

## CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

24<sup>th</sup> February 2021

### **COUNCILLOR GREG HAYMAN - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING & BENEFITS**

For the period – December 2020 – January 2021

#### **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 230 applications for the Trace & Trace Support Payment out of which we have made a payment of £500 each to 131 people to support them whilst they are self-isolating. Approval rates are low mainly due to the number of applicants who have claimed but continue to receive full pay from their employer. National unpublished data gathered by Sheffield City Council shows the combined eligibility rate is **33%** with the lowest being **7%** and a new highest being **64%** (a very small council).

Norfolk LAs have been in discussion with Norfolk County Council with regards to the discretionary pot being topped up with local funding, with the proviso that it is distributed using the same eligibility criteria County-wide. Top up funding of £250,000 per authority with a £1million back up fund is pending approval. It has been agreed that this local funding and criteria could be implemented immediately. The funding provided by DHSC would be spent first, followed by the county funding, but the new criteria would be used for both. We are awaiting further clarification of the Local Discretionary Payment scheme which is being funded by Norfolk County Council.

##### Council Tax Hardship Fund

We have spent 72% 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 can be utilised by the council as we see fit. We will be recommending to CLT & members that any underspend is rolled over to 2021/22. We think this best approach is to wait until our workloads up to and including 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 have been processed so that we have an accurate understanding of the remaining fund. Our recommendation would then be for any underspend to be distributed throughout 2021/22 using the same principles as those provided by DHSC where working age families in receipt of CTS will benefit from an additional sum towards their Council Tax bill.

The government has provided additional funding to local authorities for 2021/22 to ease the burden of the additional costs of the Council Tax Support scheme.

However this element of the funding has not been ring fenced as the Council Tax Hardship fund was for 2020/21. The Norfolk Finance Officers Group have decided that the grant will be budgeted for in the General Fund to compensate for our tax losses resulting from an increase in LCTS cases.

#### Annual billing for 2021/22

Preparation has started for the end of year reconciliation and re-billing for Revenues and Benefits. The intended shut down date to start the live year end process is Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February pm.

## **Housing**

### Temporary Housing

There are currently 50+ households in Temporary Accommodation, this includes the 14 rough sleepers currently accommodated (see below).

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, purchasing these homes is progressing well. We have offers accepted on four 1-bed properties and surveys/conveyancing is well under way to ensure purchases complete by 31 March 2020.

### New Affordable Homes

Housing Associations working in North Norfolk District expect to provide 214 new affordable homes this financial year – 92 for affordable rent and 126 for shared ownership. The forecast has reduced slightly as a number of schemes will now complete in 2021/22. Most of the new homes are expected in the last quarter of the year and 44 of the new homes had completed as at 15<sup>th</sup> February.

Two big schemes are due to complete shortly:

Laundry Loke, the Flagship development of 43 homes (32 affordable rent and 11 shared ownership) will be advertised through Your Choice Your Home shortly.

Housing 21's Fakenham Extra Care Housing scheme of 66 flats (30 affordable rent and 36 shared ownership) should also be complete in March. Occupation will be phased to ensure individual needs are catered for and again, flats should begin to be advertised on Your Choice Your Home shortly and a communications campaign to raise awareness of Extra Care housing is also planned.

### Housing Strategy

Workshops will be held over the next month to help develop the Council's new housing strategy. The workshops will look at four themes: 1. Increasing the supply of new housing, 2. Improving housing stock condition in the private sector, 3. Making better use of public sector housing, 4. Supporting vulnerable residents. Workshops attended by councillors, staff and partners, will consider evidence on need, what action is already in place to address need and the Council's agreed objectives

### Shared Equity

Norfolk Homes are in the process of selling the final five shared equity homes at their site in Cromer – which NNDC typically hold a 25% ‘silent’ equity share in. Norfolk Homes market the properties but the Council approves prospective purchasers based on previously agreed criteria including strength of local connection and income.

#### 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.

As at 15 February 2021 there were 2,827 households on the housing list of whom 426 were on the Housing Register (highest priority) broken down as follows:

- 7 Priority Card.
- 264 Band 1
- 155 Band 2.

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

Live Cases, as at 15 February 2021, breakdown into:

- Final Duties accepted: 17
- Prevention duty accepted: 14
- Relief Duty accepted: 35
- Triage (mixture of new cases, rough sleepers, being supported): 99

The team continue to work with and support rough sleepers. As at 15 February 2021 there were 18 known rough sleepers, of whom we are providing accommodation for 14 and 4 are still sleeping rough.

#### Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

The IHAT had 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. A further £160,757 was allocated to the Council in December 2020.

In January the team completed a further 7 adaptations and spent a further £33,000. A further 6 grants with a value of £44,500 were approved. The team has outstanding commitments of £378,000 for work approved but not yet completed against a remaining budget of £285,101.89 (not all of these cases will be completed in the financial year 2020/2021).

In the recent Spending Review the Government announced that the national DFG budget would increase from £505m to £573m a 13.5% uplift. The Council expects to receive £1,354,615 in 2021/22.

There is a significant amount of demand in the system and the current lockdown is having a greater impact on our service delivery than the November lockdown but not as great an impact as in the first lockdown. Most of the contractors have continued to work on DFG cases but one has closed and furloughed staff whilst another has deferred the start of all jobs scheduled to commence in January and February and another has had to delay the start of jobs due to staff contracting COVID 19 and having to isolate and other staff having to isolate due to contact with someone testing positive. We have had a small number of customers who have asked for applications/works to be deferred until after the worst of the pandemic.