

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING & PEOPLE SERVICES

JULY 2023

1. Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

Financial Inclusion

The Financial Inclusion team were introduced into People Services in October 2022 as part of the council's program of support during the cost-of-living crisis. The team provides support and guidance to residents on money matters including budgeting, debt advice, benefit advice, and income maximisation.

Since the team formed, they have seen over 650 cases referred to them and have completed nearly 300 cases, with most cases having a successful outcome. The most common reason for referring into the team is for benefit advice and support. Outstanding cases are with an officer and are in progress.

We are creating a suite of reports to illustrate the significant and important work of the team and this data will be shared in due course.

Discretionary Housing Payments

For 2023/24, North Norfolk has been allocated funding of £103,037, and up to 30th June 2023 we have spent £36,682.99 which equates to 35.6% of our allocation across 53 households. A further 61 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 across the 53 households can be seen below:

Single Working Age Households	
Number of successful applications	29
Rent Arrears	£1,321.06
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£210.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£20,105.91
Sub Total Expenditure	£21,636.97
Single Pension Age Households	
Number of successful applications	4
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£1,822.58
Sub Total Expenditure	£1,822.58
Couple Working Age Households	

Number of successful applications	2
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£1,042.62
Sub Total Expenditure	£1,042.62
Couple Pension Age Households	
Number of successful applications	1
Rent Arrears	£700.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£0.00
Sub Total Expenditure	£700.00
Family Working Age Households	
Number of successful applications	17
Rent Arrears	£800.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£1,095.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£9,585.82
Sub Total Expenditure	£11,480.82
Family Pension Age Households	
Number of successful applications	0
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£0.00
Sub Total Expenditure	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£36,682.99

Most of the expenditure has been allocated to households to support with a shortfall between their rent and the amount of Housing Benefit they are entitled to.

Housing Benefit for privately rented housing is based on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. LHA rates have been frozen in cash terms since 2020. As the LHA rates are not keeping up with the rate of inflation, and as rents continue to rise, more people receiving housing benefit are seeking additional support through funds such as the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme.

Council Tax Support Fund (Q1 2023/24)

Recognising the impact of rising bills, the government has provided funding to LAs in 2023-24 to support economically vulnerable households in their area with council tax payments. Households in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) will be awarded up to £25 towards their council tax bill.

North Norfolk District Council has been allocated **£203,643** under the fund. The discount of £25 has been applied directly to the council tax accounts where the taxpayer is in receipt of council tax support and has an outstanding council tax liability for the 2023-24 financial year. So far, we have provided 5276 households with additional support utilising 63% of the fund.

Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support caseload

Due to the increase in the number of reported changes in circumstances we receive around income changes, rent increases, and benefit upratings for the new financial year, our outstanding workloads had increased from January through to May, but have now significantly reduced.

Month 2023	Volume of Work Items Received	Volume of Cases Received	Volume of Cases Outstanding*
January	8647	4319	1142
February	8339	5081	1325
March	5756	4579	1923
April	5513	3927	2198
May	8080	4748	2598
June	6126	3631	1123

* Cases outstanding at the end of each month

Please note December 2022 volumes: work items received was 4166, cases received 2510 and cases outstanding was 493.

Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support Speed of processing

Our local target for processing new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support is 20 days, and for changes in circumstances, this is 14 days. Our speed of processing times had increased as we worked through the significant volume of outstanding work, and our times have now started to improve.

New Claims

Month	SOP
January	11
February	10
March	18
April	19
May	13

Changes in Circumstances

Month	SOP
January	8
February	7
March	25
April	18
May	16

We are continuing to look at ways of achieving a performance level that offers customers a response time in line with other benchmarked authorities.

Recruitment

We are recruiting to the following posts:

1 x Permanent Benefits Visiting Officer post to support the work of the Financial Inclusion team and to ensure our service continues to be accessible to all. This is currently a vacant post.

1 x Benefits Officer (12 months) to replace an officer who has been seconded to another service area within the council.

2 x Service Development Officers (up to 31st March 2024) to review the services being provided and methods of service delivery, and to propose changes which deliver better outcomes for the customer in a more cost efficient and effective manner. The post holders will also be working with the Quality Assurance and Subsidy Team to identify potential areas of risk and loss of subsidy and to develop solutions to maximise and generate income. They will be working collaboratively with People Services Development Officers under the direction of the Assistant Director for People Services and the service managers to embed the ethos of prevention more generally across People Services and the wider Council.

Housing Strategy

Local Authority Housing Fund

In the first round of funding government offered the Council up to £1,245,210 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. We have identified 11 suitable properties and offers have been made and accepted on all 11. One home will be owned by NNDC and the remaining 10 will be owned by Flagship.

The Council has been offered a further £560,000 of funding to provide four further homes. Three would initially be to house Afghan refugee households. The fourth would be to provide a home to house a homeless household. The Council is in discussion with the Flagship Housing Group. The proposal is for Flagship to own the three properties for Afghan refugees whilst the Council will own the fourth home and add to the Council's stock of homes used for temporary housing.

Long-term all 15 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

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.

We anticipate completion of 27 affordable homes in 2023/24. Unfortunately, this is lower than reported in June as some sites previously expected to complete in 2023/24 will now complete in 2024/25.

Grant for Energy Efficiency Improvement Works

North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) is part of the Norfolk Warm Homes Consortium of five Norfolk districts.

The consortium has been successful in a bid for £3,933,000 to improve the energy efficiency of 'off-gas' homes. 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 30 June there were **2,538 households** on the housing list with 592 (23%) 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 +	Total
Housing Register	266	142	86	91	7	592
Housing Options	988	365	99	86	13	1,551
Transfer	199	107	39	42	8	395
Total:	1453	614	224	219	28	2538

Homes Let

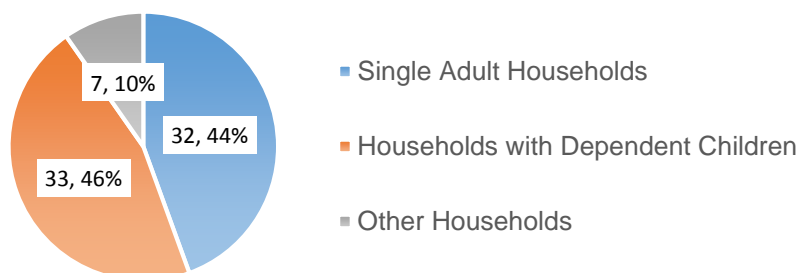
Social Housing lets by banding and bedroom size between 01 April 2023 to 30 June 2023

	Social Housing lets housing list/bedroom size					
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed+	Total
Housing Register	30	23	0	0	0	53
Housing Options		1	0	0	0	1
Transfer	1	2	0	0	0	3
Total:	31	26	0	0	0	57

Temporary Accommodation

As at the 30 June 2023 there were **72 households** in Temporary Accommodation.

Households in Temporary Accommodation



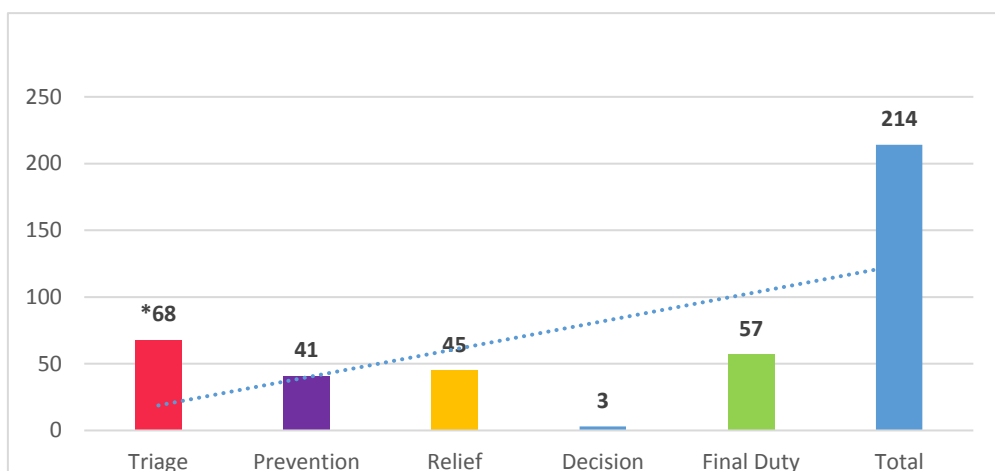
* Other households includes couples and families with older Children.

Households Assessed and Duty Owed

Open Cases

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, as at the 30 June 2023, there were **214** open cases. Each represents a household who has contacted us as they have some sort of housing need and we are still seeing an increase in homeless households.



**A high proportion of the Triage cases will be supported by the Early Intervention Team.*

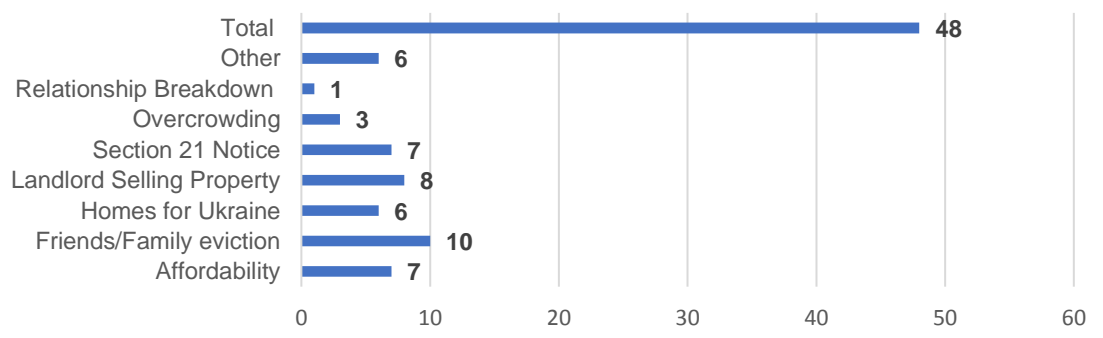
Early Intervention – improving outcomes for people.

The Early Intervention team, forms part of the Housing Options service and work closely with other services to identify those in need and proactively targets people at risk of homelessness much sooner to avoid them becoming threatened with homelessness. This pre-crisis intervention can take many forms, including but not limited to, specialist advice and support on rent, tenancy rights and help finding alternative accommodation.

Early Intervention work starts as early as possible. In many cases this will be before issues have escalated to a point where homelessness appears imminent, and the household is in crisis.

During Q1 (April to 30 June 2023) the team opened 48 new early intervention cases.

Early Intervention - Reasons



For the same period (Q1 April to 30 June 2023) the team closed 58 early intervention cases. Of the 58 cases closed, 49% (28) households were supported with securing alternative accommodation or sustaining existing accommodation/staying with family. Early Intervention activities were not successful for 10% of cases closed and resulted in a homeless case being opened. 41% of cases were closed due to either non engagement or at the request of the client.

Detailed below are some case studies detailing some of the successful outcomes:-

No Fault Eviction (Section 21)

We were approached by a family (2 adults and 3 Children) who were a risk of losing their private rented tenancy. We contacted the landlord, who advised that he needed to sell the property due to increased mortgage payments. We started working with the family to identify alternative housing options and were realistic that due to the lack of social housing, we would need to look at private rented.

We were made aware of a private landlord who had a 3-bedroom property that they wanted to rent out to a family facing homelessness. We contacted the landlord and they agreed to rent the property to this family. We supported the family with a Rent in Advance and Damage Deposit Loan.

Whilst the loss of their home could not be prevented, working with the family early meant that we could find alternative accommodation in the same area, without the need for them to make a homeless application or spend any time in temporary accommodation.

- *Cost of Living*

We were contacted by a family in private rented accommodation, their landlord had increased their rent and it simply wasn't affordable to them anymore. Although we identified that the rent increase was significant, it had been applied lawfully and was still affordable when compared to other 3 bed properties in the area. We advised the family of this and worked with them to look at their expenditure to establish what the family could afford. Through this we identified that they were not claiming Child Benefit for one of their children and also supported an application for a Discretionary Housing Payment whilst they reworked on their expenditure to account for the increased rent.

The family were able to re-work their budget to account for the new rent figure and were able to sustain their tenancy, avoiding any rent arrears occurring and potential notice being issued.

- *Universal Credit*

Mr F was renting a room in a house. He was working full time until diagnosed with Leukaemia. His company sick pay has come to an end, and he was still very unwell and receiving treatment. With no income now to pay his rent, his landlord had asked him to leave and advised that he was thinking about selling the property. We liaised with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to submit a Universal Credit claim and provided the DWP with evidence of his rent liability to get the housing element added to his claim. His claim was successful which meant that he could afford the rental payment and the Landlord confirmed that with a guaranteed payment, we would not be selling the property, which allowed Mr F to stay in his home.

- *Homes for Ukraine*

A Ukrainian family and their 2 children were still living with their host but were looking to move into more permanent accommodation due to overcrowding. Their original Homes for Ukraine placement had been for 1 adult and 1 child but following the arrival of their second child and the

husband being able to leave Ukraine to be with his family, the accommodation was no longer suitable.

Working with NNDC's Ukrainian Community Support Officer, we met with the family to discuss housing options, support available with finding private rented and information on benefit entitlement.

Suitable private rented accommodation was found, and we were able to loan the family rent in advance for 6 months in order to secure the property.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping

During Qtr. 1 we have seen the rollout across all local authorities in England a new Rough Sleeping Data Framework to measure progress locally towards ending rough sleeping

Previously data to track rough sleeping in England has come from the annual rough sleeping 'snapshot', which uses an annual street count to estimate the number of people sleeping out on a single night each autumn.

Within the new framework, there is a set of five core indicators which require data to be submitted on a monthly basis.

These indicators are relevant to every part of the country and allow us to capture the prevalence of specific types of experiences of rough sleeping (for example, someone who is experiencing long term rough sleeping, or repeated rough sleeping or has been seen for the first time in the district.

For the month of June, our data return highlights that we continue to support 2 entrenched Rough Sleepers, 2 people were new to rough and 2 people have previously slept rough (with the past 180 days) within North Norfolk.

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Preparing for Adulthood

Over the past three months, the People Services Teams within the Communities Directorate has welcomed over 30 students from Sidestrand Hall Sixth Form. The aim of the visits was to support students with complex needs (including moderate learning difficulties; behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; autistic spectrum disorder; and speech, language and communication difficulties) gain an understanding around what support might be available to them as they approach adulthood.

Information was provided around their housing options (including joining the Housing Register and Housing Adaptations), access to benefits, social prescribing and information about the fantastic voluntary and community groups in North Norfolk that are available and can provide that little bit of extra support.

Feedback from the school has been very positive, and not only provided the opportunity for students to get an understanding about the support and services we offer, but they also benefited from visiting NNDC and meeting officers which will help build their confidence when interacting and engaging with services in the future.

Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

Demand for the service remains high. A total of 87 new contacts were received in May & June.

In the last financial year 142 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) were completed. This equates to 33 grants under £5,000, 92 grants between £5,001 & £15,000, 15 grants between £15,001 & £29,999 and 2 grants over £30,000.

A Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy was approved by Cabinet in June. This will enable additional Discretionary DFG's that meet identified needs that are outside of the scope of the current mandatory DFG to be offered.

Waiting Well

The Waiting Well project aims to support residents on the orthopaedic waiting list for a knee or hip condition at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital.

A mid project report was presented to the North Locality Place board in June. The project is currently due to end in October 2023. Research is being done to investigate possible areas where the model could be re-purposed.

Community Connectors

The Community Connectors weekly radio show <https://www.poppylandradio.co.uk/shows/community-connectors> has recently covered the following topics:

- Domestic abuse support
- Veteran's support
- Menopause support
- Archaeology for Wellbeing

In June the Community Connectors were involved in the following events to provide information, signposting and support:

- Carers week
- Information stalls in Wroxham and North Walsham
- Inaugural "Parent Support" event in Cromer – a collaboration between the WOW Bus, Local Maternity & Neonatal System (LMNS) and Children's Services.
- Armed Forces Day in Northrepps
- Healing Harbour, High Kelling event

The Community Connectors continue to have a regular presence at warm spaces, community groups, food hubs, food banks, coffee mornings, libraries, community lunches and wellbeing walks.

Social Prescribing

In June 2023, seventy-seven new Social Prescribing referrals were received requesting support with one hundred and ninety issues. Benefits, financial advice, mental health, long term health conditions and social isolation are the most frequent reason for referral.

The total number of referrals received in 2023 until 30th June is four hundred and six.

An increasing number of referrals are complex and require multi agency input. Referrals where hoarding is a factor have risen.

In addition to NNDC funded Living Well Officers, NNDC has a contract with North Norfolk Primary Care Network to deliver a Link Worker Social Prescribing service to Birchwood, Paston, Mundesley, Cromer and Aldborough Practices. External funding has also been secured to deliver a Social Prescribing in Secondary Care Service.

Homes for Ukraine (H4U)

There are currently 164 Ukrainian Guests being supported in North Norfolk of which 104 are adults and 60 are children.

There are currently 55 Hosts In North Norfolk, Norfolk County Council has recently run a campaign to try to increase the number of hosts able to offer a home to H4U guests.

During the month of June;

- We Received One new accommodation request;
- Completed two new initial welfare visits
- Three families were moved into Homes for Ukraine temporary accommodation.
- One guest was assisted to move into private rented accommodation.

Grants

North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund

The June meeting has been rescheduled for 11th July. Seven applications were received for consideration, 5 for between £1,000 and £15,000 and 2 for under £1,000 totalling £56,004.

Arts & Culture Fund

Five new applications have been received totalling £16,286.

Community Transport

1 application for continuation funding totalling £2,000.

Other activities

North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership Older Person's Group:

The inaugural meeting of this working group has been arranged for the 25th of July. This initial meeting will agree the format and structure of the group, and its initial actions in addressing the Health and Wellbeing partnership strategy action plan.

Carer Friendly Tick Accreditation:

The application for the Carer Friendly Tick Employer accreditation was submitted at the end of June. We anticipate a response by the end of August.

Waiting Well:

The Waiting Well project has been well received to date with positive feedback. A mid project report was presented to the North Locality Place board in June. The project is currently due to end in October 2023. Research is being done to investigate possible areas where the model could be re-purposed.

Age Friendly Communities:

Initial conversations have taken place with Age UK Norfolk to collaborate on work around Age Friendly Communities. This is also an identified action for the North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership strategy, and therefore will connect with both NNDC and the partnership, specifically the Older People Working group.

2. Forthcoming Activities and Developments

Site visit Broadland Housing Association Broadgate Close Northrepps
DCN – Call to driving better health outcomes through the Integrated Care System
North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership Older Persons Working Group
North Norfolk and Broadland Health and Wellbeing Partnership Chairpersons Meeting
Business Planning
Pre-Cabinet Agenda
Local Network for Children and Young People with Asthma Meeting
Integrated Care System District Council Meeting
Domestic Abuse Conference
Integrated Care Partnership and Health and Well being Partnership Meeting

3. Meetings attended.

Portfolio holder meetings Peoples Services
Portfolio holder meetings Housing Strategy
North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership – voted in as Chairperson
Government Waste Strategy Briefing
Non Executive Directors Briefing Integrated Care Board
Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care Partnership Meeting
Mundesley Parish Council Full Council
Cabinet
Business Planning
Pre-cabinet Agenda Meetings
Everyone Active Introduction Meeting
Flagship Strategic Liaison Meeting
Review of Community Services across Norfolk and Waveney Workshop
Planning Policy and Built Heritage Working Party
Climate Change Briefing
Fakenham Visit
North Norfolk Community Led Housing Organisations Meeting
East of England Childrens and Young Peoples Housing and Respiratory
National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Webinar
Private Rental Information gathering with Browns
North Norfolk Coastal Forum