

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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

Health Squad

2. Following a period of mobilisation the new Darlington Health Squad Service will be fully operational in our communities from 1 April 2026.
3. The service will provide intensive outreach, engagement, holistic health and wellbeing assessments and support for people at greatest risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes, and those experiencing health inequalities due to social exclusion, multiple disadvantage, or systemic barriers to accessing healthcare.
4. The Health Squad team will deliver wellbeing interventions, offer appropriate onward referral to services and support and empower people most at risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes to make behaviour changes and access services to meet their needs. The service is based on a proven outreach-first model established in County Durham to tackle health inequalities and improve population health and wellbeing and will work in collaboration with the NHS and voluntary sector.
5. The aims of the service include:
 - a) Improved access to healthcare and wider support services amongst target groups.
 - b) Increased GP registration and engagement with preventative care.
 - c) Improved physical and mental health outcomes across a range of standardised tools/measures.
 - d) Reduction in A&E attendances for frequent attenders.
 - e) Stronger system-wide partnerships and feedback loops.

Healthy Hearts Bus

6. The Public Health team have been working collaboratively with Health Innovations North East and North Cumbria to host their "Healthy Hearts Bus" in a number of locations and venues in Darlington between 16 March 2026 and 20 March 2026, including community venues and public spaces, in order to reach people who may not otherwise attend their GP practice. The service offers a range of mini health checks which may indicate that people could benefit from lifestyle advice and guidance, or further medical investigations. Once final attendance has been collated, a more detailed update will follow. I am looking

forward to attending the Healthy Hearts Bus on 18th March and hope the programme can be repeated in the future.

7. Alongside the Healthy Hearts Bus, the sessions were supported by a number of Darlington organisations and services, including Health Trainers, Health Squad, Drug and Alcohol support team, Smoking Cessation team, and the 0-19 service, to offer a range of support and guidance to individuals.
8. In addition, staff raised awareness of the NHS Health Check service which is available every 5 years to all adults in Darlington aged 40-74 via their GP (with exemptions for certain pre-existing conditions).

Suicide Prevention

9. Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training was identified as a key deliverable by the Suicide Prevention Partnership. A procurement process has been undertaken to identify a suitable training provider, with an expectation of contract commencement in April 2026. The provider will be confirmed after the standstill period has ended.
10. The training aims to raise awareness of the signs that someone may be experiencing crisis, to support people to know how to open difficult conversations and to build confidence in responding to a disclosure that someone is considering taking their life.
11. Training will be offered to members of the suicide prevention partnership, partner organisations working with those at increased risk, elected members and council employees, as well as being made available to members of the Darlington community.

Best Start in Life Strategic Plan

12. Public Health are working in partnership with key partners to develop a Darlington Best Start in Life Strategic Plan. Partners include Family Hubs & Early Help and Education Teams at the Council, County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust and Harrogate and District Foundation Trust (who provide the health visiting and school nursing service in our Borough). Every Local Authority must develop a plan by 31 March 2026 as part of the Department of Education's 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy', to bring together early years and family services to improve child development and meet the government target of 75% of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. Overall, GLD in Darlington was 64.9% in 2024/25, however there are differences between cohorts including those children receiving Free School Meals, children with an Education and Health Care Plan, boys and children with English as a second language.
13. The local plan will include the development of a vision and targets in the following key areas:
 - a) Home Learning Environment and parenting interventions
 - b) Early Education and Care access and quality
 - c) Transition to School and Reception Year
 - d) SEND Support
 - e) Maternal and Early Years Services

Health and Wellbeing Board

14. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 19 March 2026. The main discussion items included the Neighbourhood Health Plan, Director of Public Health Annual Report and Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2024/2025.
15. Other issues considered at the meeting included a review of the Terms of Reference for the Board and the Child Death Review Process for County Durham and Darlington Annual Report 2024/25.

Housing Services

Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2025-26

16. The annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey results for our Council tenants have just been received and show continued high satisfaction across most areas for our Council Housing Services, and well above the latest national benchmarking figures.

Description	National Benchmark	2024/25 DBC results	2025/26 DBC Results
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord	68%	79%	77%
Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service	71%	84%	82%
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	68%	83%	82%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained	68%	82%	79%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe	74%	85%	82%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	57%	70%	66%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them	68%	76%	75%
Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect	74%	82%	83%
Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling	32%	35%	42%

Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	63%	71%	70%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	61%	66%	68%
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Darlington Borough Council's Housing Service's approach to handling anti-social behaviour?	56%	59%	58%

17. Analysis of the data is currently being undertaken, and these results will be shared with our Tenants Panel, who will lead on improvement actions in 2026-27. Additional questions were also asked of respondents, in relation to issues raised on the previous satisfaction survey around tenants' views for Housing Service can prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the community and how we can improve complaints handling.

A National Plan to End Homelessness

18. In December 2025, the Government launched their National Plan to End Homelessness, including 5 "pillars" that Local Authorities are being asked to work toward, as follows:
- (a) Universal Prevention (housing supply, tenancy security, income and allocations).
 - (b) Targeted Prevention (duty to collaborate, targets to prevent homelessness from institutions, such as care or prison).
 - (c) Preventing Crisis (funding, early detection, legal support).
 - (d) Emergency Response (mitigating the impacts of homelessness, such as temporary accommodation and child welfare).
 - (e) Recovery and Stability (non-recurring) (rough sleeping, support services).
19. The priorities in our local Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy meets the Governments key aims around homelessness and rough sleeping, and our Housing Services team are working with partners through the Homelessness Forum, to ensure our strategy delivers the outcomes contained within the national plan.

Allocations

20. The number of residents on the Council's housing waiting list continues to show encouraging signs of improvement. The number of households on the housing register at the end of January 2026 was 1,955. Whilst still high, this compares to a peak in March 2025 of 2,133. However, included in the current figures are 1,274 households whose current home meets their housing needs (band 4), meaning that the number of households in priority housing need is 681.
21. Most encouraging is the reduction in households in the most urgent housing need (band 1), which is currently 132. This compares to a peak of 310 in October 2024. In particular, the number of households on the housing register who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness is 83, a 45 per cent reduction since the start of 2025-26.

Tenancy Enforcement

22. Our Housing Services Tenancy Enforcement team continues to engage with Council tenants to obtain feedback on how anti-social behaviour impacts them directly, their family and community, and how we can work together to resolve issues in a timely manner. The team have been holding focus groups within areas where we have recognised repeated reports and higher numbers of anti-social behaviour and working with our partners in the Community Safety team and the local Police. This is helping us to review the way we work, handle complaints from our tenants, and shape our Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, which is due for review in 2026.
23. The team recently held a meeting with residents directly impacted by anti-social behaviour over a prolonged period. It was evident from this meeting that residents felt heard by holding a face-to-face meeting and reassured that we were there listening to them, and that this was a positive way of agreeing next steps in the ongoing case.
24. Over the last quarter we received 104 new cases, in comparison to 107 in the previous quarter. The main themes of the reported anti-social behaviour were verbal abuse and noise.

Tenant Involvement

25. In January, our Tenants Panel met and were asked what they would like to review in 2026. From this it was decided that over the next few months they would focus on our repairs service, solar panels and complaints. The panel also asked to be introduced to members of the Civic Enforcement and Street Scene teams.
26. The Housing Services Tenant Involvement team recently hosted an engagement day at Rise Carr, to find out from Council tenants in that area. A litter pick of the area was also carried out, and a skip was provided for residents to enable them to dispose of unwanted items from their home or garden.

Stock Condition Surveys

27. Housing Services has recently undertaken a project to undertake over 3,120 stock condition surveys on our Council homes. The Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards state that providers of social housing "must have an accurate record at an individual property level of the condition of their homes, based on a physical assessment of all homes and keep this up to date". Together with surveys previously undertaken, this means that 78 per cent of our Council homes currently have an up-to-date stock condition survey. A programme of work is currently being planned, to ensure we have a complete picture of our stock condition over the next 12 months.
28. In addition to this, Housing officers will be reviewing the stock condition data to understand how our properties are performing both for building components and energy performance. This will help us understand if key components, such as the roof, windows and doors are meeting their expected lifecycles and will be supported by repairs data, to help inform where our capital investments should be directed as part of our future Medium Term Financial Plans and the longer term 30-year business plan. The data will also be used to plan energy efficiency works in Council homes with an Energy Performance

Certificate (EPC) rating of below C.

Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund

29. Work has now commenced on our ambitious 3-year grant funded Warm Homes project, with REGEN as our contractor, to deliver over £14m worth of energy efficient upgrades to a proposed 680 Council homes. This will include cavity wall insulation, external wall insulation and loft insulation, along with other measures, such as low energy lighting, new doors and windows, and ventilation works. This will see upgrades to the Parkside, Lascelles, Skerne Park and Red Hall areas; we are currently working in Skerne Park with proposal to move to Red Hall over the summer months.

Awaab's Law

30. It has been 5 months since Awaab's law became effective. Awaab's Law is a legal requirement mandating social landlords to investigate and fix reported housing hazards, particularly damp and mould, within strict timeframes. Since then, our Housing Services team has implemented processes and developed ICT data recording systems, to ensure we are not only able to respond to those hazards and make our tenants homes safe but are also able to record this correctly and ensure no repairs get missed.
31. We have also been working with other providers and reviewing our benchmarking provider Housemark's data collection and reporting plans, to ensure we are able to provide visibility and transparency on our response and performance against these hazards. It is anticipated we will be able to provide fully validated information as part of our annual Compliance reporting for 2025-26. Initial data has shown that only 1.5 per cent of emergency hazards being reported are due to damp and mould, demonstrating the high quality of our Council homes.

Local Authority Housing Fund

32. I am pleased to announce that that Darlington Borough Council has been successful in securing £347.5k of Government funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund to increase the supply of temporary accommodation, the vast majority of which is those who are, or are at risk of homelessness. The funding will be used to acquire four additional family residential properties.
33. Two of the properties will be used for temporary accommodation, supporting our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, reducing the need to place families experiencing homelessness into inappropriate and expensive bed and breakfast accommodation. The other two properties will support the Government's Afghan Resettlement Programme, for those individual's and their families, who assisted the UK's military's efforts in Afghanistan and who had to leave Afghanistan following the change in regime.

Skinnergate New Build Housing Scheme

34. I am also pleased to announce that Darlington Borough Council has been successful in securing £2.08m of Government funding from Homes England for the Skinnergate new build scheme. This scheme will see a mix of new commercial and residential properties,

including 16 new Council homes being delivered with social rents, in the heart of the Town Centre.

35. Work is already underway on the construction phase of the scheme, which is due to complete in early 2027.

School Games Programme

36. The School Games Programme continues to work with all Primary, Secondary and Special Schools in Darlington. Between January and March 2026, 19 events have been made available to schools which have included Basketball, Multi Skills Festivals, Swimming Festivals, Tennis Festivals, Futsal, Football and Secondary T1 Rugby. The programme is running a Mental Health Awareness Day for schools to support Children's Mental Health Week, to empower, raise awareness and encourage open conversation to highlight the importance of mental health. To support International Woman's Day the School Games is holding an Army Outreach Elite Skills and Team Building day to inspire secondary school girls to be more active. It is estimated over 2000 young people have or will be taking part across all events with 64 Secondary School Sports Leaders supporting the events.

Dolphin Centre

37. Work has started on the plans to upgrade mechanical and electrical plant within the Dolphin Centre including the installation of indoor golf, darts and shuffleboard, as well as the introduction of a new spinning studio and an upgrade to the existing fitness studio. A temporary pop-up café has opened and increased opening times in 16 Horsemarket, which proved very popular at this early stage. Events are still being delivered in parallel with the ongoing capital project.
38. Various activities took place during February half term, including bowling, diving and swimming and this remained one of our busiest half term periods. We also re-introduced our extremely popular pool parties to complement the other half term activities.
39. Work continued on recruiting the student champions at Darlington College, and we recently engaged 10 students from various schools across Darlington by offering them work experience opportunities.
40. Five new fitness classes were introduced to the timetable from January following consultation with members and customers. These included additional Pilates, aqua aerobics and yoga sessions, as well as new classes in Triple 12 and Hydro Health. All were well attended, with sessions being fully booked on a regular basis.

Sport England Place Expansion

41. Darlington has now completed the three-month follow-up phase of the Sport England leadership programme since January 2026 building on the early insights and consultation gathered so far from community partners. The next stage will involve delivering dedicated insight events within each priority location. These events over the coming weeks will explore, in greater depth, the barriers young people and local communities experience when accessing green spaces, paths, parks, and community facilities.

42. These locality-based events will gather further insight that will directly shape the development of targeted test-and-learn pilots. By bringing partners, organisations, and community stakeholders together, the test-and-learn process will aim to strengthen collaboration, deepen shared understanding, and co-design practical solutions that support increased physical activity and improved active environments across Northgate, Red Hall, Skerne Park, and Albert Hill.

Darlington Playing Pitch and Facilities Strategy

43. Work continues on the development of a new Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and Built Facilities Strategy (BFS) for 2026 -2031. This will provide a strategic framework to ensure that the provision of outdoor and indoor sport pitches and facilities meet the needs of residents (both existing and future) and visitors to Darlington. We have had a 100 per cent response rate from all winter/summer sports clubs and the national governing bodies on the supply and demand for indoor facilities and playing pitch provision across the borough. The new strategy and action plan will be used to lever and monitor the delivery of improvement and investment into the sporting infrastructure across Darlington and is scheduled for completion in the first part of the new financial year.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing