

Housing

CONNECT

August 2021 | Edition 12



HELP FOR ONLINE LEARNING

PAGES 4 & 5

INSIDE



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



BREAD AND BUTTER THING



HOUSING HEROES



ALLINGTON WAY PROGRESS



COMMUNITY WALKABOUTS

www.darlington.gov.uk/housing



Kevin Nicholson

As the Cabinet member with responsibility for Health and Housing I have been so proud of our teams who have been, and continue to work tirelessly to support our tenants during the pandemic. I have also been so impressed to read about our tenants who volunteer and take an active part in their local communities.

As we start to emerge from lockdown, I hope that we can all get back to the things that we have missed out on. Our shared communal areas have started to open again, and I hope that everyone can start to create some amazing memories together.

As difficult as things have been at times, I am optimistic about our future and for the plans we have to transform Darlington Housing Services. As always we will continue to involve and empower our tenants, ensuring they are at the heart of everything we do.

Darlington Housing Services has a long history of working with our tenants to help shape their communities and influence decisions about their homes and the services that we provide.

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

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The Bread and Butter Thing



Over the course of the last few months, The Bread and Butter Thing, a charity aimed at reducing food waste has been working wonders throughout Darlington.

Weekly hubs have been set up at Skerne Park, Firth Moor, Harrowgate Hill, Branksome, Red Hall as well as brand new site in Eastbourne Park which opened in April 2021.

TBBT's affordable food service means that for just £7.50, members receive food goods worth a minimum of £35. Each week members get a bag of fresh fruit and veg, chilled items for the fridge like meat or dairy products and also a bag of staples such as pasta, rice and snacks. The food varies from week to week depending on what's available from suppliers but it's always good quality and value for money.

With different collections in different areas of the town families do not have to travel far and with a weekly pick up it can be used again and again.

The charity is supported by volunteers which have included housing officers, councillors, MP's and employees of local schools.

Hubs in Darlington

Harrowgate Hill Primary School,
Thompson Street West, DL3 0HZ,
Monday 2:15pm

Skerne Park Community Centre,
Coleridge Gardens, DL1 5AN,
Monday 12 noon

Eastbourne Park Community Hub,
Eastbourne Park, DL1 4AY,
Thursday 2pm

Windsor Court,
Newton Lane, DL3 9HF,
Tuesday 1:30pm

Corporation Road Primary School,
Corporation Road, DL3 6AR,
Wednesday 2:15pm

Red Hall Primary School,
Headingly Crescent, DL1 2ST,
Thursday 1:30pm

Firthmoor Community Centre,
Burnside Road, DL1 4SU,
Friday 1:30pm

Skerne Park laptops



Councillor Nicholson and members of the Councils Housing Team visited Skerne Park to donate 45 laptops to families to provide help for online learning.

With funding from Darlington Borough Council and the Department for Education the computers were given to aid children in this difficult and challenging time.

Pictured are Councillor Kevin Nicholson, Housing Team Leader Becci Gardner-Queen, Housing Management Officer Rachel Foster and Skerne Park Assistant Head Jamie Dillon.

'Having this amazing donation from DBC housing has transformed the schools ability to provide online learning for our children. Devices before this time were not readily available for our children nor were the devices they did have available fit for an educational purpose. We feel that with this outstanding support it has definitely closed the device deprivation gap and hopefully placed our pupils on a more level playing field when it comes to remote learning. I cannot thank Matthew Hufford, Becci Gardner-Queen and the team at DBC enough for this amazing contribution to our families.'

Kate Chisholm – Skerne Park Academy Head

This will make a massive difference, our daughter was missing school and seeing her friends and this laptop will really help as she will be able to engage with her friends on Zoom and continue learning. The little tablet that we had previously kept freezing so this is brilliant

Miss E Liddle – Parent at Skerne Park

"I'm delighted that we have been able to support families in this way, our Housing teams work tirelessly to support our communities. I know how much these laptops will help to support young people and their families at this challenging time"

Councillor Nicholson



More school laptops!



Following the success of the donation of laptops to Skerne Park earlier this year the housing department used their engagement fund to donate 75 laptops to local schools in Darlington.

7 schools which included Red Hall, St John's, St George's, Whinfield, The Education Village, Holy Family and St Teresa's were given the laptops for children of council tenants to help aid home working after what has been a difficult year for all.

The laptops are part of a scheme by housing tenancy management to find out more about families of young children and what

matters most to them moving forward and how DBC can assist.

Following the delivery a young parents forum was set up with volunteers which will tackle issues being faced in 2021.

You can find out more about the Young Persons Forum by emailing customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk or calling 01325 406682

Pictured with the parents and students are Housing Officers Dean Morris, Naomi Dixon, Amanda Robinson, Linda Johnstone and Ricki Hotton as well as Engagement Co-Ordinator Matthew Hufford.

Anthony King

With engagement continuing to be a large focus at Darlington Borough Council it has never been more important for our tenants to have a voice.



We currently have a strong Tenants Panel in place who are essential in the way that we move forward.

Anthony is one such member, joining the panel a couple of years ago. 'I wanted to be a part of the panel because it gives me a chance to meet people in housing and diverse panel members. I also wanted to influence housing policies and where I live.

It also gives me and others the opportunity to challenge any matters that arise so they can be dealt with quickly.

Customer engagement and feedback is the biggest assets to a housing team so they speak with tenants to understand the needs of the community.

'What I would say to potential new panel members is that everyone is very welcoming and it's a relaxed, friendly and positive environment.

Any concerns and ideas can be addressed and we can help shape the way housing is run.

If you want to become a member of the tenants panel and perform such key roles as estate inspections, fire safety checks, reviewing literature that DBC create, training courses, online surveys and monthly meetings please contact the team on **01325 406682** or contact us via email at **customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk**

Meet your

Ricki Hotton

Ricki has been a Housing Management Officer for 4 years and looks after Red Hall and Haughton. As part of his role Ricki is looking to move forward with customer engagement including ;



- Starting up regular estate inspections
- Organising community litter picks
- Encouraging multi agency working with tenants including Police, Fire, ASB team via PACT meetings
- Encouraging use of digital platforms
- Arrange future events and obtain customer feedback on their estate

You can contact your housing officer by calling 01325 405333 or emailing housing@darlington.gov.uk

Amanda Robinson

Amanda Robinson has been in the role for 5 years and looks after Lascelles, Hundens Lane and parts of Springfield and Whinfi Id.



As part of her role in 2021 Amanda is looking to introduce focus groups in each of her areas to gain an understanding of ongoing issues.

"We want to establish a clear focus on their issues and give residents a chance to air their views in which they can make a real contribution, to listen, promise and deliver."

You can contact your housing officer by calling 01325 405333 or emailing housing@darlington.gov.uk

Housing Officers...

Rachel Foster

Rachel Foster has just taken over as Housing Management Officer for Skerne Park, Bank Top, Hurworth and Sadberge after previously working as a Furnished Tenancy Officer.

As part of her role this year Rachel is keen to engage with communities in her area.

'With all the restrictions in place this year customer engagement has been difficult but I will be looking at ways to interact with everyone virtually before things start to open up later in the year.

You can contact your housing officer by calling 01325 405333 or emailing housing@darlington.gov.uk



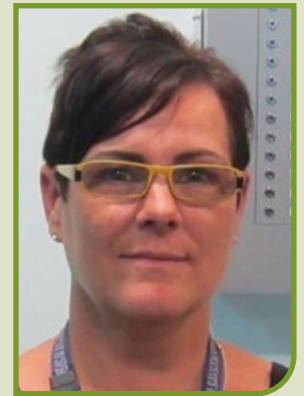
Linda Johnston

Linda Johnston has worked in the Housing Department for the last 16 years and looks after Cockerton, Heighington, North Road and Park Place.

As part of her role in 2021 Linda is looking to encourage tenants to engage interactively and introduce teams to carry out residents meetings.

Linda is also keen to continue with litter picking making sure her areas are kept as clean as possible.

You can contact your housing officer by calling 01325 405333 or emailing housing@darlington.gov.uk



Dean Morris

Dean Morris has been in the role for 5 years and looks after Firthmoor, MSG and Lingfield.

As part of his role in 2021 Dean will be engaging with all tenants virtually via virtual PACT meetings and organise virtual tours of new build sites.

There will also be a greater focus on digital inclusion within sheltered schemes as well as continuing with community litter picks when able to.

You can contact your housing officer by calling 01325 405333 or emailing housing@darlington.gov.uk



Naomi Dixon

Naomi is new to the role of Housing Management Officer, but has held various roles within the Housing Team for over 17 years. As part of her role Naomi looks after Rise Carr, Branksome, Harrowgate Hill and Albert Hill.

As part of her role this year Naomi is keen to engage with communities in her area. Naomi hopes to start programmes of regular estate inspections and keeping her areas clean, clear and tidy.

'I want to promote engagement with tenants and encourage co-operation and joint working so tenants can be proud of where they live and actively want to participate in community improvement'

You can contact your housing officer by calling 01325 405333 or emailing housing@darlington.gov.uk



In the next edition we will be looking at the Housing Plus team

Praise for staff providing 'Lifeline' to residents

Council staff have been praised for providing an essential 'Lifeline' to residents across Darlington, particularly amid the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

More than 3,360 residents rely on support from the council's Lifeline team, which gives users the freedom to live independently with the added security of knowing that help is always there if needed. If you are living alone, unwell or caring for someone Lifeline could be the service for you.

Councillor Kevin Nicholson, Darlington Borough Council's cabinet member for health and housing, said:

"Our Lifeline team does an extraordinary job; they are always available to support our residents all year round. Our Lifeline programme helps people to have independent lives and gives confidence that should you need help, it is only a call away.

"Throughout the pandemic our Lifeline staff have been on the frontline doing an exceptional job. It is staggering to see that the team has received 47,417 calls for support so far this year and have attended 3,934 incidents.

"I am proud of what they do for our communities, ensuring that the most vulnerable have a lifeline in these challenging times."

This year, between the start of January and the end of June, the Lifeline team has achieved the following:

Phone calls received - 47,417

Incidents attended - 3,934

Average response time - 12min 10seconds

New equipment installs - 241

Activities delivered - 748

**Welfare calls made by
scheme managers - 67,434**



Lifeline staff Nicola Mattinson, Tom Ward and Julie Paton with Cllr Kevin Nicholson

Early response and intervention can often mean that the Response Officers assist someone before their situation deteriorates, which can sometimes reduce the need for a hospital visit or admission.

The team has also taken additional steps to make sure that users have been kept as safe as possible during the pandemic, which have included ensuring all members of the team have had their second COVID vaccinations.

A roadmap has also been produced which reflects government guidance but is relevant to our group living settings. For example we have worked closely with our Move More team to restart our exercise classes and non-essential services such as private cleaners and hairdressers.

All of this for a cost of £5.98 per week with free installation and no extra cost per visit.

For more information or to start the process of getting equipment installed call our Lifeline Team on 01325 406888 where a free no obligation demonstration can be organised or visit our website at www.darlington.gov.uk/lifeline

If you are working with Adult Social Care then the Lifeline Service can be assessed and referred for as part of the person's care plan and if someone is receiving a reablement service from RIACT they can also receive up to six weeks free Lifeline support.

FIRE SAFETY IN THE HOME



Follow these helpful tips to protect yourself and your family from deadly **CHIP PAN FIRES**

ALWAYS

- Keep the oven, hob and grill clean – a build up fat and grease can easily catch fire .
- Use a thermostat-controlled deep-fat fryer, which will make sure the fat doesn't get too hot.
- Dry the chips before putting them in the pan
- Test the temperature of the oil by putting in a small piece of bread. If the bread crisps up quickly the oil is ready.

NEVER

- Leave cooking unattended
- Fill the pan more than a third full with fat or oil
- Put food in the pan if the oil begins to give off smoke. Turn off the heat and leave the oil to cool otherwise it could catch fire



IF A PAN DOES CATCH FIRE

- Don't move it or throw water on it
- Do turn off the heat if you can do it safely



15 hours of fun for your 2 year old!



Did you know, your child could be entitled to 15 hours of free early education a week?

2 year olds living in families in receipt of certain benefits are eligible, as are 2 year olds who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or who attract Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Looked After 2 year olds.

You do not have to buy additional hours or additional services in order to access your free early education place. Once you are eligible for free early education, you will remain eligible.

Your child will experience a varied and stimulating range of play and early learning activities, including:

- learning by playing and exploring;
- creative and critical thinking;
- socialising and making friends; and
- having fun, in a safe and nurturing environment.

For further information and an eligibility check, please go to www.darlington.gov.uk/early-years-funding or you can ring the Darlington Families' Information Service on 01325 406222 (option 7) or email pfis@darlington.gov.uk. They can provide you with a list of registered childcare providers in Darlington.

They are waiting for your call!



Supporting you back into work.

With job searches being particularly hard over the last year North East based Routes to Work is here to help.

Routes to Work is a scheme for those in the Tees Valley and supports those unemployed and looking for work in the region.

If you're over the age of 30 and your personal circumstances make it difficult to find a job then Routes to Work can help. RTW provides a range of support depending on your individual needs to

help you overcome any barriers and support you back into the workplace.

The scheme offers one to one tailored support from a dedicated key-worker who will work with you to put together a plan, get you the right skills and training and find the right job for you.

To find out more about Routes to Work contact the Darlington Office on 01325 406170 or via email at onestopshop@darlington.gov.uk

A day in the life: Becci Gardner-Queen

Housing Team Leader

Becci Gardner-Queen is the Housing Team Leader who has rose through the ranks here at Darlington Borough Council. With more than 17 years' experience Becci started her new role in late 2020. In a particularly busy time for the Housing Team Becci gives us an insight into her day to day working life.

What does your job entail?

I am responsible for the day to day operation of the Housing Tenancy Management team including Housing Officers and Housing Advisors who run the day to day tenancy issues across Darlington. This includes advertising and allocating vacant properties, inspecting empty properties and scheduling work.

We are also responsible of taking care of the estates through regular inspections and working with partner agencies.

I support the team to enable them to provide an efficient Housing Service.

What do you enjoy the most about your role?

I enjoy seeing our Housing Officers help to make the communities thrive for our residents and seeing the hard work that goes into this. Working in Housing is always rewarding as we rehouse people who may have found themselves in difficult situations, watching them succeed and sustain a successful tenancy is very satisfying.

How long have you worked at Darlington Borough Council and what roles did you do before?

I have worked at Darlington Borough Council for 17 years, starting as a Modern Apprentice in our Housing Options team. From there I have worked in Housing Administration then transferring to Building Services as a maintenance planner. More recently I was a Housing Officer looking after Skerne Park, Bank Top, Hurworth and Sadberge.

I thoroughly enjoyed this role and gained a lot of experience enabling me to become Housing Team Leader.

A
DAY
IN
THE
LIFE



Darlington Home Online

Darlington Home Online is Darlington Borough Councils online service for named tenants. It's quick and easy and once signed up to Darlington Home Online you will be able to

- Check your account balance and make payments
- Report Repairs and view your repair history
- Update your personal information
- Order a new rent card
- View rent account statements

To get started all you need is an email address, internet access and a device to register for Darlington Home Online as well as your tenancy number.



HOUSING

You can pay your rent, report repairs, contact the housing team and more.



Pay, Update, Message, Book



SAVE TIME, DO IT ONLINE

Have we got your up to date contact details?

To give our customers the best support we can it is important we have up to date contact details. Have you changed your telephone number or email address? If the answer is yes or not sure, email us at housing@darlington.gov.uk and we will update your details.

You might want to tell us you have difficulty hearing when our tradesmen call at your home. We will make sure we knock louder. We aim to provide the right services in the right way to everyone.



**DIRECT
Debit**

DIRECT DEBIT – make the switch today

Why not take the strain out of paying your rent by switching to direct debit. It's easy to set up and you will never have to worry about paying your rent again.

You can download a form from our website:

www.darlington.gov.uk/media/12318/new-dd-mandate-october-2020.pdf

Housing heroes

As part of the Housing Facebook Page the Housing Team have introduced an award which celebrates the extraordinary generosity of our council tenants.

Housing Heroes aims to celebrate those who have made a difference, no matter how big or small.

Entries in the opening couple of months have included some of our armies of litter pickers who are key in keeping the streets clean and tidy, volunteers from the Bread and Butter Thing who have helped the charity thrive in Darlington and residents who have helped out during the Pandemic.

An example of this is the Roxby Knitters who have been busy making baby hats and blankets which will be delivered to Darlington Memorial Hospital.

If you know anyone who is going above and beyond let us know and they can become the next 'Housing Hero'.

To nominate a Housing Hero you can email us at housing@darlington.gov.uk with a short description of why you think our residents deserve to become a housing hero.





Applications for community funding

This year we will be continuing our Community Fund for worthwhile causes around the town

If you are a group of residents or leaseholders, or a voluntary or community group with a good idea that will make a difference to the lives of Darlington Council tenants and the wider community of council housing estates the Community Fund may be something which can be applied for.

Applications can be made for funding of upto £1000 and will go through a panel to determine which are successful.

Previous applications have included funds for projects such as the Roxby Rotavators a group of amateur gardeners within our vibrant sheltered scheme with the aim of improving the garden area in which they live. The residents worked alongside StreetScene and their Management Officer to secure funding which helped improved the overall horticulture of the complex.

In addition to this Roxby Court was given funding so that all of the scheme was given Deaf Awareness Training to assist with a hearing impaired tenant thanks to the community fund showing that an application can have a profound effect on residents lives.

Any Questions

If you have any queries or require any assistance in your application please don't hesitate to contact the Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator by email at customerservices@darlington.gov.uk or telephone on 01325 405333

How to apply

Simply visit our website and complete the online application.

Applications can be sent directly to the Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator at customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk

Alternatively you can send an application form via mail to

Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator
Housing Services
Town Hall
Darlington
DL15QT



Allington Way progress

Our latest new homes are well under way in Allington Way.

The site which is phase 2 in the Lancaster Close properties is due for completion in early 2021 and will consist of 24 apartments, 28 three bed houses and 3 four bed houses.

During construction we have documented the fantastic progress which has been made with a

series of drone pictures which have been taken on a weekly basis.

The pictures show the true scale of the project and the hard work that has gone into creating our newest properties.

Allington Way properties will be released closer to the time and you can register via our homefinder page.



Find us on Facebook



In December 2020 the Housing Facebook was launched as new way for the housing team to keep in contact with housing residents.

The Facebook page was opened with a message from Councillor Nicholson and aims to keep you fully up to date with all things housing.

On our page we provide a mix of useful information, adverts for Council services and good news stories from around Darlington.

Included into this is 'Housing Heroes' which celebrates housing tenants that have gone the extra mile for their community.

We want our Facebook Page to be a celebration of Darlington's diverse community and we want to celebrate good news stories and resident who have gone that extra mile.

For more information visit www.facebook.com/DBCHousing

Community walkabouts to return...

With restrictions lifting the Housing Team are looking to reintroduce regular estate inspections in all parts of the town.

Over the course of the summer comprehensive checks will be put in place with dates listed on the Housing Facebook Page to ensure that hotspots are regularly checked and cleared.

The Housing team will be joined by StreetScene and Civic Enforcement to crack down on problems area and we will be inviting local Councillors to maintain a relationship which will work for all parties.



We will also look at the possibility of inviting council tenants, who will provide vital information, once restrictions have fully lifted in the near future giving residents opportunity to suggest improvements to estates.

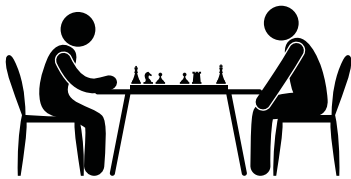
Inspections should normally last for approximately 1 hour and will concentrate on visual issues such as graffiti, garden rubbish, StreetScene issues and street signs.

Around the schemes

Lockdown restrictions ease

With lockdown restrictions easing in the last few months, we have been able to open the schemes in line with government guidance.

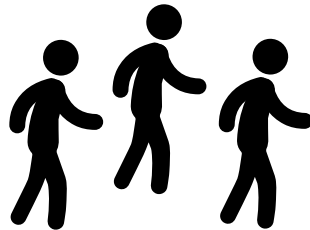
This has meant that residents have been able to interact socially and get back to some of the things that they love best including arts and crafts, gardening, exercise groups and much more. It's been a long time coming and brilliant to see.



Planned indoor entertainment and activities up to a maximum of 6 participants.

These are arranged and booked via a scheme manager and are subject to specific scheme capacity.

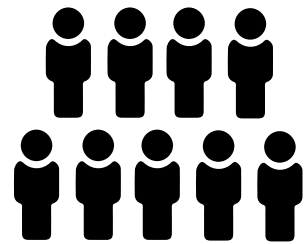
All Covid safe arrangements are in place and scheme managers will support any tenants that may be apprehensive



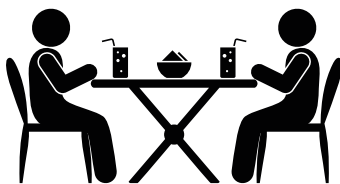
Organised physical activities delivered via Move More and booked via a scheme manager.

These sessions are for a maximum of 6 participants.

All Covid safe arrangements are in place and scheme managers will support any tenants that may be apprehensive



Up to 30 people limit outdoors and visitors welcome to use the outside areas for this but tenants and families are asked to arrange this via the scheme manager



Extra care only - Lunchtime meal to restart in the communal dining area.

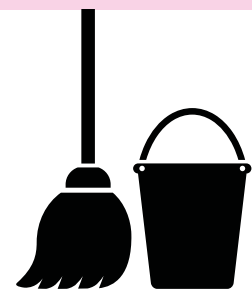
The scheme manager will be working alongside the tenants, Making Space care and the catering team to arrange 6 person/two household sittings



Planned outdoor entertainment and events-to include Bingo, performances, gardening groups etc.

These are subject to specific scheme arrangements and weather permitting.

Scheme managers will regularly update tenants with 'what's on'



All non essential services such as private cleaners and hairdressers are welcome to restart their services to tenants homes.

All government and building guidelines must be adhered to and the scheme manager should be made aware of these visits to enable these to be managed safely



Liz Blundell

Earlier this year Scheme Manager Liz Blundell retired from Lifeline Services after 6 years with her last day on the 30th April. Instead of a collection Liz asked for people to donate to a charity of their choice.

'All Charities are struggling at the moment and all have a special meaning to someone. My charity is British Heart Foundation, my family and friends have supported this charity for many years, and I continue to support it at every opportunity.

All at the Housing Team wish Liz a happy retirement.





Sunny Days Wordsearch

B	S	S	L	I	I	S	R	C	B	L	K	O	H
E	P	U	A	A	E	A	T	S	H	E	R	L	E
I	A	N	E	E	V	A	N	A	E	B	A	E	E
H	D	G	S	C	I	I	A	C	N	T	P	C	A
A	E	L	A	G	A	N	T	E	B	G	H	A	H
L	C	A	G	S	S	M	C	S	T	I	T	N	O
S	I	S	S	S	U	B	P	R	E	I	U	D	L
Y	C	S	U	P	N	A	H	I	M	F	O	T	I
A	E	E	N	R	S	R	H	T	N	K	S	H	D
R	C	S	H	D	H	B	E	D	A	G	E	P	A
I	R	E	A	N	I	E	N	C	A	C	C	A	Y
E	E	D	T	A	N	C	I	B	U	C	K	E	T
N	A	I	D	S	E	U	I	M	L	E	L	U	R
U	M	C	E	B	E	E	R	G	A	R	D	E	N

- SAND
- FESTIVAL
- BUCKET
- BEACH
- RAYS
- BARBECUE
- SPADE
- SUN HAT
- SUNGLASSES
- SUNSHINE
- SOUTH PARK
- ICE CREAM
- CAMPING
- HOLIDAY
- BEER GARDEN

To be in with a chance of a £30 Love2Shop voucher simply fill in the wordsearch and return to **Housing Tenancy Management, Town Hall, Feethams Darlington, DL1 5QT**

Wordsearch Winner

Hillary Morison won our Christmas competition last year, successfully renaming our online portal 'Darlington Home Online'.



Name Address

.....

Postcode Telephone number