



# Darlington Housing Strategy Annual Monitoring Report

September 2013



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## Contents

Contents.....	1
Executive Summary .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Context.....	4
Are We Achieving Our Objectives, Ambitions and Vision?.....	16
Do We Need to Introduce New Priority Actions?.....	17
Appendix 1: Priority Action Plan	
Appendix 2: Measuring Our Progress?	
Appendix 3: Glossary	

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## Executive Summary

This is the first Annual Monitoring Report for the Housing Strategy 2012-2017. The Monitoring Report provides an assessment of progress in achieving the detailed actions and milestones set out in the Housing Strategy. As part of this review, the Action Plan has been refreshed. The refreshed Action Plan is contained in Appendix 1.

Overall, good progress has been made in the first year of implementing the Housing Strategy. In terms of the six Objectives, we have:

- (a) Increased the supply and choice of housing.
- (b) Improved the sustainability of housing.
- (c) Improved conditions in the private sector.
- (d) Invested in the regeneration of key locations.
- (e) Provided good quality advice to prevent crisis and ensure access to appropriate housing.
- (f) Provided effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups.

Of course, more still needs to be done. However, with 51% of milestones achieved in the first year of a two year programme and a further 34% on schedule, we are on course to meeting our six Objectives.

The only area where we are falling short is in the provision of housing to meet local needs. The housing requirement for the last monitoring year was approximately 340 dwellings, whereas the number of dwellings built was 113 with another 14 created through sub-divisions and conversions. While, the forecasts for the number of new houses to be built this year are better (particularly with new sites at Lingfield Point, Central Park and former Feethams football ground) there is still likely to be a shortfall. This is not a problem unique to Darlington as most of the local authorities in the North East of England are experiencing the same problem. One positive though is the forecast number of affordable housing completions which, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year. Another positive was the 14.5% reduction in the number of empty properties from 1,813 last year to 1,550 this year.

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## Introduction

This is the first Annual Monitoring Report for the Housing Strategy 2012-2017 which sets out the overarching vision, ambitions, objectives, and achievements to date to improve the availability, accessibility and quality of housing across all tenures within the Borough.

The Housing Strategy was approved in July 2012 and contains a commitment to annually review and assess progress against the targets, which this report seeks to do. As part of this review, the Action Plan has been refreshed. Completed actions and milestones have been removed, some have been revised and some have been superseded with new actions. Any outstanding actions from the 2012-2013 Action Plan will be carried forward. The refreshed Action Plan is contained in Appendix 1.

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## Context

The Darlington Housing Strategy refers to the recently published National Housing Strategy, as well as the substantial changes to the Benefits system which will present significant challenges to landlords, their tenants and Local Authorities. The Strategy identifies various key challenges (below) moving forward, which are made more difficult by the economic climate and the current housing market.

- (a) How do we increase the number of houses?
- (b) How do we reduce the number of long-term empty properties?
- (c) How do we improve conditions and reduce the number of non-decent homes?
- (d) How do we meet the needs of vulnerable people?
- (e) How do we meet the changing needs of older people?
- (f) How do we respond to the Government's Welfare Reforms and ensure we protect vulnerable people.

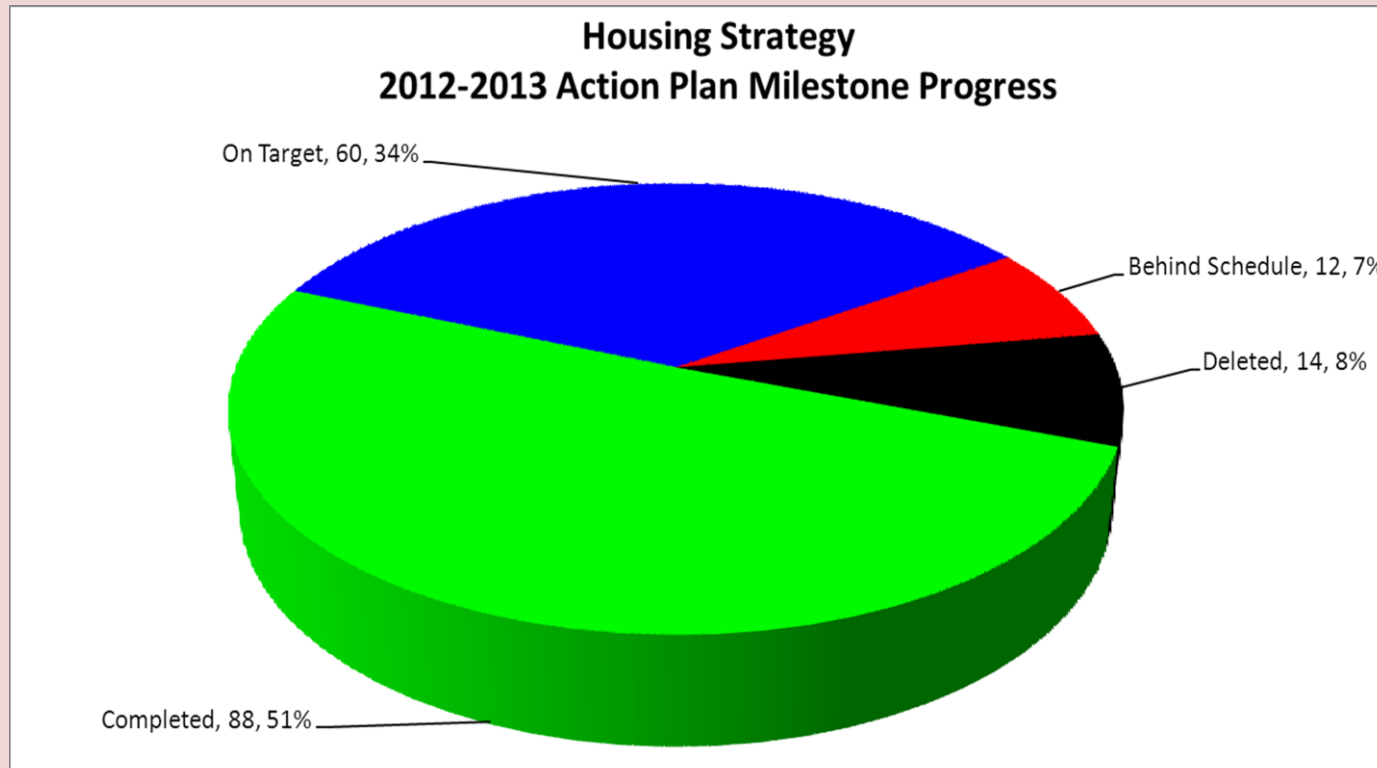
The Strategy contains six clear objectives (below), to be achieved within the five years, covered by the Strategy, delivered through a rolling two year Action Plan:-

- (a) Increase the supply, choice and accessibility to housing to meet identified local needs.
- (b) Improve the sustainability of housing.
- (c) Improve housing conditions in the private sector.
- (d) Invest in the regeneration of key locations to improve quality of place and generate inward investment, creating employment, training and growth.
- (e) Provide good quality advice to prevent crisis and ensure access to appropriate housing.
- (f) Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups.


This Annual Monitoring Report describes the first year's progress on implementing the Action Plan with reference to the six Objectives and the identified Milestones.

## Section 1 - What Have We Done?

Across the 6 Objectives there has been significant progress against the 25 Priority Actions which contain a total of 174 Milestones. This includes 56 new milestones which were created during the last year. As the pie chart shows we are on target, to reach most of the milestones within the two year Action Plan. After one year, 51% of the milestones have been met and a further 34% are on target. Only 12 milestones (7%) are behind schedule, while 14 milestones (8%) have been deleted as no longer appropriate.



## Objective 1: Increase the supply of housing to meet the needs

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
7	11	3	0	

### Achievements:

- The number of empty homes, as at 31 August 2013, was 1,550 compared to 1,813 at the same date last year. This represents a 14.5% reduction.
- The Council has secured funding through partnership arrangements with Five Lamps Organisation, Coast and Country Housing and Centrepont to deliver a total of 60 empty homes back into use up until March 2015 representing an investment of £2.7M.
- Consultation on possible gypsy sites completed to inform Local Plan.
- Homes and Communities Agency investment of £1.5M secured to deliver 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches at Neasham Road by March 2015.
- Homes and Communities Agency Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) funding secured to deliver 245 new affordable homes by March 2015 representing a grant investment of £4M.

### Behind Schedule:

- Making and Growing Places DPD has been delayed due to the selection of Housing Allocations. Adoption may not be until early 2015. Delivery of 35 new affordable homes per year will now be delivered over a 3 year period to 2015. Only 12 new affordable homes delivered last year at Haughton Road which represented a downturn in the availability of grant funding and mortgage lending to support new affordable housing. However, 124 new affordable homes are projected for 2013-14 and 121 projected for 2014-15 with negotiations for the delivery of a further 100 new affordable homes across two sites being explored. This will outstrip the current projected outturn target of 35 new affordable homes per annum.


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### **Are we achieving Objective 1?**

While the vast majority of milestones have been reached, and new dwellings have been built, they have failed to increase the supply of housing to meet requirements. The housing requirement for the last monitoring year was approximately 340 dwellings, whereas the number of dwellings built was 113 with another 14 created through sub-divisions and conversions. While, the forecasts for the number of new houses to be built this year are better (particularly with development on new sites at Lingfield Point, Central Park and former Darlington FC ground at Feethams) there is still likely to be a shortfall. One positive though is the forecast number of affordable housing completions which, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year. While we need to do all we can to increase the number of completions, this is not a problem unique to Darlington. Most of the local authorities in the North East of England are experiencing the same problem. In Darlington, there is ample land suitable and available for residential development, but not enough first-time buyers willing or able to get onto the property ladder. It remains to be seen what impact the recently introduced Help to Buy Scheme has on the housing market.



## Objective 2: Improve the sustainability of housing

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
28	18	4	11	

### Achievements:

- Council tenants affected by the Bedroom Tax were identified, written to and offered a home visit and as a consequence the impact has been very limited in comparison to other areas
- Other housing providers have also been in contact with their tenants.
- Action Plan for dealing with the welfare reforms has been developed and is being delivered.
- Capital Programme for 2013-14 has been approved. The annual Housing Investment Programme delivers essential home improvements for council tenants to ensure their homes meet their longer term expectations, create a safe and secure environment and meet quality standards over and above Decent Homes. The programme also includes the funding of private sector Disabled Facilities Grants.
- 2012/13 Housing Improvement Programme completed.
- New void management standard to reduce relet time has been completed.
- Analysis of energy performance certificates completed.
- Delivery Partner – British Gas - appointed in July 2013 to deliver energy efficiency measures as part of the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation scheme. Phase 1 of the Warm Up North Programme started in September 2013.
- Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy have been adopted introducing the use of Flexible Tenancies.
- Review of Allocations Policy completed taking account of the impact of the Welfare Reforms.
- A review of the Care and Repair service has been completed.

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### Behind Schedule:

- The review of the repairs and refit programmes to increase customer satisfaction has been delayed due to the Building Services restructure.
- The consideration of “Just in Time” approach to service delivery should be deleted as changes to stores procurement and job costing need to be fully implemented before JIT can be considered.
- The review of the Asset Management Strategy has been delayed due to the preparation of a new Housing Business Plan which will be completed in December 2013. This will be followed by a new Asset Management Strategy.

### **Are we achieving Objective 2?**

The Housing Improvement Programme was completed last year which delivered essential home improvements on the Council’s housing stock. These improvements, which are above the Decent Homes Standard, will prolong the life of the dwellings and make them more energy efficient. The vast majority of targets have either been reached or are on schedule. Therefore, we are achieving Objective 2 by improving the sustainability of housing. Further “difficult to insulate” properties will be targeted for the Warm Up North programme commencing in September 2013.

## Objective 3: Improve conditions in the private housing sector

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
20	9	2	3	

### Achievements:

- A review of accredited landlord criteria has been completed.
- Publicity of the accredited landlord scheme is ongoing. Promotion has been held at Landlord Forum events in Darlington and Tees Valley. Further events will continue throughout 2013/14.
- Evaluation of National Landlords Accreditation Scheme was completed. It was not a credible scheme for Darlington. The review has ensured that the accreditation keeps up-to-date with legislative changes and is still beneficial for landlords.
- The targets of 70 Accredited Landlords and 450 properties have been exceeded with the current figures of 84 and 616 properties. Numbers are increasing on a regular basis. The target for May 2014 is 100 accredited landlords and 650 properties.
- Review of Licensing conditions has been completed. The review has ensured that conditions remain legally compliant, reasonable and captures any problematic areas that were not in the original conditions.
- The number of cyclical inspections increased from 19 in 2012 to 34 in 2013. Inspections continue to increase and higher risk properties targeted. Cyclical inspections improves housing standards, detects hazards and helps to reduce reactive complaints about disrepair and improves efficiency
- The HMO cyclical inspection has been implemented. HMO inspections target the worst properties and is based on risk ensuring that higher risk properties with vulnerable occupiers are inspected more regularly.
- HMO database has been reviewed and updates are ongoing. The database captures details of all known HMO's in Darlington and creates an intelligence base to manage inspections and these inspections reduce reactive complaints from HMO's.
- Reactive and proactive inspections of properties reducing Category 1 hazards is ongoing with 149 inspections since April 2012. Reducing category 1 hazards makes homes safer, reduces NHS costs and promotes longer and more sustainable tenancies.
- 101 Category 2 hazards have been removed since April 2012.
- 141 homes have been returned to decency.
- 413 homes have been made free from health and safety hazards.

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### Behind Schedule:

- Review of the Bond Scheme to deliver home improvement loans has been delayed due to external factors beyond the control of the Council. Progress is being monitored at the Regional Loans Board. Target for completion needs to be amended to April 2014. The Bond Scheme is the only opportunity that the council will have to obtain funds to improve housing conditions given that other funds are no longer available
- The Private Rented Strategy has been renamed the Private Rented Sector Operation Plan and will now include links to public health and public health outcomes. Target for completion to be amended to November 2013. Closer links now take place between CCG and Health and financial related performance data is now being captured from reactive and cyclical inspections.

### **Are we achieving Objective 3?**

The standards of the Accredited Landlord Scheme are high and this ensures that tenants are living in good quality properties with good landlords. Last year's targets for expanding the Scheme have been exceeded which means conditions in the private sector have been improved. In addition, more inspections of unsafe properties have resulted in the removal of 101 Category 2 hazards, 141 homes returned to decency and 413 homes have been made free from health and safety hazards. Improving properties and removing hazards makes homes safer, increases the supply of good quality housing and promotes longer sustainable tenancies. This reduces the pressure on housing waiting lists and other housing services. Savings are also delivered to Social Services and wider costs to the NHS as homes are made safer and warmer to live in. Expanding the Landlord Accreditation scheme will also assist in the delivery of all of these benefits. Therefore, we are achieving Objective 3 by improving conditions in the private rented housing sector.

## Objective 4: Invest in the regeneration of key locations

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
19	12	1	0	

### Achievements:

#### *Central Park*

- Consultation with stakeholders and the public on the revised Master Plan for Central Park has been completed.
- Revised Master Plan has been endorsed by Council.
- Hybrid planning permission for the entire scheme secured with detailed consent for Phase 1 residential (332 units) at Central Park North.
- Development Agreement has been dissolved. Revised joint venture with HCA and contracts for residential with Keepmoat Homes completed..
- Formal consultation on Planning Application completed and has now been approved by Council.
- Implementation of Phase 1 residential commenced 1 July 2013 (332 units including 20 affordable)
- Funding and planning permission secured for Business Growth Hub on Central Park South which will be catalyst for delivery from Yarm Road end..

#### *Cockerton*

- Successfully accommodated any displaced residents as part of the Cockerton Investment programme.
- Demolition of 77 properties at Cockerton completed April 2013.
- Environmental improvements to Council Stock completed. We have already: built 31 hard-standing areas and paths; put new fences up at 32 homes; improved front walls at 30 homes; improved 67 roofs and, started work on rendering eight homes.

#### *Red Hall*

- Community engagement workshops held at Redhall to identify key investment opportunities and shape future intervention plans.
- Collation of community engagement completed.

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### *Town Centre Fringe*

- Potential housing sites have been identified in the Town Centre Fringe Master Plan.
- Master Plan approved and adopted by Council on 9 April 2013.
- Preferred Options of the Making Places and Accommodating Growth DPD was published in June 2013.
- Appraisal and viability of key housing sites to be completed by November 2013 to inform Local Plan.

### Behind Schedule:


#### *Cockerton*

- Options Appraisal for Nickstream Lane shops has been rescheduled to be completed by September 2013.
- Option appraisal conclusions and recommendations for Nickstream Lane shops to Cabinet by November 2013

### **Are we achieving Objective 4?**

Very good progress has been made in all four regeneration areas. With only one target behind schedule, we are achieving Objective 4.

## Objective 5: Provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
20	9	2	3	


### Achievements:

- All tenants who have been affected by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes have been offered appropriate advice when transitional protection was due to expire.
- All LHA changes have been completed. Discretionary Housing Payments made to tenants affected.
- Information on the Welfare Reforms are being made available on the Council's Website and a number of information leaflets have been produced
- All Council tenants affected by Bedroom Tax and Benefit Cap have been identified and home visits made.
- A Money Advice service has been introduced for Council tenants.
- Consultation with Stakeholders about the changes in policy has been undertaken and Darlington Partnership has taken up the Welfare Reforms as a major theme
- Increased capacity is being made available within the Council's Contact Centre to take account of the additional pressures from the Welfare Reforms

### **Are we achieving Objective 5?**

The vast majority of the milestones have either been achieved or are on target which means that we are providing good quality and timely advice. Therefore, we are achieving Objective 5.

## Objective 6: Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
9	6	2	0	

### Achievements:

- Review of Sheltered Housing and Extra Care has been completed.
- A Supported Housing Strategy has been produced
- A Extra Care Housing Strategy has been produced and a review of Extra Care has been completed
- A workshop focused on housing for older people has taken place bringing together a wide range of interested parties representing national, regional and local organisations
- Discussions have taken place with a range of housing providers about the quality of their existing stock
- A number of proposals are being developed for independent housing for people with Learning Disabilities

### **Are we achieving Objective 6?**

A Supporting People Review is critically considering emerging needs, priorities, current service configuration and remodelling/ re-commissioning opportunities. To date existing client and stakeholder consultation has taken place, an Equality Impact Assessment commenced, opportunities for collaborative working with stakeholders explored, gap analysis undertaken and best practice reviewed. The vast majority of milestones have been achieved or are on target which means we are providing effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups. Therefore, we are achieving Objective 6.



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## Are We Achieving Our Objectives, Ambitions and Vision?

Overall, we have made good progress in the first year of implementing the Housing Strategy. In terms of the six Objectives, we have:

- (a) Increased the supply and choice of housing.
- (b) Improved the sustainability of housing.
- (c) Improved conditions in the private rented sector.
- (d) Invested in the regeneration of key locations.
- (e) Provided good quality advice to prevent crisis and ensured access to appropriate housing.
- (f) Provided effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups.
- (g) Reduced the numbers of empty homes.

Of course, more still needs to be done. However, with 51% of milestones achieved in the first year of a two year programme, we are on course to meeting our six Objectives.

The only area where we are falling short is in the provision of housing to meet local needs. While we need to do all we can to increase the number of completions, this is not a problem unique to Darlington as most of the local authorities in the North East of England are experiencing the same problem. One positive though is the forecast number of affordable housing completions which, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year.

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## Do We Need to Introduce New Priority Actions?

A new Priority Action has been added to raise tenant awareness of the introduction of Universal Credit and to offer a Money Advice Service. The introduction of Universal Credit will begin to impact during 2014. A partnership is being established to consider digital access and payment systems are being reviewed. This Priority Action will assist in providing good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access (Objective 5).

A new Priority Action has been added which will provide a joint Planning and Housing position paper on accommodating older people. Following the development of the Supported Housing Strategy, a workshop was held concerning housing for Older People. This suggested that it would be very helpful to developers and others interested in Older People's housing if the council made a clear statement about the need for future housing. This is particularly important in relation to the housing choices of owner occupiers who may want to down size. This Priority Action will assist in providing effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups (Objective 6).