

**APPENDIX 1**



**Darlington Housing Strategy  
Monitoring Report**

**November 2015**

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## Executive Summary

This is the second 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.

Overall, steady progress has been made in the third 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 55% of milestones achieved and a further 27% on schedule, we are on course to meeting our six Objectives. In fact, Objective 5: To provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access has been achieved and continues to be achieved.

Last year saw a substantial increase in the number of net additional dwellings (completions minus demolitions) up from 190 in 2013/14 to 479 in 2014/15. Although this number includes 117 completions for dwellings built prior to 2014/15, but with no DBC record of completion until 2014/15, it compares favourably to the housing requirement for the last monitoring year which was approximately 500 dwellings. However, the completions last year were boosted by the ending of the Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15 which required all dwellings funded under this Programme to be completed by 31 March 2015. As a result there was a surge in affordable housing completions in the final quarter of 2014/15 financial year which will not be repeated this year.

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## Introduction

This is the second 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 review and assess progress against the targets, which this report seeks to do. Completed actions and milestones have been removed, some have been revised and some have been superseded with new actions. Any outstanding actions from the 2014-2015 Action Plan will be carried forward.

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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.

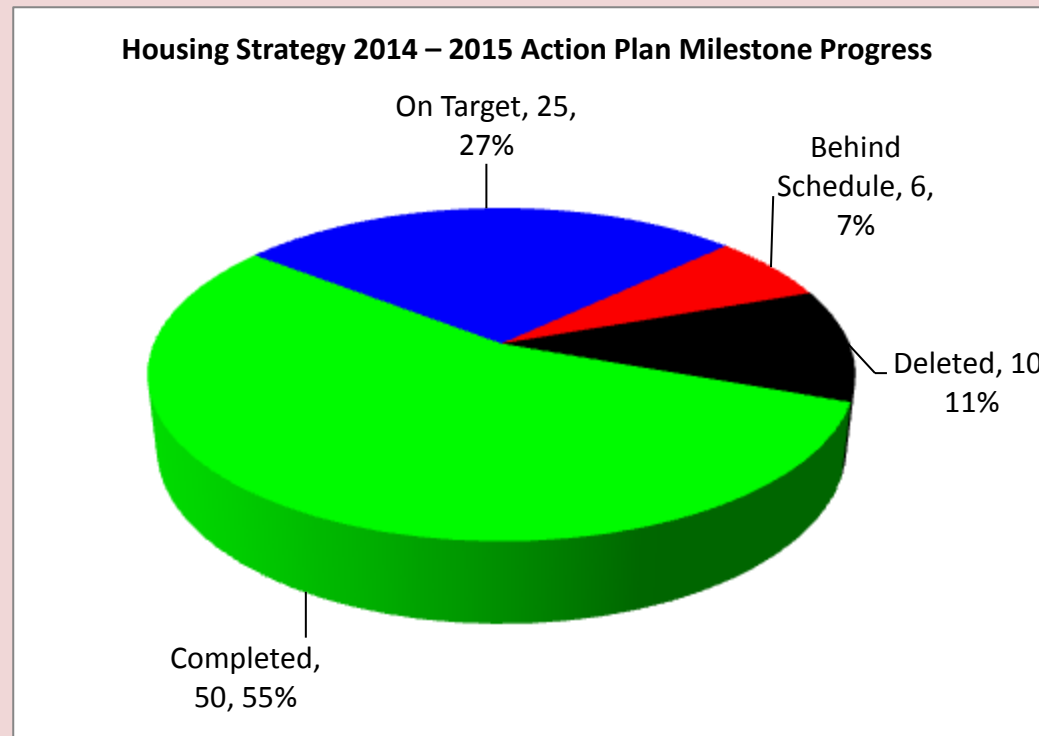
The Strategy contains six clear objectives (below), to be achieved within the five years, covered by the Strategy, delivered through a rolling two year Action Plan:-

- (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 Monitoring Report describes the progress made 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 good progress against the 25 Priority Actions which contain a total of 174 Milestones. As the pie chart shows, we are on target to reach most of the milestones within the five year Strategy. After three years, 55% of the milestones have been met and a further 27% are on target. Only 6 milestones (7%) are behind schedule, while 10 milestones (11%) have been deleted as, either, no longer appropriate or due to budget cuts.



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

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
7	6	1	0	

### Achievements:

- The number of long term empty homes, as at 30 September 2015, was 540 compared to 587 at the same date last year. This represents a 37% reduction in long term empty homes since 2012.
- The Council 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 by March 2015. Due to higher than estimated renovation costs only 29 dwellings were brought back into use. However, Coast and Country have redeveloped an empty office block, Regent House, into 47 apartments. These projects have now been completed.
- Homes and Communities Agency investment of £1.5M was used to deliver 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches at Neasham Road by March 2015.
- In November 2015 DBC was successful in bidding for 1.9m from the HCA Affordable Homes Programme to deliver 22 new pitches.
- Homes and Communities Agency Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) funding was used to deliver 245 new affordable homes by March 2015 representing a grant investment of £4M. Over the three year period, 2012-15, this represents an annual average of almost 82 dwellings which exceeded the target of 35 dwellings per annum.
- HCA AHP funding has been secured to deliver 323 new affordable homes by March 2018.

### Behind Schedule:

- Making and Growing Places DPD has been withdrawn and work has started on a new Local Plan. Adoption may not be until early 2019.

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

Last year saw a substantial increase in the number of net additional dwellings (completions minus demolitions) up from 190 in 2013/14 to 479 in 2014/15. Although this number includes 117 completions for dwellings built prior to 2014/15, but with no DBC record of completion until 2014/15, it compares favourably to the housing requirement for the last monitoring year which was approximately 500 dwellings. However, the completions last year were boosted by the ending of the Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15 which required all dwellings funded under this Programme to be completed by 31 March 2015. As a result there was a surge in affordable housing completions in the final quarter of 2014/15 financial year. Over the last two years, there were 669 net additions to the housing stock against a requirement for 1,000 dwellings. In addition, 29 empty homes were brought back into use and 20 new Gypsy and Traveller Pitches were delivered.


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 houses are being built. This is not due to problems in the supply chain but due to not enough households being willing or able to buy new properties. Even the government's Help to Buy Scheme has not had an impact on the number of houses built.

On a more positive note, the number of long term empty homes has continued to decrease. As at 30 September 2015, the figure was 540 compared to 587 at the same date last year. This represents a 37% reduction in long term empty homes since 2012.

Although the supply of housing has increased over the previous two years, it has not increased sufficiently to meet the new objectively assessed housing need published in November 2015. The forecast of housing completions for 2015/16 suggests that there will be another shortfall in this year as well.



## Objective 2: Improve the sustainability of housing

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
10	7	1	4	

### Achievements:

- Capital Programme for 2015-16 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: £5.5 million towards the regeneration of Red Hall and £19.5 million available for new build Council Housing to help replace those lost to Right to Buy, regeneration work and to meet housing need.
- Adaptations play a key role in reducing demands on Adult Social Care budgets and to reflect this, the Business Plan is committed to investing £300k per year on adaptations. The five year investment plan directed £7.174m towards investment in A rated combination boilers and £51.193m over 30 Year Business Plan period. A further £3.53m has been allocated to Energy Efficiency measures within the five year investment plan for the replacement of PVCu windows and the installation of composite doors to properties identified as the hardest to treat in relation to other basic retro fit measures. Supplementary investment was identified working with Warm Up North to leverage additional grant funding to complete a wider range of energy efficiency improvements including; the provision of external cladding, double glazing and composite doors to 39 System Built properties with an average SAP rating of 64 and external cladding to 239 properties and double glazing and composite doors to 384 Wimpey No Fines and System Built properties with an average SAP rating of 54
- An application for grant funding was made by Darlington along with the other eight Warm up North local authority members. The bid, via the Department of Energy and Climate Change, to install central heating in properties across the region was successful and we were awarded the full £6.5 million that was applied for (25% of the national funding available). With complementary funding, the total investment across the region should be in excess of £10 million and aims to deliver 1900 – 2000 new central heating systems.

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Behind Schedule:


- A programme of property surveys, which had been delayed until the purchase of an Asset Management System, has now started.

**Are we achieving Objective 2?**

The 2014/15 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. Furthermore, commitments in the Business Plan will continue to deliver energy efficiency improvements to the Council's housing stock. In addition, the installation of central heating systems to fuel poor households with no central heating or partial central heating will improve the living conditions of those least able to afford high fuel prices.

The vast majority of targets have either been reached or are on schedule. Only one milestone is behind schedule. Therefore, we are achieving Objective 2 by improving the sustainability of housing.

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

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
11	5	0	3	


### Achievements:

- 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 and 90 in 2014. To achieve MTFP budget savings only licensed HMO inspections will take place from 2014/15 onwards. Reactive and proactive inspections of properties reducing Category 1 hazards are ongoing with 309 category 1 hazards removed since April 2012. Reducing category 1 hazards makes homes safer, reduces NHS costs and promotes longer and more sustainable tenancies.
- 292 Category 2 hazards have been removed since April 2012.
- 354 homes have been returned to decency.
- 832 homes have been made free from health and safety hazards.

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

Although by any standards the Accredited Landlord Scheme was successful in ensuring that tenants were living in good quality properties with good landlords, unfortunately it had to be stopped in June 2015 due to budget cuts. In addition, inspections of unsafe properties are now concentrated on licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) only. 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. However, following budget cuts, the service has had to be scaled back to address Category 1 hazards only and exclude Category 2 hazards. Therefore, although we are achieving Objective 3 by improving conditions in the private rented housing sector, the level of service is not as comprehensive as it was. The result will be more households living in unsatisfactory conditions. However, with all the Milestones either completed or on target, we are continuing to improve conditions in the private housing sector.

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

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
10	5	4	0	

### Achievements:

#### *Central Park*

- Over 50 dwellings have been completed.
- The Business Growth Hub, a Grade A BREEAM Excellent serviced office facility offering 60 units over 2,250sqm, is open.
- Approximately 25 businesses are operating

#### *Cockerton*

- The regeneration of Cockerton is almost complete. Only the redevelopment of the shopping parade is outstanding.

#### *Red Hall*

- Community engagement workshops held at Redhall to identify key investment opportunities and shape future intervention plans.
- Collation of community engagement completed.
- Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy published.
- Selective demolition completed.
- 20 dwellings under construction. Affordable Homes Programme Funding approved for a further 20 dwellings.
- 248 properties are receiving external cladding and 383 properties are receiving double glazing and composite doors.

### Behind Schedule:

#### *Red Hall*

- Although a draft Masterplan has been consulted on, preparation of the Masterplan has been delayed to incorporate the comments and

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suggestions from Red Hall residents.


*Town Centre Fringe*

- In the Town Centre Fringe, good progress has been made on the Feethams cinema, hotel and restaurants site and negotiations are ongoing with National Gas Networks to demolish the gas holder and redevelop for housing. However, individual housing sites have not been identified in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document which has been withdrawn. In November 2015, Cabinet decided to withdraw the DPD and begin work on a new Local Plan.

**Are we achieving Objective 4?**

Good progress has been made in three of the four regeneration areas. With only four milestones 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
8	0	0	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 has been made available within the Council's Contact Centre to take account of the additional pressures from the Welfare Reforms
- About 140 tenants are receiving a self-funding Housing Plus service designed to ensure that council tenants who may be at risk of breaching their tenancy agreement receive an intensive housing management service.

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

All the milestones have been achieved which means that we are providing good quality and timely advice. Therefore, we have achieved, and continue to achieve. Objective 5.

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

Completed	On Target	Behind Schedule	Deleted	Status
4	1	0	3	

### Achievements:

- A Review of Lifeline has been completed resulting in the service becoming cost neutral. The service currently supports about 3,000 people.
- A Supported Housing Strategy has been produced and will be reviewed in September 2016.
- An Extra Care Housing Strategy has been produced and a review of Extra Care has been completed
- A Preventing Homelessness Strategy has been adopted
- A number of proposals are being developed for independent housing for people with Learning Disabilities
- A Government sponsored Peer Review has taken place. The review found that “partnership working was outstanding”. Housing Options has also produced excellent performance on preventing homelessness. Darlington was found to be proportionately one of the best performers in England. While the numbers seeking help has steadily increased from 1,545 cases in 2007/8 to 1,996 in 2014/15 the number actually housed as homeless in the last year were 28. This is mainly due to preventative work.

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

The vast majority of milestones have been achieved. There is only one milestone left to achieve, to review the Supported Housing Strategy in September 2016, and that is 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 three years of implementing the five year 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 55% of milestones achieved in the first three years of a five year strategy and 27% on target, we are on course to meeting our six Objectives. In fact, Objective 5: To provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access has been achieved and continues to be achieved.

There are three areas where we are falling short. The first is in the provision of housing to meet local needs. While we had a good year in 2014/15, we need to do all we can to increase the number of completions. Unfortunately, the forecast number of completions this year (2015/16) is likely to be well short of requirements. The second is in the Town Centre Fringe where little progress has been made over the previous two years. The third is the failure to deliver the Making and Growing Places DPD to provide a statutory planning document to guide the housing strategy. In November 2015, the Council decided to withdraw the DPD and begin work on a new Local Plan. Officers are reviewing how the Council might proceed to produce a new Local Plan as quickly as possible in the context of the current and emerging regulations.



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## Do We Need to Introduce New Priority Actions?

Over the last two years since the previous monitoring report, good progress has been made on achieving our targets and objectives. However, while the work has increased and the budgets have reduced, we have not identified any more priority actions to be added to the Action Plan.

The Government is planning to introduce a number of very significant changes through the Housing and Planning Bill and the Welfare Reform and Work Bill that will have consequences for this Strategy. As the Bills are still going through Parliament, and therefore subject to change, we are unable to review priorities at this moment.