

HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 October 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Johnson (Chair), Anderson, Beckett, Crudass, Holroyd, Layton, M Nicholson and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillor Pease

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Roche

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Lorraine Hughes (Director of Public Health), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Claire Gardner-Queen (Head of Housing), Claire Turnbull (Housing Manager - Management Services), Jane Sutcliffe (Public Health Officer) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

HH21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

HH22 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3 September 2025.

RESOLVED – That, with the suggested amendment to HH16, the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3 September 2025 be approved as a correct record.

HH23 HOUSING SERVICES ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY 2022-2026 UPDATE

The Assistant Director Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update of the Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy 2022-2026. A presentation accompanied the report (also previously circulated).

It was reported that the policy was approved by Cabinet in 2022, setting out how the Council would deal with reports of ASB and hate crime effectively and promptly, taking appropriate, swift, proportionate action, including legal action, when necessary; and reference was made to the expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards.

Members were provided with details of performance, noting that 383 cases involving Council tenants were opened in 2024/25; with the main areas of complaints being noise, pet nuisance, verbal abuse/harassment/intimidation/threatening behaviour and drug/substance misuse; and that repeat complaints were high, with 185 cases opened where a previous complaint had been made. It was reported that the majority of complaints were closed as a result of advice given and early intervention.

The presentation outlined the multi-agency working, enforcement action undertaken, and

work undertaken in the last 12 months along with planned work for the next 12 months.

Discussion ensued regarding the processes involved with a court eviction, this included safeguarding referrals and referral to the Housing Options team if required; and following a question Members were informed that once a case had been closed, tenants would receive a case closure letter and survey and non-responders would be contacted via telephone for feedback.

Members sought clarification regarding 'Failure to reside in the property as their sole and only residence' as a reason for repossession and requested further information regarding age demographics for those responsible for anti-social behaviour in council housing.

RESOLVED – That the report and Housing Services Anti-social Behaviour Policy review be noted.

HH24 HEALTH PROTECTION ASSURANCE

The Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the health protection arrangements in Darlington.

It was reported that Local Authorities in England had statutory health protection duties under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and related regulations; these responsibilities are exercised primarily by the Director of Public Health and are supported by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the NHS; and an annual health protection assurance report was produced to provide an overview of health protection arrangements and relevant activity in the Borough of Darlington.

Members were informed that health protection refers to the coordinated activities and systems in place to safeguard the population from threats to health, including those arising from infectious diseases, environmental hazards or chemical exposure; and involved three key components namely prevention of harm, surveillance of potential risks and control of incidents when they occur.

Members were informed that NHS England was responsible for the commissioning of screening and immunisation programmes; and that UKHSA's Health Protection Teams (HPT) were responsible for the provision of expert functions to respond directly to incidents and outbreaks and to support the Council in understanding and responding to threats.

Reference was made to the duties and responsibilities of local authorities and in particular the role of Directors of Public Health in supporting health protection work; and information was provided on the performance and activity in relation to immunisations, infection prevention and control, screening, surveillance, healthcare associated infections and outbreak management.

Discussion ensued regarding the CPE outbreak at Darlington Memorial Hospital, with Members seeking assurance that the Trust were being responsive to public concerns. The Director of Public Health informed Members that the Trust had undertaken work around infection prevention control measures and building work to relocate sinks to corridors, and that it was the Trusts decision to introduce waterless bathing.

Further discussion ensued regarding uptake of vaccinations and the importance of clear information leaflets and supporting resources to encourage vaccine uptake; that the Tees Valley Local Immunisation Steering Group would be undertaking work to identify learning from GP practices with higher uptake rates; and additional funding had been allocated by NHS England to support targeted work to understand barriers and improve vaccination rates within the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Community.

Members raised concerns regarding wait times for screening; and discussions were held regarding herd immunity and work to support care homes with infection prevention and control.

RESOLVED – (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That the shared responsibility for Health Protection be noted.

(c) That it be noted that the Director of Public Health is assured that the health protection arrangements are appropriate and effective in addressing the various aspects of health protection.

(d) That the Chair of this Scrutiny Committee writes to the Chief Executive, CDDFT on behalf of the Members of this Scrutiny Committee requesting an update on the reintroduction of washing facilities at Darlington Memorial Hospital to enable patients to clean themselves with water.

HH25 HOUSING SERVICES TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029 UPDATE

The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on the Housing Services Tenant Involvement Strategy 2024-2029. An annual review report 2024-25 (also previously circulated) accompanied the report.

The submitted report stated that the Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 5 November 2024, setting out how the Council would involve and empower its tenants, including how the Council's engagement activities would be monitored and reported, and how the Council would involve its tenants in decisions about the services they receive; and the Regulator of Social Housing's new consumer standards set out their expectations for how social landlords must give tenants a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise their landlord's strategies, policies and services.

It was reported that the strategy promotes the Council's continued commitment to tenant involvement; details were provided of the annual review report which sets out the progress over the past 12 months against the key priorities of the strategy; and reference was made to the positive feedback from the Tenants Panel on the report.

Members queried accessibility of information for tenants, noting that a note would be added to the system for any residents requiring information in a different format; and following a question regarding tenant satisfaction in relation to complaints handling, Members were informed that a feedback survey was provided to residents who had submitted complaints

and work had been undertaken to improve information on the council's web page regarding housing complaints.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

HH26 INJURY PREVENTION UPDATE

The Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with a clear overview of the local, regional and national data relating to hospital admissions for unintentional and deliberate injuries amongst children and young people aged 0-14 years, in response to a request made following the update in January on performance indicator PBH024 and PBH026. The submitted report also detailed the current work underway in Darlington on injury prevention, highlighting current actions and the forward work plan.

It was reported that nationally hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children and young people was the leading cause of death and serious injury in children under 15 years of age and that many of the injuries were preventable; and that the rate of hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in Darlington was significantly higher than the England average and the highest in England. Members were informed however that differences in the way that paediatric hospital admission data was collected between hospital Trusts means that caution should be applied when comparing local authority areas on these indicators.

The submitted report provided details on the inequalities regarding hospital admissions by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children 0-4 years and those aged 0 - 14 years per 10,000 population for 2023/24; highlighted that the most common cause of injuries within the home were poisoning and falls, with Darlington having the highest rate of emergency admissions for accidental poisoning in children aged 0-4, nationally in 2018/19 to 2020/21; and that Darlington was ranked fifth highest local authority in England in 2018/19 to 2020/21 for the rate of emergency admissions for falls in children aged 0-4.

Members were informed that an audit had been undertaken by County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) to understand the key reasons for hospital admissions in children for unintentional and deliberate, including a deep dive audit of 100 records and the key messages were outlined.

The submitted report outlined the key actions to support injury prevention in relation to system-approach to injury prevention, health promotion and service development and data intelligence and evidence.

Discussion ensued on the impact of data quality on the figures for Darlington and Members queried how many admissions resulted in safeguarding referrals. Members noted that whilst there were inconsistencies in how data was collected between hospital trusts, the hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children and young people for Darlington was showing an increasing trend and there was a need to understand the reasons for this increase.

Members sought clarification regarding the new national data collection methods for urgent and emergency care and how this would affect the figures for Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That the current data on childhood injuries and the importance of preventing injuries as a mechanism to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people, be noted.

(b) That the contribution of childhood injuries to health inequalities, as a greater proportion of injuries are experienced by children living in our most deprived communities, be acknowledged.

(c) That the work already underway with system partners on injury prevention, be supported.

(d) That the system-wide approach and key priorities in the forward work plan be endorsed.

HH27 HOUSING SERVICES TENANCY POLICY 2025-2030

The Assistant Director- Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the draft Housing Services Tenancy Policy 2025 - 2030 (also previously circulated) prior to consideration by Cabinet on 2 December 2025.

It was reported that the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Consumer Standards state that Registered Providers of social housing must "offer tenancies or terms of occupation which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of their housing stock"; and the aims of the Housing Services Tenancy Policy 2025-2030 were outlined.

The submitted report stated that the types of tenancies offered for Darlington's Council housing were introductory tenancies, secure tenancies and flexible tenancies (or fixed term tenancies); and the tenancy policy also covered mutual exchanges, succession rights, transfers and tenancy assignments.

The proposed changes to the existing tenancy policy were outlined and reference was made to the outcome of consultation, in particular, the Tenancy Panel's support for flexible tenancies for new build properties.

Members voiced their support for the rightsizing offer and secure tenancies for new build properties; and requested figures for the number of flexible tenancies. Discussion ensued regarding the review process for flexible tenancies.

RESOLVED – That Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee agree to the onward submission of the draft Housing Services Tenancy Policy 2025-2030 to Cabinet.

HH28 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest for inclusion in the previously approved work programme.

Members requested that a site visit be arranged for Darlington Memorial Hospital, following

the recent staffing changes.

RESOLVED – (a) That the work programme be noted.

(b) That a site visit of Darlington Memorial Hospital be arranged for Members of this Scrutiny Committee.

HH29 HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

It was reported that the Board last met on 18 September 2025 and that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled for 4 December 2025.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Housing informed Members that items discussed at the last meeting included a review of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the updated Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment for approval. The next meeting of the Board would focus on mental health and suicide.

RESOLVED – That Members of this Scrutiny Committee continue to receive the Minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board.