

Housing and Health

Why is Housing a Public Health issue?

Having shelter, which is warm and welcoming, free from damp and mould, that is big enough for the family living there, has good sanitation, and is in pleasant surroundings is an essential basic requirement for human existence.

Fuel Poverty and Thermal Comfort

- The fuel poverty rate is 24.7% in Northumberland, which causes significant health problems, and excess winter deaths.
- Many homes have poor thermal comfort, as they lack loft or cavity wall insulation, and have old and inefficient heating systems.
- Damp homes are associated with a higher prevalence of poor health, particularly in children.
- House dust mites, moulds and their spores thrive in damp conditions, leading to a range of respiratory conditions such as asthma.

Housing Condition

- Poor accommodation and a poor environment lead to a negative impact on health.
- People from materially deprived groups are likely to find poor housing is the only option available to them.
- Those in private rented accommodation have poorer health than those in social rented sector who in turn have poorer health than those living in homes they own.

Amenities

- Tenants in social housing are more likely to suffer other housing stress from crime and anti-social behaviour, poorer access to open spaces and leisure amenities.
- Poor neighbourhoods tend to lack local amenities eg food shops and often suffer crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Overcrowding

- Houses in multiple occupation can pose a significant risk to health.
- Overcrowding is associated with poor physical and mental health, including the risk of accidents – fire, trips and falls, cardio vascular disease, stress and depression.

Homelessness

- Homelessness, leads to poor health due to lack of an established place to live, which can lead to living on the streets, 'sofa surfing' living in a hostel, or other temporary accommodation.

- Gypsy, Roma and travellers have particular housing needs with sites that provide adequate sanitation.

What can the County Council do about it?

Fuel Poverty

- Partnership working through the Northumberland Warmzone to provide access to free or reduced cost cavity wall and loft insulation.
- Access to grant to replace old and inefficient heating systems
- Access to funding to address insulation in solid wall properties
- Use of new technologies such as air source heat and biomass boilers, particularly in off-gas areas

Housing Quality

- Operation of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessment which identifies significant hazards and identifies health impacts and the likelihood & spread of harms.
- Managing the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing scheme by undertaking regular inspections as well as ensuring housing health and safety standards are met.
- Control of exposure to infectious diseases, vermin & other pests, using public health legislation
- Maintaining the Decent Homes Standard by assessing housing conditions working with owners to bring them up to the decent homes standards.
- Supporting the Northumberland Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to help older, disabled or vulnerable owner-occupiers or private tenants to remain living in their own home
- Operating the Local Lend a Hand scheme with Lloyds bank to help 1st time buyers to access their first home with a 5% deposit,

Housing Provision

- The Council operates the Northumberland Homefinder allocation service in partnership with its strategic housing partners to assesses housing need and provide eligible tenants with a decent home to rent.
- Through right to buy, NCC offers eligible tenants the opportunity to buy their current rented property at a discount.

Homelessness

- By tackling homelessness through targeted prevention initiatives including prevention, to avoid homelessness in the first place, reducing the need for the use of crisis and temporary accommodation and increasing the quality of provision.
- The Council has a statutory duty to prevent homelessness and to meet the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers by the provision of suitable sites.

Amenities

- Ensure housing developments have good access to basic amenities such as food shops, and safe well lit open spaces.

How will it make a difference?

- Good housing promotes and supports good mental and physical health
- Children and young people perform better at school and college when they have a warm quiet place to study
- Warm homes reduce excess winter deaths
- People living in homes which are not overcrowded are at less risk of accident and injury.
- Suitably adapted homes support the elderly, sick and disabled to live in their own home for as long as practicable
- Well designed homes and neighbourhoods suffer from less crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour and have a positive impact on overall health and wellbeing.