



**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021**

Across my portfolio we are really starting to pull together our service delivery to provide consistent services across West Northants whilst maintaining an approach that recognises the uniqueness of our local places. Below are some of the things we have taken forward over the last two months;

### **Housing strategy**

We have started work on our Housing strategy and over the next few months people will have a real opportunity to shape and influence its focus and priorities. Our intention with the strategy is for it to be a live document that depicts local need and recognises and promotes the interventions of both the Council and its partners. Local people will be able to see our priorities and feedback their experience of the support we provide.

### **Ending Rough Sleeping Plan 2021/2022**

In August we were required by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to submit our Ending Rough Sleeping Plan 2021/2022. This document outlines our plans to contribute to preventing single homelessness and ending rough sleeping by the end of the financial year. It will be used by MHCLG to track our progress against our agreed objectives. Our plan is orientated around the following three pillars;

1. Prevention - Stopping people sleeping rough for the first time.
2. Intervention – Support to those currently sleeping rough to move off the streets.
3. Recovery – Support to those who have slept rough to ensure they don't return to the streets.

The plan to date is very much structured in outline terms using the MHCLG proforma. Over the next few months we will be working with partners, stakeholders and local people to produce a public facing version that structures our activity for the next year.

### **Accommodation for ex-offenders**

In April, MHCLG announced a new scheme to provide grant funding to local authorities to support ex-offenders, who are, or are at risk of becoming homeless into their own private rented sector (PRS) tenancies. The government is committed to reducing homelessness and rough sleeping and re-offending and stresses the importance of settled accommodation in contributing to reducing re-offending.

The scheme specifically focussed at supporting ex-offenders, aims to build a pathway from prison into the private rented sector accommodation, by increasing access to private rented sector tenancies and sustainment through the provision of dedicated support and management via a tenancy support officer.

Improving housing outcomes for ex-offenders and removing barriers can be achieved through working with and strengthening the links with partners and stakeholders with appropriate procedures in place:

- Timely referrals i.e. Duty to Refer;
- Appropriate risk assessments;
- Adequate support and supervision;
- Financial support through rent deposit / rent in advance;
- Dedicated tenancy support and sustainment;

- Support mechanisms for landlords.

West Northants secured a grant award in August of £200,475. This funding covers interventions for:

- 40 service users
- 2 x tenancy support officers
- 1 private sector access officer (PSAO)
- Financial tenancy support package

The scheme will support eligible ex-offenders with low to medium needs into the private rented sector, alongside working closely with private sector landlords providing support and assurances of established property management expertise.

### **Library management system**

At cabinet last week we took a report to seek approval to replace our library management system. The Library Management System is the core system that is used by the Library Service, Community Managed Libraries, Council Customer Services and several traded services.

Alongside the library management system the report also sort permission to invest in a range of IT hardware as the previous computer and associated tech had not been replaced for some time.

The new system and hardware will be essential to the continuing success of our libraries being a central feature of our local communities

### **And finally...**

I would like to mention NPH Housing management team. The team was named Local Authority / ALMO Team of the Year in the national Housing Heroes Awards on the 7<sup>th</sup> September. The award ceremony, organised by The Chartered Institute of Housing, celebrates the achievements of social housing providers across England and shines a light on the incredible work carried out across the housing sector in the past 12 months.

NPH was recognised by the judging panel for “delivering wide ranging, pragmatic and effective services for many customers and supporting the whole community during hard times”.

Congratulations to everyone at NPH for their great work!

### **Museums – Reporting Period 15 June – 15 August 2021**

The second full month of opening of saw the new Northampton Museum & Art Gallery welcome 12,000 visitors over this reporting period. These figures are in line with the (pre Covid) projected visitor figures. This is a major achievement given many museums are operating at between 13 – 40% of visitor numbers compared to 2019 figures for the same period (source The Art Newspaper, 25 June 2021). Visitor comments have been very positive, and the museum continues to gain good reviews across traditional media and social media channels.

The museum, in partnership with Royal and Derngate Theatre and University of Northampton, hosted National Youth Theatre Summer School. The NYT ran a two week and a three week course for students aged 16-21 covering a wide range of acting and theatre skills, with several hundred students from across the region participating in the programme. This generated valuable income for the museums service and helping raise the museum’s profile as a professional, high quality venue for corporate and private hire customers.

The museum's retail operations are building on the very successful opening sales activity. The shop is continuing to develop its product ranges, particularly with regard to local suppliers and makers, with several new ranges slated for September and October. The Selling Gallery has performed well, providing a physical gallery space for local artists and makers. There has been significant interest and sales of artworks and sculpture have been strong, including several high-price point pieces from the Chris Fiddes exhibition, demonstrating a healthy market for higher ticket pieces.

The café continues to be very popular with visitors, with a menu strongly focused on produce from local suppliers and producers. The café turnover has increased by over 30% month on month since opening and is beginning to establish itself in its own right.

The museum service has continued to develop its national presence and partnerships. In a competitive process the museum service was selected from Museums across the UK to take part in an exclusive 2 year programme partnering with the National Portrait Gallery. The project is fully funded and. The programme includes an internship, mentoring opportunities, knowledge exchange partnerships with 7 other UK museums; and access to exclusive targeted seminars. It is anticipated that the programme will lead to other opportunities for partnership working with other museums. Work is underway identifying 10 high profile artwork loans from the National Portrait Gallery to be displayed in the Sense of Self running March – June 2023 at the museum.

### **Archives and Heritage Service**

The Archives have continued the process of opening up, whilst maintaining Covid safety measures. These have been well received by users, many of whom find the pre-booking and planned access to document and improvement on the previous arrangement. Plans are being developed to address various building issues, including levels of humidity in the main stores.

Remaining archaeological artefacts and related items have been transferred from Boulton House to the Arc at that Chester House Estate. The Boulton House building, at the end of its functional life, will be demolished.

**Councillor Adam Brown**  
**Deputy Leader of the Council**  
**Portfolio Holder for Housing, Culture & Leisure**