

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

22 November 2023

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING & PEOPLE SERVICES

For the Period up to 31 October 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

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 2023/24, North Norfolk has been allocated funding of £103,037, and up to 31st October 2023 we have spent 59.78% of our allocation across 73 households. A further total of 132 applications (121 households) 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 73 households can be seen below.

Single Working Age Households		Couple Pension Age Households	
Number of successful applications	45	Number of successful applications	1
Rent Arrears	£3,033.11	Rent Arrears	£700.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£210.00	Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£37,155.63	Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£0.00
Sub Total Expenditure	£40,398.74	Sub Total Expenditure	£700.00
Single Pension Age Households		Family Working Age Households	
Number of successful applications	5	Number of successful applications	19
Rent Arrears	£0.00	Rent Arrears	£800.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00	Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£1,095.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£2,002.50	Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£15,018.43
Sub Total Expenditure	£2,002.50	Sub Total Expenditure	£16,913.43
Couple Working Age Households		Family Pension Age Households	
Number of successful applications	3	Number of successful applications	0
Rent Arrears	£0.00	Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00	Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£1,583.90	Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£0.00
Sub Total Expenditure	£1,583.90	Sub Total Expenditure	£0.00
		Total Expenditure	£61,598.57

We are continuing to use data insights to proactively target low-income households who have rent arrears, rent shortfalls, or who are at risk of homelessness.

Household Support Fund

During August 1024 households received a voucher for £80 towards the cost of energy, food, or wider essentials, utilising 42% of the Household Support Fund. Where households did not cash the voucher, we have contacted by phone and in writing, to ensure the support reaches as many residents as possible. The deadline for claiming payments under tranche 1, is 30th November 2023.

In January, we will be looking to send out the second tranche of payments using the same eligibility criteria.

Caseload

We have seen a small increase overall to the total number of households claiming Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support compared to the previous month. The number of pension age households has shown a small increase and the number of working age households has shown a small decrease. Our total caseload currently stands at 3837 working age claimants and 3436 pension age claimants (total 7273).

Housing Benefit Performance (Source: Single Housing Benefit Extract – DWP)

At the end of Q1 2023/24 we processed 121 new claims for Housing Benefit and our average speed of processing was 13 days which was under the national level of 22 days and second lowest in Norfolk. We continue to prioritise new claims for benefit and assess these within 24 hours of receipt.

We also processed 1,873 changes in circumstances with an average speed of processing of 19 days. We continue to prioritise changes in circumstances which carry an overpayment of benefit, but we have been slower processing changes in circumstances in general due to the volume of these, and due to the number of less experienced staff we have in the team. We are reviewing our best practice around handling changes in circumstances, with particular focus on automating Universal Credit changes as these make up a significant portion of our workload.

DWP Housing Benefit (HB) Speed of Processing						
Quarterly figures on New HB Claims and Change of Circumstances to existing HB Claims, by local authority (LA)						
Q1 2023 to 2024	New HB Claims			Change of Circumstances to existing HB Claims		
Local Authority Name	Total number of processing days	Total number of processed cases	Average speed of processing (days)	Total number of processing days	Total number of processed cases	Average speed of processing (days)
England	1,795,622	82,525	22	9,795,284	1,167,814	8
Norfolk						
Breckland	3,074	113	27	13,387	1,691	8
Broadland	1,682	78	22	9,107	1,087	8
Great Yarmouth	2,633	192	14	13,047	1,485	9
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	2,731	186	15	23,277	3,125	7
North Norfolk	1,523	121	13	36,167	1,873	19
Norwich	6,873	316	22	35,354	4,237	8
South Norfolk	1,278	119	11	6,828	1,448	5
Source: Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE)						

Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

Your Choice Your Home

As at the 31 October there were **2499** households on the housing list with **576** (23%) being on the Housing Register – this register contains those qualifying applicants who have the most urgent housing needs.

	Housing List by Bedroom Need				Homes Let by Property size (01 April to 31 October 2023)			
	Housing Register	Housing Options	Transfer	Total	Housing Register	Housing Options	Transfer	Total
1 Bed	256	973	193	1422	52	1	2	55
2 Bed	129	372	96	597	56	2	3	61
3 Bed	91	103	41	235	6	0	1	7
4 Bed	94	84	42	220	0	0	0	0
5 Bed +	6	13	6	25	0	0	0	0
Total	576	1545	378	2499	114	3	6	123

The mismatch between the demand for, and supply of, permanent, affordable housing is one of the reasons we are seeing an increase year on year in the number of people requiring, and the time spent in, temporary accommodation. Overall, the total number of lettings has decreased by 38% when compared to the same date in 2022. We are also seeing a decrease in family homes being let 28 (23%) of properties let had a minimum age requirement of 55/60.

Working with representatives of our Registered Providers, we have begun to review our Allocations scheme and to gather customers' views on the current scheme. Whilst the scheme is mainly directed by legislation and guidelines set by the government, there is scope to set a policy which reflects the local needs and determining priorities for social housing between applicants. Some ideas are currently being piloted, but there is significant further work to be undertaken before formal recommendations of any changes can be made.

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.

Approaches to the service remain high and between 01 April to 31 October 2023 we have opened 624 new cases. Each case 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 (relief cases).

As at the 31 October 2023, there were 203 open cases, of which 150 households assessed as at threat of homeless or are already homeless,

Temporary Accommodation

As at the 31 October 2023 there were 75 households in Temporary Accommodation. This is an overall increase of 33% from the same date in 2022.

- 39 (52%) Family Households have dependent Children
- 32 (43%) Single Adult Households
- 4 (5%) Other Households (includes couples and households with older children)

The number of Households with dependent children has also increased by 44% compared to October 2022. Included in the 39 family households, there are 85 children.

Rough Sleeping

During the month of October, there were 4 known individuals sleeping rough in North Norfolk. The team continues to work hard at finding ways to help people who are rough sleeping, achieve stability, and help break the cycle of homelessness. During the Month we supported one person who was new to rough sleeping into Interim accommodation and successfully got one long term and entrenched rough sleeper into temporary accommodation and continue to provide support so they will hopefully want to make permanent move away from a street-based lifestyle. This has reduced the number of people currently sleeping rough to two.

Over the coming months we anticipate that we may have to activate our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and encourage people who are sleeping rough and want to access emergency accommodation to come in.

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. The Council will own one h and Flagship will own the remaining 10.

The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has 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 proposal is for the Council to buy four homes; three properties for Afghan refugees whilst the fourth home will 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.

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.

The Council's Energy Officer working with Norfolk Warm Homes have been promoting the scheme in the Stalham area. The local community; Town Council, shop-keepers, schools, etc. have been very supportive and as a result Norfolk Warm Homes has had over 30 applications (as at 02/11/23).

Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

IHAT remains extremely busy with new contacts, existing cases and discretionary grant applications. At present, we are fully staffed and continue to look at the most efficient ways to increase output with existing staff resource. This is an on-going piece of work that has seen many changes and developments to IHAT and the ways in which we deliver the service to customers.

The introduction of the discretionary grants continues to be a focus, at present we are implementing the IT infrastructure to support the delivery of these in the most efficient way possible. We have begun processing referrals for the discretionary grants and identifying cases within our system currently that may be able to benefit from the introduction of some of the grants. We anticipate the demand for the various grants will increase as we progress through the winter months.

New contacts	48
Year to date total Contacts	364
Total approved grants	14
Total approved grants value	£98,688.81
Year to date Approval value	£1,572,201.87
Completed adaptations	14

Total spend for period	£98,688.81
Year to date Completed cases	70
Year to date Spend	£700,341.88
Year to date Housing needs reports completed	26

Community Connectors

In collaboration with the North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership Older People Working Group, the Community Connectors hosted four PositiviTea events, with a focus on services and support for older residents. These were held in Briston, Walsingham, Northrepps and Neatishead.

As expected, these were not as highly attended as the previous events held in market town locations, however attendance was still quite good, and feedback positive.

As part of the events a scoping survey was completed with attendees, and the results of these are being collated. The information gathered will be reported upon to the North Norfolk Health & Wellbeing Partnership at the meeting, scheduled for 11th December.

The Community Connectors, alongside their regular presence at community groups, warm spaces and other events, attended two sessions with the WOW bus, a volunteering promotion event, and an engagement event with Victory homes, A Healthwatch Norfolk live event, A town council drop-in session, and three market or store based events.

<https://www.poppylandradi.co.uk/shows/community-connectors> shows recorded covering the following topics:

- Spotlight on our community 2
- Opening Doors
- Speed Awareness with PC Jack Houghton

Social Prescribing

In October 2023, ninety-four referrals have been received into Social Prescribing, covering one hundred and fifty-one concerns.

An average of forty cases per month are received from the NN2 contract, covering five surgeries.

A total of nine hundred and seven referrals have been received into the service since January 2023.

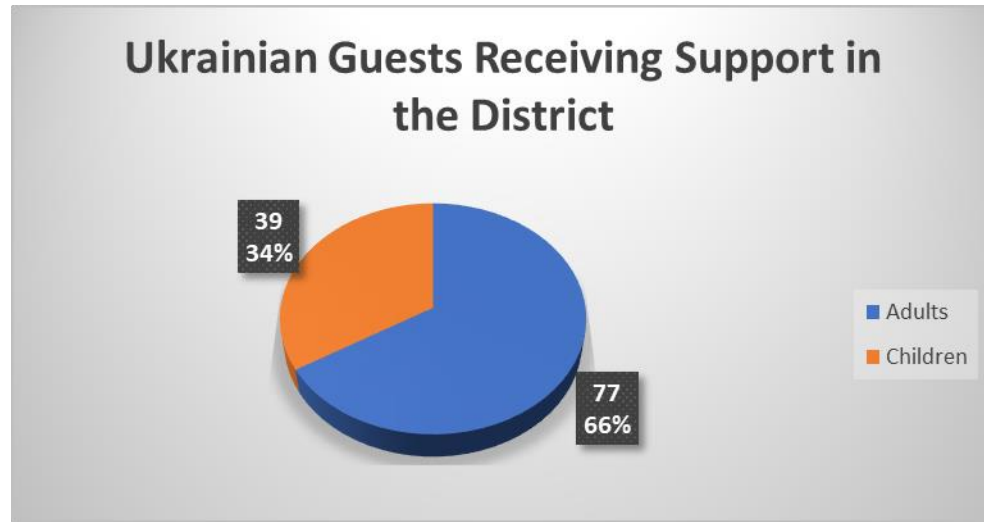
We continue to see complex cases coming through the North Norfolk Help Hub. An increase in residents with Long Term Health Conditions needing support regarding their housing conditions has been noted, and the impact of poor private rented property conditions and the cost of living continues to be prevalent within hub cases.

There are four current hoarding cases, including one which is highly complex. A trend of enforcement action by housing associations to retake possession of properties has been noted due to reduced Social Services input with hoarders, where a clearance of the property has been carried out previously.

Waiting Well

The North Norfolk Waiting Well pilot came to an end on the 31st of October. A final project report was presented at the North Place Board on the 24th of October and received positive feedback.

Homes for Ukraine (H4U)



There are currently one hundred and sixteen Ukrainian guests being supported in North Norfolk of which seventy-seven are adults and thirty-nine are children.

There are forty hosts, of which five are hosting two separate families/un-related single guests.

Three families are currently in temporary accommodation provided by NNDC.

Grants

Sustainable Communities Fund: The next panel is due on the 4th of December. Six Applications have been received for this round, totalling £55,456.

Arts and Culture Fund: The next panel is due on the 27th of November. Five applications have been received for this round, totalling £16,935.

Community Transport Fund: The next panel is due on the 27th of November. Two applications have been received for this round, totalling £40,000.

3 Meetings attended

Mundesley Parish Council Meetings
Developing Communities Working Group
NN affordable housing Study
Positivitea event Mundesley
Cabinet Meetings
Business Plannings

A strong responsible Council Working Group
Broadland Housing Association visit
Mundesley Parking Working Group
Overview and Scrutiny
Development Committees
Portfolio Holder Catchups Peoples Services
Portfolio Holder Catchups Housing
Integrated Care Conference
Norfolk CAB meeting
Group Briefings
Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation Emergency Summit Guest Speaker
Norfolk CAB AGM
Coastwise Member Briefing
Bacton Gas Site Liaison Group Meeting
NNDC Rough Sleepers Meeting
Victory Flagship meeting with NNDC
Overview and Scrutiny Meetings
Energy Grants Catch up

Media interest:

BBC Radio Norfolk
EDP interviews
Financial Times interview
Heart FM interview