

# Draft County Durham Housing Strategy 2024

## Foreword

We believe that housing is more than just bricks and mortar. It is at the heart of families, communities and our local economy. Whether renting or buying, there is clear evidence that having access to good quality, suitable, secure and well-maintained housing has a profound impact on health and wellbeing and, therefore, quality of life. A sufficient supply of housing, including affordable housing, is a key component of achieving inclusive economic growth, and the role it plays in supporting good health and wellbeing and supporting people into work is recognised by Public Health England<sup>1</sup>.

For many years, the number of new affordable houses built in County Durham has fallen below the number needed, whilst the quality of much of our older stock needs significant investment to bring it up to modern standards.

The Housing Strategy aims to support people, to live independently with support where required, and remain in their home for as long as they desire by ensuring houses are flexible to differing needs over their lifetime, including supporting family living and adaptability for older age.

To achieve this aim, we need to see a step change in the number of affordable houses being built in all parts of the county, including the rural west. We also need to do much more to drive up the quality and standard of properties, whether newly built houses coming through the planning system or existing houses in the private rented, market or affordable sectors, so that everyone has access to a warm, safe and decent property that they can afford. Bringing back into use empty properties, wherever possible, is a key aim of the strategy as this both helps deliver much needed housing and tackles what can otherwise be a blight on the community, including the impact of high hedges.

The Housing Strategy is a strategy for County Durham and reflects the diversity of communities across County Durham and differing issues and opportunities. We believe that all stakeholders – residents, developers, investors, builders, housing associations and the local authority – have a part to play in delivering it and support sustainable, mixed, and balanced and connected communities. We also believe that the best solutions are delivered locally, which is why we will encourage local solutions to local problems by engaging with local people, recognising that what is needed in one part of the county might be different to what is needed elsewhere.

Finally, the strategy will help deliver the ambitions of our Inclusive Economic Strategy, which recognises that housing is a major enabler to achieving economic growth and better social outcomes for our communities. The strategy will also support energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing and new housing and contribute towards achieving the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan. We will also maximise the opportunities available to address fuel poverty through combining advice schemes and heating improvements and targeting interventions at those most in need, whilst new houses will be designed in line with current energy efficiency standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health England was subsequently replaced by UK Health Security Agency and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities

We are confident that with effective partnership working, determination, creativity and innovation, we can deliver this new approach to housing in a way that makes a real difference in our communities.



**Councillor James Rowlandson**

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets**

## Executive Summary

The County Durham Housing Strategy sets out the strategic direction for housing activity in County Durham and a vision to provide good quality housing that meets everyone's needs, is affordable for local people and supports the creation of great places to live. Its purpose is to set the context as to how we will meet the housing challenges we face, setting out the following priorities for action (these are not in order of importance):

- **Priority 1:** Increase the delivery of new housing, including secure, affordable housing to meet housing needs together with the infrastructure required.
- **Priority 2:** Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that support health and wellbeing.
- **Priority 3:** Ensure high quality, energy efficient houses and effective landlord services.
- **Priority 4:** Ensure a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people, including specialist accommodation and support.
- **Priority 5:** Ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.

The strategy recognises the importance of placemaking and how housing must complement and integrate with the spaces around it so that people feel part of a community and can easily access the services and amenities they need. Providing the right infrastructure is of vital importance to good placemaking. We must increase the delivery of new houses, including secure, affordable housing and new council owned housing.

Everyone in County Durham should have fair and equal access to safe and secure housing that meets their needs. This includes addressing the specific needs of groups including children in care, children leaving care, people with disabilities, those with complex health issues and older people.

We will help and support people to prevent them becoming homeless and enable them to secure and maintain, and sustain living in, good quality, permanent accommodation, with support in place where it is needed. We must also ensure that a comprehensive range of supported, and specialist housing is available for those who need it.

We are committed to providing high quality houses and will work with local communities and put them at the heart of the decision-making process in a way that meets their needs and priorities. We will also strive to drive up standards in the private rented sector.

## 1. Introduction

1.1. This Strategy identifies the key housing opportunities and challenges facing County Durham in the next five years. Our vision is:

**‘By 2035 County Durham will be a place that has good quality houses that meet the needs of existing and future residents that they can afford. The provision and quality of housing will support economic growth, contribute to improved health, community safety and create and maintain sustainable, mixed and balanced communities. People will live long and independent lives within connected and safer communities.’**

1.2. The Housing Strategy provides the strategic framework to deliver our housing priorities and supports the delivery of the Council Plan and the County Durham Vision.

- The Council Plan sets out the council’s vision and overall priorities and programme of work for the period 2019-2035.
- The County Durham Vision 2035, which was developed together with partner organisations and the public, sets out what we would want the county to look like in 15 years’ time. This vision is structured around three ambitions which are:
  - More and better jobs;
  - People live long and independent lives; and
  - Connected communities.

**The Housing Strategy is a strategy for the county not just the council, therefore, throughout the document any reference to ‘we’ or ‘our’ refers to Durham County Council, its partners and relevant agencies such as, registered providers, NHS, Durham Police, Durham Fire and safety services.**

## 2. National Context

- 2.1. The UK has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe and a history of failing to meet the number of new dwellings, and new affordable social housing, to meet demand. The combination of housing stock in need of regeneration and a lack of supply of new houses, including affordable houses, has resulted in a long-term increase in house prices, as well as increasing rents in the private rented sector. This means that owning a property is beyond the reach of many in the UK and private rented accommodation is becoming increasingly expensive for households as demand increases. When people are unable to access suitable housing it can result in overcrowding, more young people living with their parents for longer, impaired labour mobility, which makes it harder for businesses to recruit staff, and increased levels of homelessness.
- 2.2. Older housing stock can also bring with it issues around energy efficiency, adaptability, maintenance, repair and general suitability for housing demands and needs today, and in the future, as some housing stock reaches the end of its useable life.
- 2.3. The price of an average property in England in June 2023 was £286,000 an increase of 5% from November 2022. The 2021 Census record 61.3% of people owning their own homes in England, a decrease from 63.6% in 2011, it also shows an increase in those in private rented accommodation since 2011, at 20.5% and a decrease for those in social rented housing, at 17.1 %.
- 2.4. The National Housing Federation estimates that around 340,000 new houses need to be supplied in England each year, of which 145,000 should be affordable. The legacy of Covid and the present cost of living crisis have also had a real impact on people being able to afford a home and a stall on the delivery of new houses to meet demand and need.
- 2.5. The government has set a national target for 300,000 new houses to be built each year to tackle the acute shortage of housing across the country. To help meet this target it has also introduced a new, larger, £11.5bn Affordable Homes Programme between 2021-2026 to deliver 180,000 affordable new properties. The government identifies the provision of affordable housing as key to ending the housing crisis, tackle homelessness and provide aspiring homeowners with a step onto the housing ladder.
- 2.6. The government has recently passed new legislation and has published white papers and reports that will impact the housing market. The Housing Strategy will be delivered in the context of the following:
  - **Social Housing Act 2023** - forms a new era of regulation for the social housing sector and will enact the reforms outlines in the Social Housing White Paper, which are aimed at improving the regulation of social housing, strengthening tenants' rights, and ensuring better quality and safer homes for residents. This will be done through stronger powers for the Regulator of Social Housing to carry out inspections, additional Housing Ombudsman powers to publish landlord best practice, 'Awaab's Law' which sets strict time limits for social landlords to address hazards such as damp and mould, new qualification requirements for registered providers.
  - **Renters Reform Bill** - introduced to Parliament in May 2023 but halted from passing into law by the calling of the general election. It planned to abolish Section 21 'no fault' evictions (following reforms to the court system) which would have empowered renters

to challenge poor landlords without fear of losing their home. A number of other proposals were included such as making it illegal for landlords and agents to have blanket bans on renting properties to people who receive benefits or have children, a new national landlord register, provisions for landlords to regain possession in some prescribed circumstances and a requirement for all landlords to join a new Ombudsman scheme and a Decent Homes standard. The Conservative Government placed a great deal of importance on this Bill and it is possible that its proposals may return under a new Government.

- **Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill** - sets out a policy regime to tackle geographical disparities across the UK based on the government setting medium term missions, with a 2030 timeframe, to boost productivity and living standards, spread opportunities and improve opportunities, restore a sense of community and local pride and belonging and empower local leaders and communities. Housing is a key component of this. The Levelling Up paper seeks to work with places in a more joined up way to tackle housing and regeneration issues.
- **Homes England Strategic Plan 2023-2028** - has been developed collaboratively with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The strategy sets out how Homes England will play its part in delivering the government's Levelling up and housing agendas. Its mission is to "drive regeneration and housing delivery to create high-quality houses and thriving places. This will support greater social justice, the levelling up of communities across England and the creation of places people are proud to call home". The strategy has five interconnected objectives to deliver on the mission: create vibrant and successful places, build a housing and regeneration sector that works for everyone, enable sustainable houses and places, promote creation of high-quality houses in well-designed places, facilitate the creation of homes people need.

2.7. Homes England pledge to use the strategy to work closely with local authorities, registered providers, government departments and the private sector as partners to deliver change, and intervene directly, exercising the use of their statutory powers to champion both national and local interests.

### 3. Local context

3.1. All the following data and much more can be found on the Durham insights webpage<sup>2</sup> and are up to date at time of publication. County Durham is a largely rural county with almost half the population living in rural areas. In 2021 the County contained 249,520 dwellings, projected to rise to 258,374 by 2043.

#### Dwelling Stock

3.2. In County Durham 62.5% of properties are owner-occupied, 20% are social rented and 17.1% are private rented. Most dwellings in the county are terraced houses, which at 36% of the stock, is higher than for the Northeast region and for England. The mix of dwelling types in the county is changing with the proportion of bungalows in the county rising to 14%, higher than the region and England percentages. Detached dwellings have risen to 15%, again above the Northeast region of 12%. Of all dwellings, 5.9% have one bedroom/bedsit, 35.2% have two bedrooms, 44.9% have three bedrooms and 16.7% have four or more bedrooms.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.durhaminsight.info/#/view-report/5f6e69673588409bae5d58e537a1c5bf/E06000047>

## Housing Market context

- 3.3. Median prices in County Durham have consistently been slightly lower than median prices for the North East, which are well below those for England as a whole. Overall, prices have increased from £100,000 in 2015 to £123,000 in 2022. Prices peaked at £128,000 in between April 2020 – March 2021 but have since fallen slightly.

## Social Context

- 3.4. Indicators of deprivation have seen improvements in some areas, but not all have experienced the same benefits. The county is ranked 48<sup>th</sup> for deprivation out of 151 Upper Tier Local Authorities, with 1 being the most deprived authority. Child poverty in the county is 27.3% which is slightly lower than the Northeast as a region but still higher than England which is 22.5%. As a county it is also ranked 148<sup>th</sup> out of 151 Upper Tier Local Authorities for living environment. This rank considers the quality of the local environment including the quality of housing and outdoor environment.
- 3.5. The delivery of the Housing Strategy will complement activities in the following plans and strategies.
- The County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy sets a clear, long-term vision for the area's economy up to 2035, with an overarching aim to create more and better jobs in an inclusive, green economy. It seeks to overcome barriers in order to transform levels of growth and harness the county's potential. It recognises that housing is a major enabler to achieving economic growth and better social outcomes for our communities.
  - The County Durham Plan is the Council's Local Plan. It sets out our growth ambitions between now and 2035 and the level of new houses, jobs and infrastructure needed to support this. The plan presents a vision for potential housing, jobs and the environment until 2035.
  - The County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2020-25) places our community at the heart of our wish to improve health and wellbeing, and to reduce health inequalities. It recognises the impact that housing quality can have on people's physical and mental health and sets out priorities to tackle the number of rough sleepers and the rise of households in temporary accommodation and reduce low quality housing.
  - The Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 (2022-24) sets out the long-term vision for County Durham, Durham County Council to reach net zero in its emissions by 2030, with the target for the County to become carbon neutral being brought forward to 2045 It sets out green energy aims including all new developments to have green energy generation schemes, and energy efficient, carbon passive technology to be used on new and existing buildings.

## Devolution

- 3.6. On 28 December 2022 the Government announced a devolution deal with the seven councils across the North East, including Durham. To implement the deal, a new Mayoral Combined Authority (NECA) has been established. The newly elected Mayor has significant powers including relating to housing. We therefore recognise that the Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan are being developed in the context of emerging devolution work, including a Strategic Place Partnership between NECA and Homes England. The Strategic Place Partnership (SPP) is a model developed by Homes England to enable greater collaboration and partnership

working at a sub-regional scale, recognising those places such as the North East, with ambitious proposals for place-based growth and regeneration.

- 3.7. NECA also has a Brownfield Housing Fund which is seeking to support housing delivery by providing funding to unlock site delivery. The housing strategy will provide the context for any bids to the Brownfield Housing Fund.



## 4. Principles

4.1. The following principles establish the foundation and rationale underpinning our vision.

**Principle 1: Everyone has a right to a warm, safe and decent home.**

4.2. Properties should be well maintained, free of damp and mould. People should feel safe in their homes from domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour. A home should support positive health outcomes.

**Principle 2: Everyone should have access to a home that is affordable to them.**

4.3. We will support the delivery of a range and choice of homes to meet housing need and demand, including market housing for those who can afford it, affordable housing products for those who cannot afford to have their needs met through the market. Alongside the provision of new homes, we will work to bring regenerate our existing housing stock and bring empty homes back in to use, where appropriate, to meet housing needs. By ensuring a sufficient supply of all types of housing we can help prevent homelessness and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation. We will also seek to make sure there is sufficient homes for everyone.

**Principle 3: Housing is the cornerstone of communities and should support improved health, community safety, educational attainment, and the local economy.**

4.4. Health and wellbeing and life opportunities should be the same for all residents of County Durham. Housing plays a vital role in creating and sustaining strong communities, from providing a safe and secure place to live, to providing outdoor space to play and socialise. The blend of good quality houses, outdoor space, good infrastructure, with access to services, good schools and employment opportunities are key to thriving communities.

4.5. The Housing Strategy will align with a number of other strategies and plans to ensure that communities are safer, healthier and more prosperous. These include the Inclusive Economic Strategy, the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Growing Up in County Durham Strategy and the principles of the Anti-Social Behaviour pledge in supporting safe neighbourhoods.

**Principle 4: The strategy will be for the county, not the council, and will promote local solutions underpinned by community engagement.**

4.6. The Housing Strategy will be a strategy for County Durham that will be developed and delivered in partnership across the county and for the benefit of all of our residents. We will make use of the County Durham Partnership, its sub-groups including the Housing Forum, and other relevant groups in developing and delivering the Strategy.

4.7. The Housing Strategy will promote consultation and engagement with all members of the community as part of the delivery of its priorities. It will also jointly develop local solutions with partners, residents and relevant agencies.

**Principle 5: All new houses should be accessible, tenure blind and provide flexible living for different stages in a person's life, always aiming to allow people to be independent, including remaining in their home for as long as they desire.**

4.8. It is important that the houses that are delivered to meet needs are accessible and flexible. We will support people to live independently and remain in their home for as long as they desire by ensuring properties are flexible and can adapt to differing accommodation needs

over a person's lifetime, including supporting family living and adaptability for older age. The tenure of an affordable new build should not be distinguishable from market housing in the quality of its external finishings.

Principle 6: Existing and new communities should be physically, digitally, culturally and economically connected to support the creation of sustainable, safe, mixed and balanced communities, including bringing empty properties back into use.

4.9. The Housing Strategy recognises the diversity of communities across County Durham and the differing issues and opportunities they face. It has a role to coordinate activity of the council, its partners and wider investment opportunities to support sustainable, safe, mixed, and balanced and connected communities. We will pursue regeneration and renewal in our communities, including improving access to outdoor greenspace, bringing empty properties back into use, remodelling the existing stock or using demolition where appropriate.

Principle 7: The strategy will support energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing and new housing and contribute towards the council's Climate Emergency Response Plan

4.10. In line with the council's Climate Emergency Response Plan, we will maximise the opportunities available to address fuel poverty through combining advice schemes and heating improvements and targeting interventions at those most in need to improve the energy efficiency of housing and reduce bills. We recognise the importance of the contribution of housing to energy efficiency targets and will actively explore new technologies as they emerge. As a minimum, new houses will be designed in line with current and future energy efficiency standards. In addition, we will continue to explore opportunities to deliver measures above and beyond standards including, utilising new and emerging technologies.

## 5. Priorities.

- 5.1. These priorities take forward the strategic direction of the Housing Strategy to deliver the vision. They set out the key areas where we will focus activity and how we will meet the housing challenges of the county.

### Priority 1: Increase the delivery of new housing, including secure, affordable housing to meet housing needs together with the infrastructure required.

- 5.2. An additional 24,852 new houses are needed in the county between 2016 and 2035 to meet housing need with a significant proportion of these already committed either on sites under construction or sites not started with planning permission.
- 5.3. We recognise the different housing needs of households and groups across the county. The Housing Strategy supports a range and choice of housing which is accessible and well designed to meet future needs and contribute to the sustainability of our communities.
- 5.4. Housing can shape and influence health and wellbeing of occupants, educational outcomes for children, economic opportunities as well as providing a feeling of security for occupants. Access to physical, social and green infrastructure, such as health services, employment, education, transport and outdoor greenspace, can play a positive role in creating and maintaining connected, mixed, balanced and sustainable communities and improving social mobility. Therefore, we will seek to ensure that new housing is delivered in locations in proximity to existing services and facilities, however recognising that in some rural areas there is not the existing infrastructure, but these communities would benefit from development for local people so that they can continue to live in rural areas and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities. New housing should also utilise brownfield land wherever possible.
- 5.5. Whilst meeting the housing needs of all groups is important, there are some specific needs which require intervention.
  - In order to meet existing and emerging housing need, 836 affordable houses are required every year for the County Durham Plan period. This is for people who lack their own housing or who live in unsuitable housing and cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market, but historically delivery has fallen short of this. Registered providers will play a role in the delivery of affordable housing products;
  - The population of the county is ageing and over the next few decades, there will be a 'demographic shift' with the number (and proportion) of older people increasing. 2014 based population projections for County Durham indicate that from 2016 to 2035 the number of people aged over 65 will increase from 105,200 to 146,300 (a 39% increase) and those aged 75 and over will increase from 45,700 to 75,700 (a 65.6% increase). As most older people usually live in small households, usually as couples and single people, a minimum of 90% of household growth over the 19-year County Durham Plan period will be in households aged over 65; and

- There is an increase in the number of people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness in County Durham, with pregnant women particularly vulnerable to homelessness, which includes a rise in the complexity of cases that are being presented. The Homelessness Strategy sets out its vision to eradicate homelessness and ensure everyone has a safe place to live and supports the Housing Strategy.
- The student accommodation market is a uniquely functioning part of the private rented sector within County Durham<sup>3</sup> and therefore requires specific action to deliver on the priorities and principles set out in the Housing Strategy to ensure the needs of students are met and the impact on residents is minimised.
- Those who are pregnant or have babies and children will also have specific needs that will change as their families grow. Housing that will accommodate growing families and adapt to their changing needs will be required across all tenures.

#### What we will do

5.6. We are committed to supporting the ambitions as set out in the County Durham Plan, by ensuring enough new houses are provided that are energy efficient and meet the needs and affordability levels of local residents.

#### We will:

- Increase the supply of affordable houses, including new council housing;
- Ensure that affordable housing products are affordable for local people;
- Work with partners, including Durham University, to produce a safe, healthy, affordable, secure and good quality student housing stock; and
- Deliver infrastructure as set out in the County Durham Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and via s106 contributions.

#### We will do this by:

5.7. Continuing to shape and direct investment through the County Durham Plan to ensure housing needs are met. This includes:

- Allocating sites for housing – the current County Durham Plan allocates sites for the delivery of houses to meet the housing need of 1,308 dwellings per annum over the plan period up to 2035. Further allocations will be considered as part of the next County Durham Plan;
- Supporting the delivery of strategic housing sites within the County Durham Plan to ensure sufficient and suitable housing land is available to support economic growth and provide quality housing for the residents of the county;
- Working with partners to identify and manage a pipeline of development sites with an emphasis on brownfield land where available;
- Delivering affordable housing, including through the following: discount market sale, First Homes, shared ownership, rent-to-buy, affordable rent, social rent, help to buy,

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<sup>3</sup> There are up to 2,250 private rented properties within the DH1 postcode where students live, mostly in Houses in Multiple Occupation with 3 or more bedrooms.

starter homes, council house new build programme, and supporting registered providers with their development. The County Durham Plan also requires that on eligible sites, a portion of housing is delivered as affordable to meet affordable needs;

- Enabling housing in rural areas, including through the use of rural exception sites, to meet identified local needs for affordable or specialist housing;
- Delivering properties that meet the needs of older people – the County Durham Plan requires that houses are required of a standard, design and type to meet the needs of older people; and
- Delivering student accommodation – the County Durham Plan allocates sites for purpose-built student accommodation and supports the delivery of non-allocated purpose-built student accommodation where it can be demonstrated that there is an identified need, alongside other considerations. The County Durham Plan enables houses in multiple occupation to be permitted in line with a policy approach, recognising the concerns of some residents, and promoting, creating and preserving inclusive, mixed and balanced communities.
- Delivering and maintaining suitable sites and accommodation for gypsies and travellers - County Durham has a significant number of gypsies and travellers, most living in housing but a sizeable population live on six council sites and a number of authorised private sites across the County. The council also provides six temporary ‘stopover’ areas in the county which are made available for 28 days or less each year for seasonal use, also enabling gypsies and travellers to travel to popular events like Appleby Fair.

5.8. Delivering affordable housing by:

- Delivering 500 council houses as part of the Council Housing Delivery Programme. This includes both new build schemes and a programme of targeted acquisitions. The original intention was to deliver these 500 houses by 2026, however, the impact of covid 19 and wider economic conditions including inflationary pressures and rising interest rates have presented delivery challenges for the programme. As a result, we are intending to roll the programme forward commencing from the approval of the cabinet report in July 2023 with a six-year delivery plan.
- Supporting registered providers to continue to play a significant role in the delivery of affordable housing products in County Durham through their investment plans.

5.9. Securing additional inward investment in the provision of new houses, including s106 delivery, to meet the target of the provision of an 836 of affordable homes per year between 2016-2035, by working closely with Homes England and registered providers (registered social landlords) to enable the provision of houses that meet needs.

5.10. Providing support for alternative delivery models including Community Led Housing. Community Led Housing is a valuable route of supply for affordable homes and other forms of specialist accommodation to meet localised needs.

5.11. Working with landlords to bring empty properties back into use, where appropriate, in order to meet local needs, by working with landlords, acquiring properties and delivering Targeted Delivery Plans (TDPs).

5.12. Commissioning a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment to identify housing demand and meet housing need including through a future review of the County Durham Plan.

5.13. Securing contributions for infrastructure, including through s106 agreements. The IDP has been developed in partnership with providers to identify infrastructure needs. It highlights some of the key development aspirations of the County Durham Plan including where future housing and jobs will be located and identifies those places where additional infrastructure or capacity is needed in the future.

Priority 2: Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that support health and wellbeing.

- 5.14. Even though house prices in County Durham are below the national average, so are wages. New builds are still unaffordable for many on lower wages, particularly in areas that are considered high viability areas. Housing stock may not be available in some areas, for example in the city centre, and in parts of the county where there is stock available, it may be unsuitable for people's housing needs or not in a suitable location.
- 5.15. Whilst the NPPF definition of affordable housing is recognised, we are committed to delivering affordable housing products that are available in a variety of tenures and types and linked to local income. Houses should be affordable for local people with a choice of products and tenures that households can afford without falling into debt. Home ownership should be accessible to all. Those on lower wages should also be able to afford to rent their home or aspire to home ownership with a range of options available to assist them.
- 5.16. There has been an increase in homelessness in County Durham. This can be attributed to several factors including:
- The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which placed a legal duty upon local authorities to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need;
  - The impact of policy approaches introduced in response to Covid 19, which have since been rescinded, and have led to an increase in the number of evictions;
  - The fact that homelessness cases presenting are becoming more complex with a range of acute housing needs; and
  - The cost-of-living crisis, which puts additional financial pressures on households and their ability to sustain a tenancy.
- 5.17. The 2017 Act introduced a requirement to both prevent and relieve homelessness through the provision of interim or short-term temporary accommodation where necessary. As a result, the council has faced increasing costs for the provision of temporary accommodation, with households living in temporary accommodation longer.
- 5.18. We are working hard to reduce the number of households being placed in temporary accommodation and to minimise the impact that homelessness has on individuals and families.
- 5.19. Housing quality has a significant and material impact on health and wellbeing. A decent home gives us a foundation for living a healthy life. Ensuring people have good and secure housing can help to delay or reduce a person's need for health and care services in the future and help them retain their independence, health and wellbeing for longer.

## What we will do

5.20. We want to ensure that everyone has fair and equitable access to housing that is safe, secure, affordable and meets their needs.

### We will:

- Help and support people onto the housing ladder and own their own property through a variety of products;
- Help and support people in gaining secure rented accommodation they can afford;
- Help and support people to prevent themselves becoming homeless; and
- Enable people to secure and maintain good quality, permanent accommodation.

### We will do this by:

5.21. Working together to maximise the delivery of affordable housing through the housing enabling function including accessing Homes England grant.

5.22. Focusing on homelessness prevention by developing a new Homelessness Strategy aligned to the Homelessness Reduction Act, setting out how we and our partners will help people address their housing needs to avoid homelessness.

5.23. Preparing a Housing Needs Supplementary Planning Document, including a First Homes cap, which will enable people to get on the housing market ladder. Continue to deliver affordable housing products including Social Rent, Affordable Rent, First Homes, Discount Market Sale, Shared Ownership, Rent-To-Buy.

5.24. Preparing and implement a Temporary Accommodation Strategy.

5.25. Reviewing the choice based letting system, Durham Key Options (DKO) and work collaboratively with partners to deliver houses through DKO, to ensure that those who need housing, including those who have complex needs, have fair and equal access to it.

## Priority 3: Ensure high quality, energy efficient houses and effective landlord services.

5.26. County Durham has seen a significant rise in the size of the privately rented sector (PRS) stock, with growth of nearly 78% to over 28,000 dwellings (12.6% of all occupied dwellings) between 2001 and 2011. The census of 2021 and modelled data suggest that this has increased again. Much of the private rented housing stock is older terraced housing and is often in poor condition.

5.27. Housing is an important determinant of health. Condensation and damp in houses can lead to mould growth, and inhaling mould spores can cause allergic type reactions, the development or worsening of asthma, respiratory infections, coughs, wheezing and shortness of breath. Living in a cold house can worsen asthma and other respiratory illnesses and increase the risk of other diseases and worsen other health conditions. Cold or damp conditions can have a significant impact on mental health, with depression and anxiety more common among people living in these conditions.

5.28. Housing is particularly important in ensuring a healthy start in life and is a key factor causing health inequalities. Some groups are more vulnerable to these housing conditions, such as children and young people, the elderly or people with pre-existing illness, are at a greater risk of ill health associated with cold or damp houses.

- 5.29. Some groups of people are more likely to live in poor quality cold and damp housing conditions, including households with an older person living in them, households with a lone parent, households with children, low-income households and households with people from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 5.30. The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) takes into account housing safety hazards in order to assist the council in identifying and protecting against potential risks from deficiencies identified in dwellings. This research has shown that 12% of PRS properties have at least one category 1 hazard as determined by HHSRS as opposed to 10% in owner occupied homes and 5% in the social rented sector.
- 5.31. As the largest social landlords in the county, registered providers will continue to improve their stock including as part of their decarbonisation programmes. In addition, the recent Social Housing Act (2023) includes stronger powers for the regulator of Social Housing, social housing reform such as 'Awaab's Law', changes to the Decent Homes Standards, more rights for tenants and new qualifications and training standards for registered providers.
- 5.32. County Durham has many areas and communities that are experiencing a mix of housing and wider residential environment issues. This includes issues such as:
- improving standards in the private rented sector;
  - long-term empty properties;
  - the provision of sufficient affordable housing;
  - meeting the housing needs of older people; and
  - addressing fuel poverty.
- 5.33. We are committed to working with local communities and landlords to ensure that regeneration is shaped and delivered in a way that meets their needs.
- 5.34. The council approved a selective licensing scheme for County Durham in September 2020 and was introduced in April 2022. The scheme runs until 2027 and aims to improve management standards increasing compliance rates, provide safe and healthy homes by reducing housing hazards and disrepair and reduce anti-social behaviour by 10% from baseline figures. Enforcement action will also be carried out where appropriate to do so.

#### What we will do

- 5.35. We are committed to ensuring that all houses are of high quality and that landlords that do not meet this quality are held to account.

#### We will:

- Ensure continuing and improved housing standards and conditions; and
- Deliver our new stock to the highest standards, with a focus on sustainability and energy efficiency.

#### We will do this by:

- 5.36. Continuously reviewing housing conditions in the private sector, identifying any action, including further licensing, that needs to be taken to improve conditions.



- 5.37. Continuing to build and maintain positive relationships with private rented sector providers and make the new Private Landlords Accreditation Scheme, The Durham Rental Standard, an effective mechanism for engaging with the sector and a catalyst for change.
- 5.38. Improving the quality of the housing stock with the aim of ensuring that housing is free from damp and mould.
- 5.39. Working with partners to ensure robust processes are in place including a reporting mechanism for frontline staff.
- 5.40. Working with partners to ensure that residents are informed of hazards, and how to prevent them e.g. damp and mould which are a specific risk to their health and inform residents about how they can be supported to have identified hazards rectified.
- 5.41. Implementing the Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) to improve the standards of accommodation and support provided by non-commissioned supported housing providers.
- 5.42. Continuing to effectively implement our Selective Licensing Scheme and explore extending licencing arrangements to improve standards where appropriate.
- 5.43. Inspecting properties as part of ongoing projects such as the Supported Housing Improvement Programme, Asylum Widening Dispersal Scheme, Afghan Resettlement Scheme and Homes for Ukraine, to ensure these properties offer safe accommodation.
- 5.44. Working to identify new HMOs that require a licence and take robust action against landlords who fail to comply with legislative requirements and HMO management regulations.
- 5.45. Continuing partnership working through our formal partnership arrangements, including the Housing Forum, and as part of the council's wider housing enabling role.
- 5.46. Regenerating our estates and communities by working with residents to develop and deliver solutions that meet local needs and priorities, generate new investment, create safe, mixed, balanced, and sustainable communities, and provide houses that are affordable.

Priority 4: Ensure a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people, including specialist accommodation and support.

- 5.47. As our population of older people continues to grow, sometimes with complex health conditions, the demand for appropriate housing and support is increasing. Meeting the needs of older people is a key issue which will be addressed, including through new provision, accessible and adaptable houses, specialist accommodation and bungalows in the right locations with the infrastructure and amenities to support them.
- 5.48. People with additional needs require safe, secure and affordable homes with the support required to remain independent and have a good quality of life. The join up between housing and social care is really important to assist many residents live independently and to plan for future housing stock provision. For many people the care and support required can be delivered in general needs housing, but independent living and supported housing models are required where people need additional safety and security and/or a substantial level of support. This includes through a Housing First Approach which prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. Others that may need support are, pregnant women and women

with babies, victims of crime, including non-domestic crime, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse and people involved in the Criminal Justice System and prison releases.

#### What we will do

5.49. We want to ensure that everyone has fair and equal access to the supported and specialist housing that meets their specific needs.

#### We will:

- Support a range of housing options that enable people to live safely and independently for as long as possible;
- Develop a Housing First programme that focuses on first giving someone immediate access to a settled and secure home, with access to appropriate support, where requested by the client, including services to cater for those who may be alcohol or drug dependant; and
- Continue joint working between housing, health, social care services and external providers and partners.

#### We will do this by:

5.50. Promoting and sustain independent living, by planning for the provision of specialist and supported housing and housing related support for a variety of client groups, such as people with physical and mental health needs and those with learning disabilities in line with Adults and Childrens Services commissioning strategies.

5.51. Providing temporary accommodation which gives tenancy support to tenants who are excluded from the Housing Register for various reasons or present with complex needs.

5.52. Ensuring the provision of adaptations together with flexible, personalised care and support to enable people to live independently for as long as possible as their care needs develop with age.

5.53. Undertaking a Needs Led Accommodation Review (NLAR) to consider longer term specialist accommodation needs – the NLAR is considering the longer term needs of specific groups including pregnant women, children and young people, older people, people with mental health or learning difficulties and homelessness. The join up between housing and social care is important to assist many residents live independently and to plan for future housing stock provision.

5.54. Assessing the need for single occupancy properties with social space and community facilities, particularly for vulnerable men and women.

5.55. Implementing the polices of the County Durham Plan including:

- Ensure that new housing meets the Nationally Described Space Standards;
- build 66% of new housing to M4(2) accessible and adaptable standards on developments of 5 units or more;
- Require 100% of specialist housing for older people will meet M4(2) accessible and adaptable standards, and a minimum of 25% of accommodation to meet M4(3) (wheelchair user dwellings); and

- Require new development to provide an attractive range of housing options for older people with a minimum of 10% of dwellings to be of a design and type that will increase the housing options of older people, such as bungalows.
- 5.56. Continuing engagement and joint working with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and other Criminal Justice Agencies, including the Local Criminal Justice Board, to prioritise and maintain housing pathways in the Justice System.
- 5.57. As part of the review of DKO we will ensure the housing needs of our care leavers are prioritised, securing accommodation that mirrors the options available for young people who have not been in care.
- 5.58. Including the importance of social support from family and friends and the need for people to have a choice of where to live so that they can sustain their social and family support networks.

#### Priority 5: Ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.

- 5.59. The quality of the environment in which houses are built is as important to our health, wellbeing and prosperity as the buildings themselves. We are committed to ensuring that in future it will be of a high standard in terms of architecture, urban design, sustainability, and innovation. This ensures that new development enhances and complements existing high-quality areas and raises the design standards and quality of areas in need of regeneration and contributes to the social value of an area.
- 5.60. Where a need for regeneration has been identified, we will use a variety of housing regeneration activities such as acquisition and demolition, group repair schemes, environmental improvements or the facilitation of new development depending on the needs of the area and community. Where appropriate we will also collaborate at a strategic level with our partners, such as Registered Providers, including joint ventures and other suitable mechanisms.
- 5.61. New development should provide local people with civic pride, make them feel safe and secure and help improve the overall image of the county and reflect local distinctiveness. Development needs to be carefully planned to ensure important features and characteristics are protected and enhanced, where the needs of the community are reflected.
- 5.62. Creating accessible and permeable public realm through connecting places and spaces, will help to ensure that many daily needs can be met using walking, cycling or public transport. A high-quality built environment should consider the amenity of both existing and future residents and consideration should be given to matters of privacy, outlook, natural lighting, ventilation, as well as local climatic conditions. Indoor and outdoor space, including private and communal gardens, should be provided as appropriate to support a reduction in health inequality and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Spaces should be designed to be accessible to all users, including people with sensory and cognitive issues as well as reduced physical mobility. They must also seek to minimise opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour and make people feel that they can use them safely.
- 5.63. High-quality digital infrastructure is now essential for inclusivity, enabling residents to access training and employment. Recent trends toward home and hybrid working also require stable and fast connections. There is currently a lack of fast and reliable broadband in parts of the county, particularly in rural areas, which can cause digital exclusion. While we recognise that

living in good quality housing which is free from hazards will improve the health and wellbeing of residents, addressing only the physical aspects of housing in County Durham will not in itself entirely improve the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of our communities, or reduce inequalities. Poverty in the form of material deprivation (inability to afford basic resources and services such as sufficient food and heating) is a persistent issue within certain localities and communities. If we wish to address this, then the location of our housing must take into account easy access to health and social care, education, employment, transport and healthy food. It must also support the viability and vitality of our communities including those in rural areas.

#### What we will do

5.64. We want to ensure our communities are places where people want to live.

We will:

- Aim to ensure that all housing, in particular affordable housing, is developed alongside the provision of sustainable infrastructure and community-based services; and
- Ensure that the wider environment of communities is of a high quality, including raising the quality of the wider environment in communities in need of regeneration.

#### We will do this by:

- 5.65. Continue to develop and implement a programme of Targeted Delivery Plans (TDPs) to improve the quality of the existing housing stock and the wider residential environment to focus regeneration activities for communities most in need and support the creation and maintenance of mixed and balanced communities.
- 5.66. Ensure that new housing is accompanied by the delivery of the infrastructure, both physical and digital, that is needed to support it.
- 5.67. Create sustainable communities by locating new development in areas which offer the best opportunity for sustainable development patterns or support the vitality and viability of our towns and villages.
- 5.68. Create digitally enabled towns and villages to increase technology uptake, encourage innovation, and improve access to digital services.
- 5.69. Create safer living environments through careful neighbourhood design, proactively tackling anti-social behaviour in our communities.
- 5.70. Create healthier places to live which are fully accessible to people with disabilities, by supporting the design and layout of open and amenity spaces that are flexible and explore opportunities for community food growing space where appropriate to support the creation of healthy communities and improve wellbeing.
- 5.71. Promote well designed places and buildings that reflect local distinctiveness, promote sustainability and support the transition to a low carbon future.
- 5.72. Support the housing related element of the development and delivery of a new employment support offer which provides key worker support to vulnerable groups, those excluded from the labour market and those in insecure and low paid employment.

## 6. Delivery and Monitoring

- 6.1. The Housing Strategy sets out an ambitious set of priorities which can be achieved through the collective commitment of the council and its key partners and stakeholders. It is also recognised that there is a whole range of activities currently being undertaken across the county. Many of these are included in the attached Twelve-Month Delivery Plan at Appendix 1 which has been prepared in conjunction with internal and external partners. It also identifies further activity and actions that will ensure delivery of the Housing Strategy. A further, more long-term Delivery Plan will be prepared following adoption.
- 6.2. Through delivering the Strategy, we will respond to the specific needs of localities and address local issues. This has been recognised in developing the Delivery Plan, and which reflects the geography of the area.
- 6.3. It is important that progress against this Strategy and Delivery Plan is monitored robustly and transparently, we will therefore:
  - Monitor progress annually against a monitoring framework so that we are responsive to emerging needs, policy, and legislative changes; and
  - Report progress against the strategic priorities and actions in the Delivery Plan annually and publish details of our progress on the council's website.
- 6.4. The delivery of the Housing Strategy will be supported by a number of other policies and strategies including: The Towns and Villages Investment Plan; Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) 2; Inclusive Economic Strategy; Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy; County Durham Plan; Homelessness Strategy; Poverty Action Plan; Growing up in County Durham Strategy; Tenancy Strategy; Affordable Warmth Strategy; and Allocations Policy.
- 6.5. Although the end date of the Housing Strategy's Vision is 2035 it will be reviewed as and when necessary.