



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Annual Report

2021/2022



Introduction

As the Cabinet member with responsibility for Health and Housing I continue to be proud of the work we are doing to improve our service for tenants across Darlington.

This year we have been transforming our processes to ensure that we deliver brilliant services for tenants and our communities. The introduction of our new housing terms and conditions reinforces our responsibilities as a landlord and makes clear the responsibilities of our tenants who live within our council properties. If you are having any issues with your home or with anyone living in a council home, please do speak with your housing officer who will provide you with support.

I was pleased to accelerate our single glazed window replacement scheme this year which will deliver upgrades to around 1,600 single glazed properties, this will help our tenants with their energy bills and will improve the overall feel and look of their homes.

It was great to attend our tenants panel meeting recently where we talked about a wide range of issues that impact our council homes and communities. We're always looking for new members to join our tenants panel and there is more information within this newsletter about how to get involved.

As a council we are continuing to see increased demand for our services and in particular for council homes. That's why we're building 1,000 new council properties over the next 10 years, we have already delivered around 300 new homes in the last couple of years. The next development will be at Neasham Road, which will see additional 150 new council properties built by spring 2023.

In the meantime, if there is anything you may need from me, or the team please don't hesitate to get in touch.



Kevin Nicholson

Councillor Kevin Nicholson, B.E.M.
Cabinet Member for Health & Housing



Achievements

2021 was shaped by the lasting effect of the Covid 19 Pandemic but thankfully the later months were guided towards reopening our facilities and getting back to somewhere near where we were before the pandemic

Housing Options

Our Housing Options team were recognised at a prestigious awards scheme in November. Each year the Nepacs Ruth Cranfield Awards highlight and celebrate examples of exceptional work by people in the North East in the cause of rehabilitating prisoners into society and helping to cut the risk of reoffending.

The team along with the 700 club were among 19 organisations that received certificates of high commendation for their work.

Spending Plans for 2022

In February we unveiled our spending plans for the next 12 months. We will be concentrating on improvements issues such as double glazing, responsive repairs and maintenance and energy efficiency measures.

To add to this we pledged to build 1000 new council homes over the next 10 years.

Lifeline

Our Lifeline Team were awarded the Exceptional Care Award at the Stronger Communities Awards in November 2021.

“We are extremely proud of the service that we provide to the older and more vulnerable members of our community, particularly during the last 2 years when we have all been dealing with the negative impacts of the pandemic both professionally and personally.

Receiving the award has been great for the team and the recognition for our work is really satisfying”



Tenant Satisfaction

During this time we learnt to live with Covid 19 with many schemes opening for the first time in over 18 months. To many communal areas provides a social lifeline which has been sorely missed.

‘It has felt like a very long time since the Havelock Centre closed its doors due to the pandemic. I didn’t realise just how important it was to have a place where I can go to meet my friends until it was taken away from us. I am so pleased to finally be able to go and sit at the community hub with all my friends. I feel so much happier within myself now that we can sit together. I used to take the community centre for granted but losing it like we did has mad me realise how lonely It would be if we lost it altogether.’

Dot Nash, resident of Alfred Street

Community Funding

Residents of Carlton Court and Branksome Hall Drive were awarded £1000 in funding from the Community Funding Scheme. This money will be used for community garden projects in those locations. You too could be the beneficiary of our community funding scheme which gives Council tenants up to £500 with support for activities and projects that make a difference in the community.

We set up extra funding around the Queens Jubilee at the start of the year with up to £500 worth of funding for local projects.

We had a series of engagement events right throughout the borough. Events were organised at Roxby Court, Linden Court, Firthmoor, Dinsdale Court, Bank Top and North Riverside. The purpose of these events were too find the views of tenants. Whether it is what we are doing well or what we need to improve.



Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standards

Our Tenants Panel returned to face-to-face meetings from September 2021 with the group meeting on a bi-monthly basis to discuss matters important to them.

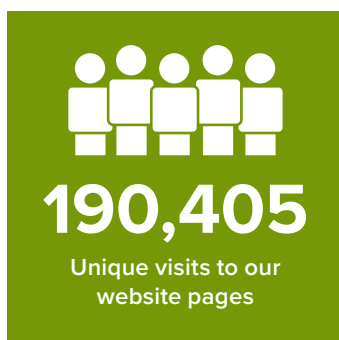
As well as meetings we invited our tenants to attend training sessions to help them fulfil their roles. One example of this is a mystery shopping workshop which was attended by Tenants Panel member Julian in preparation for some exercises we are looking to perform in the upcoming months.

'The main part of the course was a slide presentation, with the bullet points being explained by the tutor. There was also interaction with the other people, where you were separated in two groups and could then, via a room, you could take part in discussion, and role playing.

The course covered all the key points needed to create a mystery shopper plan. The course details will also be posted to you, as well as a certificate of participation. I recommend the course as I drew a great deal of knowledge from it'.

Our Tenants Panel continues to grow with a increasing membership and plans to increase this further in 2022 with a plan to involve local schools in areas where council properties are prevalent.

In 2022 the Housing Web Page underwent an update to create a more fluid experience for customers with information more easily accessible. This included a section dedicated to the Tenants Panel where viewers can get an insight into what it is like to become a tenants panel member.



Compliments and Complaints

In 2021/22 we continued to receive compliments to the different departments within the Housing Team. Although the figures were slightly down on last year we received more compliments than previous non covid years, which is an indication that services were returning to normal.

The departments where we saw the most compliments were within our Housing Management and Lifeline teams which received 57% of the compliments in 2021 / 22.

Some of the reasons for the compliments to both teams were how we adapted to change in 2021/22. Coming off the back of a pandemic a series of changes were enforced to ensure that tenants were able to get back to the activities that they loved.

In 2021/22 we also received a number of compliments regarding our Building Services Team who continued their exemplary work in tenants properties.

‘David was an exemplary workman, not only did he do an amazing job, he treat my home and myself with the utmost respect’.

It is vitally important to recognise that we do not always get things right.

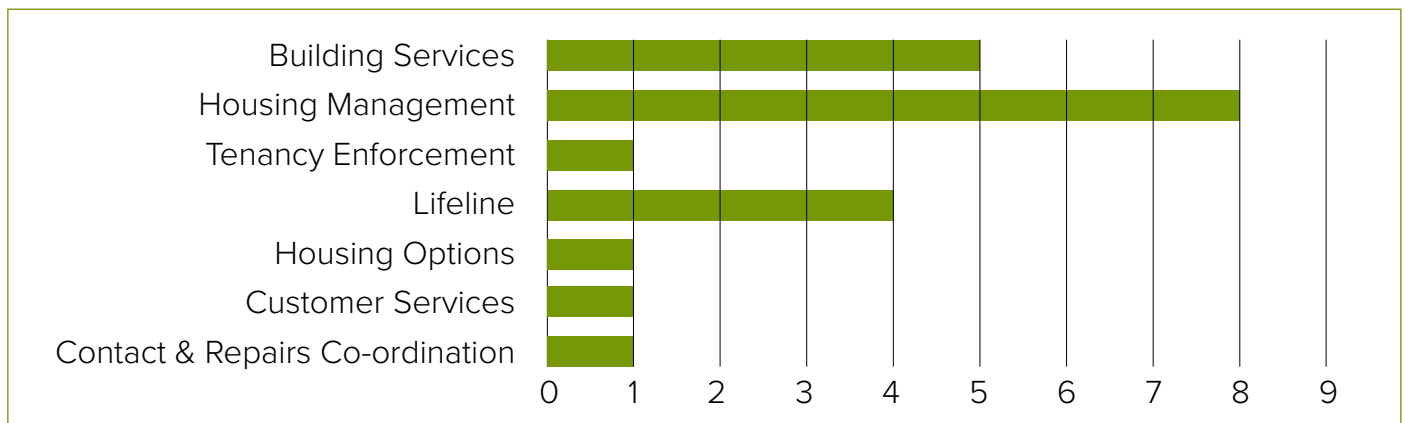
In 2021/22 all senior management have taken part in the Housing Ombudsman online complaint training with a plan for Housing Officers to also complete this training in the near future. By doing this the council has enhanced the offer to customers as well as increasing officer knowledge.

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022 the council received a total of 88 complaints which is a slight increase from the 2020/21 figures of 61. The increase may be down to two things. Firstly we have made it easier for tenants to raise complaints by setting up an additional complaints page within our website page as well encouraging tenants to get in touch through our Facebook Page.

We also believe that the increase is also, in part, attributable to the legacy of the pandemic, with people reporting fewer issues in the earlier part of the pandemic and feeling more confident in the reporting process within the last year.


Despite the increase in complaints none were considered at Stage 3 which involved the housing onbudsman.

Compliments 2021/22




88.9%
Our Stage 1 complaint response time was met from Jan 2021 to March 2021


8
Compliments to our Housing Management Team


4
Compliments to our Lifeline Team


0
Compliments to our Building Services Team



Your Home

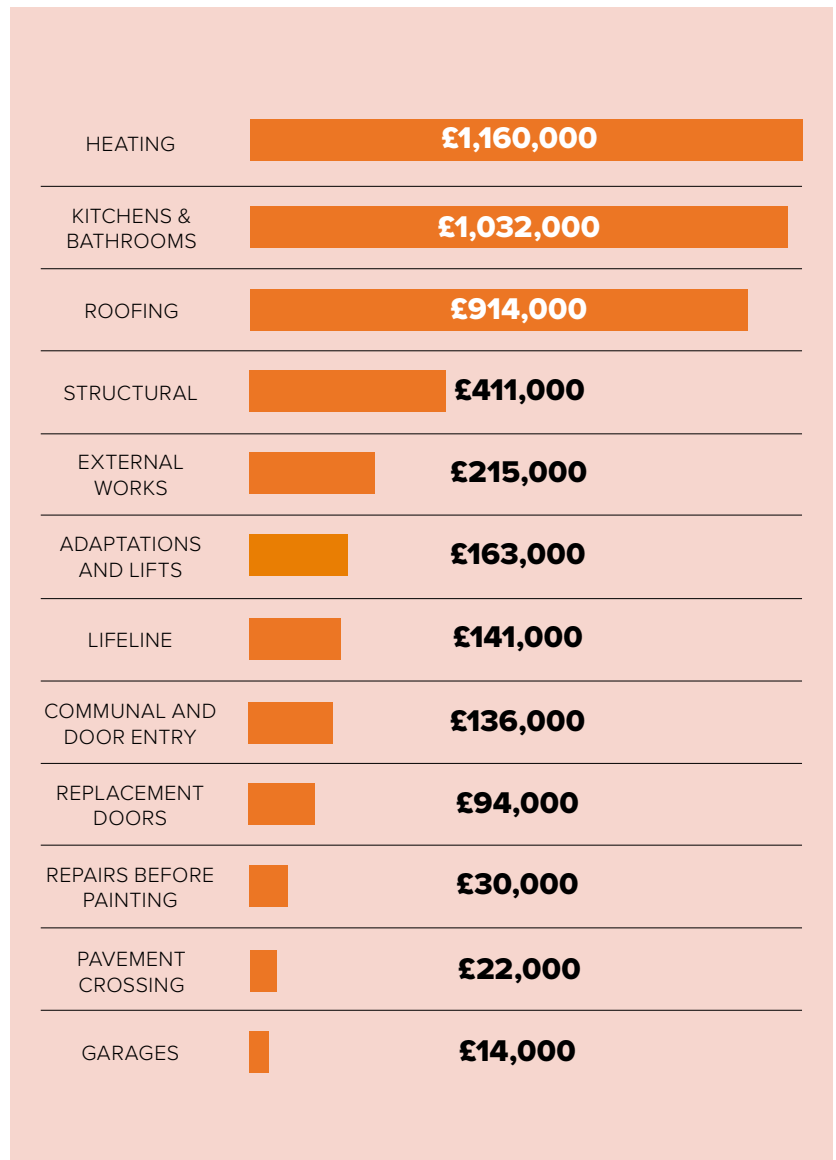
Home Improvements

The council has committed to achieving Net Carbon Zero by 2050. This means we need to reduce our use of fossil fuels such as gas that give off carbon emissions and opt for more environment friendly renewable powered measures such as solar and wind power.

In Housing we are supporting this and are committed to reducing our carbon emissions and energy demand. We want our tenants to have a warm, ventilated and energy efficient home, as we know good quality and well-maintained homes can significantly impact upon the health, wellbeing and quality of life of our tenants.

We have already made a start on this journey and were successful in securing funding under the governments Green Home Grants Local Authority Delivery Scheme in both Phase 1b and Phase 2. This funding enabled us to carry out measures to over 650 homes with grant funding of almost £1m along with £400k DBC housing contribution. Work included Double Glazing, Solar Panels, Air Source Heat Pumps, Loft Insulation and Solar PV panels. More work on these schemes will continue in 2022/23 along with additional works with £300k funding secured on Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

Where we spent our maintenance budget



225

Properties received window and/or door upgrades



105

Properties had works to their roofs



333

Heating upgrades undertaken

£3m

spent improving your homes





In 2021 /22 we continued with our ambitious plan to build 1000 homes over the next decade. As mentioned last year the demand for affordable, high quality housing still remains high across Darlington, especially with the influx of high profile jobs in the area.

We again had to face the challenges of Covid whilst building council properties within our Lancaster site.

Over the course of under 3 years 86 properties were built in our Lancaster phases which are due to be finished in 2022. This includes three and four bed family homes with access to gardens.

We continued to aid tenants who faced difficulties within their household. In 2021/22 alone we completed 277 adaptations to our properties.

It is also important to respond quickly when things go wrong. In 2021/22 our team responded to nearly 30'000 repairs from our council tenants which included repairs to our garages and communal areas with nearly £5million of our yearly budget spent on repairs and maintenance.

We understand how damaging and worrying it can be if you get an urgent repair, which is why our emergency team aim to attend within 24 hours.



Health and Safety

Annual Report – Gas Safety

After a difficult start to the year with Covid playing a part in our Gas Servicing due to access and staffing levels we managed to complete 4,967 of our 4,977 gas safety checks within the year.

Of the remaining 10 properties 7 were capped or made safe meaning that we are above target with a 99.8%.

Of our sheltered schemes 13 out of the 14 properties had their gas services completed on time.

In our programme for Asbestos surveys 156 Asbestos refurbishment and demolition surveys were all completed on time with 100% compliance achieved.

We also had a 100% compliance in Asbestos Management Surveys completed within the year with 19 surveys required and 19 surveys completed on time.


Our Fire Regulatory Reform Audits in blocks of flats showed that of the 73 blocks due for risk assessment 73 were completed on time generating 1,140 actions with 1,132 (99.3%) completed.

In our sheltered schemes 12 out of the 18 schemes and community centres were compliant (66.6%) with performance again impacted due to Covid which caused access issues as well as a change of contractor.

Our Electrical Safety programme told a slightly different story with 68.7% of our Electrical Installation Condition Reports completed (611 out of 890). Performance was significantly impacted due to Covid and unlike Gas Servicing we do not have an legal way to enforce access.

We aim to combat this in a number of ways with changing our terms of the new tenancy agreement to including tenancy breach notices when this hasn't been achieved as well improving information on the internet, articles in news letters and client engagement.



73 
Fire Risk Assessments carried out in the communal flats

156 
Asbestos refurbishment and demolition surveys carried out

99.8%
Gas Servicing completed in time 



Neighbourhood and Community Standards

Refugee Program

In 2021 the UK Government announced programmes to resettle Afghan refugees in the UK. Darlington Borough Council were keen to play a part in assisting and initially agreed to housing of four families from the Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) with both schemes being funded by the Home Office.

Darlington's first ARAP arrival was on the 20th January 2022 when a family moved into the area.

The family were overjoyed with their new home with the daughter asking 'is this all for us' with the rest of the family thanking the team for their new home.

Due to the increase in Refugee Scheme's in Darlington there is a team of Refugee Support Officer who offer support to assist with integrating families into life in the UK and the local community. This support ranges from advice regarding benefits, education, language tuition and health as well as general day to day life in the UK.



As well as sourcing the properties the team furnish accordingly with items such as white goods, furniture and provisions to enable the family to start their new life in Darlington.

In Jan 2022 two new vacancies were posted and Nicola Kelly and Sayed Elnemer were successfully introduced to the team.



Afghani families successfully homed



New Refugee Support Officer roles filled



Ukrainian households to be welcomed in 2022



Housing Options

In 2021/22, 1745 individuals contacted the Housing Options for advice regarding homelessness, this was an increase of 329 clients (23.2%) from 2020/21. This was as a result of services opening up again after Covid, for example the court embargo was lifted on serving notices for tenants to leave their social and private tenancies. From January 2022, we also introduced seeing clients face to face again.

The main reason people find themselves homeless is due to friends and/or family being no longer able to accommodate (37.9% of cases). This is followed by relationship breakdown (non-violent), which is 12.6% and the end of Assured Shorthold tenancies 10.3%.

One of the core aims of the Housing options is reduce rough sleepers and individuals begging, along with the support of the 700 Club, Community Safety and the Police. The team have also tried to raise awareness of reporting street homelessness through Streetlink and making charity donations to the 'Have a Heart, Give Smart' campaign, instead of giving money directly to those begging. In 2021/22, we had 37 rough sleepers, which is 1 less from 2020/21. The team had 64 reported clients sofa surfing, which is a decrease from 1166 the previous year. This is a positive indication that 'hidden homelessness' is reducing in Darlington.

Throughout, 2021/22, we supported 96 victims of domestic abuse, which is an increase of 14 from 2021/22.

- 890 Owed a statutory duty
- 578 Positive outcomes achieved for clients 2021/22
- 11 People assisted under severe weather protocol for a total of 106 nights



96

Victims of domestic abuse supported



1745

Individuals contacted the Housing Options team for advice.



11

People assisted under severe weather emergency protocol



Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

In Early 2022 we are looking to change our Anti Social Behaviour Policy to continue our commitment to ensuring that all of our tenants enjoy their right to a safe home and community.

Under the terms of the policy we will not tolerate anti social behaviour or hate crime and will act wherever necessary to prevent it as well as taking robust actions against tenants who commit ASB as well as members of the family or visitors to their property.

Some of the enforcement actions that were taken over the past year included, notice of seeking

possession, notice of possession proceedings, injunctions as well as mediation referrals.

Of the 370 cases opened in 2021/22 exactly half were noise related with other reason including pet and animal nuisance, substance misuse and verbal abuse all of which we hope to decrease.

We are also expanding our tenancy enforcement team in 2022 to ensure that all Anti Social Behaviour issues are dealt with in a timely manner.



379

Anti-social behaviour cases resolved



21

Restorative justice cases



The average time taken to close an ASB case:

25 days



88%
ASB cases

COMPLETED



Managing Tenancies

Allocations, Lettings and Tenancy

During the past 12 months as we exited from Covid restrictions we continued to face challenging economic conditions. We again strived to maintain high performance within rents for the financial year.

Within the last year £25,506,340 worth of rent was due with £25,555,758 rent collected between April 2021 and the end of March 2022.

We also has 2883 customers who had a zero or credit balance at the year end March 2022 which equates to nearly 50% of our tenants.

We have a large waiting list for our properties which also shows the popularity of council homes. They include 599 One Bedroom properties, 354 Two Bedroom properties, 156 Three Properties and 50 Four Bedroom + properties, totalling 1159 people on the waiting list.

COUNCIL HOUSING WAITING LIST

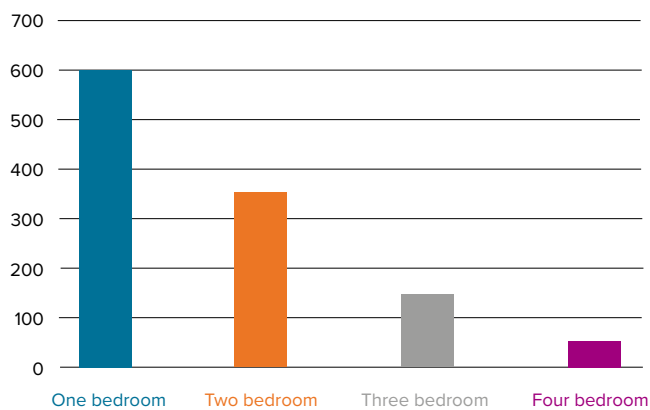
Number of Bedrooms	2021/22
One Bedroom	599
Two Bedrooms	354
Three Bedrooms	156
Four Bedrooms +	50
Total	1159

Tenancy Sustainment and Housing Plus

Our tenancy sustainment team offer free and confidential advice to our tenants on budgeting, money managements, gas and electric and more. For instance in 2021/22 they assisted 1257 customers to receive water tariff reductions from Northumbrian Water, saving over £96,000.

In 2021/22, Housing Plus worked with an average of 116 cases weekly between our 3 officers. With the relaxation of Covid restrictions we increased our new cases to 28 during the year. With restrictions still in place for parts of the year we were still limited and unable to visit tenants, but this did pick up at the end of the year. 40 Housing Plus cases were sustained in 2021/2022.

Waiting List



1,159

Households on the waiting list
Darlington residents only, with overall list of 1,600



£25.5
MILLION

Overall rent collected



1257

tenants were offered advice to water tariff reductions



2883

Prope customers with zero credit balance 2020/21

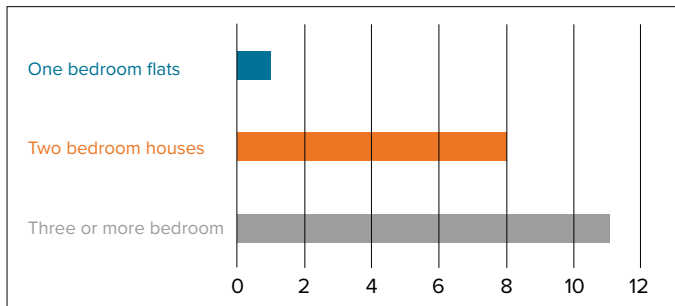


Right to Buy

In 2012/22 we received 72 right to buy applications for our homes. Of these 41 were completed (59.94%). The number is higher than last year when we received 56 application with a higher number of completions (only 32 last year). The completion rate for this year and last year are relatively similar.

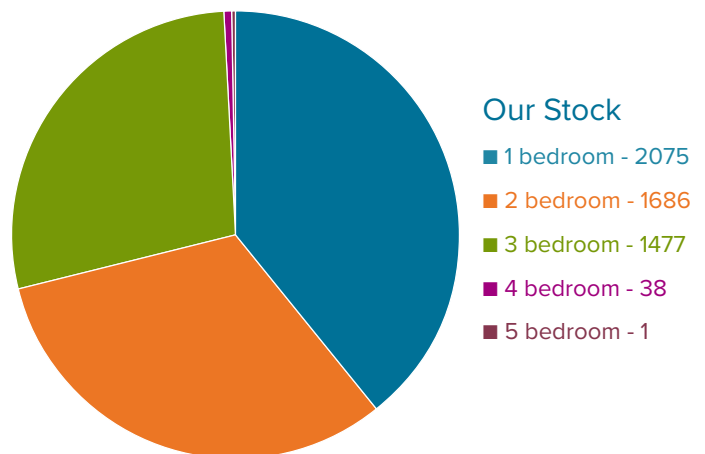
The vast majority of the properties were two or three bedrooms and all except one were houses.

Right to buy sales



Stock

We have 5,277 homes in our stock.



Apprentices

We continue to see apprentices successfully gaining permanent employment after their apprenticeship.

We receive money for recruiting apprentices aged between 16 and 18. This money is directly re-invested into resources to support apprentices within the work place.

The following quotes are from apprentices who successfully gained employment with DBC in the last 12 months.

“Completing my apprenticeship in Business Admin within Darlington Borough Council has helped me to develop my skills and my knowledge of housing”
- **Savanna (Housing Advisor)**

“Completing an apprenticeship has been very beneficial to my personal growth and development and has helped me to work towards starting a career” - **Meg (Revenues and Benefits Assistant)**

“My apprenticeship ended with a successful opportunity employment and now I am part of the Revenue and Benefits department. So all I can say to the future apprentices is the sky is the limit.”
- **Olga (Revenues and Benefits Assistant)**



Lifeline

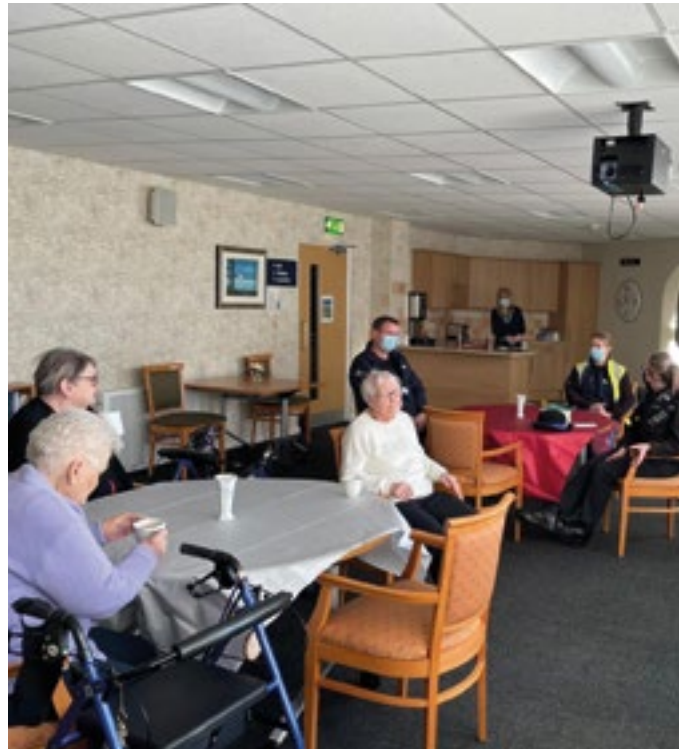
Our lifeline team works to help provide individuals with the ability to live independently. They manage our community care alarm and Telecare services, plus all of our older person housing.

We have seen a small increase in the number of clients using the Lifeline service over the last year, this may be due to the end of the lockdown and people becoming more mobile once again and where they possibly had more family support over the lockdowns this may reduce due to their work commitments.

The incidents attended and percentage responded within 30 minutes have both been kept similar as 2020/21 which runs inline with the average number of clients throughout the year.

This year we are looking at how we can upgrade systems to change over our older Lifeline systems to the new digital units. This will enable us to carry on our services after the telephone digital changeover happens.

We plan to change over 1400 pieces of equipment in clients properties over the next 3 years with 400 to be installed over the next few months. On top of this we need to upgrade our Good Neighbour, hardwired, sheltered and extra care schemes to digital, which will be phased over the next 3 years.



3,374

Average number of clients throughout the year



8616

Incidents attended



102,331

Calls taken by the team in 2020/21



93%

Average % of incidents attended by the Lifeline service within 30mins in 2020/21





Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
Feethams
Darlington
County Durham
DL1 5QT



01325 405333



housing@darlington.gov.uk



www.darlington.gov.uk



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Borough Council