

COUNCIL
27 MARCH 2025

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Health and Housing Portfolio were as follows.

Public Health

2. In February the Stop Smoking Hub held the first 'Swap to Stop' event outside Darlington Memorial Hospital, where smokers were encouraged to stop smoking and offered vape packs to support their quit attempt. Through the event the Service engaged with 60 individuals, of which 48 people signed up to a quit attempt and received a vape pack (they will receive ongoing support from the service). Building on this success more events were held in March to promote national No Smoking Day on Wednesday 12 March 2025.
3. The Stop Smoking Hub is now co-located with primary care at Forsythe House and runs two stop smoking support clinics a day (every weekday), whilst telephone appointments are offered on evenings. The team plan to extend the services to evening and weekends soon. The Service offers behavioural support to stop smoking, alongside a choice of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) products and vapes, and from 1st April prescription-only stop smoking medications (Varenicline and Cytisine) will also be available via pharmacies. This further enhances the offer available and is based on national guidance.
4. We have recently started working with Veg Power, an organisation which supports schools to increase the consumption of, and familiarity with, fruit and vegetables. They have several projects including 'Eat Them to Defeat Them', 'Growing to Love Tomatoes' and 'Simply Veg'. After consultation we have five schools embarking on the 'Growing to Love Tomatoes' project this spring and one trialling 'Eat Them to Defeat Them'. As part of this work, we can offer broader support to schools via our School Food Catering Award and holistic support around positive eating environments and changing attitudes towards food.
5. The Supporting Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing in Schools Conference took place on 11 February 2025. There were 102 delegates, with representation from 33 Darlington schools alongside 14 local and national services which can support the work in schools. The main agenda saw eight speakers deliver a range of regional and local updates, good practice sharing and examples of what works well, with links to local and national strategy.
6. The consultation on our Healthy Lifestyle Survey project opened at the event with an activity for all participants. Also launched was a consultation on the development of the Oral Health Promotion Strategy.

7. Reid Street and Hurworth Primary Schools received their PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education) Quality Mark Award for completing their accreditation. Other outcomes from the day include four schools revisiting the opportunity to provide the supervised toothbrushing scheme within their settings and two schools offering to pilot the Health and Wellbeing Toolbox project. The agendas for the virtual Primary and Secondary PSHE Networks in March were developed based on feedback from the conference.
8. I am pleased to inform members of the successful recruitment into the post of Public Health Portfolio Lead for Public Mental Health and Ageing Well. This post makes a key contribution in coordinating and leading the work of the authority in working with our partners and our communities on these important areas of health improvement. The new post holder brings with them a wealth of experience in local government and the voluntary and community sector, and I am looking forward to their valuable contributions.

Housing Services

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

9. Members will recall from the last Council meeting that I reported the outcome of our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey for 2023-24 and how they compared with other social housing providers. The results from our TSM survey for 2024-25 have now been received and I am pleased to report that satisfaction in 11 out of the 12 measures has improved. In addition, our performance, when benchmarked at a regional and national level, is higher in all areas.
10. These results demonstrate the high-quality services delivered by our fantastic Housing Services team. However, we are not complacent and will ensure during 2025-26 that we focus on the areas of dissatisfaction and our Tenants Panel will lead on developing an action plan to help address these. Areas to address will include:
 - (a) Improving how we keep communal areas in our sheltered and extra care schemes and our apartments blocks clean, tidy and well-maintained.
 - (b) Raising awareness of the Tenants Panel and the work they do to improve services for our tenants.
 - (c) Raising awareness of the actions we are taking to address anti-social behaviour on our estates.
 - (d) Improving the quality of our repairs; whilst this was again one of the highest areas of satisfaction, it is also the area where we see most formal complaints. In particular, we will need to focus on how we deal with damp and mould cases, with Awaab's Law being introduced later this year.
 - (e) Improving the process of complaints handling.

TSM Results 2024-25

TSM	DBC Result 2024	DBC Result 2024	LA Northeast Benchmark	LA National Benchmark
TP01 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord	79%	76%	67%	68%
TP02 Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service	84%	80%	70%	70%
TP03 Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair	83%	80%	65%	67%
TP04 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained	82%	78%	66%	67%
TP05 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe	85%	81%	70%	73%
TP06 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	70%	66%	53%	56%
TP07 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them	76%	72%	60%	66%
TP08 Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect	82%	78%	70%	73%
TP09 Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling	35%	38%	29%	31%
TP10 Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	71%	68%	58%	62%

TSM	DBC Result 2024	DBC Result 2024	LA Northeast Benchmark	LA National Benchmark
TP11 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	66%	65%	54%	60%
TP12 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with their landlord's approach to handling antisocial behaviour	59%	58%	50%	54%

Neasham Road Council Homes Site

11. Completion of our Council homes new build site at Neasham Road continues on schedule. After the handover of the first two phases of 28 homes, a further 10 homes were completed at the beginning of March, with another 6 due on 28 March. Phase 1 of the site is due to be completed in May 2025, with the completion of another 8 homes, before phase 2 will start to be handed over from May 2025, up to the full site completion in March 2026.
12. Feedback from the new residents has been very positive. Our Housing Services team are looking to help foster community in the area, starting with completing a consultation for the new play park that will be built on site. A consultation event was held at Darlington Mowden Park Rugby ground in February and some excellent conversations and feedback on the park were received. Residents are looking forward to the completion of the site so they can help us shape a new community and area that everyone can be proud of.

Lifeline Services Digitalisation

13. Our Lifeline Services team continues to deliver the project to upgrade all our analogue Lifeline equipment to Digital, as part of the UK's switch to a fully digital telephone network by January 2027. Work delivered so far, includes the following:
 - (a) We have upgraded 1,300 dispersed units (box and button) out of a total of 1,364, leaving just 64 to upgrade.
 - (b) We have upgraded our 'Jontek' calls handling equipment to a digital, web-based, hybrid version that will be capable of handling both analogue and digital calls until the switchover date.
 - (c) We need to upgrade 76 warden call systems in our multi-occupied supported housing schemes (sheltered and extra care). So far, 3 sheltered schemes have had their call systems upgraded, with a further 4 sites planned in 2025-26.
 - (d) A programme of works has been developed to install dispersed equipment to schemes where the warden call systems will be decommissioned altogether.

- (e) We have also procured 25 digital communicators (these will turn analogue into digital data) for the schemes, to enable us to create some breathing space, as we work through the warden call upgrades and identified a test bed site for the first digital communicator install.

Rent Collection

- 14. Our Housing Services team continue to perform well in the collection of Council rents and service charges. Rent arrears levels at the beginning of February were 3.2 per cent which is 0.2 per cent better than our target, and below the same point in 2024, which was 3.3 per cent. £25.7 million has been collected compared to £24.3 million for the same period in 2024, which represents a collection rate of 97.5 per cent compared to 96.9 per cent in 2024.
- 15. The number of working age Council tenants receiving some element of Universal Credit (UC) stands at 2,360, an increase from 2,062 at the same point in 2024 and consequently the number of Council Tenants receiving Housing Benefit (HB) has reduced from 1,882 to 1,593.
- 16. The migration of our tenants from HB to UC migration continues at a pace and is due to be completed by the Department for Work and Pensions by the end of March 2026 in Darlington. Our Tenancy Sustainment Team are on hand to help our tenants through this process. The final tranche of people due to migrate to UC in 2025-26 will be those currently receiving Employment and Support Allowance, so are likely to be those needing the most advice and support.
- 17. The average rent arrears for those tenants receiving UC is currently £450.31, which, although increased from 2024, is still within the normal 5 week waiting period for the first UC payment, and therefore within the expected arrears levels for these tenants.

Warm Homes Social Housing Funding

- 18. I am pleased to report that our Housing Services team has been successful in bidding for £3.55m of Government funding through the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (WH:SHF) Wave 3. Our award was part of a Tees Valley Combined Authority consortium bid worth £43.9m.
- 19. This significant sum of money will be used alongside funding from our Housing Revenue Account budget, to fund a three-year programme of improvements worth over £15m. The work will include the installation of wall and loft insulation measures, double glazing and doors to help cut bills, tackle fuel poverty and also reduce the borough's emissions, which supports one of the council's key priorities to tackle climate change.
- 20. Our Housing Services team will start the procurement of specialist contractors to undertake this work, which is due to start later this year.

Dolphin Centre

- 21. Work will commence on 13 March 2025 to install 399 photovoltaic (PV) panels on the flat roofs of the Dolphin Centre, which includes the swimming pool and the sports hall. It is

anticipated these panels will generate an estimated annual saving of £35,500, reducing the overall spend on electricity.

22. Dolphin centre memberships have continued to grow in the new year, which has included the introduction of a new corporate membership scheme offered to 400 Darlington College tutors, which enables them to join and pay by salary sacrifice through the College. This further develops and builds on the strong partnership in place with the College. January saw the highest net growth in memberships this financial year.
23. February half term welcomed many families to the centre to participate in swimming, pool parties with DJs, family bowling, soft play, family racket sports, diving camps and intensive swimming lessons that were fully subscribed by children from Darlington.
24. Catering and hospitality across the venues has been thriving in the new year, including during the half term holiday, with very positive footfall at South Park Cafe. The cafe is undergoing a small interior refurbishment to enhance the customer experience following the introduction of permanent outdoor furniture late last year, and external decoration carried out early this year.

Health in Haughton Matters Project

25. The Health in Haughton Matters committee have started putting together the National Lottery Awards for All grant programme, with 'The Move to Improve' session, Mat Pilates and a children's sports provision all up and running in the local area. Netball will also become part of the provision once a suitable venue and time slot is identified. The existing provision recorded a total of 342 attendances throughout January.
26. We have supported Haughton in obtaining external funding but will work with any community group that approaches us on external funding applications. The Haughton project has been in delivery for 4-5 years and has become sustainable. We work with the committee to grow participation levels/reach. In the draft Physical Activity Strategy, we have committed to widening this offer with other community groups using Haughton as an example of good practice.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing