

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND BENEFITS

For the period to 31 March 2022

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Housing

Temporary Housing

As at 31 March 2022 there were **43** households in Temporary Accommodation, this includes the 4 new & former rough sleepers currently accommodated as follows:

- 1 x Protect & Vaccinate (P&V)
- 0 x Reeves Court
- 3 X Former Rough Sleepers: NSAP (Next Steps Accommodation Programme)

When current purchases/works are complete the Council will have a portfolio of 16 homes for use as temporary accommodation – five units of move-on accommodation for rough sleepers and 11 homes as alternatives to bed and breakfast for homeless households. 14 of the 16 homes are in use. 1 unit requires works to bring it into use as a fully wheelchair accessible home – a badly needed gap in TA and property services have advised this will be in use later this year. The final 16th unit is the one funded by the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme (see below) and should be available within the next few weeks.

Five of the 16 homes have been part funded by the government:

- Next Steps Accommodation Programme - £140,000 grant towards four homes for use by ex-rough-sleepers. All four homes are now in use.
- Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme - £35,000 as a contribution to the refurbishment of a one-bed self-contained flat for rough sleeper move-on housing. This project has now achieved planning permission and the works have been tendered and the successful contractor aims to complete works by February 2022.

Purchase of homes to be used for temporary accommodation has also been possible as Cabinet agreed to the repurposing of £500k Disabled Facilities Grant budget (in March 2021) to purchase accessible temporary accommodation units and £640k of Housing Reserves (in October 2021) to purchase family temporary accommodation homes.

New Affordable Homes

Housing associations provided 160 new affordable homes in 2021/22 - 64 affordable rent and 96 shared ownership. This is more than our target of 100 new affordable homes but slightly less than the 165 we hoped would complete by the end of March

2022. The site in Little Snoring which will provide five affordable rent homes is now expected to hand over in May 2022.

Grant for Energy Efficiency Improvement Works

North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) as part of the Norfolk Warm Homes Consortium of five Norfolk districts has been successful in a bid for £3.85 million of government grant to provide energy efficiency improvement works to homes occupied by low income households. The funding is part of the government's sustainable warmth programme.

Our new Energy Officer started with us in March. The Energy Officer will identify suitable properties and support owner-occupiers and landlords with applications for improvement works. Our aim is to ensure we maximize take-up for North Norfolk residents.

Housing Options Team

The team continue to focus on supporting all clients that approach the service.

Your Choice Your Home

As at 31 March 22 there were **2560** households on the housing waiting list of whom:

- **471** were on the Housing Register (highest priority) broken down as follows:
- Priority Card x **4**
- Band 1 x **264**
- Band 2 x **203**

The total number of households on the waiting list (as at 31 March 2022) is the lowest it has been for the last five years, however the number of people being placed in the highest bands has increased year on year which highlights the number of people with a priority need.

	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
Assessment of applications	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Priority Card	2	0.07%	5	0.15%	7	0.24%	15	0.51%	4	0.15%
Band 1	165	6.1%	184	6%	357	12.5%	367	12%	264	10%
Band 2	152	6.2%	167	5%	166	5.81%	179	6%	203	8%
Housing Options	1845	69%	2282	71%	1881	65.9%	1949	67%	1755	68%
Transfer	480	18%	556	17%	443	15.5%	396	14%	334	13%
Totals	2646		3194		2854		2906		2560	

Housing Waiting List Applicants – Bedroom Need

The below snapshot shows the number of active applications on the Housing waiting list as of 31 March 2022. It gives an indication of demand based on the identified numbers of bedrooms required by the applicants and subsequently breaks this down by priority banding.

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	8 Bed	Total
Priority Card	3	1					4
Band 1	128	78	34	18	1	5	264
Band 2	87	35	36	43		2	203
Housing Options	1107	422	107	107		12	1755
Transfer	152	95	39	44	1	3	334
Total:	1477	631	216	212	2	22	2560



Lets

QTR 1 01 Apr 2021 to 30 Jun 2021: **88** Households have secured social housing
 QTR 2 01 Jul 2021 to 30 Sep 2021: **97** Households have secured social housing
 QTR 3 01 Oct 2021 to 31 Dec 2021: **74** Households have secured social housing
 QTR 4 01 JAN 2022 to 31 Mar 2022: **76** Households have secured Social Housing

In total **335** homes were let during 2021/22 of which 38 (11%) were Shared Ownership Homes. Overall lettings have increased by 26% compared with the same period last year (266 20/21).

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping

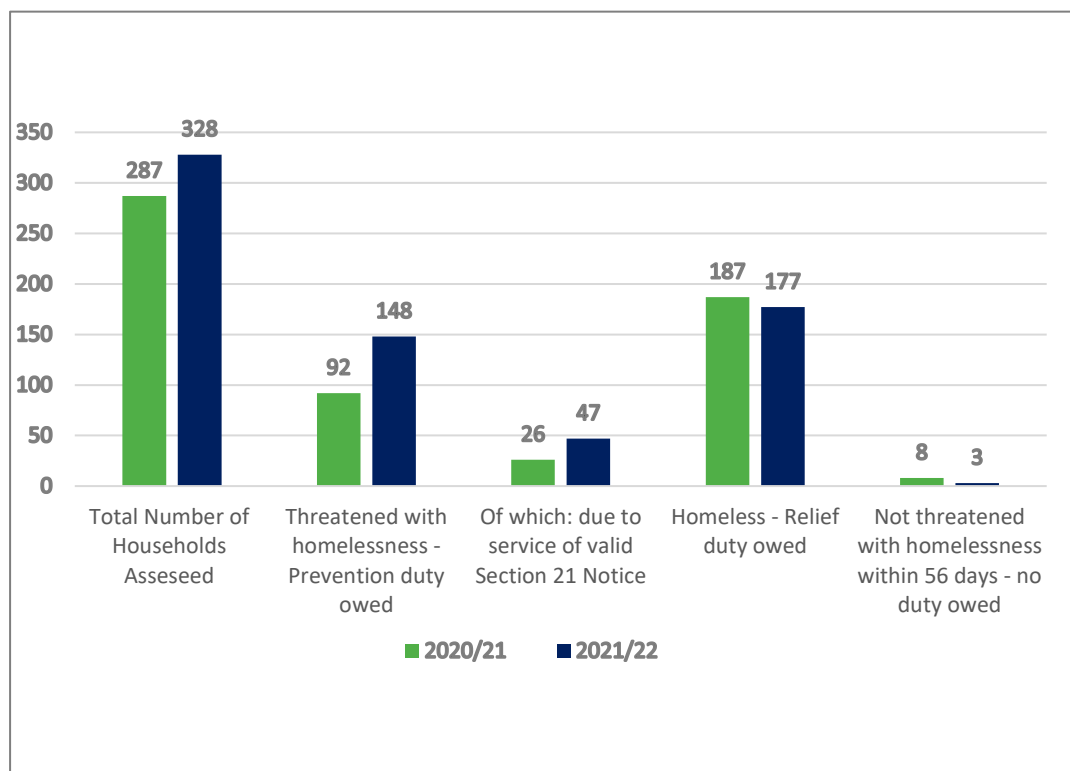
20 December 2022 – DLUHC instructed all authorities under the Protect & Vaccinate to bring in Rough Sleepers. NNDC at the 20 Dec 2021 had 8 Rough Sleepers through this programme we have brought in 5 –with 3 still rough sleeping and continue to refuse to come in. This service ended on 31 March 2022

3 x Entrenched rough sleepers
 1 x Protect & Vaccinate (P&V)
 0 x Rough Sleeper in Reeves Court
 3 x Former Rough Sleepers accommodated in the NSAP properties

Following a recent discussion with DLUHC we are still focusing on finding solutions for our single clients to whom the authority is accommodating.

Households Assessed and Duty Owed:

Between the 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 328 households were initially assessed as threatened with homelessness (owed prevention duty) or homeless (owed relief duty). The outcomes of the initial assessment is shown in the table below. Overall case numbers increased 14% (41 cases) from the same period last year.



As 31 March 2022, there were 166 active live cases:

- Final Duties accepted: **43**
- Prevention duty accepted: **48**
- Relief Duty accepted: **42**
- Decisions **1**
- Reviews: **0**
- Triage (mixture of new cases, rough sleepers, clients being supported): **32**

Domestic Abuse

We are developing a Housing Options - Domestic Abuse Strategy/protocol. This strategy/protocol will outline our approach to assist and support any person experiencing, or threatened with, domestic abuse. The document will underpin the changes within the new Domestic Abuse Act and the introduction of the County Wide 'Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy' adopted for Norfolk and recently obtained approval in cabinet.

As a service we are also looking at achieving DAHA accreditation, which is a scheme open to housing associations, Local Authority housing teams, and homelessness providers across the UK to help them improve their response to domestic abuse.

We have completed a review and have updated the relevant pages on our website including informing and signposting people to the new Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) which went live on the 3rd January 2022 and provides support and help for those experiencing domestic abuse.

Benefits

Following the influx of claims in 2020/21 due to Covid 19, our workload is starting to reduce. The Benefits Team have dealt with 1,773 **new claims** in the last year, which is 700 less than the previous year.

The team has also seen a fall in the number of **changes of circumstances** this year. We received just under 68,000 reported changes in 2021/22 which was just under 4,000 less than the previous year.

The team are continuing to maintain a high level of administration in new claims and changes in circumstances for both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, with these being processed within the target times contained in previous service plans; 20 days for new claims and 14 days for changes in circumstances.

Additional temporary support continues to be in place to meet demand and to ensure that residents receive the support that they require in a timely manner. Customer contact via our phone lines has been transferred to the Customer Services Team on a temporary basis, and we have two temporary posts within the team to support Benefits administration.

The Housing Benefit **caseload** continues to decrease slightly as all new working age claimants, with some exceptions, are required to claim Universal Credit for the housing element, which replaces Housing Benefit. There are currently 3844 live Housing Benefit claims, which is a reduction of 369 claims compared to April 2021.

The number of Council Tax Support claims have also decreased slightly to 3821 compared to 3951 this time last year. 62% of Council Tax Support claims relate to working age claimants, and the remaining 38% to Pensionable age claimants. Our Council Tax Support expenditure for 2021/22 reduced by 5% compared to the previous year to £7.5 million.

The recovery of **Housing Benefit overpayments** was halted during the height of the pandemic, although recovery from ongoing benefit entitlement continued, as well as existing attachments to earnings and benefits. Customers were offered payment breaks and no new recovery action was started. Recovery of overpayments has now fully recommenced, and arrangements are being made with customers to repay outstanding debts, new attachment of earning orders and deductions from benefits are now being applied where all other recovery options have been exhausted, whilst the team continues to apply sensitivity to individual financial circumstances.

The **Discretionary Housing Payment** budget for 2021/22 budget was £145,377 and 93% of the budget was spent across 197 households. Careful management of this budget with collaborative decision making across Benefits and Housing Teams ensures that vital support can be allocated to those in need throughout the year. The government contribution for 2022/23 is £100,945.

The audit in relation to the **Housing Benefit Subsidy** claim for 2020/21 has now been completed with no adverse financial impact to the amount of subsidy we claimed. Our Housing Benefit expenditure for 2020/21 was £21,085,852 and we have been able to claim 98.49% of the expenditure back through subsidy.

The team have worked extremely hard to protect the subsidy claim through rigorous risk based checks and additional checks. A program of cyclic refresher training has been delivered, and overall the team has worked really hard to ensure

a high level of accuracy. The pro-active work has minimised error and is testament to the effort the team have all put in to get us to this position. The Subsidy Audit for 2021/22 is due to commence in the summer.

Since September 2020, the team have been responsible for the administration of the **Test and Trace Support Payments**. The scheme closed on 24th February 2022. During this period the team handled 1264 applications of which 50.08% were approved in line with government guidance. 376 applications were approved under the standard scheme and 257 applications were approved under the Discretionary Scheme, which allowed for applications from people who were not in receipt of a welfare benefit.

In July 2021, we opted into the **Housing Benefit Award Accuracy initiative**. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) would like to continue working with local authorities (LAs) to tackle fraud and error. The initiative is funded by the DWP and is designed to support LAs undertaking specific, mandatory activities to proactively identify unreported changes and make sure that the right amount of benefit is paid to the right person, at the right time. In 2021 we issued 408 reviews and in 2022 we are required to issue 529 reviews.

As well as mandated reviews, we also identify fraud and error in the system through **Housing Matching Service (HBMS)** referrals. The DWP will cross reference their data with data held against the Housing Benefit system. In 2021 we handled 158 HBMS referrals.

In October 2021, the DWP launched the first round of the **Household Support Fund (HSF)** for the period 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022. The objective of the HSF was to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support during the winter as the economy recovers. North Norfolk District Council allocated a total of £115,899.17 across 342 households, as represented in the table below. This was 99.98% of our total fund devolved to the district by Norfolk County Council.

In addition to the financial support we have also provided support through food and energy bank referrals, referring cases to the Early Help and Prevention Team for physical, mental, social or financial wellbeing. We have supported households maximise their income through unclaimed benefits, and supported rent arrears and evictions cases through Discretionary Housing Payments.

	Food	Energy & Water	Essentials linked to Energy & Water	Wider Essentials
Number of Households supported with Children	2	90	1	55
Expenditure	£400.00	£29,877.28	£249.20	£12,964.60
Number of Households supported without Children	9	128	0	57
Expenditure	£1,700.00	£50,200.83	£0.00	£20,507.26

The second round of the Household Support Fund starts from 1st April 2022. We are working with Norfolk County Council to launch the scheme as soon as possible.

On 3rd February 2022, the government has announced measures to help protect millions of households from rising energy costs through the **Energy Rebate Scheme**. The Government will provide funding for billing authorities to give all households in England whose primary residence is valued in council tax bands A – D a one-off council tax energy rebate payment of £150. This payment will operate outside of the council tax system, using council tax lists to identify eligible households.

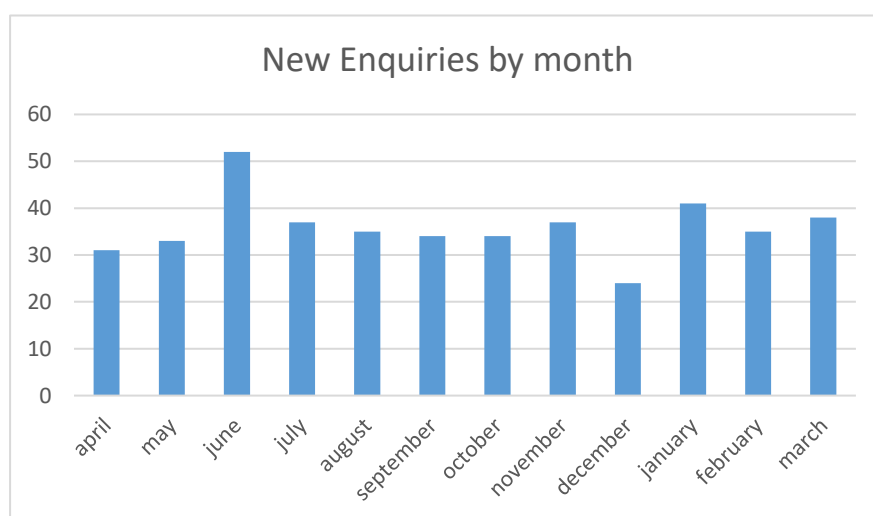
They will also provide funding for billing authorities to operate a discretionary fund for households in need who would not otherwise be eligible. This could include for example individuals on low incomes who live in properties valued in bands E – H.

The Benefits team will be administering payments under the **Discretionary scheme**. Further guidance including a draft policy will be presented to members shortly.

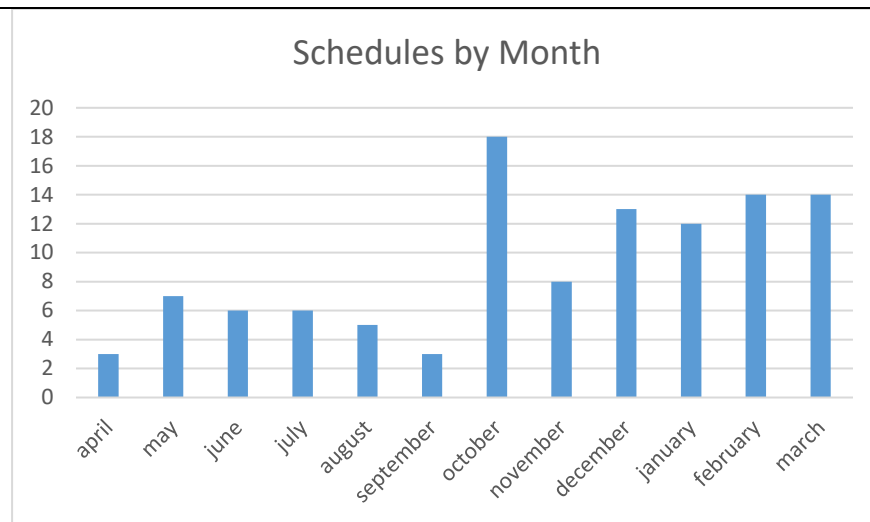
Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

The team received a record 431 new enquiries during 2021-22 resulting in 350 assessments being undertaken and 220 recommendations being made. We also have a number of existing cases within the system, which are being progressed – February saw 15 grants being approved at a cost of approximately £125,500 and in March there were 12 grants approved at a cost of approximately £123,000. The team have been working hard to adjust to some new ways of working with the introduction of a new Team Leader in late December. We continue to monitor and progress some of the more complex cases which require additional resource. In total 6 adaptations were completed during February and 2 in March with a total year to date spend of approximately £882,000. We anticipate the completed adaptations to continue to increase with the increased amount of grant approvals during the months of February and March 2022.

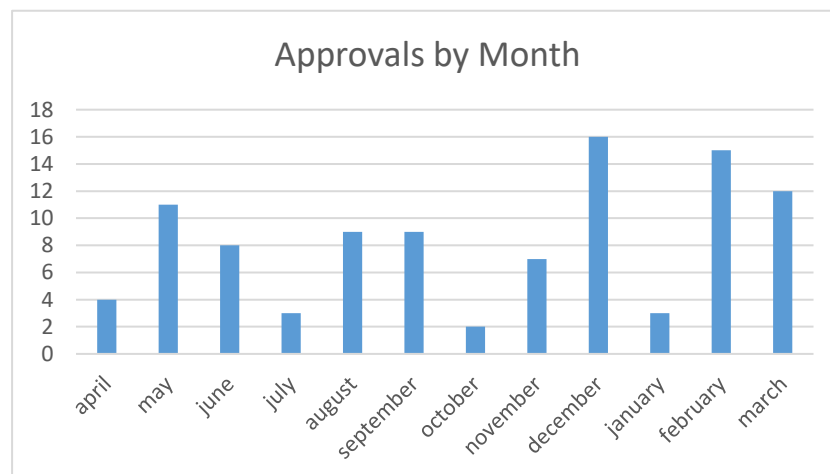
New enquiries by month – IHAT have continued to see a steady number of new contacts each month throughout 2021-2022.



Schedules by month – the progression of cases and number of schedules produced during the latter stages of 2021-22. This has increased the amount of grants that are being approved each month.



Grant approvals – we have seen an increase in the number of cases that have been moved to the grant approval stage in the months of February and March 2022.



Developments & update

A new IHAT team leader was appointed at the end of 2021, Samantha Jarrad was our existing Assistant Practitioner and was successful in securing this role. The recruitment process for a new Assistant Practitioner began during Jan 2022, Amy Watson was appointed as the new IHAT AP and joined the team at the beginning of March 22. We are further looking to expand the resource within the team to cope with increased demand with the creation of an additional Housing Adaptations Officer post.

2021-2022 also saw a new pilot scheme working in conjunction with Flagship be launched. With an increase in demand for the service we have piloted and agreed a proposal with Flagship to undertake the adaptations to their properties. The contract came into effect on the 1st April 2022 and it is hoped that this will increase the amount of grants being approved and completed during 2022-23 and reduce wait times for customers who urgently need adaptations.

IHAT has also been working closely with customer services to form a working relationship for managing incoming calls and enquiries from customers. This also went live during the first week of April 2022, It is anticipated that this will improve the customers journey and increase customer satisfaction as a whole. This is an

area which we are still developing alongside our webpage and will continue to monitor and report on moving into 2022-23.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

3 Meetings attended