

# CONNECT



## INSIDE



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council



Gardening  
Competition



Coronation  
Parties



Tenants  
Panel

# Welcome

I am honoured to have been made Darlington Council Cabinet member for Health and Housing. There is much great work to build on in making our council housing services even better, as well as build the additional council homes we need for the future. I am very excited about working with tenants and staff to achieve this.

From my time on housing committees and Tenants and Residents Associations in the past, as well as my ongoing community work, I know how key tenant involvement is. That is why it was great to attend the Tenants Panel recently. You'll find information about our Tenants Panel on page 23. It is great to welcome Dawn as a new member of the Tenants Panel, as well as hear from Karen, Glynis and Denise.

Thinking of tenants dedicated to making their areas better, I am struck by the great work of those living in Roxby Court and Ted Fletcher Court - the first two winners of the Tenants Garden Competition (see page 5 and 11).

Please do think about getting more involved yourself, even if that is to get in touch with us with ideas about how we can improve what we do.

Finally, I want to give a shout out to our staff team for their hard work and dedication. In this edition of Housing Connect you can find out more about a number of our staff and what they get up to.



**Councillor Matthew Roche**  
Darlington Council Cabinet Member  
for Health and Housing

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# Tenant Satisfaction Measures

## **The Regulator of Social Housing introduced Tenant Satisfaction Measures on 1st April this year.**

The aim for these TSM's is to hold all social housing providers to account for their actions. We need to know what we are doing right, what we're getting wrong, where we can improve and to give you great visibility of our performance

With the measures we are required to ask a proportion of tenants some set questions which all housing providers will do over the next few months.

These surveys are an important tool to ensure social housing is of a decent standard across the country.

We will be required to report back the results of the survey to the Regulator and they will publish the results annually, we will also publish these on our website in early 2024.

This is an amazing opportunity for us to hear from you about how you think we are performing, and to compare our performance with other social landlords across the country. We are looking forward to hearing what you think of Darlington Borough Council.

## **What are Tenant Satisfaction Measures?**

There are 22 in total and all social housing providers must report on them.

The measures are split into two parts:

- 10 performance measures that we will collect through management performance information.
- 12 customer perception survey measures that will be collected through surveying customers directly.

Results from every housing provider will be visible to everyone to view online, compare and question.

The TSMs cover the following key areas:

- Overall satisfaction
- Keeping properties in good order
- Building safety
- Safety checks

- Respectful and helpful engagement
- Effective handling of complaints/ASB
- Responsible neighbourhood management

We have chosen to carry out the survey in September in 2023 and have invited an external company BMG to carry out these surveys.

## **How will we collect the information from you?**

BMG will be contacting you by telephone and by email. If you are contacted by BMG we encourage you to take part in the survey, we really want to hear from you on issues such as completing repairs, keeping your homes safe and engaging with you.

## **Who are BMG**

BMG research is a leading independent provider of market research services to the UK public and social sectors. They will work in partnership with our team to deliver market research and surveys with one of their goals being to positively impact society.

Over the course of the last 12 months we have worked closely with BMG to ensure that the Tenant Satisfaction Measures run smoothly and that they provide our tenants with a professional service.

For more information about BMG visit BMG Research : [www.bmgresearch.co.uk](http://www.bmgresearch.co.uk)

## **What we need from you**

In preparation for the Tenant Satisfaction Measures we need the most up to date contact information from you. This will include updated phone numbers and email addresses. If these change before September you can update these through Darlington Home Online, by emailing us at [housing@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:housing@darlington.gov.uk) or by calling us on 01325 405333

If you would like to know more about the TSMs please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-introduction-of-tenant-satisfaction-measures/outcome/tenant-satisfaction-measures-summary-of-rsh-requirements-accessible>

# Around the Schemes

## Havelock Centre Party

**On Thursday 15th June, residents of North Riverside were treated to a party at the Havelock Centre. With the sun shining and spirits high it seemed like a perfect time for a get together.**

Residents were treated to singers, bingo, games and an afternoon tea with Scheme Manager Carl, Housing Officer Naomi and Tenancy Enforcement Officer Chris all in attendance.

For more information about the Havelock Centre visit [www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/50plus-housing/good-neighbour-schemes/havelock-street-richard-court/](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/50plus-housing/good-neighbour-schemes/havelock-street-richard-court/)



### CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

awarded to

**Supporters who  
attended the Wesley  
Community Centre**

have raised an incredible

**£189.00**

**With grateful thanks**

Signed: Debbie Gardiner

Title: Supporter Services Executive

Date: 08 June 2023

Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and the Isle of Man (1103)

## Wesley Court Community Centre

Residents of Wesley Court Community Centre were sent a certificate of appreciation by Cancer Research UK for the incredible work raising **£189.00** for the charity.

The money was raised by volunteers at the Kings Coronation Party. Money was raised with games of bingo and raffles and shows that charity is never far from their minds.

## Heatherwood Grove Walk About

**On Tuesday 20th June residents of Heatherwood Grove braved the elements to join Housing Officer Naomi, Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator Matthew and the Street Scene team to discuss issues in the estate.**

With the relevant teams on hand to deal with important matters, the walk about provided a constructive consultation with a plan in place to deal with issues such as drainage, garden tidying, and how best to deal with the beautiful but large trees in the vicinity.

## Linden Court Garden consultation

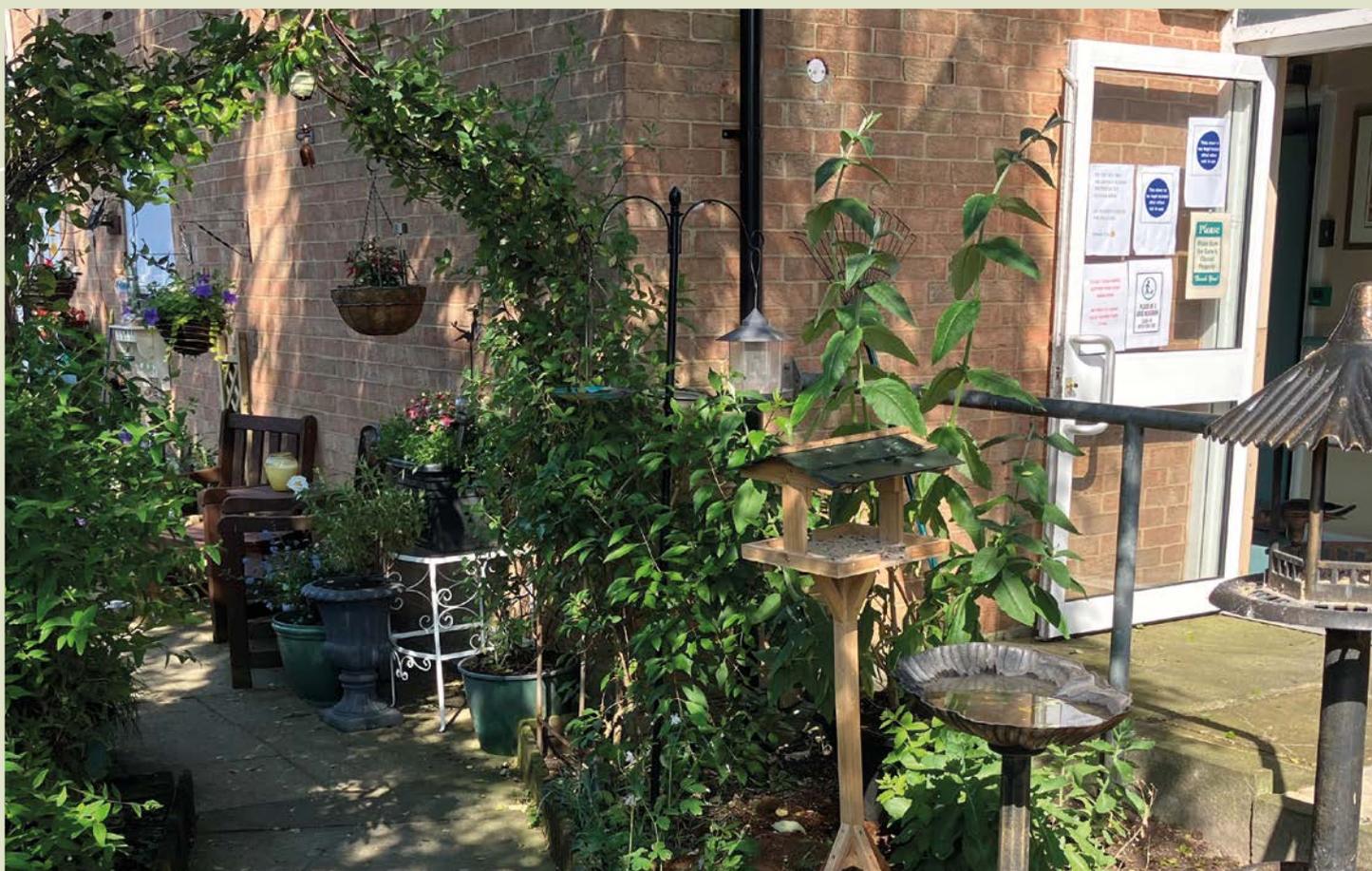
**On Tuesday 13th June residents of Linden Court met with Scheme manager Fran, Housing Officer Dean and Customer Engagement Co-ordinator Matthew to discuss plans for their community fund application.**

The application centred around plans to improve the gardens with items such as a shed, greenhouse and tools that were requested. The meeting was a huge success with all keen gardeners in agreement and the

application flying through the admin stage meaning that the summer of 2023 is looking bright for the Linden Court garden.

‘Linden Court is now thriving and the garden is a prime example of this. Tenants are coming together to celebrate what they love about where they live’

**Dean Morris** – Housing Manager



## Roxby Court

**Residents of Roxby Court were the first monthly winners of our Tenant Garden competition. The scheme was awarded the prize due to their fantastic use of communal gardens.**

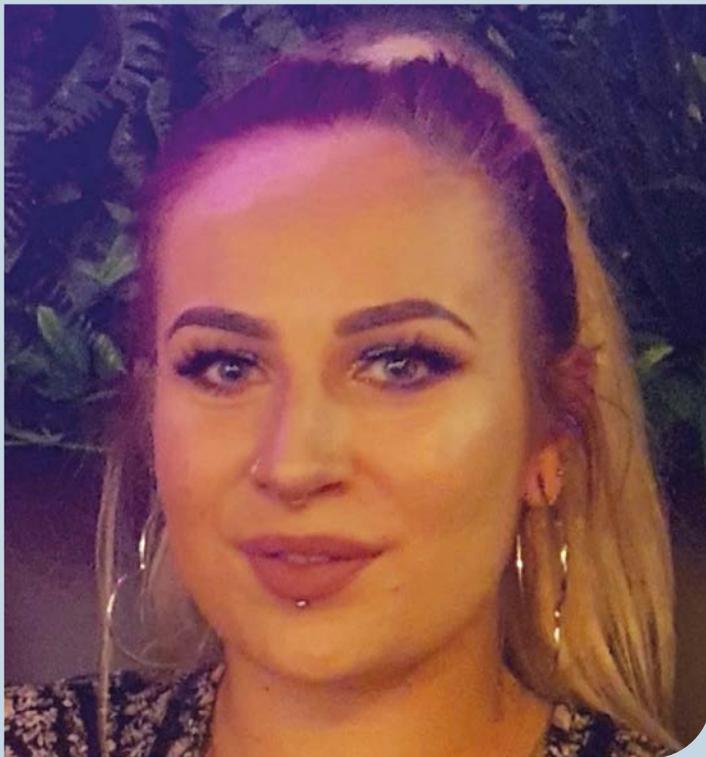
“The tranquillity of our beautiful garden has been lovingly created by Sam and June (residents).

“Our residents do enjoy the peace, beauty and sounds of nature, which encourages positive mental health and wellbeing to all who come out to sit and mingle in the garden. A winner here at Roxby Court” Donna Hodgson Roxby Court Scheme Manager.

# Building Our Team

## Building your Housing Team

**Over the course of the last 12 months we have continued to invest in both staff and the wellbeing of residents of Darlington. In that time numerous roles have been created within the Housing Team with new colleagues adding to our success and strengthening our commitment to our tenants and leaseholders. These roles have been designed to ensure that we provide the best homes for our tenants as well as meeting the consumer standards set by the regulator.**



'I started in my role in 2023 and since then the team have been really welcoming, making the transition as smooth as possible and allowed me to make links with all aspects of the department who have supported me to understand different roles and how I can utilise the wider team. It has been a pleasure to join a team who are so passionate and knowledgeable, which has then been cascaded to myself as a new starter. I have enjoyed having access to relevant training programmes that allow further professional development.'

**Abbie Robinson**

(Refugee Resettlement Officer)

Abbie, Rana, Stephen and Charlotte have been successful in their short time with us.

Abbie and Rana recently joined our team as Refugee Resettlement Officers supporting integration into the community for Refugees.

Abbie has a wealth of experience with vulnerable people, previously working as a Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Officer, whilst Rana joined us after previously working for the Refugee council.



'As a new starter, I was a bit nervous when I joined the team at the Council. However, with the passage of time and due to the welcoming attitude of my colleagues, I felt easy and relaxed. I enjoy working within the team and helping the clients to resettle effectively into the society. In this short span of time, I have learnt a lot about the social housing sector and especially about the homelessness prevention laws, duties and procedure.'

**Rana Bari**

(Refugee Resettlement Officer)



Steven has switched roles in the Council bringing his expertise from the Choice Based Letting team where he worked as an Allocation Support Assistant into his new role as a Housing Data Quality Officer.

‘Starting a new role has been a refreshing change of pace, doing a wide range of new tasks, training opportunities, and learning new skills. One of the biggest changes has been working in a new team with staff members I’d previously had limited or no prior interactions with the team. The team have been helpful in assisting me with any enquiries and learning the day to day responsibilities of my new role.’

**Steven Trenholme**  
(Housing Data Quality Officer)



Charlotte joins us from EE and is the new Complaints Officer in the team. She helps us to investigate any complaints or compliments we receive and to make sure we adhere to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code. Charlotte has a wealth of knowledge in complaint handling, customer service and working to effective resolutions which she has brought to this new role

‘Since joining Darlington Borough Council this year I have been welcomed into the team and feel like I have worked here for years. My job can be varied; from meeting with tenants and listening to their concerns to performing street inspections with members of the Housing Team, Police and Councillors. No day is the same.

Although there is the option for hybrid working, I enjoy coming into the office and catching up with colleagues. I would like to thank everyone in the Council who I have met so far for welcoming me into the office and helping me along the way to getting settled into my role.’

**Charlotte Robinson**  
(Housing Complaints Response Officer)



# Community Fund Bids

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

Our Community Engagement Fund has been set up by us to help you do just that!

We want to support community projects in areas where Housing Services own properties. The community fund offers a financial contribution to support tenant led activities and projects that make a difference to the community and helps to promote social, environmental, and economic wellbeing.

Funding is available up to £1000 or £500 for special public events like the Kings Coronation in May.

## Eligibility criteria

Applications need to be from:

- residents or leaseholders, as part of a group or individual
- voluntary groups
- resident led community groups

All applications need to benefit and make a difference to the lives of Darlington Council tenants, their families, and the wider community where we own properties.

Applications must be able to demonstrate how it aims to help achieve some of the following outcomes in the local community:

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



## How to Apply?

Visit for more information: <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/customer-engagement/housing-services-community-fund/>

Please print and email a copy to [customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk)

Or Post to:

**Customer Engagement**  
Housing Services  
Darlington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Darlington  
DL1 5QT

# Darlington HomeSearch

**A new way to apply for a home, Darlington HomeSearch is now live. The service went live on the 12th June and already there have been 1656 applications.**

Darlington Borough Council Housing Services has moved away from Tees Valley Lettings Partnership so we can focus on Darlington residents and their housing needs.

Before going live the Darlington Borough Council Housing Allocation policy was approved by cabinet and our council housing will now be allocated according to the new policy. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/18684/housing-services-allocation-policy-2023-2028.pdf>

To help with any queries, we have answered some of your frequently asked questions regarding the new system.



## Darlington HomeSearch

<https://darlingtonhomesearch.housingjigsaw.co.uk>

### **1. I had an application on the old system, what will happen to that?**

If you were in Band 1 we have transferred your information on to Darlington HomeSearch. If you were in band 1 and we have not contacted you, please call us to activate your online account. If you were in Band 2, 3 or 4 you will need to reapply for housing using Darlington HomeSearch.

### **2. I have been registered for housing for some time. Will I lose my original registration date?**

If you reapply before the 30th August 2023 we will honour your original registration date.

### **3. What can I do if I don't have access to the Internet?**

We can offer telephone appointments to customers who are unable to register online themselves. During the appointment we will also discuss how you can apply for properties and discuss any additional support you may require. Please call 01325 405333 to request a telephone appointment or face to face.

### **4. If I am threatened by homelessness, what should I do?**

If you are homeless, threatened with homelessness or in urgent need of housing please contact us for advice. For further information please go to our homeless advice pages, call our Housing Options team on 01325 405333 or out of hours on 01642 524552 or email [housing@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:housing@darlington.gov.uk)



# Facebook Page – Housing Connect

**The Housing Facebook Page was created in December 2020 to showcase the work of the Housing Team at Darlington Borough Council.**

Rather than concentrate on more traditional ways of communicating with tenants the Housing Team wanted to give tenants regular, ongoing content and highlight matters which mean the most.

3 years later the page has over 1,500 followers with new information going out daily and has seen posts from The Queens Platinum Jubilee and Kings Coronation celebrations, competitions such as our yearly Gardening Competition and important information such as 'Keeping You Safe In Your Home'

The page is ran by our Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator Matthew and Housing Systems and Digital Support Officer Leesa.

'My favourite posts, and some of the most successful, are the ones that involve our tenants. Whether it be garden parties or good news stories it is always a pleasure to showcase the heart of the community'.

**Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator  
Matthew**

But the continued success of the Facebook Page relies on our tenants. If you have any stories which you would like featured on our page or you have any ideas which you would like to see on our Facebook page, please contact us at [customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk)



Find us on  
**facebook**

# Gardening Competition



## **In May we launched our 2023 Gardening Competition.**

This year's competition celebrates the best council gardens with nominations given by Tenants, Scheme Managers and Housing Officers split into 5 different categories.

Those categories include

- The Best Individual Garden
- The Best Community Garden
- The Most Sustainable Garden
- The Best Young Gardener
- Largest Sunflower (New to 2023)

So far we have seen applications from tenants at Carlton Court, Earl Carlson Grove, Adelphi Court and Tennyson Gardens, among many others, with winners announced every month.

Our July winners came from the Ted Fletcher Court Scheme for the fantastic use of their communal garden, creating a fantastic haven for residents with keen gardeners working all year round to ensure a fabulous retreat.

'Our garden has gone from strength to strength over the last couple of years with many tenants chipping in and helping. For some it is extremely important for their wellbeing and keeping themselves busy and the pride they take in the garden is clear to see – Hayley Scott Scheme Manager Ted Fletcher Court. If you are a council tenant and want to apply for the competition it is not too late, with entries running until September.

To apply for the competition, simply email [customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk) or call 01325 405333 with your details and a member of our team will visit your garden.

All our terms and conditions are available on the Darlington Borough Council website.

# Housing in Numbers

**2022 / 2023 have been a very busy year for our Housing Team.**

Our services are busier than ever and the number below illustrate some of the phenomenal work that our team does.

**6**

## **New policies introduced after consultation with the tenants panel.**

These included Housing Management Policy, Low Cost Home Ownership, Damp Mould and Condensation Policy, Allocation Policy, Fire Safety Policy and the Leaseholder Handbook.



**424**

**Anti Social Behaviour cases resolved with positive resolutions**

**&\$!#%**

**90,000+**

**Calls made to our lifeline team within the last year**



**64,914**

**Calls made to our housing contact team in 2022/23**



**150**

**Brand new council houses being built at our Neasham Road site, our biggest site to date (more info in due course).**



**5,274**

**Total amount of council properties**



# Coronation Parties



In early June the nation celebrated the Kings Coronation with celebrations up and down the country over a long weekend. Darlington was no exception.

Amongst town wide celebrations tenants from all over the Borough of Darlington donned their red, white and blue for the second year in succession with garden and street parties in aid of the new King.

Our schemes did what they do best and celebrated in style with afternoon tea parties, music and games, and with a little help from the Housing Team, memories were made that will last a lifetime.

On the back of the Jubilee Fund in 2022, the Housing Team opened the Coronation Fund where tenants were invited to apply to up to £500 worth of funding. This was advertised throughout April with over £5000 of money given to worthy causes.

Pictured are some of the lucky recipients.



# Being a Leaseholder in 2023

**Over the last 12 months we have received 47 right to buy applications and welcomed 18 new leaseholders. With this in mind we take a look to see what's it like to be a leaseholder**

## What is the meaning of being a Leaseholder?

Once you complete the purchase of your home you become a leaseholder. As a leaseholder you own your flat, but you do not own the land surrounding your home, or the building in which it is situated. The Council remains the freeholder of the building and the estate in which it stands.

## What is a lease?

A lease sets out the rights and responsibilities of both you as a leaseholder and Darlington Borough Council as a freeholder. Your lease is an important document and you should ensure your solicitor provides you with a copy and fully explains its contents.

If you sell your home, the new purchaser buys the remaining years of the lease. You can apply to extend your lease if it is coming towards its end.

## Internal improvements and alterations

As a leaseholder you must obtain the Council's written approval before carrying out major improvements or alterations to your home. You may also need to get planning permission and building consent before starting work. We do not need to know about minor work i.e decorating.

## Anti Social Behaviour / Noise

We are strongly opposed to anti-social behaviour and do not tolerate it within our properties. We work in partnership with other agencies such as Police, Civic Enforcement and Environmental Health.

Noise in flats can travel far and fast. It is important to consider your neighbours and keep any noise to a reasonable level when watching television, playing music, having pets and DIY activity.

## Pets

You should ask for written permission from us before bringing a pet into your home. If we receive complaints about an animal at your home or in the communal areas, you may be asked to re-home the pet.

## Personal property and insurance

The Council is responsible for the insurance for the building and under the terms of your lease, you must have this insurance and the costs will be charged to you as part of your service charge on an annual basis. As a leaseholder, you are responsible for purchasing your own contents insurance because items such as furniture or other personal belongings will not be covered by the building insurance.

For more information about your leaseholder rights visits our Web Page and read the full Leaseholder handbook via <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/17687/leaseholder-booklet-v1-dec-2022.pdf>



## Leaseholder Handbook



# UPSKILL FOR EMPLOYMENT

WITH **LEARNING & SKILLS DARLINGTON** IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **ALDI**



TEES VALLEY MAYOR



## WAREHOUSING

Gain the vital warehousing knowledge and interview skills needed in order to obtain employment in the Aldi Distribution Centre in Darlington.

Understanding how to work safely and efficiently in a Warehousing role how to implement key health & safety skills at work.

You will have the chance to engage in a site tour of the Aldi Distribution Centre in Darlington.

Finally, you'll also get to meet your future colleagues and shadow them whilst they work on stock rotation, preparing packages, loading cargo, forklift driving and more!



1 week intensive course



Apply Now

For job seekers aged 19+ in Darlington



Guaranteed fast-track interview

**ENROL FOR THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY**

**APPLY ONLINE**

**[www.darlington.gov.uk/learningandskills](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/learningandskills)**  
**COURSES RUN MONTHLY**

**YOU! can work for Aldi**

# Void Lettable Standard

**When a property becomes empty it is important to us that we re-let our homes to a high standards. As a new tenant you should expect your new home to be clean, safe and comfortable. The following standards will tell you what to expect when you view and move into one of our homes.**

## External Windows and Doors

- All windows are secure, open and close properly and will have window keys where applicable.
- External doors will be secure, serviceable and weatherproof. You will receive two keys for each external door.
- Apartments that share a communal entrance will be provided with 2 door entry fobs.

## Ceilings, Walls, Floors and Stairs

- All walls and ceilings will be left in a serviceable condition. Defective and missing plasterwork will be replaced or repaired.
- Polystyrene ceiling tiles will be removed and the ceiling made good. This excludes decorative finish.
- Ceilings and walls will be free of nails and screws ready to receive decoration.
- Flooring will be fitted to the kitchen and bathroom. Non slip flooring will be provided where necessary.
- Floors in the rest of the property will be left in a condition ready to receive floor coverings.
- All handrails and balustrades to stairs will be safe, secure and meet safety requirements.

## General

- All skirting boards, architraves and door frames will be securely fitted.
- Broken wall tiles will be replaced.
- Internal doors will open and close freely and door furniture will be securely fitted, (Internal doors requiring adjusting after flooring is fitted will be your responsibility).

- A sure stop, or stop tap will be fitted to the incoming main to allow the water supply to be turned off in case of an emergency.
- We will provide smoke alarms, a heat alarm where necessary and a carbon monoxide alarm and ensure these are working prior to you moving in.
- Internal garages will be structurally safe with a working door and lock.

## Kitchen

- Units, doors, drawers, worktops that are clean and serviceable. Missing or damaged units and worktops will be replaced with nearest matching colours
- A sink with hot and cold supply and a plug and chain.
- A space for a gas or electric cooker (installation is your responsibility by a qualified tradesman)
- A space for a fridge
- A space will be left for a washing machine with access to washing machine connector via a hole in the carcass (washing machine connections will not be provided if there is a laundry room within the building)
- Two rows of splashback tiles and mastic sealed worktops

## Bathrooms

- Wash hand basin, toilet, bath with overhead electrical shower or level access shower
- New toilet seat and shower curtain (it will be your responsibility to replace these in the future)
- Plug and chains to wash hand basins and baths
- Non-slip flooring to wet rooms
- One row of tiles splashback to the wash hand basin
- A good mastic seal to bath and wash hand basin



## Services and Heating

- We carry out a Gas Safety check before you move in to ensure the system is in safe working order and meets regulations. We will leave your gas certificate in the property.
- A gas service visit will be carried out every 12 months to ensure your heating appliances are in compliance.
- Once you have moved in you may change your gas and electric supplier at any time.
- We will show you the location of your services in the property including stop tap, fuse board and gas/ electric meters.
- All electrical installations including switches, light fittings, sockets, extractor fans and PIV units will be safe and working
- We carry out an Electrical periodic check on your property prior to you moving in and further inspections are carried out every 5 years.

## Decoration and Cleanliness

Decorating the inside of the property will be your responsibility. If the decorating is not to a good standard we may carry out decorating prior to you moving in or offer you assistance with purchasing decorating materials. This will be discussed with you when you view the property.

- Existing decoration will be left intact wherever possible if it is deemed to be clean and in good condition, although it may not be to your taste.
- The property will be cleaned throughout ensuring all surfaces, fixtures and fittings are sanitised.
- Where an outgoing tenant has left fixtures or fittings in the property they will be removed and repair work completed to make good.
- Any personal items and rubbish left by the outgoing

tenant will be removed. We will check the loft, garden, shed and bin store.

- On occasion, we may decide to keep carpets and items that are left by the outgoing tenant which are in good condition. You may decide to keep these items and if so they become your responsibility to repair or replace in the future.
- The property will be free from damp and mould. An information leaflet will be provided in your welcome pack.

## Gardens and External

- Roofs, chimneys, fascias and soffits, will be secure and watertight.
- Gutters and pipe work will be secure and free of leaks and blockages.
- Outbuildings attached to the property will be structurally safe with a working door and lock.
- Driveways and hardstanding's will be left in place where there is a dropped kerb and in good condition. They must meet the current regulations and be installed correctly.
- Pathways, Fencing, Steps, Boundary Walls and gates will be safe and in good repair. Large areas of fencing may be completed after you have moved in.
- Gardens will be tidy and not overgrown. Grass, shrubs and hedges will be cut back to a manageable level. You will be responsible for future maintenance of the gardens.
- A rotary dryer or clothes pole/line holder will be provided in the rear garden.

## Repairs

If you identify any repairs in the future with your home there are several ways you can report a repair.

- Using Darlington Home Online account. [Link here](#)
- Email [customerservices@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@darlington.gov.uk)
- Call us on 01325 405333
- Emergency repairs can be reported to 01325 405333

# A Day in the Life –

## Natalie Creighton (Housing Team Leader)

### What does your job entail?

I manage a team of Housing Advisors who oversee terminations and signups for properties and garages. The team process emails, take calls and deal with all tenancy related queries for Council properties. I also monitor the repairs and maintenance budget, looking at spends on repairs and external contractors. I look at compliance and work towards ensuring our gas services are booked in within the compliance dates.

### What do you enjoy most about the role?

No two days are ever the same. It's a very reactive role and you have to be prepared to deal with urgent queries or events. External visits are required so it's not always office based. I enjoy going out on visits and meeting tenants face to face.

### How long have you worked at Darlington Borough Council and what roles have you done at DBC?

I have worked for DBC for 8 years and I started as a Customer Services Advisor before becoming the Team Leader for the Contact and Planning Teams. I have been in my current role as a Housing Team Leader for just over a year.



# Fire Safety

## Electric Scooter / Mobility Scooters

Although E-Scooters and Mobility Scooters offer tenants a lifeline in independence and have been gaining in popularity due to their convenience and relatively low cost, they have been getting more attention within the Housing Team for another reason: battery fires.

Most electric scooter batteries contain highly flammable materials, so they could ignite if exposed to the wrong conditions.

Below is everything you needed to know about the common causes of scooter fires.

## Why do Electrical Scooter Batteries Catch Fire?

Batteries generate electrical energy through chemical processes. For it to be safe, it needs to be charged in a controlled environment under the stated optimum conditions. If these ideal conditions are disrupted due to a flaw of any kind, be it an internal or external failure, it can lead to dangerous reactions, short circuits and even potential fire and explosions.

**Manufacturer Defects** – Including faulty wiring and circuits, design flaws, poor soldering and low quality components. All of these flaws might cause battery failure and finally result in the battery igniting and catching fire.

**Mechanical Battery Abuse** – This includes anything that disfigures the structure of the battery (dropping, piercing, crushing the battery, exposure to harsh conditions). If an electrical scooter falls or is involved in a collision, it can damage the battery, so always inspect your scooter afterward.

**Electrical Abuse** – Involves overcharging or over-discharging the battery. This leads to the formation of dendrites, electrolyte decomposition and metal dissolution, which are all recipes for short circuits within the cell. This process can also emit gasses like Oxygen, Hydrogen and Carbon Monoxide.

### Avoiding Electrical Abuse

- Avoid tampering with scooter's internal circuitry, electrical system or wiring.
- Avoid modifying e-scooters with parts not designed for use. This could lead to a fire
- Don't charge the battery with the wrong charger

**Thermal Abuse** – This occurs when the battery is exposed to extremely high temperatures such as direct sunlight which leads to an internal short circuit.

## How to Reduce the Chances of Battery Fire

- Don't use counterfeit batteries. They are often made with substandard materials that may not meet safety standards.
- Keep your devices clean. Dust and dirt can build up on the battery contacts and cause them to overheat. Be sure to clean your e-scooter regularly with a soft, dry cloth.
- Handle your battery carefully.
- Avoid Extreme Temperatures – Most batteries have a safe operating temperature between -20 degrees and 60 degrees. Going out of range increases the risk of the battery catching fire.
- Inspect for battery damage regularly such as cracks, dents or leaks in the battery casing. If you notice any damage, do not use the battery.
- Use a battery case or fireproof bag when transporting battery packs.

## Fire Risks in Communal Areas

Tenants in blocks need to ensure that communal areas are clear. Although we understand that residents want to make their property homely it is often a breach of our Fire Safety policy. This includes items such as decorations and door mats.

As a Landlord we have a duty to ensure Fire Risk Assessments are carried out in all our buildings with communal facilities and that all immediate risks are removed. We carry out regular fire risk assessments to blocks and will pick up any items which are deemed unsuitable.

After the initial concern is picked up another visit will take place roughly two weeks later to give tenants time to remove any personal items. If items are still found after a second inspection there is a chance that they will be disposed of and may result in a recharge.

All fire evacuation plans are located in communal areas.

# Moving Properties

**Are you looking to move to a smaller property or are you currently in a property that you are not managing in?**

Moving properties could potentially bring monthly outgoings down and may make for more comfortable living.

If this sounds like an option that you would like to explore, your Housing Officer can visit you at your home, explain any questions you may have and support you through a potential move.

For more information call our Housing Team on 01325 405333 or email [housing@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:housing@darlington.gov.uk)

You can also visit the Home Swapper website which can connect you with potential properties to swap with and message other tenants. To do this all you need to do is register, download and log into your app [www.homeswapper.co.uk/](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk/)

We also have a new way to apply for a home in Darlington. Darlington Home Search (<https://darlingtonhomesearch.housingjigsaw.co.uk>) is here as is a standalone digital lettings platform.



# Apprentice Focus – Jamellia Greenhough-Lee

**Darlington Borough Council has a successful history of welcoming apprentices and guiding them towards work, often within the Council itself. The Housing Team is a prime example of this with numerous members of our team in employment after initially joining us through this process.**

One of our current cohort of apprentices Jamellia works in our Housing Tenancy Management team, helping our Advisors with tasks such as garage applications, meeting minutes, essential printing and scanning as well as other important admin tasks.

We asked her how she has found her time here.

‘I’ve been at my apprenticeship for eight months and it has been very enjoyable for me. I am completing a Business Admin Apprenticeship and have learnt many skills during my time here, all of which are transferrable to future job roles. This has prepared me for my future and makes me very hopeful as I know I will not be entering a field with no prior knowledge. On top of that, the Council is very warm and welcoming place to work, with everyone around you inviting you to be part of the team. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here and look forward to its continuance as I go through my term here’.

Our apprenticeships, which are run through Learning and Skills, last a minimum of 12 months and give you the chance to learn and gain a nationally recognised qualification whilst being employed. The course will involve being trained by centre training staff and the employer, which will allow you to develop your skills, knowledge and behaviours in your chosen vocational area.



For more information about apprenticeships visit  
[www.darlington.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/apprenticeships/about-apprenticeships/](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/apprenticeships/about-apprenticeships/)

# Have you tested your smoke alarm recently?

As a responsible landlord we want to make sure we are keeping you safe in your home. All our properties are fitted with smoke alarms and if you have a gas boiler you will also have a carbon monoxide (CO) detector.

Tenants have a responsibility to test their smoke alarms regularly, so we'd like to remind you and ask you to test your smoke alarms and CO detector now. To do this there will be a test push button on the alarm, which you will need to press until you hear a high pitched alarm sound.

Smoke alarms are generally located in hallways and landings and sometimes in your main living area. Houses will have a minimum of 2 alarms and flats will have a minimum of 1.

Carbon monoxide detectors will be located on a wall close to your boiler.

If you need to report any missing or faulty alarms, please contact us, so that we can arrange to have those replaced. You can do this by email at [housingfiresafety@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:housingfiresafety@darlington.gov.uk) or by telephone on 01325 405333.

# Why I joined the Tenants Panel

**From this edition onwards we are dedicating a page to our valued Tenants Panel. Moving forward we will showcase the Panel and find out more about them and their aims and objectives as well as some of the work that they do.**

This month we will find out the reasons why the Panel joined us in the first place. From the social aspect to wanting to make a difference in their community.

We will also hear from one of our newest members Dawn who joined the group in June this year and has a passion for her local area of Bank Top.

“I joined the Tenants Panel to understand housing issues and to engage with other council tenants around Darlington. Darlington is changing so fast and there are a lot of new builds that are expanding the original estates.” – **Karen Wright**

“I really joined the Tenant’s Panel because I’m nosy, and love to learn new things, whether it’s new skills or a new way we can help tenant’s like ourselves” – **Glynis Johnson**

“I have been a Tenants Panel member for a number of years, it is always interesting to find out new policies and look through them before they are released to the public. It’s always nice to catch up with fellow member too.” – **Denise Parkin**

If you would like to be a member please contact [customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk) to find out more details about our next meeting.



## **Dawn King – Tenants Panel Member**

**Our Tenants Panel always welcomes new members, especially tenants who are passionate about their community.**

Dawn King has been a council tenant for a number of years, living in locations such as Melsonby Crescent, Fenby Avenue and Middleton St George before moving to her current flat at Bank Top over 12 years ago.

‘I love my flat and there is such a fantastic community spirit here. Everyone helps out and the neighbourly spirit is fantastic. When I was critically ill a few years ago the neighbourhood helped out massively, I love helping out in the community, I am always wanting to put something back’.

As well as her duties with the panel, which started a couple of months ago, Dawn works closely with the Wesley Court community centre, hosting a bingo club every week and helping restore the communal garden with fellow residents, after a little help from community funding.

Dawn also puts on charity events at the centre for ‘Breast Cancer Awareness’ and has raised more than £1000 pounds over numerous events.

A true Housing Hero, Dawn, as well as our other members represent our Tenants Panel across Darlington and act as a spokesperson for their community bringing local issues to the Housing Team.

If you would like to become a tenants panel member email our engagement team at [engagement@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:engagement@darlington.gov.uk)



# How to Contact us

**It has never been easier to contact us.**

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

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

**DO IT ONLINE**

Contact us via email at [housing@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:housing@darlington.gov.uk)

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

#### **Housing Services**

01325 405333

#### **StreetScene & Environmental Services**

01325 405111

#### **Transport & Projects (inc parking)**

01325 405222

#### **Planning & Property**

01325 405777

#### **Civic Enforcement & Anti-Social Behaviour**

01325 406999

#### **Council Housing inc Homelessness**

01325 405333



#### **Housing Benefit**

01325 405444

#### **Council Tax**

01325 405555

#### **Business Rates**

01325 405666

#### **Adult Social Care**

01325 406111

#### **Children & Families**

#### **Social Care**

01325 406222

#### **Complaints, Comments**

#### **& Compliments**

01325 406777

#### **Lifeline Services**

01325 406888



**DO IT ONLINE**



**DARLINGTON HOME ONLINE**

Pay, Update, Message, Book



**SAVE TIME, DO IT ONLINE**