



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Housing Services

Tenant Involvement Strategy Annual Review Report

2024-2025



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Introduction

This report reviews the progress of the Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029 and brings together the highlights of 2024/2025. It sets out what the key priorities of the strategy are, shares tenant and staff perspectives, celebrates successes and outlines the next steps for the year ahead.

The Strategy sets out the 4 key priorities for effective tenant involvement which assist us in meeting the regulatory standards set in the Regulator of Social

Housing Consumer Standards - Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. The key priorities are:

- Providing tenants with the right information.
- Supporting tenants to make their voice heard.
- Making decisions with our tenants.
- Maximizing scrutiny and accountability.

Priority 1: Providing the Right Information

Clear communication underpins effective tenant involvement and measures for success for this priority include promoting online services, reducing telephone calls, and ensuring positive feedback.

What have we done in 2024/2025?

Improved written communication

To ensure that all our written communication for tenants is written in a way that they can fully understand, we have had all new policies, strategies, and leaflets approved by the Tenants Panel, with all documents carrying the “Panel Approved” logo. In total in 2024/2025, the Tenants Panel approved 15 documents, these include:

- Local Lettings Policy Neasham Road February 2025.
- Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030.
- Fire Safety Policy.
- Allocations Banding.
- New Tenant Policy.
- A guide to Decants.

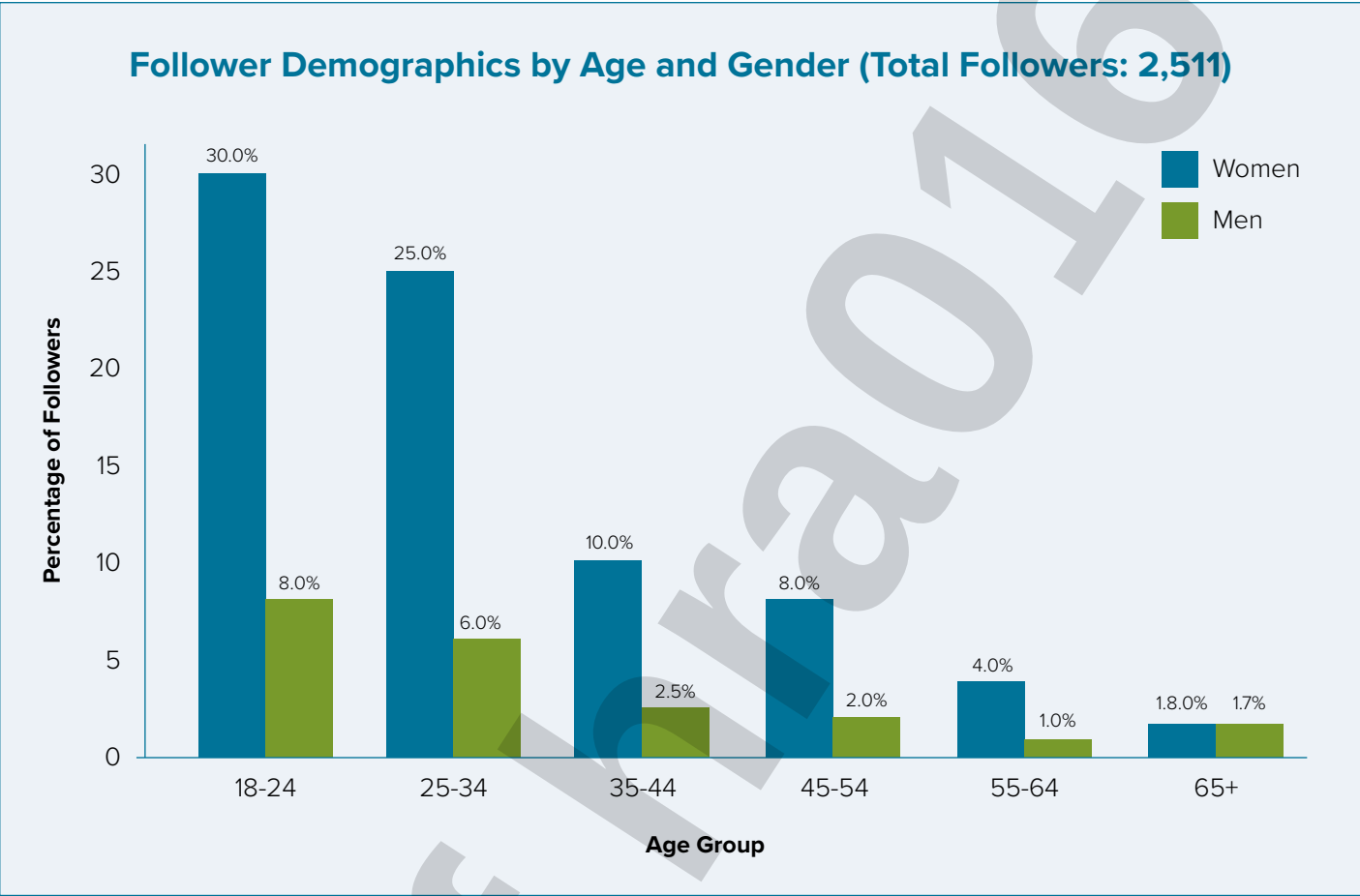
- Social Housing Fraud Leaflet.
- Care Leavers Protocol.
- Fire Risk letter.
- Access to your home.

In the strategy we said we would ensure all our written communications would be approved by the Tenants Panel, this a measure of our success over the last year.

Offered more ways for tenants to access information about us

To ensure we offer diverse ways for tenants to find information about our services we aimed to increase website and social media use in 2024/2025. Website visits have been consistent in views; however, this is an area we would like to improve

on with a new layout on various pages. Social media (Facebook) followers rose from 2,000 in 2023/2024 to over 2,500 in 2024/2025. Below is a breakdown of the age ranges of our Facebook followers as of September 2025.



In the strategy we said we would increase subscriptions to our Facebook page, the above is a measure of our success over the last year.

Considered ways to improve how we can make it easier for tenants to contact us

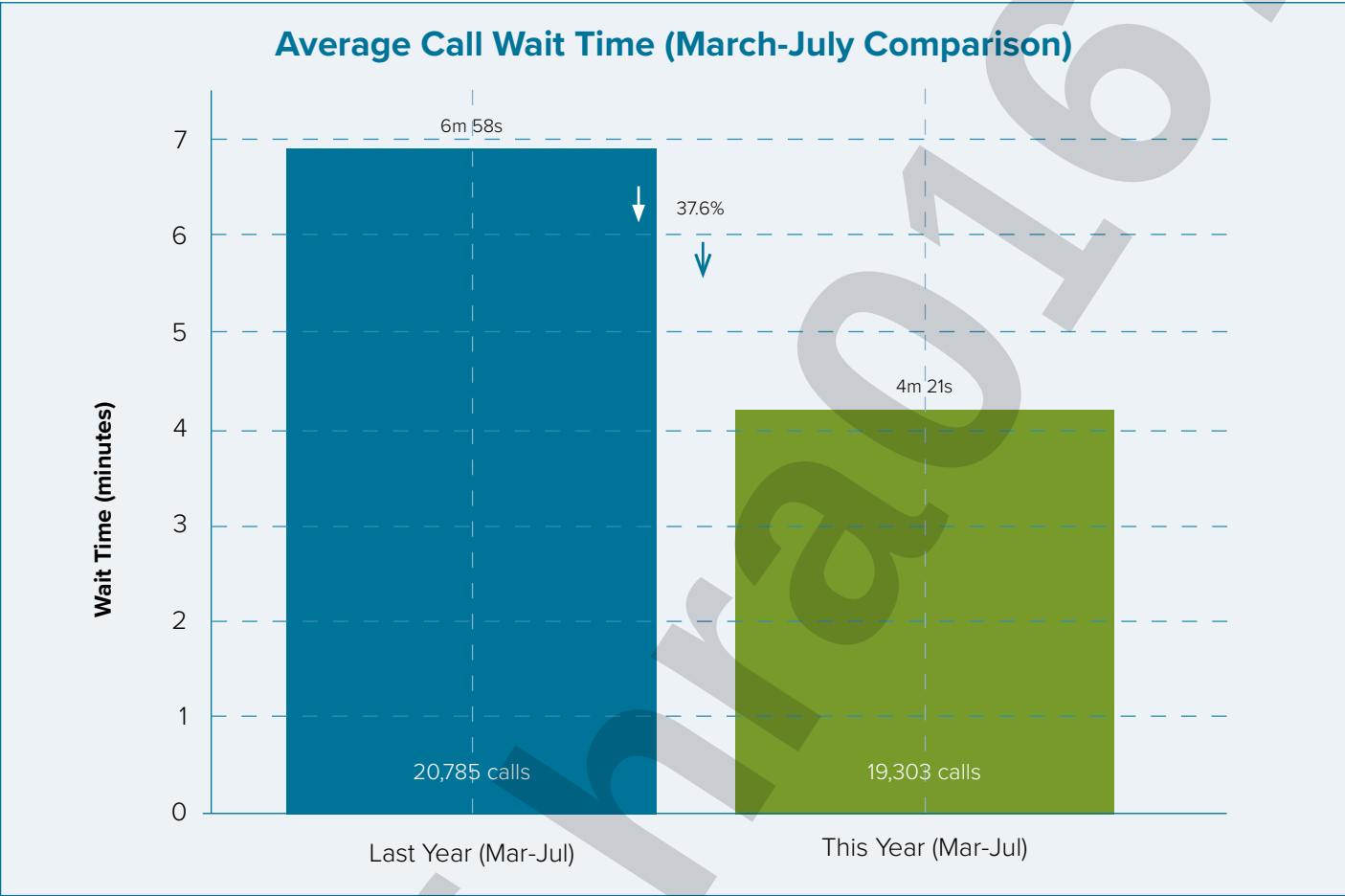
We have continued to look at how to make it easier for tenants to contact us and access our services. Whilst we await some changes to our Darlington Home Online service it now has 300 people signed up, which shows the growth in digital engagement by tenants and the need for us to focus on this in coming years. To help us make it as easy as possible for people to contact us we have made several changes to the Housing Contact service.

These include:

- Changing the opening hours to the same each day to make it easier to remember and to allow staff to dedicate admin time to deal with emails and Darlington Home Online messages.
- Introduced the call-back facility to reduce waiting times for callers.
- Promoted online channels to give tenants more ways to contact us.

Results have been good, with average call waiting times reducing and call numbers reducing too.

Call Numbers	
23/24	24/25
20,785	19,303



The graph shows the measure of success in our strategy of reducing wait times to our Housing Contact team; helping us to provide more support to the people who need us most.

We have received positive feedback from tenants about these changes, comments from tenants include:

- Embracing more Facebook posts.
- The call-back service.
- More consistent opening hours.

In relation to the new opening hours, Tenants Panel members voted wholeheartedly for this to happen, and their feedback played a key role in shaping the outcome, one member said,

“It made sense to open and close at the same time every day, when everything is in line customers know where they stand.” **Carl Bennett, Tenants Panel Member.**



Priority 2: Supporting Tenants to Make Their Voice Heard

This priority focuses on increasing involvement, building skills, improving satisfaction measures, and supporting tenant-led initiatives.

What have we done in 2024/2025?

Reviewed how we can improve opportunities for tenants to be involved

To maximize opportunities for tenants from across all areas where we own properties in 2024/2025, we introduced more engagement events, including in the Borough’s rural villages, at schools, and held

joint events with Housing Providers. Below are some examples of the existing events and those that we have introduced and held across the Borough.

Patches	Existing Engagement Events	New for 2024 / 2025	Future Plans
Patch 1 Branksome	Branksome Hall Drive	St Mary’s Community Hall, Mount Pleasant Primary School	Wyvern Academy
Patch 2 Lascelles and Villages	A Drop in at Rosemary Court	Eastbourne Hub, Village Engagement Day, St John’s Primary School	Community Day for Villages
Patch 3 Firthmoor	Roxby Court	Firthmoor Community Centre, Firthmoor Primary School	Community Fun day at school and invite residents
Patch 4 Cockerton, Heighington and Heatherwood	Windsor Court	Cockerton Club, Hopelands and Heatherwood Grove, High Coniscliffe Engagement Day	Pop up gazebo to be in place at Heatherwood so tenants can attend
Patch 5 Rise Carr, North Riverside, Mowden Terrace	Havelock Centre, Rise Carr	The Well, Richard Court, The Edge Centre	Look at increasing engagement in Rise Carr area and Mowden Terrace
Patch 6 Skerne Park, Tennyson Gardens and Parkside		Skerne Park Community Centre, Tennyson Community Centre,	Link in with schools
Patch 7 Haughton, Neasham New Build	Ted Fletcher	Springfield Primary School, Rydal Primary School	Create a community event at the new build site

Patches	Existing Engagement Events	New for 2024 / 2025	Future Plans
Patch 8 Whinfield/Springfield, Hurworth, MSG, Harrowgate Hill and Sadberge	Dinsdale Scheme	Rockwell Court, Oban Court, Springfield Primary School, Salvation Army, Sadberge Village Hall, Kings Church,	Link in with tenants at Hurworth and Middleton St George
Patch 9 Red Hall, Lingfield	Lingfield	Red hall Community Centre, Red Hall School, The Range	Engage with Lingfield Tenants
Patch 10 Albert Hill, Hundens Lane, Park Place and Bank Top	Park Place Community Centre, King William Community Centre, Wesley Court community Centre	Park place Community Centre, King William Community Centre, Wesley Court community Centre, St Jame's Church Hall	Look at increasing engagement with Hundens Lane tenants

Created new opportunities for joint working with other Housing Providers to strengthen communities

In 2024/2025 we created new working partnerships with other Housing Providers to strengthen community engagement and improve services for our tenants. These collaborations have already led to some great joint initiatives:

- **North Star** - Joint community event held at Skerne Park.
- **Railway Housing** - Joint estate inspections and information sharing.
- **Places for People** - Joint community event at Whinfield and joint estate inspection.
- **Hull City Housing** - meetings held as they were highlighted by TPAS (Tenant Engagement Experts) as leading advocates for engagement.

We are excited about the opportunities these partnerships bring and look forward to working with more Housing Providers in the future. By sharing ideas and resources, we aim to provide even more support and information for our tenants.

Increased opportunities for improving skill levels for our Tenants Panel members

One of our measures of success was to increase attendance of our Tenants Panel at training events. We have been successful against this measure and have helped to help increase skill levels in 2024/2025 by setting up several training and skill development sessions for our Tenants Panel, these included:

- Online TPAS training sessions to allow access for those tenants who cannot do face to face.
- Attended national events to gain further insight into what other providers are doing.
- A tailored scrutiny workshop in July improved panel members' confidence and knowledge.
- Setting up access to Academy 10 training so the Tenants Panel can work on their own learning objectives.
- Social Housing White Paper training to help Tenants Panel members understand the legal requirements we must meet as landlords.

Improved our Tenants Satisfaction Measure results

We were pleased to report that we improved on 2023/2024's survey results for the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM). This has been a measure of success against our Tenant Involvement

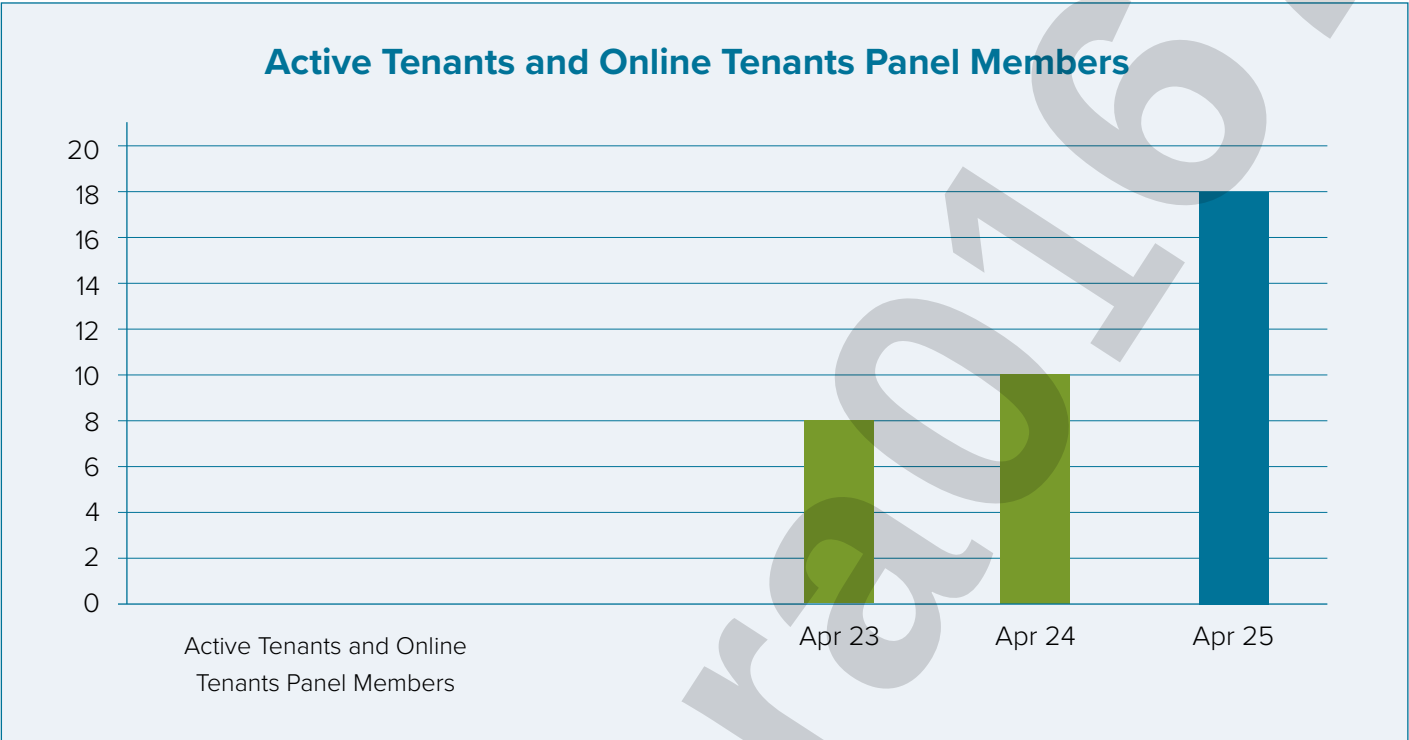
Strategy; we improved in 11 of 12 categories. We are awaiting the national results for 2024/25 so we can compare ourselves nationally and regionally.

Code	Question	2024	2023	LA Northeast Benchmark	LA National Benchmark
TP01	Overall satisfaction with the Housing Service	79%	76%	67%	68%
TP02	Satisfaction with the overall repairs service	84%	80%	70%	70%
TP03	Satisfaction with time taken to complete the most recent repair	83%	80%	65%	67%
TP04	Satisfaction that the home is well maintained	82%	78%	66%	67%
TP05	Satisfaction that the home is safe	85%	81%	70%	73%
TP06	Satisfaction that views are listened to and acted upon	70%	66%	53%	56%
TP07	Satisfaction with being kept informed	76%	72%	60%	66%
TP08	Agreement that the service treats tenants fairly and with respect	82%	78%	70%	73%
TP09	Satisfaction with complaints handling	35%	38%	29%	31%
TP10	Satisfaction with communal areas being clean and well maintained	71%	68%	58%	62%
TP11	Satisfaction that the service contributes positively to the neighbourhood	66%	65%	54%	60%
TP12	Satisfaction with the approach to handling anti-social behaviour	59%	58%	50%	54%

Increased online opportunities for tenants to be involved

To increase opportunities for tenants to have their voices heard we built on the new Digital Tenants Panel in 2024/2025. The first online tenant meeting was held in summer 2025, and panel members

expressed interest in hybrid membership (both virtual and in-person). This has had a profound impact with the numbers of involved tenants increasing as below:



The graph above shows a measure of our success against the Tenant Involvement Strategy.

Assisted in setting up tenant-led activities

Tenant Involvement Officers assisted in the establishment of a tenant darts group which has been successfully continued by the tenants, strengthening local communities and helping to reduce isolation and loneliness.

"I joined the Tenants Panel... there is no point complaining about things if you are not going to look to change things. The panel is important as it asks questions of Darlington Borough Council."
Ivan Sparks, Tenants Panel Member.



Ted Fletcher Flyers - Darts Team

Priority 3: Making Decisions with Our Tenants

At Darlington Borough Council, we believe that tenants are at the heart of shaping the services they rely on. Through active involvement, feedback, and collaboration, tenants are helping to:

- Influence Policy.
- Tenant Role in Safety.
- Community Champions.
- Design Choices.

What have we done in 2024/2025?

Tenant influence on policy

The Tenants Panel shaped the Darlington Borough Council Care Leavers Housing Protocol, simplifying complex information into accessible formats.

"It sets out the right objectives, clarifies and separates the issues. I do agree that a condensed version could be created for a heavy document."

Tanya C, Tenants Panel Member.

Plans are in place to create simpler versions of policies that highlight key areas allowing tenants to gain a better understanding of a document, this will be a measure of success once it has been implemented.

Tenant role in safety

Fire drills were held across schemes, ensuring tenants and staff understood procedures and their role in safety, visits from the Darlington and Durham Fire Service (DDFS) have also taken place across schemes, with plans to expand this to all schemes and events.

"Several fire alarm tests have been conducted in our schemes, where a stay put policy is in place. This was an opportunity for us to ensure tenants and staff know what to do in an event of a fire."

Cheryl Williams, Housing Asset & Compliance Manager



DDFS at Rockwell House

Estate Champions

New roles were created, including litter pickers, estate inspection participants, and Estate Champions like Karen Wright Tenant Panel Member at Lancaster Close. We are looking to increase these in 2025/2026 to include Fire Safety Champions.

“When I am out and about on the estate, if I notice anything I will just send an email in and report it. I really like Lancaster to look nice and am keen to be actively involved in keeping the area tidy.”

Karen W, Tenant Panel Member and Estate Champion.

Estate Champion	Name
Windsor Court	Stephen Douglan
Windsor Court	Phillip Hardy
Hargreave Terrace	Hugh Mortimer
Earl Carlson Grove	Deborah Carpenter
Earl Carlson Grove	Ray Lockwood
Havelock Street	Lindsay Sinclair
Hopelands Court	Tanya Caenazzo
Bank Top	Suzanne Carter
Branksome Hall Drive	Don Aitchson
Parkside	Carol Bradbrook-Taylor
Branksome Hall Drive	Richard Lax

In the Tenant Involvement Strategy, we said we would increase numbers of Estate Champion, the table above shows we have been successful, and this will continue to grow.

Estate Champions

Tenants were keen to help make decisions about the future housing designs of their home; this includes the selection of worktops and flooring for new properties and porch colours on the SHDF properties. SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) is a government scheme that provides grants to social housing providers for improving energy efficiency and upgrading systems in social homes.

“As a local authority with a large housing stock, tenant involvement plays an integrative part... by working alongside tenants and partner agencies we can listen, act and learn.” **Donna Young, Housing Management Officer.**

In the strategy one of our measure of successes was to evidence that tenant’s views have informed our future designs and choice of products.

These choices have been put forward and are now in place in tenant’s homes.

Priority 4: Maximising Scrutiny and Accountability

This priority ensures transparency, strong governance, and complaint handling

What have we done in 2024/2025?

Decisions shaped by tenants: The Tenants Panel was consulted on the following documents:

- Housing Services Vulnerability Policy 2024-2029.
- Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029.
- Tenancy Policy 2020-2025.
- Housing Services Climate Strategy 2024-2029.
- Housing Services Allocations Policy 2023-2028.
- Care Leavers Housing Protocol 2025
- Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030.

Tenants Panel members are often asked to give detailed comments on their feedback, so we understand the reasoning behind opinions.

Ivan Sparks reviewed the banding quota in the Allocations Policy and shared *'The division of housing allocation looks great, very good to see the higher allocation of band 1.'* **Ivan Sparks,**

Tenants Panel Member

The Tenants Panel scrutinised the new Tenancy Policy and Christine shared *'I have re-read the proposed policy and taken on board other Tenants Panel Members comments. I still believe that flexible tenancies should apply to those in new build homes.'*

Christine Fishwick, Tenants Panel Member

The Tenants Panel met with Anna Ginsberg (Housing Options Team Leader) who came to present the Care Leavers Protocol, and the members were asked to give their feedback. Karen shared *'Although it was a long document and a hard read, I believe everything made sense. One thing I would maybe suggest would be a version which is easier to read and gives the vital information, but I understand if this not an option.'* **Karen Wright, Tenants Panel Member**

In January 2025 Tenant Panel members were asked about the use of the word 'perpetrator' used in the Fire Risk letter sent to tenants. This was following a complaint received that the word was harsh and extreme. The panel members scrutinised the letter.

Tenant Panel member Hugh shared *'Perpetrator seems ok but could use person responsible'.*

Hugh Mortimer, Tenants Panel Member

Mark also shared *'Add an extra line in to explain the meaning of the word and the legal reason.'*

Mark Hornsby, Tenant Panel Member

Following scrutiny the letter now reads; 'Items found in the communal areas following this visit will be disposed of and may result in a recharge to perpetrator (person responsible).' The Tenants Panel challenged the work and were successful in the change within our letter which is measure of success in our strategy.

Publishing performance data

Performance measures are regularly reported to tenants, through the webpages and Housing Connect. The Tenants Panel also scrutinise and meet with relevant teams to learn more about our performance. In the strategy we said we would share our key performance measures this is a measure of our success.

Complaints handling

In 2024/2025 the number of Stage 2 complaints reduced which is measure of success from the strategy.

‘However, Stage 1 complaints increased with all registered providers and the Housing Ombudsman reporting significant increases too.’

The team and Tenants Panel continue to look for emerging trends learning opportunities and good practice.

Key Focus - Clarity in Stage 1 Responses

To reduce the number of complaints escalating to Stage 2, we must ensure our Stage 1 responses:

- Clearly explain the evidence considered.
- Outline the processes followed.
- Demonstrate how we arrived at our conclusion.
- Use plain language to make decisions understandable to all complainants.

By improving transparency and clarity, we can help complainants feel heard and informed, potentially reducing the need for escalation.

Stage 2 complaints reduced from 30 to 27 in the last year. Only one Ombudsman case was recorded, the same as the year before.

In 2024/25, of the complaints escalated to Stage 2:

- 1 was upheld.
- 3 were partially upheld.
- 11 were not upheld.
- 1 was withdrawn.
- 4 remained open at year-end.

In comparison, 2023/24 saw:

- 5 upheld.
- 8 partially upheld.
- 14 not upheld.
- 2 withdrawn.
- 1 inconclusive.

This year's lower number of upheld and partially upheld Stage 2 complaints may indicate that our Stage 1 responses are becoming more robust and accurate. However, there is still room for improvement in how we communicate our decisions.

Meeting the Ombudsman Code

Complaint handling in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is an area where we unfortunately did not meet the standard this time. However, we recognise its importance and are committed to improving. To support this, we have put a new apprentice in place who is helping the Complaints Officer, and a Team Leader role was also created in place to strengthen our approach and ensure better alignment going forward.

Using complaints to improve

A member of the complaints team attends the Tenants Panel regularly and Panel members review complaints and advise on alternative responses.

Denise shared *'This Tenants Panel has been inciteful as both Lee and Charlotte share difference aspects on complaints. It was interesting to hear what type of complaints are raised and the differences between stage 1 and 2 complaints.'* **Denise Parkin, Tenants Panel Member**

Looking Ahead: The Next 12 Months

To build on current progress, the following strategic actions will be prioritised:

Expanding the Digital Tenant Panel

- **Promotion:** Advertise the Online Panel via social media.
- **Direct Engagement:** Encourage sign-ups during tenant canvassing and estate visits.

Strengthening External Stakeholder Links

- **Partnership Events:** Continue collaborative estate inspections and joint events.
- **Networking:** Increase attendance at external events to build relationships and share best practices.

Increasing Community Presence

- **Council Collaboration:** Work with the Council's events team to attend more local events.
- **Broaden Reach:** Liaise with schools and community groups to take part in their events.

Publishing Accessible Housing Information

- **Website Improvements:** Review and update housing-related web pages to ensure clarity, relevance, and accessibility for tenants.

Boosting Survey Participation

- **Action Plan:** Co-develop a strategy with the Tenants Panel to increase response rates and ensure feedback is representative.
- Look into other social media platforms to expand numbers of involved tenants.

Complaints

- Increase scrutiny by Tenants Panel on upheld complaints to look for areas of improvement in responses, processes and decision making.



Conclusion

The Tenant Involvement Strategy has achieved measurable progress in communication, tenant empowerment, and accountability. By embedding tenant voices into service design, scrutiny, and

decision-making, we are building stronger, safer, and more engaged communities. Looking ahead, the strategy will continue to prioritise digital engagement, transparency, and community partnerships.



Housing Services Contact Details



01325 405333



housing@darlington.gov.uk



www.darlington.gov.uk/housing



facebook.com/DBCHousing

