when we targeted the property portfolio of a landlord and identified more than one hundred criminal offences under the Housing Act 2004, including operating HMOs without a licence and allowing tenants to live in squalid and unsafe conditions.

At the end of this 3 months initiative, we will be publishing a report on what we have achieved and we will be hosting a one day seminar for other local authorities to learn more about Northampton's intelligence-led approach and the role that the Special Operations Unit has played in tackling criminal landlords and serious organised crime.

Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH)

NCC's Supported Living Projects

Following Cabinet approval of additional funding in December 2019, construction of the new homes at Moray Lodge and Billing Brook Road Thorplands has now commenced and is due to be completed in Autumn 2020.

Council House New Build Programme

- New homes have been completed in Longland Road, Eastfield and West Oval, Kings Heath.
- Construction has started on the development of new homes on 10 garage sites in Blackthorn and in Fieldway (Abington), Cherry Close (Abington) and Nursery Lane (Kingsthorpe).
- Construction will start soon on the construction of new homes in Limehurst Close, Newton Road and Pendle Road, Duston.
- Following Cabinet approval of 'The Roof Gardens' in November 2019, arrangements are being made to rehouse the remaining residents from Berkeley House and St Mary's Court. Demolition of the flats will be phased to enable archaeological investigations to take place.

Planned Investment Programme

The scoping and scheduling of works for the 2020/21 programme has been completed. Subject to final approval of the 2020/21 HRA budget, the neighbourhood investment works in Briar Hill, Goldings and Southfields will commence on site in April 2020.

Housemark Accreditation for ASB Service

I am delighted to report that the Anti-Social Behaviour Service has been accredited by Housemark for its work in preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour.

NPH's ASB Service is one of only 26 ASB Services, nationally, to be accredited by Housemark and it is the only one that is accredited in Northamptonshire.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing