

---

**DARLINGTON HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-2017**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Chris McEwan,  
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio and  
Councillor Veronica Copeland, Adult Social Care and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Director of Place**

---

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Members' approval of the Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-2017. A copy of the document is attached at **Annex 1** and is available on the Council's Website at the following link  
(<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Living/Planning+and+Building+Control/Planning+Services/Planning+Policy/DarlingtonHousingStrategy.htm>).

**Summary**

2. The current Housing Strategy expires at the end of this year and we therefore need to prepare a new Strategy incorporating an Action Plan for the next five years.
3. This new Strategy (**Annex 1**) sets out our 15 year ambitions and five year objectives and is supported by an Action Plan which explains how we will deliver and make progress. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually.
4. The Strategy explains why we need a new strategy for housing and 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 Draft Strategy reflects on the achievements of the existing Strategy and identifies the challenges and opportunities ahead, which are made more difficult by the economic climate and the current housing market. The Strategy identifies 25 Priority Actions, grouped under six Objectives, which will be implemented over the next two years.
5. The Strategy was the subject of consultation between 11 April and 16 May 2012.

**Recommendation**

6. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Darlington Housing Strategy 2012 – 2017.

## Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported for the following reasons:-
- (a) A revised Housing Strategy is required to replace the existing Housing Strategy which expires this year.
  - (b) The revised Strategy reflects the recent changes in the national and local housing landscape, including the implications of the welfare reforms.
  - (c) The Strategy provides a clear set of objectives and actions across a broad housing agenda.

**Richard Alty**  
**Director of Place**

## Background Papers

- (i) Technical Work Stream Reports on: Empty Properties;
- (ii) Energy Efficiency Improvements;
- (iii) Homelessness;
- (iv) Housing Service;
- (v) Planning Reforms;
- (vi) Regeneration and Sustainable Neighbourhoods;
- (vii) Stock Condition;
- (viii) Supported Accommodation;
- (ix) Tenancy Reforms;
- (x) Welfare Reforms.

Bryan Huntley : Extension 2623

S17 Crime and Disorder	Empty properties can be a magnet for anti-social behaviour, arson and vandalism. Therefore, reducing the number of empty properties will have a positive impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	It is universally acknowledged that good housing and good neighbourhoods have positive impacts on health & well being.
Carbon Impact	The delivery of energy efficiency measures through the Strategy will have a positive impact on domestic carbon emissions.
Diversity	The Strategy has been the subject of a Equalities Impact Assessment
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The Housing Strategy is not one of the strategies that forms part of the Council's Policy Framework as set out in the Constitution and therefore this report does not represent a change to the framework.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The draft Housing Strategy supports the vision and outcomes of the Darlington Partnership by seeking to make sure that everyone has access to affordable, decent housing that meets their individual and family needs.
Efficiency	No new implications

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The current Housing Strategy expires at the end of this year and we, therefore, need to prepare a new Strategy incorporating a Commissioning/Action Plan for the next five years.
9. The Strategy explains why we need a new strategy for housing and 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 reflects on the achievements of the existing Strategy and 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.
10. This new Strategy sets out our vision and the following associated ambitions, in line with the outcomes identified in One Darlington: Perfectly Placed:-
  - (a) To contribute to Darlington's economic prosperity, and health and well-being of residents, by increasing the supply of housing and improving current stock.
  - (b) To provide a framework which encourages and allows people to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible.
11. These medium to long-term ambitions are supported by six clear objectives (below), to be achieved within the five years covered by the Strategy, through a rolling 12-18 month Action Plan:-
  - (a) Increase the supply and choice of housing to meet identified local needs.
  - (b) Improve the sustainability of housing.
  - (c) Improve conditions in the private sector.
  - (d) Invest in the regeneration of key locations.
  - (e) Provide good quality advice to prevent crisis and ensure access to appropriate housing.
  - (f) Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups.
12. 26 Priority Actions are identified to deliver the objectives including the need to develop or review detailed strategies for Supported Accommodation, Homelessness, Tenancies, and private sector housing. The Town Centre Fringe, Central Park, Cockerton and Redhall are all identified as key locations for regeneration, to include a significant element of housing. Effectively managing the Council's retained stock remains an important element of the Housing Strategy as is ensuring that all new development contributes to the climate change agenda through energy efficiency measures. Offering support to all households adversely

affected by welfare reforms is of particular importance at this time of change.

13. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually, whilst the Strategy will be reviewed every five years. The Strategy also sets out what will be measured, how and by whom to monitor progress against the actions and objectives. This format fits well with the Council's Business Model and the intention to become more of a commissioning organization. The document provides both the high level strategy and commissioning intentions through the action plan.
14. The Strategy is based on evidence, both quantitative and qualitative and seeks outcomes that are realistic given the difficult economic climate and the depressed state of the housing market, both of which are forecast to continue for the next five years. The Strategy needs to generate commitment from our partners to ensure that it is used as a practical tool to focus resources in delivering a range of housing to meet the needs of all residents. It needs to translate broad strategy into practical and deliverable actions that will: contribute to Darlington's economic prosperity; support the health and wellbeing of residents and, provide a framework which encourages and allows people to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

15. An initial Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken on an early draft of the Housing Strategy. The self-assessment concluded that the Strategy would probably have a slightly positive impact on most vulnerable groups and a nil impact on the rest. Representatives of vulnerable groups (including: disabled people, older people, people on low incomes and people with criminal convictions) were then contacted during the consultation period on the Draft Strategy and this was followed by meetings, drop-in sessions, talks, workshops and questionnaires aimed at making the impact of the Strategy more positive. A copy of the EQIA is appended as **Annex 2**. As a result of the feedback, the following suggestions were considered:-
    - (a) The draft strategy should explicitly state that the design and delivery of the proposed actions will include appropriate consideration of equalities impact. *Response – Agree*
    - (b) Include an action to initiate the development of a Tees Valley wide accessible housing register, with common standards including access by wheelchair. *Response – No action, the Choice Based Lettings system transparently captures applicants' health and disability needs. The adverts for social housing identify where there are adaptations already in place and the allocations policy gives preference to applicants who need the adaptation.*
    - (c) Include an action to campaign for a review of the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, such that their impact on vulnerable groups is mitigated. *Response – Disagree, the Strategy is not a campaigning document.*
    - (d) Include an action to develop a grant scheme that disabled people could bid for funds from, to carry out adaptations to their owner occupied homes. *Response – No action, there is already a Loan Scheme available to carry out adaptations to owner occupied homes.*
  16. Appropriate changes have been made to the Strategy, as a result of the EQIA.
-

## **Outcome of Consultation**

17. The public consultation period for the draft Strategy ran between 11 April and 16 May with details available on the Council's website. Key stakeholders including the Housing and Communities Agency and Registered Social Providers were consulted, and the Draft Strategy was presented to the Tenants Board and the Landlords Forum for comments.
18. Members views were sought at a Joint Special Adults and Housing and Place Scrutiny Committee held during the consultation period.
19. Only a few formal responses were received which, it is felt, reflects general support for the document, the realistic view taken on what can be achieved, early engagement in the preparation of a draft strategy and the succinct, clear format that has been used. Where suggested amendments were felt to be appropriate, changes to the Draft were incorporated.