

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND BENEFITS

JANUARY 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

Household Support Fund (round 3)

Household Support Fund extension (from 01 October 2022 until 31 March 2023) – Round 3

NNDC has been awarded £88k under round 3 of the scheme. We have used this funding to target support to **210** disabled households and **342** low-income households who did not receive the DWP COL payments. Each household will receive a Post Office PayOut voucher for **£100** which they can cash at any Post Office. These vouchers will be issued in the next 7 – 10 days. The Post Office PayOut scheme worked well under round 2 and we had a high volume of vouchers being cashed (91%). Where vouchers are not cashed and subsequently expire, we will be working with customers to ensure they still receive the funding.

We also have the Household Support Fund application form live on our web page [Home | Household Support Fund \(north-norfolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/home/household-support-fund) where low income households can apply for support directly. The application will be available up to 10th March or earlier if our funds are exhausted prior to this date.

Council Tax Support Fund

North Norfolk District Council has been allocated **£203,643** under the fund.

The discount of £25 will be applied to current LCTS claimants that have an outstanding council tax liability for the 2023-24 financial year. This will be delivered using our discretionary powers under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

As part of the CTS fund, we will also be setting up a Discretionary fund to allocate additional funding to further support vulnerable households with council tax bills.

We will release additional information as and when it becomes available.

Discretionary Housing Payments

We continue to administer **Discretionary Housing Payments** (DHP) to support tenancy sustainment, homelessness, 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 31st January 2023 we have spent £101,050.18, which equates to 98% of our allocation across 136 households. A further 253 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.

A breakdown of how the expenditure has been allocated can be seen below:

| Area of expenditure | Amount allocated |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Rent Arrears | £16,505.25 |
| Rent Deposit | £920.00 |
| Ongoing Rent Shortfalls | £83,624.93 |
| Total Expenditure | £101,050.18 |

Financial Inclusion Team

Our Financial Inclusion Team has received 295 referrals since the team was launched in October. Referrals have come from other services within the council, or through direct contact from the client or third party. The officers have also attended several events in the community promoting the support available.

We now have a Benefit Officer supporting the administration of cases, who will touch base with the client on the day the referral is received. They will ensure support such as food, electric, gas, or oil is requested straight away, and they will also order forms from the DWP, and send income & expenditure forms to clients for completion. This ensures we have all the information needed for the case as soon as possible and address any immediate needs.

Case management of Financial Inclusion records is in the process of being transferred to Civica Open Revenues workflow, which will allow more efficient case management, document management, and data recording. This is of no additional cost to the authority and forms part of the existing Benefits system.

Financial Inclusion Take Up Campaign

We will shortly be contacting 179 pension age households who may be entitled to Pension Credit and are not claiming it.

Pension Credit is made up of two parts: Guarantee Credit and Savings Credit

1. **Guarantee Credit** tops up your weekly income to a guaranteed minimum level of £182.60 if you are single or £278.70 if you are a couple. You may get more if you have a severe disability, are a carer or have certain housing costs
2. **Savings Credit** is extra money if you have some savings, or your income is higher than the basic state pension. You could get up to £14.48 extra per week if you are single or £16.20 if you are a couple.

Claiming Pension Credit is important because it means you may automatically be able to:

1. Apply for a free TV licence if you are 75 or over
2. Get cold weather payments
3. Get £900 in cost-of-living payments in 2023
4. Get help with NHS costs if you get the Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit. This can include things like prescriptions, dental treatment, glasses, and transport costs for hospital appointments

If you are sick, disabled or have caring needs you could also apply for Attendance Allowance. This is extra help for people 66 and over who need help with personal care or supervision because of

illness or disability. If you claim Pension Credit you could get an extra £69.40 a week if you also claim Attendance Allowance.

We will be offering support with applications via the Financial Inclusion team and the DWP Visiting Team.

Speed of Processing for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

As of the 31st December 2022, the speed of processing time for the assessment of a new claim is 9 days and 5 days for a change in circumstances.

Our performance has continued to improve due to a combination of increased resources, and changes to our working practices using a system thinking approach to claims processing. We continue to develop our best practice so that our processing times in the future will align with top benchmarked LAs.

End of Year Upgrading

The team is now preparing for end of year upgrading to the Benefits system. This will involve completion of outstanding work to ensure customers data is as up to date as possible, upgrading customer's welfare benefit entitlement, reviewing rent charges for 2023/24, parameter checking, and system testing. The live Benefits system will be unavailable for several days at the end of February whilst this process takes place. The process is expected to be completed by early March and letters to customers issued middle of March. We will also be including a Cost-of-Living flyer with all letters.

Housing Strategy

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. Officers have worked with Broadland Housing Association to get in-principle support from Homes England (the government's funding agency for affordable housing) to fund a package of five Exception sites in North Norfolk to be delivered over the next 2-3 years.

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).

Grant for Energy Efficiency Improvement Works

North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) as part of the Norfolk Warm Homes Consortium of five Norfolk districts was successful in a bid for government grant to provide energy efficiency improvement works to homes occupied by low-income households. Our new Energy Officer has been promoting the scheme through several routes and encouraging applications.

The government has announced further funding for 2023/24 and again we intend to bid for this as part of the Warm Homes Consortium. Eligibility criteria for future grants has been simplified and will include any home within the most deprived areas in the UK (measured by the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation income deciles 1-3) if privately owned or privately rented, provided the Energy Performance Certificate is rated D-G and the households has no more than £100k in savings. This will open up the grant to many more eligible households – across Norfolk there are 603 postcode areas covering 2,600 properties we believe meet the criteria and 23% of these are in North Norfolk.

Lobbying for simpler applications process for the new energy grants

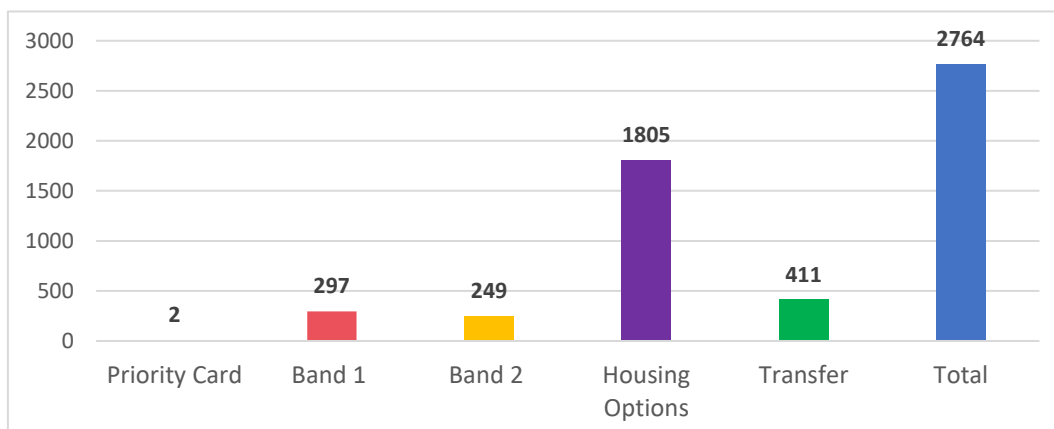
We recently wrote to BEIS (Business, Energy and industrial strategy) expressing concern about the challenges we face while trying to deliver energy efficiency works, these concerns are - certainty over future funding, due to the uncertainty over future funding the council and its partners find it difficult to retain skilled officers and over complex eligibility criteria. It is a concern that the rules for HUG funding act as a barrier. For 'off gas' properties (the majority in North Norfolk district), to be eligible for the HUG contractors often have to deliver multiple measures in order to increase the EPC by two bands e.g. EPC Band E to C. In addition there is too little funding for small and less expensive measures for windows, doors and storage heaters. In consequence a whole house fabric first approach often costs more than the funding rules allow. This means that many households which apply and would benefit from a single measure or a combination of measures are ineligible due to the requirement for a two EPC band increase.

We hope by writing to BEIS they may support simplifying some of the rules and so open up funding for many more households.

Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

Your Choice Your Home

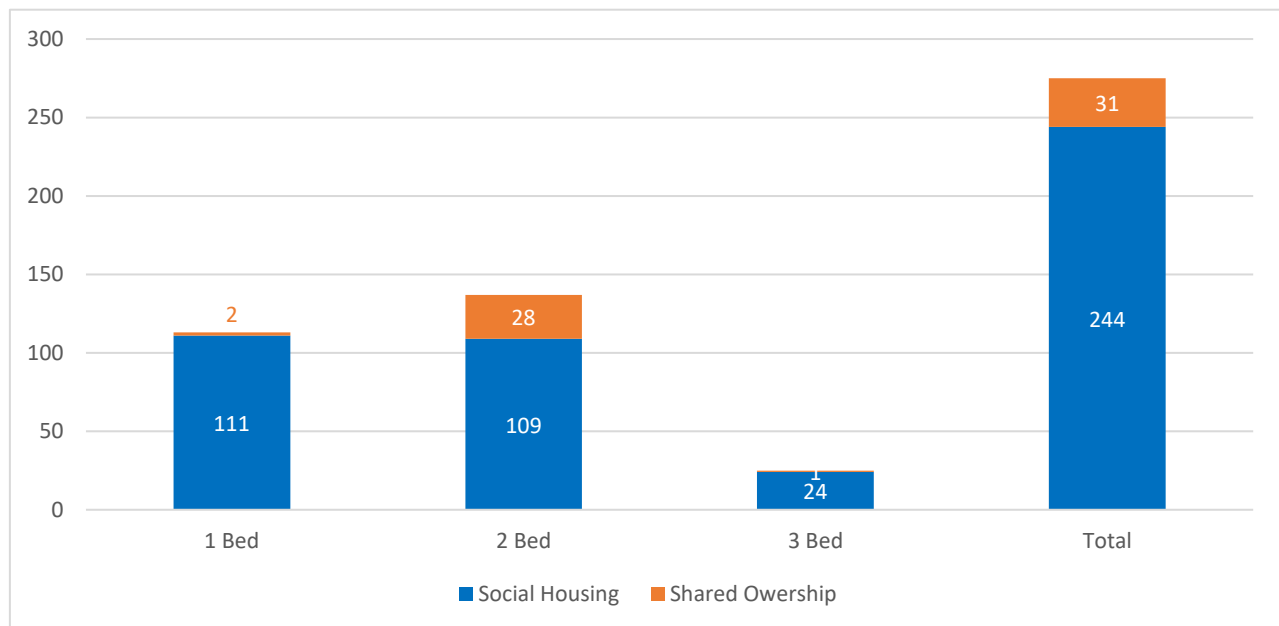
As at the 31 January 2023 there were **2,764 households** on the housing list with 19% being on the Housing Register – this register contains those qualifying applicants who have the most urgent housing needs.



Housing List by Bedroom Need:

| - | Housing List – Bedroom Need: | | | | | | Total |
|-----------------|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| | 1 Bed | 2 Bed | 3 Bed | 4 Bed | 5 Bed | 8 Bed | |
| 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 |
| Total: | 1575 | 680 | 241 | 230 | 4 | 24 | 2754 |

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.

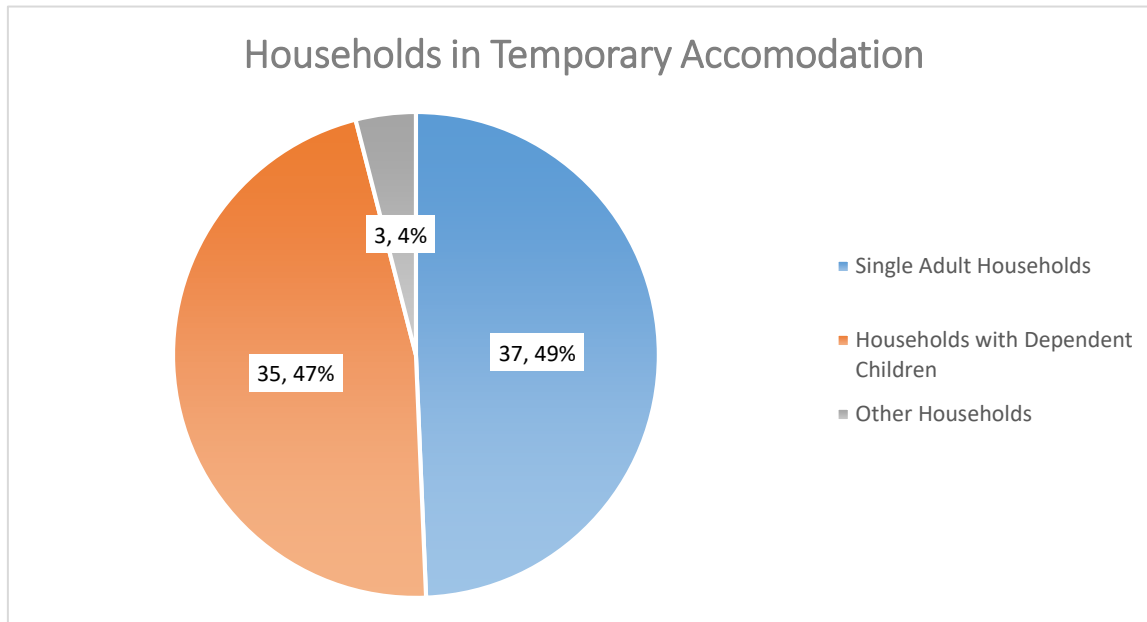
Social Housing lets by banding and bedroom size

| | 1 Bed | 2 Bed | 3 Bed | 4 Bed + | Total |
|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------|---------|------------|
| Priority Card | | 9 | | | 9 |
| Band 1 | 96 | 92 | 21 | | 209 |
| Band 2 | 4 | 2 | | | 6 |
| Housing Options | 7 | 5 | | | 12 |
| Transfer | 4 | 4 | | | 8 |
| Total: | 111 | 112 | 21 | | 244 |

Temporary Accommodation

The number of people living in temporary accommodation continues to rise at an alarming rate - driven by the shortage of social homes, and expensive private rented.

As at the 31 January 2023 there were 75 households in Temporary Accommodation.



* *Other househilds includes couples and families with older Children.*

22% of families living in temporary accommodation have been there for over 6 months, showing this type of accommodation is becoming less and less “temporary” as families cannot escape homelessness due to the severe lack of affordable homes. Officers continue to review and assess a number of options to expand and improve the emergency accommodation and Temporary Accommodation available

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.

We continue to actively seek opportunities to identify alternative solutions to nightly paid accommodation, this includes increasing our own portfolio of accommodation. We are close to completion on a 2-bed property in Mundesley. Upon completion the Council will have a portfolio of 18 home for use as temporary accommodation – the five units of move of or rough sleepers and 13 homes as alternatives to bed and breakfast type accommodation.

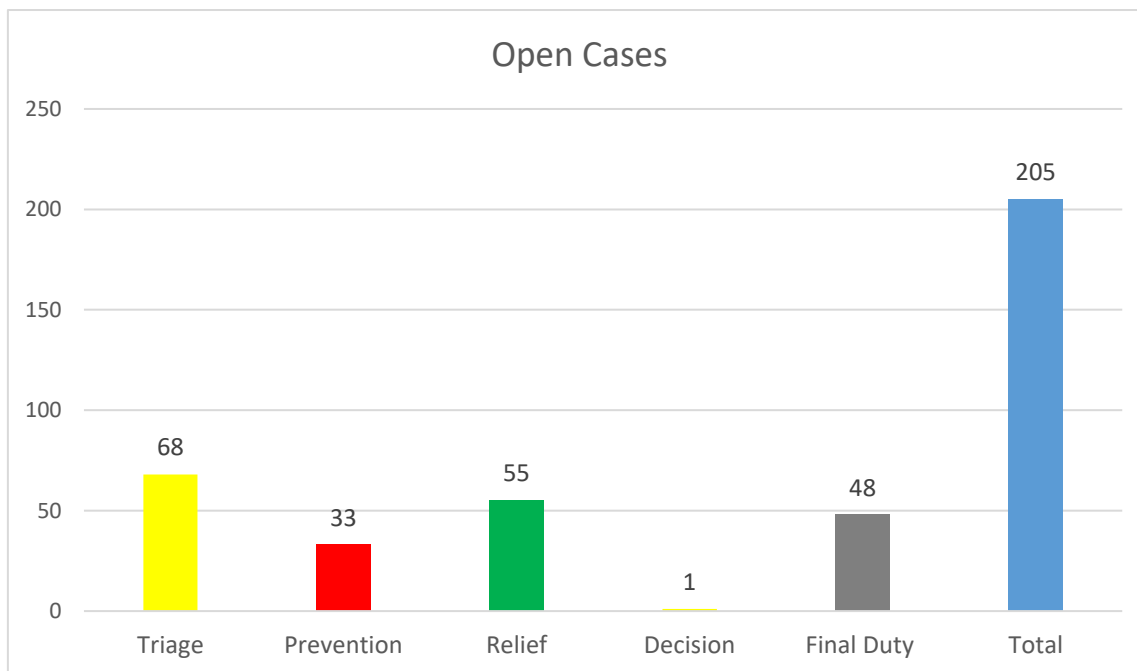
Private Sector Leasing Scheme

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.

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 January 2023 there were **205** open cases:



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 and during the month of January we verified 2 new Rough Sleepers. One person is being assisted under Part 7 of the Housing Act and one has returned to another Local Authority Area.

SWEP

Historically, SWEP provision was triggered when the forecast was zero degrees or below for three days. It is now best practice to take a common-sense approach, where any forecast approaching zero is considered; the impact of rain, snow and wind chill are taken into account; and the 'feels like' temperature is checked, along with conditions underfoot (e.g., ice).

When SWEP is activated, our Pathway, Prevention & Sustainment Officers actively engage with anyone who is sleeping rough with the offer of somewhere warm to sleep, regardless of their eligibility under homelessness legislation.

SWEP was activated between 5 dec to 04 January and 14 Jan to 25 January as temperatures plummeted and supported 11 people into emergency accommodation. 2 people brought in under SWEP have now been placed into Reeves Court and are being assisted under Part 7 of the Housing Act.

Being able to house rough sleepers during this time not only means people have a warm place to sleep during severe weather, but also gives us the opportunity to get to know them and help assess their needs for housing in the longer term

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 DA project officer is not able to provide direct advice on individual cases/circumstances is working not only the Housing team but with teams across the organisation to help embed standards of good practise and support towards accreditation

Some of the work being undertaken include:

- The first meeting of the Strategic Project Group.
- Domestic abuse DASH training has delivered by a domestic abuse specialist to Housing Options Staff
- policies and procedures including a tailored policy and procedure to support staff and a separate Housing Options document to support customers are being drafted.
- Targeted publicity and awareness raising campaigns have been promoted both internally and externally.

Ukraine Household - Emerging Homelessness situation

We have taken 7 homeless applications from Ukrainian households following the end /breakdown of host arrangements.

| Household Make Up | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Single Households (without Children) | 4 |
| Family Households (with Children) | 3 |

| Accommodation Outcomes | |
|--|---|
| 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

The Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT) continues to review processes to improve outcomes and customer satisfaction. A percentage of cases referred to IHAT will not lead to a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) for various reasons such as the customer may not be eligible, the property may be unsuitable for adaption, or the provision of equipment or minor adaptations solves the issue.

The IHAT service is developing alternative pathways for self-funded adaptations, advice, assisting people to move to suitable accommodation and home repairs grant / referring into other services including financial inclusion and Warm homes grant.

Year to date (YTD) a total of 397 new contacts have been received, 208 assessments have been completed. From these 136 recommendations for adaptations submitted. YTD 99 adaptation cases have been completed and 123 cases have been approved.

The Home repairs pilot continues to receive new referrals from IHAT, Social Prescribing, Energy Officer, Environmental Protection and Finance Intervention Team To date we have received 20 referrals and have taken forward 16 of these to contractor site inspections. We have received quotations back for 12 cases and have approved these works, with an approximate value of £30,000.

North Norfolk Waiting Well Project Update – 31st January 2022

The first patient list was received from the NNUH in the week prior to the Christmas closure. Patients are sent an initial letter to inform them why they are being contacted and to give them time to consider the support they may need. A flyer gives information about the types of support available and a link to an NNDC webpage, jointly branded with the Integrated Care System, enabling patients to verify project authenticity. The letter advises patients they will receive a phone call during a specified week, enabling us to call on more than one occasion if we are unable to make contact on first attempt. Patients can request an appointment on specified date/time, a face-to-face visit, or decline contact.

Of the first sixty patients contacted, four patients have declined contact stating they do not have support needs and six patients have declined contact as they have already had their treatment. Of the remaining fifty patients, it was not possible to make contact with two and, therefore, we have sent them a second letter offering an appointment on a specified date/time. This indicates that we are making contact and engaging with 80% of patients through this approach following one letter.

The most common support needs identified relate to housing adaptations, low-level equipment needs to improve safety with daily tasks, and access to physiotherapy due to worsening condition.

Community Safety Update

Community Trigger Training

The training in December was attended by a number of staff from Environment and Leisure and Peoples Services. The partners are reviewing processes. The Community Trigger is a process which allows members of the community to ask the Community Safety Partnership to review their responses to complaints of anti-social behaviour (including incidents of hate).

Prevent Awareness Training

The Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership has been successful in a joint bid (with Suffolk) for funding from the Home Office to deliver Prevent Awareness Training to practitioners and parents and children. The training will be delivered throughout February and March with provider and dates yet to be confirmed. The aim of the awareness training is to mainstream the response to the Prevent duty so that it becomes part of the day-to-day safeguarding of young people for professionals in the partnership, parents and carers. It supports safeguarding young people by working in partnership with local agencies to ensure a coordinated, multiagency approach to identifying, increase referrals and putting in place support measures, at the earliest opportunity for those subject to radicalisation and extremism.

Serious Violence Duty

The Serious Violence Duty commenced on 31 January 2023. Partners now have 12 months to complete a strategic needs assessment and develop a strategy to respond to and prevent serious violence in the County.

Modern Day Slavery

There are concerns that those fleeing the war in Ukraine and asylum seekers/immigrants are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of modern-day slavery. The Government has recently notified the Council that in certain cases victims of modern-day slavery will be awarded automatic priority need under the Homelessness Provisions.

Asylum Dispersal

SERCO is the provider commissioned to acquire dispersal for asylum seekers in Norfolk. Currently SERCO would consult with the district and provide the full postcode for the property being considered. SERCO is changing the consultation process at the end of March and in the meantime has requested that we identify from a full list of 4-character postcodes whether the area is 'open', 'closed' or 'limited' based on crime data and recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour. 'Open' would indicate there are no issues in the areas, 'Closed' that the area should not be considered for dispersal and 'limited' that some concerns identified, but further consideration would need to be given. There would then be further consultation providing the full post code if acquisition of a property was being consider. The new system will be implemented from the end of March. We have not as yet been contacted by SERCO which suggests that they have not as yet identified any properties in North Norfolk that meet their criteria.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

The next Domestic Abuse forum will be on the 27th of February 2023. Focusing on Elder and Vulnerable adult abuse.

3 Meetings attended (January 2023)

Informal Cabinet
Cabinet Meeting
Community Larder
NNDC Town & Parish Council Engagement Forum
LAHF - for Ukraine/Afghan homes
CLT/Cabinet
Portfolio Holder Meeting
Member Briefing S106 Agreements
NN Sustainable Communities Panel
Business Planning Meeting
Overview and Scrutiny
Discussion on Wells Coastal Community Supermarket and Nourishing Norfolk