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**Report of Lynn Hall, Strategic Housing Manager, Housing Solutions, Durham County Council**

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update of the housing and health related projects that Housing Solutions have delivered over the past year, as well as any planned initiatives, which align to the priorities outlined in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 2 A presentation providing a summary of the report will be presented by the Strategic Manager for Housing at the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting.

**Executive summary**

- 3 A report was last presented to the Board in September 2021 by the Strategy and Partnerships Housing Manager, which provided an overview of the work delivered and planned by Housing with a health-related theme or output.
- 4 In July 2019, the council adopted a revised Housing Strategy for County Durham. The two main aims of the Strategy are 'Better housing support for County Durham residents' and 'More and better homes', with health and rurality being cross cutting themes. Measures are being introduced to ensure a wide range of quality homes are built to meet the needs of residents. Opportunities for the improvement of physical accessibility, affordability and suitability are key factors when considering the impact of housing on the health of the local population.
- 5 As part of the Housing Strategy, Cabinet also approved a revised three-year Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, running up to 2022. A full review of homelessness is currently being carried out with a view to produce a revised strategy for implementation in 2023.
- 6 The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy has three strategic priorities: Starting Well, Living Well and Ageing Well. The projects and initiatives within Housing Solutions cuts across each of these, as set out below: -

### **Starting Well**

7 Key projects include:

- Administration of Disabled Facilities Grants for children aged 19 and under
- Remain Safe – target hardening initiative supported financially by the Stronger Families Programme, to support children and their families to live safely and securely in their home
- Young Persons Joint Protocol

### **Living Well**

8 Key projects include:

- Disabled Facilities Grant Adaptations
- Fuel Poverty
- Hospital Discharge
- Reducing hospital discharge
- Domestic abuse
- Rough sleeping
- Accommodation for vulnerable people
- Joint working with Registered Housing Providers
- Selective Licensing

### **Ageing Well**

9 Key projects include:

- Council New Build Programme
- New housing for older people
- Needs Based Accommodation Programme Board

### **Recommendation**

10 Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to:

- a) Note the content of the report

## **Background**

- 11 Housing and a positive home environment is a key determinant to health and wellbeing. Poor quality housing is a risk to health - living in housing which is in poor condition, cold, overcrowded, or unsuitable will adversely affect the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It can cause or exacerbate a range of underlying health conditions, from falls to poor mental health.
- 12 Housing plays an integral part in the health of individuals and the general population. The suitability of homes for people with a long-term condition, or the ability to adapt homes to changing needs as they get older makes a big difference to wellbeing, physical health, and independence. It is important that all homes in County Durham provide a safe, inclusive and secure environment for people to live and grow within their local community.
- 13 The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy has three strategic priorities: Starting Well, Living Well and Ageing Well. The projects and initiatives within Housing Solutions cut across each of these and are detailed below.

### **Strategic Priority 1 – Starting Well**

- 14 Social factors including poverty and poor housing can act against the ability of the parents and families to create a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for their children. Children who are exposed to adverse events such as domestic abuse or alcohol misuse can be affected negatively, both physically and mentally, throughout their childhood into adult life. The paragraphs below set out the projects and initiatives that help contribute towards this priority.

#### **Adaptations for children**

- 15 During 2021/22, Housing Solutions approved 33 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) for children aged 19 and under, which is an increase of 50% from 2020/21. These grants will fund suitable adaptations and will enable those children to live more independently in their own home, which will help to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

#### **Target Hardening for families**

- 16 Housing Solutions co-ordinates the target hardening initiative 'Remain Safe', which is a partnership approach to support victims of domestic abuse, harassment and hate crime to remain safely in their own home or make a new home secure for themselves and their family. The Stronger Families Programme contributes financially, by paying up to

£250 per case where children who are currently working with them are involved. During 2021/22 there were 228 Remain Safe cases assisted under the initiative, of which 121 cases (53%), were supported by Stronger Families. Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) Funding received in 2021 enabled the Remain Safe target hardening to be extended to victims of domestic abuse moving on from refuge accommodation into their own home, (5 cases out of the 228).

### **Young Person's Joint Protocol**

- 17 Housing Solutions are working closely with Children's Services to further develop the joint protocol for 16- and 17-year-olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. In 2021/22, 118, 16 and 17 year-olds presented to housing solutions as homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 18 Housing Solutions jointly fund with Children's and Young Peoples Services Hedley House, which is a supported accommodation project for 16 to 21 year olds. During 2021/22 49 referrals were made from Housing Solutions to Hedley House, of which 12 were aged 16 or 17.

### **Strategic Priority 2 – Living Well**

- 19 While the length of life of local people continues to increase, the years that people can expect to live a high quality of life sees significant differences across County Durham. Housing conditions can influence our physical and mental health, for example, a warm and dry house can improve general health outcomes and specifically reduce respiratory conditions and good housing promotes positive mental health.
- 20 Alcohol and substance misuse causes harm to people's health including their mental health and can impact on the ability of individuals to access or sustain employment and housing. The paragraphs below set out the projects and initiatives that help contribute towards this priority.

### **Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Adaptations**

- 21 As well as DFG's for children, during 2021/22 Housing Solutions approved a total of 812 grants, an increase of 12% from 2020/21. 594 (73%) were for people aged 60 and over, 185 (23%) were people aged 20 to 59 and 33 (4%) were for people aged 19 and under. These grants will fund adaptations to help people to remain safely in their own homes and could range from installing ramps, handrails, ground floor bathrooms etc.

## **Fuel Poverty**

- 22 Housing Solutions coordinates the delivery of the corporate Fuel Poverty Strategy and action plan overseen by the County Durham Energy and Fuel Poverty Partnership. This is a multi-agency partnership that uses countywide networks to help promote awareness and uptake of the fuel poverty grants and assistance.
- 23 Housing Solutions oversee the delivery of the Warm and Healthy Homes (WHH) project. WHH is a Public Health commissioned service that commenced in 2017 in response to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) NG6<sup>1</sup> guideline. This guideline makes recommendations on how to reduce the risk of excess winter deaths and ill health associated with living in a cold home. The aim is to help meet a range of public health and other goals, including:
- Reducing preventable excess winter death rates
  - Improving health and wellbeing among vulnerable groups
  - Reducing pressure on health and social care services
  - Reducing 'fuel poverty' and the risk of fuel debt or being disconnected from gas and electricity supplies (including self-disconnection)
  - Government grants to improve the energy efficiency of owner occupiers for new boilers, central heating and insulation measures available to households in receipt of a qualifying benefit or having a cold related illness and a household income less than £31,000.
- 24 The WHH project works with GP surgeries to contact patients who have a cold related illness. In June 2022 the project received the national "Energy Champions of the Year" award for providing help ranging from boiler servicing, repairs, replacements, home insulation measures and support with reducing energy bills. In 2021/22 11,327 patients have accessed the service to receive help and support with their energy bills.
- 25 Between April 2021 and March 2022, a total of 1,364 fuel poor households have been assisted and received an ECO3 grant for energy efficiency measures equating to over £2.3m of external funding drawn down into the county. Over the same period the Managing Money Better (MMB) Service has assisted 694 low-income households to save over £66,000 off their energy bills.

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<sup>1</sup> NICE Guidelines (NG6): Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng6>

26 The team also provide advice and assistance with fuel and food vouchers, boiler servicing, warm homes discount and winter fuel payments.

### **Hospital discharge**

27 Housing Solutions has implemented a Hospital Discharge Protocol to ensure that patients who are ready for discharge are referred and assessed in a timely manner.

28 Over the past year a dedicated duty to refer co-ordinator role was employed and both internal and external process were improved in relation to CDDFT referrals where the person was identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness.

29 Housing solutions is involved in the daily interagency hospital discharge meeting, which includes the discharge management team. This includes a daily call between CDDFT hospital medical professionals, Adult Services Hospital Social Work Managers, Mental Health, Commissioning Services and housing. The purpose of the daily meeting is to discuss cases where patients are ready for discharge but require involvement from another service, e.g., Social Services, a care home or care package or other assessment or housing intervention.

30 Housing attendance at the meetings has proven to be effective by having a direct link between health and housing colleagues and being able to work together to address housing related issues, reducing delays in discharge when a Duty to Refer is made by CDDFT hospital staff. A homeless team duty officer attends these meetings and is able to offer advice and guidance to those on the call and is also able to pick cases up directly if the person is roofless on discharge.

31 Housing solutions has fed into the development of the CDDFT electronic patient record (EPR) system with a new section on housing added to support early identification of homelessness or at risk of homelessness and subsequent referral.

### **Reducing hospital admissions**

32 It was recognised that a joined-up and combined approach around the prevention of hospital admissions would be welcomed by health colleagues. Housing solutions are now involved in the Hospital Discharge Steering Group meeting and Housing and Health meeting.

33 Housing Solutions initiated conversations with housing providers and health to discuss how they could work together to identify potential

cases where a hospital admission could be prevented. A small pilot was ran with Believe Housing, Livin, Darlington Borough Council and community health matrons, carrying out joint visits to identify people who may be at risk and, through early intervention, prevent a hospital admission. This is currently being reviewed, it is proposed that the visits are re visited at an appropriate time for all agencies.

### **Domestic Abuse**

- 34 Those suffering from domestic abuse are identified as being vulnerable in terms of the impact that their housing situation can have on their health. In 2021/22 there were 874 presentations to Housing Solutions in relation to domestic abuse, 720 (82%) of these were provided with early advice and intervention or were closed and the remaining 154 (18%) were supported through the duties under the Homeless Reduction Act. Of the total presentations in relation to domestic abuse 448 (51%) were families with children.
- 35 Due to the high number of people presenting to the service as homeless, with Domestic Abuse being the main cause, it was decided in early 2021 to appoint 2 Domestic Abuse specialist Housing Officers in the service. All Domestic Abuse cases are now dealt with by one of the specialist officers, who provide a holistic approach for the client.
- 36 Housing Solutions have fed into the newly adopted Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 – 2024. As part of the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Strategy, 6 workstreams have been agreed. Housing Solutions chair and lead on the 'Early identification, intervention and prevention' workstream. This group will look at the provision of safe accommodation and support and initiatives to reduce risk and harm. Their action plan will concentrate on the principles Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) across all tenures and the future need of accommodation for victims of Domestic Abuse.

### **Rough Sleeping**

- 37 Rough sleeping can have a major impact on someone's physical and mental health. Within Housing Solutions, there is a complex needs team with roles dedicated to addressing rough sleeping. The team work intensively with anyone sleeping rough across the County, with an overarching aim to source suitable accommodation and support to meet their needs.
- 38 During 2021/22, the Rough Sleeper Team responded to 735 reports of rough sleepers across the County. Following investigations, 250 were verified as rough sleeping, of these, 134 have secured and sustained

tenancies for 3 or more months, along with personalised support and interventions.

- 39 In 2021/22, the Rough Sleeper Team delivered fully on the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) 4 funding objectives. The team have also been successful in receiving RSI5 funding that covers 3 years to 31st March 2025, in line with the Government aim of ending rough sleeping by this date. Durham received £1.451,505 to provide a rough sleeper coordinator, 2 outreach workers, 9 Somewhere Safe to Stay beds, 9 complex needs beds at the Jigsaw Complex Needs Project and a dedicated Adult Social Worker.
- 40 The Rough Sleeper Team received Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and COVID Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) monies in 2021/22 to purchase properties for rough sleepers displaced by COVID. This was delivered via the County Durham Lettings Agency (CDLA) who have now purchased 45 properties and leased 22, housing complex rough sleepers with support.

#### **Accommodation for vulnerable people**

- 41 County Durham Lettings Agency (CDLA) was established in 2020 to provide homes for people who may otherwise be excluded through more traditional housing pathways because of their chaotic lifestyles and support needs, which can have a negative impact on their physical and mental health. These groups include victims of domestic abuse, prison and hospital leavers, adult and children's care leavers, homeless or those in danger of imminent homelessness. The properties are provided via direct acquisition and private sector leasing coupled with intensive support to ensure tenancies are sustained. To date there is a portfolio of 65 properties, of which 43 are owned by CDLA and 22 are leased. There is a planned need to purchase an additional 20 properties and lease a further 10 during 2022/23 to meet the Homes England contract.
- 42 In August 2021 Housing Solutions were successful in securing £149,861 of funding for 'Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AfEO)' from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The funding is to support the effective rehousing of ex-offenders leaving prison, who are typically the most difficult cohort to rehouse due to previous convictions, risk and are unable to provide the references that landlords require. They can often end up in a circle of repeat homelessness and re-offending.
- 43 The AfEO funding enabled a new team to be formed with the main focus to prevent homelessness and reduce the risk of rough sleeping and re-offending. The team utilised the funding to introduce financial

incentives for private landlords, which include rent in advance, rent guarantees, insurance payments and other tenancy incentives. The team also provide tenancy support to both the client and the landlord to promote sustained tenancies and provide reassurance to landlords that any issues would be dealt with quickly and effectively.

- 44 The team has successfully supported 66 ex-offenders into new Private Rented Tenancies and have managed to keep a further 5 offenders in their home who were at risk of being evicted. 29 people have sustained their tenancies for over 6 months, 9 between 3 to 5 months and 11 are well on their way to making the 3-month mark.
- 45 Nationally, 82 Local Authorities were successful in securing AfEO funding, Durham have ranked 3rd in terms of successful outcomes on the programme and the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities have rated the performance as exceptional. The team have since been awarded an additional £43,204 in continuation funding, which will last through to March 2023.

#### **Joint working with Registered Housing Providers**

- 46 As part of the strategic housing role, regular meetings take place with housing providers through a range of partner forums. Housing and health is a priority and a number of initiatives including Making Every Contact Count (MECC), housing for older people, new developments, poverty and regeneration are discussed on a regular basis as part of the Housing Strategy action plan.

#### **Selective Licensing**

- 47 In County Durham, a large number of the private rented housing stock is older terraced in ex mining communities and is often in poor condition. This can have a serious impact on health including exacerbation of respiratory illness, accidents and mental ill-health, as well as a long-term illness or disability. In response to this, one of the aims of our Housing Strategy is to maintain and improve standards across all housing sectors in County Durham, which includes raising standards in the private rented sector.
- 48 An application was made to central government in December 2020 for a large-scale Selective Licensing scheme in County Durham. Selective licensing requires a private landlord to obtain a licence to rent properties in a designated area. The scheme was approved by the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on 30 November 2021.
- 49 The scheme covers 42% of the private rented sector (PRS) in County Durham (approximately 28,500 homes) and 103 of the 324 Lower Super

Output Areas (LSOAs) in County Durham (32%). In each LSOA evidence was provided to demonstrate that the area met at least one of the conditions required by legislation, and some areas met the conditions for all three. These relate to:

- Significant and persistent anti-social behaviour
- Low demand
- High levels of deprivation

- 50 Selective licensing provides a regulatory framework which allows for pro-active monitoring of the private rented sector and the opportunity for enforcement against poor landlords at the earliest opportunity. It facilitates a full multi-agency approach making the best use of a range of powers available in addition to selective licensing.
- 51 A complex needs officer, working with tenants to sustain tenancies in designated areas, and two additional staff within the existing private rented sector team, are also funded to work within designated areas supplementing licensing work.

### **Strategic Priority 3 – Ageing Well**

#### **Council New Build Programme**

- 52 In October 2020, Cabinet approved a 5-year Council New Build Programme for the delivery of 500 affordable homes by becoming a direct housing provider. The report highlighted that there is a clear under provision of affordable rented homes in the County with the annual delivery falling short of the numbers required, as well as there being a specific lack of provision of bungalow accommodation.
- 53 Housing Solutions acquired their first four 2 bedroom bungalows in summer 2022 as part of a Section 106 agreement with Chapter Homes, with a further 2 expected later in the year.
- #### **New housing for older people**
- 54 In addition to the Council New Build Programme, the County Durham Plan (CDP) includes policies to help meet the housing needs of older people and people with disabilities. Policy 15 of the CDP states that to meet the needs of older people and people with disabilities, on sites of 5 units or more, 66% of dwellings must be built to 'Building Regulations Requirement M4 (2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings) standard'. Furthermore, on sites of 10 units or more, a minimum of 10% of the total number of dwellings on the site should be of a design and type that will increase the housing options of older people. This will include appropriate house types including level access flats, level access bungalows and other housing products that can be shown to meet the specific needs of a multi-generational family.

### **Needs Based Accommodation Programme Board**

- 55 An integrated commissioning Needs Led Accommodation Review (NLAR) Programme Board meets monthly to plan and implement projects to meet the future needs for older people, children and those with learning disabilities (LD), homelessness, and poor mental health. The Board includes members from integrated commissioning, housing, health, and adult care.
- 56 Joint working with housing and commissioning is ongoing in a number of areas: -
- immediate needs for Children's Services to identify and source temporary accommodation
  - future planning for accommodation and support for people with LD and poor mental health
  - future needs and demand for older people. A specific piece of work has been carried out by Housing to develop a Power BI dashboard showing older persons housing supply and demand. This work is being shared with Housing Providers to enable a planned approach to needs led development.
  - existing provision for homelessness accommodation and support
  - Housing are feeding into the review of non-assessed accommodation and support

### **Approach to Wellbeing**

- 57 The core principles of the Wellbeing approach were applied to the strategic element and the operations-based action plan of the Housing strategy. It was applied retrospectively so acted as an impact assessment rather than a development tool. Through the application of this approach, it was useful to see how the principles are embedded in the delivery through delivery in action and case-studies; specifically, case-study journeys in the Housing Strategy. This approach is also a valuable tool to use as the Housing Strategy and action plan progress.

### **Conclusion**

- 58 Housing is a key determinant to health and wellbeing. Housing and health is referenced in our key strategic documents including the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the County Durham Plan, the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 59 Access to housing, improving housing and the home environment is key to improving health outcomes for individuals, families and the elderly. Housing have delivered a number of key projects to assist with improving the health of the population of County Durham. Housing will

continue to work with partners to deliver the strategic aims of our key strategies.

### **Background papers**

- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2025
- County Durham Plan 2018-2035
- County Durham Housing Strategy 2019 - 2025
- County Durham Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2022

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Homelessness Reduction Act published in 2017, signalled a significant change to homelessness protection across England over the next 3 years. The Act aims to reduce homelessness by joining up services to provide better support for people, especially those leaving prison/hospital and other groups at increased risk of homelessness, such as people fleeing domestic abuse and care leavers

The Coronavirus Act 2020 brought about the 'Everyone In' initiative to house all rough sleepers during the peak of the pandemic.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – one of the main implications on Housing Solutions is to ensure support within safe accommodation is provided for all those who require it.

Under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities currently have powers to introduce selective licensing of privately rented homes to address problems in their area, or any part of them, caused by low housing demand and/or significant anti-social behaviour. It is therefore illegal for a private landlord to rent a property in a designated area without the appropriate licence, unless an exemption applies.

### **Finance**

n/a

### **Consultation**

Consultation was carried out with the residents of County Durham, which helped inform the final revised Housing Strategy 2019-2025.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

Housing is a 'social determinant of health', meaning that it can affect physical and mental health inequalities throughout life.

### **Climate Change**

A warm, but energy efficient home will contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions.

### **Human Rights**

n/a

**Crime and Disorder**

A reduction in homelessness and risk of homelessness will contribute to a reduction in antisocial behaviour in local communities.

**Staffing**

n/a

**Accommodation**

n/a

**Risk**

None

**Procurement**

None.