

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

January 2025

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS - CABINET MEMBER FOR PEOPLE SERVICES

For the period up to 31st January 2025

Benefits

Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26

The Council is making changes to the Council Tax Support scheme from 1 April including:

- The introduction of a flat rate non-dependent deduction of £10 per week for each non-dependent adult
- The removal of the additional £17.10 weekly earnings disregard
- A reduction in the time an award of Council Tax Support will be backdated (from 6 months to 1 month)

These changes only affect working age claimants. Council Tax Support for low-income pensioners (66 years or over) is determined by central government.

The changes were approved by Full Council on Wednesday 29th January 2025. Full details of the Council Tax Support Scheme can be found at www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/benefitscts

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

Caseload

In January, the team received over 9,350 reported changes in circumstances and over 170 new claims.

As of 1st February, we have 7,163 households claiming Housing Benefits and/or Council Tax Support of which 53% are working age.

We are continuing to see a reduction in the number of Housing Benefit claimants due to the managed migration to Universal Credit which is due to be completed by the end of 2025/26.

Speed of Processing (benchmarking) for January

The table below represents our speed of processing data for January 2025, against the published data by the Department for Work and Pensions for Q2 (2024), which is the latest published data.

	NNDC number of days to process (January 2025)	NNDC Benchmarked number of days to process (Q2)	National Benchmarked number of days to process (Q2)
New claims HB	6.70	6	22
New claims CTS	7.90		
Changes in circumstances HB	12.30	9	9
Changes in circumstances CTS	6.70		

For Q2 North Norfolk is placed top across Norfolk for speed of processing of new claims and placed joint second across Norfolk for speed of processing change in circumstances.

Our current unpublished data for January 2025, shows an increase to our speed of processing for Housing Benefit change in circumstances due to an influx of migration notices.

Discretionary Housing Payments

We continue to administer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to support tenancy sustainment, homelessness, and to support people stay within the community. Cases are determined by officers from the Benefits and Housing Options Teams.

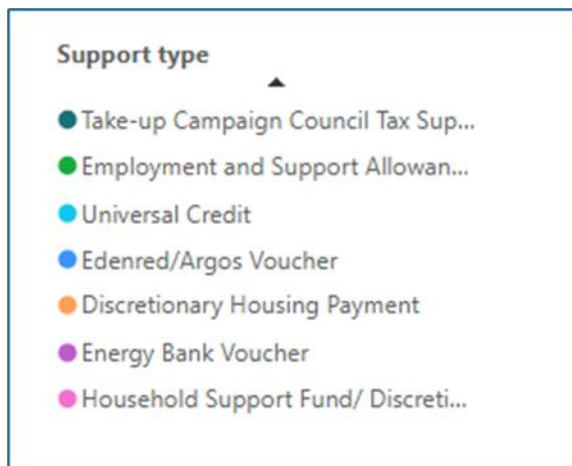
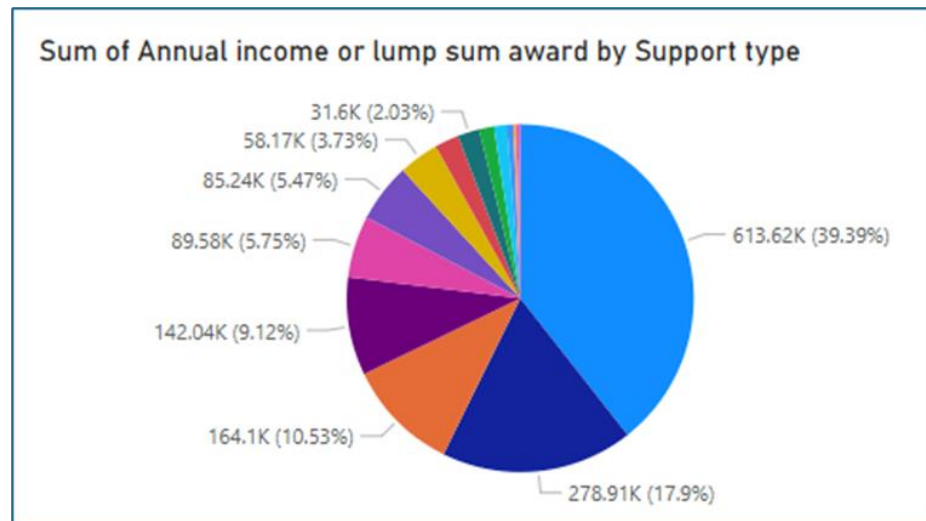
For 2024/25, North Norfolk has been allocated funding of £103,037.00, and up to 31st January 2025 we have spent 90% of our allocation across 110 households. A further total of 201 applications (across 185 households) have been refused as the circumstances of the household are outside the scope of the scheme. Where we have not been able to provide support through the DHP scheme, the team considers other funding options and support available and signposts the customer accordingly.

A breakdown of how the expenditure has been allocated across the 110 households can be seen below.

Single Working Age Households	
Number of successful households	67
Rent Arrears	£6,600.03
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£2,925.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£39,174.69
Sub Total Expenditure	£48,699.72
Single Pension Age Households	
Number of successful households	6
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£6,599.67
Sub Total Expenditure	£6,599.67
Couple Working Age Households	
Number of successful households	5
Rent Arrears	£2,034.73
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£978.25
Sub Total Expenditure	£3,012.98
Couple Pension Age Households	
Number of successful households	1
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£2,154.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£0.00
Sub Total Expenditure	£2,154.00
Family Working Age Households	
Number of successful households	31
Rent Arrears	£5,159.75
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£2,865.95
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£23,932.63
Sub Total Expenditure	£31,958.33
Family Pension Age Households	
Number of successful households	0
Rent Arrears	£0.00
Rent Deposit/Moving Costs	£0.00
Ongoing Rent Shortfall	£0.00
Sub Total Expenditure	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£92,424.70

Financial Inclusion

The Financial Inclusion team is continuing to support low-income households become financially resilient by maximising their income through unclaimed benefits, premiums, and grants. We have also run two Pension Credit campaigns using data from the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) to target individual households and have used DWP data shared through Norfolk County Council to increase take up of Council Tax Support. In total the Benefits team and Financial Inclusion team have generated over £1.55 million in missed benefits and/or funding for households across North Norfolk, with the highest amount of income being claimed for disabled households. This is illustrated below.



Household Support Fund

We have been given a further £109,000 from Norfolk County Council to distribute as part of the Household Support Fund round 6 to low income pension age households not in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment and who are not entitled to Pension Credit. We will be identifying eligible households using the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) data and each eligible household

will be offered £120. This payment will be distributed through the Post Office PayOut scheme. This demonstrates how as a service we are supporting our vulnerable residents having taken the decision to invest in the LIFT product.

Better Off Calculator

To support residents maximise their income, we have a Better Off Calculator available on our website www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/benefits/calculator This is outcome-focused and gives residents information they can trust. It shows how households can be affected by welfare reforms, income changes, household changes, etc. It also links directly to Anglian Water where eligible households can claim the social tariff to reduce their water bill.

Housing Options and Homeless Prevention

Your Choice Your Home

As of the 31 January 2025 there were 2,256 households on the housing list with 474 (21%) being on the Housing Register – the register contains those qualifying applicants who have the most urgent housing needs, including households to whom the council owns a statutory housing duty.

The tables below highlight the makeup of housing need and size of property that is required by applicants on the housing list. Although the greatest demand for housing is those with a 1-bedroom need, there are significantly fewer larger properties allocated with current demand for 4beds+ properties being 240 with only 1 four-bedroom housing being let between 01 April 2024 to 31 January 2025.

Some properties have a minimum age requirement, for example, in some cases only people over 55 years of age can apply, this applied to 51 properties let during 01 April 2024 to 31 January 2025.

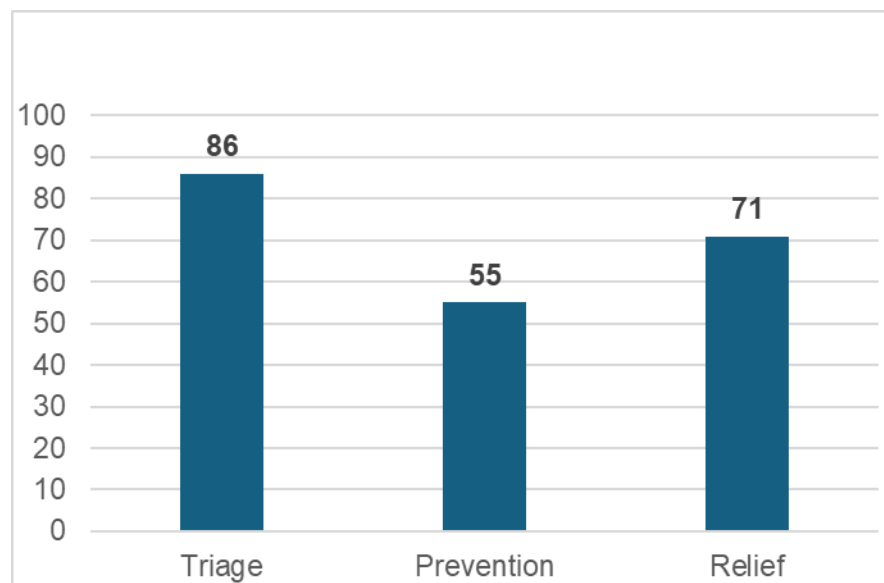
Housing List by Bedroom Need					Homes Let by Property size (Bedrooms)			
	Housing Register	Housing Options	Transfer	Total	Housing Register	Housing Options	Transfer	Total
1 Bed	205	896	160	1261	89	2	6	97
2 Bed	97	333	91	521	95	8	7	110
3 Bed	67	92	42	201	23	1	6	30
4 Bed	92	108	40	240	1	0	0	1
5 Bed +	13	12	8	33	0	0	0	0
Total	474	1141	341	2256	208	11	19	238

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 2024 to 31 January 2025 we have opened 1,000 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 households being owed the Relief Duty (179 cases) Vs the Prevention Duty (111 cases).

As of 31 January 2025, there were 207 open homeless cases. The table below shows the levels of Homelessness, where a household is owed either the prevention or relief duty following initial assessment.



The three most common triggers of homelessness for Households owed a homeless duty by reason of loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home were:

- End of Private Tenancy
- Family/Friends no longer/willing to accommodate
- Domestic Abuse

Outcome of main duty decisions for eligible households

Main homelessness duty describes the duty a local authority has towards an applicant who is unintentionally homeless, eligible for assistance and has priority need. Households are only owed a main duty if their homelessness has not been successfully prevented or relieved.

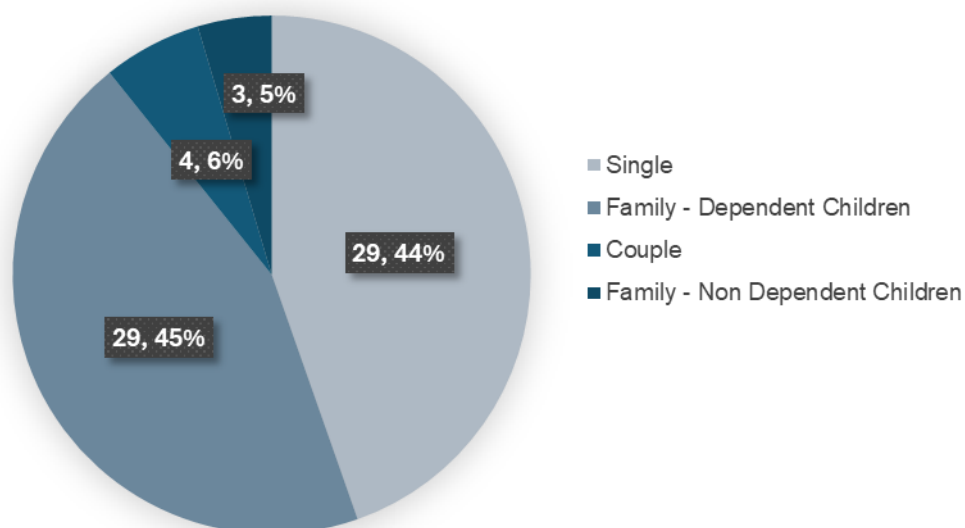
Between 01 April 2024 to 31 January 2025, 144 main duty decisions have been taken with 103 households (72%) being found to be Homeless, priority

need, and unintentionally homeless.

Where a local authority has accepted a main housing duty to an applicant, Section 193 accommodation duty arises. This requires the local authority to ensure that the applicant has access to suitable temporary accommodation until the applicant is rehoused and the Section 193 duty is discharged.

Temporary Accommodation

On the 31 January 2025 there were 65 Households in Temporary Accommodation.



Households in Temporary Accommodation

Rough Sleeping

During the month of January (at various points in time) 8 people were reported/verified as sleeping rough in North Norfolk, this includes 1 person with entrenched experience of rough sleeping, 4 people who have previously slept rough in the district and 3 people who were new rough sleeping in the district.

At the end of the month, 3 people remain sleeping rough, 2 people have been assisted Supported Housing, 1 person has been offered interim emergency accommodation and 2 people are believed to have left the area and are no longer engaging with us.

Housing Strategy

Temporary Accommodation

The Council currently holds 25 units of Temporary or other homeless accommodation (including five units of move on accommodation for ex-rough sleepers). Some of these units have been partly funded using government grant, including Local Authority Housing Fund Grant (which has also helped to fund Flagship Housing to purchase 10 affordable homes).

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, deliver more than 550 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, but mitigation solutions are now well underway in a number of cases.

In 2024/25 we expect Housing Associations to provide 41 new affordable homes in the district – this is a lower figure than previously reported as one scheme will only partially handover their new development this year with the remaining in a phased process which takes some home now into early 2025/26.

So far in 2024/25 35 new homes have been completed, which include, in January, a rural exception site in Warham with 12 affordable rented homes specifically for Homes for Wells. The development of 24 affordable homes in Sheringham (Westwood), is due for completion over the next few months.

Planning applications continue – in Stalham planning consent has been granted to a fully affordable development which will deliver 61 extra care homes, along with 40 affordable homes. In Wells, planning consent has been granted to the Holkham Estate where 10 affordable homes will be delivered as part of their market led development in the town. A planning application has been submitted for a rural exception housing site in Little Snoring, where we hope to have 10 affordable homes delivered subject to consent. Following a successful public consultation, Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Society continue to work in partnership with Broadland Housing Association to deliver eight affordable homes, with a planning application submission expected in the coming months.

We continue to work with Parish Councils in respect to new affordable homes opportunities for their parishes with Felmingham Parish Council being the most recently visited.

Work continues to seek further land in the district which is suitable for affordable housing with some local landowners making contact following recent publicity. Over the last three months Strategic Housing have been approached with land offers or have identified suitable land across parishes in the district.

Social Prescribing

January 2025:

Referrals received into SP = **62**

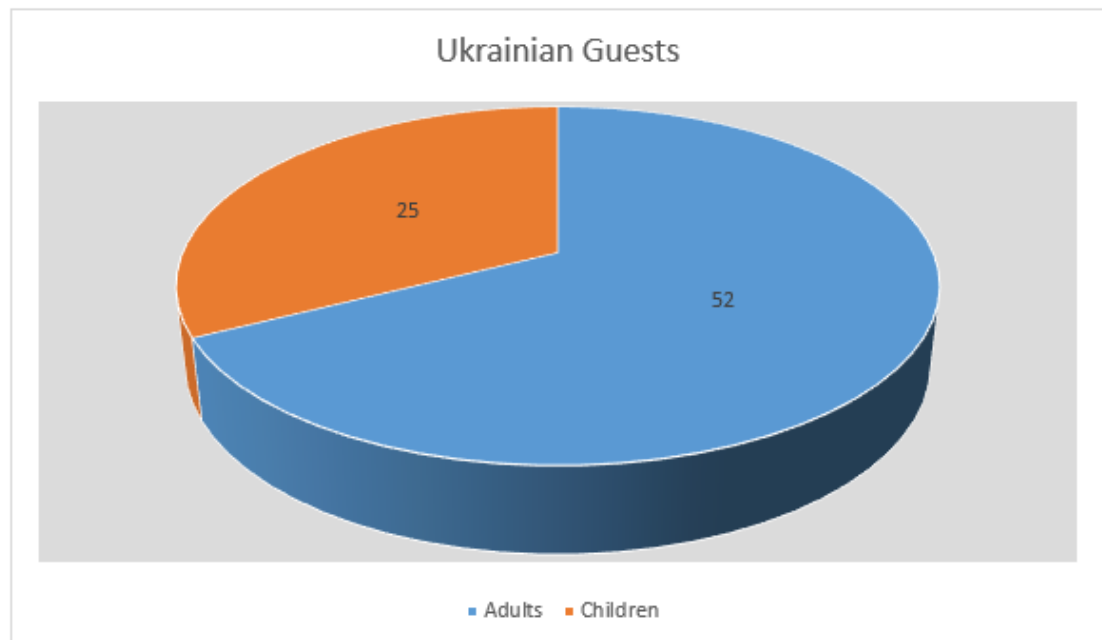
(Higher number than usual due to Christmas break.)

Key issues in respect of reasons for referral include support with budgeting, benefits and financial advice due to debts, housing conditions and potential risk of homelessness, support with mental health and long-term conditions and social isolation.

Complex referrals are presented to and discussed at the multi-agency Help Hub to get a more holistic view of the person being referred. Agreement is reached at the Hub on how to deal with the referral and the concerns raised. Referrals are also allocated to Social Prescribers, Community Connectors for Social Isolation or Financial Inclusion for benefits, debt, budgeting and financial issues.

Homes for Ukraine (H4U)

Currently we have 30 hosts, 77 guests in a hosting arrangement (52 adults and 25 children), plus 1 person in Temporary Accommodation.



Ukraine permission Extension Scheme (UPES) went live on 4th February. Within one month of the expiry date of their current visa, existing H4U guests can apply for further Leave to Remain in the UK for 18 months.

The current Thank You payments awarded to hosts of H4U guests is ending 31st March 2025.

Hosts will need to reapply for Thank You payments however, this amount will reduce from £500 to £350. There is concern that due to this some hosts may be unable to continue to offer accommodation. NNDC's Ukraine Community Support Officer continues to work closely with existing guests and hosts helping them deal with Government changes in process and procedure and helping guests wishing to move on to independent living.

IHAT

Continue to promote IHAT and discretionary grants available throughout 2024-25 through the following,

- Development of IHAT leaflet to better promote the service across the council and to reach a wider audience in addition to the website information. The leaflet is to be used for professional and public use to better understand eligibility for DFG and referral process.
- Recent network even with Norfolk's wider occupational therapy service to increase integration across public service and the voluntary sector to improve the service for North Norfolk's residents.
- NNDC IHAT attendance at Norfolk's DFG roadshow with other Norfolk IHAT teams to problem solve areas and develop better workflow across the county.
- Discretionary grant policy due to be renewed before the next financial year. Reviewing the benefits of the discretionary grants on a wider process and how this can improve wait times for the core DFG works.

Update

- On 03/01 the government announced an immediate in-year uplift to the Disabled Facilities Grant for the 2024-2025 financial year. The expectation is that these funds are spent this year or at least committed. Reviewing how this expenditure can be undertaken within current staffing resource.
- Additional funds allocated to NNDC's IHAT and increase in demand are placing additional pressures on each stage and leading to increased wait time across the whole DFG process.
- Evaluating how we manage this along with the predicted continuation in demand following promotion of IHAT and grants and natural increase in demand for adaptations due to demographics and focus on prevention from other services, such as NHS and local community healthcare services.

Figures 2024-25 – Disabled Facilities Grant

YTD Total approved grants 2024-25 (as of 31 st January)	£1,173,534.08
YTD Approved value outstanding 2024-25 (as of 31 st January)	£799,542.92
Brought forward approval value form 203-24 (not yet completed, as of 31 st January)	£89,056.94
Brought forward approved cases 2023-24 (not yet completed)	8 cases
Q3 (Oct 24 – Dec 24) total spend	£451,388.65
Q3 (Oct 24 – Dec 24) total approved value	£507,783.11 (49 cases)
Total spend YTD (as of 31 st January)	£1,207,845.11
Cases awaiting assessment for adaptation (as of 31 st January)	65
Average time for all category of cases (working days) between Oct 24 – Dec 24	
Triage and assessment being completed	61 days
Recommendation for adaptations and schedule of work	106 days
Case start to completion of work	318 days

Figures 2024-25 – Discretionary Grants

YTD as of 31 st January grants awarded (completed)	65
YTD as of 31 st January total value	£91,298.70

Discretionary Grants Key Highlights from quarter 3

- 29 minor adaptation grants (*adaptations costing under £1,000, non means tested*) awarded totalling £8,977.77 (average spend per grant £309.58). This has included applicants who may not be financially eligible for DFG and lower-level adaptations that have prevented the need for DFG producing savings within DFG budget and also relieving some of the pressure/demand on the DFG process.
- 12 home repair grants awarded totalling £58,899.00 (average spend per grant £4,908.25) these have included repairs and replacement boilers/heating system inc. hot water with some properties and residents being without these basic utilities for 2+ years. Grants have also been awarded under home repair that have helped facilitate a DFG for adaptations in addition to Discretionary including upgrades to electrical systems to allow for the installation of stair lifts and level access showers. Without the grant these upgrades would have been

prevented an adaptation if the client was unable to fund prior to DFG application submission.

- 18 architects and surveyor's grants awarded totalling £20,787.65 (average spend £1,154.87) these grants have enabled complex cases to progress to DFG through taking away the expensive upfront costs required away from the family/applicant and offering support to applicants through the architect and surveyor grant. Without the introduction of this grant less than 10% of our complex cases were able to progress previously due to financial implications.

Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Meetings attended

Pre Cabinet Agenda
Business Planning
Peoples' Services Catchup
EELGA Women's Health Publicity Chat
Bacton Energy Summit
Portfolio Holder Catchup Housing Strategy
Site Visit to West Wood Victory Flagship Development
LGA Audit Training
Cabinet
DCN Blueprint for Affordable Housing – Speaker
Mundesley Parish council Full Council
Extraordinary Full Council NNDC
LGA Roundtable on Temporary Accommodation and finance