

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

21st July 2021

COUNCILLOR WENDY FREDERICKS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING & BENEFITS

For the period – July 2021 – August 2021

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

Test & Trace Support Payment

The number of Test & Trace Support Payment applications has now started to increase, although the numbers continue to remain low. The table below shows the number of applications received since January 2021.

Month received	Number of standard applications	Number of discretionary applications
January 2021	62	52
February 2021	12	18
March 2021	8	5
April 2021	1	1
May 2021	2	2
June	7	7

In addition to the DHSC Test & Trace Support Payment we are also operating a local Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment scheme as part of a county co-hort with Norfolk Councils. The scheme provides local top-up funding of £250,000 per an authority with a £1 million back up fund pending approval, which has been funded by Norfolk County Council.

Where eligibility meets the DHSC scheme, the funding from DHSC would be used first but where the eligibility does not meet this scheme, payment can be considered under the local discretionary scheme. The guidelines for the local scheme have been discussed and agreed by all Norfolk councils.

From 1st July, the local scheme has been extended to include eligibility for those who have tested positive following a lateral flow test, as well income and capital limits under the eligibility criteria being increased, to encourage more people to apply for the payment and self-isolate.

Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative

On 5th July 2021, the Benefits Service will be starting a new initiative through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) called Housing Benefit (HB) Award

Accuracy. The Housing Delivery Division at the DWP will be working with us to further improve the accuracy of HB awards. Paying the right amount of benefit, at the right time, to the right person, is already a high priority for us but the indicator has been designed to support us in benchmarking and best practice.

Under the initiative we will be expected to identify a set volume of unreported changes in circumstances through targeted activities. To enable us to target our activities the DWP will be sending us a list of our full HB caseload, ranked in order by the HB Award Accuracy risk score. The DWP has worked with a small selection of LAs and this has demonstrated that using these risk scores to target Full Case Reviews (FCRs) provides a high hit rate and will help identify more unreported changes in order to improve our HB Award Accuracy.

The HB Award Accuracy Indicator is calculated by comparing the actual value of weekly reductions processed by us to the expected value of weekly reductions the DWP believe we should be making, based on a range of claim characteristics which estimate the risk of the claim having a change of circumstances. Performance will differ across LAs based on their HB caseload composition and it takes account of variations in regional rent levels and claimants who move to Universal Credit (UC).

The initiative will continue for the next four years.

Housing

Temporary Housing

There are currently 29 households in Temporary Accommodation, this includes the 6 rough sleepers currently accommodated (see below).

Following the Council's successful bid to secure £140,000 from the Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) 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 the four 1-bed properties and checks and minor works are now being carried out on these with the first tenants moving in shortly.

Cabinet also agreed to the repurposing of £500k Disabled Facilities Grant budget to purchase accessible temporary accommodation units. The first purchase, of an ex-Flagship bungalow, has now completed. Again, minor works are underway to bring the home into use shortly. A further bungalow, capable of being made fully wheelchair accessible is under offer.

The Council has also received £35k from the MHCLG Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme (RSAP) as a contribution to the refurbishment of a one-bed self-contained flat for rough sleeper move-on housing.

New Affordable Homes

We project that housing associations will provide 183 new affordable homes (71 affordable rent and 112 shared ownership) in 2021/22. The 2021/22 figures include Housing 21's Fakenham Extra Care Housing scheme of 66 flats (30 affordable rent and 36 shared ownership) which completed in April 2021. Following works to fit out the interior residents are beginning to move in. Housing 21 hosted two open sessions attended by a number of members last month.

Cabinet in February agreed the use of £900k of section 106 commuted sums 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

Following workshops held in February and March 2021 with a range of stakeholders a first draft of the new housing strategy was shared with members on 5th May. An updated draft and an associated action plan was supported at Cabinet on Monday 5th July and is due to be considered by Full Council later in July.

Housing Options Team

The team continue to focus on supporting all clients that approach the service.

Your Choice Your Home

As at 06 July 2021 there were 2789 households on the housing list of whom 367 were on the Housing Register (highest priority) broken down as follows:

- 6 x Priority Card.
- 208 x Band 1
- 153 x Band 2

Lets

QTR 1 01 Apr 2021 to 30 June 2021 - 81 Households have secured social housing

Homelessness

There is still a firm focus on Rough sleepers from MHCLG in that we are still reporting monthly stats in relation to rough sleepers within the district. As at 05 July 2021 there were 9 known rough sleepers, of whom we are providing accommodation for 6 and 3 are still sleeping rough.

Following a recent discussion with MHCLG we are still focusing on finding solutions for our single clients to whom the authority is accommodating.

As at 07 June 2021, there were 111 active live cases:

- Final Duties accepted: 12
- Prevention duty accepted: 16
- Relief Duty accepted: 26
- Reviews: 3
- Triage (mixture of new cases, rough sleepers, clients being supported): 44

Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT)

All contractors were back to full operation in May however we have had a recent incident where one contractor's entire team has had to self-isolate holding up works with a knock on effect for other cases. A further 11 grants were approved in May with a value of £93,023 taking the total approved for the financial year to 15 with a total commitment of £132,499. In addition 8 grants were completed in May taking the total for the financial year to 9 with a total spend of £173,023. There has been a technical hitch with our reporting software associated with the changes to the M drive which has meant that the June figures are not yet available

The Housing Adaptations Service was audited in March/April and the audit has recently been finalised with a reasonable level of assurance and one agreed action to take forward.

3 Meetings attended

Cabinet Meetings
Meeting with Mundesley Parish Council
Your Choice Your Home Partnership Meeting
Cabinet Business Planning
Coastal Forum
Baseline Carbon Audit Session
Overview and Scrutiny
Group Briefings