



Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

9th March 2020

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

As Members will be aware, SWEP was activated on three occasions during February when Northampton was first battered by the high winds and heavy rain of Storms Ciara and Dennis and then endured a sudden cold snap of wintry showers and sub-zero temperatures.

I am pleased to report that the Severe Weather Shelter is now operating from the Salvation Army Building in Tower Street (larger premises which have a bigger sleeping area and a separate, spacious dining area) with the support of the Salvation Army, the Hope Centre, local services and community groups, and a fantastic team of volunteers.

I would like to express my thanks to the Hope Centre and Midland Heart for their help and support in hosting SWEP in Oasis House over the years. SWEP provides a multi-agency, emergency response to severe weather and is invariably activated at very short notice. It is a testament to everyone's goodwill and flexibility, therefore, that it has been possible to run an overnight shelter alongside the vital services that operate from Oasis House during the day.

When SWEP is activated, people who are sleeping rough in Northampton will be able to stay in the severe weather shelter (which provides guests with hot drinks, an evening meal, breakfast and somewhere safe, warm and dry) from 9.00pm until 9.00am. During the day, extended opening hours will operate at the Hope Centre's day centre in Oasis House.

Northampton's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

After being agreed with key stakeholders, the draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy was published in February and consultation ended on 3rd March.

Feedback from the consultation will determine what amendments are made to the Strategy before it is submitted to Cabinet for approval in April.

The draft strategy can be found on the Council's website:

<https://www.northampton.gov.uk/info/200024/consultation-and-feedback/2503/draft-homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-strategy-2020-23>

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.

Additional HMO Licensing Scheme

I am pleased to report that the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme came into effect on 1st February and the new online HMO licensing system is operational.

The Housing Enforcement Team continues to work closely with landlords and letting agents to ensure that they meet their legal obligations, and an 'early bird discount' remains available for the first 150 HMO licence applications that are received and complete.

Multi-Agency Housing Enforcement

Following a successful bid for government funding – resulting in an enforcement and innovation grant of £196k; the largest in the country – the Housing Enforcement Team has established its Special Operations Unit and has been undertaking a series of multi-agency operations targeted at the housing portfolios of Northampton’s criminal landlords.

During one of these operations, warrants of entry were executed in relation to nine HMOs that were being managed by the same individual. On inspection, all of the properties were found to be licensable and operating without an HMO licence, and Officers identified and recorded a total of more than two hundred breaches of the HMO Management Regulations. To protect the occupants, emergency remedial action was undertaken in three of the HMOs and two prohibition orders were issued in relation to the occupation of a cellar and the structural collapse of a kitchen floor.

Northampton’s Housing Enforcement Team and its partners – including the Police, Fire & Rescue Service, Trading Standards, Immigration, HMRC, the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority and the Planning and Building Control teams – are tackling serious organised crime in a manner that is innovative, effective and could be replicated across the country. The Council’s intelligence-led, targeted approach is attracting the interest of the government and law enforcement agencies.

Housing Enforcement and Civil Penalties Policies

Later this month, Cabinet will be asked to approve a new and updated Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and Private Sector Housing Civil Penalties Policy.

These policies will support the Council’s work in raising standards in Northampton’s private rented sector, encouraging behaviour change and tackling criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords.

Northampton Partnership Homes

Re-accreditation of Housing Support Team

In 2019, the Housing Support Team received accreditation for the support services that it provides for tenants. I am delighted to report that, following an extremely thorough assessment process by Erosh which involved an emphasis on the feedback received from tenants, NPH’s Housing Support Team has again been rated as “outstanding”.

Council House New Build Programme

New build developments are progressing very well at Toms Close (21 homes), Witham Way Kingsheath (12 homes) and a number of former garage sites in Briar Hill and Delapre.

All of these developments will be completed by the end of March 2020.

Community Hubs

NPH has completed a review of Community Hubs, and a programme of upgrading and modernisation works to 10 Community Hubs is now being planned for 2020/21.

Arrangements are being put in place to undertake a full consultation with the people who use the Community Hubs to ensure that each Hub is designed with them in mind.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing