

CABINET STATEMENT

CABINET MEMBER FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND REGENERATION (NORTH) – COUNCILLOR BICKNELL

Overall, the teams which support the Social Policy portfolio have been seeing increased pressures due to the Cost of Living Crisis. This can also be seen with the increased work that Citizens Advice Eastleigh is receiving for debt advice, Universal Credit and benefits and tax credits. All are trending sharply in an upward direction and are expected to increase even further once the effects of increased energy bills are realised.

Despite this though, teams are delivering great results across the Borough for our residents as can be seen from the highlights below.

Social Policy

Housing and Homelessness

- As part of our Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding bid we were awarded £58,500 to fund a rough sleeping recovery worker for an 18 month post. Following successful recruitment, the Housing Resettlement Specialist starts on 31st October 2022 and will be working directly with rough sleepers providing intensive support and drawing services together to ensure a wraparound package of support to aid in the resolution of homelessness. This is a great opportunity for some key partnership working.
- Following a review of the Housing Case Management Team, the Homelessness function of the Case Management role has been moved to the Health and Wellbeing Executive area and is currently undergoing Job Evaluation. The change will support greater opportunities to train, mentor and develop the team to subsequently deliver an improved service to our most vulnerable customers who are threatened/ homeless.
- Using homelessness grant funding, a new support service has been procured for the service. BEAM supports vulnerable people by providing an intensive package of support, raising funds for the prevention of homelessness via crowdfunding and engaging local landlords and businesses in the area to increase housing and employment opportunities. The funding covers 25 x support packages in the first instance with a view to extending if successful.

Disabled Facilities Grants and Housing Enforcement

- The Housing Enforcement team has, in Q2 of this financial year, received 87 service requests which, while lower compared to same period last year, is on par with pre-pandemic levels and could be symptomatic of the focus currently being more on cost of living crisis matters for residents.

- The Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) service, over Q2 of this financial year, have approved 70 DFGs, committing just over £600k in grant money for adaptations. The average cost per DFG has increase to just below £10k which is a 34% increase since 2019/20 reflecting increased complexity of cases and effect of the global increase in material costs.

Housing benefits and Council Tax Support

- As you can image the team is extremely busy due to the pressures of the “cost of living crisis”. Despite this the team are performing heroics and have delivered the following results:
 - Discretionary Housing Payment allocation is on track for 100% spend.
 - Housing Benefit Subsidy audit for year 21/22 spend now in progress.
 - Due to service review, performance in terms of processing days has meant we are currently running at 9 days (previously 20 days which was national average) for new claims which puts us in the top quartile in the country. This is a fantastic achievement and I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the team for achieving this.

Housing Revenue Account

- As well as providing new affordable housing, work is progressing well on drawing up the policies needed for Eastleigh Councils new Housing Revenue Account. This is a large piece of work that needs to be concluded before the HRA can function. The first tranche of policies have already been through the Policy and Scrutiny panel with the second tranche soon to follow.
- I would like to thank all the staff and members who are involved with the drafting of these policies to ensure that not only is Eastleigh Borough Council providing quality homes, but we have equally good quality policies to support our tenants when they start to live in these homes.

Regeneration North

Post Office site

- I am pleased to be able to report that work will be starting in the very near future on this exciting new regeneration development site in the Town Centre. This will be the first development in the Town Centre for a considerable time and will serve as a kickstart for future regeneration opportunities to revitalise the Town Centre.
- This is alongside the new planters in the Town Centre which have been provided by the Eastleigh Local Area Committee, with more enhancements to come in the new year. This has regenerated the public realm and feel of the Town Centre which is as important as regenerating the “bricks and mortar”.
- The old Post Office will provide residential rented accommodation on the upper floors in both buildings. In total, it is proposed there will be 10 one

bedroom flats and 18 two bedroom flats across the two buildings. All of the flats will be for made available for rent and 10 provided at affordable rent rates.

- The approximate timings of works are below.
 - Demolition Complete – January 2023
 - Foundations (piling) Complete – Spring 2023
 - Buildings Concrete Frame Start – Spring 2023
 - Buildings Concrete Frame Complete – Autumn 2023
 - External works complete – Summer 2024
 - Tenants in occupation – Autumn 2024

Flexford Nature Reserve

- Regeneration is not always about brick and mortar as it also encompasses green things too. An example is the £75K improvement works at the Flexford Nature Reserve in Chandlers Ford making the reserve accessible for everyone, by laying a new path and repairing bridges, while increasing biodiversity and protecting eroding river banks.