

Housing

February 2024 | Edition 16

CONNECT



INSIDE



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



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www.darlington.gov.uk/housing

Welcome

Welcome to the 16th edition of Housing Connect.

Firstly, I would like to thank all of you that took the time to complete the recent Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey and our recent rent consultation survey. Your feedback to Tenants Panel in February is vital to us and helps us to shape our service and ensure that we continue to improve. We received over 500 responses to the recent rent consultation, and we'll be providing your feedback to Council in February. We will be feeding back to all Tenants in special edition of Housing Connect in the spring.

One of the key findings from the surveys was that around 75% of you told us that climate change was important to you, so we must rise to this challenge.

Last month, Councillors approved our new Housing Services Climate Change Strategy, a copy of which can be found at: www.darlington.gov.uk/media/20275/climate-change-strategy-2023-web-version.pdf. Housing accounts for 22% of all the UK's carbon emissions and as the biggest landlord in Darlington, we have a duty to ensure our homes are as energy efficient as possible.

It's a huge undertaking and its important that none of us underestimate the scale of the task ahead. The cost of making your homes "net zero carbon" is estimated to be in excess of £140 million and will take us many years to achieve. Our first step in this journey will be to improve insulation within your homes which will help to keep your homes warmer and reduce the energy you use.

Work is already underway. Over the past 3 years we have upgraded 760 Council homes, at a cost of £2.4 million, including £1.5 million of Government funding. Upgrades have included new loft insulation, external wall insulation, double glazing and solar panels. A further 130 homes will be upgraded in 2024-25 and we are committing to spend around £3 million each year on this and other energy efficiency measures.

We'll soon be looking for tenant and leaseholder volunteers to be "Neighbourhood Green Champions". These volunteers will work alongside us and help us to promote ways to reduce your energy bills and improve things like recycling in your neighbourhoods. We'll be providing more information about Neighbourhood Green Champions in the next edition of Housing Connect later this year.

In the coming months we'll be publicising all the feedback from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and how we're going to use this information and involve you in the next steps to improving our service to you. Don't forget that we're always looking for new members of the Tenants Panel and our new Digital Tenants Panel, you can find more details on page 15.



**Assistant Director of
Housing and Revenues
Anthony Sandys**

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Around the Schemes

Dalkeith House

As well as numerous Christmas themed coffee mornings and a festive lunch, residents of Dalkeith House took part in an interactive pantomime in December which brought festive cheer to all residents and visitors.

Resident Keith became 'Daisy the Cow' for the shows finale, showcasing his acting prowess.

After the panto there were also dancing, games and sweet treats, all of which would not of been possible without scheme manager Gilly and volunteers Jackie and Diane.



Festive Firthmoor

On Friday 15 December the Housing team were guests at the popular Festive Firthmoor.

Matthew, Paul, Sarah, Claire and Becci joined hundreds of residents in what was an early Christmas treat. The event included fairground rides, Christmas carols, live music, hot food, market stalls and a visit from Father Christmas.

During the event the team were on hand to talk to residents about their tenancy answering any queries they may have had, including information on the rent consultation, Tenants Panel and Council Housing in the area.



Christmas Events



12 Days of Christmas

Over the course of the festive period the Housing Team celebrated 2023 with the 12 Days of Christmas running between 11 and 22 December.

This year we concentrated on showcasing good news stories throughout the year as well as the schemes and teams which make up Darlington Borough Council Housing, all of which filled the Facebook page in the run up to the big day.

In 2024 we are committed to showcasing the above throughout the year and keeping you informed with our teams.



Christmas Parties

Christmas in the schemes are always full of parties and this year was no different. Residents were treated to an array of Christmas activities to celebrate the season.

This included a Christmas singer at Dinsdale Court, Christmas wreath making at Branksome Hall Drive and Christmas Lunch at Oban Court and Rockwell House.

All this plus so much more was showcased on our Facebook Page.



Building Our Team

Building your Housing Team

In August last year we introduced our 'Building Our Team' page in the Housing Connect to update you on how we strengthening the Housing team. Since then we have continued to invest in both staff and the wellbeing of residents of Darlington. In the last 6 months we have again welcomed new members to our team with new roles created adding to our success and strengthening our commitment to our tenants and leaseholders. We have also seen team members promoted to more senior roles which is a testament to their hard work. In this edition 3 new members of the Housing Team introduce themselves and describe what it's been like in the first few months of working in Housing.

Luke and Jessica are both new starters in their roles where as Holly has changed position within the Housing Team with all 3 enjoying a successful start to their new career.



Staff Training

Over the course of the last 12 months, Housing Teams have also been sent on group training to improve their skills and help with team building. This has included training on Equality and Diversity, Unlocking Construction as well as many more.

'I attended the Equality and Diversity training in August 2023 and it was fun and interactive but covered important information about such a vital topic. It will not only help me with tenants but with team members to ensure the working environment is a healthy and productive one. I can also adapt to the diverse needs of my colleagues and our tenants'.

Matthew

(Engagement Co-Ordinator)

'I started working at Darlington Borough Council in September of this year and I have never worked in such a positive environment.

Everyone is so approachable and genuinely cares about each other and our tenants.

My role as a Housing Contact Advisor has lots of different areas. We deal with rent calls, repairs, Anti-Social Behavior, Housing Allocations and Housing Options. It covers such a large area of things which means it's always interesting and something new every day.

My background has been in Executive Complaints for the last few years which is a huge help in my new role here at the Council. I feel I'm lucky to have found this role, I really enjoy helping people and the work family I have found is the cherry on the top of the cake'

Jessica Bell

(Housing Contact Advisor)



‘In August 2023 I joined Darlington Borough Council, stepping into the role of Housing Advisor with Housing Tenancy Management. Since joining I have been warmly welcomed by everyone in the team and it has been great working alongside such a dynamic group of people.

Taking the leap to a new workplace to try something new was worthwhile, and as a result, I have already started to develop new skills and improve my confidence.

So far, I have found working within the Council to be an engaging experience, each day is completely different, and I am always positively challenged. I am looking forward to my future with the Council and the further development to come.’

Luke Pilkington
(Housing Advisor)

‘Earlier this year I was given a secondment into the role as Housing Officer and I am now in that post in a full time role. I have worked at Darlington Borough Council for over 6 years. I started as a Customer Services Advisor in the Contact Team taking Housing calls as well as Streetscene and Environmental Health. In December 2019 I began working as a Housing Advisor before making the recent transition.

As a Housing Officer I manage the tenancies of a certain patch and deal with any tenancy related issues or queries. The role involves a lot of collaboration with other departments in the Council as well as external agencies. I work closely with tenants and correspond with them on a daily basis via email, phone and face to face.

I love the variety of my role. I feel like everyday is different and I enjoy going out to see people face to face. I like problem solving and feeling that I am helping people and making a difference.’

Holly Stewart
(Housing Officer)

Community Fund Bids

Do you have a good idea and want to make a difference to where you live?

Our Community Engagement Fund has been set up by the Housing Team and can help you do just that in 2024.

We want to continue to support community events and projects in areas where Housing Services own properties.

The Community Fund offers a financial contribution to support tenant led activities and projects that make a difference to the community and helps promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing.

Applications need to be from

Applications need to be from:

- Residents or Leaseholders as part of a group
- Voluntary groups
- Resident led community groups
- Benefit and make a difference to the lives of Darlington Council tenants, their families, and the wider community where we own properties

Applications must demonstrate some of the following outcomes

- A safe and caring community where residents know and support their neighbours
- The diverse needs within the community are supported
- More people active and involved in community events
- A place designed to thrive
- More people caring for the environment
- Enough support for people when needed
- More people healthy and independent
- Support the formation and activities of resident groups and tenant panels
- Build capacity within the community so more residents can be effectively involved

Tenant Panel approval

As of 2024 all applications will be approved by the Tenants Panel at a meeting who will help us in the decision making process to ensure that they are looked at fairly without any bias.

How to Apply?

Visit for more information: www.darlington.gov.uk/Housing/customer-engagement/Housing-services-community-fund/

Please print and email a copy to customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk

Or Post to:

Customer Engagement

Housing Services
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
Darlington
DL1 5QT



Recent Successful Bids

Festive Firthmoor

In December 2023 residents of Firthmoor applied for some funding to help with Festive Firthmoor which had been planned over a number of months. The event attracted hundreds of people with a large array of stalls, circus acts, fireworks and an appearance by Santa Claus himself.

Firthmoor is a perfect example of a thriving community and a fantastic showcase of how the money can benefit Council Tenants.



Branksome Hall Drive De Fib



A combination of the Community Fund and some fantastic fundraising contributed to the purchase of a potentially life saving De Fib machine at the site in the summer of 2023.

The Defibrillators are devices that apply an electric charge or current to the heart to restore a normal heartbeat.

“We are very proud of the tenants from Branksome Hall Drive for the fundraising they have achieved to buy our very own Defib. We are the first scheme to have our very own machine and I am so proud of what has been achieved through great team work.” **Scheme Manager Loraine Glenning.**

Havelock Centre Craft and Games

To help increase the footfall and use of the Havelock Centre residents applied for funding for indoor games including table tennis, pool and air hockey.

In Summer 2023 money was awarded to the centre for just that with £1000 funding equipment as well as necessary upgrades to craft equipment, utensils and stationary.

“Since buying a new table tennis table and pool table we have started a games club which takes place every Friday morning at the Havelock centre.

It has proved very popular with tenants of all ages and has brought in new people to join in. We have since seen a steady increase of tenants participating at the centre as a direct result of having the new sports equipment. There are around 10 new regular users of the centre.

We are planning to host pool, table tennis and darts competitions with other Schemes in the near future.” **Scheme Manager Carl**

A Day in the Life

Charlotte Moss Senior Contact Advisor



What does your job entail?

My role as the Senior Contact Advisor for Housing Contact means that I am responsible for assisting the Customer Service Team Leaders with the day to day running of the team. This includes being responsible for training all members of the team, both new starters and existing colleagues when new systems may come into place. As part of my job role it is important for me to consider how we can improve the service we are providing as well as how we can implement these ideas in the future.

What do you enjoy most about the role?

I have a keen interest in all things Housing, I enjoy expanding my knowledge and being able to help both colleagues and tenants. My job is very rewarding when I know I have had a positive impact and helped someone by resolving their query.

How long have you been at DBC and what roles have you done in that time?

I have worked at Darlington Borough Council for 5 years, I started in 2018 as an apprentice within the Income Management Team and then transitioned to Housing Contact in 2019. Since then I became the Senior Contact Advisor almost 2 years ago.

What training have you been involved in within the last 12 months?

Over the last 12 months I have taken part in courses which have benefitted my role. These have included Capability, Management of Change and Governance and political awareness management courses as well as courses on understanding your customer.

Take a leap into social media in 2024

Free workshop!



Thursday 29 February, 6 - 8pm, Dolphin Centre

Calling all clubs/groups and small businesses who have an interest in sustainability and climate change. Get more social in 2024 and take advantage of our FREE social media workshop.

If your group or small business is struggling to get their messages across or to grow and develop your membership or business, this course could be for you.

A FREE interactive workshop which includes:

- Overview of main social media platforms.
- Understanding the ever-changing algorithms.
- Content creation - what to post and time-saving tips.
- Understanding social media analytics.
- Ensuring your branding online.
- Copy of online content calendar template.

Places are limited and you can apply for a maximum of two per organisation/club. To register for your free place simply visit <https://tinyurl.com/yrzn5xmh>

Terms and Conditions are available on the Darlington Borough Council website; www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/learning-skills



Safety in Your Home

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibre that was widely used in construction and other industries until the late 1990's.

If asbestos inside buildings remains intact, it poses very little risk. It's only when damaged or disturbed that tiny asbestos fibers can be released into the air and enter your lungs when breathing. This again is fairly harmless, it is only when breathed in continuously that it becomes an issue.

Where is asbestos found?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from the 1930s but in particular from the 1960's onwards. Typical locations where asbestos may be found around the home are;

- Insulation boards such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall linings, bath panels and partitions
- Lagging used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers, mainly in public buildings and system built flats
- Sprayed coating used for fire protection of structural steel. Often found in system built flats, applied around the core of the building such as service ducts and lift shafts. Most sprayed asbestos has now either been removed or sealed.
- Others items that may contain asbestos include textured paints and plasters, plastic floor tiles, cushion flooring, roofing felts, tapes, ropes and blankets

Asbestos in Council Housing

All of our contractors have been trained to identify asbestos and may call in specialist asbestos contractors who will decide how to deal with the asbestos in your home. This can include removing or sealing the asbestos.

The Housing team carry out asbestos surveys in every void property so when new tenants move into their new home they can be assured all asbestos is safe, has been removed and/or encapsulated.

If the asbestos needs to be removed, it will be done following all health and safety laws and will only be removed if it is disturbed or damaged and is assessed as being a potential risk to health. This will all be done safely without any risk to the tenant.

If you are looking to carry out any DIY it may be worth checking with us if you think you will be disturbing asbestos in your property whilst you get permission for your home improvements.

If you would like some advice regarding asbestos call the Housing team on 01325 405333 or alternatively visit the HSE website on www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos.



XL Bully Dogs

The Government announced in 2023 that it has added the XL Bully breed type dog to the list of those banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. The new legislation applies in England and Wales.

From 31 December 2023, breeding, selling, exchanging, advertising, rehoming, gifting, abandoning, and allowing an XL Bully dog to stray is illegal. These dogs must also be muzzled and on a lead when in public.

From 1 February 2024 it is a criminal offence and a breach of your tenancy agreement, to own an XL Bully in England and Wales unless the owner has a Certificate of Exemption.

For information on the new rules please visit www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-for-the-ban-on-xl-bully-dogs and to apply for a certificate of exemption please visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-certificate-of-exemption-by-email-or-post-to-keep-an-xl-bully-dog.

Housing Services has a Housing Management Policy in place, and we work alongside our partner agencies to support and enforce any issues in relation to dog ownership. We allow pet(s) within most of our properties but should a tenant wish to have a pet within their home, they must first seek written permission from us. If you have previously been granted permission by Housing Services for this type of dog, after 1 February 2024 this permission will be automatically retracted, unless you are able to provide a copy of a certificate of exemption which confirms you are complying with the law. If any tenant is unsure about how to obtain a certificate of exemption, please contact Housing Services on 01325 405333 or visit the websites above.

Housing Services may request that a tenant re-homes their pet(s) should we substantiate any complaints about the pet(s), the condition of the property or garden.

We understand that for many people, owning a dog can be an important member of the family, a dog can bring a lot of joy, however, comes with a lot of responsibility. As a responsible dog owner, it is important you understand dog laws in order to protect yourself, your dog and others around you. Many dog owners may not realise there are so many laws relevant to them or will feel that the risks associated with these laws are low in terms of consequences.

If you have concerns about the continued illegal breeding of XL Bully breed types from 31 December 2023, please report to police on 101 or Darlington Borough Council's Licensing Department licensing@darlington.gov.uk or 01325 405888.

Alternatively, if you wish to discuss any aspect of pet management or have any questions in relation to the new law please contact Housing Services on 01325 405333 who can offer you support and assistance.



Tenants Panel

Highlights for 2024



What the Panel got up to in 2023

In 2023 the panel were the stars of their own podcast when Karen and Dawn took part in the Darlington Xtra podcast in November. As well as panel also gave feedback on important policies and documents such as the Fire Door Policy, Rent Increase Leaflet and Complaints Remedies Guidance.

Simon

'I am looking forward to learning about the public Housing sector regulations and helping to make a difference in my local community'.

Dawn

'I am looking forward to helping with the improvements near to where I live'.

Hugh

'I am looking forward to seeing more volunteers thanks to the work of the tenants panel. I love to see the Tenants Panel growing.'

Glynis

'I am looking forward to learning something new and volunteering for courses which expand my knowledge.'

Karen

'I am looking forward to taking part in the estate walkabouts in the coming year'.

Simon

'I am looking to continue my work with the online Tenants Panel. As I am now working when the tenants panel meet up it is great that I still have an opportunity to take part in such an important matter'

Online Tenants Panel



In 2024 Darlington Borough Council is looking to expand it's Tenants Panel to include online members.

This will mean Darlington Residents can contribute in ensuring that their community is listened too whilst doing so in the comfort of their own home.

The online tenants panel will open its doors to all communities in the Darlington area with the only qualification being a DBC resident with a passion for their local area.

Online Tenants Panel members can not only review literature and scrutinise our documents before being released to our tenants but also broaden their knowledge by taking part in training opportunities provided by Darlington Borough council and our training partners HQN and TPAS.

Other functions of the Online Tenants Panel will include;

- Attending Online Meetings
- Being a spokesperson for your neighborhood
- Contributing to our Housing Connect magazine, website and Facebook page
- Mystery Shopping
- Completing Surveys
- Promoting the tenants panel

If this is something you would be interested in you can get in touch via

customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk

Make 2024 the year you make a difference

Estate Walkabouts

Throughout 2024 the Housing Team will be out and about attending our estates on a regular basis and we look forward to seeing you there.

An inspection is an excellent opportunity for us to identify any issues that need dealing with and speak to tenants about their concerns or matters which they wish to bring to our attention. This will be attended by a Housing Officer who will be joined on some walkabouts with other organisations and agencies such as Street Scene, Civic Enforcement and Police.

Our work with tenants and other agencies will help improve local areas and ensure everyone is surrounded by a clear environment.

During the Inspections we will look at issues including;

- Litter and FlyTipping
- Property Damage
- Highways Issues

Please see our website via the link below for dates and times with further information to be shared on our Facebook Page, close to each walkabout date.

www.darlington.gov.uk/estate-inspections-2024



Estates to be Inspected

Estates to be Inspected		Day	January	March	May	July	September	November
Haughton	Redhall	Monday	08/01/2024	04/03/2024	06/05/2024	08/07/2024	02/09/2024	04/11/2024
		Monday	15/01/2024	11/03/2024	13/05/2024	15/07/2024	09/09/2024	11/11/2024
Cockerton	North Riverside	Tuesday	02/01/2024	05/03/2024	07/05/2024	09/07/2024	03/09/2024	05/11/2024
		Tuesday	09/01/2024	12/03/2024	14/05/2024	16/07/2024	10/09/2024	12/11/2024
		Tuesday	16/01/2024	19/03/2024	21/05/2024	23/07/2024	17/09/2024	19/11/2024
		Tuesday	23/01/2024	26/03/2024	28/05/2024	30/07/2024	24/09/2024	26/11/2024
Hundens Lane/Dinsdale Crescent	Lascelles	Thursday	04/01/2024	07/03/2024	02/05/2024	04/07/2024	05/09/2024	07/11/2024
		Thursday	11/01/2024	14/03/2024	09/05/2024	11/07/2024	12/09/2024	14/11/2024
		Thursday	18/01/2024	21/03/2024	16/05/2024	18/07/2024	19/09/2024	21/11/2024
		Thursday	25/01/2024	28/03/2024	23/05/2024	25/07/2024	26/09/2024	28/11/2024
Albert Hill	Branksome	Thursday	04/01/2024	07/03/2024	02/05/2024	04/07/2024	05/09/2024	07/11/2024
		Thursday	11/01/2024	14/03/2024	09/05/2024	11/07/2024	12/09/2024	14/11/2024
		Thursday	18/01/2024	21/03/2024	16/05/2024	18/07/2024	19/09/2024	21/11/2024
Bank Top	Hurworth & Sadberge	Friday	05/01/2024	08/03/2024	10/05/2024	05/07/2024	06/09/2024	01/11/2024
		Friday	12/01/2024	15/03/2024	17/05/2024	12/07/2024	13/09/2024	08/11/2024
		Friday	19/01/2024	22/03/2024	24/05/2024	19/07/2024	20/09/2024	15/11/2024
Firthmoor	Lingfield and McMullen Road	Friday	05/01/2024	08/03/2024	10/05/2024	05/07/2024	06/09/2024	01/11/2024
		Friday	12/01/2024	15/03/2024	17/05/2024	12/07/2024	13/09/2024	08/11/2024
		Friday	19/01/2024	22/03/2024	24/05/2024	19/07/2024	20/09/2024	15/11/2024

New Council Housing

If you have driven past our Neasham Road site lately you will start to see our first properties taking shape on our biggest new build site to date.

We are very pleased to announce that our first phase of properties will be ready in spring / summer 2024. Phase one will have the following available:

- 4 x 2 bedroom Flats (ground floor and 1st floor)
- 4 x 3 bedroom Houses
- 4 x 2 bedroom Houses
- 1 x 4 Bedroom House

The Housing Team make regular site visits to check progress and ensure everything is going to plan. As you can see by the front cover this is also a hands-on experience with our Housing Team Leader, Becci Gardner-Queen helping the bricklayers out in the warmer weather!

Housing Services are very excited about this project and are very proud to announce that one of our streets will be named 'Arthur Wharton Way'. Arthur Wharton was from Ghana and moved to Darlington in 1883 where he began an amazing sports career becoming the first black professional footballer, the first official fastest man, a professional cricketer and a rugby player. We think this is a fitting tribute to an iconic Darlington man.

The whole scheme aims to be completed by 2025 and to be able to apply all applicants will need a live Darlington HomeSearch account. If you still need to apply you can visit the HomeSearch link www.darlingtonhomesearch.housingjigsaw.co.uk and complete your details online.

If you have already applied we would suggest logging on and checking that we have all of your documents up to date and your account is active.

Please visit our website for more information and frequently asked questions which will help you

www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/applying-for-a-council-home





How to Contact us

It has never been easier to contact us.

You can log onto your **Darlington Home Online** account via www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/darlington-home-online

- Check your rent balance and transactions
- Make online rent payments
- Report repairs
- Send messages to our Housing team
- View and print your rent statements

**DO IT
ONLINE**

Contact us via email at housing@darlington.gov.uk

You can contact the Housing team via phone as well as other teams with the numbers below

Housing Services

01325 405333

StreetScene & Environmental Services

01325 405111

Transport & Projects (inc parking)

01325 405222

Planning & Property

01325 405777

Civic Enforcement & Anti-Social Behaviour

01325 406999

Council Housing inc Homelessness

01325 405333



Housing Benefit

01325 405444

Council Tax

01325 405555

Business Rates

01325 405666

Adult Social Care

01325 406111

Children & Families

Social Care

01325 406222

Complaints, Comments & Compliments

01325 406777

Lifeline Services

01325 406888



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HOME ONLINE**

Pay, Update, Message, Book



SAVE TIME, DO IT ONLINE