

## CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

28<sup>th</sup> April 2021

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

For the period – February – April 2021

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

##### **Benefits**

The Benefits Team continue to assist households in need of financial support. The live caseload is continuing to increase. We currently have 8164 households claiming financial support, compared to 7756 households at the same time in 2020, and 7936 households in 2019.

##### Test & Trace Support Payment

The number of Test & Trace Support Payment applications has started to slow down. The table below shows the number of applications received over the last quarter. This may suggest a reflection of National Lockdown measures and the roll out of the vaccination program.

Month received	Number of standard applications	Number of discretionary applications
January 2021	62	52
February 2021	12	18
March 2021	8	5

From 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the scheme has been extended to include parents and guardians who are not legally required to self-isolate, but who need to take time off work to look after a child or young person who is self-isolating. The council web pages and application form are being updated to reflect these changes.

##### Council Tax Hardship Fund

The Council Tax Hardship scheme was introduced by the DHSC on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, as additional financial support for working age households in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS). The scheme offered households an additional payment towards their Council Tax bill of up to £150.

Under the scheme we were allocated £723,824. The scheme ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and we have spent £538,322 of the fund. The remaining fund will not be clawed back by the DHSC and it is for councils to decide how best to utilise any underspends. The Benefit Manager will be pulling together data and suggested options, which will be put forward for further consideration.

Our recommendation at this stage would 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 for 2021/22.

## **Housing**

### Temporary Housing

There are currently 40+ households in Temporary Accommodation, this includes the 12 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 completed the purchase of three 1-bed properties and checks and minor works are now being carried out on these with the first tenants moving in April 2021. The fourth property should complete by the end of April 2021.

Cabinet also agreed to the repurposing of £500k Disabled Facilities Grant budget to purchase accessible temporary accommodation units. Two ex-Flagship bungalows are currently being considered for purchase

### New Affordable Homes

Housing Associations working in North Norfolk District have delivered 108 new affordable homes this financial year – 56 for affordable rent and 52 for shared ownership. The number is lower than previously forecast as a number of schemes will now complete in 2021/22.

The Flagship development at Laundry Loke completed in March 2021 and provides 43 new homes (32 affordable rent and 11 shared ownership).

The building of Housing 21's Fakenham Extra Care Housing scheme of 66 flats (30 affordable rent and 36 shared ownership) also completed in March. However, works to fit out the interior of the scheme are ongoing so it has not been included in the outturn figures for 2020/21. Occupation will be phased to ensure individual needs are catered for from May 2021. Other sites are being considered for further Extra Care housing developments.

Cabinet in February agreed the use of £900k of section 106 commuted to support the delivery of new affordable homes. One of the schemes which the money is intended to support, the Exception Housing scheme in Walcott, recently achieved planning permission.

### Housing Strategy

Four workshops were held in February and March 2021 with a range of stakeholders attending to help develop the Council's new housing strategy. The workshops looked 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. The outcomes of these workshops, together with the Council's agreed objectives, are now being collated into the first draft of a strategy which is to be shared with members.

### 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 31 March 2021 there were 2928 households on the housing list of whom 426 were on the Housing Register (highest priority) broken down as follows:

- 7 Priority Card.
- 245 Band 1
- 146 Band 2.

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

Live Cases, as at 16 April 2021, breakdown into:

- Final Duties accepted: 16
- Prevention duty accepted: 14
- Relief Duty accepted: 20
- Triage (mixture of new cases, rough sleepers, being supported): 50

The team continue to work with and support rough sleepers. As at 16 April 2021 there were 12 known rough sleepers, of whom we are providing accommodation for 9 and 3 are still sleeping rough. Received notification of 2 new RS these will need to be verified before counted.

### 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 2020/21 the team approved 83 grants at a value of £790,000 and completed 87 with a total spend of £764,000. £422,000 of approved grant is taken forward into 2021/22.

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.

### Domestic abuse

The Domestic Abuse Bill (which is due to be enacted in the coming weeks) introduces new responsibilities for the upper tier authority in the assessment of the need for support for survivors of domestic abuse in specific accommodation. The upper tier authority is then responsible for commissioning support in accordance with

identified needs. Once enacted Councils will be responsible for undertaking a needs assessment and producing a strategy to meet the identified needs. The upper tier authority is required to set up a Board of key strategic partners to oversee this work. The district Housing Authority has a duty to co-operate with the upper tier authority in meeting this statutory obligation and will be a stakeholder represented on the Board.

As part of the work of the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership a proposal to pool funding across the county to jointly procure a single domestic abuse service with a long term contract was agreed. This procurement is being led by the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner. The procurement will be overseen by a Board comprised of funders of such services. North Norfolk District Council does not currently directly fund any domestic abuse services and therefore does not have any specific funding that can be contributed to the pooled fund. The procurement process is due to commence in the next few weeks. It is not proposed that the procurement of support services will be included in the joint procurement being led by the OPCCN at this point but this may be incorporated at some point in the future.