



## Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing

Northampton Borough Council

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

### **Protecting rough sleepers from COVID-19**

Since my last report, the Single Homelessness Team has been busy delivering Northampton's second 'Everyone In' initiative (which will operate for 10 weeks until 31<sup>st</sup> March) to keep rough sleepers safe, provide round-the-clock housing and support, and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In common with the first 'Everyone Initiative' (which operated for 8½ months until 14<sup>th</sup> December), the Northampton Hope Centre is providing residents with a cooked evening meal and the Single Homelessness Team is working closely with International Lighthouse, NAASH and local services to enable residents to address the causes of their homelessness and move on to settled housing.

After a small number of people tested 'positive' for COVID-19 in Oasis House and 'Everyone In', Keystage Housing set aside three of its beds in the HARPP for use as short-term, emergency 'isolation beds' for homeless people who have tested 'positive' and are referred by the Council.

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

At the time of writing, SWEP has been activated six times (and for a total of 22 nights) since 24<sup>th</sup> December. This is the most it has been activated since the 'Beast from the East' in 2018.

Although emergency shelter will be provided for one or two nights if the overnight temperature falls to -1°C or below, SWEP will normally be activated when the Met Office is forecasting that the temperature will be 0°C or below for three consecutive nights. When SWEP is activated, emergency shelter will be provided between 9.00pm and 9.00am.

I am pleased to report that everyone staying in the severe weather shelter has respected, and complied with, the special measures introduced to prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

### **Housing Advice and Options**

During the first 10 months in 2020/21, the Housing Advice & Options Team has prevented a total of 697 households from becoming homeless by helping them to remain in their existing homes or to secure alternative accommodation.

Despite an increase in the number of homeless customers approaching the Council for help after the Christmas break, the Temporary Accommodation Team has continued to reduce the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation (down 16%, from 351 to 294, since September 2020) which include those living in expensive nightly-purchased temporary accommodation (down 29%, from 276 to 197, since July 2020).

### **Housing Enforcement Activity**

The Housing Enforcement Team has continued to be very active in recent months. The Team has continued to execute a large number of warrants.

In response to serious concerns about the standards of management within a house in multiple occupation, the Council has instigated an Interim Management Order. This is the first such Order imposed by the Council and represents one of the most significant level of intervention by the Council into properties that are being poorly managed and endangering the safety of tenants.

## **Northampton Partnership Homes**

Looking after and keeping its staff and the Council's tenants and leaseholders safe during the Covid-19 pandemic remains NPH's main priority.

### Maintenance, compliance and safety works

Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, NPH continues to undertake all essential repairs and safety works in tenants' homes. Risk assessments are in place and are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that works can be completed safely.

Although the large backlog of non-urgent works that built up during the first COVID-19 lockdown was reduced from 2700 in July to just 350 in November, the backlog has increased again during this third COVID-19 lockdown. Plans have already been put in place (with a new sub-contractor framework being created) to reduce the backlog once restrictions are relaxed. Despite the lockdown, NPH has confirmed that it remains 100% compliant on all aspects of compliance.

The majority of neighbourhood investment works have continued where these can be carried out safely. However, non-essential works (such as window replacements) have been put on hold.

### Neighbourhoods and housing services

Although the COVID-19 lockdown again forced the closure of its paint shop, the 'Happy to Help' community interest company has been able to commence its new handyman service and tenants gardening service.

NPH is continuing to work on the estates and, although routine appointments are not taking place, it is responding to all emergencies. Staff are still completing welfare checks and responding to reports of ASB, and they are continuing to work closely with the Police on serious cases.

For housing allocations, NPH is continuing to undertake viewings in accordance with the 'social distancing' guidelines. Although it is processing mutual exchange applications, this is being reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure that safety is maintained.

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