

March 2023**HOUSING****Homelessness & Housing Solutions**

Joint 16/17 year old protocol training has been delivered to both NCT and Housing Officers with a further mop-up session due to take place in March to ensure the protocol is embedded within both teams. Following the training, work will begin on the youth offer on the website to ensure that this provides consistent advice across WNC, NNC and NCT websites. Further work has begun on a Homelessness Quality Assurance Framework as requested by DLUHC.

The various transformation work packages are progressing well and work has begun to extract the key deliverables from each workstream to provide a high level project plan. We are engaging with the DTI Innovation Manager to find innovative ways to raise awareness of our service to encourage early interventions for homelessness and avoid crisis situations. Work has begun to project and track the benefits committed to for the transformation project to clarify the benefits agreed and align them to specific activities.

Following a successful funding bid to Public Health, external consultants, PPL (Private Public Ltd) have been appointed to undertake an independent assessment of the needs of people at risk of rough sleeping, street homeless or at risk of returning to rough sleeping. The assessment will inform recommendations as to the health, social care, housing and other services needed to ensure that rough sleeping is prevented where possible and where it cannot be prevented, that it is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Housing Strategy & Partnerships

Now that the Housing Strategy has been adopted the work has started on development of the Housing Delivery Plan that sits beside this. Assessments of current delivery are underway and the first session of the Housing Delivery Board has taken place. The board is made up of members of the senior housing team alongside representation from Northamptonshire Partnership Homes, the council's arm's length management organisation, the larger registered providers and representation from the Voluntary & Community Sector.

Work has also commenced on the development of the new West Northants Housing allocations policy. There has been an initial review of the existing policies and work will start over the next couple of months to engage stakeholders, members, and service users to input to the initial development of the policy and its content.

The relationship with Northamptonshire Partnership Homes continues to build with the council. The new governance framework has now been implemented and initial meetings of all forums and boards has taken place. This is enabling delivery to happen at pace and given a conduit for recommendations to feed through to both the Council and NPH decision making bodies.

Private Sector Housing

Housing Enforcement

The Team continues to investigate complaints relating to housing conditions in Private Rented accommodation. Following the publicity regarding the Coroner's report relating to the Awaab Ishak death in social housing this has included an increase in complaints relating to damp and mould. The team continue to take action across the private rented sector, and support tenants with their approach to social landlords.

Since the last Council meeting in November further civil penalty notices have been issued:

- A licenced HMO landlord failing to maintain their property in accordance with the HMO licence conditions, civil penalty of £25,800
- A private landlord failing to ensure effective testing and maintenance of the electric systems, civil penalty of £1,200

Home Adaptations

The Team continues to respond to requests for local residents seeking support to adapt their property to ensure they can continue to live safely at home. Adaptations including, for example, stair lifts, through floor lifts, access ramps, doorway widening, level access bathrooms, through to full adapted extensions.

The Team have now completed adaptation work during 2022/23 to a value of £2.7m. With a total grant funding budget of £2.55m. There is some underspend in this grant allocation from 2021/22, mainly due to the impact of the Covid19 pandemic, that will mitigate the overspend. However, this year's performance sees outputs greater than a number of previous years, and demonstrates how the team have recovered from the pandemic to ensure that residents adaptations are now completed as pandemic restrictions have eased.

CULTURE & LEISURE

As part of the Communities & Opportunities Tier 4 restructure, Peter Cox has been appointed as Head of Service for Sport, Leisure & Culture. The service has been renamed accordingly to cover, sport and leisure facilities, physical activity and active lives, major events (sporting and cultural), cultural activity and partners.

The service continues to work with our contracted leisure operators through a challenging financial period. The industry has not yet fully recovered from the impact of Covid and now operators and Local Authorities are managing the impact in the rise of utility costs. WNC is in a positive position with all its leisure stock remaining open and fully operational. Credit is due to our leisure operators and the positive working relationship with WNC officers.

WNC Assets Team are working with our (rural) leisure operators* with the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS). PSDS is a combination of Government grant funding and council investment of £8m. The prime objective for the funding is reducing the carbon footprint of our leisure centres. A secondary benefit will be financial savings through reduced energy consumption. The project is in the early stages, completing condition surveys which will determine the programme of works for each leisure centre. Project completion date is

scheduled for March 2024. The council will work with leisure operators to monitor energy consumption and map the efficiencies generated through the PSDS project.

*Parkwood Leisure Ltd – Towcester Centre for Leisure and Brackley Leisure Centre. Sport & Leisure Management Ltd (SLM) – Daventry Leisure Centre and Moulton Leisure Centre.

West Northants will host a stage start of the Women's Tour in June 2023. The start will take place in Northampton Town Centre on Thursday 8th June. The route will wind its way from Northampton through West Northamptonshire on way to the stage finish in Ampthill. Event planning is underway, and the council will seek to work with many local stakeholders, generating pre-event engagement through a range of activity in schools and local communities. In the coming months a more detailed plan for event day will be shared. National launch of the Women's Tour is due on 8th March in line with International Women's Day, followed by a local launch shortly afterwards. Hosting the Women's Tour is an exciting opportunity to showcase West Northamptonshire as a visitor destination and a host of major sporting events that will inspire future generations to become more active.

The Active Lives team are delivering physical activity programmes in our rural areas. Walking Football, Wildcats (girls football programme) and a sports programme for home educated children engages with 150 people each week. The team aspires to grow these programmes and are working with partners to help resource this development.

Northampton Bike Park

Remedial drainage work is now complete at the free-to-use Northampton Bike Park and contractor On Track is waiting for them to dry sufficiently before resurfacing work can take place.

Persistent rain in December and January made it necessary to close trails on the western side of the site, though those on the eastern side have remained open throughout.

On Track returned on 8th March to begin remedial work, which involved creating new drainage measures which will help divert excess water from each of the trails. The majority of additional costs have been covered by the contractor, with WNC's liabilities covered by a pre-existing contingency within the original budget.

Libraries and Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire

Libraries have been operating as part of the Warm Spaces initiative over the winter months providing comfortable and welcoming spaces for those needing somewhere to stay warm during the current cost of living crisis. Grant funding from the Community Safety and Engagement Team has enabled us to provide hot drinks, soup and biscuits for those visiting a warm space.

The Reading Friends initiative was launched at Central Library on 15th February and will be rolled out across West Northants libraries in the coming months. The project is an innovative reading befriending programme administered by The Reading Agency, developed with funding from The National Lottery Community Fund, that tackles loneliness through the power of reading. It aims to bring people together to read, share stories and have fun and uses reading - whether books, magazines, newspapers, or anything else - to start everyone chatting. With 41% of adults reporting that they feel lonelier since lockdown Reading Friends helps both

participants and volunteers feel more connected to others. More information can be found on the WNC website Reading Friends web page.

The Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire held a celebration networking reception at the Northampton Nat West Bank on November 29th in celebration of this year's Kick Start Grant award winners. The successful 3 year DCMS funded project enabling these grants comes to a close in March but the BIPC has secured UK Shared Prosperity Funding to deliver further interventions around SME business support over the next two years.

Museums & Gallery

In December Northampton Museum and Arts Gallery announced that the museum has regained full Arts Council accreditation and, as a National Portfolio Organisation will benefit from £150,000 of funding per year for the next three years. Work has already begun on the first NPO funded project, Histories of Northamptonshire, which will see the development of an offsite programme of exhibitions in spaces in four libraries, provisionally Towcester, Brackley, Weston Favell and East Hunsbury.

Councillor Adam Brown

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure