

Health and Wellbeing Report

18 March 2025

Housing and Health Update



Report of Michael Kelleher, Head of Planning and Housing, Durham County Council

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on:
 - The delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2029, in particular the links to health-related projects.
 - The adoption and delivery of the County Durham Housing Strategy
 - Housing, homelessness and health related projects as well as any planned projects, that align to the four priorities outlined in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS) 2023-2028. The timeframe used to provide data will be from April 23 to March 24, however there are some exceptions where projects have started following that date.
- 2 A presentation providing a summary of the report will be presented at the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting.

Executive summary

- 3 A report was last presented to the Board in November 2023, which provided an overview of projects delivered by the Housing Service with a health-related theme or output from April 2022 to March 2023.
- 4 The Board has requested an annual update on housing projects and initiatives that relate to the four priorities in the JLHWS, as well as an update on the adoption and delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (24-29) and the County Durham Housing Strategy.
- 5 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (HRSS) along with a 12-month delivery plan was adopted by Full Council in July 2024. The strategy sets out how the Council aims to achieve the four priorities of

homelessness over the next five years covering the period 2024 to 2029. The four priorities are:

1. Prevent people from becoming homeless
 2. Improve access to and supply of accommodation
 3. Ensure the appropriate support is available for people who are homeless (work with partners to build resilience in people)
 4. Reduce Rough Sleeping
- 6 The County Durham Housing Strategy (CDHS) was adopted by Full Council in January 2025, including a 12-month delivery plan. A long-term delivery plan will be prepared over the coming months, working with partners including the Housing Forum, and adopted by Cabinet.
- 7 The CDHS provides a high level strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners and has been developed to ensure the council is well positioned to maximise future opportunities for funding support. The CDHS will replace the current housing strategy adopted in 2019. The council's priorities within the CDHS are:
- Increase the delivery of new housing, including secure, affordable housing to meet housing needs together with the infrastructure required.
 - Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that support health and wellbeing.
 - Ensure high quality, energy efficient houses and effective landlord services.
 - Ensure a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people, including specialist accommodation and support.
 - Ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.
- 8 Alongside the development and adoption of the HRSS and the CDHS, a review of the partnership structure has taken place. It was identified that the governance and oversight of the delivery of both key strategies must be reviewed and strengthened to ensure the vision and priorities are achieved within the agreed timescales.

- 9 As a result of the partnership review a revised partnership structure has been established (see appendix 2). The existing Housing Forum will become a Strategic Housing Board (SHB), which will provide the strategic direction and influence for housing and homelessness related issues across County Durham. In addition to senior housing colleagues from across the county, including from the council and its registered provider partners, the SHB will include senior officers from Public Health, Children and Young Peoples Services and Adult Social Care, to ensure health has a key focus when delivering key projects.
- 10 Two new steering groups will be established: one for the HRSS and the other for the CDHS. Both Steering groups will be responsible to the Strategic Housing Board and will provide scrutiny and oversight of both strategies to ensure they are delivered via a partnership approach. Each steering group will be chaired by the relevant Portfolio Holder and have membership at a strategic level. Task and finish groups will be established beneath each steering group, to focus on time limited priorities and projects.
- 11 As part of the wider partnership review the already established 'Health, Housing and Social Care Steering Group' would be included as part of the Strategic Housing Board governance framework, as can be seen at appendix 2.
- 12 The role of housing as a social and wider determinant of health is well established across many projects and initiatives in existence across County Durham. The Planning and Housing Service works closely with health colleagues to ensure that priorities are achieved in housing and homelessness strategies as well as across wider Council strategies including the JLHWS.
- 13 This report provides the detail of projects that are being delivered by teams across housing and health service areas, which cut across the four strategic priorities outlined in the JLHWS: 'Making smoking history', 'Enabling healthy weight for all', 'Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing' and 'Reducing alcohol harms'.
- 14 The projects include:

Making smoking history

- Partnership working
- Training and development, including 'making every contact count', Eyes on the baby pilot, Eyes wide open training

Enabling healthy weight for all

- Partnership working, including Income maximisation – welfare rights, use of foodbanks, signposting to health and wellbeing

services, Health Squad, working with supported housing providers

- Planning policies on take away venues

Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing

- Fuel Poverty/Warm and healthy homes
- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Rough Sleepers
- Support to vulnerable clients, including homeless, domestic abuse children, GRT communities, humanitarian support, those leaving hospital, armed forces veterans
- Partnership working – Housing Poverty Group
- Selective Licencing
- Private Sector Housing
- Supported Housing
- Housing for older people

Reducing alcohol harms

- Drug and Alcohol Recovery
- Partnership working with Public Health
- Drug and alcohol co-ordinators

Recommendation

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

- Note the content of the report and consider a future Health and Wellbeing Board session be focused on Health and Housing delivery.

Background

Adoption and delivery of the HRSS and the CDHS

- 16 It is important that all residents in County Durham can live in a property they can call home, that provides a safe, healthy, inclusive and secure environment.
- 17 Two key housing related strategies have recently been adopted. The HRSS (2024 – 2029) was adopted in July 2024 and the CDHS was adopted in January 2025. Both strategies have a 12-month delivery plan, which will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
- 18 Alongside the development of the two strategies a review of the partnership structure has taken place. It was identified that the governance and oversight of the delivery of both key strategies must be reviewed and strengthened to ensure the vision and priorities are achieved within the agreed timescales.
- 19 As a result of the partnership review a revised partnership structure has been established (see appendix 2). The existing Housing Forum will become a Strategic Housing Board (SHB), which will provide the strategic direction and influence for housing and homelessness related issues across County Durham. In addition to senior housing colleagues from across the county, including from the council and its registered provider partners, the SHB will include senior leadership and directors from Children and Young Peoples Services and Adult and Health Services, to ensure health has a key focus when delivering key projects.
- 20 Two new steering groups will be established: one for the HRSS and the other for the CDHS. Both steering groups will be responsible to the SHB and will provide scrutiny and oversight of both strategies to ensure they are delivered via a partnership approach. Each steering group will be chaired by the relevant Portfolio Holder and have membership at a strategic level from across the council, including external partners. Task and finish groups will be established beneath each steering group, to focus on time limited priorities and projects. An annual forum will be established for both the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy and housing strategy steering groups. These annual forums will include invitations for a wider range of partners and stakeholders, including residents groups as well as private sector developers, with an interest in the subject matter.
- 21 Health is a key factor of a person's housing situation and without secure, safe and sustainable housing, the physical and mental health of an individual can be detrimentally affected. It was therefore decided as part of the wider partnership review the already established 'Health, Housing and Social Care Steering Group' would be included as part of

the Strategic Housing Board governance framework, as can be seen at appendix 2. The Corporate Director for Adult and Health Services is chair of this group and the Head of Planning and Housing is vice chair, both sit on the SHB, therefore ensuring the priorities across health and housing are aligned and to avoid duplication in service delivery and improvements.

22 The HRSS has four key priorities: -

1. Prevent people from becoming homeless
2. Improve access to and supply of accommodation
3. Ensure the appropriate support is available for people who are homeless (work with partners to build resilience in people)
4. Reduce Rough Sleeping

23 Each priority has a number of actions included in the 12-month delivery plan. Some of those actions are to not only improve the housing situation for the person, but also their health and well-being, some of the key actions are: -

- Review of the housing allocations policy.
- Work with CYPS to understand the potential demands to the housing service as young people progress to adulthood.
- Develop a strategic approach to the provision and utilisation of temporary accommodation for homeless people.
- Improve pathways to accommodation and support for vulnerable people, including; victims of domestic abuse, ex-offenders, care leavers, rough sleepers, migrants and asylum seekers
- Work with public health to review existing specialist funded posts, including gaps in provision. For example specialists may include drug and alcohol co-ordinators or rough sleeper social workers.
- Establish an all year-round night shelter for rough sleepers

24 The CDHS has five key priorities: -

1. Increase the delivery of new housing, including secure, affordable housing to meet housing needs together with the infrastructure required.
2. Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that support health and wellbeing.
3. Ensure high quality, energy efficient houses and effective landlord services.
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. Ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.

25 The actions within the 12-month delivery plan cover all aspects of housing including the increase in the supply of affordable housing across County Durham, as well as improved property standards and the creation of 'great places to live'. Some of the actions with a particular focus on health and well-being include: -

- Promotion of the warm and healthy homes campaign offering free boiler repairs and services to people with health conditions exacerbated by the cold.
- Work with Durham university students to promote council services through communications systems in family hubs/GPs regarding housing.
- Prevent fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions in domestic households through the promotion of the Home Upgrade Grant, eligibility checks for central heating grants and co-ordinate the energy efficiency advice across the Combined Authority and across County Durham.
- Issue new guidance for landlords and tenants in line with the new expectations from government on damp and mould in line with the new ombudsman code of guidance.

- Assess the housing needs of specialist groups including older people, children and young people, homeless and people with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health issues to ensure their needs are being met.
 - Deliver the Disabled Facilities Grants to enable people to stay in their own houses.
- 26 Updates on the delivery of both strategies will be provided to the SHB as well as Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Joint working has taken place with public health to ensure the core principles of the Wellbeing approach have been applied in the development of both the CDHS and the HRSS.

Housing projects aligned with the JLHWS

- 27 The JLHWS 23-28 has four strategic priorities. This section of the report details the projects and initiatives within the Housing and Planning Service that cut across each of these.

Strategic Priority 1 – Making smoking history

- 28 Higher rates of smoking are often linked with indicators of social and economic disadvantage, which can include poverty and poor housing. Set out below are the projects and initiatives that help contribute towards this priority.

Partnership Working

- 29 Information received from Public Health in relation to ‘Smoke Free County Durham’ is shared with different partnerships including the Housing Poverty Group which includes other council departments and Registered Providers, the Housing Provider Safeguarding Partnership which includes social and supported registered providers, the Supported Housing Forum and frontline staff. Front line housing staff have received briefings from the Smoke Free County Durham service and a referral is offered to this service for every client who is a smoker, as well as advice.
- 30 The Planning & Housing service funds a dedicated Welfare Rights Officer to provide advice and practical support in order to maximise the income of clients presenting to the housing service. If the cost and concerns of smoking are raised by a client during an assessment, the Welfare Rights Officer is able to provide options including signposting to stop smoking services.

- 31 The NHS Health Squad has been working with various organisations across County Durham since November 2023 to support vulnerable people who are far removed from health-related services. These services cover smoking cessation, full health checks, spirometry, asthma checks, signposting and referrals where needed to other support services. The squad has worked closely with the housing service and alongside the Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) team, as well as with supported housing providers, the Voluntary and Community Sector, the Council's Rough Sleeper Team and they hold regular sessions at two of the county's Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) sites.
- 32 The housing service commission accommodation with support for homeless people and rough sleepers. The support provider works with their clients who wish to reduce or stop smoking, including referrals to Smoke Free County Durham, the Health Squad and GP's. Training is also provided to support staff.

Training and Development

- 33 Front line housing staff have completed 'Making Every Contact Count (MECC)' training with a specific focus on smoking cessation. This training also gave access to a directory of services and referral pathways to assist when signposting clients requesting support.
- 34 The housing service and wider housing providers were invited to take part in the 'eyes on the baby' pilot developed by Durham Infancy and Sleep Centre focussed on Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) prevention in County Durham. Most SUDI deaths occur in families living in impoverished circumstances with multiple risks or vulnerabilities which includes smoking in the home, and County Durham ranks 7th in UK for children living in impoverished circumstances. This training provided front line staff with an awareness of the risks of SUDI and what to look out for when carrying out client visits.
- 35 The housing service and supported housing provider forum received 'Eyes wide open' training delivered by Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service which is aimed at anyone who goes into a domestic dwelling for a service user or tenant and gives them signs to look out for and what to do if they have concerns relating fire safety. This training has also been booked in to be delivered to the Housing Provider Safeguarding Partnership in March 2025.

Strategic Priority 2 – Enabling healthy weight for all

- 36 Research indicates a strong link between obesity and housing conditions, particularly in areas where access to healthy food options,

safe outdoor spaces for physical activity, and walkable environments are limited. These areas are often found in lower income housing areas, contributing to higher obesity rates among residents. The paragraphs below set out the projects and initiatives that help contribute towards this priority.

Partnership Working

- 37 The Planning & Housing service funds a dedicated Welfare Rights Officer (WRO) to provide advice and support to clients to maximise their income. Maximising income can assist people to make healthier choices with food. Fresh produce is much more expensive and harder to purchase for those on lower incomes.
- 38 The Homeless Prevention Team promotes and signposts people to foodbanks. Foodbank vouchers are often provided, which typically contains a minimum of three days of nutritionally balanced, non-perishable, tinned and dried foods. Some foodbanks also provide fresh produce if they are able to. Foodbanks can also usually adapt to suit dietary needs, including diabetes, gluten intolerance etc. Some areas within the county offer a Food Pantry (e.g. Coxhoe) where fresh fruit, vegetables and bread are usually available.
- 39 When the Homeless Prevention Team places people into temporary accommodation, colleagues try wherever possible to utilise accommodation with suitable cooking facilities. This enables families to cook meals, without having to rely on fast food. Food vouchers are also provided as well as advice and support to access local services including foodbanks.
- 40 The council's 'Dispersed and Supported Housing Team' provides advice and guidance to its clients. Exercise and activities are encouraged, particularly by the Tenancy Sustainment Officers, whose role is to integrate residents into the community. This includes accessing gyms, local group activities and going for walks. The team also work closely with Children's and Young People Services and Adults and Health Services and community groups, signposting residents for support where required.
- 41 The Housing team has Complex Key Workers, who support ex-offenders through the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme (AFEO) and those with more complex support needs. They support clients with a variety of issues including budgeting and finance and will always attempt to steer clients into making healthy food choices, for example how to prepare cheap meals which may last for 2-3 days. The AFEO funding is also used to promote social interaction and health and well-being. One client was supported with a gym membership, who has

benefitted not only in focussing on healthier eating and wellbeing but also in his lifestyle choices, which have distracted him from criminal activity.

- 42 Housing's commissioned homeless support accommodation provider, Changing Lives, promote a variety of internal and external health and well-being services for their residents. These include healthy cooking, cooking on a budget, and couch to 5k. A support worker from February will be focussing on budget meals made from donations and food bank parcels, making it something that can be continued by residents as they move on or start to increase their independence.
- 43 'Jigsaw', another supported housing provider commissioned via the housing service provides group sessions with their residents for cooking on a budget and facilitates community meals at least once a week. The project liaises with a range of local foodbanks who provide a variety of surplus food to those in need to sustain a healthy diet. The Project provides hot drinks to all residents daily and also has a range of literature that provides healthy eating information.

Planning Policy

- 44 Policy has recently been strengthened in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) around promoting good health, especially where this would reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities. In addition, the NPPF now places restrictions on hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets within walking distance of schools and other places where children and young people congregate (unless within a designated town centre) or where a concentration of such uses is having an adverse impact on local health, pollution, or anti-social behaviour. This supports the approach in the County Durham Plan Policy 30 (Hot Food Takeaways) and also introduces additional requirements.

Strategic Priority 3 – Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing

- 45 Unsuitable housing can negatively impact mental health by causing significant stress, anxiety and depression due to factors like overcrowding, lack of privacy, insecurity about housing stability, poor living conditions (damp and mould) which ultimately reduces resilience and overall wellbeing. This particularly affects individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions. The following paragraphs detail the projects and initiatives across the housing and planning service that promote positive mental and physical, resilience and wellbeing.

Fuel Poverty

- 46 The Housing Service 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. The service between April 2023 and March 2024 received contact from 3083 households.
- 47 The Energy Efficiency Team oversees 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 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).
- 48 Eligible residents with health issues which are made worse by living in a cold damp home or have a premature baby up to 9 months old living in the home, can qualify for a one off grant for a gas boiler service or minor repair. During 2023/24 54 applications were sent out and 30 of these were returned.
- 49 The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is a government energy efficiency scheme. Its aim is to help reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty by improving the energy efficiency of homes occupied by low income, fuel poor and vulnerable households. Obligated energy suppliers can opt to take part in the scheme to improve the ability of low income, fuel poor and vulnerable households to heat their homes. Between April 2023 and March 2024, a total of 849 applications for ECO flex funding were approved.
- 50 The Partnership project between the Energy Saving Trust, the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and Northeast Local Authority's, was launched in 2023/24. Energy advice is delivered by Groundwork with a dedicated Home Energy Advice Officer for each Local Authority.

Referrals for support are made via an on-line portal. Between April 2023 and March 2024, a total of 70 referrals were made to the Managing Money Better (MMB) Service. The team also provides advice and assistance with fuel and food vouchers, warm homes discount and winter fuel payments.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

- 51 DFGs fund suitable adaptations to enable children and adults to live more independently in their homes, which in turn helps to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. Adaptations could include installation of ramps, handrails, stairlifts, ground floor extensions etc.
- 52 During 2023/24 31 DFGs were approved for children aged 19 and under, which is a decrease of approximately 18% from 2022/23.
- 53 During 2023/24 a total of 934 DFGs were completed for adult clients, a decrease of approximately 3% from 2022/23, 699 were for people aged 60 and over (a decrease of 77 from the previous year); 143 were for people aged 50-59 (and increase of 35 from the previous year) and 92 were for those aged 20-49 (a decrease of 3 from the previous year).

Rough Sleepers

- 54 Rough sleeping can have a major impact on someone's physical and mental health. Within the Planning and Housing Service there is a rough sleeper team with roles dedicated to supporting those sleeping rough. The team works intensively with clients to source suitable long term accommodation and support to meet their needs.
- 55 During 2024 the Rough Sleeper Team responded to 685 reports of rough sleepers across the County. Following investigations, 107 were verified as rough sleeping. When someone is verified as rough sleeping the team support them into accommodation wherever possible, utilising temporary bedspaces, as well as commissioned and non-commissioned supported housing. Some clients want to go straight into independent accommodation and the team support clients to complete applications for access to social and private rented accommodation.
- 56 The Rough Sleeper Team has a dedicated Adult Social Worker who is an approved mental health practitioner and can carry out assessments under the Mental Health Act where necessary, resulting in prompt action for those most vulnerable rough sleepers.

Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

- 57 In February 2024 the council was awarded a grant of over £6 million over 3 years from DLUHC and Homes England to deliver the Single

Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) which will provide an additional 32 bed spaces of supported accommodation specifically targeted towards rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping in two cohorts; those aged 18 to 25 years, and those over 25 years

- 58 The accommodation, which is a mix of multiple self-contained flats with 24-hour support plus dispersed properties with lower levels of support but regular visits from the support provider, is in the process of being acquired and renovated in preparation for the residents moving in from March 2025. Two specialist support providers have been procured to provide support to the two cohorts detailed above.

Support to vulnerable clients

Homeless clients

- 59 The Homeless Prevention Team regularly refers clients to the Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance. This service includes support with medication reviews, occupational health, crisis support, care needs etc.
- 60 Staff within DCC's Dispersed & Supported Housing Team receive regular training which covers mental health, resilience and wellbeing, as well as other related topics. This enables the team to offer advice and guidance, as well as signpost to relevant services where required. Staff support residents to access the community, sourcing activities for meaningful use of their time and support them with wellbeing. Staff within this team visit all residents weekly, checking on their wellbeing.

Domestic Abuse

- 61 Those suffering from domestic abuse are identified as being vulnerable in terms of the impact that their housing situation can have on their mental and physical health. In 2023/24 there were 747 presentations (9% of all presentations) to Housing Solutions in relation to domestic abuse, 514 (69%) of these were provided with early advice and intervention or were closed and the remaining 233 (31%) were supported through the duties under the Homeless Reduction Act. Of the total presentations in relation to domestic abuse 341 (46%) were families with children.
- 62 The Homeless Prevention Team has two Domestic Abuse Specialist Housing Officers. These specialist officers provide a holistic approach for the client, including signposting and information relating to alcohol and/or drug support, support with access to GP's, mental health or a Social Prescriber, as well as other local services.

- 63 In addition, New Burdens funding provides a full-time Support Worker from Harbour Support Services to work alongside the specialist officers to provide practical support specifically to those placed in temporary accommodation under homelessness legislation.
- 64 The Planning and Housing Service works closely with Public Health and are members of three multi-agency subgroups from the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group – Prioritising Prevention, Supporting Victims and Tackling Those Who Cause Harm.

Gypsy, Roma Travellers

- 65 Investing in children currently hold weekly wellbeing sessions in two of the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) community buildings on site. These are for children aged 8-16. A play group is also held weekly in one of the GRT community buildings for parents and children aged 4 and under.

Humanitarian Support

- 66 The scale of the global humanitarian challenge has seen the UK face significant demands for humanitarian support. The county is now supporting programmes to resettle and support vulnerable refugees under the United Kingdom Resettlement Schemes. There are, two schemes to assist Afghan arrivals and the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme. The national transfer scheme also assists unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) allocated to the care of the local authority.
- 67 The Humanitarian Support Team ensures that refugee arrivals are provided with a dedicated source of advice and support and are assisted to register for mainstream services and signposted to other advice and information giving agencies. The support includes registering with a local GP, and other healthcare providers in line with identified medical needs, and advice around referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture as appropriate. An overarching support plan as well as bespoke support plans are developed for all individuals and families.

Armed Forces support

- 68 The Armed Forces Outreach Service (AFOS) provides bespoke support to veterans, serving personnel and their families as a single point of contact for those who may be reluctant to approach statutory services. The AFOS Officers often refer cases to Operation Courage, which is a pathway into the NHS for veterans with mental health issues. Officers also work closely with NHS Social Prescribing Link Workers. Signposting is a key aspect of the work of AFOS, enabling people to be

in touch with a wide range of public services through one point of contact.

Hospital Discharge

- 69 Hospitals have the 'Duty to Refer' anyone who is homeless and will have no address on discharge. Discussions with hospitals within the county and within the vicinity are aware of how to refer through this process into the Homeless Prevention Team. It has been agreed that the housing position of a patient will be discussed upon admittance to hospital so that the Duty to Refer can be made as soon as possible. The Homeless Prevention Team has a strong relationship with Lanchester Road Hospital and work closely, together with the Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance, to ensure patients have support and accommodation where possible on discharge.

Health Squad

- 70 The NHS Health Squad has been working alongside the SHIP team and other supported housing providers since November 2023. The Health Squad provide health checks and run health events for vulnerable adults who are disengaged from wider health services. To date the Health Squad have worked with 12 housing providers, collaborating with other support services including Wellbeing4Life, to offer support. Between April 2024 and January 2025, the 3 Health Squad Teams (North, East and South) provided health checks to 146 clients in non-commissioned supported accommodation under SHIP. Across this time frame they provided 204 different episodes of support. The highest proportion were males aged 26-45 in the East of the county.

Commissioned supported accommodation

- 71 The Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning Team, within the Planning and Housing Service, works with all commissioned supported housing providers to ensure that they promote health and well-being to residents. The providers must work closely with their residents and the support workers to regularly liaise with GPs, access Mental Health Teams, refer to Talking Changes and to access drug and alcohol services. Other initiatives include: -
- Material relating to self-help guidance are left in properties which include useful contacts.
 - Well-being walks.
 - Engagement and Resilience Worker in one project, whose role is to engage residents and promote activity and social inclusion.

- Wellbeing packs are being trialled with one provider, which include activity packs with crosswords, colouring, fidgets etc.
- Partnership working with the Health Squad to carry out health checks, provide Hep C injections, checking clients who may have specific health issues.
- Community groups that offer bespoke support for men.
- Arts and crafts activities and other diversionary activities.

Partnership Working

- 72 The Housing Poverty group, which meets bi-monthly, sits under the corporate Poverty Action Steering Group and brings together a range of partners including social and supported housing providers, private sector housing, employability, welfare rights, illegal money lending and assessment and awards, to share experience and best practice across all aspects of poverty and collectively take forward agreed actions.
- 73 In 2024 the Financial Inclusion Support Officer's (FISO's) joined the Housing Poverty Group. The FISO's are involved in a pilot working alongside a number of secondary schools and the purpose of the FISO programme is to embed financial inclusion support in schools. The FISO's work closely with families to support them and improve their financial situation by looking at their income including benefit entitlement and will signpost to other specialist services where required including foodbanks, clothing banks and mental health and wellbeing services. The FISO's have good links with the social housing providers and will contact them if there are any housing concerns.

Selective Licensing

- 74 In County Durham, much of the private rented housing stock is older terraced property 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.
- 75 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.

- 76 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 conditions relate to significant and persistent anti-social behaviour, low demand of properties and high levels of deprivation.
- 77 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.
- 78 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. Since April 2022 to March 2024:
- 13,068 licence applications were received
 - 13,003 licences issued
 - 3,000+ inspections
 - 84 Improvement Notices issued for disrepair – majority of notices included remedial action for damp & mould hazard
 - 709 properties in disrepair improved
 - More than 300 enforcement cases open at end of March 24 that may lead to prosecution or civil penalty.

Private Sector Housing Team

- 79 Although not covered by licensing rules under legislation, 48% of the private rented stock within County Durham is open to inspection by the Private Rented Sector Team under HHSRS (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) guidelines to prevent housing in poor condition being let. The aim of the team is to reduce the number of low quality private rented housing stock.

- 80 The team give informal advice to landlords about their responsibilities and how to address issues such as damp and mould and excess cold.
- 81 The Selective Licensing and Private Sector Housing team are also taking part in MHCLGs healthy homes project in 24/25 because of the concerns over damp and mould in both social and privately rented properties (following Awaab Ishak's death which was a result of exposure to mould spores in his home). The team will identify those properties with a low EPC rating (D or below) which can correlate with poor standards and lead to issues such as damp and mould and excess cold.

Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP)

- 82 Durham County Council submitted a bid for funding to the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in Summer 2022 to establish a Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP). The bid was successful and £578,795 was awarded to run the programme until March 2025. The funding will enable DCC to increase its oversight and involvement in the non-commissioned supported housing sector. The proposed outcomes of the programme are:
- Improved property and management standards of supported accommodation;
 - Introduction of a new gateway approach to better manage supply of supported accommodation across the county;
 - Quality support tailored to meet individual tenant needs;
 - Value for money for both providers, tenants and the council;
 - Upskilling of the providers' workforce;
 - Improved engagement and support to service users from the council; and
 - Collaborative production of a supported accommodation charter to help establish and maintain high standards
- 83 The SHIP is having a significant positive impact on the non-commissioned supported housing sector and is progressing well with delivering the outcomes set out in the original funding bid. The programme is on track to review all non-commissioned supported

housing providers operating in County Durham before the end of March 2025.

- 84 In addition to being on track to deliver the proposed outcomes set out in the original funding bid, the programme is also having a significant impact in supporting internal services and external partners tackle wider social challenges, including partners within health and wellbeing provision.
- 85 The SHIP has established a quarterly supported housing forum, where providers, partners and colleagues from across DCC come together to share updates and best practice and co-produce documents including the non-commissioned supported housing charter. This forum includes updates from partners the Health and Wellbeing sector, with presentations received from Smoke Free County Durham and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

New housing for older people

- 86 Following the appointment of the main contractor to deliver the Council New Build Programme, the council has developed a delivery pipeline for the council house new build programme and is seeking to bring two to three sites forward at a time as part of a rolling programme.
- 87 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'.
- 88 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.

Strategic Priority 4 – Reducing alcohol harms

- 89 Housing instability and alcohol misuse are strongly linked, where there is a lack of stable housing, this can contribute to alcohol abuse, and conversely alcohol abuse can significantly increase the risk of becoming homeless. Essentially, one can exacerbate the other, creating a cyclical problem where individuals struggle to maintain both stable housing and manage their alcohol consumption.

- 90 The council's front line homeless and support teams have received training in relation to drug and alcohol misuse, including harm reduction. They provide advice and guidance to residents and signpost to specialist services for tailored support where required.
- 91 Housing's commissioned Homeless Support accommodation provider, Changing Lives, has recently changed its approach to dealing with alcohol and drug issues with residents. Previously a warning would be issued, now leaflets are provided, and clients are given support and follow-up from support workers. Information is displayed in projects showing community groups and Waythrough (commissioned drug and alcohol support provider) attend projects on a weekly basis to provide support and advice to residents. There are currently six residents from dispersed accommodation actively engaging in services from Waythrough.
- 92 Housing's commissioned supported accommodation provider for rough sleepers, Jigsaw Recovery Project, allows alcohol harm minimisation kits within the provision and work in partnership with Drug & Alcohol Service and GP/Mental Health Teams where required. Staff can access detox and rehab facilities to signpost and receive advice for longer term solutions to substance misuse and addictions for residents.
- 93 The Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) Team has worked with Public Health to secure funding via the "Dame Carol Black" housing support grant to recruit two drug and alcohol workers, employed by Waythrough, to work directly with the non-commissioned supported housing providers. The two Waythrough workers provide weekly drop-in sessions and tenant visits at the non-commissioned supported accommodation sites, providing support and a recovery pathway for those tenants who suffer from substance misuse issues.
- 94 Two of the current non-commissioned supported housing providers, Free the Way and Addictions North East provide abstinence based accommodation services with specific support for those requiring this service.

Conclusion

- 95 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 County Durham Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 96 Over the next twelve months the Planning and Housing Service will continue to work closely with health and social care teams to ensure

that projects in the CDHS and the HRSS are delivered to improve health outcomes for the residents of County Durham including those who are homeless, vulnerable, families and older people. Some key projects with a health-related theme are mentioned in paragraphs 21 and 23 of the report. Progress of these projects will be reported to the Strategic Housing Board as well as discussion and oversight at the HRSSG, the HSSG and the Health, Housing and Social Care Steering Group.

97 The Health and Wellbeing Board will be kept up to date of the emerging key projects with a strong focus on both health and housing.

Background papers

- [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 – 2028](#)
- [County Durham Plan 2018-2035](#)
- [County Durham Housing Strategy](#)
- [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2029](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

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 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

The report highlights where specific projects are funded via external grants. Data is included to highlight expenditure of grant for some projects.

Consultation and Engagement

Consultation was carried out with the residents of County Durham, which helped inform the County Durham Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

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

Appendix 2: Governance structure of the Strategic Housing Board

