

## CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

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

FEBRUARY 2023

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

#### **Benefits**

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

We have now closed round 3 of the scheme to further applications to allow us to process outstanding applications prior to the scheme ending on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. During the scheme we targeted 550 households who we had identified as eligible to receive a payment of £100 towards their energy bills, as they had not received a DWP Cost of Living payment or because the household was occupied by someone with a disability. Households were provided with a voucher which could be cashed in at a Post Office. 92% of households collected their payment.

We also provided further support through a reactive approach by inviting struggling households to apply for support using an online application form. So far, we have distributed nearly £23k.

##### **Household Support Fund (round 4)**

The government has announced round 4 of the Household Support Fund which is due to go live on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and is to run to the end of the financial year. North Norfolk District Council has been allocated £196k under the scheme. We are working with other councils across Norfolk to agree on a collaborative approach.

##### **Council Tax Support Fund**

North Norfolk District Council has been allocated **£203,643** under the fund. The discount has been applied to 4994 households as part of the annual billing process. This equates to nearly £124k. The remainder of the fund will be used to support households throughout 2023/24 who become entitled to Council Tax Support and we will support vulnerable households further through a Discretionary fund.

##### **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 been allocated funding of £103,037, and up to 28th February 2023 we have spent £102,571.48, which equates to 99% of our allocation across 144 households. A further 269 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:

<b>Area of expenditure</b>	<b>Amount allocated</b>
Rent Arrears	£16,505.25
Rent Deposit	£920.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfalls	£85,146.23
Total Expenditure	£102,571.48

Due to the funding received from the Department for Work and Pensions being exhausted it has been agreed that the authority will top up the DHP fund by a further £30,000.00 from unspent burdens funding. This will enable us to continue to support our residents throughout March, who are struggling to pay their rent costs which are not covered by their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs.

### **Speed of Processing for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support**

As at 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023, the speed of processing time for the assessment of a new claim is 10 days and 7 days for a change in circumstances, both being within target.

### **Housing Strategy**

#### **Local Authority Housing Fund**

The government have offered the Council up to 1,245,210 through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) to provide 11 additional affordable homes in the district by December 2023 – initially to house Ukrainian and Afghan refugee households. Cabinet (on 6/3/23) agreed to accept the money and work with the Flagship Housing Group to deliver the 11 homes. Long-term these homes would be available to households on the Council's housing list, either as temporary accommodation for homeless households or as a long-term affordable home.

#### **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 21 new affordable homes will be completed by the end of March 2023.

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 20+ developments which will or could, subject to approvals, yield 350+ 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.

### **Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention**

#### **Your Choice Your Home**

As at the 28 February 2023 there were **2,775 households** on the housing list with (586) 21% being on the Housing Register – this register contains those qualifying applicants who have the most urgent housing needs.

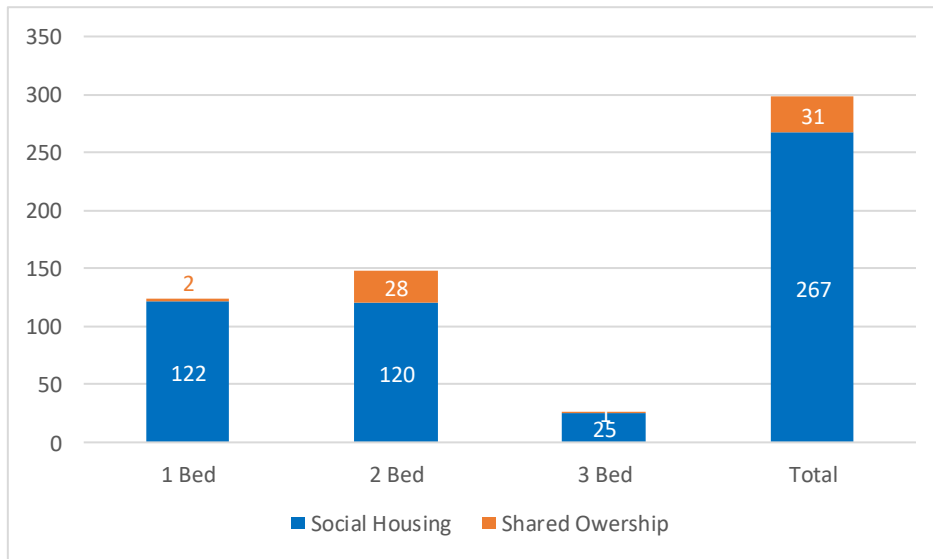
#### **Housing List by Bedroom Need:**

	Housing List – Bedroom Need:						
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	8 Bed	Total
Housing Register	267	133	78	82	3	3	566
Housing Options	1,133	421	121	96		19	1,790
Transfer	198	125	43	44	1	8	419
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1598</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2775</b>

#### **Homes Let**

Social Housing lets by banding and bedroom size

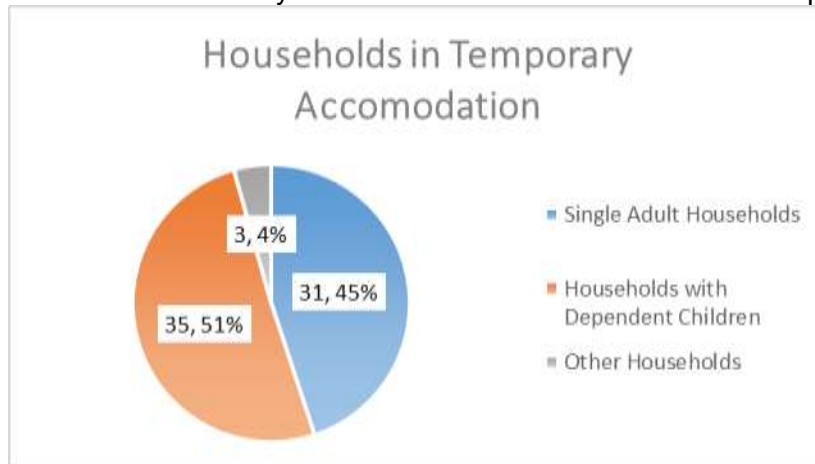
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed +	Total
Housing Register	111	110	25		246
Housing Options	7	5			12
Transfer	4	5			9
<b>Total:</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>267</b>



Year to date - 28 February 2023 \*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.

### Temporary Accommodation

As at the 28 February 2023 there were 69 households in Temporary Accommodation.



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

In addition to the above, our 4 Next Steps Accommodation (NSAP) and 1 Rough Sleeper Accommodation (RSAP) are being used to accommodate previous rough sleepers. By having the NSAP and RSAP properties within our property portfolio, they not only offer a suitable home with better facilities but also provides financial continuity and control with a reduced reliance on the need for expensive Bed and Breakfasts.

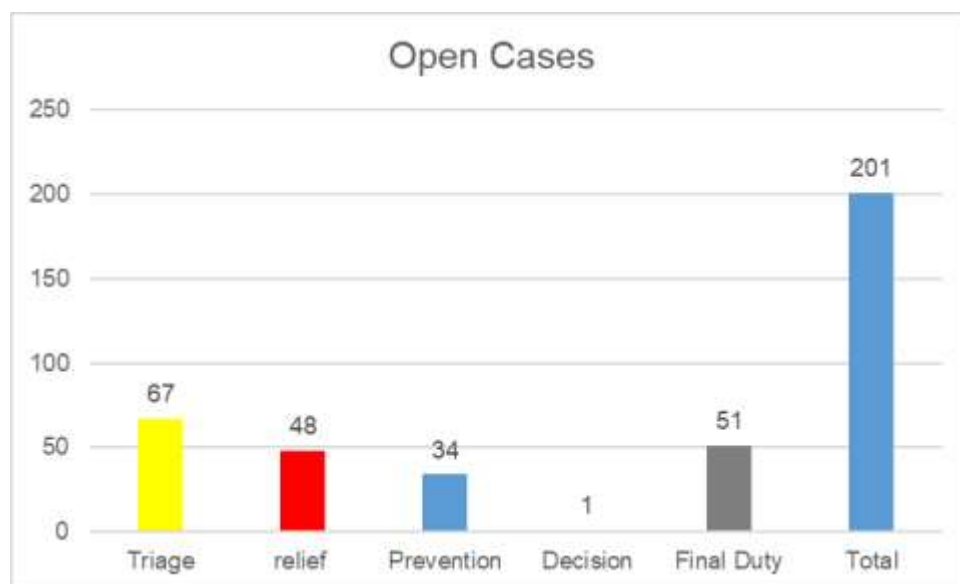
Additionally, access to NSAP properties not only offers a safe home to a rough sleeper but enables a supported environment for a tenant to work with our Pathway, Prevention & Sustainment Officers to improve their interpersonal and social skills and enable them to build their resilience and live positively within the community. Assistance is also helping people take the next steps in their journey to sustained tenancies and prevent them from returning to a life on the streets, and in February one of our tenants housed under the NSAP team back in July 2021, was successful in securing a Social Housing Tenancy. The property is currently void but will be re-let to provide a home 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

### **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 February 2023 there were **201** open cases:



Between the 01 April 2022 and 28 February 2023, 576 triage cases were closed, for cases assessed under statutory homeless legislation, the following outcomes were achieved:

- Total number of households whose prevention duty ended: **138**
  - Secured new or existing accommodation for a period of 6 months or more **64**
  - Withdrew Application: **11**
  - No longer eligible or contact lost: **8**
  - 56 days or more expired and no further action: **25**
  - Homeless not prevented: **30**
- Total number of Households whose relief duty ended: **181**
  - Secured new or existing accommodation for a period of 6 months or more: **38**
  - Withdrew Application: **23**
  - No longer eligible or contact lost: **23**
  - Local connection referral accepted by other Local Authority: **1**
  - Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided: **1**
  - Homeless not prevented: **95**
- Total number of Households assessed, following relief duty end, as unintentionally homeless and priority need (owed main duty): **68**
- Accommodation outcomes (main duty): **68**
  - Social Housing: **53**
  - Private Rented: **8**

- Not Known/Other: 7

### **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping**

We continue to support 3 entrenched Rough Sleepers. 1 person who has been sleeping rough for the past 6 months but came in under SWEP and continues to work with our Prevention & Sustainment Officers.

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 February we verified 2 new Rough Sleepers.

### **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 7 February and 13 February as temperatures plummeted and supported 7 people into emergency accommodation.

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. 1 person brought in under SWEP have now been placed into interim temporary accommodation and are being assisted under Part 7 of the Housing Act.

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

We have taken 8 homeless applications from Ukrainian households following the end /breakdown of host arrangements.

<b>Household Make Up</b>	
Single Households (without Children)	5
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
Awaiting a rematch or alternative accommodation offer whilst still with host	1

## **Integrated Housing Adaptations Team**

Demand for the service continues to be high, we are actively analysing ways to manage new contacts and the pathways that currently exist. We continue to look at how customer wait times can be reduced and customer journeys improved.

Year to date (YTD) a total of 488 new contacts have been received (395 for same period 2021-22), 266 assessments have been completed. From these 176 recommendations for adaptations submitted. YTD 120 adaptation cases have been completed (68 for same period 2021-22) and 147 cases have been approved (87 same period 2021-22).

The Home repairs pilot continues to receive new referrals from IHAT, Social Prescribing, Energy Officer and Environmental Protection and finance intervention team. The referrals have ranged in requested repair work, however more recently we are continuing to see requests to fix broken/faulty boilers and heating systems.

We continue to see increased demand on the project – the winter period and cold spells have seen an increase in referrals / general demand for the service. We have seen an increase demand for boiler / heating system repairs. This could also be attributed to the increased awareness of the pilot scheme amongst NNDC staff following some presentations aimed at raising awareness of the scheme.

To date we have received 25 referrals and have taken forward 16 of these to contractor site inspections. We have received quotations back for 13 cases and have approved these works. Cases have repairs scheduled for the coming weeks / are underway or awaiting materials that have been ordered. At present we have a committed spend of approx. £42,000 of the £50,000 budget.

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

## **3 Meetings attended (February 2023)**

Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan  
Portfolio Holder Meeting  
Cabinet  
visit to Swallowtail Place - Independent Living scheme  
Site visit – Erpingham  
Development viability meeting  
Group Meeting  
Broadland Housing Group Strategic Liaison Meeting  
Full Council  
Development Committee  
NCCSP County Hall  
Former Metfield Estate  
Domestic Abuse Forum