

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

March 2024

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING & PEOPLE SERVICES

For the Period up to 29th February 2024.

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

Spring Budget Update (6th March 2024)

National Insurance contributions (NICs) rates – The main rate of Class 1 employee NICs will be cut from 10% to 8%. This will take effect from 6 April 2024. The government will also make a further 2p cut to the main rate of self-employed National Insurance on top of the 1p cut announced at Autumn Statement. This means that from 6 April 2024 the main rate of Class 4 self-employed NICs will now be reduced from 9% to 6%.

National Insurance (class 2) - The government will launch a consultation later this year to deliver its commitment to fully abolish Class 2 National Insurance. This follows the announcement at Autumn Statement 2023 that from April 2024 no self-employed person will be required to pay Class 2, whilst those who pay voluntarily will continue to be able to do so to build entitlement to contributory benefits. The government remains committed to reforming this complex part of the tax system while ensuring that low-income self-employed individuals will not pay more.

Exploring options to better target support to households – The government will consult shortly on options to enable better targeting of economic support to households. This will improve the fairness of policies such as the high-income child benefit cap, by allowing it to move to a system based on household income, and the targeting of future economic support including in times of crisis.

Household Support Fund Extension – To help the most vulnerable households with the cost of essentials such as food and utilities, the government is providing an additional £500 million to enable the extension of the Household Support Fund in England from April to September 2024.

Universal Credit Budgeting Loans - The government is increasing the repayment period on budgeting advance loans taken out by claimants on Universal Credit from 12 months to 24 months. This will apply to new Budgeting Advances taken out from December 2024 and will reduce the monthly repayments on these loans, relieving financial pressure on low-income households on Universal Credit.

Debt Relief Orders - To support households struggling with problem debts, the government is making it easier to access a Debt Relief Order (DRO). DROs are a personal insolvency debt solution for individuals who cannot pay their debts. The government is removing the £90 administration fee from 6 April 2024. The government is also raising the maximum debt value threshold from £30,000 to £50,000 and increasing the maximum value of motor vehicle that an individual can retain from £2,000 to £4,000, from 28 June 2024. These changes mean that more people can access debt relief and get a fresh start with their finances.

Annual uprating of Benefits

We are pleased to confirm we have now completed the annual uprating of all Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims from 1st April 2024. In total 7348 claims have been updated. Notifications for claimants along with their Council Tax bill will be issued on 4th March 2024. A web page providing useful information has been created to allow residents to self-serve www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/benefitsuprating

There will be 53 Mondays in the 2024/25 financial year, from 1 April 2024 until 6 April 2025, with the last Monday on 31 March 2025.

It happens every five or six years because there are 365 days in a year or 366 days in a leap year, which breaks down to 52 weeks in a year plus one day or 52 weeks plus two days in a leap year. These extra days accumulate to add an additional week to the year.

Customers on Housing Benefits and legacy benefits will not be affected by this, as Housing Benefit will cover every week that it is charged. For customers in receipt of Universal Credit, this will mean they will miss out on 1 weeks Housing Costs. The DWP only pays up to 52 weeks of rent per year as they work out the weekly rent for those on Universal Credit by taking the total yearly amount and dividing it by 52 weeks. For example, £10,400 per year ÷ 52 weeks = £200pw rent. We have provided further information on this on our webpage www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/benefitsuprating

Household Support Fund (Round 4)

NNDC was awarded £196k under round 4 of the scheme. In August we issued funding to 1042 households with each household receiving a Post Office PayOut voucher for £80. We have now issued the second and final tranche of payments under the fund where we have provided a voucher for £65 to a further 1008 households. Households have one month to cash their voucher. Where vouchers are not cashed and subsequently expire, we will be working with customers to ensure they still receive the funding.

Under the Household Support Fund, we are also operating an emergency support fund for groceries which will provide a 48hr response.

All funding must be spent by 31st March 2024.

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 29th February 2024 we have spent 89.4% of our allocation across 105 households. A further total of 200 applications (185 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 105 households can be seen below.

Single Working Age Households	
Number of successful applications	64
Rent Arrears	£4,659.51
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£210.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£52,886.16
Sub Total Expenditure	£57,577.67
Single Pension Age Households	
Number of successful applications	8
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£3,956.08
Sub Total Expenditure	£3,956.08
Couple Working Age Households	
Number of successful applications	4
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£2,367.99
Sub Total Expenditure	£2,367.99
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	28
Rent Arrears	£800.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£1,694.99
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£24,829.78
Sub Total Expenditure	£27,324.77
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	£92,104.51

Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

Your Choice Your Home

As at the 29 February 2024 there were 2490 households on the housing list with 506 (20%) 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 2023 to 29 February 2024)			
	Housing Register	Housing Options	Transfer	Total	Housing Register	Housing Options	Transfer	Total
1 Bed	203	1005	202	1410	95	9	4	108
2 Bed	116	379	99	594	89	5	5	99
3 Bed	98	109	39	246	18		1	19
4 Bed	83	86	42	211	1			1
5 Bed +	6	13	10	29	0			
Total	506	1592	392	2490	203	14	10	227

Overall, the total number of lettings has decreased by 25% when compared to the same period in 22/23. We continue to see an increase demand for homes suitable for families. Over 32% of the total homes had a minimum age requirement.

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 2023 to 29 February 2024 we have opened 1017 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 29 February 2024 there were 216 open homeless cases. Of which 127 households were initially assessed as threatened with homelessness (prevention Duty) or were homeless (Relief Duty), of these 72 households included dependent children.

The three most common triggers of homelessness during this period were:

- The loss of a private tenancy (34)
- Households no longer being able to stay with families and friends (14)
- Domestic abuse (11)

Temporary Accommodation

As at the 29 February 2024 there were 54 households in Temporary Accommodation. This is an overall decrease of 22% from the same date (February) 2023. The decrease reflects a reduction in Single households which have decreased by 46% when compared to February 2023, the number of families households have risen just over 5%, and the actual number of children within family households has increased by just over 10%.

- 36 (67%) Family Households have dependent Children
- 15 (28%) Single Adult Households
- 2 (5%) Other Households (includes couples and households with older children)

Rough Sleeping

For the month of February (at various points in time) we recorded 9 people sleeping rough in North Norfolk, this includes 1 person with entrenched experience of rough sleeping, 5 people who have previously been seen sleeping rough in the district and 3 people who were new to rough sleeping in the district.

At the end of February 1 person was still rough sleeping, 2 people are being assisted under Homeless legislation and are in Temporary Accommodation and the remaining 6 people are no longer in the district and are not engaging with officers.

Housing Strategy

Local Authority Housing Fund

In the first round of funding, Government offered the Council up to £1,245,210 to provide eleven 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 homes. The Council will own one (purchase now complete and home occupied) and Flagship Housing will own the remaining ten (the first of these have now been advertised on Your Choice Your Home and the remainder will be ready before April 2024).

The Council accepted a further £560,000 of funding to provide four further homes. Three will initially house Afghan refugee households. The fourth will house a homeless household. Offers to purchase have been accepted on four properties, two of which have completed and will be ready for occupation shortly, and the remaining two purchases will complete by March 2024.

In the long-term, all fifteen 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 scheme pipeline, many of which are 'rural exception' housing sites at various points in the development process. There are over twenty developments which will, subject to approvals, yield more than 350 new affordable homes in the next few years.

In common with most of Norfolk, 'Nutrient neutrality' is a delaying factor for many sites within the district. Officers have worked with Broadland Housing Association to get in-principal 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 two to three years.

Seventeen new affordable homes have been built so far, and it is anticipated that thirty-eight affordable homes will be completed in 2023/24.

Grant for Energy Efficiency Improvement Works

North Norfolk District Council 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 have 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 £100,000 in savings. This will open up the grant to many more eligible households – across Norfolk there are 603 postcode areas covering 2,600 properties believed to meet the criteria and 23% of these are in North Norfolk.

The Council's Energy Officer, working with Norfolk Warm Homes, has been promoting the scheme in the Stalham area. The local community, Town Council, shopkeepers, schools, etc. have been very supportive. The approach of sending targeted mail followed by door knocking has worked very well. As a result, the projected spend in North Norfolk for 2023/24 will be 40% of the total for Norfolk Warm Homes. We plan to replicate this approach in other parts of the district in 2024.

Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

IHAT is constantly evolving and striving to improve. We are continually evaluating customer pathways, and how improvements can be made (reducing time scales, increasing availability of literature) and how we can utilise IHAT resources as effectively as possible.

We have identified that a number of our customers are keen to be able to self-serve and self-manage their own adaptations with guidance from IHAT. With this in mind, we have designed a range of literature and resources to support and guide customers through the process and allow them to consider the option available to them. By customers being able to take a proactive role it can reduce wait times significantly and empower customers to make informed decisions on how they would like their needs met.

We aim to monitor this and record outcomes (including number of formal referrals to IHAT) customer journey satisfaction and wait times over the course of 2024-25.

Figures – Disabled Facilities Grant

New contacts	32
YTD total Contacts	510
Total approved grants	19
Total approved grants value	£184,155.72
YTD Approval value	£1,278,435.88
Completed adaptations	2
Total spend for period	£19,895.00
YTD Completed cases	101
YTD Spend	£1,167,503.68

Social Prescribing

For February 2024, the statistical highlights are as follows:

- **60** Referrals into Social Prescribing identifying **152** concerns.

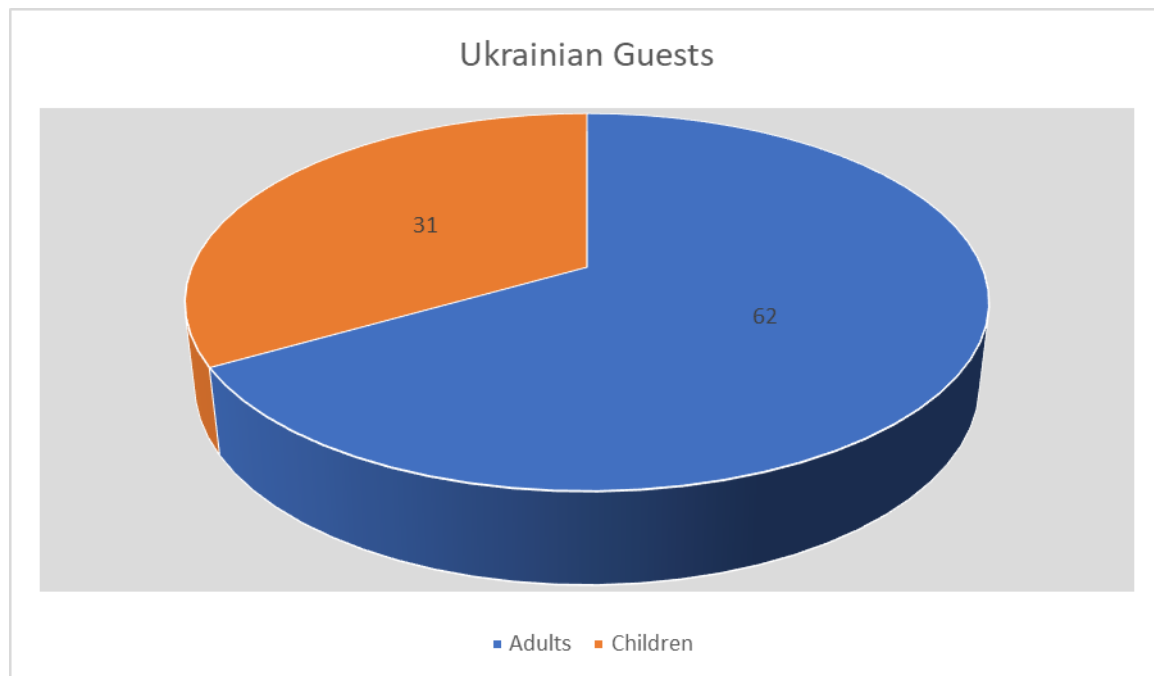
From April 2023 to date, the team have received:

- **589** Referrals since April 2023
- **1440** different concerns raised by residents and supported throughout 2023-2024

The new North Norfolk Community HUB meetings will launch Thursday 4th April and will take place monthly. The meetings will offer an opportunity for statutory and voluntary organisations in North Norfolk to network, share best practice, promote events and update on new and existing services.

Homes for Ukraine (H4U)

There are currently ninety-three Ukrainian guests being supported in the North Norfolk, of which sixty-two are adults and thirty-one are under the age of eighteen.



There are thirty-four hosts, of which three are hosting two separate families/un-related single guests.

Other Business

Defense Employers Recognition Scheme – Gold Accreditation

NNDC’s expression of interest application has been submitted and accepted for 2024. The application for NNDC to gain gold accreditation for 2024 is on schedule, with a target date of submission of the 12th March 2024.

Ageism Action Day (20th March 2024)

NNDC, on behalf of the North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership are hosting an Age positive imagery photography competition, open to the public from March 1st. The aim of the competition is to challenge stereotypes around older people, by encouraging the public to capture images of older people living active lives and making a valuable contribution to their communities. The images captured will be used within promotional materials produced for Age Friendly North Norfolk, and an exhibition of the entries will be hosted in Sheringham Library from Ageism Action Day, the 20th of March.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

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Meetings attended