

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

16th December 2020

COUNCILLOR GREG HAYMAN - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING & BENEFITS

For the period November – December 2020

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

The Benefits Team continue to assist households in need of financial support.

Test & Trace Support Payment

We have received 64 applications for the Trace & Trace Support Payment out of which we have made a payment of £500 each to 22 people to support them whilst they are self-isolating. We have refused 36 applications, mainly due to the employer continuing to pay full wages whilst the person is self-isolating. The remaining applications are in the process of being verified.

Council Tax Hardship Fund

We have spent 70% of the £723,824 fund allocated in April. This has given additional support to households financially affected by the pandemic. Any remaining fund as at 31st March 2021 can be utilised by the council as we see fit.

However, the Spending Review (SR20) implies local authorities will receive additional grant funding in 2021/22 to help support households that are least able to afford council tax. This may indicate the scheme will continue in 2021/22. In which case, we may wish to add any remaining fund to the new allocation for 2021/22.

Covid Winter Grant Scheme - Norfolk

Norfolk County Council has been allocated £2.7 million by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for the Covid Winter Grant Scheme. This might help in meeting essential needs for many people (perhaps people who have never needed help before) as this winter will be challenging for a variety of reasons, and there will be a lot of people who will need help with things like paying bills and buying food. Norfolk County Council will be responsible for making payments under the scheme but Sonia Shuter, Health and Communities Manager, is the scheme contact for this authority.

Where we do identify a family or resident in Norfolk who is currently suffering from hardship and unsure how to pay their bills, keep warm and buy food, Norfolk County Council are asking that we help them apply for the support. This can be done online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/covidwintersupport.

In a proactive move, the Benefits Team will use existing data around Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, debtors, and Discretionary Hardship applicants, to identify potential vulnerable households and to reach as many people as possible.

Housing

Green Homes Grant

A consortium of Norfolk Councils, including North Norfolk District has been successful in securing £1.24 million of Green Homes Grant.

The Green Homes Grant will be implemented by the Norfolk Warm Homes Partnership, to support fuel poor residents to reduce heating costs and improve the energy efficiency of their homes by the end of March 2021. Insulation measures available include solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, air source heat pumps and underfloor insulation.

Part of the grant funding targets the addition of insulation to Park Home properties. To promote this element of the grant we have written to residents of the Council-owned Park Home site in Pudding Norton to invite applications. Several residents have expressed interest and we expect work to start early in the New Year.

Temporary Housing

Following the Council's successful bid to secure £140,000 from the Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme to help provide four homes for single rough sleepers or people at a risk of rough sleeping, we are now moving ahead with the purchase of 4 x one-bed homes. We have offers accepted on two properties and are actively seeking two more. We must complete purchases by 31 March 2020. As at 30th November the Council had 48 households in temporary housing.

New Affordable Homes

Housing Associations working in North Norfolk District expect to provide 225 new affordable homes this financial year – 95 for affordable rent and 130 for shared ownership. Most of the new homes are expected in the last quarter of the year. Forty-four of the new homes had completed as at 30 November.

Housing 21's construction of the Fakenham Extra Care Housing scheme is progressing well and should be ready for occupation in March 2021. The official opening of the show flat for the shared ownership homes is on 8th December; Council leader, Cllr Sarah Bütikofer will attend.

Housing Options Team

The team continue to focus on supporting all clients that approach the service. There is still a firm focus on Rough sleepers and in accordance with Government advice the service has moved from 'Everyone in' to 'Protect' and will continue to offer accommodation to rough sleepers over the winter period.

Your Choice Your Home is still operating; with 1 in 3 properties being considered for direct let. This means that the authority is able to still support & rehouse those that the authority has duties to assist through the Homeless Reduction Act and rough sleepers. This will continue until the agreed review in January 2021.

As at 30 Nov there were 2,813 households on the housing list of whom 412 were on the Housing Register (highest priority) broken down as follows:

- 4 Priority Card.
- 254 Band 1
- 154 Band 2.

Between 1 Apr 2020 and 30 Nov 2020 there have 158 affordable home lets. For the same period last year there were 214.

The team is supporting a large number of homeless households and households at risk of homelessness.

Live Cases, as at 03 Dec 2020, breakdown into:

- Final Duties accepted: 26
- Prevention duty accepted: 28
- Relief Duty accepted: 41
- Triage (mixture of new cases, rough sleepers, being supported): 62

The team continue to work with and support rough sleepers. As at 3 Dec 2020 there were 12 known rough sleepers, of whom we are providing accommodation for 7 and 5 are still sleeping rough.

Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

The IHAT has a budget of just under £1.2 million in 20/21 to provide adaptations to help people remain in their homes. The IHAT provide a range of adaptations including level access showers and stair-lifts.

In November the team completed 13 adaptations and spent £115,000. A further 5 grants with a value of £41,500 were approved. The team has outstanding commitments of £480,000 for work approved but not yet completed against a remaining budget of £740,000. This leaves £260,000 of budget uncommitted with four months of activity remaining.

In the recent Spending Review the Government announced that the national DFG budget would increase from £505m to £573m a 13.5% uplift.

There is a significant amount of demand in the system and the recent (November) lockdown has not had any significant impact on our service delivery. All contractors have continued to work on DFG cases. We have had a small number of customers who have asked for applications/works to be deferred until after the worst of the pandemic.

We are in the process of managing the transition to our new web based IT system which has had some impact on service delivery during October and November. This new system will be available to the Occupational Therapist and Assistant Practitioner who are part of the integrated team which will improve efficiency.

The team's apprentice has secured a permanent position with the Council in the Property Services team. In the New Year the team will consider whether to support a further apprenticeship.

Broadland Housing Association Wins Royal Town Planners Institute (RTPI) Award

Broadland's North Norfolk District Wide Affordable Housing Strategy was the regional winner in the RTPI's virtual awards ceremony in November.

Broadland's award-winning strategy is helping to meet the acute shortage of affordable housing in north Norfolk. Working closely with partners at North Norfolk District Council and local parish councils, Broadland is creating vibrant, sustainable rural communities.

Chair of the RTPI judges' panel, David Potter, said:

We were very impressed with this novel and very successful approach to tackling the difficult and urgent problem of providing affordable housing in rural areas. The judges concluded this careful management and collaborative working arrangement should be commended.'

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

3 Meetings attended