

# **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

December 2022

**COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND BENEFITS**

## **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

### **Benefits**

#### **Energy Support**

##### **Energy Rebate (Discretionary) Scheme**

This scheme ended on 30th November 2022. North Norfolk District Council received funding of £226,350 which was paid across 4938 households. This was targeted at low-income households across the district to help with the rising cost of household bills. We also included an emergency fund for residents to apply directly for support.

##### **Household Support Fund (round 3)**

We will be going live with round 3 of the Household Support Fund in December. We have received £89,000 to allocate to our residents to support households with food, energy, and essentials over the winter. In line with the guidance provided by the DWP, we will be targeting low-income households with disabilities, low-income households who did not receive the DWP Cost of Living Payments, and we will also be providing for an emergency fund where other low-income households can apply directly.

##### **Energy Bills Support Scheme – Alternative Fund**

The Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) provided a discount on energy bills of £400 for most households in Great Britain. Domestic electricity suppliers delivered this scheme.

For households who pay for their electricity in a separate way, and so will not receive support through EBSS, the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and local authorities will together deliver the EBSS Alternative Funding (EBSS AF).

It is a one-off payment of £400 to help with energy costs over this winter. Those eligible will include those with a commercial landlord or intermediary, such as park home residents and some housing association tenants.

Local authorities will be tasked with verifying the identity and eligibility of applicants, from data sent on via a digital portal. Local authorities will deliver the £400 support to applicants through their bank accounts.

BEIS will create and manage a digital portal, including an online eligibility checker and application form, which will be the gateway for applications, and which will aim to reduce to a minimum the amount of discretion that local authorities are required to exercise in processing applications.

BEIS determines the policy and approach for the scheme and will support local authorities with complex cases.

Applications must comply with the following criteria to successfully receive the £400 support from the scheme:

- The dwelling for which support is being claimed is the main or sole residential address of the applicant making the claim.
- The applicant or resident (if someone else manages the application on their behalf) is responsible for paying for energy used in the dwelling as part of a service charge, rent or other arrangement.
- The household is not already receiving the £400 EBSS payment, either through the main EBSS scheme or the EBSS Alternative Fund, in whole or in part.
- The household dwelling is:
  - not a business premises or other form of non-domestic premises (unless the main business activity is to provide long term residential accommodation such as landlords and care homes).
  - used wholly or mainly for domestic purposes.

BEIS intends for the scheme to be live around 16th January. Local Authorities are awaiting the final guidance on the scheme.

### **Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard**

We have now launched the LIFT Dashboard which will allow us to use data analytics to provide us with powerful insights into how individual households are impacted by welfare changes and the cost-of-living crisis. We will use the data to pro-actively target just managing households and households already in crisis to tackle problem debt, rent arrears, maximise income, prevent homelessness, and to also understand current and future demand on our services.

We have already used the dashboard to engage with households in crisis who may need support with fuel and food. We have also contacted households who are entitled to but who may not be claiming free childcare, or Healthy Start Food Vouchers.

We will be carrying out communications on a larger scale to encourage and support households who are entitled to but not claiming Pension Credit, Council Tax Support, or Free School Meal vouchers.

### **Discretionary Housing Payments**

We continue to administer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to support tenancy sustainment and to support people to stay within the community. Cases are worked on as a panel which includes officers from the Benefits Team and Housing Options.

For 2022/23, North Norfolk has now been allocated funding of £103,037, and up to 30th November 2022 we have spent 82% of our allocation across 105 households and a further 192 applications have been refused as the circumstances of the household are outside the scope of the scheme. Where we have not been able to provide support through the DHP scheme, the team will consider other funding options and signpost the customer accordingly.

We are also using a Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard to identify residents of North Norfolk that may require assistance with a rent shortfall.

### **Financial Inclusion Team**

The team has been busy supporting residents who require advice and support across all areas of financial inclusion, including debt advice, welfare benefits advice and financial capability.

The team will also be supporting tenancy sustainment by enabling customers to manage their financial commitments to be able to retain suitable accommodation and prevent homelessness where possible.

The service was launched in October and since then the team has received 153 referrals of which 84 urgent referrals have either been completed or the client is currently working with Harvey and Suzanne.

The service is working well and has already positively impacted the lives of many households in the small timeframe the team has been operating. The team has also received some wonderful feedback.

### **Speed of Processing and workloads**

The Benefits team has worked hard to reduce the time taken to administer claims for Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support as well as changes to someone's circumstances. The service is now operating well within its service targets. Performance for processing new claims in October was 12 days (target 20 days) and for handling changes in circumstances was 12 days (target 14 days).

We are continuing to work on service developments which will see our performance improve further.

With the recruitment to temporary posts, we have been able to fully resource the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, which not only has supported our quicker response times but has also allowed for our outstanding workloads to reduce.

Our overall live caseload has reduced slightly by 3.71% over the last year but we anticipate our Council Tax Support caseload will increase over the next 6 months following take-up campaigns.

## **New Affordable Homes**

The forecast number of new affordable homes to be built in 2022/23 is significantly lower than the numbers achieved in the last few years as a result of fewer sites available and the delay caused by Nutrient Neutrality. We anticipate 28 affordable homes during the current financial year (the figure was 52 but one scheme will not compete until 2023/24).

However, we have a healthy affordable housing schemes pipeline, many of which are Rural Exception Housing Sites at various points in the development process. There are a total of 18 developments which will or could, subject to approvals, yield 354 new Affordable Homes in the next few years. The Importance of Rural Exception Schemes, which provide affordable homes in the countryside to meet local need, and NNDC's success in delivering these has recently been recognised. North Norfolk is named as one of the top 5 deliverers of affordable homes on Exception Schemes. These schemes provide homes in the countryside to meet local housing needs. For further information see:

<https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/news/2022/november/north-norfolk-district-council-delivers-some-of-the-highest-numbers-of-new-affordable-homes-on-rural-exception-housing-sites/>

## **Encouraging Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Developers**

Housing Strategy have established a project to provide support and encouragement to SME developers to bring forward small sites of new affordable housing which will be purchased by Registered Providers. The Council's role (supported by Local Partnerships – an organisation owned by the Treasury, the Local Government Association and the Welsh Government) is to help make this happen through publicity to raise awareness of opportunities with SMEs, making the process simpler by liaising with Planning, clarifying specifications and contract requirements and providing support.

The project aims to help tackle one of the key challenges to increasing the supply of new affordable homes in North Norfolk - the shortage of local developers and builders, especially Small & Medium Enterprises (SME). For further information see:

<https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/news/2022/december/council-seeking-proposals-for-new-affordable-homes/>

## **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.

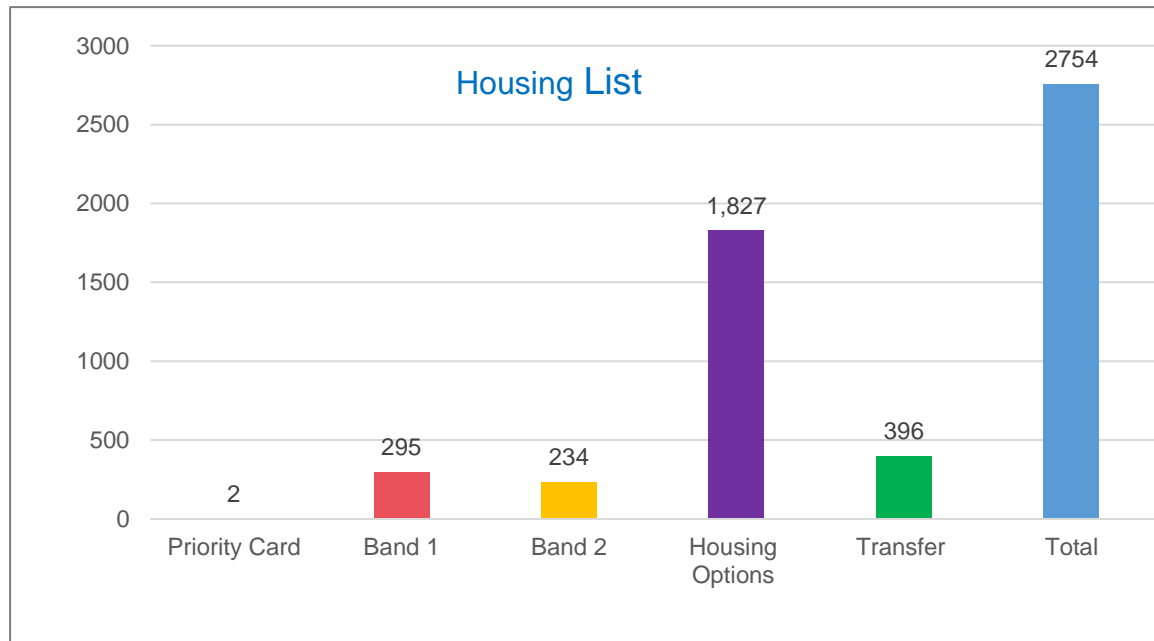
Our new Energy Officer started with us in March and has been promoting the scheme through several routes: a "Your money matters" spread in North Norfolk News, a video published on all NNDC social media and our website, a leaflet sent to all parish councils, followed by attendance at many parish council and other public meetings, and an article in the Council's Outlook magazine.

To date 106 applications have been sent, with 28 properties approved for works. Actual grant spend is £57,327, with a further £62,954 committed. Works approved external wall insulation, loft insulation, cavity insulation and air source heat pumps. For further information on grants: <https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/news/2022/april/warm-homes-grant-available-after-successful-bid/>

## Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

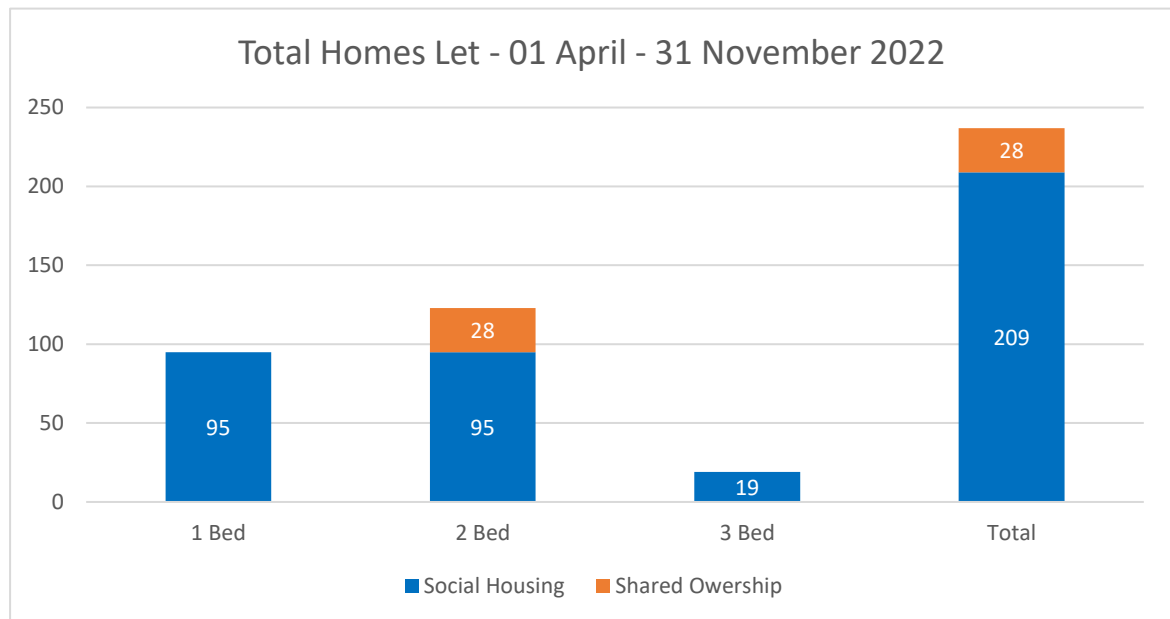
### Your Choice Your Home

As at the 30 November 2022 there were **2,772 households** on the housing list with 19% being on the Housing Register – this register contains those qualifying applicants who have the most urgent housing needs.



	Housing List – Bedroom Need:						
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	8 Bed	Total
Priority Card	1	1					2
Band 1	148	81	30	33	2	1	295
Band 2	99	48	40	45	1	1	234
Housing Options	1,140	430	131	110		16	1,827
Transfer	187	120	40	42	1	6	396
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1575</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2754</b>

## Homes Let



\*Shared ownership - during QTR 1 Meadow Walk an Extra Care living development (housing 21) for people over the age of 55 in Fakenham was completed – these properties were let outside of Your Choice Your Home.

Social Housing lets by banding and bedroom size							
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	8 Bed	Total
Priority Card		6	1				7
Band 1	81	81	17				179
Band 2	2		1				3
Housing Options	7	5					12
Transfer	2	3					5
<b>Total:</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>19</b>				<b>206</b>

## Allocations Review

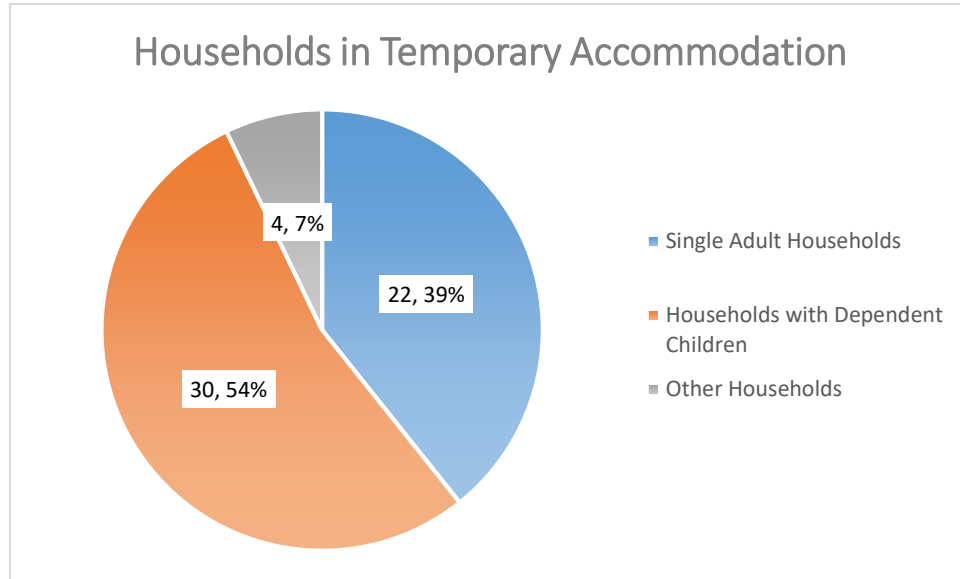
Our Allocations Scheme explains the rules, criteria and procedures that determine how we allocate social and affordable housing to households in North Norfolk. We last reviewed our scheme in 2018, since then the scheme has been updated to reflect changes in the law, and minor changes as allowed by the scheme.

Housing is a top priority for North Norfolk District Council - Our Corporate Plan 2019 to 2023, Housing Strategy, Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy and more recently our quality-of-life strategy all recognise that having a safe and secure home is one of the most important things in life.

To ensure that people have homes that meet their needs, giving priority to those in greatest need, and making the application process easier we are reviewing our scheme, this will be undertaken in several phases. The initial phase is looking at how the current scheme is working and identifying priority areas.

## **Temporary Accommodation**

As at the 30 November 2022 there were 55 households in Temporary Accommodation:



\* Other households includes couples and families with older children.

In addition to the above, all 5 units of Next Steps Accommodation (4) and Rough Sleeper Accommodation (1) are being used to accommodate previous rough sleepers. NSAP and RSAP properties provide a portfolio of NNDC self-contained dwellings with wraparound support, in accommodation provided for up to two years allowing dwellings to be “re-used” for other former rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping.

## **Private Sector Leasing Scheme**

A number of factors (including the cost-of-living crisis, rising mortgage interest rates, no fault evictions in the private rented sector, a reduction in new affordable homes being built) mean we anticipate a sustained, or potentially an increased, need for TA for the foreseeable future. To help meet this demand, we continue to look at alternatives to bed and breakfast accommodation and one option that we will be piloting in the new year is a private sector leasing scheme (PSL) which will involve the council leasing a property in exchange for a guaranteed income to the owner.

## **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping**

We continue to support 3 entrenched Rough Sleepers. Whilst it is not always possible to locate rough sleepers, we respond to reports from the community and via Street Link to quickly identify and verify rough sleepers and help the most vulnerable access the services they need.

## **Annual Rough Sleeping Count**

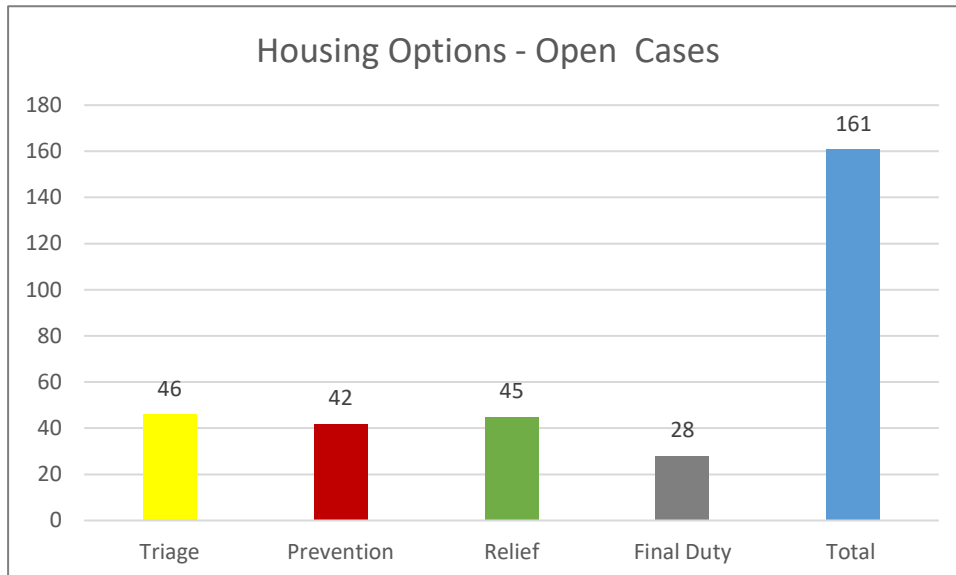
Rough sleeping trends are measured at a national level with an ‘annual snapshot’ which provides Government with an understanding of how many people are sleeping rough in an area on a ‘typical night’ based on the figure at a snapshot point in the year (Autumn).

The annual count was undertaken in November and the number of people who were rough sleeping in North Norfolk was recorded as 4.

### **Households Assessed and Duty Owed**

Our Housing Options Service offers advice to anyone who has a housing problem, and offers support and assistance if someone is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, within the next 56 days.

Demand on the service remains high, at the end of November there were **161** open cases:



### **Domestic Abuse**

As we've previously reported, we are currently working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. DAHA accreditation is the UK benchmark for how housing providers and local authorities should respond to domestic abuse in the UK.

Whilst the focus will be on the Housing Options Service, they no longer look at housing in isolation and will be looking at our approach across the Council. A Strategic Project Steering Group has been set up, and is due to take place on the 19th December and will meet every three months. Consequently, through the Strategic Steering Group, an Operational Project Steering Group will also be created which will meet more frequently, around every other month. Individuals from different departments in the Council have been invited to both so that responsibility and standards are embedded throughout the organisation. This will enhance our accreditation and allow for greater chance of success.



### **Ukraine Household - Emerging Homelessness situation**

We have taken 7 homeless applications from Ukrainian households following the end of the 6-month host arrangements.

<b>Household Make Up</b>	
Single Households (without Children)	4
Family Households (with Children)	3

<b>Accommodation Outcomes</b>	
Private Rented Property	2
Allocation of housing from the council's housing register.	2
Rematch	1
Awaiting a rematch or alternative accommodation offer whilst in Temporary Accommodation.	2

### **Integrated Housing Adaptations Team**

IHAT continues to implement changes to the DFG application process to improve customer journey and reduce end to end timescales. Feedback from customers to date following amendments to the DFG process has been positive and we continue to explore ways for how we can further develop and improve the service.

During November we received 35 new contacts and completed a total of 24 assessments. From this 12 cases have progressed to recommendation for adaptations and 5 Housing Needs Reports (HNR) were completed to support people to obtain more suitable accommodation. Year to date (YTD) a total of 371 new contacts have been received, 194 assessments have been completed. From this, 44 HNRs have completed and 127 recommendations for adaptations submitted.

During November we completed 15 DFG Adaptations cases with a total value of £66,636 and approved a further 11 cases with a total value of £96,718. This takes the total YTD spend to £834,848. YTD 95 adaptation cases have been completed, 117 cases have been approved.

The Home repairs pilot continues to see cases being referred into the scheme from IHAT, Social Prescribing, Energy Officer and Environmental Protection and finance intervention team.

To date we have received 15 referrals and have taken forward 13 of these to contractor site inspections. We have received quotations back for 9 cases and have approved these works, with an approximate value of £20,000. At the end of November four cases have had work started with two being complete. A further three cases have repairs scheduled for the coming weeks.

Outcomes have been positive and feedback obtained from residents on completed projects. Contractor capacity remains good and we are confident the budget will be committed before the end of the financial year.

Our new 'Waiting Well Officer' Nathan Benedettini has joined the team and begun rolling out the project. He has been focused on raising awareness of the project amongst local residents through NNDC media outlets and creating suitable literature to inform and signpost our intended audience to the appropriate services

## **2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

## **3 Meetings attended**

### **01 November 2022**

- Children, Young People with Asthma
- **Domestic Abuse Forum**  
As a local Authority, we recognise we play in supporting those tenants, families, customers and staff affected by domestic abuse, as well as the actions we can and do take alongside our partners to help prevent domestic abuse. The Forum allows us to listen to those with experience about how services support survivors and what improvements could be made. We will be hosting another forum in the new year.

### **02 November 2022**

- Coastal Forum

### **07 November 2022**

- Cabinet
- Meeting to discuss temporary Accommodation Options

### **09 November 2022**

- Overview and Scrutiny

### **11 November 2022**

- Group Meeting

### **14 November 2022**

- Portfolio Holder Meeting

### **15 November 2022**

- Domestic Abuse Conference

**16 November 2022**

- Full Council

**22 November 2022**

- Cabinet pre agenda and Business Planning Meeting

**24 November 2022**

- Voluntary Norfolk Good Practice Workshop  
Food Aid & Food Distribution in Norfolk

I continue to attend and support the Mundesley Community Larder every Friday and on 24 November 2022 I met with other organisations online to discuss one of the most pressing issues today - food insecurity in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis.

Across Norfolk there is a growing network of organisations and voluntary groups in finding innovative ways to redistribute food within their communities, making sure it gets to those who need it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm-hkmrXOJw>